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Headline: Urbanisation to figure strongly in Sino-S'pore cooperation

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Photo: Reuters

Office buildings at the financial district of Pudong in Shanghai.

Esther Teo

The Straits Times

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Urbanisation is likely to feature strongly in the next stage of Sino-Singapore cooperation as both grapple with the challenge of building a high-quality environment for its citizens, said Singapore's deputy chief of mission to China Eric Teo.

As both states mark the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year, they will review "how far we have come and how far we are going forward as partners pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation", said Mr Teo.

"Singapore stands ready to share with our Chinese friends the experiences we have accumulated through our urbanisation efforts since our independence in 1965," he said to about 60 participants at the first Singapore Management University (SMU)-Tsinghua University Global Forum in Beijing yesterday, which was also attended by SMU president Arnoud De Meyer.

This is the second half of the launch of SMU's first international dialogue series. A similar forum took place at Fudan University in Shanghai on Tuesday.

Given that both national and local conditions in China may not be the same as Singapore's, some adaptation is necessary, Mr Teo noted.

Already, joint projects like the Guangzhou Knowledge City in southern Guangdong province and the Sichuan Hi-Tech Innovation Park in south-western Chengdu city have allowed Singapore to share its experiences in areas like master planning, water and waste management and logistics, he said.

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Dr Liu Thai Ker, chair of the Centre for Liveable Cities in Singapore, also weighed in at the one-day forum yesterday, citing the similarities and differences between both countries and how this might affect urban planning.

Both societies, for instance, have strong government involvement, with land mostly owned by the state. But Singapore, unlike China, is essentially urban, with a single-tier government.

"It is important for the professionals and politicians to have good dialogue to understand each other," he said. "Infrastructure design is also vital at every stage of urban planning."

Tsinghua's social sciences school dean Li Qiang told The Straits Times that China's larger cities like Beijing can also take a leaf out of Singapore's books.

The role of the private sector is stronger in Singapore and that could be why it has developed differently and with more order compared with China, despite the governments of both countries having large influence, he added. This is because letting the market play a decisive role in allocating resources - which Beijing recently committed to - raises efficiency.

"We jointly organised this forum on urbanisation due to similarities in the way our government is run. Singapore is an interesting model and we hope to learn from it in areas like housing as well," Professor Li said.

His counterpart at SMU, Professor James Tang, said that the forum is also part of a larger goal of raising SMU's profile in China as a research university in the broad field of social sciences.

"We want to contribute to the Singapore-China collaboration in business, government and civic society by nurturing China-ready and bicultural graduates who are able to function effectively in the business and financial environment in China," said Prof Tang.