Development of Partnership Networks in the North-West Europe in the framework of International Cooperation in ICT Sphere

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Abstract

In the paper we showed tendencies to form partnerships in professional sphere along with describing their benefits on the example of e-Development Partnership in the North-West of Russia which unites organisations on the issue of ICT (information and communication technologies) and information society.

1. Introduction

One of the tendencies in the latest years is a tendency to unite, exchange information and coordinate efforts of numerous organizations in their professional sphere creating and supporting partnerships. These partnerships are at the same time networks of professional contacts, meeting points for professional experience exchange, dissemination and exchange of the targeted professional information in the sphere – and that makes them demanded and helpful. They solve these two important tasks – faster the professional growth of all cooperating organizations and give an opportunity to rich at one time almost all the main players in some specialized professional sphere. Another important outcome of such partnerships is that very often a consortium of several organizations can deal with much more complicated and wide-scaled problems and tasks than a particular company can. Moreover, many wide-scaled problems can not be solved not having such partnership cooperation. That makes competitive organizations cooperating ones.

These tendencies mentioned entirely relate to ICT (Information-Communication Technologies) sphere. ICT became one of the most important factors of the social development. Their revolutionary impact concerns the functioning of the state structures and social institutions, economical and social spheres, science and education, culture and the life way of people. ICT development and wide-ranging use is one of the essential factors of social, economical and technological development of the whole state and its regions.


Abbreviation PRIOR comes from the Russian name of the organization — Partnerstvo dlya Razvitiya Informatsionnogo Obshhestva v Rossii. Members of the Russian e-Development Partnership (PRIOR) are now about 250 organizations. E-Development Partnership in the North-West of Russia (PRIOR North-West) is a self-dependent part of the Russian e-Development Partnership and unites organizations in Russian North-West. Members of PRIOR North-West are now 85 organizations [1] from 6 regions within the North-West Federal District of the Russian Federation — St. Petersburg, Leningrad Region, Murmansk Region, Republic of Karelia, Pskov Region, and Novgorod Region, including organizations representing government (18), business (17), non-government sector (20), research and education community (29), international organizations (1).

2. Main goals and activities of Russian North-West e-Development Partnership

The main goals of PRIOR NW are:
- to facilitate development of an Information Society in North-West of Russia through building a partnership between the participants of the e-Development process: government, business, civil society, research and education community, donors and investors;
- to undertake targeted efforts to bridge the digital divide in North-West of Russia;
- to assist in the development of a Knowledge Economy.

And of course – as above mentioned – to be at the same time a network of professional contacts, a meeting point for professional experience exchange, dissemination and exchange of the targeted professional information in ICT sphere.

In order to achieve these goals, the following objectives are to be achieved:
I. Building a Partnership between the Participants of the e-Development Process:

- Organization of a dialogue on e-Development through the traditional and electronic media, online forums, conferences and seminars, etc.;
- Initiation and assistance in the implementation of partnership-based programs and projects aimed at development through ICT;
- Assistance in self-organization of development communities, integration of knowledge and exchange of practical experience in the sphere of e-Development;
- Organization of public activity to foster the development of an Information Society;

II. Bridging the Digital Divide:

- Implementation of projects and events intended to involve socially disadvantaged groups of the population in active use of knowledge and information for development (opening of public access centers, providing basic training for users);
- Implementation of a system of measures to increase the awareness of various social groups of the advantages of ICT use for development (organization of awareness and preparedness campaigns, realization of projects demonstrating the potential of ICT for life and work, etc.);
- Organization of consulting services dealing with development opportunities through ICT for various groups of users (decision makers, managers and specialists of different organizations; representatives of SMEs; individuals, etc.);
- Stimulation of the development information resources of North-West of Russia, accessible via the Internet;

III. Assistance in the Development of a Knowledge Economy:

- Accumulation and dissemination of expert knowledge dealing with e-Development;
- Promotion of e-Government, e-Business, e-Learning, etc.;
- Provision of access to high-quality solutions and know-how in the field of e-Development for Russian users;
- Expertise of and assistance in developing efficient business models with the use of ICT, organization of experimental facilities for their testing and implementation;
- Provision of concentrated and coordinated information on the respective programs, projects and initiatives in the sphere of e-Development for potential investors and donors as well as for potential applicants.

In addition to the above-mentioned, the following system objectives are to be achieved:

- Creation of an efficient system for coordination of PRIOR North-West activities, supporting active involvement of participants representing government, business, civil society, research and education community, donor and international organizations;
- Support of E-Development Partnership in the North-West of Russia Portal as an efficient environment for cooperation of all forces of the society that facilitate e-Development and an efficient instrument for integration of the expert knowledge in the sphere of development;
- Designing and necessary adjustment of a business model of stable functioning of PRIOR North-West organizational structure;
- Creation of a system of financial support for ICT development and use in the civil sphere, including fund raising and search for investments for the implementation of PRIOR North-West projects and events;
- Creation of a system of public support for PRIOR North-West activities.

A new membership of PRIOR North-West Coordinating Board was elected on 22 March 2004 at the 3rd Interregional Conference of E-Development Partnership in the North-West of Russia. For more information on the PRIOR North-West activities please refer to http://www.prior.nw.ru.

The results of the analysis of the ICT assimilation by Russian population, state and municipal bodies, business, scientific and educational associations etc. reveals considerable potential for the growth of the number of users of the Internet social technologies in the years to come. From this point of view North-West Region is the most promising one in Russia.

The main trends of the PRIOR North-West activities are the following:

- development and use of information society technologies in SME support in St. Petersburg and North-West of Russia (St. Petersburg Foundation of Business Development — http://www.fbd.spb.ru);
- consulting and information support of local government on the basis of wide use of ICT (Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Professional Education, St.Petersburg State University — http://www.cape.ru);
- transparent and responsible government in St. Petersburg and North-West of Russia: the Internet as a mean to access to the information about the activity of the government: St.Petersburg Humanity and Poliitology Center “Strategy” — http://www.strategy-spb.ru).
Realization of PRIOR North-West goals and objectives will allow for a substantial supplement to the existing initiatives in the region, facilitating e-Development, and for support of the principally new kinds of activities required by the society.

The Partnership is envisioned as a mutual initiative of a consortium of partners, joining their efforts and resources to facilitate e-Development of the North-West of Russia and giving informational, technological, consultative, financial, organizational and other support to each other.

Coordination of activities and collaboration:
- Machinery of the Plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation in North-West Federal District
- Informatization and Communication Committee of the St. Petersburg City Administration
- North-West Association
- The Council on Informatization under the governor of St. Petersburg

One of the ultimate goals of the Partnership is setting up relationships with European Programmes of e-Development. Currently European Comission is developing a number of projects aimed at North-West of Russia. - “E-Karelia”, “E-Skills for Russian SMEs”, “New Information Society Indicators for Russia”, “Development of Internet Based Interactive Government-to-Business Services in the North-West of Russia”.

3. Cross-border cooperation - Northern Dimension ICT Development Network

In the latest years there has been felt a need to enlarge the cooperation and partnership activity to cross-border European regions, for there are also partnerships in the sphere of ICT and information society in European countries. And this cross-border cooperation in ICT sphere also develops very fast - PRIOR North-West takes active part in forming an international partnership of Russian North-West and Finnish companies and organizations interested in cooperation. This consortium is formed in the framework of Northern Dimension ICT Development Network (http://www.ict-network.ru). The objective of the Network is to promote cooperation between Russia and the EU in the field of ICT in four sectors: administration, infrastructure, education and training, and co-operation between companies. The ICT Development Network aims to support development projects and different co-operation activities in these sectors both financially and with concrete tools.

Northern Dimension ICT Development Network Goals and Objectives

- To increase and develop the co-operation of the members of the Partnership in ICT sphere especially in Higher education, Adult training, Technology, Information Society and Business cooperation fields
- To promote development of Information and Communication technologies (ICT) in the Northwestern region of Russia
- To promote co-operation between Russian Federation and the European Union in the sphere of ICT
- To promote development of ICT oriented business
- To promote ICT policy and information society issues
- To assist in strengthening the ties between the border region of Russia and Finland in administrative, education and business areas by means of using the modern information and communication technologies
- To promote ICT and e-skills among the conventional economy

Northern Dimension ICT Development Network

Main Activities include:
- Education and Training activities
- Business development services
- Information services
- Activity in the sphere of electronic commerce, including trade in the Internet, electronic trade and invoicing
- Conduct of seminars, conferences, symposiums, exhibitions; promotion of projects devoted to development ICT sphere.
- Activity in the sphere of electronic commerce, including trade in the Internet, electronic trade and invoicing
- Assistance to foreign firms and organizations as well as the Russian companies in searching for ICT business partners, personnel and premises in St. Petersburg.

4. ICT priority domains proposal for the EU Neighbourhood Programmes

One of the wide-scaled activities and outcomes of PRIOR North-West cooperation was creating the proposal for EU Neighbourhood Programmes on the request of the St. Petersburg city administration. PRIOR North-West Coordinating Board according to the Recommendations on preparation of the European Union (EU) Neighbourhood Programmes on the outside boarders of EU participant countries and EU candidate countries, and also basing on the Report of European
Communities Commission “Applying the new mechanism of setting the neighbourhood relations, proposed to consider a domain "Information Society Technologies Development" as one a Priority Domain of EU Neighbourhood Programmes, the issues mentioned hereunder included:

- Development of concepts and programmes for Information Society Development in the regions of cross-border cooperation, development of indicators for estimation of development level of information and communication technologies at neighbouring territories;
- Development of network partnership structures to provide for interaction of various governmental structures, business, academic community and non-governmental organizations;
- Development of e-Government techniques and technologies, providing for interactions between citizens and authorities via Information Society technologies;
- Development of global Spatial Data Infrastructure to be employed at state management and social planning;
- Application of information and communication technologies for saving and further development of cultural heritage, development of related information resources and systems;
- Development of conditions for study and efficient usage of languages of neighbouring territories, provision for electronic cooperation of cultures in the regions of cross-border cooperation
- Application of information and communication technologies in education (distance learning, videoconferencing in education, development of joint information resources for educational use);
- Development and use of information society technologies for dealing with social issues (welfare, telemedicine, environmental safety, employment and mobility);
- Development and use of information society technologies in economy and SME support (information portals, building credibility and legal concernment in e-business and in mobile business, telework, e-Commerce and electronic payments);
- Legal aspects of information society development, analysis and adjustment of legal issues in the field of development, use and cross-border transfers of Hi-Tech products of information and communication technologies;
- Holding conferences and workshops on information society technology application issues concerning government and business structures, academic community and non-governmental organizations.

The issues proposed were discussed and adopted on the enlarged sitting of PRIOR North-West Coordinating Board on the 17-th of February 2004. [2]

The domain “Information Society Technologies Development” if included as one a Priority Domain of EU Neighbourhood Programmes will both promote greatly the works on creation the united information society and increase the number of researches carried out in EU and NIS countries under the EU Neighbourhood Programmes, 6-th Framework Programme (FP6) and in particular according the Programme “Information society Technologies” which is the part of FP6.

5. Conclusion

After taking an analysis of partnership networks development in ICT and information society sphere, we can make the following conclusions:

- Forming the professional partnership networks is an effective instrument to faster the development of the sphere, raise cooperation and information distribution.
- International cooperation creates good preconditions for integration of professional communities in different spheres of activity into partnerships.
- Partnerships also create new possibilities for large-scale complicated projects implementation and for wide exchange of experience.

6. References

[1] PRIOR North-West full list of participants is available on PRIOR North-West web-site - http://www.prior.nw.ru/ewin/epart.htm