"Window to the Future" Educates an E-citizen

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In 2002, businesses in Lithuania announced that they were teaming up with the "Window to the Future" alliance, which had launched a unique project aimed at providing support to Lithuanian businesses in the development of the Information Society. The goal of the alliance is to encourage Internet use in Lithuania, thus enhancing the standard of living of the country's residents. Implementation of the project began after businesses began to offer co-operation in terms of the resources which initiated the alliance.

In 2002, the alliance's partners noted that the increasing digital divide in society was disadvantageous for the public and for businesses. The "Window to the Future" alliance organised a team which encourages co-operation with businesses and governmental institutions in encouraging members of Lithuania's society to use information technologies so as to reduce the digital divide.

A co-operation agreement which was signed with the Lithuanian Interior Ministry was the cornerstone for government and business co-operation in the process of building up the Knowledge Society. In co-operation with the ministry, 175 Internet centres have been established in Lithuania over the last two years. Governmental institutions or business organisations which work individually have never been able to achieve the key goals in Internet development, and so the process is being facilitated by the mutual endeavours of the Lithuanian government and the country's private businesses. Support from the EU has been used successfully for this purpose – first there was a PHARE Programme project which was implemented by the Ministry of the Interior and that led to the establishment of more than 300 Internet centres in rural areas. This means that today, Internet centres in Lithuania are a part of a wide network. Free Internet access is offered to local residents.

There are readily visible results to the establishment of public Internet access facilities. Social changes can be seen in the country, and these have oc-curred thanks to the ability of local residents to use the Internet and to receive access to information from the worldwide Web.

Apart from public Internet access facilities which make it possible to use the Internet for free, the alliance has emphasised the great importance of knowledge about Internet use among the population at large. The number of visitors at Internet centres and the number of Internet users can be enhanced as the level of knowledge expands.

In 2003, "Window to the Future" began to train a large number of Lithuanians in Internet use – 20,000 people completed the course. Much public attention was focused on the project, and that encouraged the alliance to pre-pare a project proposal for the EU's Structural Funds.

In 2006, "Window to the Future" received funding from the EU for the training of local residents in Internet use. Between 2006 and 2008, 50,000 Lithuanians will learn the fundamentals of Internet use as a result of this project.

POOR COMPUTER LITERACY, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Computer literacy is one of the key elements of the Information Society and one of the most important factors in reducing the digital divide. According to various studies, Lithuanian computer literacy is not at the lowest possible level, but it is far behind the level found in other EU member states which are more advanced in this sphere.

Each year, greater numbers of schoolchildren and university students have a chance to acquire computer literacy through the country's educational institutions. Still, lots of people in the countryside of Lithuania don't attend educational institutions and are far away from major IT&T centres – although they make up a significant share of the population, they have fewer possibilities to acquire IT&T knowledge.

It is a matter of concern that the people of Lithuania are not inclined to use E-services via the Internet, instead preferring non-Internet services. The incli-

In 2003, "Window to the Future" financed basic Internet training for 20,000 people.

nation of Lithuanian residents to use E-government services is lower than that which is found in the other new member states of the European Union.
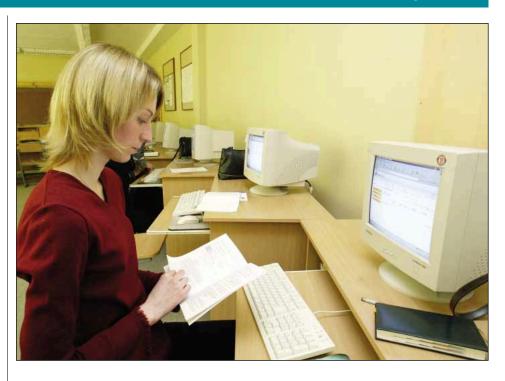
If existing problems related to the Knowledge Society and, specifically, to computer literacy are to be addressed, existing public policy must be developed at the EU and the Lithuanian level. A European memorandum on lifelong education emphasises that the competence of members of society when it comes to work in the electronic sphere is essential. Computer literacy is described as the one new and key skill that is needed for active participation in the activities of the Information Society and the knowledge-based economy. The memorandum also states that gaps in information technology management have the most to do with the high level of unemployment in particular areas, in some industrial spheres, and among socially vulnerable population groups.

In addition to the projects that are co-financed by the EU, there are independent national policies in Lithuania which focus on the Information Society. The national concept for a long-term development strategy states that it is Lithuania's goal to make IT&T the predominant economic sector by 2015, ensuring that it represents as much as 25% of GDP.

A global computer literacy programme that was approved by the Lithuanian government means that between 2004 and 2012, everyone in Lithuania will have an equal possibility to achieve computer literacy, irrespective of their background, profession, place of residence (urban or rural), age, gender, special needs and social standing. It is expected that some 970,000 people will acquire computer literacy that is appropriate for their background and professional qualifications.

COMPUTER EDUCATION PROJECT STARTED

The purpose of the "Window to the Future" project is to enhance the computer literacy of the Lithuanian population, to enhance the competitiveness of educated people and groups of such people in the labour market, also making it more possible for them to receive the information which they need in their work

"Window to the Future" received financing from the EU for Internet education for the population.

and to enjoy broader opportunities for education.

Since March 6, 2006, "Window the Future" has been implementing an EU-sponsored project, "Fundamentals of Computer Literacy of an E-Citizen of Lithuania." The aim is to provide direct computer training and knowledge about safe Internet use to 50,000 Lithuanians who are older than 16. The programme is based on the minimal computer literacy qualification programme which was approved by the Lithuanian government. This programme matches the latest version of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) programme for E-Citizens. The project will run through April 2008 and will cover the entire territory of Lithuania. The first courses are due to start in September 2006. The target group is made up of economically active citizens of Lithuania who are older than 16, who have no knowledge or skills in computer literacy, or who have acquired very poor skills.

On August 25, 2003, the Council of the Knowledge Society, which operates under the wing of the Lithuanian president's office, approved a declaration, "Time for a Breakthrough in the Information Society". The document said that over the subsequent two years, the fundamentals of Internet use

must be acquired by no fewer than 300,000 adults. This, according to the document, would encourage the more extensive use of information technologies and E-services in Lithuania.

The association conducted analysis to show, too, that this number of trained people would enable the breakthrough that is needed in the formation of a social environment which encourages computer literacy and supports its attainment. On the basis of goals set out by the Council of the Knowledge Society, "Window to the Future" is providing computer training to 300,000 people in Lithuania, but it is clear that this is a project that must be implemented in stages. The first stage would involve 50,000 trainees. Experience would then be used for the preparation and implementation of further projects.

The project provides education to Lithuanians in computer classes and on the basis of an educational programme which is in line with the standards of minimal computer literacy. Adequate educational planning services are to be purchased for the educational process. The classes will be taught in computer classrooms leased from educational institutions and in public Internet centres.

In preparation for the educational programme, the EU's E-Citizen Pro-

The "E-Citizen" programme was prepared by the ECDL fund in accordance with the "E-Europe 2005" Action Plan.

gramme has been prepared by the ECDL Fund in accordance with the "E-Europe 2005" action plan. The programme is already being used for teaching purposes in the UK and Finland.

The educational programme requires 30 academic hours, including 19 academic hours of practical classroom work, 10 academic hours of independent learning, and one hour spent in taking an evaluation exam. Participants receive handouts of materials, which include exercises and assignments for individual work. A test completes the process. The course focuses on the fundamentals of PC use, major worldwide Internet resources and services, services provided by leading EU and Lithuanian institutions, services provided by local businesses and educational institutions, and placing orders on the Internet. Specific knowledge focuses on:

- Fundamentals of PC use;
- Use of simple applications;
- Organising files and folders;
- Fundamentals of Internet use;
- Fundamentals of E-mail use;
- Searching for information;
- Protecting information;
- Services on the Internet;
- Browsing the Internet.

The project is to be implemented nationally – in all 60 Lithuanian municipalities.

COMPUTER LITERACY BREAKTHROUGH EXPECTED

Training 50,000 Lithuanians to provide the fundamentals of computer literacy is the first stage in achieving the goal of educating 300,000 people and thus achieving the necessary rate of computer literacy. The first aim is to create a positive impact on one of the aspects of the Information Society – the level of computer literacy in Lithuania.

It seems likely that after the successful implementation of project activities, the level of computer literacy in Lithuania will be substantially increased. The 50,000 trained individuals can be expected to spread their knowledge in various environments, helping relatively computer-illiterate people to understand the benefits of this knowledge and thus encouraging the desire for learning. Once the 300,000 people are trained, there will be a breakthrough in computer literacy.

It is very important that increasing numbers of Internet users expand the number of users for potential E-services, and E-learning, E-business and E-government services in particular. The market for commercial IT and E-services would be expanded, and implementation of strategic state aims related to the development of E-government services would be ensured. ❏