Internet history and it's perspectives in central asia – internet for sotial and political development: community building

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Abstract:

This paper shall give a brief history of Internet's development and it's perspectives in Central Asia. It concludes that Internet has great perspectives in Central Asia and that it becomes more and more supported by people and authorities. It can help to build local communities and support the advancement of democracy in Central Asia.

History

Nowadays Central Asia presented by the countries of former Soviet Union, such countries as: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan. Tradition and culture of these countries is a little bit similar due to some territorial position, cultural unity and dominating religion, but all of them were influenced by Russian culture and life style during a long period of time.

The Internet came to Central Asia firstly in the time of big changes that took place in Soviet Union in 1990'ies. Since this time the Internet become well-known to the people. From that time on some small companies provided the opportunity to the people to use the Internet. But currently almost all of them are closed and their place was occupied by some communicational monopolies which now provide Internet service.

Infrastructure and local resources

It's also important to remark that some percentage of population of Central Asia is living in rural areas. This fact arise the problem of providing telecommunication infrastructure and electricity in those rural areas even in the 21th century. Therefore, most of Internet users are living in urban areas and cities.

Local web resources are underrepresented in the Internet. That can be explained due to technical difficulties, lack of qualified personal and financial means. The larger part of local web resources in the Internet still is written in Russian or English language. Web resources formulated in the languages of Central Asia (which, for instance, are Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Uzbek) are not wide spread, although this situation is continuously changing. But unfortunately that change is still too slow. For the development of localized web resources it will be important that the people of the region will understand that this development strongly depends on their readiness to participate in building up those localized web resources.

The Internet in Central Asia

Actually most of the people of Central Asia do understand that the Internet could play a very important role in their lives - especially for grass-root organizations, NGOs, and so on, but also for students, teachers, and employees. Last but not least the Internet could be an important tool for state authorities and administration. All of these institutions, groups and individuals need actual information that the Internet could provide in case that there is a wide spread readiness to produce and to share it with others. In fact, people use the Internet in their daily life as a source of information and a means to communicate with each other. The Internet is a tool that provides the opportunity of inter-cultural contacts and actually the young generation uses it to create relationships and to gain new experiences. It seems that the Internet does not crush the cultural identity. On the contrary it seems that it provides a field of multi-cultural inter-action and mutual understanding in Central Asia and beyond that region.

Impacts of the Internet

The Internet in Central Asia seems to have some impacts to mass media. There are some changes of the local mass media, since almost all of them use information provided by the Internet. It is difficult to determine the sources and the quality of such information but it is used anyway. People get used to it and find it up-to-date and interesting - in the future perhaps a more critical stance could help to provide better information. More important, in contrast to traditional mass media, the Internet is a medium that can be used to distribute information unfiltered and uncensored. All the information that cannot be published in local media due to many reasons can be freely published in the Net. There-fore, it could be a tool to the advancement of democracy in Central Asia.

Besides the aspect of the advancement of democratic processes the Internet is an important factor in economic progress. Actually one can learn that the economies of the countries of Central Asia are vastly growing and developing. To strengthen that improvement, the digital divide has to be closed. It necessary to provide the opportunity to access the Internet to everyone who wants to access it - especially in rural areas. Even for the population living in urban areas and cities the lack of access to the Internet still is pressing. Some international Foundations tried to change that situation by pro-viding some Internet access points and Internet courses free of charge. Some of the universities in the region offer Internet access free of charge to their students, too.

Some problems

However, at the time the usual type of Internet access are dial-up-connections with low bandwidth, so the speed of data transfer normally is slow. Broadband connections are still expensive, but it is very likely that in the near future people will use broadband connections due to some technical advantages like Wireless LAN which can provide a relatively cheap infrastructure and can be build up very fast especially in urban areas and cities. Most of the governments of the countries in Central Asia have recognized the importance of the Internet as a tool of economic competition in the context of the globalisation as well as a tool of social and political advances. Therefore,

on the governmental agendas connecting schools, colleges, and universities to the Internet and hence building up a local informational space is an important task.

In contrast to the governmental attitudes, which are characterized by control, concerning traditional mass media, the governmental way of behaving to the Internet lacks that strictness of control - one even could say that there is a kind of liberalism concern-ing the Internet at least in some countries of Central Asia. In those countries there are no limitations to the free flow of information which in the future could open the door for social and political advances and democratization of the societies in Central Asia.

Conclusion

As a conclusion it can be said that the Internet has great perspectives in Central Asia. It becomes more and more supported by people and authorities. Internet could make life of the people easier and it can help to solve political and economic problems efficiently and much faster than without it. However, the Internet is just a tool - it needs people to use it.