How can a best practice guide of the Network of National Big Data Value Centres of Excellence facilitate the first Big Data Centre of Excellence in Bulgaria?

It was with great enthusiasm, when we received the news about a recent attempt to create the first dedicated Big Data Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Bulgaria that would also make it the first one in Eastern Europe, according to our findings. This project, "GATE – Big Data for Smart Society", is funded by Horizon 2020 WIDESPREAD-2016-2017 TEAMING Phase 1 programme and involves partners from Sofia University (Bulgaria), Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden) and Chalmers Industriteknik (Sweden). Their goal is to create a sustainable plan for a Big Data Centre that will be evaluated by the European Commission to be given the green light and the necessary European and National funding for the establishment of the CoE.

This whole endeavour is received very positively from the Bulgarian government and industry, as the goal is to foster and develop a vivid data ecosystem not just within the country, but in the region as well, that will pave the way for significant scientific contributions, successful commercial collaborations with industry and high international visibility.

With innovation pillars such as Data Driven Government (public services enhancement and efficient decision making based on Open Data), Data Driven Industry (smart factories production optimization and sustainable precision agriculture), Data Driven Society (better living through smart and sustainable cities creation, advanced health care and improved environment) and Data Driven Science (cultivating new generation data scientists), the GATE project aspires to create a centre that produces responsible research and innovation relevant to the national priority sectors and of European high standards.

The Big Data Value Ecosystem (BDVe) project as part of the Big Data Value PPP is a Horizon 2020 project that aims to create a vibrant data-driven EU economy by supporting the development of a European Network of CoEs in Big Data, as well as the sustainability and acceleration of data-driven businesses and investments. BDVe is developing a best practice guide for Big Data CoEs to support the sharing of best practices for existing centres and to support the establishment of new CoEs such as GATE.

To create this guide, one of the first tasks was to conduct a survey on existing CoEs in Europe, as well as their challenges, successes and strategies. We found that 21 centres belong to Western Europe, 5 to Southern Europe, 5 to Northern Europe. Therefore, it was only natural to realise that GATE is trying to achieve a very important move that aspires to strengthen the research capacity in Big Data in Eastern Europe.

But how can a new Centre in Eastern Europe avail of the best practices of CoEs mostly in the region of Western Europe? Our best practice guide was conducted through extensive literature survey on successful CoEs and it is enhanced by detailed interviews with the key management people from successful CoEs across Europe. "Our goal is to help new centres of excellence to leverage the hard earned experiences and best practices from Europe's leading Big Data CoEs." Dr. Edward Curry from the Insight Centre of Data Analytics who leads the activity in BDVe, noted that "The focus of our best practice guide is on the strategy, governance, structure, funding, cultural, academic/research-industry collaboration and outreach practices for Big Data CoEs, in order to create a guide that could facilitate other centres, new or old. These best practices have been shared with the GATE project in a series of workshops to support them in the creation of their new centre and us validating our guide"

"The great interest towards GATE was demonstrated at the two days of workshops in Sofia last December that aimed to identify stakeholders' needs and where the project team met with representatives of over 100 organisations in Bulgaria from all sectors. The discussions have resulted in a wealth of ideas for projects that can contribute to the sustainability of cities, enable smarter decision making in administration, make industry more competitive and improve citizen's quality of life. **Graham Kemp (Chalmers)**

"Our goal is to help new centres of excellence to leverage the hard earned experiences and best practices from Europe's leading Big Data CoEs. The focus of our best practice guide is on the strategy, governance, structure, funding, cultural, academic/research-industry collaboration and outreach practices for Big Data CoEs, in order to create a guide that could facilitate other centres, new or old. These best practices have been shared with the GATE project in a series of workshops to support them in the creation of their new centre and us validating our guide". **Ed Curry (Insight Centre of Data Analytics, BDVe)**

"A growing ecosystem of digital and high-tech entrepreneurs has emerged in the past years in Bulgaria and many international companies have their IT offices in Bulgaria, in order to tap into the pool of highly qualified ICT specialists. In this process of most rapidly increasing innovation performance at EU, GATE aims to play a pivotal role in this dynamic innovation ecosystem. The project team sees a great opportunity to expand this local ecosystem and to integrate it within the European Big Data community". **Sylvia Ilieva (GATE Coordinator)**

"The work of the team in BDVe, and Dr Curry in particular, has generously been shared with us in numerous valuable workshop sessions systematically addressing topic by topic. It allows us to build on the collective experience and best practice of Big Data centres in Europe, to draw on successes as well as mistakes, to specialise and be complementary regarding mission and focus, and to add value to Europe as a whole. We could not wish for a better and more efficient support". **Patrik Carlsson (CIT)**

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