Innovation, not isolation

When *Thinking Highways* was invited to deliver a presentation at the InnoWeek 2018 forum in Russia, there was only one man for the job – our Russophile technology editor **Norbert Schindler**…
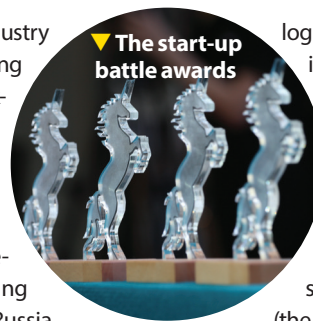
I n June I embarked on a memorable journey from Vienna, Austria to Central Russia to participate in the InnoWeek technology forum in Tyumen, the first Russian settlement in Siberia and the most important industrial and economic centre east of the Urals. I flew into Tyumen on a Sukhoi Superjet 100, a very modern and comfortable regional passenger airplane borne from an international partnership of more than 30 foreign companies that formed at the beginning of this century. As I flew over the vast – mostly uninhabited – land of Russia, I reflected on the potential Russian technology companies could have if they followed Sukhoi's example of international engagement and cooperation.

One might not ordinarily expect to encounter state-of-the-art technological innovation in Tyumen, where the oil and gas industries dominate the local economy, yet the level of technological expertise at InnoWeek 2018 was impressive, and the interaction between industry leaders, academics, and young technology start-ups – working at the cutting edge of technology – was inspiring.

The forum is part of the regional program for the development of IT entrepreneurship and attracts leading innovators from all over Russia. The key topics of this year's InnoWeek were Smart Cities and Information Security. More than a thousand people attended the forum, including experts and investors from more than 40 large companies and organizations.

During the sessions and panel discussions, experts discussed methods for developing IT products and bringing them to the global market. Unfortunately, since Russia has been quite isolated in recent years, we don't really hear much "in the West" about the techno-

▼ **The start-up battle awards**

logical innovations taking place in Russia. The fact that Russian technology companies have a hard time exporting their products abroad was a major topic during the plenum discussions that I participated in. During the first plenary session, the moderator asked me (the only foreigner on the panel, second from the right in the picture): "Is it true that there is a prejudice against Russians in the West and that this could be the reason that it is so difficult for us to export our state-of-the-art technologies?" I think the answer was already obvious to most of the attendees, although some of them may not have been ready to accept the hard fact that the isolationist approach taken by the political leadership could have such consequences. In my response, I encouraged Russian technology companies to more actively participate

in international conferences and exhibitions, and to consider cooperating with technology innovators abroad.

BATTLE OF THE START-UPS

The highlight of the forum was the "Battle of Start-ups," the competition of young start-up companies, where I had the honor of being on the jury. During the "battle," experts and investors selected the best IT start-ups in seven categories, including "first start-ups" for participants under 18 years of age (which was held as part of InnoWeek for the first time).

Over 280 IT projects from Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia and the USA were registered to the Battle of Start-ups. During the first round, 100 projects were evaluated in the categories "Artificial Intelligence", "Cybersecurity", "Internet of Things", "Blockchain and Cryptocurrencies", "Computer Games" and "Virtual Reality". For the final, 16 start-ups were selected.

The following winners of the contest were awarded a total of 10 million rubles (€140,000):

DROVA – a P2P gaming platform that connects hardware owners with players. It enables clients to rent games/apps anywhere in the world and enjoy playing these new games in high quality on their own device without needing to invest in a powerful gaming station or console.

DIALTECH - a platform for creating intelligent chat-bots based on neural networks. The system is trained on real conversations of employees with customers and able to correctly answer 80 percent of all customer support requests.

Warden Machinery – a company developing computer vision technology that monitors driver's fatigue behind the wheel. Based on the facial expression of the driver, the monitoring system also detects when a driver is distracted, has health issues, or is intoxicated.

PhotoMama - a mobile

◀ **Norbert Schindler presented examples of successful smart city implementations across Europe at InnoWeek 2018**

▲ **Cognitive Technologies' Olga Uskova with Alexander Moor, Governor of Tyumen region**

application based on neural networks that selects the best children's photos and creates photo albums in much the same way that a parent would do it.

WareVision received a special prize from Sberbank, the official partner of the forum, in the form of an internship in Silicon Valley. The inventory system is managed by a drone that moves within a warehouse, scans barcodes, RFID tags or QR codes, and takes pictures.

For all of the participants, the forum was an opportunity for many start-ups to find partners and talented professionals for the development and expansion of their businesses. Sergey Negodyaev, the manager of the investment portfolio of the Internet Initiatives Development Fund (IIDF) that supports young developers, said: "We are stunned by the quantity and quality of the projects that we have seen. There is a unique situation here, because never in any region were we able to accelerate so many companies in one day in one region." In total, the

Internet Initiatives Development Fund awarded 18 start-ups.

NEW TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS LAUNCHED IN TYUMEN

Within the framework of the forum, a number of companies signed off agreements with the government of the Tyumen Region. Most notably, an agreement was signed with Cognitive Technologies, an international leader in the development of software for autonomous vehicles.

Artificial Intelligence technologies will be deployed throughout Tyumen for an autonomous city infrastructure management system. Andrey Chernogorov, CEO of Cognitive Technologies, describes bringing the Smart City concept to the next level: "The smart cities concept that equips residential areas with lots of sensors, which in fact is a one-way information flow, is gradually fading out." Cognitive Technologies proposes the broad installation of AI and neural networks technologies by collecting data from city vehicles. "A deep learning neural network makes it easy to monitor streets cleanliness, garbage removal intervals, the state of road pavement and road markings, lighting systems, parking compliance, etc."

Similar agreements have been signed with Group-IB, NTC Protei, Softico, Directum, Netrika, BARS Group, and Softline. These companies are considering the possibility of implementing innovative projects in the region. Alexander Moor, the Governor of the Tyumen Region, said that the agreements are aimed at ensuring that these companies create products in Tyumen for subsequent sale in Russia and internationally.

The InnoWeek forum was not only one of great innovation, but one of the most interesting of its kind that I have attended so far (and I've attended a lot over the last 20+ years). I look forward to returning to Tyumen again.

Norbert Schindler is Technology Editor of *Thinking Highways, Thinking Cities* and *Tolling Review*, and is also CEO of GNSS Consulting, **norbert@h3bm.com** **norbert@gnss-consulting.com**