



KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT FOR NORTH-SOUTH PARTNERSHIPS: PROMOTING THE CANADA-LATIN AMERICA CONNECTION



Summary¹

This is the summary of the account of an experience aimed at innovating knowledge management in support of development. The experience was guided by the belief that knowledge can be shared and expanded through the use of integrated virtual pedagogical, information and communication tools, contributing to bridging the North-South knowledge divide, and thus supporting the work of development professionals and practitioners. The experience targeted the communities of knowledge and practice constituted by academics, graduate students and, in particular, front-line development personnel. It consisted in the implementation of a project entitled "North-South Knowledge Partnerships: Promoting the Canada-Latin America Connection", funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC-Canada), and carried out as a partnership made up of a number of Canadian university centres, a Canadian NGO network, and a Bolivian research and training centre – the Bolivian Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies (CEBEM). The central component of the project, which was carried out from November 2008 to June 2011, was to test a 'structuring model' for collaborative knowledge management.

1. TEST OF A 'STRUCTURING' MODEL

Globalization and the revolution in ICTs have created a new context for knowledge management in which North-South communities of knowledge may be promoted for the benefit of professionals that work in communities, local governments, and development programs. Professionals and technicians constitute a key clientele because they have limited opportunities to return to the classroom once they have completed formal education. There are strong indications of the existence of an unmet demand of short-term courses for professional updating: information for Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) region shows that hundreds of thousands of students graduate each year from higher education institutions, most of them from provincial and small institutions²; most higher education institutions are more interested in graduating people than in professional updating; courses to fulfill specific knowledge needs of development personnel are scarce; and there is the opinion, obtained repeatedly from diverse institutions and academics across the region, that graduates have very limited or no opportunities for professional updating. Putting together these elements of information, it is possible to assert – despite the absence of statistical data about demands for professional updating and of articulated demands coming from various professional sectors – that there is a niche for meeting the potential demand for knowledge updating in varied topics, coming from professionals and practitioners who work on development issues in local governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), grass-root organizations (GROs), and development projects.

The concept of a 'structuring model' emerged from the work of the Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios (CEBEM) during the late 1990s and early 2000s. During those years CEBEM, with financial support from IDRC, accumulated experience in three areas: design and delivery of in-classroom and online training for professionals; mass communication through electronic newsletters; and organization of a virtual library and various databases. CEBEM also gained experience in online training by delivering over thirty short online courses on local development, territorial planning, community forestry, and environmental development, to development professionals across the region. This experience revealed a potential niche to CEBEM and its various partners in Canada and LAC, for meeting knowledge needs by producing and delivering short, targeted online courses. Geographical and time differences could be overcome by using virtual tools. In addition to practice with online courses, experience was developed with other important virtual tools. One was CEBEM's newsletter, REDESMA (Red en Desarrollo Sostenible y Medio Ambiente), which at the time the idea of the 'structuring model' was born, it already had over 40,000 subscribers from several countries. Other valuable available capacity included creation of websites, organization of a virtual library, production of a virtual journal (Revista REDESMA), design of online mechanisms for self-registration, and a small team of young professionals which included a Webmaster, a web developer, online education tutors, and a librarian. Last but not least was the large number of professionals known to CEBEM who could serve as instructors for the courses.

The model was built as an integrated conceptual, methodological and pedagogical structuring system. It was named the CKD 'Structuring Model' (http://ccd-ckd.cebem.org/who/index_eng.php) (or just the 'model' as it will be named from now on) with three elements (Figure 1):

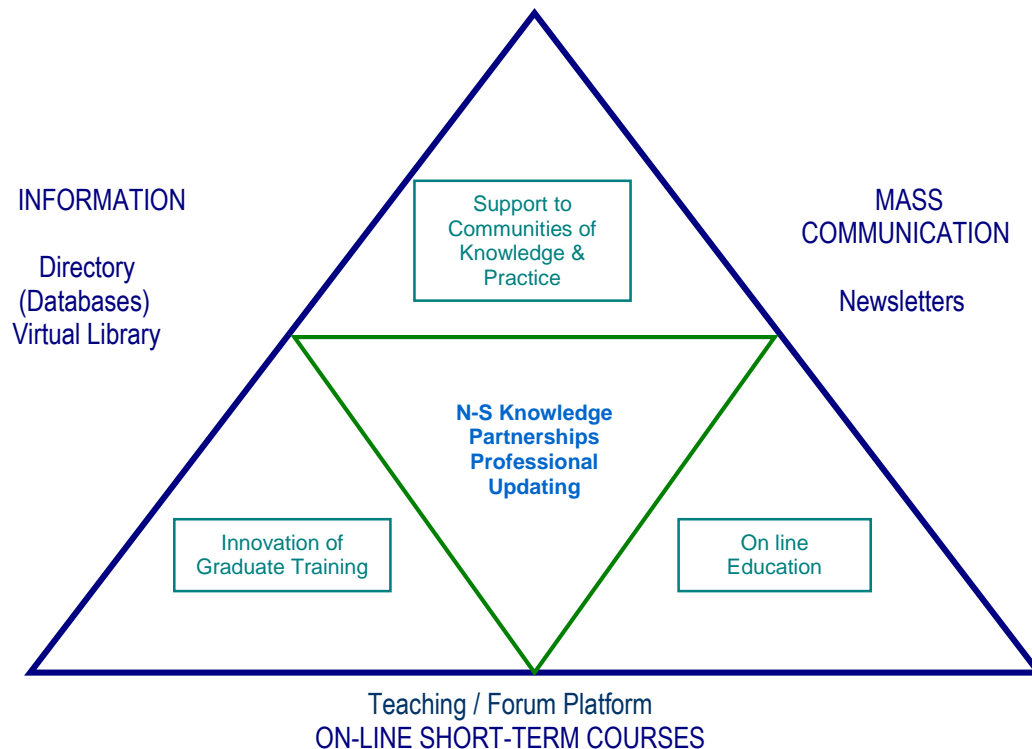
- a. *A philosophical orientation towards collective building of knowledge and participative learning.* The model looks at structuring the relationships among partners, individuals and networks, supported by a system that combines a virtual learning platform with a constructivist pedagogical approach.
- b. *The combined use of three virtual tools: online short-term courses, directories of specialists, research centers and virtual libraries, and mass communication newsletters.*

¹ Prepared by Mario Torres with collaboration of Jose Blanes and the project's partners. This summary is based on the project's Final Report and the external evaluation conducted by Claudia Marcondes.

² 1793,847 individuals graduated from LAC first level university institutions in 2008. Source: Red de Indicadores de Ciencia y Tecnología. <http://www.ricyt.org>

- c. *Two objectives: North-South and South-South Knowledge Partnerships, and Professional Development and Updating.* The model proposes to convene Canadian (North) and LAC (South) members of universities, research centres and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with the purpose to respond to the demand for short internet-based professional development training courses.

FIGURE 1 THE COOPERATION, KNOWLEDGE & DEVELOPMENT MODEL (CKD)



Using the CKD model as a heuristic guide, objectives, expected results, partners, and beneficiaries were identified for a two-phase experimental project. Phase I (2007-2008) allowed the partners to produce tools, and gain basic experience. Phase II (2009- 2011) saw consolidation of results, a test of the model with diverse partners and audiences, and the establishment of a solid base of results and products. Phase II objectives were to promote and further develop support to North-South and South-South knowledge partnerships based on participatory and constructivist management of information and e-learning pedagogy. Specific objectives were (1) to consolidate a model of collaboration supported by a Portal that provides tools and resources for communities of knowledge and practice; (2) to enhance and promote collaboration for the design and delivery of short online courses for professional updating; and (3) to provide short-term learning opportunities to Canadian and LAC graduate students, professors, and practitioners.

Two major groups of beneficiaries were targeted: individuals and institutions engaged in, or interested in experimenting with, learning communities and communities of practice across geographic, disciplinary, and occupational boundaries; and professionals and technical personnel interested in expanding or updating their knowledge and skills in one or more focus themes of the project. Expected outputs and results included: (1) a series of 20-25 online courses for the benefit of no less than 450 professionals, (2) training of up to 12 Canadian graduate students as producers of online courses, (3) expansion of audiences by a massive use of newsletters, (4) support to learning communities, (5) opening of Canadian universities to LAC, and (6) cost recovery.

The Centre for Intercultural Communication at the University of British Columbia (CIC-UBC) joined CEBEM in Phase. It was interested in developing closer links to the LAC region. CIC's willingness to attempt to overcome the challenge of potential language and cultural barriers was a key element for collaboration with CEBEM, and for testing the proposed model. At the end of Phase I, enough results had been accumulated to explore the interest of other potential Canadian partners in addition to CIC-UBC. After some months of discussions, another centres and networks agreed to participate in the experiment and to submit a joint proposal for support for Phase II³. It was expected that the partners would give more breadth and depth to the experiment, access to resources and students, and help in selecting and supervising graduate students that would be course and forum instructors. CEBEM brought to the table its experience with online

³ Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC-York U.), Centre for Developing-Area Studies (CDAS-McGill U.) later on Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID), International Secretariat for Human Development (ISHD-York U.), Centre for Sustainable Community Development (CSCD-Simon Fraser U.) and Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet).

education aimed at professional updating as well as its extensive network of contacts in Latin America, several of which were approached to participate in the production of online courses⁴.

2. RESULTS

For the most part, all activities were completed and anticipated results obtained in the course of the 32 months of project implementation; the quality of the outputs was deemed quite acceptable. A Portal was created (<http://ccd-ckd.cebem.org>) that integrated a database of Canadian and LAC experts and universities offering graduate studies programs, information on selected Canadian projects and funding agencies, data on networks, links to diverse newsletters, and access to CEBEM's virtual library and other online libraries. A series of 22 online courses for professional development were delivered a total of 41 times (Table 1). 5,501 individuals indicated interest in participating in the courses and of these, 717 actually completed one or more courses. Canadian and LAC instructors produced 12 and 10 courses respectively. 19 instructors participated including six Canadian graduate students, who designed six courses, and two Canadian professors. Six regional forums were organized. The newsletter was reaching over 140,000 subscribers by the end of the project.

Training for updating of professionals

CEBEM's platform – with a Moodle format – was used for delivery of most courses; CIC's platform was used for delivery of a small number of courses in English. Participants (instructors and learners) who were new to e-learning and e-teaching did not experience any particular difficulties in understanding and using Moodle options and mechanisms. There were no significant problems either for reading materials, writing comments or communicating. Courses were delivered under four focus themes: Intercultural Relations; Local, Regional and Territorial Development; Virtual Education; and, Human and Social Development. The definition of each theme was ample enough to accommodate diverse topics. This selection of themes did not respond to a previous theoretical or policy analysis. It responded to expertise and interests of CEBEM's members, and the interests of the partners. Given that the philosophy of the model is promotion of partnerships and communities of knowledge whatever the substantive area of work, the selection of specific course topics inside each theme was related to the proven expertise and interests of instructors. The filter was not the content but the quality of the proposal. In this sense, the project relied on the expertise of instructors – specialists, professors and graduate students. Courses were for a maximum of seven weeks, including a week devoted to learning the platform environment; follow-up of participants was close to ensure feedback among participants. The usual fee was US\$ 150; many times a US\$ 50 discount ('scholarship') was granted.

Courses were designed with the idea that the learners (or participants) would be professionals or experienced practitioners, interested in knowledge updating rather than academic credentials. Courses were therefore 'non-credit' and relied completely on the interests of participants. Overall, around 80% of registered learners completed their courses. The courses delivered a Certificate of Approval after fulfillment of all activities, including a final work or exam if they were required, or a Certificate of Participation when the participant did not complete all course requirements. In some cases, it was observed that participants were interested in course discussions or materials only.

An analysis was made of the characteristics of the audience for a sample of four courses. Results indicated that courses reached the target audiences over a wide range of types of professional work and disciplines (Table 2). Audiences were concentrated in the Andean region. Participation from other areas like Southern Cone, Brazil, Central America and the Caribbean was limited. One explanation is that course enrolment mirrors the geographical reach of the newsletter used for course advertising. However, this trend was changing in later courses, as the proportion of participants from the Andean region decreased overall. Very little participation was obtained from Canadians. One course, "Best Practices in Migration, Remittances and Development Projects" published online the final papers prepared by participants. Another course "Introduction to Social Economy, Theory and Practice" resulted in 17 documented experiences of social and solidarity economy from Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, Mexico and Mali. Some LAC participants had difficulties reading English and did not benefit fully from courses delivered in English. There is no easy solution to this problem because translation to Spanish is very costly in terms of time and resources. The difficulties of participants in reading English documents led instructors to offer, when possible, equivalent or comparable reading material in Spanish.

An evaluation was done at the end of each course by administering a questionnaire asking participants to grade – as excellent, adequate or insufficient – knowledge of professor, academic coordination, bibliography, and usefulness of course. Additional comments were invited about self-performance, and instructors were asked to give their opinions and recommendations. Participants' evaluations rated courses as generally satisfactory and useful, and indicated that their knowledge needs and learning objectives had been met.

Training of graduate students

⁴ These included the Centro de Estudios Superiores Universitarios (Universidad Mayor de San Simon), the Universidad Mayor de San Andres, the Instituto de Ecología (Universidad Mayor de San Agustin), and PROGEO network in Bolivia; the Centro de Estudios en Relaciones Internacionales (Universidad de Rosario), Universidad de Buenos Aires and Universidad de Rio Cuarto in Argentina; Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Mexico; and Universidad de La Mancha in Spain.

Canadian partners provided support by making the connections between CEBEM and graduate students, whether through organizing a process for expressions of interest to identify the students or identifying suitable candidates among their own networks. Two self-administered short modules were produced with materials from a series of three courses originally produced by CEBEM during Phase I. This basic training in online education techniques and the use of Moodle platform provided ten Canadian graduate students with a basic conceptual orientation prior to serving as instructors as they could not, given time constraints, take longer courses. Guidelines for course production and a complete course model were also made available, as were support and advice from CEBEM's tutors. In this way, courses were produced, teaching materials were selected and uploaded, discussions and forums were organized, and participants were guided throughout the duration of the online course.

The training was successful and courses were delivered with good results as indicated by the participants' positive evaluation. Good support from tutors was essential for course performance. Canadian graduate students produced a set of demonstration courses suitable for distribution throughout the region. The experience indicated that delivery of courses by graduate student as instructors is feasible even when they may not be already familiar with online education.

Information on Knowledge Sources

The internet-based structure and organizational framework materialized in the CKD website (<http://ccd-ckd.cebem.org>) which gives access to diverse Canadian and LAC sources of knowledge, online education tools, and newsletters. The project produced databases on 568 Canadian specialists in LAC development issues across all disciplines, 616 Canadian research centres, and 50 Canadian graduate programs - in this last case in the four focus themes of the project only⁵. Data were gathered also on Canadian networks, journals, development institutions, donors, and other sources of information.

Databases face several challenges: awareness of their existence, easy searching of information, and need for regular updating. The project met these challenges through use of REDESMA newsletter to inform about the existence of databases; integration of a search engine and inclusion of a mechanism for self-updating of personal information. The Canadian Association of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CALACS) and CERLAC have indicated interest to participate in the maintenance and further development of the databases. CALACS has a clear mandate to this purpose and CERLAC is interested on this task given its research and training activities.

Communications to increase audience reach

The initial plan was to produce a newsletter to disseminate information about Canadian activities, projects, conferences, and publications related to LAC. Some issues were delivered, with English translation, but this was not sustainable. At the time, CEBEM was already producing REDESMA, a newsletter created in 1997, which had become a very popular resource for advertising diverse professional and academic activities in Bolivia and beyond. It seemed more appropriate to take advantage of this resource and include in REDESMA news about Canadian activities – using the original language of each news item, either English or Spanish, and inserting a Google translator.

The newsletter reached over 140,000 subscribers by the end of the project. The challenge was to reach and include relevant information about knowledge communities from the North – in particular from Canada – and other regions. The newsletter still has a limited audience in Canada and the North. Notwithstanding these limitations, the newsletter was a very powerful tool for advertising Canadian courses, forums, and calls in LAC. A comparison with other newsletters showed that REDESMA's design was not as sophisticated as those with more important institutional resources. However, it proved to have a good presentation and to reach diverse communities of practice. An interesting characteristic of REDESMA is the Google translator, which most others do not have.

Support to communities of knowledge

A community of knowledge (or knowledge community) is defined as a group of individuals (professionals, educators, practitioners) interested in knowing about a problem, how to deal with it, and in learning together and from one other. Such groups are fluid and not tied to particular processes of institutionalization. The ICT revolution has allowed these communities to become virtual and globally accessible. The project results indicated that communities of knowledge and practice exist but as loose systems of knowledge exchange among individuals, with varying levels of intensity over time, depending on discipline, topic or practice. These communities could be detected through courses and forums. The project organized 6 forums on topics related to indigenous issues, communication, and social economy and made a call for presentations of cases for creation of a global knowledge bank of women-led initiatives of social change. CCEDNet developed three teleconferences and two on-line forums in partnership with Simon Fraser University. About 245 people (including about 80 Latin Americans) participated in these activities by CCEDNet. An online forum in "Aboriginal/Indigenous Community Economic Development" resulted in 9 publishable case studies. A virtual forum "Training on Intercultural Communication in the Work Environment: Latin America- Canada-USA-EU-Asia" attracted 460 persons from 14 LAC countries. Based on interest demonstrated in these forums short on-line courses were developed on social and solidarity economy and aboriginal/indigenous community.

⁵ Total figures including other countries are 2,459 specialists, 653 research centers and 158 graduate programs.

Although tools and resources were produced to help turn 'latent' communities into 'online' learning communities, this was not enough in itself. The CKD experience indicated that online knowledge communities may be promoted or energized provided there is leadership through online training and related activities.

Cost recovery

Cost recovery is key to assessing the financial viability of the CKD model. An analysis based on the project's experience was conducted on a set of 18 courses produced on CEBEM's platform. Estimates of costs on a Canadian platform were not done but would be higher. The exercise assumed production of a package of nine six-week online courses (plus one week for introduction), each delivered twice in a 12-month period by a team of three tutors. Costs related to webmaster, communication, Internet services, administration, LAC course instructor, and five partial scholarships of US \$100 each per course were included. A maximum fee of US \$150 was assumed because, according to previous experience, a higher fee would discourage registration. For this analysis LAC instructors were assumed to be paid US \$3,500 per course produced, and Canadian instructors up to CAD \$5,000. Costs of academic coordination, selection of instructors, and general supervision, were not included. A similar analysis was conducted for the case of training of graduate students.

Results estimated total costs for a package of nine courses delivered twice in a year at around US\$110,000. However the potential cost recovery could be between 54 and 31 percent depending on the number of participants per course – 20 or 15 – and the total number of individuals that received training – 360 or 270. The conclusion is that online courses as proposed by the model require partial subsidy. Another conclusion was that training of graduate students could be partially or totally recovered through fees paid by participants in online courses.

3. DISCUSSION⁶

How the CKD model could contribute for building communities of knowledge and promote Canada-South partnerships?

The 'Structuring Model' performed well as a heuristic instrument of knowledge management. The model served to articulate along a four-year period North-South activities for mutual learning, communication, and information. Results indicated that the model points to the right direction as it was possible to convene, through online courses and forums, diverse partners and beneficiaries from North and South; make accessible information about diverse sources of knowledge by using the Internet; apply a constructivist pedagogy perspective to online courses; generate learning opportunities for participants across national boundaries – professors, instructors, graduate students, professionals, and users of databases and newsletters – and approach communities of knowledge and practice. Although in the short term there has not been enough time to observe changes in practice and impact, it became clear during the course of Phase II that the model could contribute to building bridges between higher education institutions, on the one side, and community and professional experiences on the other. The model can generate opportunities for innovation in higher education, professional updating, and mutual learning among diverse communities of knowledge and practice. The model was based on collaboration and knowledge exchanges between Northern and Southern "thinkers" and "doers", as a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice, academics and practitioners.

Limited economic resources, priorities, and routine institutional practices may be obstacles to attempting innovation practices in academic institutions and NGOs. Dissemination of information about the potential of the model to bring visibility and expand audiences may encourage them to apply the model in the future. Another option is to attract young professionals who may be more open to change and innovation. The experience indicates that ICTs in combination with a pedagogical approach can empower communities of knowledge and practice. The critical element is to obtain synergies among training, communication and information activities as the model proposes. The challenge has been to overcome the fact that people are used to conceptualize communication, information and training as discrete, self-contained activities.

Partnerships are multidimensional and temporal relations founded on the interests of people and organizations. The project suggests that partnerships may be facilitated by the application of ICTs: the model demonstrated that its application allows one to convene people and institutions around activities conducive to establishing potential longer-lasting partnerships. However, the project's lifespan was too short to instil strong ownership by the project partners. Much work is necessary to motivate long-term collaboration in the form of ICT-based information sharing, training and work in communities of knowledge and practice beyond external support. Communities of knowledge and practice need facilitators, people and institutions interested in the creation of agenda, promotion of new activities, and securing lasting impact.

Relevance and significance of CKD results

⁶ This discussion integrates contributions made by the external evaluation of the project conducted by Claudia B. Marcondes B. Arch., M. Urban Planning between February and June 2011.

As an experiment, the project was successful. All project objectives produced results consistent with the model's philosophy and purpose. A model of collaboration supported by a Portal and organizational arrangements was set up and provided opportunity, space, tools, and resources for the activities of communities of knowledge and practice (objective 1). As such, an integrated system exists and is functioning but adjustments are necessary to ensure it promotes learning communities and knowledge partnerships. Regarding the objective of enhanced collaboration for design and delivery of short on line courses (objective 2), there have been positive results in course production and delivery. Logistical constraints prevented the production of courses by Canadian and LAC instructors working together; for this to function well, course designers require time and opportunity to become acquainted, and coordinate content, readings and teaching methodologies. Regarding the provision of short-term work and learning opportunities to Canadian and LAC graduate students, professors, and practitioners (objective 3) these were provided mostly at the level of the Canadian graduate students and LAC practitioners undertaking these courses.

The project was successful in bringing together academics and practitioners. Short-term courses for professional updating delivered across cultures were not unduly impeded by cultural and language barriers when conceived and delivered with the appropriate pedagogical methodology. The challenge lay in identifying courses that respond to knowledge needs. While the external evaluation of the project did not establish links between research and policy making as a direct result of the project, it is possible that some of this Northern research has helped to advance Southern thinking and practices by LAC professionals taking the courses. It is worth noting that the external evaluation found some experiments within the courses taught by the Canadian graduate students, in which the project fostered the development of a learning community beyond the project's reach.

Mass communication made it possible to approach communities of knowledge and communities of practice which are, as indicated before, informal and scattered across countries, disciplines and professional areas of practice. Unfortunately, use of databases was limited because they were under construction at the time forums and courses were going on. There is much to be gained if course and forum participants use databases and virtual libraries. Course methodology needs to put more emphasis in the use of databases for discussion and learning purposes. The project's databases have a great potential usefulness for the identification of learning communities, organization of forums, conducting consultancies, and increasing visibility. However, here again, databases per se are not enough: coordination with a mass communication strategy and online training is fundamental. The creation of tools as proposed by the model and wide communication about their existence was not enough to produce long-term interest, collaboration and partnership activities. These tools alone are not sufficient to establish a community of knowledge and practice. It is necessary to focus on common thematic areas about which there is mutual interest in producing and sharing knowledge together.

CCK implementation experience

The use of ICTs for project coordination was intense. Collaboration in course design and delivery worked well. The level of institutional participation in the delivery of courses was generally good. The engagement of a group of Canadian academics as members of the research team interested in the Latin American region contributed to the credibility of the undertaking and facilitated course production and organization of forums, although by itself it was not conducive to enhanced long-term North-South collaboration. This can be explained by very heavy workloads which made it difficult for these academics to devote enough time to ensure that they could play a really substantive role in the experience of co-generation of knowledge. Actually, this was not a surprise; rather, it reinforced the idea that the future of this sort of initiative must rely on graduate students and post-students.

It is necessary to examine how to overcome the obstacle to LAC participation in Canadian courses represented by the relatively high level of Canadian fees. On the other hand, although courses offered from LAC were open to Canadians, they did not attract participation of English speaking individuals. This may be explained by the relatively limited number of Spanish-speaking among the potential Canadian audiences of the project, by the fact that the project's newsletters did not reach the intended audience, or by the lack of relevance of the course content. One comment received in this regard was that Canadians might expect that there is not much to learn from the South. It would be interesting to examine all these possible factors.

The issue of accreditation was omitted purposely by the project. This question had been examined in fairly great depth in the course of another earlier experiment, and it was determined that short online courses aimed at updating or complement skills of professionals and practitioners did not require accreditation. It became clear during this project that professionals and practitioners taking the courses were not interested in credits but in obtaining useful knowledge; a Certificate signed by prestigious institutions was deemed satisfactory.

The virtual forums were quite effective to test the level of interest in certain topics and determine the relevance of developing a course, to narrow down agenda setting, or to delineate research interests further. They were an inexpensive way to gather good information and to design subsequent inquiries. The directories were found to be good products and potentially very useful; they were strategically important to both CALACS and CERLAC in particular, helping them to identify potential collaborators/members from disciplines beyond the usual network of Latin Americanists (social sciences for the most part) to involve researchers in other disciplines such as natural, engineering, environmental, and food sciences. Another potential use of the databases produced during Phase II is to explore the creation of thematic communities among CALACS members. The performance of the newsletter in terms of reaching LAC audiences was excellent despite the fact that REDESMA historically has served mainly Bolivia and the Andean countries. The main problem was to reach Canadian audiences.

One option to reach effectively Canadian and Northern audiences in general is to use existing newsletters because attempting to produce a multicultural newsletter may be too costly. However, many of the Canadian partners did not have their own newsletter, making it difficult for CEBEM to use them as vehicles to enhance REDESMA's circulation within Canada.

The institutionalization of the CKD initiative constitutes a major challenge. Although the initiative looked at long-term innovative approaches to knowledge sharing and collaborative learning, institutionalization of the model was not one of the objectives for the life span of the project. Institutionalization would require much more time, experimentation and demonstration. The purpose of the project was not to obtain a series of products but to introduce a practice. The model is not expected to yield significant benefits in the short term either. Results indicate that people and institutions can obtain returns not in terms of monetary profit but in terms of visibility, increased research opportunities, and more capacity to reach communities of knowledge and practice, not to mention a limited but significant cost recovery than other partnership models do not necessarily demonstrate.

A niche for innovating knowledge management by focusing on the updating of professionals in LDCs and graduates' training in development issues

The initiative defined in the CKD model and materialized in Phases I and II represents an approach to knowledge management for the potential benefit of countless professionals while attempting to make a bridge between North and South communities of knowledge and practice. As indicated by the external evaluation, the project worked quite well, with several online courses demonstrating that they were effective ways to improve graduate training in development issues while at the same time updating professionals in lower-income countries.

There is a well-identified need for professional updating in LAC especially for graduates of small and provincial higher education institutions. Professionals from diverse disciplines and backgrounds participated in the courses. Some thousands of professionals expressed interest. There was a good representation by disciplinary background and type of professional work. This diversity enriched courses as diverse participants shared information about varied professional experiences. The enduring demand for courses suggests that they make a difference in knowledge and practice, and that courses meet a real need. Focus on development practitioners and professionals working in non-academic environments should continue to be the main focus of future activities.

Also important to underline is that a niche exists not only for knowledge updating but also for innovating graduate training and expanding opportunities for community-engaged training and research. The model showed a path to professional updating by giving, on the one hand, access to short-term and low cost courses on key issues to professionals, and on the other, opportunities for checking new ideas, approaches and research results to professors and graduate students. The experience added value to their training and professional expertise; gave them the opportunity to discuss with professionals working in the same field concepts, theoretical approaches and development experiences; expanded their professional skills; provided them with opportunities to test their newly developed courses; gave them their experience for teaching online courses; and expanded the horizon of professional and academic contacts. The area of virtual education, previously little known to them, was opened up through this experiment. Moreover, many courses with participation of professionals and practitioners may provide a 'reality check' to curriculum content and research initiatives. There is certainly a niche for improving graduate training. On the other hand, course participants had the opportunity to learn about the most recent theoretical approaches, research, and policy results. There is no other comparable method to obtain similar results at low cost from a wide audience across geographical and cultural boundaries. While graduate and post-graduate students were not invited to produce courses in LAC in the context of the project, this option is one that should be explored in future, as LAC graduate students surely represent as a good a resource as they do in Canada.

There was also another key result. It was demonstrated that graduate training, professional updating, and contributing to community development are not incompatible but rather complementary activities. Without a doubt there will be obstacles to overcome. The main difficulty for the graduates was to free time to be able to do their work within a short time frame. The fact that it is necessary to have Spanish-speaking graduates for work in LAC is a challenge for the expansion of the experiment. Matching the research interests of graduates in the North and the professional updating needs of Southern communities will always remain a challenge.

4 FINAL REMARKS

The CKD model inspired a project which, within two phases over five years, produced results that open up innovative paths for North-South shared learning. This vision may certainly inspire other models different from that of CKD; the model may possibly inspire other, different projects. However, the CKD model was sufficient to demonstrate that building a bridge between academic institutions and communities may be feasible by resorting to graduate students, professors and rich knowledge resources, and by using a pedagogical approach based on varied ICTs. Time and budget limitations did not allow further testing of the model to include NGOs and private sector organizations. Both are also rich in knowledge and experience that undoubtedly could feed online education activities for the benefit of development professionals. In this sense it is hoped that this project report will inspire other similar initiatives; options are almost endless when imagination and enthusiasm are at work to overcome geographical distance, cultural differences and cumbersome institutional practices.

TABLE 1 ON-LINE COURSES BY CANADIAN AND LAC PARTNERS (2009 – 2011)

CANADIAN COURSES

Name	Institution
1. "Introduction to International Development"	CIC – UBC
2. "Education & Development"	CIC – UBC
3. "Evaluating International Development Work"	CIC – UBC
4. "Labour Migration & Displacement"	CIC – UBC
5. "Facilitating Online Across Cultures"	CIC – UBC
6. "Best Practices" in Migration, Remittances and Development Projects	CERLAC – York U.
7. "Social vulnerability, sexual and reproductive citizenship, health and rights. Concepts, problems and practices in LA"	Sociology / Université Laval / ISID
8. "Thinking Contemporary Latin American: 'Neo-liberalism', 'Shift to the Left', 'Populism' and other continental dilemmas"	CERLAC / ISHD – York U
9. "Energy, Development and the Environment"	Urban Planning / ISID McGill U
10. "Social Economy: Theory and Practice"	Geography / CSCD - SFU
11. "Women and Food Sovereignty"	ISDH – York U
12. "Self-determination and Indigenous Autonomy in Latin America and Canada"	CERLAC – York U

II. LATIN AMERICAN COURSES

Name	Institution
1. "Leadership from a Gender and Intercultural Perspective"	PROGEO
2. "Environmental Health"	Instituto de Ecología - UMSA
3. "Ecological Economy"	Instituto de Ecología - UMSA
4. "Participatory Planning and Design of Communication Strategies"	Universidad Católica Boliviana
5. "Climatic Change: causes and impact of a growing phenomenon"	Instituto de Ecología – UMSA
6. "Controversy on the Quantification of the Social Economy"	Universidad de la Mancha
7. "Intercultural Communication as a Tool in the Work Environment"	CEBEM
8. "Cities and Urban Space Process of Transformation"	CEBEM
9. "Introduction of Systems of Social Analysis"	CEBEM
10. "Guide of Tools for Territorial Analysis"	CEBEM

Centre for Developing-Area Studies (CDAS)
 Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) McGill University
 Centre for Intercultural Communications (CIC-UBC), University of British Columbia
 Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), York University
 Centre for Sustainable Community Development (CSDC), Simon Fraser
 University International Secretariat for Human Development (ISHD), York University
 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto
 Universidad Mayor de San Andres (UMSA)

TABLE 2 COURSES “ENERGY, DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENT”, “SOCIAL ECONOMY: THEORY AND PRACTICE”, “WOMEN AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY” & “SOCIAL VULNERABILITY, SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS”

DISTRIBUTION OF INTERESTED PERSONS (I) AND PARTICIPANTS (P) BY TYPE OF PROFESSIONAL WORK

Type of professional work	Energy, Development & Environment		Social Economy		Food Sovereignty		Social Vulnerability Sexual & Reproductive Rights	
	I	P	I	P	I	P	I	P
Private sector / consultancies (1)	25.8	46.7	6.4	19.0	16.4	3.8	11.4	28.6
Director / Executive of NGO	5.2		7.2	9.5	5.5	3.8	10.9	
Officer of foundation (2)	5.9	6.7	2.6	4.8	3.6		6.6	7.1
Officer / member of NGO (3)	9.2	13.3	28.7	4.8	27.2	34.6	28.2	21.5
Community based organization			14.7	4.8	6.4	15.4		
University Professor		1,3	3.0	4.8	6.4	3.8	13.3	21.5
Researcher	7.2	6.7	4.9		10.9	19.3	4.7	
Local authority / Officer at local government	12.5		5.3		0.9		9.0	7.1
National ministry employee	3.9		7.6	42.8	8.2		5.0	
Other type of national government institution	6.6		6.8		7.3		2.7	
Project operator (4)	6.6		3.4	9.5	5.4	7.7	6.2	7.1
University student	2.6	13.3	0.7		0.9	11.6	2.0	7.1
Other			8.7		0.9			
Total (percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	152	15	265	21	110	26	256	14

- (1) Managers of private enterprises, self-employed workers, consultants, advisors
- (2) Members / officials of NGOS who operate as national foundations
- (3) Includes administrators, general coordinators, program coordinators, members
- (4) Includes individuals who stated they were operating a program or project