

# MultiCampus Open Educational Resources: the case of OER-HE

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## Abstract

In this paper we address the implementation strategies regarding Open Educational Resources within a multicampus setting. A comparison is made between 3 institutions that are taking a very different approach: K.U.Leuven, which is a traditional university, the Open Universiteit (Netherlands) which is in the process of starting up the Network Open Polytechnics, and the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. We are looking deeper into the pedagogical and organizational issues involved in implementing an OER strategy and show how OER holds the promise of flexible solutions for reaching at first sight very divergent goals.

## Keywords

Open Educational Resources, multicampus, regional embedding

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# 1. Introduction

In the context of the project Innovative Open Educational Resources (OER) in European higher education (OER-HE) led by the European Association of Distance Universities (EADTU) we assess different kinds of approaches towards implementation of OER in a multicampus environment. OER can fill local expertise gaps help to create an integrated learning environment that is both virtual and physical, mixing distant and blended learning. We will detail how OER can offer both pedagogical and organizational flexibility. Each institution is trying to shape future learning conditions out of starting conditions that are historically evolved. In each case, the relation between content, human resources and knowledge dissemination is explored and a case is made to strengthen OER policies at the strategic institutional level, by connecting it to the different business models at hand. A thorough literature research on multicampus completes this effort.

OER-HE is a project in the Erasmus Lifelong Learning programme within the strand Virtual Campus, which includes 11 European partners and envisions a continuation (and extension) of the activities which started under the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation grants (Atkins, Brown, Hammond 2007) and continues the work on the *Multilingual Open Resources for Independent Learning* (MORIL) taskforce (van Dorp & Lane 2010: 577). OER-HE is organized into five study work packages: (1) OER widening participation (i.e., best practices), (2) OER multi campus (associations and stakeholder), (3) OER internationalization (development manuals), (4) Quality in OER (quality assurance of OER), and (5) a European OER portal (a repository).

All individual efforts of the EADTU members are consolidated under one future portal, which also provides access to the open course repositories of members. The project generates a concise manual, a handbook, on how to deal with OER. OER-HE consists of the following partners: EADTU, Universidade Aberta, Open Universiteit (Netherlands), Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, FernUniversität in Hagen, Anadolu University, Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO, Open University, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, and Hellenic Open University.

## 2. Multicampus

In this paper we will focus on the OER-multicampus effort. Multicampus poses some specific organizational and pedagogical challenges (Gade 1993; Resta e.a. 2003; Holland & Sullivan 2005:1-14). The three partners involved in this research, the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (K.U.Leuven) and the Open Universiteit (OUNL), look into OER for multicampus from very different backgrounds and goals. Whereas for UOC multicampus means a virtual campus, and ODL technologies are at the core of using OER, the OUNL is involved in a project to setup a *Network of Open Polytechnics* (NOP), aiming to share innovative course content to existing higher education institutions. For K.U.Leuven, OER

technologies help to overcome logistical and synergy problems stemming from its University Association, involving 13 institutions in multiple campuses throughout the Flemish Region.

OUNL has the explicit mission to provide Open Education in the Netherlands and Flemish-speaking Belgium, and has a widening participation role towards more classical education, as is exemplified by its role in the NOP. K.U.Leuven is a traditional University (the 4th oldest in Europe), with about 37.000 students at the University and totaling 75.000 in the whole University Association. UOC is a distance teaching University that provides Open education through innovative technologies. Widening participation is certainly a common ingredient in the reasons for looking at OER (Smith & Casserly 2006), but the three institutions do have their own very specific motives to pursue this line of action. For OUNL, it follows from their role within the NOP network, where quality content will be a common standard delivered to the polytechnics, and OUNL is the learning technology and pedagogical innovator.

The relation between the K.U.Leuven and its associated Institutions for Higher Education is more bi-directional: the institutions in the first place have an independent pedagogical concept, and often host disciplines that are not covered by K.U.Leuven. The aim of multicampus OER is in this case more a sharing of expertise, with collaboration on the content in a network of practice (Brown & Duguid 2001, Brown & Adler 2008); it will always be used in a blended learning context (Bijnens e.a. 2009: 164). The K.U.Leuven pilot in OER is *Literature and Culture in Europe* (LACE) (Truyen & Kuppens 2010), which builds on previous experience in the use of social software for Open Distance Learning (ODL) (Baetens, Truyen & Roegiers 2007).

For UOC, the high quality, finished Open course products are part of their added value. These need to be delivered and finalized before they are used. UOC is studying the optimization of the ratio of self-authored course materials and re-used OER in their course products. We will show that in these different contexts, OER indeed proves to be an enabling factor, but that on the other hand from the different stakes follows an impact on how OER courses are conceived. This has also an impact on the kind of Open licensing involved, which leads to different choices from the available Creative Commons licensing models (Bissell 2009: 100).

### 3. Institutional OER Objectives

OER can be implemented for a multitude of reasons, as our exploration in the three case studies will show. The three institutions involved allow us a sneak peek into their inner decision making process on OER.

#### Life-Long-Learning

OER fit very well into the mission of the OUNL, as it develops, provides and promotes innovative higher distance education of top quality, in collaboration with other HE-institutions in networks and alliances. As the Dutch prime university for lifelong learners, it addresses the wide-ranging learning needs of adult people during their course of life, plus the need to achieve a considerable upgrade of

the knowledge level of the community at large (Janssen e.a. 2009). A similar vision on the role of OER for Open universities is shared by the Open University UK (Gourley & Lane 2009). A first component of this strategy at OUNL was OpenER (Schuwer & Mulder 2009). OUNL is member of the Open CourseWare Consortium (OCWC).

OER is one of the instruments by which this necessary change can be achieved. Lifelong learning (LLL) should be enhanced in the direction of individualized mass production of resources in relation with social networks of individualized learners (Geith & Vignare 2008). New hybrid forms of both adult distance education and collaborative learning are needed. The potentialities of OER are very useful in achieving this goal, with different strategies and business models (Casserly 2007: 14-19; Rejas e.a. 2008).

On the contrary, K.U.Leuven offers traditional, daytime education both at the University Campus as well as in 12 institutions of Higher Education spread through the Flemish region. A strongly developed E-Learning system (Toledo) warrants a blended learning approach, offering both local branding possibilities as well as advantages of scale. The Belgian legislation offers possibilities to use copyrighted materials for educational purposes in a closed, subscriber-only learning platform, which is then equated with a classroom situation.

Both this legal situation and the fact that the thousands of courses in Toledo are meant for a blended learning context where a lot of information is passed directly in the classroom, makes that choosing for OER is not so evident. Understandably, the University seems still quite hesitant to embrace a true open policy: the focus is now in the first place on re-usable materials within the Association.

In July 2010, the Education Council of K.U.Leuven approved a policy document on OER submitted by the ICT for Education Board, inspired by the participation in OER-HE, and expanding on thoughts developed at the Council for ICT in Education of the University for many years (Truyen 2004, 2009). This document outlines several reasons why the K.U.Leuven should venture into OER.

## Profiling

OER strengthen the profile of both the university and the individual researcher and teacher. For the institution, it is the ideal tool to foster the local embedding in a community. With its openly published materials and results, universities are present in broader layers of today's information society and get picked up earlier in Google. There is also a clear advantage to the individual researcher. There is a difference between the research published in top journals, which as such is aimed at a small, highly specialized audience, and many other competencies of the researcher, stemming from his teaching or work in a lab. OER help position the researcher in this broader field.

## Mainstreaming

By distributing high quality OER, researchers help to mainstream new research insights. Used by teachers in higher education or at the secondary school level, it ensures that novel views on topics can be spread faster amongst the learning community. Mainstreaming amounts to shaping the

research environment. By mainstreaming their insights, researchers can foster interest in their research topic, and make a wider audience aware of the principles and issues at stake. This approach is also beneficial to the internet as a whole, through a positive effect on web searches. The more universities provide reference materials on the internet, the better the search results internet users will obtain, as is clearly demonstrated by how Wikipedia articles show up in Google searches.

## **Internationalization and reaching out to stakeholder communities**

Research is international as such, yet part of the mission of the university is a service towards its “constituency”, its regional embedding. Internationalization is an effort to provide a link between the local communities and the international dimension. OER can be freely embedded in local practices, enriching the international community with local perspectives. A lot of internet communities work on this principle: people share their views on open content online, while embedding it in very different practices and different contexts. There is an intrinsic link between well-understood OER and Social Software (see e.g. Piedra e.a. 2009).

## **Quality insurance**

Paradoxically, one of the reasons traditional universities are hesitating to opt boldly for an open policy towards their learning materials, is that after review, many of the online courses on their e-learning platforms are not really ready for open publication. First of all, these courses are often used in a blended context, so not all relevant information is on the web: there is a lot of extra information communicated in the classroom. Second, a lot of third party materials on these closed e-learning systems are copyrighted. Third, in many ways online courses involve privacy data, in bio-medics even patient-related data. These data cannot be opened to the general public. Fourth, teaching is a dynamic thing: on the e-learning environment one will find a lot of drafts, unfinished materials, debates, that are not meant to be published. Finally, the quality might be not good enough for publication. In this sense, promoting university teachers to work towards open publishable materials is a good instrument for quality control.

## **Impact**

The UOC is a member of the OCWC and is member of the Universia OCW project too, a consortium of Spanish speaking universities. UOC has high hopes from a new policy about OER which promotes a use of modular, reusable OER. They anticipate that this policy will promote the use of open licenses for a great part of our learning resources. The impact of university on society can be greatly increased thanks to the OCW project. The authors can share the learning resources using the OCW site and open licenses, and then use them in other educational institutions for teaching purposes.

## Learning in the Digital Age

For the three involved institutions, OER is also a way to connect to the 21<sup>st</sup> century way of learning that is natural for the so-called Digital Natives (Brown 2000; van der Baaren e.a. 2008; Thierstein 2009). Our students are expected to want to integrate learning materials in their own digital workspace (for some critical caution see Bennett e.a. 2008).

## 4. Different pedagogical models involved

For the three involved institutions, starting from a very different background, with different goals and pedagogical frameworks, OER are part of their future way of work, for different but equally convincing and compelling reasons.

The educational design of the NOP (OUNL) is derived from good practices of undergraduate education and extensive experience in LLL of the partners involved in the NOP. Base elements in the programs are use of professional experience of the students in semesters, blended learning, a modular curriculum consisting of semesters that are directly relevant to the professional practice, active learning communities and high-quality educational resources that will be publicly available and open to modification (Janssen e.a. 2009).

The teaching method will be a combination of several complementary techniques, viz.

- Face to face tutoring, plus lab sessions and feedback on assignments. These will be available at several separate locations; locations may be mixed during a degree course;
- A working conference after every semester;
- Digital learning environments comprising cooperation facilities between students (shared documents, video conferencing, text chat, asynchronous discussion groups), virtual classes (including full duplex audio, video, whiteboard, presentation software, session recording, document uploading, application sharing), facilities for personal supervision and coaching (e.g. portfolio management);
- Learning at the workplace.

The materials will be developed initially and updated yearly by teams from all participating institutions. Except for copyrighted materials purchased from third parties, all materials will be offered in the form of OER, under the Creative Commons license. This means that they will be freely accessible to anyone, including students and teachers at other institutions, and may be used for any non-commercial purpose.

The motives of OUNL to start this national network are partnering in open innovation in LLL, sharing of costs of development of new modes of LLL-education, of costs of development of high quality materials adapted to lifelong learners, of costs of market penetration, branding of a new mode of LLL education (competitive advantage) and finally “Creative destruction” of existing models of LLL.

These are the requirements for the development and (re)use of OER:

- In principle all educational resources for all semesters will be OER;
- It must be possible to use annually fixed versions of OER based programs;
- Public must have access to “fixed versions”;

- Students, staff and public must have access to all resources in order to submit reviews and ratings, comments and suggestions, additions and improvements;
- It must be possible for staff to ad user experiences;
- Monitoring and blocking of rude behaviour and copyright violations;
- Central and decentralized databases.

K.U.Leuven for its part is now in a new phase after many years of efforts for *guided independent learning*, where considerable funds were freed to help professors design courses in such a way as to stimulate self-study. This relied heavily on the use of e-learning tools, for which a comprehensive university-wide platform based on Blackboard and Question Mark Perception was introduced.

Current university doctrine rather emphasizes a more holistic approach called the "integral learning environment". In this concept, the whole of the university is re-centered as a learning organization. It has to be structured in such a way as to create a stimulating learning space for the students, whether this space is physical or virtual. Of course, this aligns with the transformation of the monolithic university into a completely different organization now as a multicampus higher education association. The institutions in the association each have their own pedagogical models, highly adapted to their disciplinary fields of research and training, e.g. competence-driven or inquiry-based training.

Given the support for the above-mentioned policy document on OER, the university envisions the publication of an open series of K.U.Leuven-branded courses, by using existing technology within the institution. The whole idea is to select courses with broad impact and publish them online as complete courses involving exercises and self-tests. The K.U.Leuven hopes to join the Open Courseware consortium on the basis of this series when sufficient courses are available online.

At the UOC, e-learning is based in the interaction between teachers and students in the virtual classroom. Perhaps, virtual classroom is an obsolete term for an obsolete way of learning, but is the only way we know until today with a demonstrated effectiveness.

The first step to effective use of OER is to break monolithic books into modular contents, and the use of an increasing number of external resources. This will increase the complexity of the content management in the university. All university life takes place at the Virtual Campus, comprising students, teachers, researchers, collaborators, and administrators. Students access to their virtual classrooms where they meet teachers, classmates, content, activities and communication tools necessary to study and learn. UOC sends all the required books before the beginning of the lessons to the students' home. The copyrights of these books belong to the university. Other versions of the contents are available through the virtual classroom: mobipocket, epub, html, pdf and audio.

The materials are not just important within the learning process. The institution considers them a strategic asset. Firstly, the exclusivity of content is a way to differentiate commercially the UOC courses from what other universities offer. And secondly, the materials are economically part of the assets of the institution.

UOC is working on a new Strategic Plan for 2010-2014 that includes a chapter on OER. Currently, UOC uses a great number of original self-developed resources, as opposed to other external resources. These external resources are, chiefly, journal articles or book chapters. Regarding the external resources being used, UOC should be able to determine which of these can be considered OER and which are simply complementary reading materials. UOC expects gains

from the possibility of including existing OER in its own courses (see e.g. McAndrew & Wilson 2008 and Petrides e.a. 2008).

An experience with focus groups should confirm or refute some of the following hypotheses:

- Creating original material involves fewer hours of dedication, since the main part of authorship is undertaken by external professors, while the selection of materials for reuse must be done by the professors themselves.
- The professor believes that the university policy is to produce original material as a differentiating element of quality with respect to other universities.
- The professor believes that the subject material must include all assessable contents and must serve as a guideline for carrying out all continuous evaluation tests.
- The professor sees the authorship of new materials as an alternative source of income.

To arrive at the ideal situation described, UOC works on a comprehensive policy with regard to contents, as opposed to a policy of exception and differentiated treatment that creates a series of particularities that are very difficult to manage and regulate.

The focus is on the creation of contents in those fields that are not covered by others. But this must be done differently: modular and decontextualized from the subject for which it was created. A clear policy must be established for opening contents and reducing exceptions to a minimum; to reward, if possible, professors and authors who publish contents in open source, and measure the impact that these contents have externally.

## Conclusion

Multicampus is quite a different reality in the three case-studies within the OER-HE project. Embedded in a different context, going from completely virtual (UOC) over an open network effort (OUNL NOP) to a more multilateral approach (K.U.Leuven), it emerges that OER provide key solutions. However, the institutions have different goals. In the case of OUNL, widening participation and Life-Long-Learning are the main drives to look into OER. For K.U.Leuven, Profiling as well as mainstreaming and reaching out to stakeholder communities makes OER a natural choice. In the case of UOC, impact on society is important, and translates into the need to deliver timely, high-quality learning materials that offer the maximum of autonomy. The quality of its courses are UOC's main branding tool. This has been instrumental in the choice for OER. In the three cases, OER using adapted licensing models are considered a strategic asset.

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