

Awareness Raising and Community Building The Role of MEDIDA-PRIX in the Context of the OER Movement in German Speaking Countries

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The provision of licence free educational resources can be regarded as a major trend in education. Since the launch of the first open courseware projects in 2002, numerous initiatives followed. In the meantime we can talk about a worldwide Open Educational Resources (OER) movement. In advancing this movement several challenges are to be met, awareness raising and community building being top priorities. The MEDIDA-PRIX 2008 (“Mediendidaktischer Hochschulpreis”) is an initiative that intends to function as a change agent in order to sensitize the community to the idea of the OER movement.

Open Educational Resources

Setting the Scene

With the shift to the digital, remarkable opportunities for new forms of learning have emerged. High quality learning materials, until recently safely locked up behind passwords and regarded as the “crown jewels” for educational institutions are shared and can be accessed for free. Since the launch of the MIT OpenCourseWare Project, the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement has continuously gained significance. The numerous both, bottom up and top down approaches considerably vary in terms of business models, targeted outcomes, organisational structure, production models, handling of copyright issues, levels of operation with regard to internationality, or models for quality assurance.

In 2007 several reports were published which investigated the impact, addressed the drivers and barriers as well as revealed potential implications for the OER movement. One of the mayor funding organisations, the Hewlett Foundation (<http://www.hewlett.org>) was and is a leading driving force in advancing OER into a growing movement. Based on the idea that the world’s knowledge is a public good, already in 2002 the goal of the Hewlett Foundation Education Program was to “... *use information technology to help equalize the distribution of high quality knowledge and educational opportunities ...*” (Atkins, Brown, and Hammond 2007 p. 2). Considerable effort therefore was given to enlarging and sustaining a culture of sharing and contribution. Accomplishments in the meantime go far beyond the sole provision of high quality content by the organisations funded and have gained significant impact on an international level (for the current state of open educational resource initiatives in higher education see e.g. Wiley, 2007). In their review on the Open Educational Resources movement Atkins, Brown, and Hammond (2007) acknowledge these developments and go even further in advocating initiatives to create a global culture of learning, built upon enablers as open code and content, participatory systems architecture in entering the Web 2.0 phase, improvements in underlying ICT, rich media, virtual environments and gaming, and emerging of a deeper understanding of human learning (OPLI: Open Participatory Learning Infrastructure).

Although OPLI has already been advocating for a next phase within the OER movement and very much has been accomplished up to now, yet several challenges have to be met within the OER movement. The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007) and the OLCOS Roadmap (Geser, 2007) provide detailed analyses of the OER movement in order to derive recommendations for an effective integration of OER into (inter)national and institutional policies and practices. ICT infrastructure given, promoters of OER initiatives face considerable challenges respectively have to take decisions with regard to production models, approaches of user/producer involvement and motivation as

well as community building. Business models in order to sustainably implement an OER initiative need to be decided upon, didactic integration in terms of providing resources for diverse contexts and teaching models, technical interoperability of the resources, copyright issues, or the assurance of the quality of the resources are some of the further key points to be considered (Zauchner and Baumgartner 2007).

The policy implications and recommendations given by CERI are structured according to the different “jurisdictional” levels involved, i.e. institutional, intermediate (regional, state, province) and international. Whereas incentives for faculty to participate in OER activities like teaching portfolios, or training activities and quality assurance models are regarded to be implemented at an institutional level, technological infrastructure, financial sustainability, the issues of localisation, adaptation and translation of resources as well involve the intermediate and national levels. The issues of metadata/standards and intellectual properties are further to be dealt with at an international level. Promotion and awareness-raising for the idea of Open Educational Resources is one further key point of the CERI recommendations which involves all the four levels. This is in line with the latest UNESCO report pointing out the main priorities to be dealt with in advancing the OER movement, i.e. awareness raising and community building, closely followed by quality assurance and capacity building (D’Antoni, 2008).

Building Awareness and Understanding

Awareness raising activities are given within almost all single initiatives, not to mention the significant PR effects the launches of the first open courseware projects had for the single organisations on the one hand and for the dissemination of the OER idea on the other hand.

Several initiatives also especially focus on the issue of building awareness for the OER idea and its goals by giving support to initiatives to spread the idea, by teaching educators, by launching websites addressing the topic or by stimulating dialogue between commercial and non commercial stakeholders (for an overview see Atkins et al., 2007, pp.19 -20). The UNESCO Forum on the impact of OpenCourseWare for Higher Education or the newly launched Cape Town Open Education Declaration (<http://www.capetowndeclaration.org/>) for example focus on building networks and fostering the movement. Broadening conversation was also identified as one major step towards promoting open education at the 2007 iSummit. Community building efforts therefore have to be undertaken in order to address students, teachers, professors, self-learners, policy makers at organisational, national and international levels: *“Processes, communities, institutions and, most importantly, people are all central to making open education to a success.”*(Schmidt and Surman 2007, p. 4)

The typical behaviour of (university) teachers in German speaking countries is to develop their own learning materials according to the own theoretical approach. Taking materials from other teachers and adapt them to different learning contexts is considered as an inferior approach with minor intellectual challenge and reputation. It is therefore necessary to develop a strategy for changing this ineffective culture. An Austrian enactment (Zl. 629/1-III/03, cf. http://www.e-teaching-austria.at/02_arbe/02_erlass1.html) to pay teachers a small amount of money in order to motivate them to share their developed contents with other teachers did not turn out to be a successful approach. The conditions like the necessity of elaborate tests and documentations or a complete transfer of ownership to the ministry were too restrictive in relation to the amount of money paid.

What is needed from our point of view is to provide incentives for teachers to change the behaviour from maximising their individual personal advantage to a collective advantage. This means a shift from an economy where products are sold and the exchange is realised through a non-system agent, i.e. money to a sharing culture, where products are exchanged by facilitators which are inherent to the (educational) system. This could be e.g. reputation through visibility of ones own work for the community or saving of labour through using material from colleagues. Especially the developments related to Web 2.0 have shown that mass collaboration (Tapscott and Williams, 2006) and peer production (Benkler, 2006) not only work, but also are to be regarded as global trends. The MEDIDA-PRIX 2008 (“Mediendidaktischer Hochschulpreis”) is an initiative that intends to function as a change agent for this complex transformation process.

MEDIDA-PRIX

Beginning in the year 2000, the Society for Media in Science (GMW) annually announces a highly endowed contest with an award sum of Euro 100’000. Participation is limited to Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The award sum is funded by ministries of the countries mentioned and is earmarked for continuing project development.

Initiatives that function as triggers and are examples for sustainable development in higher education are honored. The goal is to support didactically driven activities and to make known to the community outstanding contributions of embedding digital media in academic teaching. In contrast to other competitions, the MEDIA-PRIX is not primarily focused on technology or design, but instead addresses the didactic innovations of contributions. The contest fosters the dissemination of knowledge and approaches among academic institutions in German speaking countries.

The award has previously involved the pertinent community and with the formulation of criteria and their operationalization that guide the documentation for the submission, the subsequent expert opinions, jury workshops and briefings, the evolution in practice has been fostered. The award further was very successful in triggering national funding programs which ran parallel to the awards' calls for bids. Evaluations show that the MEDIDA-PRIX is highly recognized within the eLearning community and is regarded as quality seal for the qualitative advancement of academic teaching by way of a sustainable integration of digital media in academia. In the first call for bids (2000 – 2003), this conceptual approach was pursued by inviting bids from projects, institutes, and associations of academic instructors and faculty. Attention was paid to the various scattered “bottom-up” initiatives that required a sustainable integration “from above” (departments, university administration), as it is only when this integration takes place that initiatives can be sustained beyond the project financing period and despite changes in staff. In the second call for bids (2004 - 2007), an assessment category was introduced which was directed at university administrations. Initiatives that focus on the development of “top-down” E-learning strategies became the focus of attention (Baumgartner and Frank 2000; Brake, Topper and Wedekind 2004).

Redesigning the Award

In the latest call for bids in 2008, the MEDIDA-PRIX will continue its role as a change agent by an intensified promotion of OER-initiatives (Baumgartner, 2007).

Though very important, not only the provision of information and good practice about production models, business models, models for quality assurance, or on dealing with intellectual property rights and quality assurance are essential in this context. As the discussion moves further in painting a picture of OER which not only focuses on the resources or contents, a broader view in considering the educational contexts emerges. Adaptability and reuse are the key essentials in making use of the huge potential ascribed to the OER movement as an enabler of the transformation and improvement of education into the direction of enhanced, collaborative and user centred approaches to learning. Besides the humanistic goal of regarding knowledge as a common good, OER are therefore regarded to essentially contribute to didactic innovation in academia. As a result, the MEDIDA-PRIX will solidify a sustained utilization of digital media in academia and will sensitize the community to the idea of the OER movement.

The effects of the MEDIDA-Prix cannot be judged by the winner and the corresponding project alone. One needs to consider the entire environment of the contest that includes all the individuals who study the bidding documentation, individuals and teams that take part in the submission procedure, experts that evaluate submissions in addition to the public at large that participates in the deciding project presentations and accompanying public relations activities.



Figure 1: Medida-Prix 2008 Website (Source: <http://www.medidaprix.org>)

Award Process

An elaborate award procedure will assure that the participating parties will confront the new emphasis in a professional and timely manner.

A committee of experts will assess the submissions in a proven process based on the method of “qualitative weight and sum” (QWS, e.g. Scriven 1980, 1991 and 1999 ; Baumgartner and Frank 2000). The course of the assessment will be executed in a two-step procedure. For each project submitted two expert opinions will be solicited that will employ specifically developed evaluation criteria (see below). If the expert opinions significantly differ from each other, one third and decisive expert opinion will be obtained. In this first phase, a reduction of submissions (there are regularly in between 80 and 150 submissions per year) will result through ranking procedure based on the qualitative data and only 20 submissions will remain in the contest. Within the framework of an expert workshop, all remaining submitting parties are invited to a public hearing. The immediately involved expert evaluators will have the opportunity to clarify open questions in direct contact with the submitting parties while the other participating evaluators will obtain a comprehensive picture of the submissions.

Table 1: Evaluation criteria for the MEDIDA-PRIX 2008

1. Goal Criteria		
	1.1. Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal conceptions • Target Groups • Target Dimension
	1.2. Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipated Effects • Added Value • Planned Future Development
	1.3.Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Management • Participation of the Target Groups • Degree of Structuring
2. Structural Criteria		
	2.1. Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational Integration • Didactic Integration • Technical Integration

	2.2. Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational Transferability • Didactical Transferability • Technical Transferability
	2.3. IPR and Copyright	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing Model • Motivational Inducements • Information
3. Process Criteria		
	3.1. Business Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financing Model • Incentives • Financial Security of Business Operation
	3.2. Quality Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QM as Control Instrument • Didactical Standards • Evaluation Process
	3.3. Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Mass • Continuity • Further Development

The evaluation criteria were adapted with regard to awarding OER initiatives based on criteria from the earlier bids. As can be seen in table 1 evaluation criteria relate to the goals, structural and process oriented aspects of the respective initiatives. In total the criteria consists of a 3*3*3, i.e. 27 single criteria to be evaluated.

Conclusions and Outlook

Since 2000 more than 1100 projects participated in the contest for the MEDIDA-PRIX. Starting 2008 with new criteria relating to OER, the award should function as an additional mediator for a cultural change in the higher educational systems of Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

The goal is that the criteria, their operationalization, the decision of the jury and the way the winner(s) can work as a model for this change, will be debated in the community and thereby contribute to the transformation of the behaviour of university teachers in this respect.

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