

Closing the

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*The future has already arrived.
It's just not evenly distributed yet*

William Gibson

Modern history contains many examples of industries that failed to see the signs of major disruption early enough for large and well-respected institutions to avoid painful damage to their businesses. The music industry marginalised Internet file sharing to its own considerable cost, and the rise of Open Source happened despite the initial opposition of the software industry.

Earlier this year ELIG (European Learning Industry Group) surveyed over 80 different organisations from the learning industry and higher education to understand the commercial hesitation for the adoption of Open Education. ELIG was left with the view that to not proactively engage with open education, its production, use and practices could present a serious threat to the sustainability of many players in the current learning market.

Our study shows there is a significant gap between the perception and reality of what Open Education already does and could mean for the Learning Industry. Any institution with a stake holding in the provision of learning as content, services or products should understand what Open Education is and its related concepts of Open Educational Services (OES), Resources (OER) and Practices (OEP).

There is clear evidence that Open Education is a steadily growing phenomenon in the learning world and the initiatives already in place are considered successful. What's more, they have made a real difference to the way people find knowledge, learn and develop within formal education, workplace learning or through informal learning.



gap

**Lin Squires and Elmar
Husmann** show the significant
gap between the perception
and reality of Open Education



WHAT IS OPEN EDUCATION?

OPEN EDUCATION IS:

“... the free and open access to, the usage of and the right to modify and re-use digital open educational resources and digital educational tools, and the free and open access to the related virtual educational communities, in order to learn, teach, exchange or advance knowledge in a collaborative and interactive way.”

The How and Why of Open Education,
Collaborative Creativity Group at UNU-MERIT:

<http://tinyurl.com/43q6g5t>

Examples of Open Educational Resources

In 2000 the Nupedia project was founded by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger as a platform for peer-reviewed expert articles licensed as OER. Wikipedia was created in 2001 as a side project to allow collaboration on Nupedia articles. In 2003, Wikipedia UK had already over 100.000 articles. In 2011, Wikipedia UK passed the 3.6 million mark and became the world's 7th most popular website.

In 2001 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT, initiated its Open Courseware Initiative (OCW) and started to subsequently release all MIT's course material as OER. Now in 2011, the MIT OCW includes material from over 2000 courses which is estimated to be shared by 100 million learners worldwide – and further strengthening the MIT brand and impact globally.

Apart from the most well-known examples, such as the MIT OCW and Wikipedia, our survey has revealed more than 25 leading Open Education initiatives. The recent Open Educational Quality Initiative has collected and analysed 58 further cases. Academia is currently the source of most of these and also the most consistent users of OER, contributing time, content and some funding. Many commercial organisations regard this heritage as a reason in itself for dismissing Open Education for their area of the market. However Open Education holds the key to as many opportunities for profit-based companies as it does for non-profit organisations.

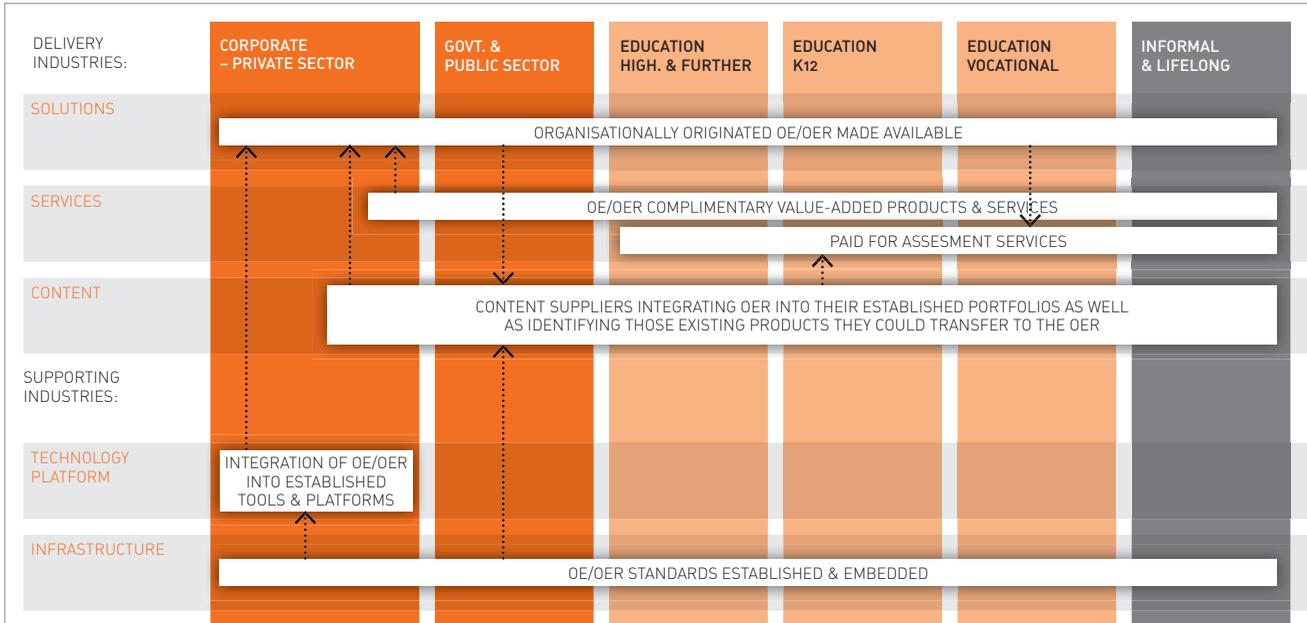


Figure 1:

Potential OE/OER learning market value chain

This is not just a question of options – our industry is also confronted with the needs of a new generation of learners that have grown up with collaborative learning, social networking and social working schemes. The impressive numbers of participants in OE initiatives, such as more than 100 million learners that share MIT Open Courseware OERs, speak for themselves.

Parallels are often drawn between the evolution of Open Source Software and Open Education. There are indeed some similarities including a founding conviction that collaborative development of open resources is a most powerful way. However, the 'Open' in Open Education is not just about licensing and development. It is also about content, its quality, its provenance and its specific didactic context.

Unlike the governance in Open Source projects, there is no organised moderation authority in Open Education overseeing how the parts relate to the whole. Rather there are governance mechanisms to ensure quality aspects of the diverse open resources, such as peer reviewing. This has allowed users to gain benefit and learn from individual open resources but it has not allowed for structured study programs that would lead to formal degrees or systematic improvement of skills and competences. Hence, Open Education initiatives mostly show a balance towards OER and predominantly self-directed learning and only more recently have we

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seen examples of entire courses being conducted as Open Education. ELIG itself has recently partnered in the piloting of such an open course on Business and Management Competencies in a Web 2.0 world with multiple providers organised by the United Nations University (<http://www.open-ed.eu/index.php>).

Within the current distribution pattern of Open Education lies the key to its fragility and the source of enormous opportunity. Open Education will further flourish as a component of a diverse ecosystem of players and with a range of activity in place to create value for all stakeholders – producers and users. In this context, motivation and funding are essential.

In fact, many of the current initiatives are linked to singular sources of funding or closely tying to an institution. The ELIG study showed that respondents believed that Open Education and also the production of OER was only possible in Europe because University grants, Foundations, National Governments and the European Commission offer primary sources of funding.

Funding and grants are important in the world of Open Source Software as well – but here these are primarily private funds from commercial entities. This indicates a reciprocal commercial interest.

Funding sources of Open Source

- The Mozilla Foundation benefits from over €75m of yearly grants and distributes funding to many projects in the OSS world. A large donor to Mozilla has been Google.
- Alternative support-models in the OSS world are donations of code from commercial projects and donations of developer time. An example for this is IBM that donates large developer capacities to Linux.
- Moodle is largely supported by the Open University.

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By 201 Moodle, an open-source software solution and also the basis for many open educational practices was used in 214 countries...

45m

...and by 45 million users



Commonsense tells us that the reliance on public funding for Open Education is a difficult model to sustain in the current European economic climate. The creation of mutually beneficial partnering models with the Learning Industry is needed.

However, with the exception of some isolated examples there are no business and funding models, comparable to those seen in Open Source Software, to make Open Education attractive to both the commercial sector and independent of public funds. The commercial viability of the practice of openness in education (OEP) is already evident in the success of learning management tools such as Moodle. Moodle is fundamentally an open-source software solution but also the basis for many open educational practices and commercially very successful. By 2011 it was used in 214 countries and by close to 45 million users. The wide support for open standards by learning platform and technology providers is further underlining the commercial viability of Open Education Practices. Here further lesson can be learnt from Open Source Software – that being open to new ways, new business models and new services will ultimately generate sufficient funds to be sustainable without funding donations.

So the practice of Open Education and the use of OER are advancing; however the development of business models and new forms of public-private partnership are lagging behind.

Viable business models which will drive Open Education into a new level of maturity cannot be achieved by just a predominantly academic community who have driven Open Education forward to date on their own. They simply do not have the resources to take Open Education to the next level. Open Education cannot develop without a real engagement from the remainder of the learning industry, which includes the commercial sector. At the same time the commercial learning industry cannot afford to ignore the force of Open Education that is so strongly aligned to people’s preferences for learning styles in today’s world. Governmental agencies would do better to provide access to venture capital to seed new innovations and sustainable models for Open Education than simply funding individual projects over a limited lifespan. There is in addition a risk for incumbent players of the learning market that new entrants, such as social networking providers, general Internet service providers and content platforms, will shake

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up the learning market and use Open Educational practices as their baseline. Already over 10 million students are using free Google Apps for Education for communication and collaboration and there are more than 350,000 files of educational audio and video content, free or at low cost to internet users on iTunes U.

During our investigations of Open Education we saw huge enthusiasm, mixed with a sense of uncertainty for Open Education from the organisations we surveyed.

It is risky for the commercial segments of the learning industry to ignore Open Education. But more than that, Open Education also provides an opportunity for the whole industry to create wide impact, innovate in related products and services and to address the needs of new learner groups such as the Internet-savvy young generations. Open Education could become a predominant model of the future. Our industry should better be prepared to grasp opportunities and to actively shape this development. **gf**

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