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Social innovation– a question of OER and MOOC

Open education and digital learning are increasing at high speed globally (Bean 2013). Experience has shown time after time that when the internet comes along and disrupts an industry, it doesn't go away. From music to books and newspapers, the Internet changes how we work, how we think, how we see the world. In 2012 that wave of disruption hit higher education. Free, open online courses are an exciting addition to the higher education landscape (Gaebel 2013). Universities in Sweden has decided to explore the opportunities of going for open access courses like MOOC (massive open online course) as many world class universities already have done to raise their quality, reputation and outreach.

Another part of openness in education, besides MOOCs, is the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement. OER are teaching, learning or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property license that allows for free use, adaptation, and distribution UNESCO (2013).[1] A variety of stakeholders are involved in the use of OER, i.e. universities, learners, society (Ossiannilsson 2012). The pedagogical issues related to OER are highlighted, as OER are seen as a change agent for transformation processes for learning and education (Punie & Haché 2013).

There is an urgent need to economize the resources in the world. To educate the world's population according to the needs that exist, one would have to open seven universities per week; this is not feasible. According to students, the best university already exists and that one is online. A culture of open education use is to be emphasised from three perspectives. Firstly, the individual's desire to learn and to get access to the best education in the world. Secondly, the academics, who don´t have to reinvent the wheel themselves, but can benefit from colleagues around the world and from networking. Thirdly, the university perspective. Universities benefit and can gain a good reputation by providing free education online. At Stanford and MIT, for example, the open courses draw more students than the regular ones. An open learning culture is based on people's commitment and desire to learn. Moving towards open and free education requires rethinking of educational issues in all aspects, which demands a changed mindset or paradigm shift regarding learning, educational design, infrastructure, organisation and quality. One of the probably most fruitful ways forward is to involve students to be change agents and to act as driving forces in the work towards increased open education and digitalisation. Other ways are social innovations[2] and to benefit from strategic partnerships and working with other universities.

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[1] http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/open-educational-resources/
[2] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/social-innovation/index_en.htm

Organisations and authorities such as the OECD (Hylén *et al.* 2012), UNESCO (2012), EC (2012) and the *Nordic OER Alliance* (Pawlowski *et al.* 2013)[3] encourage member states to move towards open education in the years to come. Technology innovations are seen as one of the strongest driving forces of transformation in education and society. Open education has an impact on many aspects of society such as educational quality, social innovation, competitiveness, democracy, globalisation, sustainability and visibility (Ossiannilsson 2012). Two other strong driving forces which are often emphasized are global branding, or instant recognition and strategic partnerships.

These developments inspired a Nordic initiative, The Nordic OER Alliance, on promoting and utilizing Open Education in the Nordic countries with a focus on creating a strong base for OER and Open Educational Practices (OEP) in the region, also with a global outreach in mind. The Nordic countries have the potential to become a forerunner in the OEP and the use of OER activities in Europe. Open Education is an issue which can reform education in the Nordic countries and across the globe - however, it needs strong actions on a policy, research and implementation level (Pawlowski *et al.* 2013). The Nordic Open Education Alliance aims at contributing to:

- Enabling and supporting collaborative actions
- Analysing opportunities and barriers for a successful implementation as mentioned above in order to be a relevant and strong partner for dialogue and for policy makers
- Creating a knowledge resource and an awareness network for advice on OER and OEP policy building and policy implementation

Challenges for Swedish universities

Universities have to set aside human resources and funding for investigating the opportunities for making open education and digital learning more affordable and strategic. Questions for Universities might be to decide strategically on aims and possible target groups as well as on policies on open access courses. As outlined above, there are many possibilities. Universities may connect to ongoing international initiatives.

Countries which have succeeded in working with fully open education have ongoing research, professors, PhD candidates and research projects. For Swedish Universities this is not the case yet, unfortunately. Along with a paradigm shift, there is a need to rethink learning and education and challenges to focus on learning design (Conole 2013). Increased student peer-review and collaboration could be interesting possibilities. Additionally, it is necessary to rethink staff working conditions and create incentives for working with open education.

Some identified challenges can be outlined as:

- *Legal:* According to Swedish law and regulations, followers of MOOCs are not students. University staff in Sweden owns the intellectual rights to teaching material they have produced. Universities can't make it openly available as OER without the teacher's consent and encouragement using creative commons licensing.

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[3] http://www.nordlet.org/sites/default/files/Nordic_Open_Education_Alliance_PositionPaper_ver1.0.pdf

- *Financial:* Since MOOCs formally are not education, they cannot be financed with governmental educational funding. Universities will have to finance this kind of open education with other sources.
- *Organisation:* Experience of designing and conducting courses based on digital learning isn't necessarily acknowledged when employing or promoting staff. There is a lack of necessary infrastructure and technical support at the university level. There are needs for interdisciplinary cooperation i.e. between academics, digital learning experts and librarians.
- *Educational:* Working with open education and digital learning isn't always encouraged; staff members lack the time and support to venture into the area. Students today demand a higher degree of personalised learning. Open education and digital learning are not necessarily recognised when educational programmes are accredited.

Discussion

Undoubtedly, Swedish universities also have to compete in the international arena with open education. Evidently there is direct competition from Harvard, Stanford and others. In this situation, the issue is on what universities decide to do, how they choose to provide their own training and how they choose to market it. A traditional university education will be affected in a positive way by the use of technology through interaction. There are needs for openness and to be attentive, especially to teachers' working conditions, but also to the quality of education. For individuals who do not have access to a university or the funds to attend training, this is revolutionary. The empowerment to which an open learning culture can give rise will be of global value.

With a creative approach, the identified problems can be turned into challenges and issues for innovation. However, some questions can still be raised in the way forward towards open education at Swedish universities. One of the main questions on the benefits of open education for Swedish Universities concerns quality and not quantity in its provision of education. Strategically, the question of both target groups and offered courses in a global arena are crucial. Finally, but not less important are questions on how to build an organisation, infrastructure that encourages staff to work with open education and digital hybid learning.

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