

OER Policy and Strategy: How to create models for a sustainable future?

Encore+ OER Policy and Strategy Position Paper No. 3



European Network for Catalysing
Open Resources in Education

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Problem Statement

This paper comments on the current state of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Europe, in particular at the policy and strategy level. It challenges some of the altruistic, philanthropic and public good drivers underlying the OER movement by identifying the need to align new open solutions with the actual problems educators and learners face in today's challenging educational landscape. Moreover, the paper critically reflects on why despite the efforts of leading advocates so few governments, schools, universities and businesses, have failed to explicitly commit to adopting Open Educational Practices (OEPs) as a core policy agenda and distinctive feature of their practice.

Summary

In summary, this paper challenges the sector to go beyond altruism and endorses the view that "...policy will be the lever by which open practice can become sustainable and mainstream" ([Weller, 2014, p.201](#)). The Encore+ project seeks to give "voice" to more stakeholders to support the development of OER institutional strategies in both academia and business contexts in order to promote their mainstreaming and a strong European OER ecosystem.

Suggested Actions

- Join the policy and strategy circle community.
- Share your views about this position paper with the circle community.
- Share examples of successful and unsuccessful policies and strategies from your country, community or business.
- Share examples of OER based effective business models.
- Share examples of HE institutional approaches to supporting OER

Background Context

Open Education is an umbrella term or movement with many dimensions that share a common viewpoint "everyone should have the freedom to use, customize, improve and redistribute educational resources without constraint" ([Cape Town Open Education Declaration](#), 2012). While Open Education has been a feature of educational research and practice for almost thirty years, its adoption has been fragmented and still remains on the margins ([Zawacki-Richter, et al., 2020](#)). International organisations such as

UNESCO have played an important role in advancing policy on Open Education around the globe. For example, the [UNESCO \(2019\) recommendation on OER](#) was an important step in providing a policy manifesto to support the mainstreaming of Open Educational Resources (OER). In the European context, the [OpenEdu Framework](#) (2017) published by the European Commission provides a policy framework to support higher education institutions to engage with Open Education. At the same time, the first-ever EU-wide study was published on Open Education policies in all the 28 Member States ([Dos Santos, et. al., 2017](#)). On a positive note, this study indicated that the majority of EU Member States were engaged in policy driven activities in the area of Open Education. On the other hand, it found there is still a long way to go and that a more systematic and strategically coordinated EU-wide approach is required to raise awareness and further support the development of open practices and policies at national level. While more recent evidence on OER adoption in Europe is scant, this paper argues that little has changed since this report and Europe continues to lack the strategic policy levels required to mainstream OERs.

Why is policy important?

The definition of policy is not a simple matter. However, [Dos Santos, et. al. \(2017\)](#) state that to mainstream OER and “... achieve our ambitious goals, effective open education policies are needed” (p. 8). In recognising that Open Education is a multifaceted movement, they propose four typologies of policies: (i) OER specific policies; (ii) general ICT policies; (iii) comprehensive strategic educational policies; and (iv) policies designed as national plans. Across these differences of scope and context, policy plays a valuable role in supporting effective policy making. Policy makers organise stakeholder engagement to build shared ownership and understandings, and serve to legitimise and enact particular practices. The key point is that only so much can be achieved at a policy level without effective engagement. Importantly, the process of policy development is crucial to developing impactful policies and this process needs to be inclusive of all stakeholders to promote critical dialogue, especially if we want to go beyond nothing more than symbolic policies.

How can we engage all stakeholders?

It is essential that in order to support the mainstreaming of OER, governments, educational institutions, community agencies, business and industry groups, and other major stakeholders are active partners in policy development. This point raises the question of whose voice has been missing in developing policies supportive of OER and how can we engage in more inclusive dialogue? In the past, arguably, policy for OER

has often been siloed from wider macro-level policy developments, failed to fully engage institutional leaders and overlooked those stakeholders with commercial interests. While there is some concern that commercial interests may infiltrate the OER movement and weaken its philosophical roots (Bali, et al., 2020), the importance of this group should not be ignored in raising greater awareness and achieving the goal of mainstreaming OERs across the education ecosystem. This observation shifts attention back to the process of policy development and the need for inclusive stakeholder dialogue at the macro (national), meso (institutional) and micro (programme) levels of the education ecosystem. Engaging stakeholders at each of these levels and across other sectors is crucial to developing a common goal that promotes more scalable and sustainable policies, which help to translate lofty and altruistic ambitions into impactful educational practices. ENCORE+ is seeking to achieve this end by intentionally connecting up different European stakeholders from a range of backgrounds to share experiences and debate the future of OERs.

Where next for OER policies?

Talk is cheap and the challenge for any educational policy is to go from the boardroom to the classroom. Lofty principles and policy statements only go so far in promoting real change in educational practice. A further challenge is to move away from promoting and developing OER solutions to giving more serious consideration to the problems facing educators in today's increasingly complex educational landscape. Put another way, if OER is the solution, then what is the problem? Such a subtle but important shift in focus might help to better demonstrate how OER can help to address some of these problems--the increasing cost of education, the intensification of teacher's workload, concerns about quality, and so on--and engender a stronger call to action by senior educational leaders. The key point is that policy for OER needs to become mainstream and go beyond the passionate community of advocates to achieve the goal of being embedded in mainstream practice. A fundamental question for future policy development is what is the business model for OER-based implementation strategies? What is the role of the commercial sector? How can educational institutions and business interests work together to better leverage the potential of OER? [Darwish \(2019\)](#) proposes four OER-based business models which augment either content production and curation or support services related to OER. The Encore+ project aims to collect and analyse further examples of OER-based business models, with the aim of developing policy to support the wider proliferation of OER within and across academia and businesses.

Strategic Support for OER Value Propositions

The [Strategic Support for Open Educational Resources \(OER\) Value Proposition Report](#), is one of the deliverables for the ENCORE+ project. The report explores the potential for educational institutions and business sectors to collaborate to harness the potential of Open Educational Resources (OER). According to Atenas et al. (2020), Open Educational policies are guidelines which encourage institutions, governments and other organisations to allocate resources and activities to developing Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Educational Practices (OEP) which offer a direct benefit and valuable learning experience for the user. This includes equality of access to high quality educational materials by a diverse body of learners.

OER Value Propositions

According to Periera (2020), a value proposition refers to the factors which influence customer decisions in relation to choosing one product or service over another and can include the design, performance, brand recognition, efficiency and customisation of features to meet the needs of different users. In this report we gathered a database of 100 businesses integrating open into their value propositions (please see it here: [value proposition database](#)). The business models included in the database were static (25%) interactive (24%), dynamic (25%), transformative (22%) and mixed models adopted depending on target audience (4%) which would suggest a more transformative approach as discussed later (Darwish, 2019). Additionally, the degree of openness also varied between gold (41%), platinum (48%) and a combination of gold and platinum (11%) depending on the demand on the OER (Jhangiani & Biswas-Diener, 2017).

Business Models and the Sustainability of OER

Researchers such as Darwish (2019) suggest greater attention to identifying business models which address the sustainability of OER in the long term beyond a dependence on short-term insecure funding streams.

As part of our research on business models, we have developed the following conceptual framework (see Figure 1) that outlines three (micro, meso and macro) layers of analysis to understand how different organisations support the development and dissemination of Open Educational Resources. The micro level of analysis focuses on activities, resources and priorities within the organisation. This includes value propositions for developing OER content and materials which offer value to the customer, which is different to offerings from other OER providers (Periera, 2020). The meso level of analysis addresses customer interaction, stakeholder networks and

product and service differentiation for various users. The macro level of analysis relates to the environmental factors which can influence sustainability of OER, in terms of funding streams, revenue, government priorities for enhancing access to education for different target audiences and legal and technological issues. Examples include GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) IP (Intellectual Property) rights, Creative Commons licensing agreements for developing and sharing educational materials, content and resources.

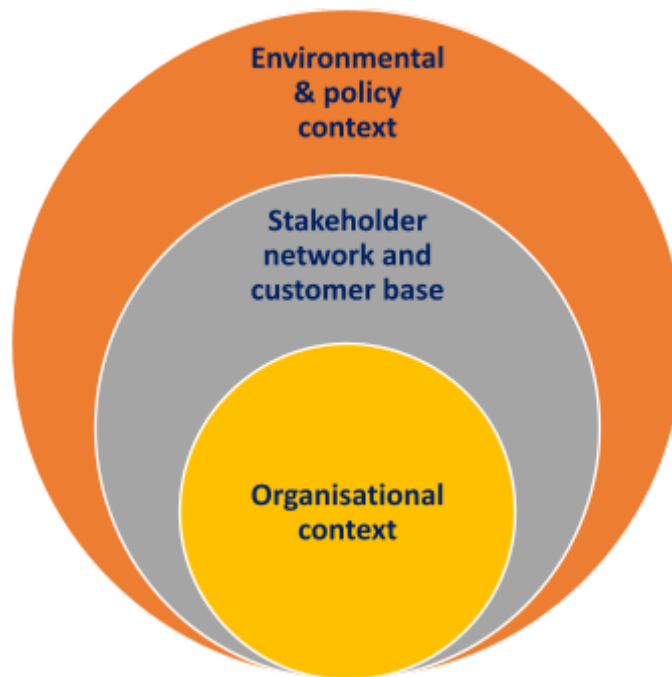


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework to explore different aspects of business models for OER

Conceptual Framework to explore different aspects of business models for OER		
Micro	Organisational context and activities	Visual representation, namely the Business Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) of organisational activities, including resources, customer segments, partners, products, services, value

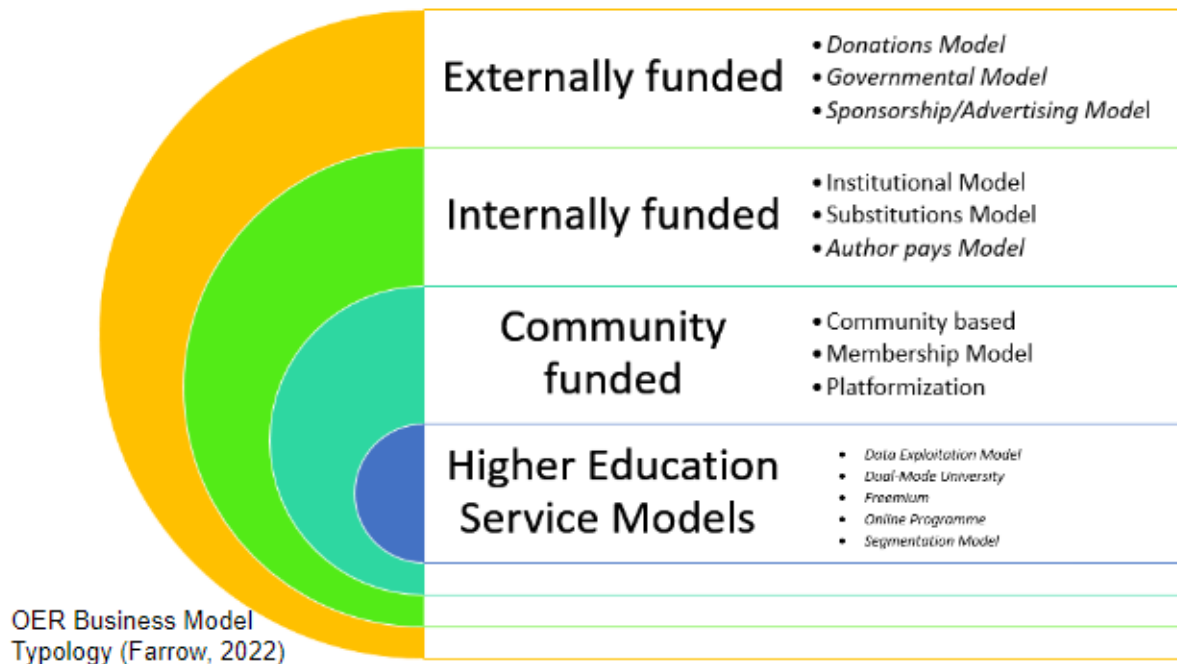
		propositions, revenue streams and cost structure
Meso	Stakeholder networks, funding and revenue streams, OER products, services, customers and users	Different models of OER which address sustainability and user engagement with products and services, for example static, interactive, dynamic and transformative (Darwish, 2019)
Macro	Environmental and Policy context	PESTLE model. Factors that influence development, dissemination and sustainability of Open Educational Resources, including extent to which materials are free to users or require a subscription, payment or membership fee to access different levels of service, products and features.

Case studies of OER business models in action

The report includes three illustrative case studies which highlight different approaches to fostering a culture of knowledge exchange (e.g., on CC Licensing Agreements) and encouraging individuals and organisations (primarily within the Higher Education Sector in different countries) to develop skills to produce and share high quality Open Educational Resources. The three case studies and interviews with industry experts (Joubel/H5P; NFT&L Repository and UNIR) illustrate aspects of OER models of practice as outlined by Darwish (2019). The report concludes with a cross analysis of the three case studies, highlighting similarities and differences in approaches adopted by the different organisations. The report outlines recommendations for introducing policies and practices to promote the development and sharing of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Educational Practices (OEP) and to encourage partnership and collaboration within and across different institutions.

OER Business strategies

We are also working on an additional project report which investigates the integration of OER in European business strategies. We are investigating different approaches that businesses take to integrating “open” into their business model and strategies. We are collecting and analysing these strategies, building on the OER business model typology (Farrow, 2022).



OER policy in Higher Education

We are currently working on the next project deliverable which is an investigation of OER policies in higher education institutions based in Europe. This report analyses the implementation of the OER policy initiative in European higher education institutions, and includes case studies from six European countries, including the UK, France, Greece and the Netherlands (See table 1 below).

OER HE Policy Case Studies				
OER policy Initiative	Focus	Target stakeholder	Impact	Sustainability strategy
<i>University of Edinburgh, Scotland</i>	(re)use, create, share and publish OER to improve the quality of the student experience	University staff, students	University level and National level	University funding
<i>OpenLearn, The Open University, UK</i>	publish and promote free learning content	all students on this platform	International level	University funding and public funding
<i>OER Portal, France</i>	discover courses, web documentaries, case studies, guides, tutorials, interactive lessons, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)	undergraduate students and university professors	University level and international level	Donation, Public funding
<i>Quality of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), European Alliance</i>	develop a Quality Reference Framework for the adoption, the design, the delivery and the evaluation of MOOCs	Students	International	European commission and university funding
<i>Kallipos, Greece</i>	create e-textbooks, which are freely available through open-access digital repositories under a Creative Commons licence	Teachers, students, academics	University and National levels	Greek Ministry of Education and University funding
<i>Edusource, the Netherlands</i>	easily find and reuse digital educational resources for teaching or learning	Teachers, students, academics	University and National levels	National funding

Table 1. OER HE Policy Case Studies (Tlili, 2022)

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About ENCORE+

ENCORE+ responds to the priorities of opening up and modernising the European education and training sector through a coordinated European OER ecosystem. OER (open educational resources) are “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO).

ENCORE+ brings together meaningful and focused human networks; technological solutions for sharing and discovering OER; policy reviews; quality criteria; and generating business models which draw on the affordances of OER to support innovation. ENCORE+ supports uptake of OER through business and academia by formulating value propositions for OER usage for education, training and business.

ENCORE+ directly addresses several European and international policy priorities:

- **Stimulating innovation in businesses** through learning and training innovation
- **Reducing barriers to education** affording learners the opportunity to up-skill or re-skill at a lower or nearly no cost, and in a flexible way
- **Supporting the modernisation of higher education in Europe**, including digitalisation
- **Bridging non-formal & formal education** by advancing recognition of open learning

ENCORE+ Circles

ENCORE+ uses “Circles” to describe the key stakeholders who contribute to the European OER ecosystem of tomorrow. Our four Circles represent overlapping communities of practice: technology; policy/strategy; quality and innovation.

A total of 16 Circle events will be held over the lifetime of the project; these bring together stakeholders for consultation and networking. Events are free to attend! In 2023, a series of integration events will consolidate the Circles into one integrated and sustainable ENCORE+ community by integrating perspectives and best practice from across the Circles.

ENCORE+ is designed around five challenges which are addressed through the Circles.

Needs	ENCORE+ actions	Outcomes
Need 1: De-fragment the OER stakeholders community in Europe	Mapping the OER ecosystem and its stakeholders; modelling future scenarios; consultation exercises; whitepapers; integration events; guides for innovation; integration across education and training; entrepreneurialism; reporting.	ENCORE+ network, strengthening and connecting existing OER communities
Need 2: Strengthen collaboration and interoperability among European OER repositories	Providing a centralised hub for OER content; new paradigms for repository technologies (interfaces; implementations; protocols; content creation & re-use; networking) authenticated by the relevant communities to support best practice.	Integrated architecture of a European OER repositories infrastructure
Need 3: Support development of OER institutional strategies in European businesses and academia	Working with diverse stakeholder base to identify, synthesise and share strategies and business models across business and higher education.	European guidelines for developing effective OER strategies in business and academia

<p>Need 4: Integrated European OER quality paradigm and assurance mechanisms</p>	<p>Identifying the key quality concerns for future OER repositories, communities and users; piloting a new quality framework focused on harnessing and enabling OER innovation.</p>	<p>European open & community-led Quality Review Framework for OER</p>
<p>Need 5: Entrepreneurial innovative approaches and business models based on OER</p>	<p>Supporting innovation through information exchange; appropriate software and services to enable pathways to innovation; understanding of the drivers of innovation; meaningful interactions between relevant stakeholders; providing a showcase for innovation.</p>	<p>European business and start-up community, empowered to innovate and improve operations by leveraging OER</p>

Website

For further and updated information about this project please see:

www.encoreproject.eu

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