

First expert meeting within OLCOS - Open eLearning Content Observatory Services

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Last week, an European expert meeting on the topic of "Open Educational Resources" (OER) and in particular "Open digital content" has taken place in Vienna. Whereas nowadays the benefits and characteristics of open source software in education are well known, this is not the case with the concept of OER which benefits well flexible and open eLearning models (e.g. collaborative knowledge and skills building) in schools, higher educational institutions and vocational training. Speakers from the OECD and European research institutions have identified the key issues at stake and are working together on a strategic European Roadmap towards more usage and production of OER:



"The future of open digital educational content is strong, because its time has come, regardless commercial pressures, such as digital rights management", says **Volker Grassmuck**, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany.



Timo Borst, project manager of CampusContent at Fernuniversität in Hagen, pointed out that providing a "living model" of the ODEC life cycle has to be one of the challenges in the OLCOS project. Following our definition of ODEC he sees the added value of ODEC in education in providing a long-term conceptual and legal framework for reusability. A change to a more learner/user-centred view needs a strategy to induce a change in culture. The authoring process has to be as comfortable for users as e.g. copy and paste and other cultural techniques like linking and embedding software objects into web pages according to local settings and needs/preferences of the local user have to be promoted.



Keith Jeffery, director IT and International Strategy at CCLRC, accentuated an appropriate technology that is user-friendly and changing user behaviours and he believes in demonstrators that in production level use convince the community. His advice is also to concentrate on structured, formalised metadata to make sure that the content is discoverable, readable, interoperable, editable and linked to the context.



More production and usage of ODEC in the future could be encouraged according to **Bernd Simon**, Vienna University of Economics and Business, if technology developer implement standardized metadata descriptions for content and provide open interfaces for metadata distribution such as SQL and RSS. He also agreed on a needed taxonomy for open content. Bernd Simon sees that there is still some way to walk along the "open content road".



Jan Hylén, project manager for OECD study on OER, added that teachers/tutors/researchers should be rewarded properly for their work. While he generally assesses the future potential of the ODEC concept in the educational sector as strong because of the growing awareness of need for and advantages with “open sharing”. He underlines that one has to distinguish between probable and desirable scenarios and the aim is to bridge the gap.

Within the two-years project OLCOS (stands for Open Learning Content Observatory Services), funded by the EU eLearning Programme (Call 2005; 1/2006-12/2007) the objective is to build an online information and observation center for promoting the concept, the production and the usage of open educational resources, with special respect to open digital content in Europe. Partners working together are Salzburg Research Forschungsgesellschaft (Austria) as project co-ordinator, Fernuniversität Hagen (Germany), Open University of Catalonia (Spain), Mediamasteri Group (Finland), ecmc European Centre for Media Competence (Germany) and the EDEN European Distance and E-Learning Network (UK/Hungary).

Another focus of the whole OLCOS project is to take into consideration the benefits of flexible and open learning models like collaborative evolvement of knowledge and collaborative online sequences (collaborative authoring, publishing, editing ODEC). **Peter Baumgartner**, Danube University Krems and member of the OLCOS project team, emphasised that good content is everywhere. It has to be integrated in social learning situations (situated learning) and what matters is the learning arrangement, content is just a part of it. He highlighted “Context is King! Content is just another part of the learning environment.” [Peter Baumgartner, 2006]. **Guntram Geser** from the Salzburg Research Forschungsgesellschaft pointed out that the different barriers will move closer to recommendations because the main target of recommendations is to address the barriers and shortcomings. As a result the OLCOS roadmap will offer the actors, involved in eLearning processes information and guidance of useful actions taken on the future road towards more production and usage of ODEC.

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