Porto Declaration on European MOOCs

Europe must seize this moment to grab the opportunities offered by MOOCs.

MOOCS have continued to attract considerable media coverage as governments and universities respond to the open and online education movement. MOOCs are at this moment seen as a disruptive force and an important driver for change—for both better and worse. The growth of MOOCs has helped to make institutions, governments and societies at large more aware of the possibilities of open and online education.

Risk and threats posed MOOC movement

However, we must also recognise the risks that come with the advent of MOOCs. Current evidence suggests that MOOCs do not reach those that most need access to higher education. The majority of participants who join MOOCs are already well-educated and live in developed countries. Moreover, they already have the digital and language skills needed to successfully complete MOOCs. The threats that MOOCs pose to the traditional educational system need further analysis and public debate. One threat, for example, is that only universities with celebrity academics and the financial means can develop MOOCs and offer them for free to a massive audience. Some consider this approach nothing more than a self-serving marketing exercise by a few universities with the effect of promoting the dominance of Western knowledge, a new kind of imperialism.

Opportunities

It is important to note that MOOCs remain relatively poorly defined[1] and they should not all be assumed to confer similar benefits. Nevertheless, we believe the open and online learning movement has great potential to educate the many in a flexible way that meets the needs of today's learners for an increasingly complex world. We must embrace opportunities to open up education in a manner consistent with European values of equity, inclusion and social justice, and to increase life-long learning and social mobility.

We must embrace full openness to all

In this respect we must stress the importance of full openness so everyone can benefit from the open and online education movement. The principle of 'openness' in this sense applies not only to removing financial barriers, but also to open accessibility, open licensing policy, freedom of place, pace and time of study, open entry, and open pedagogy.

Beyond the goal of social inclusion we see openness as an important driver for promoting development of skills, enhancing knowledge transfer and increasing the pace of innovation. Consequently, we urge governments and institutions within Europe to support and actively implement the Paris OER Declaration of UNESCO (2012).

A collective European response is needed

At this point, however, it is observed that the MOOC movement is dominated by the United States through both the number of course offerings and leading service providers, such as EdX, Coursera

and Udacity. EU MOOC activities are mainly concentrated in Western and Southern Europe, and are being predominantly driven by individual institutions or small groups based on a limited number of platforms (e.g., FutureLearn, Iversity, FUN, UNEDcoma, Miríada X). Moreover, they do not fully reflect the cultural diversity of Europe and serve a limited number of language communities (with the exception of OpenupEd).

Importantly, we stress that MOOCs must not be seen as the outcome or exemplar of online education. Rather they need to be understood in a wider context as there is a long history of research on open and online education and a variety of approaches and tools to provide quality learning opportunities to all.

MOOCs must be aligned with and used as a lever to advance the European Digital Agenda and the recommendations of the recent high-level EU report promoting the modernisation of the higher education system. The opportunities to provide scale in learning opportunities and open educational resource creation is a key reason for European collaboration.

Strong support EC and governments needed

As such we call upon the European Commission and individual member governments to strategically invest in digital infrastructure and capacity development in order to harness the potential of MOOCs for European society at large. We need a collective European response to minimise the risks of the MOOC movement and to maximise the opportunities for both society and business. A pan-European response is crucial if we want MOOCs to advance the many possibilities for a more flexible and modern higher education system, and to fully open up education to the many that need the skills and knowledge for 21st century jobs. It is essential that a cohesive and collaborative effort is adopted in Europe to counteract the risks and to fully realise the opportunities of open and online education.

It follows that governments and the European Commission in particular, need to play an important leadership role in collaboration with the major organizations representing European providers.

Universities need to strengthen their collaboration

In addition we call upon European higher education institutions to increase their level of collaboration in order to promote capacity development in open and online education for the benefit of all. A shared European services model that goes beyond the interests of one institution or even of one or few regions is required. Such an approach needs to be aligned with existing European policies and the wider digital and modernisation of higher education agenda. In this regard, MOOCs are not an end goal but a powerful vehicle for advancing the objectives and targets that we have already set for education in Europe.

Thus the Porto Declaration calls upon all to embrace the possibilities the open and online education movement offers the Knowledge Society and stresses the need for stronger collaboration in Europe, based in the principles of transparent cooperation, mutual benefit and collective incremental advantage.

27 November 2014

[1] http://www.openuped.eu/images/docs/Definition_Massive_Open_Online_Courses.pdf

The Porto Declaration on European MOOCs is a collective output of the conference "Mapping The European MOOC Territory" held in Porto, Portugal on 27 November 2014. Subsequently a draft declaration circulated among various stakeholders. The Porto Declaration on European MOOCs as it now stands has benefited from input by many. It reflects the views of different experts of the following projects, associations and institutions listed below.

Supporting the Porto Declaration

We have been approached by various organisations about the possibility of giving support to the Porto Declaration on European MOOCs. Please send an a mail to darco.jansen@eadtu.eu with that intention and the full name of your organisation and we will add your organisation to the declaration.

Projects and initiatives related to MOOCs

- · ECO – ELearning Communication Open-Data
- · EMMA – European Multiple MOOC Aggregator
- · HOME – Higher education Online: MOOCs the European way
- · OpenupEd
- · QLET – Quality Development for Learning, Education and Training
- · SCORE2020 – Support Centres for Open education and MOOCS in different Regions of Europe 2020
- · SEQUENT – Supporting Quality in E-learning European Network

Associations

- · DAOU – Danish Association of Open Universities
- · DESC – Distance Education Centre of Latvia
- · EADTU – European Association of Distance Teaching Universities
- · EDEN – European Distance and E-Learning Network
- · EFQUEL – European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning
- · FIED – Fédération Interuniversitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance
- · FOUAS – Finnish Online University of Applied Sciences
- · ICORE - International Community for Open Research and Education
- · ISCIA – Instituto Superior de Ciências da Informação e da Administração
- · LINQ – Learning Innovations and Learning Quality
- · NADE – Lithuanian National Distance Education Association

Educational Institutions

- · Aarhus University
- · Anadolu University
- · Delft University of Technology
- · Dublin City University
- · Escola Superior de Educação (IPS)
- · Hellenic Open University
- · Instituto Politécnico de Leiria

- Instituto Politecnico do Porto
- Instituto Superior de Engenharia do Porto
- Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
- Kaunas University of Technology
- Maria Curie Sklodowska University
- Media Literacy Lab
- Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics
- Norgesuniversitetet
- Open University of Cyprus
- Open University of Israel
- Open University of the Netherlands
- Politecnico di Milano
- Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3
- Tallinn University
- The Open University
- The University of Manchester
- Universidad de Cantabria
- Universidad de Oviedo
- Universidad de Valladolid
- Universidad de Zaragoza
- Universidad Loyola Andalucía
- Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
- Universidade Aberta
- Universidade de Aveiro
- Universidade de Coimbra
- Universidade de Lisboa
- Universidade do Porto
- Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias
- Universidade Nova de Lisboa
- Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
- Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO
- Universitetet I Tromsoe
- University of California Irvine
- University of Duisburg-Essen
- University of Leicester
- University of Patras
- Univerza v Ljubljana

Other organisations
- Audiovisual Technologies, Informatics and Telecommunications
- Difundi
- Evolui.com
- Geographica
- MOODle HQ

- · OpenMOOC
- · ProversityTLS
- · Telefónica Educación Digital