

First Steps: Promoting OCW in a New Context (Poland)

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Abstract

AGH University of Science and Technology in Krakow is the first Polish higher education institution to establish an OER repository. Foreign experiences have been helpful, but could not be relied upon entirely considering Open AGH has been a pioneer in a new context. Among other things, there is little awareness of such initiatives among educators. Few have heard about open licenses and often see it as more of a challenge to their rights than an opportunity. These conditions are probably familiar to everyone, at least outside the most developed countries. Raising awareness of the issue is the basic step in order to promote and further develop the OER repository. There are two target groups of these activities. First are the potential authors of the open courseware. Many of them have already placed their work on the Internet but it is usually copyrighted. They need to be educated about open licensing and convinced that it is as beneficial for them as for the recipients of their resources. The other group is general public, especially those who can take advantage of the open courseware. It is described what steps were and are being taken within the AGH University to achieve those goals. Open AGH has been created in a context which offers little formal support for such activities, both at the national and institutional level. This results in promotional activities being usually bottom-up and low cost. These include: (a) Attracting the interest of mainstream and social media, (b) Gaining support of influential individuals and organizations in the field, (c) Developing internal university policy to encourage creating open content. Presentation should serve as a starting point for sharing experiences, in establishing new OER repositories, especially between institutions from countries where there is little formal support for such initiatives.

Keywords

OER, open education, AGH, promotion, higher education, Creative Commons

Introduction

With the development of open source software, the growth of participatory and openness culture in the field of learning, creating and sharing can be

observed. From individual perspective access to and use of free services and applications is more than easy. The popularization of open software in the public has influence also on education. What is more it was only the first step in increasing culture of participation. In the educational setting open approach has been also transferred widely on academics' vocational activity. It has covered preparing open educational resources for unlimited, free use for others academics as well as publications available in open access models of scientific communication.

Creating open educational resources (OER) is a global movement. But there is still little awareness of open initiatives among Polish educators. As open source software is widely expected and used in the Polish higher education, the idea of sharing own work with others is rather new and revolutionary approach for academic faculty. The attitude to openness in education varies from very positive to ignorant or even unacceptable according to different professions and academic policy.

1 Openness gradation

On the Polish educational market plenty of educational materials are published online. However, conditions of using and re-using them might be varied on several levels.

1.1 Closed and copyrighted content

First, plenty of materials developed by academic staff, teachers and trainers within their vocational activity or in projects donated from local/European grants are closed on the web. The access barrier is double here. One obstacle is the copyright protection. Even if they exist online, the access is limited and requires secured account, which is seen as the second obstacle. Such double-protected resources are targeted on special groups and nobody besides has access to them. Several examples here can be provided, but the most important from academic point of view is Virtual Library of Science, which is national project of Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

It was launched in order to guarantee free access to scientific literature for Polish higher institutions, scientists, academic teachers and students. In fact

Virtual Library of Science provides access to closed, password protected databases, which can be browsed only.

1.2 Copyrighted content

Second, the majority of content available freely in the public web is copyright protected. In many cases those resources are high quality materials and could be excellent sources for teachers, trainers, academics for further use and adaptation. However, the copyright is an important obstacle here. The fact that those materials are available for free in the web, does not mean the possibility to re-use them for any purposes. Copyrighted content, even if valuable for education, can be only read, browsed, watched/listened to in passive way. Example here, can be online repository of education materials for primary and secondary school Interklasa.pl or Scholaris.pl which development is donated from public budget. Excellent example of resource prepared for academics is learning materials for informatics studies (Studia Informatyczne, 2006). Authors provided high quality educational materials and allowed everyone for unlimited usage. But if we look deeper, the condition set by authors shows that resources can be used, but re-use adaptation and modification is forbidden. This case is also a proof of wrong understanding of the idea of open educational resources.

To sum up, examples described above illustrate the lowest level of openness which should be called rather availability where the read-only approach is widely promoted. Those resources can be used on fair educational use condition and are opened for public view but at the same time closed for re-use and modification.

1.3 Creative Commons

You can also find educational materials available on more liberal conditions based on Creative Common licenses. Here the level of openness can vary according to a type of chosen license. In Poland the main responsibility for shaping open education takes Coalition for Open Education. Coalition forces using the most liberal CC license with Attribution and Share Alike conditions and promotes the attitude that full openness allows for unlimited re-use, adaptation, modification for any purpose even commercial. But taking into account that in the context of Polish education, the awareness of open educational resources and open education is still low, the Coalition for Open Education supports every project aimed at OER production. It is believed that a small steps approach is better than hermetic, limited access.

Currently, in the Polish educational field there can

be listed several projects aimed at OER development at the highest possible in Poland level of openness. In particular worth mentioned here are following projects:

- Wolne podręczniki (ang. Free textbooks) is a project of Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska educational materials prepared by teachers in digital formats. The textbooks are available for free and can be re-use, modify and adapt for any purposes.
- Otwórz książkę (ang. Open a book) is a project developed by Creative Commons Poland and ICM UW. Open a book is a digital collection of scientific books whose authors decided to publish them online for free on chosen Creative Commons license(s). Currently there are available 44 books.
- The Polish project developed by Wikimedia Poland Association (the wiki “family”: Wikipedia, Wikisources, Wikinews, Wikibooks, etc.) where content is published on free license CC BY-SA or GFDL.

1.4 Public domain

The highest level in openness gradation is public domain. This institution is strongly developed in United States, where authors and creators can abandon the property right and decide to put their works in public domain, which means that the works is public property and can be used in unlimited way. However, the Polish law system is much more restrictive. Works are transferred to the public domain after 70 years after the death of an author(s). This means that modern works will be a public property for our grandchildren. Currently in Poland, there are several projects of digital libraries which allow for easy access to works from the Polish public domain. For instance, National Library POLONA or the Polish resources in Gutenberg Project.

2 Open AGH

2.1 About Open AGH

AGH University of Science and Technology in Krakow is one of the best technical universities in Poland. Established in 1919, this year AGH has celebrated the 90th anniversary of existence. AGH is seen as one of more progressive institution on the Polish educational market, opened for new initiatives and responsive to social, technologies and pedagogical changes. Thus, to continue and sustain such positive image, AGH is the first Polish higher education institution to establish an OER repository. AGH has been a pioneer in a new

context.

When launched (January 2010) Open AGH included 70 courses. After five months that number has increased to 87 courses. Before the official start of Open AGH, some of academic teachers had placed their resources on their home pages or within AGH VLE Moodle, but they were copyright protected. After Open AGH was launched, some of staff agreed to transfer those resources into open repository and making them available on open rules. Additional, the works of AGH students created in the competition ‘Notes on the Internet’ were a good starting point for developing open institutional repository. Currently students’ works are part of Open AGH repository which is quite unique even in the global perspective.

Due to the fact that from 2006 AGH staff has been developing their courses on Moodle, this CMS was chosen as basic system for managing OER. Such decision maximized the simplicity of the process of ‘opening’ resources for AGH academic staff. In future there are plans to transfer Open AGH database to some dedicated content management systems, for instance eduCommons recommended by OpenCourseWare Consortium.

2.2 Terms of Use

OER in Open AGH are available publicly under the terms of Attribution - Non Commercial - Share Alike Creative Commons license. Any user who is interested in Open AGH content can use and copy it for free, as well as transform and adapt for own purposes under three conditions: must give the original author credit, may not use this work for commercial purposes and distribute the derivate work only under a license identical to used in “Open AGH”.

The decision about choosing Creative Commons BY-NC-SA license was driven by academic staff attitude to opening educational materials. While in Poland there is agreement that fully open educational resources is only those published on license CC BY and CC BY-SA, AGH has decided to prevent from commercial usage of Open AGH resources. This decision gives the academic staff an assurance of not losing financial benefits. AGH authorities are convinced that with a chosen license, employees will be more willing to share their resources.

According to the policy of Open AGH, in repository can be publish online courses as well as single documents – syllabuses, e-books, notes from lectures and video recording lectures, stimulations, animations, podcasts, etc. The basic rule here is to place recourses that could supports academic teachers in teaching practice. AGH at the same time is developing ABC Krakow – Academic Digital

Library where copyright protected academics textbooks, conference proceedings, PhD thesis, institutional scientific journals, etc. are published. The policy of ABC Krakow excludes didactic materials produced by academic staff for students. Thus, Open AGH in compliance with ABC Krakow provides complete access to educational materials produced by AGH academic teachers.

2.3 Challenges

There are several challenges that Open AGH is trying to face. The first one is to create and sustain first academic repository of open educational resources in Poland. Facing this challenge required training the academic staff about open licensing and convincing that it is as beneficial for them as for the recipients of their resources. The second challenge is to give a local example and start developing a new trend in the Polish education. Most academic environments are reluctant. Those groups are pro online education, however are willing to place their works on the web in closed institutional VLE, protected by password, rather than share them for free in public web. Diagnosis of educational trends for 2010 published in the annual Horizon Report [The New Media Consortium, 2010: 13] confirms that openness is clearly not a niche ideology. According to the Report prepared by the New Media Consortium, the development of open educational content on a wide scale is a matter up to one year. AGH is hoping that by Open AGH repository, other higher education institutions will take an example and decide to open their resources on similar conditions.

3 Promoting OER

As can be inferreded from the previous paragraphs, there is relatively low formal support for the development of open courseware repositories in Poland. This is changing, though, as there are first specific steps taken by the government to facilitate openness of digital resources. A more basic problem still remains, however. Awareness of the issues associated with open courseware (such as „copyleft” licenses or availability of open resources) is not common among people who should be main actors and beneficiaries of open content movement: teachers, students, and scientists. In our context it is therefore necessary to not only create and distribute open content but to also, at the same time, explain what it is, why it is advantageous to use it and, equally importantly, why it is not disadvantageous to use it. There are several issues many people unacquainted with OER bring up, when hearing about them. They fear losing control of their work, misinterpret „some

rights reserved" as „all rights given up", are concerned with financial implications of sharing their work. Sometimes their arguments can be most unexpected. One of the authors of this text heard a university professor claim that open resources are bad because when knowledge is shared freely unprepared persons gain access to it which may cause even the mighty empires to fall (sic!).

The goal of this publication though is not to give counterarguments to these claims. The benefits of open education are discussed in detail elsewhere (compare e.g. Cape Town Open Education Declaration). The authors aim at discussing the „marketing" approaches to disseminate that knowledge.

The creators of Open AGH have had two main target groups for their actions: the potential authors of the open courseware and the recipients. The former included employees of the AGH University, the latter students and teachers all over Poland. These groups were approached differently and below we elaborate on our activities in both areas.

3.1 Promoting OER internally

Centre of e-Learning is a university department which has had previous experiences with open content. We have worked on projects and published resources under open licenses (e.g. manual „How to use social software in higher education", MOSEP project resources on e-portfolios or our own blog). This was not typical of AGH though. If Open AGH is to succeed employees of our university need to be convinced of its value, starting with the highest authorities. Without the support of a rector such initiative has little chance of success.

We have been fortunate that AGH authorities were interested in listening to our arguments. Their general attitude towards new ideas is positive. Some of them have even had educational resources placed on the Internet though, admittedly, it has been still copyrighted. Nevertheless, the idea of sharing results of one's own work for free was not strange to them. They have seen the value of doing that, specifically all the benefits listed in section 3.3 of this article.

Another thing which proved very helpful in establishing Open AGH was direct and indirect support we received from external institutions. One of those was OCWC, from whom we received not only helpful advice but also an invitation to join the consortium as soon as Open AGH was accessible to public. This assured AGH authorities that our efforts will not be left in void, but that we will be formally linked to an active, international organization, which can provide us with further help.

By „indirect support" we understand examples of

other universities around the world who have established OER repositories. Most prominently it includes Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which is not just one of the best universities in the world and the first large educational institution to openly share courses, but also, like AGH, a technical university which made it an especially attractive example for us.

Generally speaking, it is good to look for the institutions in and outside our own country which have experience in the field and can provide us with valuable advice. On further stages they also help disseminate knowledge about our initiative.

Next step in internal promoting of Open AGH has been approaching all AGH employees. At the moment of writing this text (April 2010) this is still a process in action. It started with the brief presentation before Council of Deans, when the basic facts about OER and Open AGH have been given. Simultaneously, an informational brochures and leaflets were printed and distributed. Also articles have been written for the university bulletin. This stage has been completed with the Rector issuing a letter to all AGH employees once again informing them about the Open AGH initiative and encouraging them to join it.

Currently our efforts are concentrated on more direct ways of reaching authors, especially those who have already published some of their work on the web. We write or call them and try to convince them to place those educational resources on the Open AGH. Some have refused, at least so far, but others have agreed and we have managed to add some more interesting resources to the repository.

Finally, „Notes on the Internet" has to be mentioned. It is an annual competition for AGH students, who prepare digital educational resources under the supervision of their professors. Best materials from earlier years are already in our repository. This year an amendment has been made to the rules of the contest and it is explicitly stated that all the submissions should be CC-licensed and will be made available on Open AGH.

3.2 Promoting OER externally

Basic goal in this area was spreading the news that Open AGH has been created. We have hoped that the first university repository of Creative Commons-licensed resources in Poland will attract the interest of media. Indeed, it has been so. The official opening of the Open AGH has been conducted by the Rector during the press conference. Later, the news about the repository has been published in many media, including Newsweek.pl or Polish Radio. According to B. Dembinski (AGH spokesman, personal communication) very few AGH initiatives in recent

time have gained such widespread media coverage. This had great positive effect on the initial burst of interest in our project. This was an expected result. The challenge however, was to maintain and further develop visibility and popularity of Open AGH. The main means of achieving that goal has been use of social media. There are several benefits of choosing that option. First, it gives authors of the project control over some key aspects of communication process. They gain the proactive role in spreading information about the project. It is still vital that they are not the only persons discussing the subject, but they are not utterly dependent on others in that regard. They are also the first source of information. Second, social media enable spread of information in what is a digital equivalent of „word-of-mouth marketing”. It leads to the next point: it is easier to reach exactly those people, who are interested in the initiative. Finally, social media are a low-cost solution, which is an important factor in our context.

There are three main tools that are being used:

- Centre of e-Learning blog
- Centre of e-Learning microblog.
- Open AGH Facebook page.

On all these information about Open AGH is being published. CeL blog has several hundred unique visitors a day. Our microblog has about 50 followers and Facebook page more than 270 fans. These may not seem as overwhelming numbers. However, one has to take into account two factors. First, social media are gaining popularity in Poland, but at this point terms such as „microblog” or „Facebook” are not familiar to majority of people. Second, the persons we reach are interested specifically in the issue of how education and Internet intertwine. Moreover, some of them are opinion leaders in their fields. They are educators, students, IT specialists who can relay our message to other interested. Indeed, mentions of Open AGH have been made on some influential blogs (e.g. polish Coalition of Open Education).

There are also other methods to inform about our projects. These can be as easy but efficient as editing an appropriate page on the Wikipedia. The others are related to other tasks Centre of e-Learning fulfils, e.g. moderating online courses, holding workshops or presenting at conferences. Since these almost always centre on different aspects of e-learning they become a great opportunity to introduce the topic of OER and Open AGH specifically. Speaking from the authors' experience it can be said that it is always one of the most interesting issues for the listeners.

Yet another way of promoting Open AGH externally is participation in state or EU-funded research projects, which at least partially or

indirectly deal with OER. This also gives a chance to implement some of the developments in our repository. An example of this might be an iCoper project, that CeL currently participates in. One of its aims is to „analyse alternatives for integrating learning content, starting with various standards and specifications such as OpenID, Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH), Simple Publishing Interface (SPI), DOI/OpenURL”. It is also beneficial to start cooperation with other organizations with similar interests. In case of Open AGH these are Coalition for Open Education or AGH Library, which some of their resources for free, though not on open licenses yet. Even if our initiatives differ in some key points, such collaboration is an effective means of promoting each of them.

Finally, membership in organizations such as OCWC shall have much positive impact on reconcilability of our projects, as well as help learn about new ways of developing them.

4 Summary

Establishing an open courseware repository in a country where there is relatively little knowledge on what open educational resources are and systematic solutions in the area are only beginning to be introduced poses a set of specific challenges. It does not suffice to create a technological platform on which such materials can be placed and encourage authors to use it. It is also essential to act as an educator, to promote the concept of OER themselves, to explain the benefits of using them. These activities are not negligible anywhere but in a country such as Poland they have additional importance as they are building blocks upon which the success of such initiatives rests.

The authors have tried to show what can be done practically to achieve those goals. Hopefully it may help other institutions in similar position develop their projects more efficiently.

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