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Best collaborative practices for advocacy and promotion of Open Educational Resources

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Abstract:

Purpose – The present study, after reviewing the relevant literature and the recent trends that became evident from the Open Education Global Conference 2018 (and other similar fora), documents the best practices to be adopted by the Greek academic libraries, in order to support the OER actions in Higher Education by making the Academic Community aware of the culture of OER adoption/use.

Design/methodology/approach – It emerged from the analysis of the empirical results of a relevant research conducted among faculty of Greek Universities. The research inquired into the support/guidance that academic libraries offer to the faculty of their institutions for: a. adopting/using Open Educational Resources (OER), b. creating OER and c. OER intellectual property (copyright).

Findings – The results of the research showed that most of the faculty does not consider academic libraries much supportive of them in any of the three areas investigated -as opposed to what occurs in Europe and internationally.

Originality/value – The practices documented could: a. gain advantage from the existing library infrastructure and enhance the know-how and digital competence of librarians in the following areas: OER location, intellectual property (copyright), metadata and quality assurance, institutional repositories (storage and preservation), b. support faculty and students in cultivating their digital skills and thus achieving “OER Literacy”.

Index Terms — academic libraries, universities, collaboration, Open Educational Resources (OER), faculty, students

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present study is to determine the best advocacy practices that have resulted from the collaborative efforts of the academic libraries and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to promote Open Educational Resources (OER).

The starting point for this review is the outcome of the empirical research conducted (in March 2017) among faculty that had participated in the “Kallipos” Project (<https://www.kallipos.gr/en/>), the first Greek initiative for

creating academic e-textbooks and making them available through an open access digital Repository (<https://repository.kallipos.gr/?locale=en>); the results of interest for the academic libraries were first presented at the 23rd PALC¹. Specifically, deriving out of the answers given to questions about the extent to which Academic Libraries have supported and guided them to a. OER adoption/use, b. OER creation and c. OER intellectual property (copyright), it is revealed that the faculty of the research sample does not consider academic libraries much supportive of them in any of these three areas [1]. More precisely, only 22% of the survey’s participants believe that academic libraries have guided them on OER intellectual property (copyright), another 26% consider that academic libraries have supported them in the OER creation, and less than one in three (30%) are of the opinion that the academic libraries have contributed to their OER adoption/use (see figure 1).

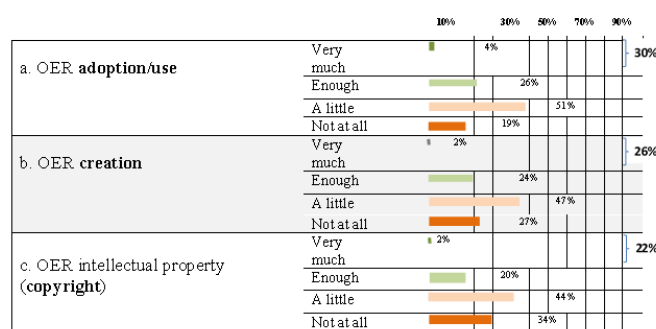


Figure 1. OER faculty support for academic libraries.

The aforementioned research findings -although apparently explained by the fact that it’s just the last five years that OER have been created and are available for use by the Greek Academic (and Research) Community- are contradictory with the findings of the literature review in the field, which is presented in brief in the next section. Indeed, by reviewing the literature (see in details below) it results that -in their policy frameworks- international organizations advocate the establishment of collaborative models between Academic (and Research) Libraries and Academic Community to raise awareness on OER and their subsequent promotion. Also, the recommendations for collaborative projects between academic libraries and faculty are aligned with the current

¹ The full text of the research article (in Greek) was presented at the 23rd PanHellenic Academic Libraries Conference (“Academic Libraries: A roadmap to sustainability”, 15-16 November 2017, AUTH).

trends for Open Education² (and Open Science) projects that have been designed and implemented mostly by US and Canadian Universities (but with growing rates in European HEIs too) in terms of OER creation, OER adoption/use and OER intellectual property. These trends were recently presented in the Open Education Global Conference 2018 [see the sessions under the topic “Library and OER” (<https://conference.oeconsortium.org/2018/program/themes/#Lib>)³].

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In general terms, cooperation is defined as the exchange of help and support among individuals or teams that have common or similar aims. In the context of our digital world, cooperation means *“sharing information, insights, strategies and resources across projects, organizations and sectors, leading to increased efficiency and impact”* (<https://digitalprinciples.org/>). According to ACRL [3], libraries do promote cooperation as a professional value. For Goodsett, Loomis and Miles [4], the academic libraries cooperate with people and organizations within and outside their HEIs, in their attempt *“to better serve their students, institutions and communities”*, by adopting innovative methods. A technological innovation that can be used by academic libraries is 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 license⁴ that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions”* [5], and due to their unique characteristics they offer numerous opportunities for better learning outcomes and quality of teaching [6] [7]. Additionally, OER may appear in many different forms, e.g. textbooks, entire courses, lesson plans, open access scholarly publications, videos, lecture notes, diagrams, infographics, quizzes, online tutorials, podcasts, etc. Customarily, OER have been created within the framework of Open Education/Science projects implemented by institutions, libraries and international organizations, and are made available through digital libraries, open access repositories, educational websites, catalogs, etc. In Greece, they have been created within two co-funded projects for Higher Education, the “Greek Academic Open Courses” (<http://www.opencourses.gr/>) and the “Kallipos” Repository (<https://repository.kallipos.gr/>).

Having examined critically the European and international literature of the field [8]-[22], we have concluded the following: in most HEIs, academic libraries support the teaching/learning/research activities in many different ways, e.g. by gathering resources for the

undergraduate/postgraduate curricula and research, by providing access to supplementary teaching material for use in classes, by aggregating free, open academic content and making it accessible through institutional repositories and their websites, by providing Information Literacy skills to the students, by creating guides about the use of particular educational resources, learning objects, etc.

Furthermore, openness offers a lot of opportunities for collaboration with the faculty, since OER creation and use has opened a new action field for academic libraries. According to Okamoto [23], academic libraries can play a leading role in many OER areas, e.g. in “OER advocacy, promotion and discovery”, in “OER evaluation, collection, maintenance/preservation”, in “OER curation and facilitation”, etc. A special challenge for the academic libraries is OER aggregation, due to the existence of various open access sources and locations as well as extremely rich open educational content (such as open textbooks, etc.).

It should also be noted that, in the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* there are guidelines for academic libraries to be assisted in meeting the required *“expectations for library contributions to institutional effectiveness”* and strengthen their role as *“partners in educating students”*. Besides that, in these standards it is stated that *“library personnel collaborate with campus partners to provide opportunities for faculty professional development”* [3].

Moreover, according to BL [24] the modern academic librarians should be enabled to *“integrate technology skills into their existing library and information technology skill set, and to understand how this new blend of skills can promote better connections with faculty”*. In that case, by combining their professional skills and the services they offer, they will be capable of: a. developing Information Literacy initiatives in their campuses, aiming to facilitate the engagement of the Academic Community in the teaching/learning process, b. assisting faculty to apply technological innovations (including OER) and provide *“enhanced”* teaching/learning experiences, c. undertaking a leadership role as agents of change and innovation in their universities.

Finally, academic libraries’ involvement with OER training should include the expansion of their activities in providing Information Literacy courses which will support faculty and students in the OER selection and evaluation. Should this happen, “OER Literacy” [25] invests in their current professional framework - since the skills needed to locate and use OER are very much alike to the Information Literacy skills that academic librarians already have as well as to their digital competence.

III. BEST PRACTICES

By reviewing the relevant literature [9]-[16], [18]-[21], we

² For the concept of Open Education, see the Cape Town Declaration on Open Education (<https://www.capetowndeclaration.org/read-the-declaration>).

³ About the Greek participation in OE Global 18, see the presentation and the article in the Conference Proceedings [2].

⁴ For the term “open license” as well as for examples of open licensing, see <http://opendefinition.org/guide/> and Creative Commons (CC) licenses (<https://creativecommons.org/choose/?lang=en>).

have assembled the best practices proposed to ensure the cooperation of the Greek academic librarians with the Academic Community in Greece regarding OER.

a. Academic libraries, should adopt any of the following methods:

- Appoint a librarian who will deal exclusively with OER.
- Suggest to the students OER that are subject relevant to the content of their courses.
- Provide students the opportunity to make comments and suggestions about OER.
- Promote open textbooks by recommending them to the students.
- Produce videos starring faculty members who have replaced -in their courses- commercial/conventional textbooks with open ones.
- Organize seminars/workshops for the faculty as well as individual ("one-on-one") meetings.
- Discuss peer-review processes for OER.
- Promote national (such as "Kallipos" Repository, "Greek Academic Open Courses", etc.), European, and international OER initiatives.
- Create online guides dedicated to openness [OER introductory lessons (definitions, the "5Rs" of openness, etc.), CC licenses, open textbooks, open data, open software, open courses (MOOCs), etc.].

b. Librarians should create a library environment that promotes an OER culture and advocates OER benefits [17], [21], [22], [26]. In particular, it is recommended that librarians contribute to the following four areas - *OER awareness, curation, creation, licensing* - by using the methods described below:

i. *Understanding and disseminating information about the use and benefits of OER*, by

- gaining OER knowhow in cooperation with other librarians through peer to peer training and professional meetings,
- contributing to the wider educational community's awareness of OER and Open Educational Practices' benefits for teaching and learning -via newsletters, social media and other communication channels.

ii. *Curation of OER collections*, by

- identifying and evaluating OER for supporting the curriculum through the use of established quality indicators,
- assessing OER in close cooperation with faculty and students.

iii. *Creation of new OER*, by

- creating OER in close cooperation with faculty and students.

iv. *Evaluation and selection of open licenses*, by

- guiding faculty and students to make proper/legitimate use of the open content,

- using their librarian expertise in advising faculty and students to choose the appropriate open license for their works.

In general, it is recommended that academic librarians should create *communities of practice* [26] for OER promotion⁵. Also, it is advisable that they should undertake professional development by organizing and participating in awareness conferences/events, by attending OER webinars and online fora, etc.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the preceding information, it is apparent that, at European and international level, academic libraries are increasingly involved in the OER areas, contributing mainly to the following: a. OER location, b. OER metadata and quality assurance, through the use of methods that render OER easily retrievable and through specific standards that ensure high quality descriptive metadata, c. OER maintenance/preservation in open access repositories, d. OER intellectual property (by providing information about the licenses required to share content as well as adequate support for OER creation), e. OER policies (support to the design of the appropriate institutional policies).

All over the world, through their involvement in the promotion of Open Access and Open Science, academic librarians can and should be the link between different settings, policies, and strategies. In Greece, too, they should mobilize the universities to produce and publish open content such as the European agenda demands, and as is already the case in the US, Canada and elsewhere.

As for the special Greek academic culture and environment, a strong supporter towards the fulfillment of this vision is the Hellenic Academic Libraries-Link, the Consortium of academic libraries, which "*works consistently to forward the concept of open access, open education resources and open science to its institutions*" [27].

However, given the shrinking budgets and reduced staff in many academic libraries in Greece, it is crucial for the library administration to carefully consider and select the most appropriate strategies for OER management ensuring that OER collections are both useful and valuable to the Academic Community. Definitely, planning is a critical factor, otherwise, OER collections may not be proved effective for the purposes they are intended.

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⁵ A promotion tool is the Open Education Resource Repository Rubric (https://mediawiki.bccampus.ca/images/d/d1/OERR_Rubric.pdf).

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