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**Open Educational  
Resources  
Mythbusting**

# About

“Open Educational Resources Policy in Europe” is a project of Creative Commons that brings together a coalition of international experts associated with CC to strengthen the implementation of open education policies across Europe.

We aim to take advantage of the current high profile of open education in Europe, demonstrated by the prominent place of OER in the new educational initiative “Opening up Education”.

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Authors: Karolina Grodecka, Kamil Śliwowski

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We would like to thank members of OER community, especially Creative Commons and OpenCourseWare communities for input from workshops about mythbusting and help with research.

If you have any comments or You would like to engage and support us in further development of this project, feel free to write: [kamil@creativecommons.pl](mailto:kamil@creativecommons.pl)





# Introduction.

## Open Educational Resources: myths need to be busted

In 2011, Polish government launched the “Digital school” program, the largest ICT program in primary and secondary schools to date, with a significant open e-textbooks component. The program generated, for the first time, considerable interest of mainstream media in the subject of open education. As the program continues (the textbooks will be ready in September 2015), in many cases media coverage is distorted by misconceptions and inaccurate information about Open Educational Resources (OER). Public debate has, to some degree, been based on these misunderstandings. OER activists and institutions involved in discussions with reluctant publishers and education specialists have gradually tackled all the misconceptions. Similar problems emerged earlier in other countries, such as Australia, Germany, USA and Spain.

In recent years we began analysing criticism of Open Educational Resources and questions raised in the public debate. These are not specific to Poland – similar problems emerged earlier in other countries, such as Australia, Germany, USA and Spain. Our goal in OER mythbusting is to demonstrate how certain negative attitudes are often based on false assumptions. Presenting, whenever

possible, actual data and evidence about the functioning of OERs in a variety of countries is the best way to counter these negative views.

OER projects around the world have faced many different obstacles, from poor understanding on the part of decision makers and educators about what Open Educational Resources actually are to concerted negative PR<sup>1</sup> campaigns against openness of educational or public resources. The latter are most typically arranged by the traditional publishing sector, which considers the OER model as competing with, and even dangerous for their business models. While conducting numerous workshops and training sessions with teachers, authors of school textbooks and educators, we found that most arguments levelled against Open Educational Resources are based on myths. Open Educational Resources are frequently confused with things that they are not, and unnecessarily regarded as enemies to educational resources produced by traditional publishers.

The press and other media are often also not conveying objective information to directly interested parties – teachers, learn-

ers of all ages, parents of schoolchildren. This situation is not improved by the largely adverse reaction of the publishing sector to the increasing popularity of OER, a reaction that hardens as electronic textbooks and digital educational resources gain purchase in public schools. It is typical all over the world for misconceptions to flourish when a government considers introducing publicly funded OER.

We started by conducting a survey among open education experts, coupled with a broad desk research. We were searching for cases of the various myths about OER. Interestingly, a closer look at relevant material in the press reveals a polarization of opinions: some articles describe OER as an established, successful trend in education while others caution against OER, their potential to damage the publishing market, or their low quality. Our own survey conducted among teachers and experts concluded with more insightful results.

The Open Educational Resources movement was conceived as a way to transform and democratize access to education. The movement is less than ten years old, but it has already matured to a point at which governments, companies – and, most importantly, teachers and learners around the world – are creating OERs and using them in countless ways. The number of resources and projects available to copy, remix and share without restriction is growing week by week. However, this in itself does not guarantee a systemic change in the forms of public education that currently prevail. Myths about OERs can stop people from using them and causing real educational change. The goal of this publication is to dispel those myths.

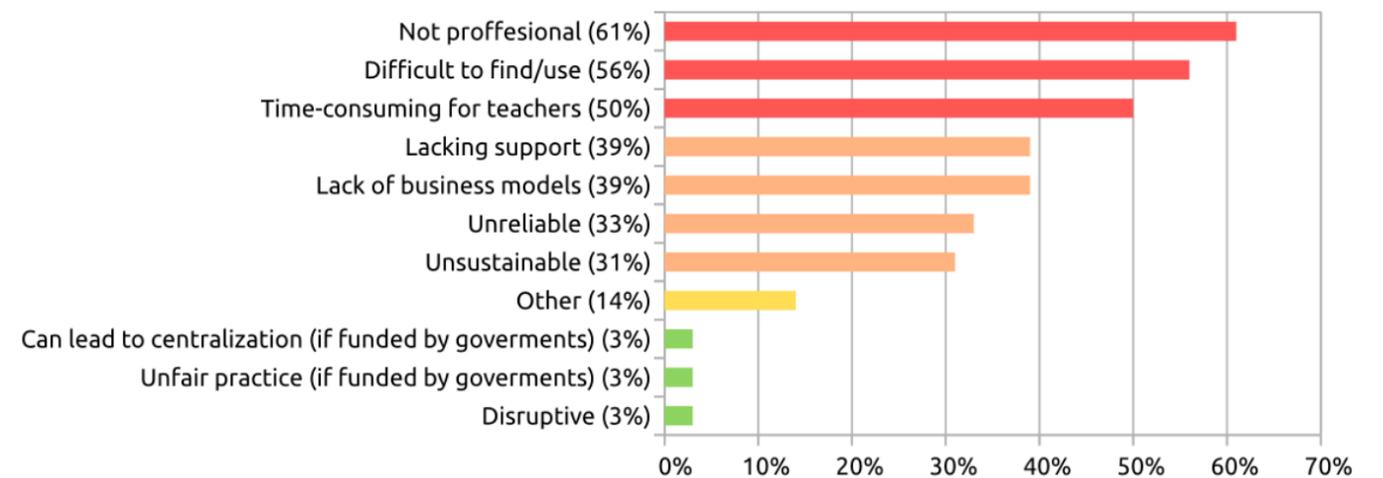


Chart . What are most typical arguments You hear against Open Educational Resources?

<sup>1</sup> Black PR around Polish eTextbooks, Michał “rysiek” Woźniak, <http://rys.io/en/94>

## Users side

In a survey by TJ Bliss, T. Jared Robinson, John Hilton and David A. Wiley entitled "An OER COUP: College Teacher and Student Perceptions of Open Educational Resources"<sup>2</sup>, 11% of participating teachers and 6% of students thought that the quality of OER textbooks was lower than that of the traditional textbooks they had used in the past. All of these respondents then pointed to technical problems or poor text formatting as reasons for the low rating. The teachers, however, have provided a detailed description of common problems with OER materials, and it appears that a perceived inferiority of OER as teaching resources was tied to difficulties with accessing content online and student practices – and not the content itself. One teacher in the survey stated that "The students have limited access to resources. They choose print materials [be-

cause] that is what they are used to." When asked to describe the main difficulty with OER materials for students, another teacher simply wrote "It's online."<sup>3</sup>

Fig. 2. Common OER misconceptions: are all digital, freely available resources open?

This survey articulates what we frequently observed while conducting OER training with teachers: a problem with perception, exacerbated by so-called "open washing": the identifying of Open Educational Resources with any free (unpaid) online resources. Most myths about OER are rooted in this misunderstanding. This may relate not just to free educational content, but more broadly to all types of information available via the Internet that can be made open.

The 2013 reports from Boundless<sup>4</sup> and EduCase<sup>5</sup> have shown a significant growth

of OER use (at least in Higher Education; research for K12 in this area is still limited). According to EduCase, 71% of respondents have used freely available open educational resources – OER – in the past year, while 10% have been using OER "all the time." Both reports were limited to university students in the United States. In such countries as Belgium, Norway or the Netherlands, where government-supported open digital resource programs are well established, even higher usage rates have been noted. The Belgian OER platform KlasCement is used by 70% of teachers nationwide, and a third of Belgian teachers have created an individual user account. The number of remixes of educational resources placed on the Dutch Wikiwijs platform has been growing by over 100% a year; the platform is now being expanded to include resources for higher education. Varied evidence and lack of research that measures use in a systemic manner make it difficult to analyse OER usage. Nonetheless, a growth trend is visible. Open Educational Resources continue to be supported by public institutions, and they attract ever-growing numbers of users seeking educational materials that are both cheaper and more sustainable. We should therefore be prepared to answer an increasing number of practical questions about what Open Educational Resources are and what they are not.

if they are to overcome initial resistance to an idea they usually do not fully understand or appreciate. Many are unfamiliar with the concepts of an open license and open educational resources, and even if they have heard about them, they voice additional worries. To quote Saylor.org, "chief concerns included the loss of control of materials, commercial reproduction, and loss of traffic/ad revenue"<sup>6</sup>.

Explaining open licenses is a battle with particular perceptions and fears. Authors and publishers are often convinced that publishing in an open model is inferior to traditional publishing: they fear that quality might suffer, that open publishing means a financial loss, a decrease in website traffic, or damage to the author's or publisher's reputation. In negotiations with academic and scientific authors it is important to understand their workflows and funding systems. Teachers often create many resources as part of their work duties; but authors of textbooks are often paid on the basis of a contract, not through royalties on book sales. It is also important to remember here that OER can be produced and distributed on various terms and within diverse models – from voluntary work (e.g., Wikipedia) to contracted, paid and peer-reviewed work (as in Poland and the United States, where government-supported open e-textbooks had been commissioned). Authors rarely believe they might actually benefit from taking control over their work instead of depending on intermediaries – and at the same time are not aware that the OER model can also offers institutional intermediation.

## The authors' perspective

In the course of projects aimed at creating new open resources, content creators can be convinced to agree to open licensing of their content. The process is often difficult – content creators need extensive information



Example of OER misconception that all digital freely available resources are open.

<sup>2</sup> Bliss, TJ, Robinson, J., Hilton, J., & Wiley, D, An OER COUP: College Teacher and Student Perceptions of Open Educational Resources, Journal of Interactive Media in Education (JIME), 2013 Spring

Issue, available online [ajime.open.ac.uk/article/201304/html](http://ajime.open.ac.uk/article/201304/html)

<sup>3</sup> ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Boundless Report: Ushering in a PostTextbook World, <http://blog.boundless.com/2014/02/boundlessreportushering-posttextbookworld/#more1026>

<sup>5</sup> ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology 2013, <http://www.educause.edu/library/resources/ecarstudy-undergraduatestudentsandinformationtechnology2013>

<sup>6</sup> A Case Study in Obstacles to and Strategies for Negotiating the Relicensing of ThirdParty Content, <http://www.saylor.org/2013/04/acasestudyinobstaclestoand-strategiesfornegotiatingtherelicensingoft hirdpartycontent/>

## About this guide

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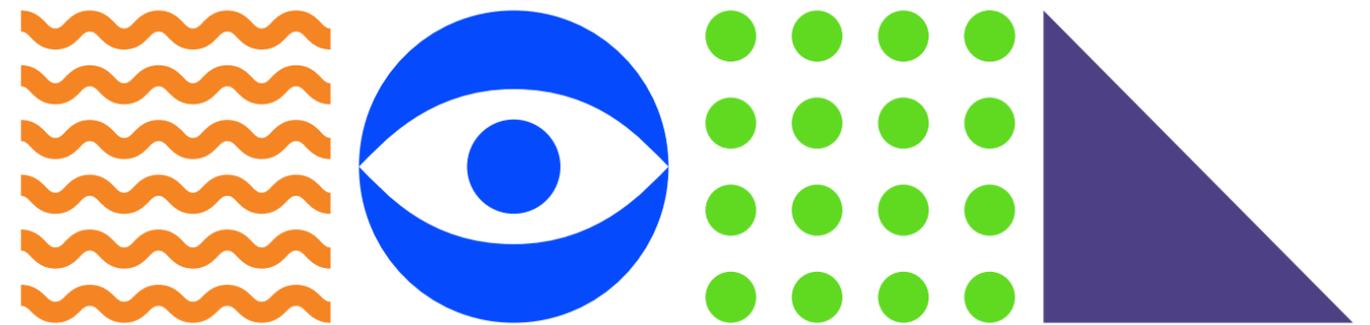
Criticism of Open Educational Resources is diverse, motivated by varying uncertainties and anxieties, but also vested interests. Some of this criticism is justified and points to areas which need further work on the part of the OER community, or refer to specific OER projects. One of the areas that, in our opinion, does need more work, is research that would provide objective information and evidence to decision makers. However, much of the criticism is rooted in fallacies that simply need to be explained.

We have designed this guide to OER mythbusting to help others navigate through common misconceptions about OER. It is mainly written with other OER activists in mind, who might have to deal with similar myths. The guide will also be helpful for educators, who have learned about OER and are looking for practical answers to their questions.

We hope this guide is simple and easy to use. It consists of two parts – a basic explanation of what are Open Education Resources, followed by the mythbusting part, written in a question-and-answer format. Further references enable the reader to get more information or to clarify any additional doubts. The guide is based on our own experiences with OER activism in Poland, and on mythbusting workshops conducted at a range of open education events.

We will continue mapping myths and fallacies about OER as they appear, with the aim of constructing a practical toolset that addresses the most common questions, and that provides references leading to further

sources of reliable information. If you would like to contribute, feel free to write to [kamil@creativecommons.pl](mailto:kamil@creativecommons.pl)



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## Basic guide to OER



## 1. What an OER is and what it is not

The term 'Open Educational Resources' (OER) describes any educational resources (including curriculum maps, course materials, textbooks, videos, multimedia applications, podcasts, or any other materials designed for teaching and learning) which have been made available for use under open licenses – which means that anyone can use, adapt and redistribute them. Those materials may be available online, in print, on DVD or any other carrier.

OER are not the only educational materials to be found on the Web. Unfortunately, most resources on the Internet are closed resources, even if they are available for free. Materials that are under full copyright, or which are not accompanied by a specific license allowing anyone to copy, adapt and share them, are not Open Educational Resources. You can use these materials only within the fair use provisions or copyright exceptions in your country.

### Want to know more?

More information about the definitions of Open Educational Resources can be found on the Creative Commons Wiki: [http://wiki.creativecommons.org/What is OER](http://wiki.creativecommons.org/What_is_OER) and in David Wiley's post on freedoms in OER: <http://opencontent.org/blog/archives/355>

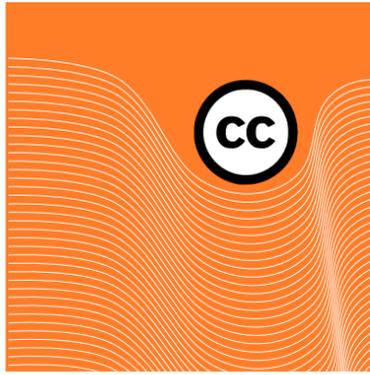


## Differences between OER and other digital resources – online courses, MOOC courses and others

General rights for copying and repurposing are what make OER different from any other educational resources available online free of charge. Free materials and courses such as most MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) allow users only fair use rights, or rights stated in specific licenses issued by the publisher. Most of them cannot be legally copied, and users cannot create their own courses based on them or update them if a mistake has been found – not, that is, without explicit agreement from copyright owners. In the case of Open Educational Resources, all users are given the above rights without needing to request permission from copyright holders (as long as they adhere to license conditions, such as attribution); the users' rights are clearly specified and easily understandable (thanks to Creative Commons licenses and their clear system). Most OER materials are published under free Creative Commons licenses <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/> or as Public Domain.

### Want to know more?

<http://oerresearchhub.org/2014/05/14/visit-oerimpactmapforevidenceofoerimpact/>



## 2. Why do open licenses make a difference?

Most of what has been created in the 20th and 21st centuries – content to be found in libraries, archives, museums and on the Web – is still under copyright. Even if the authors' intention was different, unless they explicitly stated otherwise, their work falls under full copyright protection (its extent or remit sometimes differing from country to country). If we create and publish something new on the Internet today, without charges or restrictions such as DRM (Digital Rights Management), our work is available to read, watch, hear or use only for personal purposes. Our work is not available for others to copy, republish, update, remix, re-arrange, correct, create an alternative version of or add to Wikipedia. In order to do any of these things, one needs to obtain written permission, e.g., a specific licence, from the author or copyright holder; and to do that one first needs to contact them. This might be viable for a commercial business or government body, but for the average user – teacher, student, blogger – the task can be next to impossible.

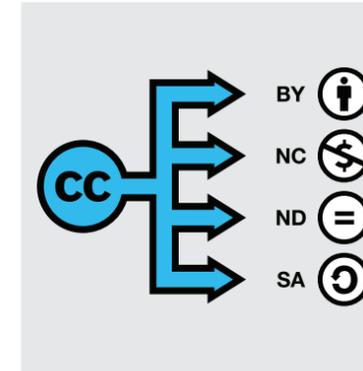
Open licenses reverse that model and encourage authors and institutions to clearly state rights and permissions when publishing content. Choosing open licenses

(such as the Creative Commons Attribution license and the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike license) is not unlike placing signs on a public road. Routes can be chosen as long as signs – like those pertaining to attribution – are obeyed. This makes reuse and cooperation easy and quick, eliminating the need to negotiate and reducing legal uncertainty.

Using licenses compatible with the Open Definition ensures that users have clear rights, that the barrier to reuse is lowered, and that educational resources proliferate. Just like Wikipedia or digitised paintings in the Public Domain, it opens up new, progressive ideas that would have been unimaginable a few years ago.

### Want to know more?

<http://opendefinition.org/>



## 3. OER and copyright. How it works?

### 3.1 Licensing models

### 3.2 Why CC BY and CC BY SA?

These two licences are called free or fully opened license. Free licences are a kind of agreement between an author/copyright holder and the rest of the universe. In this arrangement the intellectual property rights stay attached to the creator, but in the same time the author is able to (under some simple to define conditions) agree on:

- making unlimited copies of the work,
- unlimited distribution of the work, also for commercial purposes,
- adaptation of the work utworu (derivative works).<sup>7</sup>

CC BY and CC BY-SA licenses are recommended by UNESCO for Open Educational Resources.

The definition of such a freedom is not legally described, but it is mirrored in documen-

tation well-known and accepted by the OER community. You can find the Definition of Free Culture Works here: <http://freedomdefined.org/Definition>

### Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY)

This license allows maximized free re-use of the work (changes, adaptations, making copies, redistribution), also for commercial purposes with a possibility for changing the license for derivative works. It requires only attribution of the author, that means putting the proper name of the person/institution that created the work. The Attribution license requires the least conditions to be fulfilled by a user. This license is also a best choice when the author allows for the widest commercial re-use of the work and the

<sup>7</sup> Anatomia Wolnych Licencji, opracowanie Tomasz Ganicz, Wikimedia Polska, available online at: <http://pl.wikimedia.org/wiki/>

[Plik:Broszura\\_o\\_licencjach.pdf](#), last access: 6.07.2014

easiest re-distribution and promotion of it. Unfortunately CC BY license blocks harnessing OER available under CC BY-SA like open e-textbook published under CC BY eg. Wikipedia resources cannot be used in such an open textbook.

In the perspective of a textbook market, resources under CC BY license can be used in commercial products. Private market entities are able to build new business models upon open textbooks i.e. through further development of these materials, creation of additional content for learners, guidelines for teachers, multimedia and so on.

## Creative Commons Attribution Share alike (CC BY-SA)

Authors should choose this license if they would like to be guaranteed that all derivative works that were built upon the original ones will be available and open for all users as well as for the creators.

It is a “virus” license as it requires the users to publish derivative works under the same license. Wikipedia resources are published under this license and each project that makes use of Wikipedia has to be available under CC BY-SA. The copyleft character of this license guarantees the same level of the access to the original and derivative works. Such a solution leads to a situation in which no matter who and when uses the content, he or she must obey the same rules: CC BY-SA. The “Share alike” condition makes the openness stronger every time somebody re-uses resources under CC BY-SA, he or she is obliged to publish on the same conditions. This license can be also a good protection from commercial adaptation of the work. Even though CC BY-SA allows for usage the work for profits, most commercial publish-

ers strongly prefer to publish under more restrictive rules and they in fact do not decide to harness CC BY-SA licensed resources. When we combine several works and create derivative works, several solutions are possible:

1. when usage of the work under CC BY-SA leads to developing a new work, the license will work as a virus (combined works are not independent) for it. In practice this means that if in an e-textbook a publisher uses parts of Wikipedia articles, not only those fragments but whole e-textbooks must be published under CC BY-SA.
  2. when the work is a collection of works and one of them is available under CC BY-SA. In such a situation the license does not influence the work. If a photo is used as an illustration of a text, only the image must be published under original conditions but the text can be available under different licenses eg. CC BY.
- dividing the textbook/the work on separate modules - only this scenario allows for usage of text under various licenses. These modules can be available under different licenses depending on the license of the original works used in the module.



## 4. OER adoption

More than ten years after the first UNESCO congress about open education on which term Open Educational Resources was coined, open resources can be found in almost every language, open policies pop up in tens of countries and companies start to recognize OER's as great new opportunity and not only a mythical danger for their hitherto models. Open education projects like MIT OpenCourseWare Consortium, Saylor.org or Khan Academy reached global popularity and inspired tens of other projects. We cannot even imagine a day without using Wikipedia, not only in education but in everyday life.

OER Impact Map spots at least 94 policies on implementing openness into public funding of educational resources around world. 48 of them were passed and are working like huge Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program or national open e-textbooks program “Digital School” in Poland.

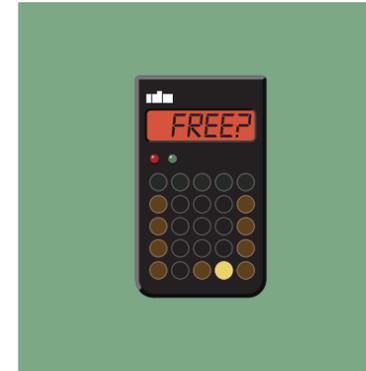
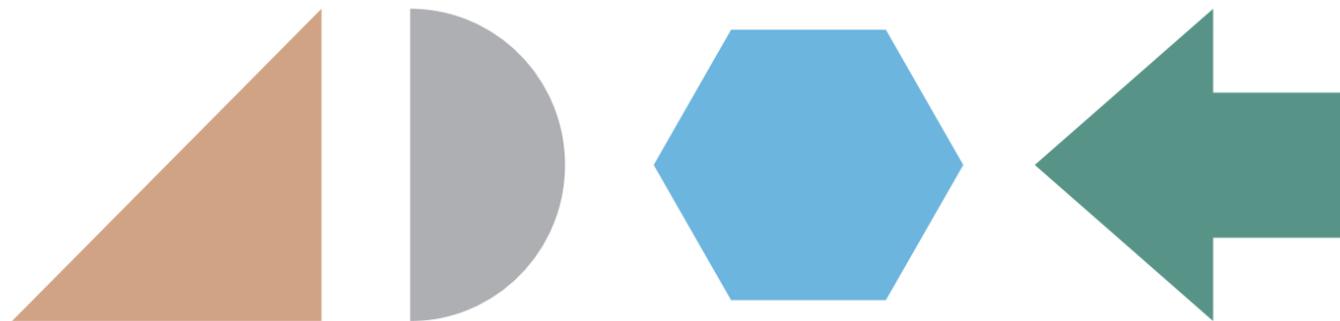
Global and multinational organisations like UNESCO, the World Bank and the European Commission not only declared support for OER but implemented their own policies, opening resources they create or fund. Even more private institutions adapted OER as part of their workflow in grant programs,

and publishing policies.

### Want to know more?

<http://oermap.org/>  
[oerresearchhub.org](http://oerresearchhub.org/)  
<http://ci.olnet.org/>

## 5. Myths



## 5.1 OER are not really free

Open Educational resources are free because they are available under free licenses and they allow anyone to use and modify them for free. They can be free in terms of cost for the end user though it doesn't mean they are always totally gratis. But we have to distinguish costs of investments, production, distribution and costs for end users. For individual users like students and teachers OERs should have no monetary costs (if available online) or as little as just print.

There are no educational resources that cost nothing. There is always the cost of production, distribution or adoption, they need financial or human resources to be created. The difference is in where and how do we distribute OERs more efficiently and lower the costs for each group of users. Open Educational Resources do that by lowering costs of copyrights (if needed, they are paid only once), cost of updates (they can be made by anyone, anytime and without copyrights barriers), costs of distribution (encouraging online publications and supporting competitive and cheap print and production).

There are also many different models of production of educational resources. For textbooks that should be created and re-

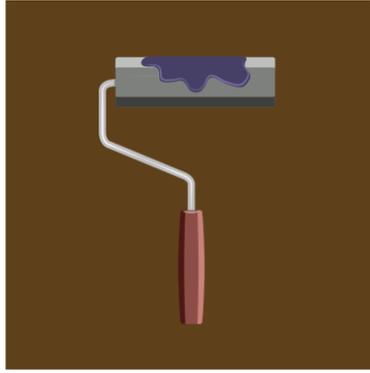
viewed by professional authors they can be funded in many ways. From national funding (like in Poland Digital School program), private funding (like Saylor.org Foundation) or even commercially funded by selling services around open content (like Boundless.com). Many traditional publishers are shifting from selling content to selling services build upon freely available resources. Of course it is hard to say that OER are free of production costs and that there are already ideal new business models for its sustainability. But it's part of a much bigger picture of change in whole education and use of educational resources caused by new technologies and internet.

### Want to know more?

David Wiley, On the Sustainability of Open Educational Resource Initiatives in Higher Education, OECD, <https://www1.oecd.org/edu/cei/38645447.pdf>

Gerd Kortemeyer, Ten Years Later: Why Open Educational Resources Have Not Noticeably Affected Higher Education, and Why We Should Care, Educase Review, <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/ten-years-later-why-open-educational-resources-have-not-noticeably-affected-higher-education-and-why-we-should-ca>

<sup>9</sup> We explore those models in [tu podać link do mitu o modelach produkcji/biznesowych]



## 5.2 OER cannot be produced professionally

Open Educational Resources can be produced in various ways like traditional materials and can be subject to review processes the same way. Most of textbooks are authored by professionals and the small atomic resources we find on the web are made by teachers and students as a part of assignments. It is the same with Open Educational Resources.

For example open textbooks produced in Poland and California, US, are publicly funded and their production is outsourced to professional publishers or universities and reviewed and certified before being admitted to schools. This model is typical for publicly funded open textbooks. Another professional model worth noticing is preparing competitions or grants for teachers and authors to write textbooks. Saylor Foundation uses this model for some of saylor.org textbooks. Some authors even organize themselves to write textbooks like a group from Australia and New Zealand which created Media Studies Textbook<sup>8</sup>.

There are also OER projects implementing open, collaborative process deeper into content creation. Those are often based on voluntary work like Wikipedia and lot of different portals for self-education. Although those models should be approached with

more scrutiny, the fact that they are more scattered doesn't mean that they cannot be professional and high quality. It is important to understand that those resources introduced highly effective ways of peer review and social scrutiny which is also possible partly because of openness of those resources. An open production model is also an important part of change in educational paradigm by bringing more equal opportunities to engage and co-author and not only consume content.

### Want to know more?

Open Educational Resources Infokit, Quality considerations  
<https://openeducationalresources.pbworks.com/w/page/24838164/Quality%20considerations>



## 5.3 OER's will damage publishing market

What What damages the publishing market is not openness, it is the low adaptability to changes brought by new technologies. Open Educational Resources bring more competitiveness and disruption into educational publishing market but they are not damaging it. Instead OER bring more flexible and connected approach focused on learners' and teachers' needs. Upon that new business models for publishers and new services are build.

Educational markets differ in many countries or even states (as we can observe in USA and Germany). What effect OER's can have on each market depends on many factors. Those effects are very often used as critical argument but without evidence and research.

The fact that a given product or service puts a different business model in jeopardy is not an argument against this product or service. Such reasoning leads to ceasing any progress in any area. New solutions that are more effective are clear signs of need for new business models, but also can upgrade the role of old ones. For example theaters survived even as cinema was expected to kill them.

And open textbooks allow for new business models — textbook publishers could, if they

only wanted, build new business models on them. For example, they could offer high quality printing services, or adapt open textbooks to particular needs of particular profiled schools. It is additionally claimed that the destruction of this market will harm the whole economy. This is a broken window fallacy — the fact that parents will now spend less money on school textbooks doesn't mean that this money will not get spent at all.

### Want to know more?

Strategies for Sustainable Business Models for Open Educational Resources, <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1533/2485>  
Open Educational Resources Infokit, Approaches and models  
<https://openeducationalresources.pbworks.com/w/page/24838043/Approaches%20and%20models>

<sup>8</sup> Media Studies Textbook, <http://creativecommons.org/nz/2014/02/announcing-the-creative-commons-media-studies-textbook/>



## 5.4 OER will replace well developed publishing models and their high quality work

Open Educational Resources are produced in various ways, same as traditional materials and can be subject to review process the same way. Quality management of OER can be as robust and professional as possible or it can be done after publication because open licenses allow to do that (which is impossible with closed resources and textbooks).

There are scenarios proving that OER are not replacing but completing educational market. In many countries like Netherlands and Belgium OERs<sup>9</sup> created by teachers for teachers are almost as widely used as textbooks. Global publishers like Pearson are making services like search engines for OER and commercial resources combined<sup>10</sup>.

Many OER projects are supporting developed publishing models and quality management in production. Some of them are even developing innovative models, better suited for the creation of modern, online focused resources.

Open educational policies on national and institutional levels (like on universities) are a key part of making openness a part of a bigger publishing process. Those policies are changing the model of how resources are available (under open conditions) but at the same time they are often based on same

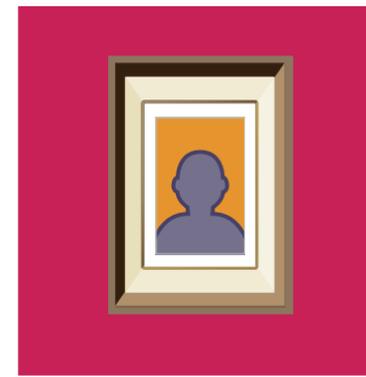
authors and creation procedures as before. Most of OER's are produced that way. Others, like teachers materials, did not have any formal quality management and were reviewed during their usage. The change is not happening in quality, but rather in rights that can help more people to access, spot and improve resources. This part of social and peer review is also very important for education, with the leading example of Wikipedia. With growing numbers of resources, quality improvement and tens of sister projects Wikipedia proved that openness is not only important during creation process but also during review and teaching critical literacy skills.

### Want to know more?

Horizon reports on K12 Education, 2014  
<http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2014nmchorizon-reportk12EN.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://oerpolicy.eu/beyondwikiwijsoerandthenetherlands/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pearsonbluesky.com/>



## 5.5 OER's are damaging authors intellectual property and their profits

The Open Educational Resources' idea is build upon high respect for both authors' and users' rights. Common use of Creative Commons (and other free licenses) for licensing open materials is a guarantee of precise information about rights and proper attribution. Authors on their own or customers buying resources (like government agencies or publishers) can decide if they want to publish them as OER's. If so, they can negotiate wages for creation and rights as in traditional, closed publishing model. The only change, which affects only a small group of authors is that they cannot be paid in royalties as open licenses exclude that option (it is impossible, as free and open licenses are always free for end users). In fact using Creative Commons licenses (which are non-exclusive) can protect authors rights even better the exclusive agreements with publishers restricting authors rights to reuse their own materials. Also, as scale of OER's grows they become free resources to re-use that can replace paid materials.

### Want to know more?

Shouldn't I worry about 'giving away' my intellectual property? in. A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources (OER), UNESCO, Commonwealth of Learning, 2011



## 5.6 Authors will not agree to such terms of open publication

Considering this issue from the very formal point of view, authors by signing a contract for creating a work (or by developing it as part of their duties) very often agree to transfer copyrights on fields of use defined in the agreement. As a result, they lose property rights to their work (on a particular field of use) and they are not aware of the consequences. In fact, authors no longer have the control over the work and they are not able to make a decision of independent distribution of their own works anymore. Creative Commons licenses are a completely different type of contract. By publishing under CC authors grant permission to use the work but retain the rights to the work and still can be in charge of its distribution. An open publication is much more convenient for the author than the transfer of the property rights to others (i.e. publishers). Creative Commons licenses are non-exclusive so they give the author a right, for instance, to sign the contract with publishing house on distribution of the work in traditional way (through selling printed copies) while in the same time the work can be available online for free on open conditions. However, when it comes to open sharing, authors start being afraid of losing the control over their work. They also consider

open publication as giving the work for free and receiving nothing in return. These concerns, while understandable, rarely turn out to be justified. There is always a risk even if the work is copyrighted, that it may be used, without asking for permission, by someone acting illegally. Such situation may happen regardless the type of legal protection of authors' intellectual rights. On the other hand, publishing under open conditions increases the visibility and the availability of their work. The clearly defined conditions of Creative Commons licenses make the usage, with regard to the rules, much more easy. It is the author who has the right to decide on ways other people can use his/her work. By choosing the particular Creative Commons license the author has control over the usage of the work as he/she informs publicly how the work can be re-used under specific conditions which paradoxically very often results in greater respect for the law, and generates less unauthorized actions. What is more, the author can specify how the work should be attributed e.g. by adding reference link to the source information. Authors also concerns that open publication after re-use will distort the meaning and decrease the quality of the work. It may

likely happen that derived work doesn't meet the expectations of the quality or esthetics. However, if an author of a derived work does act according to Creative Commons license (attributes the authorship), it is clear for users of the derived work which elements of it are developed by whom and if the users would like to, they may use the original instead of derived version of the work.

### Want to know more?

Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources, Commonwealth of Learning, UNESCO, p. 9  
<http://www.col.org/PublicationDocuments/BasicGuideToOER.pdf>



## 5.7 Teachers need more time and work to adapt OER

Discussing teachers' work on preparation and adoption of learning materials is a much more complex issue and depends on many factors. Changes to resource-based learning which are happening recently are a part of increased work time needed for teachers to create and adapt learning materials to more individualized and active use. Growing access to different resources on the internet, combined with the ongoing rollout of ICT infrastructure into educational institutions brings a lot of new challenges for teachers. OERs are rather a solution than a cause of the problems. Though, as any new solution or device, they need some time to become easy and intuitive for people who want to work with them. OER movement is developing very fast on new tools, database and learning opportunities for teachers and educator to implement them in their work. As the number of open resources and tools will grow, it will be easier for teachers to work with them. Also, if we want to work with complete sets of resources like e-textbook (and a lot of those are already available for many subjects in many countries) there can be no additional work.

### Want to know more?

How to adapt/localize training material, Open Training Platform, <http://otp.infocollections.org/otp/page/adaptlocalize/>



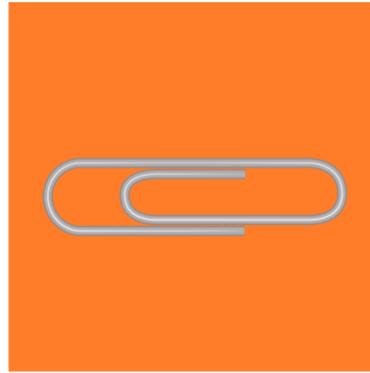
## 5.8 OER can led to using unverified materials by teachers and students

The level of assurance you can get from OER materials can be the same as with traditional materials: high when from institutionally reviewed process, lower when not reviewed or just found on the web. It depends on the country, but most of teachers are allowed to use own materials and textbooks. They are also using their reasonable judgment before using any learning resources (even many reviewed and edited textbooks have errors). Teachers use materials found on the web, not reviewed, peer produced by other teachers, often being not attributed (and infringing to copyright owners) adaptations of textbooks and other resources. The truth is that the quality of "OER depends on which resources they choose to use, how they choose to adapt them to make them contextually relevant, and how they integrate them into teaching and learning activities of different kinds" (COL, UNESCO, 2011). OER and open licensing model introduced strong approach to respect the rights of authors and to support effective online sharing of open materials. Modified OER (and any openly licensed material) have to be attributed properly and described with changes and reference to original material. Of course there will be situations when this will not happen but this does not differ from

any authorized edited copy of other, closed materials we can find on the web right now. For those circumstances in which absolute assurance is required teachers and students can choose to use materials for which they can get additional assurances for example: provided by specific specialized repositories, reviewed and certified, etc.

### Want to know more?

Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources, Commonwealth of Learning, UNESCO, 2011, p. 8 <http://www.col.org/PublicationDocuments/BasicGuideToOER.pdf>



## 5.9 OER are too complex and scattered for teachers to use

In most circumstances and for more teachers, who are already ICT qualified, the level of assurance you get from OER materials is enough. Most of the teachers and students use resources found on the Internet, often without any consideration about rights and authority of authors. For all resources, and among those available on the internet we should use reasonable judgment. OER are based on a clear copyright and creation process information about what rights apply to such resource, is it original or is it a transformation of other work. Such culture is safer and more reliable but it needs some competencies from teachers (and students as well). That is why it is often said that OER are also part of media literacy and copyright education.

In case of using open textbooks complexity starts when we want to re-use such materials and if textbook was created orderly all copyrights should be cleared and acknowledged.

### Want to know more?

Prepping for the Geography Textbook Sprint  
<http://clintlalonde.net/2014/05/28/preping-forthegeographytextbooksprint/>



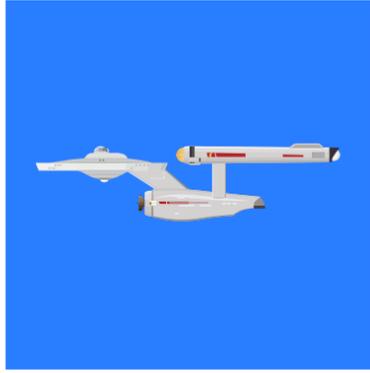
## 5.10 OER deepen digital divide in educational system

OER are dedicated to eliminate the education divide by making high-quality learning materials freely available to educators and learners around the world. A common mistake made when talking about OERs is that they are the same as digital resources which is not true. Even if OERs are digital-born, publishing under free license makes it possible for them to be modified and brought as analog resources by anyone. Apart from that, OER policies like UNESCO's or OECD's recommend that OER should support lowering access barriers to education. This can be done only by making resources both easy to print (cheaply) and use with computers or mobile devices. Which way of distribution is cheaper and more effective depends on a country.

What can deepen digital divide is forcing ICT and digital resources where and when they are not better option or supersession of traditional resources without preparing schools, teachers and students for such change. Wrong policies and rigid implementations focused on technologies, not students can deepen digital divide and again, OER can be a way to bypass that. OER should be independent tools, thus they could be also printed and delivered to schools badly-equipped in ICT.

### Want to know more?

Bridging the Bandwidth Gap OER and the Digital Divide  
[http://www.sciencemedianetwork.org/wiki/Bridging\\_the\\_Bandwidth\\_Gap\\_OER\\_and\\_the\\_Digital\\_Divide](http://www.sciencemedianetwork.org/wiki/Bridging_the_Bandwidth_Gap_OER_and_the_Digital_Divide)  
<http://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/en/node/4223>



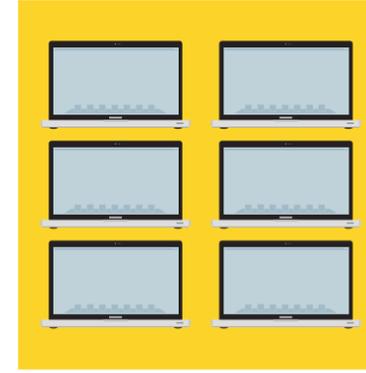
## 5.11 OER are applicable only for distance learning or highly digital/ICT fulled education

Although the use of OER very often supports ICT education and most of popular OER projects are digital, OER and digital resources are not synonyms. Openly licensed content is produced in any medium: paper-based text, video, audio or computer-based multimedia. Teaching staff can harness OER to enhance e-learning courses or build upon Massive Open Online Courses, but this does not mean that OER are necessarily e-learning or any other kind of online learning/teaching. The core of the OER concept assumes that OER should be multi-platform. In practice this mean that they are produced as such or are able to be easily adaptable to: print version, low bandwidth, different devices as well as accessible for users with disabilities.

According to a recent survey carried out by the European Commission<sup>11</sup> on ICT in schools, the bandwidth and connectivity are still challenges in most of countries around the world (not only developing countries). Thus it would be expected that programmes (especially publicly funded), devoted to creation of open content should be aimed at providing printable resources, rather than supplying educational systems with ICT understood as a must-be condition for OER use for wide scale.

### Want to know more?

Dramatically Bringing Down the Cost of Education with, Center for American Progress OER <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/news/2012/02/07/11167/dramatically-bringing-down-the-cost-of-education-with-oer/>



## 5.12 OER support IT industry profit by forcing schools and teachers to buy more IT equipment

A common impression of forcing schools and teachers to buy new hardware might have been caused on one hand by the scope of different OER initiatives and programmes in which development of OER is in line with process of equipping schools in ICT (like the Digital School program in Poland). On the other, OER are available in a variety of formats that supports flexibility of resources' usage, but may also have influence on the way people think about it - the more formats, the more ICT is required.

Open Educational Resources are tool-independent. This independency is clearly stated in definition of free cultural works that define free works as those which can be used without any technical restrictions. The work must be available in a form where no technical measures are used to limit the freedoms enumerated above.

In fact, most OER are in line with the definition above. They are compatible with different operating systems and web browsers. What is more, OER usually are available in widely used in (if not open) most common formats, that can be opened and read on different kinds of software. The schools are not forced or obliged to provide teachers and students with additionally equipment and proprietary software in order to use

open content. On ICT market open source software can be found as alternative solution to commercial ones. What is more, OER as teaching/learning materials can be downloaded, printed and supplied to schools not well-equipped with ICT and broadband Internet connection.

### Want to know more?

Investing in digital teaching and learning resources: Ten recommendations for policymakers, Micheal Trucano, World Bank, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/digital-learning-resources-ten-recommendations-policymakers>

<sup>11</sup> ICT in schools survey – many children not getting what they need; teachers need more training and support.

European Commission IP/13/341 19/04/2013  
[http://europa.eu/rapid/pressrelease\\_IP13341\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressrelease_IP13341_en.htm)



## 5.13 Public funded OER can led to politics dependent textbooks/resources

How educational resources are funded depends on a country, in many of which textbooks and other resources are already publicly funded (or co-sponsored) and selection and certification process of such resources also depends on educational system. What creates highest risk and is criticized widely by teachers and parents is the public funding and choosing of only one textbook. In such scenario it does matter if chosen textbooks are imposed to be used or it is open and free but available as one of those offered on the market, all certified. The first scenario creates an opportunity to be abused as a platform for political values of current ruling politicians. The second may lead to teachers and parents choosing more often the free textbook because of savings. Both of those scenarios can lead to political dependency not only if real choice would be difficult or unavailable but also when changing and using other versions of textbooks would be prohibited (for example by blocking use of non certified materials in schools). For such restrictions both open and closed educational materials cannot do much. But in all other cases making textbooks open can be solution for limited options available on the market by allowing authors, publishers and teachers to make their own version

of open textbook.

### Want to know more?

What happens when all textbooks are only digital? Ask the Koreans. Micheal Trucano, World Bank, <http://www.unescobkk.org/resources/e-library/publications/article/what-happens-when-all-textbooks-are-only-digital-ask-the-koreans/>



## 5.14 There are many OER available under different licenses. It's the same level of difficulty to recognize and legally use compatible materials.

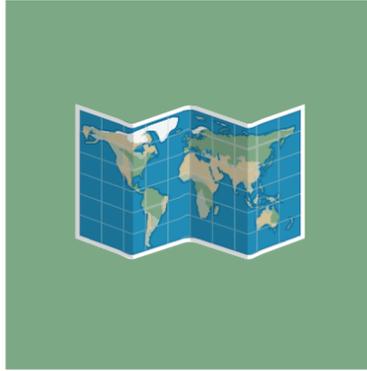
This is true that OER published under particular Creative Commons licence may not be compatible with each other but traditional copyright is not straightforward either and may lead to even more questions than compatibility of CC licences itself. The first step is to understand the conditions and licensing rules. In fact, they are clearly described so a user can see how the work is available for reuse. Then it is highly unlikely that the user will face immediate legal action for violating the terms of an OER license.

There are some ways to help acting in line with those rules. Those who do best to understand the license, can use tools providing support in differentiating their compatibility such as Compatibility Chart developed by Creative Commons ([http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Wiki/cc\\_license\\_compatibility](http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Wiki/cc_license_compatibility)). If the user is still uncertain whether found materials can be merged or not, one solution is to use only materials published under the same licence. Although, it limits the range of available content, the user gains assurance of acting legally. Most OER databases' suppliers provide a possibility to publish the content on various conditions. Thus, OER are labelled properly according to

the licence chosen by its author. OER services and even general search engines, like Google, offer filtering options by type of use or even exact licence. This is possible due to "three-layer" design of CC licences that contains: a traditional legal tool (understandable for lawyers), a "human readable" version of the license (a format understandable by ordinary users) and the last layer - a "machine readable" version that provides summary of the key freedoms and obligations written into a format which is recognized by software systems, search engines, and other kinds of technology. This approach to CC licence design guarantees OER to be searched easily and filtered by the type of licence. The user is able to search the content published under compatible licences in order to remix them.

### Want to know more?

Open Content Licensing (OCL) for Open Educational Resources, OECD <http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceeri/38645489.pdf>



## 5.15 OER are forcing internationalisation and common core standards to different educational systems

One of the main values of OER is that they can be used worldwide independently of the system of education and national curricula frameworks. Those OER which licenses guarantee freedom of re-use and distribution can be localised and adapted to the conditions, formal requirements and needs of students and teachers stated in national educational systems. The localization process is at the heart of the OER - it exemplifies its diversity, openness and reusability. By making content relevant and transferable, the barriers to implementation of OER on the local context are eliminated (Kurshan, 2008).

When re-using OER, it's often desirable to apply the procedure of localization, which refers to the process of taking educational resources developed for one context and adapting them for the other (geographical, pedagogical, political, or technical). There are many reasons why educators and learners would like to localize materials - e.g. to accommodate a particular teaching style or learning style, to take into account cultural differences, to support a specific pedagogical need etc. The practice of localization encompasses more than the translation of materials into a local language or swapping a photo to reflect cultural differences. In

most cases OER require also some work on adaptation to various learning styles. Access to OER developed by people with different educational and professional background may serve as reference materials for teachers to see how particular problem/subject is taught in different cultural and educational context, it is rather unlikely that OER will be re-used without any changes. An example of global initiatives that supports localisation of OER is Curriki that helps to advance OER by working with partners in the US and abroad to develop educational content in multiple languages and to create local federated Curriki sites that support local educational learning objectives (Kurshan, 2008). Local sites are customised to the extent to meet the national standards in each country and include Curriki sites in India, Korea, Argentina, Indonesia, United States. The fact that OER are materials upon which the learning process is built, it is worthwhile for it to be underlined. Even if a transition of educational system into more resources-based learning can be observed, OER do not require common educational international standards and do not dictate how teachers teach. How OER will be used depends on skills and competences of teachers.

### Want to know more?

Barbara Kurshan (2008), OER Models that Build a Culture of Collaboration: A Case Exemplified by Curriki, eLearning Papers, N° 10 • September 2008

<http://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/en/article/OERModelsthatBuildaCultureof-Collaboration%3AACaseExemplifiedby-Curriki>



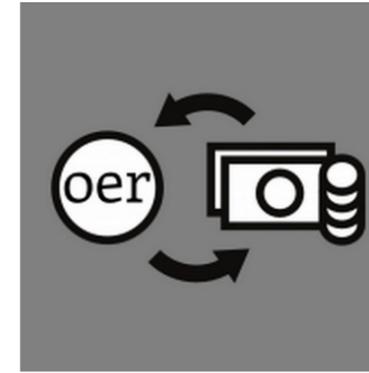
## 5.15 OER are not sustainable

Discussing sustainability of OER is a rather complex issue and depends on many factors. It is very strongly linked to the business approach and can be guaranteed by choosing (adequate) business models that generate revenue. The sustainability becomes a priority when there is a critical mass of OER initiatives. As OER are not „cost free“ their production may entail a large scale investment. Currently, the majority of OER development is undertaken on a project basis, and often with donor support and when the funding ends, further development of OER is suspended. Within EU funding procedures, institutions are expected to sustain project results up to 3 or 5 years (depending on the type of a programme) after projects' funding. However, this approach is not enough as it does not guarantee the exploitation of resources by users. Integration into policies and procedure - as well as the regular budgets - of an organisation is a key aspect in making OER sustainable. Supporting actions should include modifications to institutional policies and processes, with the aim of making open resources release an expected part of the educational resources creation cycle. The aim of OER directed initiatives should be focused on production of OER and then caring for existing OER but

also embedding processes and transforming practices to support ongoing OER production and release (JISC OER InfoKit, 2014).

### Want to know more?

J. Johansen and D. Wiley, 2010, A Sustainable Model for OpenCourseWare Development, Educational Technology Research and Development, May 2010, <http://hdl.lib.byu.edu/1877/2353>  
JISC OER InfoKit Sustainability, 2014, <https://openeducationalresources.pbworks.com/w/page/26789871/Sustainability>



## 5.16 OER are not able to generate revenue so they can not be a business model

OER, same as open source, can create revenue in many different and successful ways. From services like search engines or platforms built around resources, selling custom versions or providing implementations. From a business perspective OER projects are more like startups that build products around data than final publishers focused on selling a final product. Resources like data can flow freely but at the same time they can ignite a lot of new revenue streams and possibilities for many more than just publishers. Right now OER are at the verge of mass adoption, first few companies and projects are successful and other test, fail and start new projects. Many of new projects struggle not because of money but obstacles from old business models and time is needed to find the best ways and solutions for new business models build around OER to coexist with others and grow to scale.

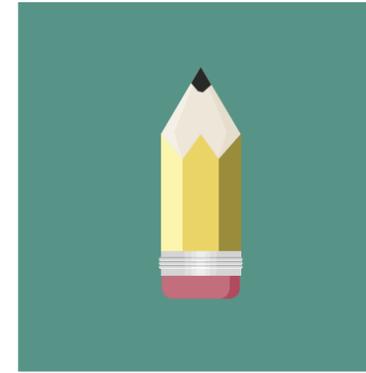
Companies like Boundless, which provides ready-to-use online content, study materials, and assessment items (raising – as they claim - nearly \$10 million in venture funding1) are already proving that OER are a great model to build upon. In the US Textbook Media and Flat World Knowledge (the two largest commercial providers of free

textbooks) utilize the “freemium” strategy. They considered which goods can be given for free and which services are available for a price. Textbook Media offers advertised versions of e-textbooks free of charge and paid version that is not supported by advertisements. Flat World Knowledge in its basic approach, give e-textbooks written by recognized authors with established reputations for free while supplemental materials (like digital flash cards, teachers material, PPT presentations, study guides) are available for purchase (Hilton & Wiley, 2010). Many other examples of commercial re-use of resources from Wikipedia and public domain are also there. Same as with open source, we tend not to see the value and business behind it, but we pay for hosting almost everything on the Internet on Linux servers, we buy Android phones and use Firefox.

### Want to know more?

Exploring the Business Case for Open Educational Resources,  
<http://www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=421>

Hilton J. L., Wiley, D. (2010), A sustainable future for open textbooks? The Flat World Knowledge story, First Monday, 15, 8, <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2800/2578>



## 5.18 OER adoption is just too radical for my institution

Adopting an OER program does not mean that you have to throw away all your closed resources on day one. A lot of OER are developed as a supplement to the current teaching methods, especially in primary and secondary education (up to 18 years of age). Start with one book for one class in the fall semester. Share the assignment you have created as a teacher openly on one of the (inter)national platforms intended for it. Include one or two open textbooks in your proofreading of new textbooks for the class you teach in spring. See the advantages of OER for yourself, gather evidence and use the evidence collected all over the world about the value of open and then discuss a broader adoption of the system in your institution. To use a cliché: Rome was not built in one day.

### Want to know more?

Creative Commons policies grow in New Zealand schools, <https://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/43758>

Guidelines for Open Educational Resources (OER) in Higher Education, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002136/213605E.pdf>

Author: Lisette Kalshoven, (Kennisland)



Open Educational Resources Policy in Europe" is a project of Creative Commons that brings together a coalition of international experts associated with CC to strengthen the implementation of open education policies across Europe.

<http://oerpolicy.eu/>