Rede von Prof. Dr. Verena Metze-Mangold
anlässlich des Zweiten UNESCO-Weltkongresses zu
Open Educational Resources in Ljubljana, 18.-20.09.2017
Beitrag zur Panel-Diskussion “Contributions of OER to SDG 4 – From Commitments to Actions”, 19.09.2017

Thank you, Mr Chakroun.
Excellencies,
Scholars and OER experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

as President of the German Commission for UNESCO, I am very pleased to be here with you in Ljubljana at the Second UNESCO World OER Congress. I would like to congratulate and thank our Slovenian hosts and UNESCO for organizing this important and very timely global event! Let me also congratulate Slovenia on the outstanding national effort of OpeningUp Slovenia, which can serve as a model to all of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, Digitalisation is one of the pertinent reference frames to our discussions of OER at this Congress. We all realize it in a way every day: Our society is increasingly becoming a digital society. The Internet is perhaps the most astonishing artefact in the history of mankind – resulting in the shrinking of space and time. As a mass phenomenon, it is still very young: barely more than 25 years.

But what exactly is the process of digitalisation about? Is it just a technical endeavour, based on algorithms and parameters? It certainly is not. It is also a process of social construction. For, this transformation changes not only all parts of the economic value chain but our society as a whole.

UNESCO has a demanding vision for this society: It is the humanistic vision of Universal Knowledge Societies. The 37th General Conference adopted the so-called Internet Universality Concept¹ which can serve as a template for the holistic and complex process of transforming and developing Knowledge Societies for the 21st Century. The concept is built on

1. Human Rights
2. Openness

¹ Basic to the Study “Keystones to foster inclusive Knowledge Societies” (UNESCO International Internet Study, 2015)
3. Accessibility
4. Multi-stakeholder processes

Even if the exact way in which Knowledge Societies are going to be established might be different, universal Human Rights have to be the frame of all these social transformation processes. And the Human Right to Education is central to sustainable and inclusive social development.

Open Educational Resources are one of the instruments that enable people to exercise the Human Right to education! OER contribute to all of the major goals of SDG 4, namely inclusive and equitable quality education for all throughout all educational stages:

In terms of equity, it goes without saying that OER improve access to education because they permit access to learning materials at no cost for the user.

OER contribute to inclusive education because they can be adjusted to diverse learning needs which leads to better learning outcomes.

Last but not least, OER have the potential to improve the quality of educational materials

- through collaboration and peer review
- because they engage learners more actively in the learning process
- and simply because information can be more easily updated and adapted to specific contexts and thus made more relevant

Therefore, OER carry a truly transformative educational potential, which also includes the promotion of a culture of sharing and collaborating among individual learners, institutions and finally, the global learning community.

It is the merit of UNESCO to have understood and underlined this transformative potential first and to have fostered OER for more than 15 years now!

Germany, however, was quite a late-comer to OER. Five years ago, at the First World OER Congress in Paris, people asked the valid question: „But where is Germany?“ The quasi absence of Germany at the Congress was characteristic for the state of development of OER in Germany at the time.

But much has changed since 2012. The topic has not only attained greater visibility in public discourse but has also received increased political support. The German Commission for UNESCO has been closely involved in these developments.

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² So-called R. O. A. M. Principles. See especially Human Rights 12, 19, 27.
Let me mention a few highlights and milestones:

- In 2013, the final report of a working group established by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the German Federal states officially endorsed OER.
- More recently, national and federal digitalisation strategies\(^1\) equally promote OER.
- The most significant recent political development in Germany in the context of OER was the start of a national OER Funding Programme by the Ministry for Education and Research in November last year. It aims at increasing the visibility of OER and seeks to strengthen capacity-building for the creation, use and distribution of OER. This includes the funding of 23 projects for capacity-building of OER multipliers as well as the establishment of a national OER information hub.
- So we can state that these political developments have come about late but have been all the more structured so that after political commitment right away some steps towards mainstreaming have been undertaken.

Parallel to these political top-down developments, a strong bottom-up process has taken place: The German OER community has continuously grown and developed an enormous variety of innovative projects. Big annual OER festivals bring together OER practitioners, experts, researchers and newcomers to discuss and exchange best practices and to celebrate the winners of the German OER awards. These big events, too, help to make OER known and broaden access and use.

As far as concrete projects are concerned, I would like to highlight the OER World Map, which has been developed in Germany, as it is an important project on a global scale. The OER World Map, funded inter alia by the Hewlett Foundation, collects and visualises data on OER actors and activities worldwide. I encourage all of you to register your organisations, events and projects on the OER World Map so that we can make the most of this extremely useful tool.

Projects like this can only be successful if there is a broad cooperation of various players. This is even more true with regard to our global endeavours, especially SDG 4. Mainstreaming of OER is an important lever to this aim. This is one of the reasons why this Second OER World Congress is so pertinent and timely!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will perhaps be astonished, but let me close with a quote from the American president Thomas Jefferson from the year 1813:

“He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me.”

Thank you very much for your attention.

\(^1\) KMK-Strategie „Bildung in der digitalen Welt“ (2016); BMBF-Strategie „Bildungsoffensive für die digitale Wissensgesellschaft“ (2016).