

PREFACE

Introductory message by Prof. Dr. Bart Verspagen – Director UNU-MERIT

ICT has dramatically changed our lives, and is still changing it in ways we could only have imagined a couple of years ago. The pervasive, networking nature of this technology has impacts that reach far beyond the economic domain, affecting many aspects of our social life. The notion of the ‘network society’ has become intrinsically associated with ICT. It is changing how we interact and behave at work, as well as in social interactions and the way time off work is spent. It is changing the relationships between government and society. And, it is changing the way we learn.

The concept of ‘open education’ is central to the developments and trends in ICT-enabled learning. It promises to allow for a higher level of (digital) inclusion, and for the provision of innovative open educational services of high socio-economic impact. When ICT and open educational resources are appropriately developed they can significantly affect economic growth and provide alleviation from poverty. Many developed and particularly developing countries and their citizens will gain from improved access to education and the development and localization of open educational services that truly fits their needs. Open educational services that meet actual local needs can also have a high impact in the poorest and most remote areas, regions affected by the ‘Digital Divide’. Such regions could even emerge as leaders in the next phase of the global educational service economy – for example, ‘educational offers with a soul’ that address societal needs. Especially in developing countries or poorer regions the number of open education producer communities and the variety of open educational service solutions is likely to increase greatly through open educational approaches. What is required at this point of time, however, is a reinforced focus on research and development in open education and open educational services, and to put these issues at the top of the political agendas.

Research and development in open education and open educational services must produce convincing evidence to show how open education and open educational services can have an impact on the development of national economies and society as a whole, building policy support for

open education and fostering its public adoption. Such evidence would pave the way for new business opportunities within the open education domain, which does not exist on a large scale at the moment and still constitutes a niche market, but with great potential to be tapped and expanded.

This volume is a step forward in this direction, with high-quality and relevant contributions from a range of top-level researchers in the field. I therefore recommend the volume wholeheartedly to all who are interested in the learning the potential of ICT, and in particular to policymakers, who will have to play a crucial role in realizing the potential that is so obvious.

Introductory message by Richard Straub – ELIG Secretary General and Ex-Officio Executive Member

The Management Thinker Peter Drucker once reminded us that: ‘The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong question’.

Technology-enhanced learning has for long been concerned with questions of scale, access and efficiency. Currently, massive open online courses (MOOCs) are impressively demonstrating how individual courses can reach over 100,000 initial participants. Also open educational resources have been around for over a decade and certainly have done great benefit to making educational resources widely shared.

One challenge is to use technology widely in learning. An other one is to use technology wisely. Learning industry as well as policymakers tend to measure technology-enhanced learning by distribution. We need to turn this towards a discussion on impact.

Our world is increasingly complex. As I have expressed in a recent blog post for the *Harvard Business Review*: ‘simplistic “can do” thinking and linear approaches in organizations and markets, which are by definition complex, won’t be sufficient. And it is the prod to us to better understand why’.¹

This complex world demands rethinking education at a more fundamental level. So by opening up education we should not only aim to provide more efficient and widely open access to the education of today, but also aim to shape the education of the future. This should start by asking very fundamental questions: What are the skills and competences that we need in the future? How can open education support them? How will learning be different from the learning of today?

This book is investigating these tough questions across different domains of education: K12 school education, higher education and life-long learning. It is published at an important point in time for Europe while the European Commission is launching a large strategic initiative on ‘Opening up Education’.

I wish that this first book of our new ELIG series on Advances in Digital Education and Life Long Learning will have a strong impact on this important debate. I am convinced that it poses the right questions at the right time for the future of digital education while bringing this in context with the most innovative practical developments in open education around the world.

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1. http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2013/05/why_managers_havent_embraced_c.html