

## OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN SWEDISH HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Introduction

OER has not yet made a major impact in HE in Sweden. A couple of national surveys, think tank seminars, workshops, networks and projects have been financed during the last few years. The main actors have been the National Library of Sweden together with The Swedish Agency for Network and Cooperation in HE (NSHU), The Swedish Agency for flexible Learning (CFL), and the Knowledge Foundation. The discussion has focused much on copyright problems, the incitement for teachers to share material and metadata. The cost of financing more grass-root projects and knowledge sharing on a national level cannot be justified by the poor outcomes of the repository projects carried out so far in higher education. We believe that the initiative must now be adopted by vice chancellors or the board of a single University or consortium to put out freely available resources/courses. Such pilot project could then partly be financed by a national organisation.

### The OER situation in Sweden

The Swedish Net University Agency (in 2005 transformed to NSHU) started in 2002. At the same time the Swedish government allotted about 470 million SEK extra to the Universities, based on their volume of distance education.<sup>1</sup> The task of the Agency was to support the development of IT-based distance education. A dialogue with teachers and other staff involved in distance education was initiated. The copyright issue was central in almost all discussions. During 2002–2003 a web-based handbook on legal issues was therefore produced<sup>2</sup>, but has for various reasons not been updated.

The national initiatives have since followed the recommendations given in the first national study on educational resources (not only OER), which was carried out 2004–2005<sup>3</sup>. The main recommendations to the national actors were:

- 1) To do an in-depth study of the needs and incitement of single teachers or teacher groups of
- 2) To do a survey of local and regional initiatives of publishing and showcases of OER
- 3) Enhance knowledge sharing by national seminars and workshops
- 4) Stimulate local ongoing initiatives and pilot projects

During 2004 and 2005, several national seminars were arranged by NSHU and the National Library. Special focus was on copyright issues, especially creative commons and the possible use of it in a Swedish context. NSHU and the National Library also financed a project for OER in mathematics. One of the main purposes of this project was to set up a group of teachers and to study the incentives for them to use material created by others. Unfortunately, almost no material was reused within the group<sup>4</sup>.

Another project financed by NSHU was an English educational database for higher education, SEED<sup>5</sup>. This ongoing project has gained national acceptance across the English departments in Swedish HE. The main problem was to motivate the teachers to submit their material and to find a suitable technical platform that interested persons easily can access.

In 2007, an OECD survey focusing on the pros and cons and other OER issues was published: “Giving knowledge for free<sup>6</sup>”. Eight Swedish respondents answered the survey questionnaire. One of the conclusions was “that we do not know much about the users and the producers of OER”. This is once again an expression of the uncertainty of who the users and senders/remitters are. In 2008, the Knowledge foundation and the National Library financed an in-

<sup>1</sup> The money was distributed directly by the government over a three year period 2002-2004

<sup>2</sup> Legala handboken,

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nshu.se/download/2760/forstudie\\_digitalalarresurser\\_2005.pdf](http://www.nshu.se/download/2760/forstudie_digitalalarresurser_2005.pdf), *Tillgång till digitala lärresurser inom högskolan – en förstudie, Katarina Jandér, NSHU rapport 2:2005*

<sup>4</sup> <http://kmr.nada.kth.se/wiki/Matriks/Matriks> and NSHU Rapport 04:2007, Matriks, Lärresurser och erfarenhetstorg för matematik, projektutvärdering

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nshu.se/english/page/4808/swedensenglisheducationaldatabasefortertiaryeducation.htm>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/41/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_3584\\_5581\\_38659497\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/41/0,3343,en_2649_3584_5581_38659497_1_1_1_1,00.html), Giving Knowledge for free – the emergence of open educational resources, OECD, ISBN: 9789264032125

depth study of the use of OER at five universities in Sweden. The project will also develop models for making digital learning resources produced by institutions teachers openly available within existing Open Access repositories. The project is planned to report in the beginning of 2009<sup>7</sup>

But there are examples of Swedish repositories that are used (from adult education and schools):

[www.lektion.se](http://www.lektion.se) (means lesson) is a community were compulsory school teachers and different companies makes OERs available for others – for free. It has today more than 160 000 users. Another example is the course hub, a repository for open learning objects, complete courses and course management tool<sup>8</sup>. It has mainly been used in adult education. Similar initiatives for HE exists<sup>9</sup> but the use aren't wide spread. Another actor currently looking at the possibilities of delivering digital learning objects (not totally open) to HE is The Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company. They are trying to reach a distribution agreement with HE institutions to extend the broadcast of their programmes and resources.

### Discussion – the future of OER in Sweden

The studies and projects in Sweden have shown that it is difficult to stimulate the production and re-use of OER by financing workshops and building up national databases. Grass-root projects aiming to engage teachers in producing, sharing, re-using and collaborating around OER do not work.

The technical difficulties that SEED has faced show that there is a lack of institutional support for OER work. But even when the infrastructure exists, very few use it. Is there a built-in resistance in HE that makes sharing difficult, although it obviously works in compulsory education. Maybe the importance of research in HE is the barrier? If we compare with articles and article databases, is there a need to make

OER more research heavy in order to gain acceptance? Is there more prestige and reputation at stake among teachers in HE than at the compulsory level?

We think the time has come for university managements to make strategic plans to make all courses visible and open for all to see on the Internet. We argue that this is the best way to ensure the quality of the OERs and to create better courses that attract more students. The open courseware project of MIT is still one of the few initiatives that seem to have made a success. In the UK and the Netherlands there are new interesting projects taking the open courseware one step further by giving courses for free<sup>10</sup>. The MIT project has shown that an OER initiative can be used not only to attract students. It can also have a positive effect on the quality of the learning material. Not many want to put out mediocre material in public, but you can get away with it in the classroom situation. It can also lead to enhanced cooperation both within and outside the University by making research material within the OER publicly available.

While we wait for a University to adopt a strategy for open courses or more actively support OER use, we think the debate should focus on pedagogical questions e.g. documenting how OER can support learning better than traditionally used teacher-made material. In the current debate some researchers also include social web tools as examples of OER. We believe that the use of these tools to enhance teaching and learning is another major challenge for teaching and learning in HE in Sweden. There are already some examples of the use of 3D worlds (mainly Second Life<sup>11</sup>) and communities such as Lunarstorm<sup>12</sup> as main tools in the learning process.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://oerir.blogspot.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://kursnavet.cfl.se/broker/portal/cfl/english2.htm>

<sup>9</sup> See for example: <http://www.digiref.se/> and <http://www.larobjekt.se/>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.open.ac.uk/> and <http://www.surf.nl/en/> for more information.

<sup>11</sup> <http://secondhouseofsweden.com/2007/05/03/kalmar-university-college-to-enter-second-life/>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.cfl.se/natochbildning/html/nr\\_1\\_05/lunarstorm.htm](http://www.cfl.se/natochbildning/html/nr_1_05/lunarstorm.htm)



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