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## **Developments in Open, Distance and eLearning**

by

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### Abstract

Starting from the conclusions of UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education the authors will show that the new dynamics that are at work in higher education today place strong importance on the roles of open, distance and eLearning. They will note that the Strategic Plan for the Open University of China is strongly aligned this agenda. They will then discuss the emergence of Open Educational Resources as a way of strengthening the role of ICTs and opening up the world of knowledge to all people. This year MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) have made the news around the world: what are MOOCs, what are the challenges facing them and what possibilities do they offer? The authors will end by describing the DeTao Masters Academy to which they belong and ask, finally, whether the DeTao Masters Academy, possibly in association with Chinese universities, might develop a MOOC and offer it worldwide in Chinese and English.

### **Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić**

#### Introduction

Sir John Daniel and I are honoured to give this address at the Open University of China, especially since we read your impressive Strategic Plan. On reading it Sir John was particularly delighted to discover – as a pleasant surprise – that it names him as a member of the OUC Steering Committee!

We congratulate the Open University of China on this audacious initiative and look forward to working with you in the implementation of the Strategy. We are both Education Masters with the DeTao Masters Academy here in China and we believe there is tremendous potential for cooperation between these two organisations.

We have entitled this presentation “Developments in Open, Distance and eLearning” and we shall deliver it in two parts.

I will first recall the New Dynamics of Higher Education as defined by UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education and then relate these global new dynamics to the DeTao Masters Academy and the strategic directions of the the OUC.

Sir John will then explore the opportunities offered by latest developments in open, distance and eLearning, focussing particularly on Open Educational Resources and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). He will attempt to place these recent developments in ODL within the framework of the activities of the two institutions – DeTao and OUC – and propose possible future scenarios involving them.

### UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education

So let me begin by recalling the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education in which China played an important part. The Conference identified a number of new dynamics that are shaping the landscape of higher education globally.

The most striking new dynamic is the massification of higher education. There are over 165 million students enrolled in higher education worldwide (UIS, 2010). Age cohort higher education participation rates in the world as a whole grew from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007 (UIS, 2010), although some consider a 40% Age Participation Rate as the springboard for development and China has adopted this target. Globally, enrolments have increased fivefold in less than 40 years. It is now predicted that the global demand for higher education will expand from 97 million students in 2000 to 263 million students in 2025 (UNESCOPRESS, 2009; UIS, 2011).

Another strong trend is cross-border education, which is the mobility of programmes and institutions. In China alone, the number of international branch campuses has grown by 70% over the past three years. An example of a well established international branch campus is the Nottingham Ningbo University. Another is a brand new one, the NYU Shanghai University.

Two other and contrasting trends are the interest of some governments in creating so-called 'world-class universities' and the emphasis that nearly all authorities are placing on lifelong learning – especially directed at raising the skill levels of the workforce. China's National Outline for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) places special importance on the creation of a society of lifelong learners.

Finally to respond to growing demand and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by today's technologies, the WCHE stressed the important role of ICTs and ODL in these words:

*14. The application of ICTs to teaching and learning has great potential to increase access, quality and success. In order to ensure that the introduction of ICTs adds value, institutions and governments should work together to pool experience, develop policies and strengthen infrastructure.*

Let me relate these developments to two local examples.

### The DeTao Masters Academy

The first one is a novel approach to the pooling of talents across borders: China's DeTao Masters Academy.

This initiative brings numbers of the world's top professionals and academics to China on a regular basis, where they share their 'tacit knowledge' with Chinese professionals who become drivers of innovation in both industry and universities.

It is a private-sector initiative, a new model that aims to blend tradition and innovation to foster cultural and economic progress in China and it includes partnerships with prestigious public universities.

To implement DeTao's vision, George Lee, a successful businessman, inspired by the Shanghai Expo, had a vision of creating a unique pool of global talent, centred on the Shanghai Institute for Visual Arts at Fudan University. He wants China to recover its talent for innovation. His idea is to enable internationally recognised thought leaders, called Masters, to pass on their 'tacit knowledge' to apprentices who will then act as bridges to larger Chinese student and professional audiences. From the original handful of Masters, the DeTao network has now attracted over 100 exceptional talents from all over the world in a variety of disciplines, all committed with enthusiasm to this new venture.

I am very privileged to be part of DeTao as an Education Master, together with Sir John Daniel, within its Knowledge Media Institute (KMI). Our role is to help develop a strong education model that can bring this enormously rich pool of talent and expertise to larger Chinese and international audience.

### The Open University of China

The second example is the Open University of China, which is the most audacious and significant development in open, distance and eLearning in the world today.

The Strategic Plan of the Open University of China stems from a decision of the government to establish the "Guojia Kaifang Daxue" (Open University of China). It is part of the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), which sets the goal of reaching an Age Participation Rate of 40% and a student population of 35.5 million. China already has the largest higher education system in the world. 2008 statistics indicate that 29.79 million students were enrolled in higher education institutions in China but the age participation rate was still only 23.3%.

The plan is to make OUC the Open University for all of China, transforming and integrating the 44 provincial RTVUs and aiming to move from the present enrolment of 3.2 million students to 4.5 million by 2020. This is a remarkable contribution to the dynamic of massification. It is interesting to recall that when Sir John invented the term mega-university in 1995 he set the enrolment threshold at 100,000 students!

Among the many things we admire in the OUC's Strategic Plan we note ten aims in particular:

- To transform the nationwide Radio and TV University system into an integrated Open University of China under the leadership of the China Central Radio and TV University with the guidance of the Ministry of Education;
- To build a self-sustaining lifelong learning system and to 'develop a large number of

- To combine degree and non-degree education;
- To make full use of contemporary information technology and develop an ultra-modern distance education system through an ‘open flexible multi-functional online platform’ that can reach every household;
- To make alliances with industry, business and public universities in order to create a strong and stable system;
- To build flyovers for lifelong learning through a credit bank that connects different levels and styles of education and training in a ‘national learning supermarket’;
- To have a global impact and promote Chinese culture worldwide;
- To operate within a common Open University of China framework of mission, strategic goals, development tasks and quality standards: all aligned to the core values of openness, responsibility, quality, diversification and globalisation;
- To manage and administer its activities in a thoroughly professional manner; and
- To stress quality in everything that it does.

I now hand over to Sir John to suggest how two recent developments might be part of this exciting plan.

### **Sir John Daniel**

I would like to follow up on Stamenka’s remarks by highlighting two developments that seem to us very relevant to the building of the Open University of China. The first is Open Educational Resources. The second is Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs as they are called.

#### Open Educational Resources

You could say that Open Educational Resources are celebrating their tenth birthday this year because the term was coined at a forum held at UNESCO in 2002. The topic was the implications of open courseware for higher education in developing countries. Earlier this year Stamenka and I were deeply involved in preparations for the World OER Congress that was held in Paris in June, partly to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that important forum.

Open Educational Resources are defined as educational materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared. This includes materials in all formats because, while nearly all OER are generated through digital technology, they are often used in print formats.

Open Educational Resources are part of a wider trend towards greater openness and sharing that has been gathering momentum for over twenty years. That trend also includes Open Source Software, which has a long history, and ‘Open Access’, which usually refers to open access to research results.

At the Forum that coined the term OER, participants declared “their wish to develop together a universal educational resource for the whole of humanity, to be referred to henceforth as Open Educational Resources”. This ideal seems absolutely in line with the values of the Open

China is already very active in the OER movement. In China, the Ministry of Education has an OER policy, within which it has developed several OER action plans. Examples involving Chinese universities are the Video Open Courseware project and Open Digital Learning Resources for Continuing Education. But these are just examples. There are also the websites of the winning courses in China's high quality courses project.

What we are saying is that there is a huge body of excellent, open material on which the OUC can draw in developing the very large number and range of courses called for in the Strategic Plan. You do not have to start from scratch.

Moreover, you can also draw on resources internationally. To mention just one institution, the UK Open University, which has been associated with China from the very beginnings of the CCRTVU and the RTVU system, is a big player in Open Education Resources. It even has an OER for teaching beginners Chinese, which I have on my iPhone. You will not need that but there are many other areas where the UK Open University OERs might be helpful.

May I say here that I am very honoured that the UK Open University has invited me to join you at the summit meeting they are holding with Open University of China and Chinese Ministry representatives early next month.

But we also suggest that the OUC's collaboration, both within and outside China, can go beyond simply getting inspiration from OER and that bring us to Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs. I wrote a review paper about MOOCs when I was a visiting fellow at the Korea National Open University last month. My paper is an OER and you are welcome to translate and adapt it.

### Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

MOOCs are a remarkable phenomenon. They are a development from Open Educational Resources that go an important step further. They allow learners not only to look at course material but also to take a course and get recognition for it. This year a number of top US universities: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard, Stanford and now many others, are offering online courses free to a global audience.

One of the first examples, earlier this year, was a course from MIT on *Circuits and Electronics*. This course was offered to the world free with no admission requirement and it attracted 155,000 registrations. They came from 160 countries. I expect that some of your students were among them.

Of these 155,000 learners, 23,000 tried the first problem set, 9,000 passed the mid-term test and 7,157 passed the course as a whole. 340 students, including a 15-year-old Mongolian, got a perfect score on the final exam, qualified by Professor Anant Agrawal, who heads the programme, as 'very hard'. Those who pass the course receive a certificate although they do not get credit that they can use in an MIT degree.

At the moment Coursera, which is just one of the for-profit companies that helps universities to design and offer MOOCs, is offering over 200 courses with 33 partners to 1.4 million learners.

MOOCs are a surprising development. Universities that consider themselves exclusive, where admission to study on campus is very competitive, have suddenly started to be open. They are being cautious, because for MIT at least, MOOCs are not a route to an MIT degree. But something important is happening.

What are the implications for China? We believe that it would be very interesting to experiment with offering MOOCs in China.

Stamenka and I are discussing this within the DeTao Masters Academy, whose world-renowned Masters could create powerful online courses on the tacit knowledge that has taken them to the top of their professions.

China's top universities usually take notice when top US universities do something new, so they are probably wondering whether they should also offer MOOCs. Our belief is that this a wonderful opportunity for a multi-partner collaboration involving the Open University of China, some top Chinese universities, the DeTao Masters Academy and, possibly, the UK Open University.

There are several reasons for approaching MOOCs in a collaborative manner.

First, critics have found that the pedagogy of some of the US MOOCs is poor. This is not surprising. Top universities earn their reputations in research, so there is no reason why they should be good at developing online courses. Similarly if top universities in China decide to offer MOOCs, they would benefit greatly from the great expertise on distance learning within the Open University of China.

Second, DeTao could bring to the collaboration its unique team of world-renowned Masters and make it possible to 'develop the large number of creative and innovative talents' at the highest professional level, that is part of your mission.

Third, if such a collaboration also involved the UK Open University we could create a unique high-level MOOC in both Chinese and English and offer it worldwide.

### Conclusion

We look forward to discussing these ideas with you. The new dynamics that Stamenka mentioned are changing global higher education even more quickly than was predicted in 2009. The transformation of China's Radio and TV University system into the Open University of China is one of the most exciting changes underway.

Open Educational Resources will help you to create the new institution more rapidly. By offering Massive Open Online Courses, elite universities have boosted the reputation of distance learning. Finally, the DeTao Masters Academy provides a route to the high-level training for innovation that governments and companies seek.

We have a wonderful opportunity to put all this together for the benefit of China and the world.

Thank you.