E-Learning – Challenges of the Next Phase

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Agenda

- Presentation University of Duisburg-Essen
- E-Learning at the UDE
- Main Challenges
- MOOCs: Promise – Risks – Opportunities

University Duisburg-Essen: Intro

- Dual-Campus (ca. 20 km distance)
- Students: 39,000 (50% women, 16% from outside Germany, 63% from commuter belt)
- Staff: 4,385 (academic: 2,600, professors: 447; women: 42%, prof.: 20%)
- 11 faculties (all major subjects except Law)
- Revenue: € 441 million (third-party funds: € 28 million)
- University Alliance Metropolis Ruhr (UAMR) – together with the University Bochum and the TU Dortmund

About the University of Duisburg-Essen
Open-Minded

Creative inspiration between the Rhine and Ruhr: the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) is located in the European region with the highest density of institutions of higher learning. Created in 2003 by the merger of the universities of Duisburg and Essen, the UDE is the youngest university in North Rhine-Westphalia and one of the ten largest universities in Germany.

Centre for Information and Media Services

- Combines Computing Centre, Media Services, Learning Technologies, ERP applications and IT project management
- Main provider of IT, media and learning technologies
- Diversity of "customer" groups: students, lecturers and researchers, central units, administration and university management/board
- Competence-Centre for the university
- Cooperation with University Library (joint sector Information, Communication and Media)
- Cooperation and to some extent division of labour with the University Alliance Metropolis Ruhr

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E-Learning UDE: Technologies

- Main strategic platform: Moodle since 2005; currently version 2.4.2 (32,529 active users; 2,608 courses)

- Video-audio/streaming: recording of lectures, pod- and videocasts, DuECast, YouTube, iTunesU

- Multimedia-Server DuEPublico

- PC supported exam centre ('PC Hall') professional eAssessment software LPLUS: Between 15th July 2008 and 31st March 2013 **399** exams involving **34,125** students

- Videoconferencing: 12 rooms and studios on 2 campuses, between 12 and 295 seats

- Mahara eportfolio system – first pilot projects

E-Learning: Strategy & Structures

- 3-Level support Centre for Information and Media Services (Helpdesk, Training, Consulting)

- Cooperative Structures:

  - Moodle Competence Centre (CIM / University Library)

  - E-Learning Alliance: university-wide projects, strategies (Centre for Higher Education and Quality Development, chair for Media Didactics, CIM and University Library)

- E-Learning Strategy: presently under discussion at the rectorate

Challenges I

- "Mass University" - Dual Campus University - Diversity of students (first generation academics, high proportion with immigrant background, part-time students)

- E-Learning is an accepted everyday feature - mostly in the shape of basic electronic support for class-room teaching

- Lecturers very much weigh didactic and organisational advantages vs. investment of labour which goes largely unacknowledged

- University management: "Push" to increase e-learning mostly pragmatic: a) channel great numbers of students b) students' demand for flexibility c) cost-effectiveness

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Challenges II: Cooperation and Competition

- National and Global: all universities have to compete for resources, the best lecturers and the best students, at the same time as finding new ways for cooperation, learning and teaching

- Regional experience: UAMR – cooperative courses in more than one university: Ruhr Campus Online. Showed a number of obstacles re curricular integration/mutual recognition and – generally – sustainability

- Division – students highly active in e-learning and students with little experience in e-learning

- Competition of new players: company colleges – international consortia

MOOCs – Challenges

- No consistent method dealing with web 2.0 or how to structure varied online resources (lost in hyperspace / information overload)

- Structured higher education vs. self-regulated web content

- No verified accreditation system or uniform learning targets

- How is an integration of these different systems possible? Opening from both sides

- MOOCs = "the opening"?

- Most needed: conceptions of self-regulated learning, of learning motivation and of controlling interests

cMOOCs – Innovation potential ?

- Self-regulation/self-activation/interaction (user generated content)
- Transparence of learning process and facilitation of new learning styles and variety of (multimedia) methods
- New role models of teacher and students
- More flexible model beyond study paths
- New learning culture (i .e. 'dropout rates are not that bad')
- Contents are mixed, not exactly synchronized but related through MOOCs!
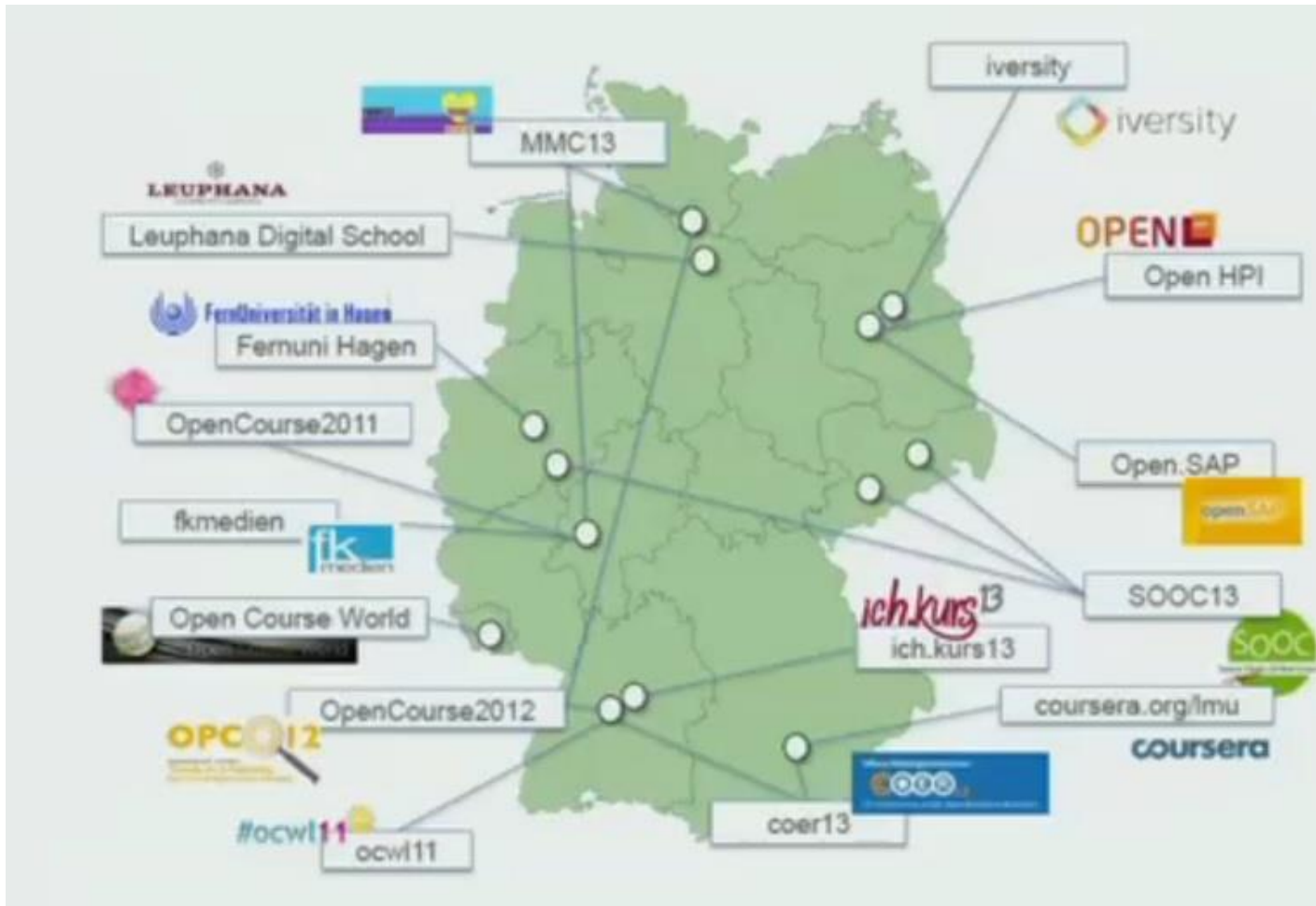
(Massive Open Online Courses – ein relevanter Trend für Hochschulen? Dr. Johannis Moskaliuk, University Tübingen)

The Promise of MOOCs

MOOCs seem to be a promising solution for a number of pressing problems

- High quality content
- Remedy for overrun lecture halls and scarce teaching resources
- Flexibility
- Self-responsibility of students
- Peer-Assessment (collaboration and teamwork)
- Extension of interconnected thinking and learning

Crossroads

- The present discussion is not only about MOOCs, but about the future role of the institutions of higher education in the e-learning sector

- This discussion is not new but has been an ongoing background music throughout the history of e-learning

- MOOCs are the present focus of this discussion, they are also the driving force of ushering in this future – in one way or another

What is at Stake?

- Not: To MOOC or Not To MOOC

- Doubtful even: differentiation of "good" cMOOCs and "bad" xMOOCs

- Quality of higher education under increasing outside pressures: globalization, demands of labour enterprises, and cost constraints

- The self-image of universities and their ability to reinvent themselves: to bring the real advantages of e-learning to bear – so far fettered by established, but outlived institutional structures (i. e. openness, cooperation across institutional boundaries within and without the university; intelligent integration of formal and informal learning; flexibility)

Risks and Fears I

- Higher Education becoming "just another (purely market-driven) business" dominated by a few potent consortia
- Streamlined contents killing off diversity and ultimately academic freedom
- Professors: to become unnecessary or reduced to mere middle-persons (i. e. devaluation of their own teaching; fear of being 'exposed')
- Students: left to their own devices (esp. in view of the myth of the digital native; also lack of guidance and support)
- "Facebookisation" of higher education/learning processes
- Despair on the one hand, overrating ones own ability on the other

Risks and Fears II

- Expecting easy solutions of cost, space/lecture halls etc.
- Adopting MOOCs as a panacea without
  - Consideration of what is involved (initial costs, but more importantly: rethinking roles, functions of the university, didactic, support etc.)
  - Strategically defining how to MOOC and for which goals exactly
  - "Business Plan" for one's own MOOC strategy (how is it paid, how does it generate revenue)

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How to Benefit as a Non-Elite University I

No-Nos:

- Dismiss MOOCs as "just another hype" or consider MOOCs as un-innovative ("we have been doing this all along")

- Take stock of the real situation (re claims and fears)

- Reinvent towards cooperation and learning (instead of fragmentation of faculties/chairs) within university and without

- Define own role and advantages to be gained and map course from there

- Review the different types and goals of MOOCs and develop your own strategy to fit in with your institution and its goals

How to Benefit as a Non-Elite University II

Towards institution and professors:

- Define areas of possible success in global/national/regional competition, boost these and bring them to the market
- Prepare for a role as integrator and facilitator of a mixed approach of teaching/self-learning

How to Benefit as a Non-Elite University III

Towards students:

- Develop the competencies and deep understanding of academic work and how digital media and technologies are used within this framework

- teach how to discern and to learn

- Supportsystem is requirement and basic condition at once!

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Modelling E-Learning towards 3.0

- Overall definition of goals for a strategy of 3 to 5 years including but not restricted to the role of MOOCs

- Exemplary MOOCs
  - Image MOOCs with large mass appeal in areas with cutting-edge contents attractive for world-wide audience
  - xMOOCs to relieve overcrowding and provide for diversity of students audience
  - cMOOCs to facilitate self-learning

Modelling E-Learning towards 3.0

- Define financial, organizational and support requirements
- Retrain lecturers to being hosts, facilitators, integrators, and advisors as well
- Organizing mixed contents and cooperation processes with outside partners and experts
- Re-fashion study entrance phase: to introduce and teach students how to learn, how to organize themselves, and how to discern good learning contents

Modelling E-Learning towards 3.0

- Invest in largely augmented didactic, technical and organizational support: e-tutors and tutors, technical infrastructure oncampus/offcampus, mobile infrastructure, training and consulting

- Reframe the planning of space – provide virtual and real spaces for the self-organisation of students' learner groups: e-learning cafes, rooms for student groups, silent rooms, single-user workstations, opening hours (till 24h), Wi-Fi, PC stations and multimedia workstations

Thank you for your attention!

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