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MAKING THE CASE: OPENING HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Open education (Oe) describes a range of practices which support and promote the open sharing of knowledge, resources, and educational opportunities, often with the goal of making these free at the point of use, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location. Through Oe it is possible to build public capabilities across the spectrum of formal, informal and non-formal educational routes and to create lifelong and lifewide learning opportunities and education for all. Grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Unesco regards education as a basic human right that reduces poverty and lessens inequalities, which should be viewed as a cornerstone of sustainable development and ultimately, social justice, and promotes Oe as foundational for these activities and aims To ignite and sustain these innovative learning and teaching opportunities and make them available for all, policies are needed. Social justice, redistribution, recognition, and cultural diversity underpinning inclusion are a challenge for education, including Oe, although it offers multiple opportunities and tools aimed precisely at adapting to very diverse user communities. Enabling policies at the institutional level can play a crucial role in fostering Oe, and higher education can thereby play an important role in overcoming challenges created by neoliberal educational systems which lead to lack of funding in education, and a lack of prestige associated with the educator role as compared with that of the researcher. The article examines the micro-politics of Oe and examples of collaboration across institutions and roles, in order to make the case for higher education institutions to support knowledge equity, and to prioritise collective expert knowledge-building and radical collaboration.

KEYWORDS *Open Educational Practices, Open Education Movement, Policy, Collaboration.*

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1. Introduction

Open education (Oe) is a social and political movement which seeks to create lifelong and lifewide learning opportunities for all. Grounded in the Universal declaration of human rights, the Oe movement has been championed by Unesco, which regards education as a basic human right that reduces poverty and lessens inequalities, which should be viewed as a cornerstone of sustainable development and, ultimately, social justice. Consequently, Oe has been endorsed and promoted in a series of Unesco initiatives culminating in the 2019 Recommendation on Open educational resources (Oer) as it promotes the open sharing of knowledge, resources, and educational opportunities for free at the point of use, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location (Unesco 2019). The Oe movement aims to build public capabilities via formal, informal and non-formal educational routes and combat misinformation by empowering individuals with access to quality education and a critical and equitable approach to information and knowledge.

This article looks into the topic of Oe through the lens of digital politics. This term often refers to forms of political action (e.g. activism) that play out in digital contexts, but equally must be concerned with the ways in which the digital realm is not merely an arena of political activity but also itself a source of politics in today's society. Indeed, a glance through a list of the world's largest companies by market capitalization suggests that it could not be otherwise – Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, and Meta are conspicuous in the top ten, along with Tesla and Nvidia, having long since displaced the household brands of yesteryear. It is not simply that the ways humans work, express themselves and communicate have gone digital, social and mobile; as in business, governments and public sector organisations are embracing digital strategies that involve moving more services online, often chasing the promise of scaling up or automating service provision while reducing organisational footprints or headcounts. In recent times, so-called Artificial intelligence (Ai) has become the latest *tech célèbre* to be hyped as «better than human» (or «good enough»), providing a boost to claims that various human roles in work and society will soon be (or are already) replaceable. Both politics and digitalisation are enmeshed inextricably with the analogue world.

In this current context of pervasive, market-driven digitalisation, so-called «open» approaches in education, while not exclusively digitally-enabled, have been reinvented in new digital forms, and become the focus of reinvigorated advocacy by educators (Bozkurt *et al.* 2023). Open movements act across a variety of domains, across which the nature and effects of openness are varied, but a common thread these movements share is that they argue the case for

access and participation for everyone, rather than only for those who can pay for the privilege. So for example, they work to provide or promote access to the results of publicly-funded research; or to government data; or to social history and cultural treasures; or to use and amend open software; or in the case of Oe, particularly, to learning and knowledge creation (although Oe takes a strong interest in all of the former domains of activity as well). Consequently, rather than simply representing a set of arcane or alternative practices that may be of interest to certain niche audiences, open movements must be understood first and foremost as social movements.

Viewed in this light, the activities of open movements are therefore case studies in both, doing politics digitally and the politics of the digital. While it is evident that social movements have become increasingly digital in their ways of operating, it is also noteworthy that digitalisation itself has become a driver of political action. Via ubiquitous commercial products, services and surveillances, digitalisation and datafication have embedded themselves throughout contemporary social relations, becoming normalised as the (only) way many things are now done, and often simultaneously, tools for the extraction of «user» data and its conversion to profit (Zuboff 2019). This situation troubles a conventional notion of a digital divide, according to which social issues in relation to technology can be resolved through universal provision of digital access; instead, we must understand those who have digital access as facing different sets of challenges from those who are excluded (Atenas *et al.* 2023). In contrast to the dominant, commercial vision of the purposes of digital technology, proponents of openness argue for alternative structures for digital-social relations which prioritise social and public goods. *Open/digital* is consequently a key interface for scholars and practitioners seeking a different digital, and through it, a more just society (Shah 2016).

Inevitably, while openness advocates increasingly seek policy interventions founded on shared interests in advancing the public good at the open/digital interface, understandings of the direction and destination of travel continue to be multiple and competing, between and also within movements. The broad Oe movement incorporates a diverse range of participants, practices and objectives across the education landscape, but we suggest that a key shared element across the movement is the willingness of these communities to collaborate for the common good. In the sections which follow we consider, initially, the (micro)politics of Oe in Higher education (He) and Higher education institutions (Heis), and then consider examples and potentialities of collaborative action.

2. Digital (micro)politics of Oe

In the context of open movements, such as those which advocate for Open science (including Open access), Open education (including open educational resources or Oer), Open source, Open glam (galleries, libraries, archives, museums) and Open government, digital politics resides at the intersection of professional practice, technology, activism and governance. Such movements promote the co-creation of policies, platforms, and networks to advance policy and political goals within open movements, which emphasise collaboration, transparency, inclusivity, and participation. Open movements are also characterised by their collaborative nature, where individuals and groups work together to create and share resources in an open and accessible manner, leveraging technology to facilitate communication, mobilise support, and drive political change. They often strive for greater citizen and community engagement, co-creation of resources, spaces, manifestos and declarations with the aims of democratising knowledge access and production, and fostering participation in decision-making processes. Digital platforms, such as social media, online forums, or open collaborative platforms, enable open movements to reach and mobilise a broader audience, facilitating open discussions, deliberations, and collective decision-making. These technologies provide strands for different people to voice their opinions, advocate for specific policies or causes, and collaborate in initiatives, or create hubs for sharing and co-creating resources, such as Oer, open source code, open access publications, or open data.

Digital politics within open movements also takes in issues of digital rights, privacy and agency, advocating for policies that protect individuals' rights (for example, as creators, or as data subjects) in the digital sphere, as well as those which promote the development of literacies in the digital, data and information space. Moreover, digital politics within open movements may involve efforts to promote transparency and accountability in governance, academic and research practice through the sharing of resources, data and research outcomes, tracking the spending of public funds, ensuring research outputs are replicable, that data is auditable or that Oer can be adapted, translated and contextualised, to enhance participation, leveraging the opportunities provided by the digital age to create more inclusive, democratic, and participatory teaching and research processes.

If advocates and practitioners of forms of educational openness tend to be collaborative and values-driven, we must at the same time acknowledge the multiplicity of different practices and communities that we are grouping under the Oe movement banner, the tensions and contradictions that can emerge between alternative conceptions of openness, and the dangers inherent in adop-

ting an open/closed binary as the core of an ethical position. Like any social movement, Oe is not monolithic in its membership or goals; rather, it forms a space of dialogue and debate for a range of communities working across areas which can be collectively referred to using the multifaceted concept of open educational practices or Oep (Cronin *et al.* 2023; Havemann 2020). This complexity arises because the tree of contemporary Oe has a complex root system, drawing substantially from open and distance learning (which had in the 20th century been mostly the preserve of mission-focused open universities), but also in the more recent developments of open source software and open content licensing, which are specifically concerned with overcoming obstacles to the sharing and reuse of intellectual property. Therefore, while some references to Oe are focused primarily on questions of content, at other moments the term is also called upon to indicate other kinds of openings of educational practices and processes, such as open learning design (Roberts *et al.* 2022). These differences of emphasis can sometimes rather reductively be depicted as a schism between those in the Oe movement who are focused particularly on resources (Oer), and those who are concerned with practices (Oep). However, the recent turn to a detailed examination of «practices» in the community and scholarship of Oe reflects a growing understanding that first of all, Oe comprises more than Oer, but in addition, that Oer themselves arise from practices; they do not come into being or enact education autonomously, nor can the making, reuse or repurposing of resources occur without people and practices.

Broadly speaking, then, it may be more worthwhile to say that contemporary discussions of Oe tend to deal with two (intertwined) strands of practice. The first of these, which has thus far garnered the most attention, is opening up access to learning resources, for free at the point of use. This can be done through openly licensing learning materials as Oer (for example, open textbooks), or alternatively, through provision of freely accessible (and potentially massive) open online courses. These courses may or may not be built using Oer, but are organised into a course structure, potentially including elements of teaching or interaction with other members of the course, but often also designed for self-paced study. At the more commercial end of the spectrum of Massive open online courses (Moocs), retention and reuse of the learning materials may be disallowed. This form of Mooc is typically developed by a university but delivered via a commercial partner platform such as Coursera, EdX or Futurelearn. The inclusion of the commercial form of Moocs as an aspect of Oe is sometimes viewed as contentious by those who regard open licensing as the core of openness, as the form of openness on offer differs from that of Oer. Typically in such courses, learners can openly enrol rather than retrieve or reuse openly licensed resources, and while access to a course is free,

often payment is required in order to gain certification of completion. This freemium business model has further shaded into the provision of explicitly fee-charging microcredentials, which again tend to be made available via commercial platforms, and offer genuine, potentially stackable institutional credit towards a larger qualification, but commensurately, their fees for participation are higher, so that what is provided becomes very similar to other online distance education, except perhaps in smaller chunks of study. Evidently, for those who regard «free» as an essential component of openness, these examples represent rather more «closed» models.

A second strand of Oep involves the opening of educational communities and processes, to enact solidarity, enable informal learning, sharing, collaboration and co-production. This latter strand has thus far received less attention, but should be regarded as both a key enabler of the former strand, and as vital to sustaining Oe long-term. These forms of Oep may well also, ultimately, involve producing resources of some kind, but the focus of the work is on processes and people rather than products (Havemann and Roberts 2021). Another way of putting this is that what is produced might well be community, just as much as content; a sense described by Costa *et al.* (2023) of «learning in solidarity». For Nerantzi *et al.* (2021, 4), «in communities we seed and nurture relationships of trust that will help us grow emotionally and socially, not just for life but also for learning and teaching as these are not activities or processes that happen outside the human experience but within it». This strand of Oep includes the fostering of less formal spaces and networks for conversation and collaboration, but also includes grassroots, community-driven forms of open online courses (as the early, connectivist Moocs also were) as their focus has tended to be on fostering participation in collective knowledge building in peer networks, rather than on presenting ready-made lessons to be learned.

While any educator (or student) who engages with aspects of openness in their practice can be regarded as a grassroots participant in Oe, it might be argued that a key aspect which justifies referring to it as a «movement» in this context is the existence of an element which consciously engages with advocacy for change and policy development. Advocacy for Oe policy is a politics of working to influence, shape and transform educational systems, organisations, processes and practices towards equity and inclusion. This is not to attempt to gloss over the fact that policy is a broad category with different forms, operating at different levels, and Oe policies approach openness from various angles (Atenas *et al.* 2022). Nor is it to simply equate the politics of Oe with policy. Policymaking and policy advocacy are overtly political, but the actions we take, day-to-day at the micro-level, are also political, as we seek to advance particular interests or negotiate small changes. Indeed, as adrienne maree brown notes,

«social movements today are fractal, practising at a small scale what we most want to see at the universal level» (Brown 2017, 12).

Consequently, in the context of Oe, micropolitics needs to be understood in terms of power dynamics, decision-making processes, and the negotiation of competing interests. At the heart of the micropolitics of Oe are various actors, including educators, learners, institutions, policymakers, and technology providers. Each of these actors possess distinct interests, goals, and perspectives that shape their engagement with Oe; hence, our micropolitical perspective recognises that power is not evenly distributed among these actors and that their interactions are influenced by power dynamics, both explicit and implicit. Some have the power to decide or influence supranational, national or institutional policies and strategies; some can decide whether to adopt a particular open practice in the context of their own teaching; others can participate and create networks to collaborate with others, or contribute their own resources to the open education community. A micropolitics lens helps us understand how educators negotiate factors such as academic recognition, intellectual property concerns, workload, and institutional support when considering whether or how to engage with Oe. For open practitioners, in addition to working to promote and enable openness in the face of systems and processes which have not been designed with such goals in mind, internal tensions can arise in the continuous negotiation of what constitutes an ideal or acceptable version of openness in a given situation or context. For example, providing open online learning events using a commercial platform, or offering students an open textbook in a print format at cost of printing, might be seen by some as inadequately open, or, alternatively, accepted as imperfect but ultimately valuable and therefore acceptable.

Institutions and policymakers also play a significant role in the micropolitics of Oe. Policymakers may create incentives or regulatory frameworks to promote (or restrict) openness. Institutions create a policy agenda around the support of educators and students in adoption of Oep through a myriad of potential policy choices, whether these are made or unmade; for example, by establishing policies that promote release of Oer, by providing infrastructures that enable sharing resources or opening practices, by hiring or allocating staff members with relevant expertise, by making development funding available, or by revising promotion criteria to recognise and reward good open practices. Furthermore, EdTech providers have their own interests and power dynamics within the micropolitics of Oe. They can contribute to, derail or obstruct initiatives, as technological choices and their impact on openness showcase uneven power relationships in education. So, a micropolitical landscape review can help

educators and leaders understand how institutional and policy contexts shape the possibilities and constraints for Oe within specific educational ecosystems.

3. Practitioner-level collaboration beyond boundaries

Research in the Uk (Crawford 2009; King 2004) had suggested that, following completion of probationary requirements for developing their teaching practice (often via gaining a postgraduate certificate in He, and/or Fellowship of the Higher education academy), academics tend to stop engaging with institutional professional development as they move into proactive engagement in related activities in disciplinary networks and communities external to the institution. This could be interpreted as a move that demonstrates a sense of belonging linked to their academic professional identity.

Academic development was started in the Seventies in the Uk by about thirty pioneers, and for many years, has been primarily inward-facing, with a strong institutional focus (Nerantzi 2017). Specific practices and models illustrate this such as the academic development models defined by Popovic and Plank (2016) as «grassroots», «faculty-led», «strategic», «community-building» and «research-based». However, there are indications that «community-building» is recognised as an activity that stretches beyond institutional boundaries. Such an early example from the Uk context is the collaborative PgCert in Central Scotland in 1989 (Ellington and Baharuddin 2000) and a further initiative in London to develop connected provision across polytechnics and other Heis in the Nineties. Since the further growth of digital technologies including the social media boom and the growth in open educational practices that utilised many of the available social media platforms, academic development has been transformed into a more outward-facing connected, inter-institutional and boundary crossing experiences often based on informal collaborations among practitioners without official institutional involvement (Nerantzi 2012; 2014; 2017; 2018).

Practice and research have shown that there is a need for more connected, shared and collaborative academic development provision beyond institutional walls, co-created across institutions, and illustrated the will of practitioners to collaborate in this area to provide opportunities to develop and raise the quality of teaching across the sector, despite the policy-driven evolution of the sector towards a highly competitive marketplace. These early attempts show that at practitioner level collaboration has been desirable and seen as valuable. Even if not framed as open educational practices, these collabora-

tions seem to support the values of open sharing for professional development across the He sector.

More and more academics, especially in the last ten years, have harnessed the power of Oep and connected informal inter-institutional and boundary-crossing professional development opportunities, often utilising social media (Nerantzi 2017). In parallel, there have also been calls for more open and inter-institutional collaboration at policy level as a driver to enhance and transform teaching across the sector (British Council 2015; European Commission 2013; 2015; Hefce 2011; Inamorato dos Santos *et al.* 2016), which may indicate an alignment of grassroots practice and the opportunity or call to also open-up and connect institutional practices more formally.

Open courses including Moocs, as well as a range of further open events and initiatives, often designed and facilitated by volunteer practitioners, have created alternative cross-disciplinary opportunities for professional development based on an ethos of sharing of ideas, community and solidarity to co-create open offers for the wider good. Such grassroots developments bring practitioners from different institutions together nationally and internationally and break free from institutional silos enabling much wider cross-fertilisation of ideas and innovations in learning and teaching (Nerantzi and Beckingham 2015; Nerantzi 2021). Informal collaboration has been fundamental to such initiatives and brought diverse individuals, practitioners and researchers, and students together and transformed the landscape of academic development in He radically towards a community-based, cross-boundary approach in which everybody is a learner and actively contributes to the learning and development of others (Nerantzi and Gossman 2015; 2018). Such engagement has shown to be not just valuable for individual academics and other professionals who teach or support learning in He. Many have used such activities to further their academic careers, gaining professional recognition, academic promotion and awards. Collectively, engagement has triggered ongoing conversations about learning, teaching and assessment, leading to multiple networking opportunities and collaborations. They also brought about wider curriculum transformation and innovation. Community-based academic development in the open has gained a central place as these not only offer peer support to diverse He professionals across disciplines and professional areas but also a space for individual and collective experimentation and growth (Nerantzi and Gossman 2015; 2018; Nerantzi 2021).

While there have been multiple benefits of open and connected practices, including sharing of ideas and collaborations, there is also evidence that suggests that, for open educators engaging in sharing their ideas, their generosity, curiosity and boldness were seen as strengths but also as their vulne-

rability, which has also led them to feel exploited and fragile. These were the findings of an open inquiry, conducted as part of the co-creative inquiry to develop a picture book about the values of Oe, in which 95 open practitioners from 16 countries and five continents participated (Roberts *et al.* 2020; Nerantzi 2022). While the Creative commons licences provide a framework to acknowledge originators of ideas and creators, open academic practice is inconsistent and has led to real challenges and disappointments. Open innovators often feel exposed (Nerantzi 2022). A lack of institutional and sector-wide recognition and protection for such activities make the problem even more acute. We would suggest that the role of Heis in collaboratively safeguarding and recognising good academic and open practice is paramount.

4. Interprofessional collaboration

Interprofessional and interdisciplinary collaboration can accelerate achieving the goals of Oe by providing opportunities for effective education; thus, it is key that resources and practices openly shared are findable and reusable, with a structure, format and metadata that enable others to retrieve them and then adopt/adapt them. Caring is not enough: the OE community cares but also needs a structured effort to make Oe actually work, be(come) more sustainable, and ultimately bring greater prosperity for all.

For example, the practical phases of creating and sharing an Oer require a multidimensional set of technical and pedagogical skills that is unlikely to be possessed and/or actioned by a single professional profile. When creating an Oer (particularly in a multimedia format), the dialogue and collaborative approach and effort by subject specialists, instructional designers, video/graphic editors, technical staff and final users (students or citizens at large) are of the utmost importance. This collaborative attitude is familiar to many practitioners and creators of educational materials. Teamwork, transparency of duties and responsibilities, conflict resolution and participatory leadership, in addition to the technical skills required, are part of the everyday experience around the creation of new digital materials; the same happens when the content is then shared openly.

The sharing part of the process and the potential reuses of Oer depend largely on equally effective interprofessional collaboration with all profiles involved and extends beyond and across the boundaries of a single institution, country or region. If we think about what happens in the present digital landscape, we see a highly siloed structure that might not best serve the needs of the community. Sometimes, accessing those silos – when we refer to digital

resources – requires the use of institutional credentials, even if they contain resources shared with open licences. Criteria for cataloguing the resources are different from one repository to another, hindering interoperability which is a key standard for the functionality of open repositories, and it is still challenging to orient oneself within this wild forest. The result is that too often quality resources are untraceable and hidden in between the folds of technological (closed or not easy to access) gates. Professional profiles with specific competencies to retrieve and organise meaningful quality resources are key to organising knowledge assets.

Librarians are able to offer Oe services in areas that are close to their core work, such as advice on copyright and open licensing, information literacy and training/education. Technology experts offer It services needed to provide a digital environment for hosting resources and guidance on good practices. There are many specialists who contribute not only with their specific expertise but also by building bridges across professions/disciplines: librarians, academic developers, learning technologists, designers and developers (Santos-Hermosa *et al.* 2022).

Policymakers have the responsibility and the duty to enable all these profiles to work in a harmonious way, to make connections across disciplines and to boost interprofessional collaboration. To do so, it is important to involve them in policy co-creation processes (Atenas *et al.* 2019; 2020) and then implement strategic actions consistent with basic and advanced needs aiming at making the information flow effective and reliable. Currently, at the European level, very limited human resources are dedicated to Oer in academic libraries, consistent with the biggest challenges identified as lack of funding and lack of staff resources. If professionals are involved, they are often limited to offering services to staff and students and do not go beyond that limited target group to reach potential users accessing resources anonymously. If you can't trace who is accessing, then access is denied.

There is often still a basic incompatibility between existing institutional cultures, politics, policies, and the philosophy of Oe. A conscious choice is needed to rethink educational practices, redefine their objectives and phases and readjust them to the context and the people involved. In addition, lack of technology, unskilled staff, and financial constraints are preventing the maximum adoption and implementation of Oe by more Heis. Efforts and actions should go in this direction, which is clearly stated in the Unesco (2019) Recommendation on Oer and its areas of action.

The open approach implies that «you are not alone» in both senses: don't think you are alone in, doing something; you are not the only one, doing it or working on it. But also: count on others to do it together, coordinating,

integrating, comparing. What is done between educators is also done between students: exchange, collaboration, co-creation, constructive feedback, and improvement. It is done also with librarians, policymakers, facilitators, and advocates: connect, share, discuss, and change for the better. Grow, in a word. Creating alliances across a diverse range of professions enhances the opportunities to ignite change and fasten the process of a larger and more effective adoption of Oe approaches.

Collaborating usually provides a means for organisations, institutions, or professions to achieve more than they can on their own. All existing sectors show examples of people collaborating to share costs, spread and reduce risk, and contain uncertainty while forming strategic alliances that also serve as fertile grounds for innovation and learning (Vangen and Huxham 2003). Collaborating on projects across professions (as happens around multimedia digital material) and across borders, whether institutional, national, or regional (as happens in networks such as Sparc Europe's Enoel[1], Go-gn[2], Creative commons[3], Oe global[4], etc., as well as within European projects), is a strategic choice that offers chances to upskill while working on co-created resources and co-designed practices, learning from peers, from other professions, from other cultures and offering more reliable, easy-to-reuse and easy-to-find resources, shared with appropriate metadata sets, common criteria, and within an interoperable technical ecosystem.

5. Institutional collaboration

For Heis to fully embrace radical collaboration in pursuance of Oe, it is necessary to explore the question of collaboration outside existing practitioner and inter-professional relations. This involves examining both the positioning of open educators within their respective institutions and the way in which institutions conduct their collaboration. By discussing existing practices at those two levels, we will be able to define affordances for a type of collaboration between institutions that will harness the expertise and talents of their open educators, as they all commit more effectively to greater levels of openness.

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[1] European network of open education librarians, https://sparceurope.org/what-we-do/open-education/enoel/.
[2] Global Oer graduate network, https://go-gn.net.
[3] Creative commons, https://creativecommons.org.
[4] Open education global, https://www.oeglobal.org.

Intra-institutional collaboration

A critical assessment of the influence of open educators within their institutions begins by defining the membership of the Oe movement. If we consider participation in specialised Oe conferences as a valid indicator, it becomes evident that the Oe movement primarily comprises teaching and research staff from academic departments (often in the field of education), librarians, learning technologists and designers, educational development practitioners, and sometimes the directors (or equivalents) of digital education services within institutions. Over the last three decades, the landscape of intra-institutional relations in He has undergone significant transformation due to managerialism (Lynch 2014; Sims 2020), a phenomenon reshaping working relationships and institutional cultures which has intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic (Nayak 2023). As one of the two pillars, alongside neoliberalism, of New public management (Shepherd 2018), managerialism has been adopted globally, although the local dimension is essential to understand how it manifests in practice and to articulate effective responses to international pressures (Deem 2010).

Despite numerous studies on the causes and effects of managerialism in He, there is a conspicuous absence of research addressing the impact of this structural shift on the positioning of Oe practitioners and advocates within their respective institutions. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding regarding how this shift affects their participation in decision-making processes at the executive level. As a result, we must currently rely on intuition and non-empirical observations to hypothesise that the limited adoption of Oe agendas within higher education – both in terms of strategy and practice – may be attributed to two factors. First, the absence of direct involvement of He executive leaders in the Oe movement, as indicated by their limited participation in conferences (unless their institution is hosting such events). Second, the centralising efforts of managerialism, which, as demonstrated by Maassen and Stensaker (2019), have led to a decoupling of coordination efforts at the horizontal level, resulting in detrimental consequences for organisational effectiveness as a whole. Managerialized He environments are not conducive to the co-creation approach to policymaking advocated by Atenas *et al.* (2022). Investigating the impact of these two predominant factors – executive leadership disengagement and the centralising effects of managerialism – on the perceived lack of progress in the design and execution of openness agendas warrants in-depth research. This research will be crucial for understanding how to overcome these challenges and further advance the valuable work carried out by the diverse and talented Oe community over the last two decades.

Inter-institutional collaboration

Collaboration at the inter-institutional level, i.e., above the level of individual and inter-departmental collaboration, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in pursuance of shared goals, has a long history. Bilateral collaboration is usually captured in agreements or Memoranda of understanding (MoUs) signed by the respective executive leaders of each institution, whereas multilateral collaboration is typically organised through networks, alliances or consortia. The accelerated proliferation of bilateral and multilateral collaboration, particularly at international level, seen in the last thirty years is the result of globalisation, alongside the massification and marketisation of He (Chan 2004).

The internationalisation agendas of universities have been promoted both internally and by state-wide authorities. In this respect, the work of the European Union in fostering alliances is a great example in the world. However, we should question the composition of partnerships and the logic that binds together constellations of institutions belonging to different countries. Institutional collaboration has been conceived as a way to improve their ability to compete (Gunn and Mintrom 2013). It is therefore possible that the multinational grouping of institutions across different countries may be a response to the reservations to collaborate with institutions from the same country, as these are more direct competitors for funding, staff, and students. Moreover, we must always question, for the sake of equitable representation, the mechanisms of access or selection of participating institutions within these organisations.

One final criticism that can be made about the way inter-institutional collaboration works is that, very often, collaboration is seen simply as a way of improving reputation. Through the signing of agreements and participation in alliances, institutions claim international links, which sadly may not translate into significant specific actions, leaving academic departments to explore concrete possibilities of research and teaching collaboration that could have occurred without any explicit agreement or attachment to a network. The lack of coordinating capacity of universities to connect the work of the network with the inner organisational matrix of relationships within their own institution has been described as one of the factors that undermine collaboration (van Ginkel 1998). Additionally, despite the economic rationale of university collaboration, there is a lack of evidence for substantial efficiencies being made, or simply sought, in areas such as the provision of shared digital infrastructure that could result from concerted inter-institutional action.

This presents us with a damning diagnosis: the future of He is inseparable from the political and economic trajectory of the capitalist system and its functional and ethical pitfalls. In short, institutional collaboration is driven by

their inevitable desire to better their position to compete, but it is not delivering the promise of efficiency of the underlying values system. The consequences of such an assessment are stark: the discrepancy between the principles and objectives of the Oe movement and the actual direction of travel of the He global system may be harder to overcome than we think, as the institutions cannot escape from a relentless pull generated by the structural contradictions of our society. In this context, the inclusion of institutions within the dynamics of the open may be more utopian than simply aspirational.

However, changing the system from within needs to remain a possibility for the Oe movement. Our concerning assessment of He (and of intra- and inter-institutional collaboration) expressed above needs to give way to alternative interpretations and frameworks in which, whilst recognising the damage done to our institutions by neoliberalism, we view universities as communities of professionals whose personal convictions can and will shape the ethical direction of our institutional strategies.

Joo *et al.* (2019) contend that networked approaches are advisable or even necessary when a complex challenge does not have one single set of solutions and requires the activation of expertise and resources by a range of institutions. For them, a successful network must bring together people around a shared vision and goal and cultivate engagement, solidarity and shared responsibility. The question of complementarity of partners is also important, as it is from diversity that more synergies can be generated. Eliminating the technological, cultural and organisational barriers to openness, and building an educational alternative to our current model, which sadly is based on competition, corporatisation of digital services, and restriction of access, are social goals that, clearly, require that institutions act as a network. For this, they need to create mechanisms for sharing funding, infrastructure, and expertise, so that collaboration moves beyond knowledge exchange and declarations into the terrain of effective actions that help institutions to deliver real tangible change.

However, institutions must ensure that the nature, extent, and direction of their strategic level collaboration is mutually and dynamically aligned with the conversations and the practices of communities of staff and students. For the aspirations and needs of all stakeholders, institutional and individual, of any network to be effectively and equitably fulfilled, we need to embrace the same principles that inform the interprofessional and practitioner-level collaboration within open movements. Trust must be at the centre of all relationships. In operational terms, institutional leaders need to delegate effectively to experts and leaders within their institution, establishing permanent co-ordination and feedback in order to provide consistency between all the

endeavours coming from the same institution, in harmony with the wider objectives of the inter-institutional alliance that they are part of.

6. Conclusions

In this article we have considered the situation of Oe as a grassroots movement for social change, but also a wide-ranging one addressing various audiences and goals, comprising a range of practices, and therefore more fractured or fragmented than related open movements which address more specific and narrowly-defined issues. That Oe takes in a diverse range of practices can be viewed as both a tension and a strength of the Oe movement. It is not simply an accident that the Oe movement is often conflated with advocacy for Oer in particular; rather, this situation reflects efforts in the Oer policy space to reduce complexity and focus the field of discussion, perhaps indeed with the aim of presenting a more straightforward line of argument about the aims and benefits of Oe to policymakers. However, the sustainability of this approach should perhaps be reconsidered. The Oe movement's understanding of Oer and the complexity of the related practices needed to teach and learn with them, as well as produce, reuse and sustain them within wider educational contexts, has increased. It is evident that there can be no Oer without practices, people and communities, and that the success of Oer depends on broadening the focus of the Oe discussion (Atenas *et al.* 2022).

In addition, the Oe movement continues to be somewhat siloed in relation to parallel movements which have tended to be more influential at policy level. While there are commonalities and grounds for optimism regarding alliances amongst opening, and other, social movements, there remains a need for increased dialogue and collaboration amongst them, in order to build mutual awareness and understanding within respective practitioner communities, and develop a culture of openness and coherence across organisational agendas. Research-focused open practices such as ensuring open access to publications and data have been widely bolstered by funder mandates which have provided the impetus to develop and resource local support infrastructures within Heis. Such mandates are often lacking for Oe, and while the idea of giving knowledge away is often viewed as laudable, securing support to do so can face strong headwinds in marketised He contexts, in which educational activities are expected to generate income. Oe policy advocates and policymakers must work to support the full range of relevant practices and articulate with related movements - in particular the open science (or research) movement, which has

had enormous success in embedding open access to research data and publications as norms in European higher education and beyond.

In addition to the open practices and advocacy of educators at the grassroots level, the case for Oe (or more specifically, Oer) is being made at the supranational level, particularly by Unesco, and some member states have initiated action. Individual educators in He tend to have some autonomy in designing and selecting pedagogy and resources, hence we do see degrees of engagement with Oe even in contexts where policy is lacking, but it is at the level of the Heis that policy can perhaps be most impactful and currently appears patchy. The need for institutional policy might well be called into question by those who argue that there are practitioners who are in any cas, doing this work already, in the absence of policy. This is certainly true, and illustrates the importance of listening to and working with the grassroots practitioners to shape and co-create policy interventions, but we would also note that similar observations could be made regarding many activities (particularly those which promote social justice) that are embraced by a committed, passionate minority, while remaining insignificant, mysterious or misunderstood to the majority. Through policy we should seek to build capacity, and enable, support and recognise the value of open practices, rather than enforce rules. Practitioners should not be forced to make the choice betwee, doing valuable, socially impactful work that they believe in, but which goes unrecognised and undervalued, or els, doing work that organisations will recognise and reward. Therefore we contend that institutional policies to enable and support practice are urgently needed if Oe is to be nurtured and allowed to flourish; but also, we perceive a danger that, like practitioners, institutions will struggle to go it alone. As we have attempted to demonstrate, solidarity and boundary-crossing collaboration is at the core of openness, and inter-institutional collaboration is potentially a game-changer. The Knowledge equity network[5] represents an emerging example in this direction in the Oe landscape. The hope and future for Oe lies in building on its greatest asset, which is the willingness of the community to collaborate across roles, institutions and borders.

[5] Knowledge equity network, https://knowledgeequitynetwork.org.

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