

LangOER aims at enhancing teaching and learning of less used languages through OER/OEP



## Open Educational Resources (OER) in less used languages: a state of the art report



<http://langoer.eun.org>

## Authors

Linda Bradley, Sylvi Vigmo

## Reviewers

Javiera Atenas, Paul Bacsich, Marit Bijlsma, Alastair Creelman, Gosia Kurek, Cor van der Meer, Ebba Ossiannilsson, Giles Pepler, Elena Shulman, Anne Tannhäuser, Gard Titlestad, Monique Udnaes, Katerina Zourou, Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė

## Contributors - project partners

-  **Cor van der Meer, Marit Bijlsma, Fryske Akademy**, The Netherlands (Project coordination)
-  **Katerina Zourou, Giulia Torresin**, Web2Learn, Greece (Project management)
-  **Elena Shulman, Valentina Garoia**, European Schoolnet, Belgium
-  **Sylvi Vigmo, Linda Bradley**, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
-  **Gosia Kurek, Ania Skowron**, Jan Dlugosz University, Poland
-  **Vaiva Zuzeviciute**, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
-  **Gard Titlestad, Monique Udnaes, Øystein Johannessen**, International Council for Open and Distance Education, Norway
-  **Anne-Christin Tannhäuser**, European Foundation for Quality in E-learning, Belgium
-  **Sanita Lazdina, Ilga Suplinska**, Rezekne Higher Education Institution, Latvia







## Graphic Designer

Stefanos Xenakis [www.steartworks.com](http://www.steartworks.com)

## Proofreader

Susan Pasco

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-  [langoer@eun.org](mailto:langoer@eun.org)



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## Foreword

The LangOER network, consisting of nine European partners, is a three-year project (January 2014 - December 2016) co-funded by the European Commission (Lifelong Learning Programme, KA2 action). The study “Open Educational Resources (OER) in less used languages: a state of the art report” is the first public output of the LangOER network, an ambitious project with highly motivated partners addressing the role of OER in less used European languages which run the risk of being linguistically and culturally marginalized in a fast developing digital world.

This study started with an in-depth investigation of OER in 17 less used languages, as stipulated in the project description. We have finally covered 23 languages due to the network's connections and, more importantly, to our passion for cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe. We hope that you will find this study comprehensive and useful and wish to connect with you at our face-to-face events and through our social networks. We believe that we have a lot to learn from each other.

Katerina Zourou, Ph.D., LangOER project manager.

## Executive summary

This report presents the results of an in-depth investigation and analysis of Open Educational Resources (OER) in the target languages of the LangOER consortium: Dutch, Frisian, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Swedish. Target languages have also been extended to more European languages, regional and minority languages (RML) such as: Catalan, Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Flemish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Latgalian, Norwegian, Romanian and Welsh. The investigation also included a more global overview by using languages such as English, French, and German for reference. The selection of 22 languages in this project is indicative and not exhaustive. The methodology used for this investigation included an international expert survey, LangOER partnership consultation, and stakeholders' events contributing to the evolving understanding of OER in less used languages. A range of resources was used, most of them available on the social sharing spaces [Mendeley](#) and [Diigo](#), freely accessible. This report only presents the current state and offers an indicative list of references.

The results illustrate the diverse landscape while identifying several challenging issues not yet tackled. In particular, we point out the need to identify quality indicators and issues of specific linguistic concern for further development. This discussion covers topics important for moving the field forward, such as policies, language barriers, multilingualism and the role of preparation of practitioners as well as practices.

**An annex is provided to exemplify and demonstrate the diversity among the languages investigated in this report.**

### 1. Introduction

The scope of this report is to present the state of the art of OER in less used languages, and to frame some current features of relevance for further development. The LangOER network addresses the role of Open Educational Resources (OER) in less used European languages, which run the risk of being linguistically and culturally marginalised. As things stand today, certain languages are inadequately represented in the OER field, as the domain is currently dominated by other world languages, English being just one example. The project, therefore, addresses less used languages and how the needs of regional and minority languages can benefit from OER.

The partners represent linguistic expertise in most of the project languages: Danish, Dutch, Flemish, French, Frisian, German, Greek, Icelandic, Italian, Latgalian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian and Polish. Additional European languages: Catalan, English, Estonian, Finnish, Flemish, Hungarian, Romanian and Welsh are also targeted and included to contribute to the understanding of the OER landscape, and to exemplify other approaches taken regarding less used languages and OER. Thus, this study has investigated the OER picture in a number of less used European languages and also some large languages for reference. The selection of languages is indicative and not exhaustive. All in all, the study embraces 22 languages.

The network represented the following languages: Dutch, Frisian, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Swedish. All of these except Frisian are on the European Commission list of 24 official languages. Among the extra languages selected for an in-depth investigation were: Danish, Estonian, Latgalian and Welsh. Due to the language skills of LangOER partners, Norwegian and Icelandic were added, despite not being included in the European Commission's list of official languages. English, German and French represent larger linguistic communities but have been included to potentially add another dimension of OER for languages in general, and for multilingual perspectives.

Enhancing the linguistic and cultural components of OER, fostering sustainability through OER reuse, addressing the needs of policymakers and educators, and lastly raising awareness of a real risk of exclusion of less used languages from the OER landscape, are all within the scope of the LangOER project. At a later stage, the project will offer training to educators in less used languages (face-to-face and online) to embrace stakeholders of regional and minority languages in remote areas of Europe and to make it possible for them to gain knowledge and develop skills. This report mainly addresses the current landscape of OER and the results are discussed in connection with gaps and challenges and some suggested issues for further investigation for continued development of particular relevance for Open Educational Practices (OEP) and for policymaking.

This study is in line with European imperatives of better understanding and widening ICT-based education and training. Ways in which education can be developed and delivered to increase European excellence and competitiveness, by opening up educational resources to the widest possible community of learners, are promoted through the pan-European [Opening Up Education](#) initiative ([Kroes and Vassiliou, 2013](#)). In addition, significant attention has been paid to the development of OER through digital channels within the European Commission's [ET 2020](#) Education and Training Strategy, the new [Erasmus+](#) and [Horizon 2020](#) Programmes.

## 2. Defining less used languages and OER

For the LangOER project, the following definition of less used languages is used: Less used languages are languages, which are either spoken by a limited number of people or dominated by more commonly used languages. Approximately 50 million people in Europe speak a regional or minority language, representing 10% of Europe's population. Many terms are used to refer to "smaller languages" and the linguistic diversity in Europe, making it complex to give a single definition. Less Used Languages include both regional and minority languages and (small) state languages. Regional and minority languages are traditionally those used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a minority of the State's population, and which are different from the official or national language of that State.

Frisian for example, belongs to the category of regional and minority languages, but is a state language which has an official legal status in the Netherlands. Latgalian, however, is not a state language but does belong to the category of regional and minority languages. This shows that the position (and legal status) of these languages can influence the position and uptake of OER.

For the LangOER state of the art investigation, we adopted the definition of OER from the Paris OER Declaration (UNESCO, 2012). OER is defined as: "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work" (p. 1).

According to this definition, OER imply materials that are open, free to modify and open licensed. In terms of concrete action and for the first steps in this study, we initially focused on OER as teaching and learning materials that reside in the public domain, released under Creative Commons or Public Domain license, with no costs attached, open to adaptation redistribution and with no or very limited restrictions on access. In order to develop an understanding of what items to look for concerning less used languages, one issue we addressed was how to distinguish OER from other open access materials. Despite concomitant concepts of openness (open data, open science, open governance, etc.), in this study we adopt an understanding of OER that emphasises the open licensing component and the importance of making this aspect explicit. In other words, if there is no statement made about open

license, the item by default becomes attached with an all rights reserved – copyright license. The list in the annex, however, does not exclude these OER. The reasons for this inclusive approach are based on an understanding of OER as part of rapidly changing societies, indicating change as a part of continuous development, and open licensing as part thereof.

### 3. Methodology

The situation of OER for less used languages was investigated in three stages: 1) an international survey where experts in e-learning and OER were consulted concerning their views on OER, 2) LangOER partnership consultation investigating OER initiatives connected to their respective languages, and 3) stakeholder events. In addition, data on useful materials and texts were collected using two online spaces, [Diigo](#) and [Mendeley](#). Information exchange through social bookmarking and social referencing also emerged as a valuable source of input for the study. In the investigation UNESCO's definition of OER was used together with a quality framework by Atenas & Havemann (2013) identifying a set of key indicators such as authorship, social media support and open licensing, considered essential for uptake in OEP and highly relevant for policy development.

The state of the art investigation involved important contributions from all partners during the spring of 2014, regarding investigative activities as well as participation in focused recurrent project meetings with language experts (in Adobe Connect), and meeting language experts from Wales and Estonia during [OpenEdWeek](#) (14 March, 2014). In addition, the project presented findings at [ICDE's international workshop](#) in Oslo (28 April, 2014). A workshop was also held at the [EFQUEL Innovation Forum and International LINQ conference](#) in Crete (9 May, [Slideshare](#)), framing quality indicators for multilingual repositories of Open Educational Resources, together with EFQUEL to disseminate results and insights reached.

To benefit from and build on existing expertise on OER and Repositories of OER (ROER), national and international experts were contacted through an online survey: Paul Kelly, Jean-Louis Maxim, Robert Schuwer, Tian Belawati, Leo Højsholt-Poulsen, Carina Bossu, Grainne Conole, Jan Pawlowski, Giles Pepler, Tore Hoel, Ronald MacIntyre, Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Aina L. Knudsen, and three anonymous experts. These experts represented global expertise within the field of pedagogy at universities, consultants, and international OER networks for open and distance education. Besides general questions regarding ROER, meta-analyses, studies and inventories of ROER, the main questions addressed the existence, access and development of ROER, in particular of less used languages. When exploring ROER, specific attention was paid to finding resources with a linguistic perspective on less used languages and multilingual resources. Results based on this survey of international experts on OER have been integrated in the following section.

### 4. Results - the big picture

The overall picture emerging from national approaches to OER is characterised by diversity; incentives for initiatives and explicit connections to ministries and national educational agencies are being addressed in concrete actions e.g. in Greece, Wales and Catalonia. The Netherlands, for example, had [Wikiwijs](#) a national initiative, whose follow-on is for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), in Higher Education, not strictly OER. The overall picture also showed that national incentives at ministry and policy level were less apparent. Some national approaches are connected to online spaces such as blogs, indicating engagement in OER for less used languages as driven by communities. The [country reports of](#)

[the POERUP project](#) contribute to the understanding of diversity regarding OER initiatives taken at national level, and are recurrently updated.

The results of our research illustrate a diverse OER landscape for languages. The existence of OER in less used languages ranges from languages with considerable OER to languages with few or no OER at all. The impression is more one of occasional initiatives without incentives for fully sustained development. However, there are good reasons to keep actively informed of ongoing changes, e.g. by following the [POERUP](#) country reports which are continuously updated and extending their scope to include more languages. Without a potential connection to long-term policy level or community level commitments, some promising initiatives eventually risk ending up as discontinued websites, not uncommonly found in the investigation. Further investigation revealed that in tandem with OER there is also a large number of open access materials and online resources that are free to use, but with restricted access where membership is required.

Using UNESCO's definition of OER, the investigation revealed that what is referred to as OER is to a large extent made up of language learning resources in the domain of OER such as dictionaries, online books in digital libraries, repositories, online course material, audio and video material, publications about OER, and resources targeting practice of specific linguistic items in exercises. These types of OER embody most of the aspects required by the UNESCO definition. However, they are commonly less open to modification, i.e. allowing others to modify. OER explicitly targeting less used languages are very scarce. One explanation for this lack of flexibility is that although the very concept of opening up educational resources enjoys popularity with teachers, it is perceived by the publishing sector as a threat to book readership and especially textbook publishing (Sliwowski & Grodecka, 2013). This is particularly evident in Icelandic where one educational publisher dominates the provision of school textbooks. One example of state involvement is the Icelandic [Námsgagnastofnun, The National Centre for Educational Materials](#) (NCEM); being attached to the Ministry of Culture and Education, the materials are free and closely linked to the national curriculum.

In some less used languages, there are a few large OER repositories that have been developed to host a high number of users and OER. Such is the case, for instance, with repositories in Estonian and Swedish. In Estonia [HITSA](#) has 4,500 records, [Koolielu](#) has 7,500 records, and in Sweden the ROER [Lektion.se](#) has over 208,000 members (June 2014 data). Entries and members indicate how two different dimensions are used to display engagement, though what they imply in concrete terms is less informative. The different dimensions of OER engagement illustrate another aspect in need of further clarification to be useful for framing OER. There are also multilingual repositories with a high number of languages, for instance [LeMill](#) (with an alleged 87 languages). Some languages, for instance Welsh, have a history of fostering the language through many actors' initiatives, [Open University](#) as one example. [Gaelic4Parents](#) exemplifies a different approach by directly addressing children and their parents for supporting the Gaelic language, though not being part of the indicative list of languages.

The search was guided by a specific focus on the following criteria; open licensing, availability through a public domain, no costs for access, unlimited sharing, adapting and repurposing, and peer evaluation/reviewing features. Resources that are not explicitly stated as openly licensed, have been excluded in this report. They have, however, been included in the annex, to display the current diverse OER landscape, and also to acknowledge the fact that the process of open licensing is ongoing.

## 5. Gaps and challenges

A closer look at the resources themselves shows that the repositories are to a large extent represented by links leading to archives in media libraries (audiovisual), museums and repositories with photos,

images, films, TV programmes and audio files as well as libraries and e-books online. Other common types of resources are informative sites on OER movement topics, open access, explanations and examples of open education practices, and online lectures e.g. about copyright as well as papers and articles about OER available for downloading.

The picture of OER in less used languages indicates that several issues of relevance for adoption among practitioners and development deserve more attention if OER for less used languages are to contribute to a more diversified cultural and linguistic landscape. To move the field forward, we need to develop a shared understanding regarding both the meaning of OER and their value for less used languages. In addition, educators, educational leaders and policymakers could have a greater impact if forces for development were more unified. Some key messages are discussed in brief below, as issues that require further attention.

### **Framing less used languages**

Less used languages display a diverse picture due to differences in a number of parameters, such as demography, policy, culture, ICT penetration and culture, and educational systems to name but a few. This indicates the need to understand parts of the picture as contextually bound. In other words, it is very important to be aware of the situatedness of OER and to refrain from superficial comparisons. Less used languages are not necessarily connected to limited OER adoption. There are examples of the opposite, such as Catalan and Welsh, two European regional languages. It was also found that small state languages can be well represented despite a limited capacity in investment and in size of population, such as Estonian and Swedish.

### **The role of policies**

OER tend to be included in the overall agenda on Open Education, implicitly assuming that there are OER for languages. With few exceptions, connections to language learning and teaching, especially for less used languages, seem to be scarcer than was expected when the LangOER investigation started. The picture that emerged indicates the potential of OER for language learning and teaching, which is especially evident in less used languages that are supported at national level. The overall picture, however, shows a lack of explicit national investment at policy and ministry level. There are, however, some examples of less used languages which are distinguished by policymaking at national level. [Wikiwijs](#) in the Netherlands (in the past) and [KlasCement](#) as part of the Flemish government both serve to highlight how fundamental policies are to the development of OER, their quality and sustainability. Norwegian digital learning arena, [NDLA](#), can exemplify a national municipal initiative that is offering open educational resources at upper secondary level.

### **Quality in OER**

There are several key features for OER uptake. What need to be addressed are transversal key issues for quality assurance, elaborated as a theoretical framework as Atenas and Havemann suggested (2013) with the aim of capturing ten quality assurance indicators as prerequisites for “design, development and implementation” (p. 23) of Repositories of OER (ROER). Based on the analysis of quality indicators among 80 ROER representing world regions, Atenas and Havemann identified key characteristics for investigating quality. Among the most frequent were keywords (93.75%), while indicators such as featured resources (30%), multilingual support (30%) and source code (27.5%) were less frequent. Open licensing was found only in half of the investigated ROER. Given a European perspective, these figures are even lower. Besides defining and arguing for indicators required for quality assurance, the lack of these key features points to constraints and barriers for development and implementation. Though the LangOER state of the art report presents findings based on a desktop research, they confirm the necessity to integrate a more elaborated and systematic approach to quality indicators.



**Access and context**

OER in connection to learning less used languages need to extend their scope beyond organised and institutionally structured language education in order to reflect the conditions for learning in today's society. This implies looking at language learning as engaging in activities for many different purposes and interests. What was found to be a linguistic barrier in this regard was restricted access to OER, e.g. when they were linked to the educational system and connection to a school was required. Monolingual OER can present another barrier for foreign language learners if they are not fully mastering the target language. Moreover, fragmented OER or OER lacking explicit pedagogical guidelines and scenarios can have a negative effect on learner autonomy. One way of addressing this is to enhance OER uptake by embedding learning pathways or integrating them in learning scenarios. This means that the context in which OER are used is also part of the challenge (Wiley, et al., 2004).

**Multilingualism**

Alongside monolingual repositories in the target languages of the study, it is worth mentioning multilingual ones. Some examples include [HITSA](#) and [Koolielu](#), two Estonian multilingual repositories, [LORO](#) run by the Open University, [Language Box](#) run by University of Southampton, [Temoa](#), a repository of more than 10 languages maintained by Virtual University of Tecnológico de Monterrey System, the OER metadata repository [Learning Resource Exchange](#) run by the European Schoonet and UNESCO's IITE [Open Education Resources Gateway](#). In the United States, Language Resource Centres (LRCs) join forces on a unique [portal](#) containing OER in several languages, with the Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning ([COERLL](#)) of University of Texas playing a leading role on OER in the last decade. All these examples demonstrate the value of OER from a global perspective.

**The role of teachers**

Teachers of languages, and indeed teachers of less used languages, are professionals with expertise in pedagogical design, of great importance for developing quality OER for language purposes. Paying concrete attention to connections to open educational practices is suggested as one powerful way forward. To address this issue, joint efforts from diverse perspectives, i.e. drawing on expertise and experience, are suggested here as a productive way forward. Teachers' engagement is crucial for ensuring sustainability and quality regarding OEP.

**Open educational practice**

From a linguistic perspective, it is suggested here that there is a need for re-visiting notions of what using and learning a language means for today's citizen. Most of the identified and investigated OER for less used languages were characterised by their static nature rather than being open to adaptation and innovation. Part of widening the scope could be to re-visit Wiley's discussion on the [Access Compromise and the 5<sup>th</sup> R](#), expressed in terms of: retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute, to contribute to the discussion on what defines OER.

The picture of OER that emerges reflects a more traditional view on the use of language as opposed to an increasingly digitally mediated global and changing world. There is a need to take full advantage of up-to-date community-driven trends, such as crowdsourcing, peer review and recommendation systems, enhancing user engagement and connecting to today's participatory cultures.

**6. Suggested issues for further investigation**

The future evolution of less used languages is discussed in this report as part of everyday life and not restricted to national curricula and use of language in institutional contexts as separate activities. Rather

the opposite, the teaching and learning of less used languages, as approached by this report, involve transversal activities, which, in turn, indicates departing from pedagogical design as connected to several quality aspects. Access to OER is often noted to be problematic and time-consuming. There are some implicit assumptions connected to OER, and taking the impact of OER as given, we exclude crucial aspects such as pedagogical issues concerning language learning and teaching practices in specific terms, and the need for re-adaptation to target contextual and curricular issues.

There are several issues that deserve further investigation as the scope of the present study is narrowed to the value for less used languages. A few are suggested here tentatively: elaborated notions of quality indicators for OER and their integration with policies and with teacher training; open learning/teaching practice and Wiley's 5Rs objective; rapid development of digital technologies and what this implies for OER and less used languages, namely in terms of metadata and platform interoperability, searchability, accessibility.

## 7. Indicative bibliography

Some references are given indicatively below, as it would be disproportionate to list all references in this short study. We invite our readers to check (and connect with us through) our socially shared spaces [Diigo](#) and [Mendeley](#) for a full list of bibliography and links.

All hyperlinks in the text last accessed June 30, 2014

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