abiertaUGR: modelling online learning communities

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Abstract: *Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) have become a trending topic for Higher Education Institutions looking to create online courses for wider student communities. However, in some cases, this approach is another replica of the distance (online) learning model, but with better support for massive communities. Our aims are based on the potential benefits of MOOCs to create active online learning communities using OER, allowing universities to adapt and include non-formal learning in the curricula. Our approach (abiertaUGR) is based on a social approach to creating MOOCs. This framework allows us to construct an online learning community where each user has a personal learning environment (PLE), and also activities for engaging in team-groups and social networks. We developed three courses last semester using this approach with excellent results.*

Key words:
online learning communities, non-formal learning, digital competences, OER, **PLE, social networks**

Introduction

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) are a current trend for creating online courses with the aim of enabling Higher Education Institutions to have free, good quality teaching initiatives with relevant visibility on Internet. This model has been conducted through inter-institutional platform of courses (i.e. Coursera[1], EdX [2], Udacity [3], as well as MiriadaX [4] in Spain). These approaches should represent new models for open learning [5] as a relevant role for (future) universities. These approaches may overcome the following issues:

- How quality and success of these courses are measured. Sometimes these aspects are focused mainly on student enrolment and completion rate.

- Purpose and outcome of these courses. These methodologies are the same as campus-based courses (content and assessment methods), but lose innovative practices in online education [6].

- Recognition and connection with the pedagogical model of higher education institutions. These courses should be connected with other formal learning strategies offered from universities.

AbiertaUGR [7] is a good example as a case study to understand the relevance of involving universities in MOOC strategies. This proposal has been developed using features that should be taken into account in this scenario:

- Use OER for learning activities and promotion of user-generated contents [8]

- Creation of online learning communities [9]

- Recognition at Universities

The courses have been developed for a wide community in order to acquire transversal competences and skills currently required in graduate titles. Some of the most relevant competences are the following:

- Knowledge and skills for autonomous learning by creating their own personal learning environment

- Enhancing the collaboration and working in groups

- Enhancing the creativity, leadership, and reputation in an online community of learners

These abilities are engaged via a context of social learning, enhanced on the abiertaUGR platform using common technologies (blogs, twitter, groups, bookmarks, debate, etc.). It is conceived as a social community: each user is shown in the platform (figure 1) as a living community with his/her own personal learning environment (figure 2).

Figure1. abiertaUGR social learning platform

Figure 2. User profile with the personal learning environment

Analysis of results

This initiative started in April with a series of courses oriented towards internet technologies for learning, and each one has a four week duration with a recognition of 1 ECTS credit:

- Digital identities. http://goo.gl/yHcam, 8th of April (finished)

- Ubiquitous learning. http://goo.gl/7bCZo, 18 of May (ongoing)

- Creative common and Open Education Resources. http://goo.gl/yV8dC

Up to now, we have the following data from these courses

|	Enrolled	Completed	Completion Rate
Digital Identities	1805	620	34'35%
Ubiquitous learning	992	403	40'60%
CC and OER	752	250	33'20%
Community	3549	1272	36'05%(*)

(*) On average

A wide community followed the initiative on the Internet. During these months, we have identified an increasing amount of traffic from visitors. Some of this data is shown below:
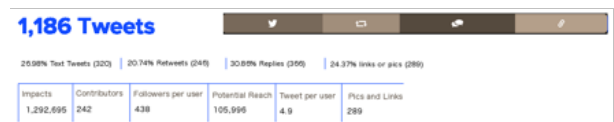
	March	April	May	Total
Num. of visitors	6140	14678	6169	26987
Num. of visits	12045	32289	12155	56489
Average time / visit	465 sec	1281 sec	1291 sec	1012 sec

(*) On average

Distribution throughout the world:
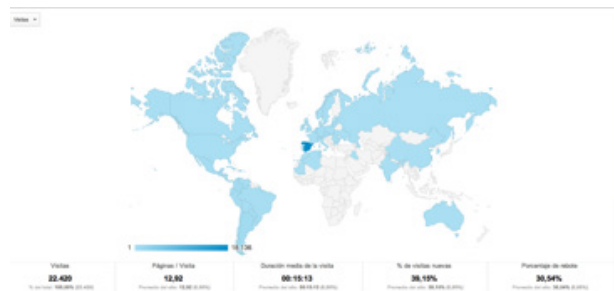
We had activities on social networks such as Twitter. Some data about one week of intensive activity gave the following results:

Evaluation methods are based around activities to promote learning in the community by facilitating tasks and goals to enhance participation, automatic recognition (through badges) from the activities performed, and facilitating the social recognition and reputation as another learning skill. Some activities are done in groups so we enhance the collaboration through the community to develop these results. Some activity indicators in the first course are shown below (activity during four weeks):

Activity indicators	1st week	2nd week	3rd week	4th week
Documentation	1841	1085	641	113
Activities	532	445	358	0
Interviews	926	295	629	0
Debate	1901	993	877	0
Tasks	169	813	285	0
WorkGroup (4 groups)	0	0	0	688
PLE (some data)	689 Blog	1275 bookmark		

An example of planning a course:

This activity means that a high percentage of the community is 'alive' throughout the four weeks, also with good maintenance of the personal portfolio (PLE) as well as with group activities.

Group Activities

Group activities were very exciting because we created free online groups to discuss and propose the internal organisation of some topics. This activity was developed during the last week for the Digital Identities course and four groups were created with the following criteria:

- **Red Group**: The Experts. 85 active users debating "digital identity and conclusions of the course". The result was this conceptual map (from the conclusions of each member, indicated in the comments)

- **Green Group:** New Professions, should we create a start-up? (179 active members). Some of the work done was an analysis of the #abiertaUGR hashtag on twitter

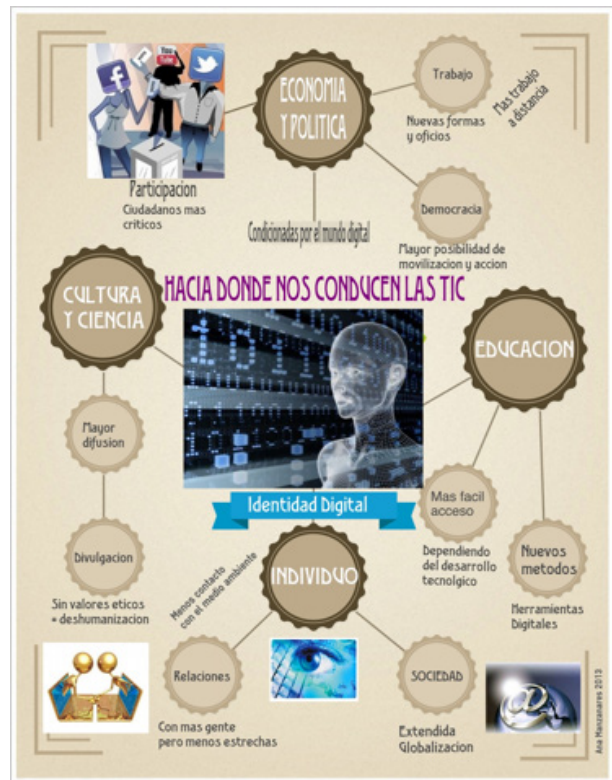http://www.slideshare.net/YOCOMU/analisis-hashtag-abiertaugr

- **Blue Group.** Where will the future be: The Philosophers (121 active members).

Diagram (from Viviana Lagos, Colombia) explaining the role of social networks, policies and trends.

Also, another infograph explaining TIC and society.

- **Yellow Group**: The Thinking Group (58 users) explaining trends and personal opinions.

User Satisfaction

Finally, other data about user satisfaction on different aspects are shown below.

| User Satisfaction from Course Resources					
	Very weak	**Weak**	**Correct**	**Good**	**Excellent**
Platform	1,3%	10,7%	26,1%	47,0%	15,0%
Workspace	2,2%	13,4%	35,3%	35,8%	13,4%
Contents	1,7%	2,6%	18,6%	45,5%	31,6%
The participation availability	3,0%	3,9%	14,2%	37,3%	41,6%
Course planning	0,9%	8,2%	23,6%	39,9%	27,5%
Tutoring and mentors	2,2%	5,2%	31,3%	33,9%	27,4%
Technical support	3,9%	15,6%	30,3%	32,0%	18,2%
Twitter use	4,0%	9,3%	31,9%	34,5%	20,4%
The community (personal PLE)	3,0%	9,4%	27,0%	42,9%	17,6%
Working groups	3,5%	12,8%	31,0%	37,6%	15,0%
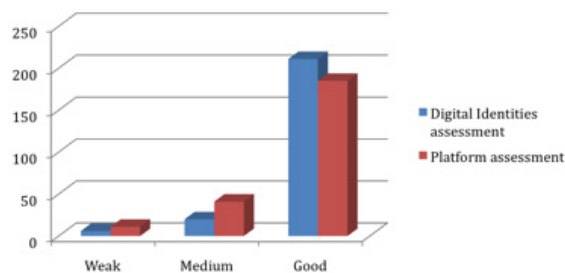
Figure 3. User satisfaction

Conclusions

This paper presents a novel model to create Massive Open Online Courses based on online learning communities. The purpose is to create living communities to learn and acquire digital competences such as reputation, participation, collaboration, critical assessment, use of technology, etc. These issues are connected with Higher Education Institutions via a lifelong learning process in society, connecting these courses with some kind of recognition of informal learning. This study has been supported with the data of the first course using this approach.

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