Open Education developments in Ukraine in times of crisis: A librarian's perspective

~Almost a confession~

The morning of February 24, 2022, changed the life of every Ukrainian: we woke up to the explosions and the surrealness of something like this happening to us in the heart of Europe in the XXI century. And "something like this" is a full-scale military invasion of Russia into Ukraine with the intention of destroying the Ukrainian people as a nation, its history, culture, education, and science.

We managed to overcome the fear, despair, and confusion of those first days thanks to family and friends, as well as thanks to work.

When you do something for others, it gives meaning to life and helps you move on.

Move on, adjusting your personal life and work to the unpredictable timing and duration of air raid sirens. Move on, even when, having grabbed the necessary items (documents, warm clothes, water, some food, a laptop), you hide in basements or corridors between the "three walls". Move on when you can tell by the sound what exactly has exploded. Move on when you take your grandchildren to a safer place by evacuation train, but even there you work every day. Move on when you joyfully return home in a month, having left your family abroad. Move on when the pain for the sons and daughters who volunteer to defend Ukraine at the front is heartbreaking.

This is our new reality. But it is precisely at this time that you also realize the importance of your work, like never before.

As librarians, we had to take care of our teams and ensure that most online library services were reliably provided for ongoing remote university work. We had to protect the unique books and digital collections and we chose to be the ambassadors of Open Education (OE) and Open Educational Resources (OER) at our universities, and possibly in the whole of Ukraine. And all of that - in critical times of crisis.

The war has made us strong.

Ukrainian librarians are determined to continue supporting students and teachers: often in extreme conditions. They are taking the chance to implement Open Education solutions at a time when most at need.

It is still early days for OER in Ukraine. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Science has made it a priority to engage in more systematic work to bring Ukrainian academia closer to the European research and innovation community. Select open practices exist in some institutions, however, OE and OER are not yet mentioned in official national documents.

Since 2007, academic and university libraries have been embracing openness and explaining it to academics. They have been working on Open Scholarship (OS). Librarians have developed open academic thinking, skillsets, experience, and tools, including almost 180 institutional repositories.

Building on this, supported by results of the national survey of university library directors, we foresee an expansion of existing open practices in support of OE and OER in Ukraine.

Since 2019, the academic library of the Ukrainian State University of Science and Technologies (USUST) has been working on OER issues both locally (for teachers and librarians), nationally (for university librarians), and internationally. The experience gained with the European Network of Open Education Librarians, e.g. in workshops, survey participation, translating OER into Ukrainian, or via contacts from different countries, has been extremely useful.

At the university level, faculty discussions have taken place during physical workshops, webinars, and face-to-face meetings on the benefits and opportunities of OER for distance or blended learning (e.g. during the COVID-19 pandemic). However, the interest of teachers/authors has been limited to isolated cases until now.

But the librarians continued their "Small Step Tactics - Little by little, but constantly!"

During wartime, the USUST's rector and vice-rectors have given more of a green light to the OER community, supporting the Library's calls for introducing new models of information support for distance learning in Ukrainian. As a result, we have held meetings with key stakeholders and started conducting library consultations for teachers as potential OER authors to cover copyright and licensing. We also saw over 200 academics attend an online event; something we have never seen before. We have looked at technical possibilities to create, curate, and preserve open textbooks and use multimedia in them. We have developed guidelines on producing open textbooks, helped create 2 open textbooks, and placed them in the institutional repository and Open Research Library. Moreover, we have also started to develop two new open textbooks. Additionally, we have created our first video lecture "Open Education and Open Educational Resources: Introduction" and posted it to the USUST Library channel on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcQ_onmTAFc. We also plan to create up to 12 short video lectures for the series "Open Education and Open Educational Resources: Importance for Ukrainian Higher Education".

This has come about through the focus and determination of many USUST teachers and librarians. They share noble and strategic goals of great importance. First of all, by attempting to solve the problem of the shortage of free digital open textbooks in Ukrainian. Moreover, this undertaking protects social justice and inclusion for current and future generations of students. It is especially important for those students who have been wounded in this war and will not be able to physically attend university, but WANT TO STUDY AND HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO IT.

University librarians of Ukraine believe in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, in the victory over Russia as an aggressor state; they bring this victory closer with their dedicated work and volunteering initiatives.

We are sincerely grateful to all the civilized countries of the world and to everyone who has supported and continues to support our incredibly talented and courageous people in this bloody war.

The countries of Europe and the whole world stand by our side by supporting the military of Ukraine, providing humanitarian and material assistance, and sheltering over 6 million refugees. And this is a defining moment in the history of mankind.

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