Chapter 1
Introduction

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Introduction

Since the mid 1990s, the digital transformation has changed the face of open and distance education as we had known it. Already in 1999, Alan Tait observed that "the secret garden of open and distance learning has become public, and many institutions are moving from single conventional mode activity to dual mode activity" (p. 141) and Kearsley (1998) even claimed that "distance education has become mainstream" (p. 1). Indeed, during the last 20 years distance education has moved from the fringes into the center of mainstream education provision (see Xiao, 2018, for a recent analysis). This is specially the case in the higher education sector where today in some countries—supported by enormous state funding programs like in Germany—almost all higher education institutions are offering some sort of online education, ranging from web-enhanced face to face teaching practices to fully online programs on an international scale—although they often do not label this distance education and use terms such as online, flexible or blended learning.

The process of the digital transformation—the "digital turn" (Westera, 2013)—affects all segments of society and economic sectors. Different nations and educational systems are responding differently to the macro process of digitalization. Some national systems are more advanced and ahead on the road by making the digitalization of teaching and learning a strategic goal for development and innovation already over a decade ago (e.g. South Korea) while in other countries distance education was recognized as a validated and accredited form of education provision only

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in the recent past, now witnessing enormous growth rates of enrollments in online distance education with private institutions massively stepping into this market (e.g. Brazil).

The transformation of teaching and learning in a digital age presents a dramatic challenge of innovation and change for the majority of 'conventional' universities. Higher education institutions throughout the world have undergone changes to innovate teaching and learning processes by implementing infrastructures for educational technology and developing organizational support structures for students and faculty.

Distance teaching institutions have always been spearheading the application of new and emerging media, because in distance education media have always been used to bridge the gap students and the teaching institutions and among learners. Starting in the mid 1990s, the Internet and new information and communication technologies paved the way for overcoming the notion of distance education as an isolated form of learning. However, also traditional distance teaching universities are still struggling to make the transition from correspondence to online distance education (e.g. in South Africa).

In order to avoid that we reinvent the wheel in this very dynamic process of digital transformation, it is important that we learn from past experiences of open and distance education systems, covering over a century of theory, research and practice in the field (e.g. in the UK, Germany, South Africa and Russia).

The present book is the second volume in which we set out to explore, compare and contrast open and distance education systems in various countries. The first volume "Open and Distance Education in Australia, Europe and the Americas" covered national systems in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, the UK and the USA. The goal is to describe different approaches and models of the relationship between distance education and higher education in each country by addressing the following questions:

1. What is the function and position of distance education within the national higher education system?
2. Which are the major DE teaching and research institutions?
3. What is the history and past of distance education including online education?
4. What is the relationship between DE and more established and older campus-based, residential institutions?
5. What is the relationship between public and private sector online and distance education?
6. What are the regulatory frameworks for DE? What are important policies for online and distance education?
7. What are estimated student enrollments for online and distance education programs?
8. What are probably important future developments and issues for online and distance education?

Structure of the Book

The countries are presented in alphabetical order. Each chapter is complemented by commentary written by an expert from each country. The aim of the commentaries is not to critique the chapters but to offer another perspective on each system and to highlight and emphasize certain aspects that are important from the experts' point of view.

Chapter 2 is about China. Wei Li and Na Chen from the Department of Comparative Education at the Open University of China emphasize the importance of online and open learning to provide services for lifelong learning for all. The Open University of China is the biggest university of the world in terms of student enrollments. It is a network with a headquarter in Beijing and 44 branches and about 3,000 study centers throughout the country. A path-breaking initiative towards lifelong learning is the creation of the "Credit Bank" for the accreditation, accumulation and transfer of formal and informal learning outcomes. An "Online Credit Bank Platform" was launched in November 2017 to support the accreditation and recognition of prior learning. The share of online enrollments in higher education reached 17% (6.45 Million students) in 2016. However, there is much room for potential growth of ODE in China. There are more than 2,900 higher education institutions in the country, but up to now only 67 campus-based universities and the Open University Network offer online degree programs.

It is interesting to note that the beginnings of Indian distance education were influenced by the Russian system. A delegation of the University Grants Commission visited the Soviet Union in 1961 to study their system of correspondence education and evening classes. Higher education expanded tremendously after independence in 1947. Today, the higher education system in India is a giant, with over 29 Million students, 712 universities and over 36,000 colleges—and this is still not enough too meet the huge demand for tertiary education of India's growing population. The authors, Santosh Panda and Suresh Garg, are from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which is the central state university (founded in 1985) that coordinates distance education systems and programs throughout the country.

A team of authors from Russia and Germany, Olaf Zawacki-Richter, Sergey Kulikov, Diana Püplichhuysen, and Daria Khanolainen, describe the changes that have occurred in distance education in Russia and the former Soviet Union. There is a long tradition of distance education in Russia starting after the October Revolution in the second decade of the 20th century. Today, about 50% of all students in Russia are enrolled in distance education programs with a peak in 2009/2010. However, Russia is facing a dramatic "demographic hole": According to official statistics, the number of 15–19-year olds fell by one third from 2009 to 2014. In the same time period, the number of distance education students decreased from 4.1 to 2.6 million students. The Russian higher education system has undergone substantial reforms in recent years, investing in "elite" higher education institutions and "modern" distance education (i.e. e-learning, MOOCs, OERs) to overcome quality problems in print-based distance education and to reach international target groups.

Paul Prinsloo writes about South Africa, which is the country where the first dedicated distance teaching university was established in 1873. After 2004 and until 2014 the University of South Africa (UNISA) was the only public distance teaching university in South Africa. Nelson Mandela was a student at UNISA during his time of imprisonment on Robben Island. UNISA is a "big ship" with over 400,000 students. As Kok, Bester and Esterhuizen (2018) write in their current article "Late departures from paper-based to supported networked learning in South Africa", the transition from correspondence education to online learning represents a great challenge, especially in a developing country where reliable power supply and access to the Internet at affordable costs cannot be taken for granted in rural as well as metropolitan areas. The implications of introducing interactive online learning are discussed. In this context, it is important to find the right balance between the introduction of personalized and tutor-led online seminars and the provision of self-study materials for independent distance learning while maintaining economies of scale to provide affordable higher education opportunities for all.

Cheolil Lim, Jihyunb Lee and Hyosun Choi report on a process of radical innovation and enormous growth of online education in South Korea. They describe this development starting with the foundation of the Korea National Open University in 1972. Distance education became widely used, but with the emergence of the Internet between 1995 and 2009 a period of rapid growth gained momentum with strong support and funding from the Ministry of Education in South Korea. In 1997 the Korea Multimedia Education Center was established to facilitate education innovation at traditional campus-based universities and to support the establishment of so called "cyberuniversities" of which 21 exist today. Supporting lifelong learning was given a top priority by the Korean government, and online distance education has played a prominent role in providing learning opportunities throughout the lifespan. It is remarkable that 79% of high school graduates in South Korea enter a higher education institution. Despite this extraordinary progress in terms of digitalization of teaching and learning and access to higher education, some challenges remain. We are reminded by Insung Jung that there is still much potential for widening access for disadvantaged groups in South Korea who do not reside in Soul or the larger metropolitan areas.

Yasar Kondakci, Svenja Bedenlier and Cengiz Hakan Aydin provide an insightful overview of the open and distance education system in Turkey, where Anadolu University (established in 1982) in Eskisehir is one of the "mega-universities" with over one million active distance education students. Also in Turkey, the residential higher education system has been expanding immensely. In the late 1970s and 80s higher education was a privilege of a few. The 27 conventional universities provided only places for less than 6% of an age cohort. The number of universities increased from 27 in 1982 to 184 public and private universities in 2017. Open and distance education, particularly Anadolu University's ODL system, has been playing a major role in Turkish Higher Education by providing equal education opportunity to millions since 1982. Based on the latest figures of the Higher Education Council of Turkey (2016–2017 academic year) of the total number of ODL students in Turkey, around 1.2 million of them are actively pursuing their studies in different programs

of Anadolu University. The quality assurance of these programs is critical for the reputation and status of online, open and distance education, in order to convince employers that degrees earned at a distance are at least as good as degrees from traditional campus-based institutions. In this context, it is notable, that since 2016 students who seek admission to Open Education programs and do not already hold a higher education degree or do not already study at another university have to take the same entrance examination as students who want to register in conventional under-graduate programs. So in fact, there is a recent development in Turkey, which reduces the openness of open education.

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