The Politics of Open Access: Decolonizing Knowledge or Corporate Capture?

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Politics of OA

- OA – claim more equitable, democratic, esp for Global South
- Plan S: Eur. OA plan -- starts Jan 2021
- Open for whom? Access to what?
- Reflect on role of corporate actors in shaping OA
- Q of how experienced in Global South
- Consider best model of OA in low resource contexts, in engagement betw N&S
- Not just advance OA, but decolonize it
Politics of OA

• Historical pressures
• Types of OA (Green, Gold, Diamond and Black)
• For profit vs non-profit OA infrastructures, vs lack of infrastructure
• Politics shaping dominant models of OA
Historical Pressures

• Journals historically non-profit modes of communication -- ‘free’ content, labour
• Pressures for OA emerged from digitization and rising subscription costs – Big Deals
• Costs of digital distribution falling, cost of journals rising -- ~2x in early 2000s
• ‘Cost of Knowledge’ campaign: Boycotting of Elsevier by univs across Eur and US
• Profits of Big 5 publishers still rising with shift to OA – central players

OA Models: Green, Gold, Diamond and Black

- **Gold OA**: ‘gold std’?
- APCs – from pay-to-read to pay-to-publish model
- Problematic for soc sci’s, and for researchers from Global South – don’t have the gold for Gold OA
- Fee waivers inadequate, neo-colonial: ‘academic charity’
- Suppression of **platinum/diamond OA** by publishers – ambiguous definition
- Diamond dominant form of OA -- > 2/3 of OA journals listed in DOAJ still do not charge APCs
- **Black OA**: predatory publishers and pirate OA platforms (Sci Hub) – whose interests served?

LibGuides@Southampton, Univ of Southampton, https://library.soton.ac.uk/openaccess/howto
OA Infrastructures

- debates about OA journal models obscure infrastructures in which embedded – power structures that shape them
- For-profit vs non-profit OA infrastructures – not one big OA network, but competing digital ecosystems, regulatory stds, interests
- Address or reproduce inequities in knowledge production?

Hindawi, https://www.hindawi.com/post/a-radically-open-approach-to-developing-infrastructure-for-open-science/
OA Infrastructures: For Profit

• for-profit OA: neoliberal transformation of scholarly publishing
• proprietary end-to-end digital platforms linked to big corporate publishers
• Eurocentric standardizing: citation metrics, language, technical requ’ts – screen out LDC submissions
• Flow of know. from N-S -- embeds neo-colonialism at heart of OA

OA Infrastructures: Non-Profit

• Eclipse/erode non-profit OA systems: AmeliCA, African Journals Online, COAR, etc.
• Often emanate from the global South – meet needs of scholars in low resource research env’ts
• Publicly-funded OA ecosystems involving digital repositories, green or diamond OA arrangements, and open-source or locally available software
OA Infrastructure: Unable to Profit

• SSA – lack of access to digital infrastructure
• Digital infrastructure patchy, research funding limited, lack equip’t, can’t afford data, etc.
• More OA, funding APCs doesn’t help -- not about more digital access, but digital infrastructure, resources to access digital research, equipment
OA Policy Paradoxes

• OA infrastructures shaped by policy initiatives, powerful actors

• Corporate publishers, corporate philanthropy: ‘outsized influence’ on OA decisions – Finch Report, Plan S, etc.

• **Paradox:** efforts to liberate scholarly publishing from corporate publishers put corporate publishers at the centre of policy decisions on OA

• public block grants to universities to finance ‘transformative agreements’ with corporate publishers – public resources into private coffers, still paying twice! -- impact on academics? Journals?
• Not competing down APCs, lack of transparency, intensifying coercion (Plan S), sustainability?

• Highlighting non-profit ethos of society/independent journals, esp Dev’t/Area Studies

• natural allies of OA activists? Of Southern Scholars?

UKRI Article Processing Charges and Gold Open Access at the OUThe Orb, http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/the_orb/?p=3038 – Open University: UK Research and Innovation
What kind of OA?

• OA not about yes or no, but what kind of OA, on whose terms?
• Need attention to OA arrangements better suited to publicly funded scholarship, academic freedom, decolonized scholarly commons –
• prioritize public research needs rather than private gains
• transparent and judicious use of public resources
• epistemic equity in relations between Northern and Southern scholars -- allows Southern scholars to shape debates, not just read them