Nikos Koutras: Building Equitable Access to Knowledge Through Open Access Repositories

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It is remarkable to see how within two decades, technology has dramatically changed the way we communicate information, making research more freely available to the broader public, and in doing so giving rise to new opportunities and challenges for publishing. In *Building Equitable Access to Knowledge Through Open Access Repositories*, Koutras illustrates how the so-called knowledge revolution has bestowed huge problems for copyright laws and intellectual protection. Yet as he argues, commercial publishers and university libraries can co-exist by collaboratively supporting open access repositories that offer the widest possible access to knowledge promoting greater social inclusion for a more fair and just global society. Koutras uses a wide variety of frameworks—including legal, philosophical, historical, economic, and ethical—to convince the reader of the enormous benefits that can be achieved through free equitable access to knowledge. After a productive analysis of how our digital landscape can extend access to information, which in turn helps construct knowledge economies for future sustainability and the safeguarding of human rights, this book takes the reader through the history of copyright, to explain how open access can be considered an infringement on IP rights, working against commercial profits and public expenses, and discouraging investments in technology. But contrary to this environment, Koutras illustrates optimistically how we can balance open access with copyright to facilitate a more efficient and equitable economy, and one where principles of corporate social responsibility can be central to the creation, preservation and sharing of research data through digital resources.

While writing *Building Equitable Access to Knowledge Through Open Access Repositories*, Koutras could not have anticipated COVID-19, but current events demonstrate the significant benefits as well as continuing drawbacks of moving to open access. The rapid development and testing of COVID-19 remedies have

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been disseminated through preprint open access and international data sharing. Longer term it will be necessary for further research to accompany, evaluate, and influence the ways in which governments and citizens adapt to the post-coronavirus world (for example, studies of the economic effects of extended lockdowns, or of the many other legal, environmental and political issues that have accompanied the pandemic). Society will have an even greater need for and reliance on open access as we share our observations and analyses more widely and rapidly than conventional publication mechanisms have tended to allow. In this context, *Building Equitable Access to Knowledge Through Open Access Repositories* provides a timely critique of entrenched attitudes toward publication in traditional prestigious commercial journals and books. By providing an outline of why diverse perspectives exist, this book adds authority to the growing international voices that call for open access to make academic research more freely available for societal benefit.

The book begins by illustrating how technological advances have provided a free-to-view online mode enabling researchers to share their outputs, maximising visibility and impact; this is aligned with the growing mission of universities to make information unequivocally available to all in society. It then reviews the growth of open access repositories, driven by university librarians concerned that for-profit publishers were restricting access to scholarly publications and driving up costs at a time when digital technology was transforming possibilities for content sharing. Yet despite the clear societal benefits of the Internet and World Wide Web, Koutras provides the example of the hard metal rock band Metallica which sued the music file-sharing platform Napster and many universities for copyright infringement, arguing that by using university servers to provide students with free access to their music they were violating the law. This case highlighted the legal issues around open access that led to international conventions calling for change toward the removal of economic barriers to peer sharing of data. Within this environment, Koutras illustrates the potential costs of open access, with the most significant being its influence on multinational publishing companies.

To reflect on the arguments for and against copyright versus open access, Koutras takes the reader back the philosophies behind private and shared ownership, and the history of copyright laws, to assess how we can balance the equilibrium between self-interest and social good. He illustrates how Plato's concept that property should be for communal use and social justice in an ideal republic aligns with the concept of open access for societal benefit. However, this conflicts with Aristotle's philosophy that suggested our actions are focused more on individualistic needs, and hence private ownership drives progress and improvement. Locke's proposition was that individuals own themselves and their labour and hence their production, wealth, and justice should be protected to encourage the development of new ideas. Koutras goes on to align this with the Enlightenment period and gives the example of Gutenberg who introduced the idea of a mechanical type of printing, and how by building on and heavily investing capital in early printing facilities, highly competitive printing monopolies emerged and with them have come copyright protections and licences. This was followed by 'piracy' where copied books could be sold at lower price by avoiding paying for author manuscripts. Thus, Koutras takes the reader through

the rationales for copyright interests, both philosophical and pragmatic, in order to assess these within the contemporary context of digital publishing.

Koutras also illustrates the history behind open access. He outlines how the growth of government investment in university research following World War II, led to the substantial increase in publication numbers and the exponential rise in publication purchasing prices—despite technological advances enabling research outputs to be made available online at lower cost—in light of the emerging power of private multinational publishing companies. Within this context, Koutras outlines the numerous changes to copyright laws introduced across the European Union, and with the support of philanthropic entities like the Wellcome Trust, to reach international agreements for the open sharing of data and the improvement of citizen assets, linking this with open access to trade. Yet he illustrates the intense restrictions and difficulties involved in introducing international derivatives and regulations to unify access and change copyright protection regimes, aligning these with the governance framework of open access repositories. Through a comparison with the Greek open access model, Koutras highlights the importance of how these laws must keep pace with technological evolution and how the beneficial dissemination and spread of information must be supported by education of university scholars.

Finally, the book turns to the role of printing companies and the need to weaken their monopolistic power over scholarly communication and their control of the traditional academic journal system. Koutras argues fervently for the need to modify their publishing policies to facilitate open access and strongly advocates for the roles they can assume toward corporate social responsibility. He highlights how this has and can be done, enabling them to co-exist with copyright regimes to support academic advances and for social good.

This book is highly persuasive, positively encouraging the reader to review open access through the lenses of all stakeholders and promoting that they come together to strengthen open access repositories as a way of supporting each group to achieve their goals while ensuring greater equity for the future sustainability of our society.

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