The dialectic of open
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Quiz 1. Open – a good thing?

An open mind.
Quiz 2: Open – a good thing?

An open wound.
Quiz 3: Open – a good thing?

An open door.
Quiz 4: Open – a good thing?

An open door. The person you want to visit is in their office and available!
Quiz 5: Open – a good thing?

An open door to your home – but you left it closed and locked before you left for Congress.
By now the key point should be obvious: “open” per se is neither good nor bad. Whether a particular instance of “open” is a good thing depends on the context and one’s perspective.
Research problem: reification of open access

VISION
unprecedented public good / unite humanity in common quest for knowledge
(BOAI 2002)

DEFINITION
no financial, legal or technical barriers
(BOAI 2002)

OPEN LICENSING
including blanket commercial re-use as essential to definition
Reification: 3 examples
EU funders policy

Recommends use of open licenses CC-BY, CC-0 (public domain), CC-SA

“Does not accommodate non-commercial restrictions” [https://www.coalition-s.org/implementations/](https://www.coalition-s.org/implementations/)
“The information provider grants you a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, non-exclusive licence to use the information, including for commercial purposes...”

Gates Foundation open access policy

• Publication on open access terms: CC-BY license
• “permit all users of the publication to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and transform and build upon the material, including for any purpose (including commercial)”
• https://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/General-Information/Open-Access-Policy
Research questions & method

Questions
- How might this have happened?
- What are some of the potential social implications? Are they necessarily desirable?
- If not, what can be done?

Method
- Empirical evidence (where available)
- Critical dialectics (Frankfurt School)
  - Form of logic
  - Contradictions
  - Social context as factor
  - Critical: problems & solutions
How might this have happened?

• What happened:

  Vision of open: uniting humanity in common quest for knowledge

  Open policy requirement: wide open to downstream commercial exploitation
How might this have happened?

- What happened:

  - Capitalist society

  - Vision of open: uniting humanity in common quest for knowledge

  - Open policy requirement: wide open to downstream commercial exploitation
Potential social implications: a case study, a scenario, and two perspectives.
Case study CC-BY / CC-0 → for-pay Scopus
What happens
• Gates Foundation How we work “To bring about the kinds of changes that will help people live healthier and more productive lives, we seek to understand the world’s inequities” https://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work
• CC-BY policy
• Downstream re-use includes for-pay Scopus

Evaluation
• Profits to Elsevier ✓
• Added value for the rich ✓
• Uniting humanity in a common quest for knowledge ×
• Development of underdevelopment (“helping” developing world but policy results in further inequity; neocolonialism) ✓
• Gates Foundation goals?
Open educational resources scenario (or killing the geese that lay the golden eggs)

1. Public institutions’ resources $\rightarrow$ CC-BY / CC-0
2. Private for-profit institutions: free resources in for-pay packages / no obligation to give back!!
3. Private for-profit institutions appear high quality more cost-efficient (minimal investment in pedagogy)
4. In neoliberal societies: governments seek to cut funding to public institutions
5. Private advantage is short-term; loss of investment in pedagogy results in lower quality education and lack of public competition allows privates to raise prices
Government data – 2 perspectives

Canada – open government license implementation guidelines:

“The information provider grants you a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, non-exclusive licence to use the information, including for commercial purposes...”

First Nations Governance Information Center
http://fnigc.ca/about-fnigc/vision.html

Vision: “every First Nation will achieve data sovereignty in alignment with its distinct worldview.”

OCAP principles: ownership – control – access - preservation
Discussion (observations)

• Empirical approach and social phenomena: alternate universes (for experiments) for wait for catastrophe (e.g. climate change)
• Policy development in capitalist, neoliberal, neocolonial context without critical thought tends to replicate these social trends
• Critical dialectics (logic focusing on contradictions in social context): logical predictions, assess social impacts, and plan more rationally
• Note that critical dialectics fits contemporary Western society; may not be needed in holistic, rational society (Horkheimer, Adorno)
Recommendations

• Practice critical dialectics in policy development
• Teach critical dialectics
• Abandon policy driving ubiquitous open licensing including for commercial purposes
• Start with broad social questions e.g.: equity, decolonization, address climate change
• Develop context-specific and flexible approaches designed to fit both open and social goals (e.g. support First Nations data sovereignty; degrees of “open” a decision for each Nation)
Thank you

Thank you for listening. Here are my coordinates if you would like to discuss further:

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https://uniweb.uottawa.ca/?lang=en#/members/706
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Selected references


