

## Case study

### Accessing pirated papers for research

SOURCE: Ivars Neiders & Signe Mežinska

Johanna is a leading researcher in a research institution at an East European university. The university library has subscribed to some most important journals in the area of Johanna's research, however, due to budgetary reasons some relevant outlets are missing. To access the papers that are not available via her university library Johanna uses Sci-Hub described in Wikipedia as a "shadow library website that provides free access to millions of research papers and books without regard to copyright." Sci-Hub was created in 2011 by Alexandra Elbakyan. The source is used by a huge number of people - in 2019 the site reported that it has served approximately 400 000 requests per day. On its website, Sci-Hub claims that as of June 2 of 2022, its database consists of 88 343 822 research articles and books. Some members and open-access advocates have praised the efforts of Elbakyan. For example, Michael Eisen, a biologist at the University of California has said to the "Nature" that "What she did is nothing short of awesome. Lack of access to the scientific literature is a massive injustice, and she fixed it with one fell swoop." Many publishing companies, however, have sued Elbakyan and claimed that what she does is illegal.

Johanna shares the sentiment expressed by Eisen. If confronted by the argument that Sci-Hub violates copyrights, Johanna points out that all academic publishing is based on a model that she thinks is immoral. Most of the research is funded by the public, she says, and it is not fair if people have to pay to access the research results. That is like paying twice for the same thing. Her opponents, however, point out that to some extent Johanna is right, but that does not justify either Johanna's using the pirated papers or Elbakyan's piracy.

### Questions for discussion:

1. Evaluate the argument provided by Johanna in her defence for using Sci-Hub! Can you add any other reasons why she might be right?
2. What reasons can you mention for Johanna being wrong? Evaluate the arguments pro and contra Johanna's view on the issue!
3. What makes Sci-Hub so popular? Using Sci-Hub violates copyrights, but it seems clear that a simple ban on using it doesn't work. What would be the best solution to this problem at the policy level?