

CENTRAL *and*
EASTERN
EUROPEANS *in*

Pirate Libraries

Pirate e-book libraries enable historically unprecedented access to the best scholarly knowledge, which CEE countries are definitely taking advantage of. Who is using these libraries and for what reasons? Unique data on pirate library use helps answer these questions.

BODÓ BALÁZS

The Russian part of the Internet conceals many of the biggest pirated text collections ever created by humanity (Bodó, 2015). A few closely interconnected websites commit copyright infringement but free and unlimited access to millions of books, literary works, and scholarly publications in DRM-free pdf or epub formats. They were assembled by devoted scholars and other individuals who have been digitizing and sharing their private book collections ever since the appearance of PCs and the Internet in the 1990s. Digital collections that accumulated on private hard drives and departmental and institutional servers were collected and compiled by pirate librarians in the late 2000s, and, as a result, these illegal text collections that operate in the shadows have become the largest and most accessible digital text collections mankind has ever produced.

FROM RUSSIA, WITH LOVE

It is by no means an accident that most of these pirate libraries are on Russian servers, and that many of the leading pirate librarians seem to be of Russian origin. It would be a mistake to attribute this to the fact that copyright protection was slow to develop in post-Soviet Russia; even after it

was brought in line with international standards, copyright enforcement remains weak and selective. Although these factors certainly explain why pirate libraries currently enjoy relative safety in Russia, they say little about the environment that fostered their creation and enabled their development. To understand this we must take into account the historical and social factors that created the ideal environment for pirate librarianship.

The first of these factors is the communist approach to access to knowledge. The importance of providing access to knowledge with as few limitations as possible was already enshrined in the first Soviet authors' right law (Elst, 2005). The high moral claim was, of course, quickly tainted by the practice of harsh political censorship (Dewhirst & Farrell, 1973; Stelmakh, 2001) and the continuous economic hardships (Friedberg, Watanabe & Nakamoto, 1984) that restrained access to works even when they were not censored. However, these two limitations taught people living in these societies how to bypass and overcome the political and economic hurdles that limited their access to books. Both participation in informal samizdat distribution networks and the exchange of books on grey/black markets belonged to the everyday experience of the Eastern European intelligentsia.



Illustration: Ola Nrepsuj

THE HIGHEST PIRATE LIBRARY USERS

in terms of overall download volume from a single piratical text collection between March–May 2012

COUNTRY	SHARE OF TOTAL DOWNLOADS BETWEEN MARCH-MAY 2012
RUSSIA	12.8%
INDONESIA	110.3%
UNITED STATES	10.2%
INDIA	6.6%
IRAN	5.1%
EGYPT	4.2%
CHINA	4.2%
GERMANY	4.1%
UNITED KINGDOM	3.1%
UKRAINE	2.5%
TURKEY	2.4%
FRANCE	2.4%
POLAND	2.1%
ITALY	2.0%
CANADA	1.6%

ANYONE HAVE A BETTER IDEA?

Although legal access conditions have improved to a considerable extent in recent years, the overwhelming majority (68%) of the pirate library catalogue is still inaccessible in e-book format. The costs of institutional subscriptions to publisher-provided electronic book repositories are often prohibitive, even for the most affluent universities. Print books are increasingly priced and sold to libraries rather than individuals. These constraints sharply separate the haves from the have-nots, and most CEE countries are still among the have-nots when it comes to access to the most recent and relevant scholarly publications. Pirate libraries fill the current gap between supply and demand. They are based on the contributions of

THE HIGHEST PIRATE LIBRARY USERS

in terms of per capita download from a single piratical text collection between March–May 2012

COUNTRY	DOWNLOADS PER 1000 PERSONS
LITHUANIA	2.9295
ESTONIA	2.2703
SWEDEN	1.9292
GREECE	1.5744
BARBADOS	1.5330
LATVIA	1.4921
SLOVENIA	1.4789
ICELAND	1.3448
LUXEMBOURG	1.2829
CROATIA	1.1931
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	1.1812
MACEDONIA, FYR	1.1113
HUNGARY	1.0101
BULGARIA	0.9889

individuals and take the non-commercial sharing ethos seriously. The catalogues of these libraries are already huge, and they are growing at an impressive speed. Their illegality, however, puts scholars, researchers, students, and interested readers in a difficult position. To pirate or not to pirate may be a straightforward decision if the work in question is Lady Gaga's latest hit, and the legal alternative to piracy is YouTube. The dilemma becomes much more difficult if one needs access to the latest advances in cancer research and there is no physical or electronic copy in sight. /

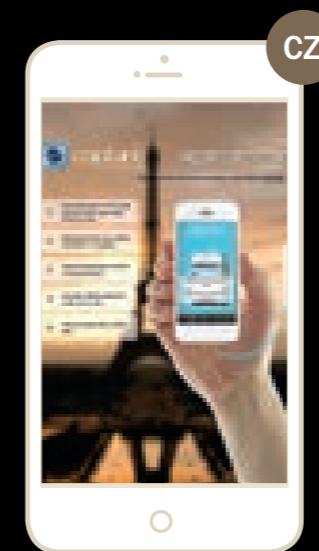
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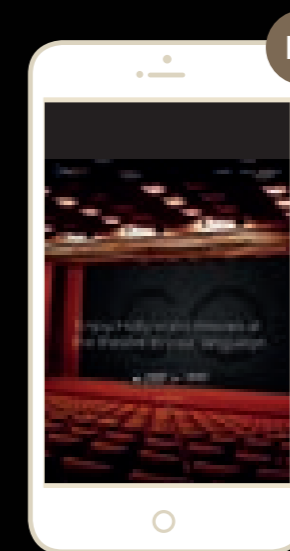
TECHNOLOGY DAILY: BEST NEW APPS

RECOMMENDED BY VISEGRAD INSIGHT EDITORS AND NEW EUROPE 100 TEAM MEMBERS



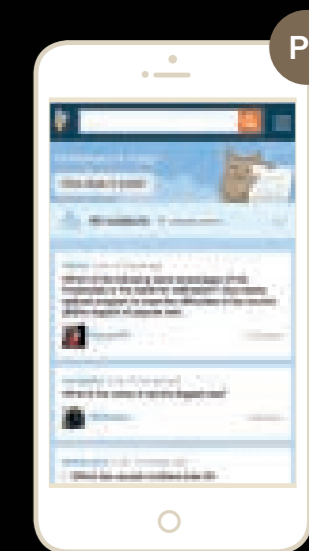
CAPTURIO
from Czech Republic

Take a snap in front of Hradčany Castle in Prague and send it as a traditional postcard in an envelope.



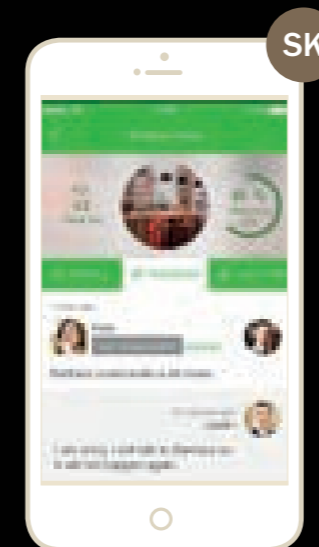
MYLINGO
from the U.S./Poland

17-year old Polish-American Harvard dropout Olenka Polak created an app to go to the movies with her non-English speaking relatives. The app synchronizes subtitles in the film screened in the cinema, so that anyone can enjoy the entertainment despite their language ability.



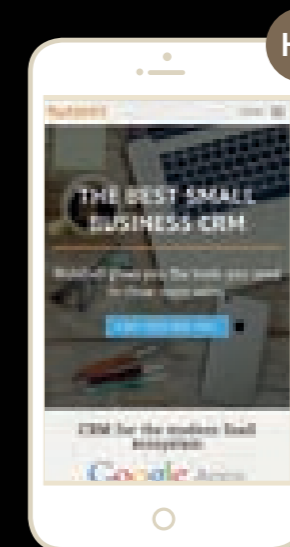
BRAINLY.COM
from Poland

It's more fun to do homework together. This social service learning allows students to learn math, chemistry, and physics based on mutual cooperation with their peers.



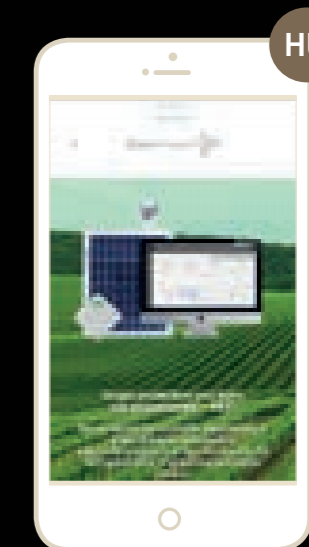
STAFFINO
from Slovakia

Useful for both restaurant owners and guests, this application is a simple tool to rate the quality of service when you are waiting for your pierogi.



NUTSHELL
from Hungary

Tell your story in a nutshell with an application that turns photos into a cinematic narrative. Brought to you by Prezi founder Peter Arvai.



SMARTVINEYARD
from Hungary

Precision viticulture technology for grape disease monitoring. A must-have for all vineyard owners and wine aficionados.

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