

Max Planck Society Joins Forces With Projekt DEAL, Cancels Contract With Elsevier

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Over the last several years, the push to shift to an open access model of publishing has been growing. As part of this trend, numerous major research and academic institutions in Germany have cancelled their contracts with Elsevier. Projekt DEAL is a consortium of these institutes seeking a national licensing agreement with Elsevier. Besides the agreement, the institutes also demand a change in the subscription model to promote open access. Now, the stakes have been raised as the Max Planck Society agreed on December 19, 2018 [not to renew its contract](#) with the publishing giant. What does this fight mean for researchers in Europe, and for model of [academic publishing](#) as a whole?

Germany's Push for Open Access Publishing

Academic publishing is a very lucrative business, with some libraries paying as much as \$1,000 per year just to access one title. Elsevier is a formidable powerhouse of academic publishing, with more than 2,500 journals in its database issuing over 400,000 papers each year. [Projekt DEAL](#) has been working for two years now to try to negotiate a better deal with Elsevier, asking to pay a single, annual national fee. Under the deal they are proposing, all German publications would be converted to open access and all German researchers would have access to Elsevier publications in what is called the “[publish and read](#)” model. As Elsevier pays for neither the research nor the papers, this seems like a fair deal to academic institutions and researchers.

The Max Planck Society is a huge part of the German research market, which is one of the strongest in Europe. The Society has been demonstrating ongoing support for Projekt DEAL. In a strong show of support for the DEAL negotiations, 13 prominent Max Planck Society scientists [resigned from their positions as editors](#) and members of the editorial and advisory boards of Elsevier journals in 2017. The Max Planck Society's Elsevier subscription expired at the end of 2018, and they chose not to renew. Gerard Meijer, director at Max Planck Society's Fritz Haber Institute, is in favor of the decision. He is also a member of the DEAL negotiation team. According to him, today's system of scholarly publishing is a relic of the print era, and calls for a new model that is [appropriate for the digital age](#).

An Ongoing Battle

The last several years have witnessed a fierce battle. The 60+ Projekt DEAL members [cancelled their subscriptions in 2017](#), although they briefly renewed as negotiations continued. In July of 2018, Elsevier decided to play hardball and [cut off access](#) of the German negotiators to their database. Currently, nearly 200 German institutions have allowed their subscriptions to expire, and the negotiations have reached a standstill. Now the Max Planck Society has joined forces in the fight for “publish and read”.

Several major publishers including Springer Nature and the Royal Society of Chemistry have already struck agreements to change their subscription models. However, Elsevier continues to hold firm. The Max Planck Society has stated they have an alternative plan in mind while negotiations continue. It is also worth noting that Elsevier [faces pressure from Sci Hub](#), an illegal open access platform.

What Happens Now?

It's hard to say who will win this battle. But with the current situation, it seems the institutions and researchers have a good chance of winning some concessions. Growing for the [OA2020 initiative](#) is helping their cause. It seems clear that change is in the air. 2019 will possibly be a big year in the academic publishing world.

What do you think of the Max Planck Society's support for Projekt DEAL? Do you support the move towards open access? Let us know your thoughts in the comments below.

Cite this article

Enago Academy, Max Planck Society Joins Forces With Projekt DEAL, Cancels Contract With Elsevier. Enago Academy. 2019/01/08. <https://www.enago.com/academy/max-planck-society-joins-forces-with-projekt-deal-cancels-contract-with-elsevier/>