

Springer Nature's new CEO

Frank Vrancken Peeters: A Round Table Talk

by Thomas Mutschler

The present article features an interview of Springer Nature's new CEO Frank Vrancken Peeters and a round table talk, hosted by *GeSIG – Netzwerk Fachinformation e.V.* on 17 October 2019. The event was moderated by GeSIG chairman Thomas Mutschler and took place during this year's Frankfurt Bookfair. It documents a discussion not only about Springer Nature and its strategic direction, but also about broader changes in scholarly communication and the consequences of the Open Access Transformation and DEAL.

› **Thomas Mutschler (GeSIG):** After becoming Springer Nature's new CEO a few weeks ago, what can we expect from the new management of Springer Nature? What will you do differently?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters (Springer Nature):** Everything will be hundred percent different (laughing) ... I joined Springer Nature about two years ago. I think the way we work is very team oriented: Our strategy and the things we feel are important, we agree upon as a team, the one who leads has to support the team. In that sense the path that we took a couple of years ago is still our path. Leadership in Open Access is of course critical for us. We believe it's the right model for the future. If you could roll back time maybe one could find that Open Access would have been the right model from the start. But at the same time, we shouldn't forget that we also have journals like *Nature* in our portfolio which is also very important for us. Every year we very successfully build our journal and book portfolio. We lead the field of digital books and are the largest scientific book publisher. So that's important for us as well. More recently we've also started looking at new research solutions, for example at language editing solutions for researchers to help them write their manuscripts. These are the areas we've focused on in the last couple of years and we hold course.

› **Thomas Mutschler:** At the moment not only the librarians are very excited about the negotiations with Springer Nature in the context of DEAL. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Project DEAL and Springer Nature has been signed. It has made the way free towards the world's largest Publish And Read agreement for journals. What are the next steps?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** First of all we are extremely happy with the agreement. Mainly for two



Thomas Mutschler (GeSIG) und Frank Vrancken Peeters (Springer Nature)

reasons. We think it's good for German science. As a result of this agreement the visibility of German science will improve. That's what we have seen from the usage, when you compare the citation of Open Access articles within the same portfolio with subscription articles which are behind a paywall, you see that the Open Access articles get more visibility. And that's first of all definitely a goal of DEAL. Second, there is access to all our content. We already opened access to our journal portfolio since 2018 within the interim solution and we see more usage. Researchers in Germany should be able to publish Open Access within our portfolio. At the same time it grants everybody access to the Springer Nature Journals.

› **Thomas Mutschler:** We saw a lot of action around DEAL in August 2019. Now we are having the Frankfurt Bookfair. So time is moving on. When will the agreement be signed?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** DEAL is a very complicated process. You have the different institutes that



Martina Näkel



Kim Steinle



Dagmar Laging



Susanne Göttker

need to agree. We have set-up work streams agreed with the MPDL. And to be honest the spirit is very good. We are all very confident that we are able to hold our deadline.

» **Dagmar Laging (Springer Nature):** Our joint aim is to be able to publish the first Open Access articles in January 2020. That means a couple of weeks prior to this we need to have an agreement in place so that we can turn on the switch for the submission of articles to peer review and then publishing them so that they are available Open Access in January. So with 30 to 40 people involved on our side we are working in different projects. And it's the same way for DEAL. It's a huge project. We are working on different levels to get everything aligned.

» **Thomas Mutschler:** The library community was surprised that the deal with Wiley came earlier than the one with Springer Nature. Was that a surprise to you as well?

» **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** I think everybody moves at their own pace. I guess DEAL was talking to different parties. We learnt from it, they learnt from it. In that sense it's always surprising. At the same time, we had from the beginning good relationships, good conversations. We knew that at some stage we would come to an agreement. That was also the idea of the prolongation of the contract that we had.

» **Thomas Mutschler:** Let's have a closer look at the

Plan S initiative. What impact will this have on scientific publishing and how will the landscape look after the initial three years period of DEAL?

» **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** There is still some way to go. We are at an early stage having just signed the Memorandum of Understanding. Our current energy is focused on the success of the current project. When we look three years ahead, first of all let's hope that everyone will be happy and that people will agree that this was an important achievement, and that we feel we have realised the goal we initially had. That's priority number one. What will happen after three years? I think it's difficult to say. I have been in scientific publishing for about 25 years. We had the same question 25 years ago in the context of print. Will print go away? If one was a bit bold, one would maybe have said five years, if one was a bit more conservative one would maybe have said ten years. Now we are 25 years later and there is still a substantial part of print. It's not that huge, in journals it's pretty limited, but in the book sector it's still big. At the end, when I look at DEAL it took all together about three to four years. I think these developments cannot be forced. They take time. In Europe, in most of the countries we have transformative agreements – especially in Northern Europe – how quickly others will join is difficult to say. What was very helpful in Germany is that we really had a very committed and a very decisive team around DEAL. All people were very committed to make DEAL work. In this process you have ups and downs. Three years looks long but in reality they pass by very quickly.



Ben Ashcroft



Tommy Doyle



Philipp Neie



Cary Bruce

› **Thomas Mutschler:** What do you say when research-intensive institutions expect exploding costs after the initial three years period?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** First of all when you look at the reading part there are a lot of countries and geographies that do not switch to Open Access. Whether we like it or not, there will be content behind paywalls. When we look at constructions like DEAL, it's not the problem because everyone has access. But if you look at the pace or the policies countries have they are quite different: some countries favor the green way, some countries are happy with the subscription model, and we feel that it's our obligation that we make sure that we meet the needs of everybody, that's what we try to do. When I look at the situation you describe regarding very research-intensive institutions, that's exactly what we need: the cost of publishing is to some extent a central part of research. There needs to be an alignment between funders, librarians and publishers, the role of the funders leads to a re-alliancing. Good effects of DEAL. Everybody is able to publish Open Access.

› **Sybille Geisenheyner (Royal Society of Chemistry):** That is also a quite relevant point. Now you have the scenario that in the portfolios of DEAL all journals have the same conditions. But then you have small publishers outside of DEAL and the scientist does not have the money to publish the article, and neither the library or at least not for hybrid Open Access. So what is the scientist going to do? They are moving towards

DEAL publishers as they can comply with their institutional or funder requirements. Because of this those publishers who are not in deals like this might suffer from less submissions, less articles, less income. Those are the things which are having an effect.

› **Cary Bruce (EBSCO):** Let me follow it up with a comment. For me it looks like we are now seeing a shift in the competitive structure of the industry. We are not competing anymore for the reader, but we are competing for the author. Do you see that?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** I think it's both. Traditionally the way publishers work was very much author-focused. Then with the transformation from print to digital, publishers became more aware of their users and how users get access. It shifted a little bit more towards end-users and customers. Now with Open Access it is getting more in the middle again. Why? I think it's very important that customers are happy and end-users feel that they have easy access, that's why you still need a publishing platform. The competition for authors has always been there which is healthy, I mean that's the way it should be. If you look at the speed of the transformation, I think it will take time. It's a little bit like the shift from print to digital.

› **Cary Bruce:** It will be interesting to see how many of the less research-intensive institutions will sign up for DEAL on the ongoing basis as soon as it becomes more standard.



Sybille Geisenheyner



› **Dagmar Laging:** I think in our case it will not be that much different to what we already see in the interim agreement. We had those institutions where we had a bilateral agreement. And of course they all came on board. But we also see a lot of institutions we never had an agreement with before, which just ordered one journal or even none. All of these have also signed up for the interim agreement in order to have access to the whole content. That is what we expect will transform one-to-one into the DEAL environment. So it's no change on the access side.

› **Cary Bruce:** In the end if it's really Open Access, what will research intensive institutions do? They will have to bear a higher and higher burden.

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** That to some extent is the spirit behind Open Access: that the access to research is more or less seen as a part of the research activity. But we need to find solutions that work for all.

› **Philipp Neie (Schweitzer Fachinformationen):** I would like to follow up to the economies and to the different disciplines. Within the APC models you have to pay for the publishing process, no matter if it's a wide spread journal or a very narrow focused journal. That will be more difficult for those areas where the journal prices were cheaper, because of the larger community using it or because of the whole peer reviewing process is easier. Do you foresee within the APC model that cost will vary in the future for the different disciplines?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** That's what we discussed with DEAL, it's one number.

› **Philipp Neie:** The content predominantly involved in DEAL is high priced STM, being Wiley, being Springer Nature, being Elsevier, the whole project was based on the high price big deal structure of things, not based on lower key journals. Within the price-setting you can leverage the less expensive titles because you have these expensive journals to make an average which works for everybody. Now if you have a setting with only very moderate prices and you don't have the leverage from the expensive ones the question is could the model still function at that price point, if the authors don't have the money to pay the price.

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** First of all, DEAL does not comprise just STM. The price is not based on the journal, it was essentially the scope of the journals involved. And the humanities and the social sciences are included. I think that's the positive side of DEAL, it makes Open Access publishing accessible for every scientist in Germany, that is the mission DEAL has. Also within the pure Open Access journals you see a wide spread in the APCs, it depends on the structure and the amount of work for the journal, prices will continue to be different.

› **Tommy Doyle (EBSCO):** I am worried we are not focusing on the biggest problems. There are very important moral arguments around Open Access,

but there are several fundamental issues the way research isn't working today and Open Access doesn't fully solve them. Three issues we see; utility – articles themselves aren't the actual research they are just adverts for it. They don't include the fundamental components of how results are created, verified and reproduced. Provenance – we don't have a good view of who did what, when. This is critical for building trust, resilience and scalability in the system. The final is attribution, how can we really measure the impact of research activities and allocate resources effectively? We see these problems already playing out in some corporate spaces and subject areas; researchers don't use journals anymore, to them they are old, slow and not verifiable or useful. These researchers focus on verifiable datasets, protocols, code, cell lines etc. So yes, we need to help support open sustainably but we need to be addressing the bigger issues facing research.

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** The step towards making at least the article available is the precondition to move further to Open Science. That's why we have data services to share data sets. I think that will be the path forward, getting standards. If you look at the goals of preprint servers, if you look at services around the article, these areas will grow, but Open Access is the first step forward. Without this step it's very difficult to get to the rest.

› **Thomas Mutschler:** What consequences does this development have let's say on the identity of a publisher? What consequences does it have on Springer Nature?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** To some extent publishers are all technology companies. The impact of technology is so huge in the way we provide service, how we can support scientists in their workflows. Innovations are very important, it's important to provide workflows for scientists, for example what we do in terms of language editing services, data services. I think this is all quite critical going forward. In that sense Springer Nature is a technology-enabled company. At the same time our passion is of course publishing. That determines our values and how we work. That's the transformation we are all going through.

› **Sybille Geisenheyner:** What we do have is a lot of very valuable data. But to have the financial power to create something is another question. That's where bigger corporations like Springer Nature are in a complete different position. If you look at the companies

you added to your portfolio it's like buying the knowledge to create an environment you just described. I think we as publishers must improve to describe how we add value to content and data in order to create quality. That's something I completely miss in the discussion.

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** I would say trust. Trust is in this context may be the better word than quality.

› **Susanne Goettker (University und State Library Duesseldorf):** Isn't it the trust in the reputation of your journals?

› **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** Yes, but also trust in us as a company. In the end the responsibility publishers feel is extremely high. In this regard there is no difference between Springer Nature, Wiley, Elsevier or the society publishers. We are all extremely committed to doing a great job and doing it in a very trustworthy, responsible, sustainable way. That's a given because it's the most important value we have.

› **Thomas Mutschler:** Let's focus more on the humanities and the social sciences. What impact does DEAL have and do transformative actions have on smaller publishers?

› **Martina Näkel (Walter de Gruyter):** These developments have dramatic consequences on publishers in the second or third row. What is happening in the context of DEAL means a lot to publishers with a strong focus on the humanities and social sciences. Right now we are also negotiating transformative agreements, but when thinking about year four or five of such agreements, publishers with a portfolio in the humanities are quite concerned because the conditions in funding are completely different than in the STM areas. In any case DEAL will also increase expectations also on publishers with focus on the humanities.

› **Kim Steinle (Duke University Press):** It's not just a lack of funding, that the researchers are concerned about, but also lack of resources. Thus larger publishers are able to experiment more. For us the situation is different as we have to serve print and digital, now we figure out what we are going to do about Plan S and transformative agreements. While smaller publishers have the will to do it, the resources are just not there. That's an additional worry to publishers primarily focused on the humanities. What happens to those publishers as they see larger publishers doing these deals and money flowing into these deals?

They feel the squeeze out on the author's as well as on the reader's level. That's not new for smaller publishers, but the serious concern is, that they are doing okay, but some of them not for profit, so they don't have a lot of extra experimentation money. From their perspective, libraries are getting their content from fewer and fewer players. So the diversity of content may continue to become smaller.

» **Ben Ashcroft (Walter de Gruyter):** The squeeze out which has already happened to some extent on the access and readership level accelerates on the authorship's side. It's a natural consequence that this will lead to further consolidation on the publisher's side. The concern is that there will be less choice for authors where to publish. From our perspective, money currently available to authors and also to smaller publishers will come out of the system as a result of DEAL. I don't expect Springer Nature to feel sorry for the rest of the industry, it's more a question for DEAL.

» **Frank Vrancken Peeters:** That's something where funders have to chip in as well, because you cannot

have both: You cannot say, well, I keep the system as it is, but now everything should be Open Access. The fact is that funders have to take their responsibility as well. But there should still be funding available for subscription journals and the authors should still have the choice if they want to publish Open Access or not.

» **Thomas Mutschler:** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for the discussion, and Mr. Peeters for the interview.

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Linda Freyberg und Sabine Wolf (Hrsg.)

Smart Libraries Konzepte, Methoden und Strategien

Vor über drei Jahren haben die Herausgeberinnen ihr erstes Seminar zu den Smarten Bibliotheken oder, wie sie es nennen, zu den Smart Libraries veranstaltet. Und seitdem stellten sie Ihr Konzept bei verschiedenen Bibliothekartagen und bei Workshops in Institutionen wie dem ZBIW oder der TH Köln vor. Das Interesse an diesem Thema hat sich im Rahmen eines gemeinsamen Forschungsprojekts zu Augmented Reality in Informationseinrichtungen mylibrARy (2014-2017) herausgebildet und sich erstmalig als theoretisches Blockseminar an der Fachhochschule Potsdam manifestiert. Am Beispiel einer Bibliotheksapp, die im Rahmen des Forschungsprojekts konzipiert wurde, stellten sie fest, dass bei jeder Form von Innovation und dem Einsatz von neuen Technologien generell, diese keinen Selbstzweck darstellen dürfen, sondern Teil einer individuellen analog-digitalen Gesamtstrategie sein müssen, die man am besten mit der Idee einer Smart Library beschreiben kann. Der Begriff „smart“ wird in vielen Bereichen für zeit- oder ressourcensparende Eigenschaften genutzt, die mit Innovation und Technologieeinsatz oder auch mit Vollautomatisierung verschiedener Lebensbereiche assoziiert werden.

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