



# The "Big Deal" in Scientific Journal Subscriptions and the Transition to Transformative Agreements

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## Abstract

This report examines the ongoing transformation in scholarly publishing, focusing on the decline of the traditional "Big Deal" journal subscription model and the rise of transformative agreements (TAs) and open access (OA) alternatives. The transition toward OA reflects a broader effort to democratize access to scientific knowledge, reduce financial barriers, and ensure equity in global research dissemination. However, while transformative agreements represent progress, they are not a panacea and may perpetuate systemic inequities if not critically implemented and supplemented by alternative models.

Transformative agreements, which combine subscription-based access with open access publishing provisions, are increasingly adopted by institutions seeking a more cost-effective and accessible model. These agreements align with initiatives like Plan S and respond to demands for immediate, unrestricted access to publicly funded research. Evidence suggests that TAs can reduce institutional costs—potentially by up to 30%—and provide more predictable budgeting for research output dissemination. Yet concerns persist about affordability, particularly due to Article Processing Charges (APCs), which may transfer the financial burden from institutions to individual researchers and marginalize scholars from underfunded institutions or low-income countries.

Given these limitations, the report explores alternative publishing models that may better address affordability and equity. The Diamond Open Access model, which eliminates charges for both authors and readers, is highlighted as a promising approach. It relies on funding from institutions, consortia, grants, and sponsorships, and aims to build a more inclusive system that ensures all researchers can publish and access work regardless of financial resources. Additionally, community-driven publishing initiatives are gaining traction, emphasizing collaboration, decentralization, and grassroots support. These models foster academic independence and knowledge sharing outside traditional commercial publishing frameworks.

The report also presents a detailed set of recommendations aimed at enhancing negotiation power and fostering a sustainable OA ecosystem, particularly for Latin American institutions. These include collective bargaining among universities and governments; incorporating OA clauses into contracts; developing centralized data collection systems for subscriptions and APCs; and formulating national policies that promote OA and fair pricing. Capacity-building through training negotiators, leveraging regional platforms such as SciELO and LA Referencia, and engaging in international collaboration are further proposed to strengthen strategic positioning. Advocacy campaigns are also recommended to raise awareness among researchers, policymakers, and the general public.

Ultimately, while transformative agreements offer a transitional solution, achieving a truly equitable and sustainable publishing system requires ongoing innovation, policy development, and institutional collaboration. Latin America, with its strong history of regional OA initiatives, is well positioned to lead in developing inclusive models that address the shortcomings of both the traditional subscription system and emerging APC-based approaches. The report underscores the need for a multipronged strategy that includes exploring alternative models like Diamond OA, supporting community-led publishing, and building capacity for negotiation and advocacy. By doing so, the academic community can move closer to an open, fair, and globally inclusive system of scholarly communication.

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## Introduction to the "Big Deal" in Journal Subscriptions

The concept of the "Big Deal" in journal subscriptions emerged in the late 1990s as a dominant model for academic institutions to access scientific research publications. A "Big Deal" refers to a bulk purchasing agreement between academic libraries and large publishing houses, where institutions pay for access to a bundle of journals rather than subscribing to individual titles <sup>1</sup>. While this model initially provided cost savings and broader access to content, over time, concerns about its sustainability, cost inflation, and restrictive nature surfaced.

The "Big Deal" offered publishers a steady revenue stream, while libraries gained access to a large volume of journals at fixed prices. However, the increase in journal prices—commonly referred to as the "serials crisis"—strained library budgets, limiting their ability to diversify their resources. Librarians began criticizing the inflexibility of these deals, as they were often locked into long-term contracts that did not accommodate evolving research needs or shrinking budgets <sup>2</sup>.

The 2019 EUA Big Deals Survey Report <sup>3</sup>, explored major scientific publishing contracts in Europe. It provided data from 31 consortia in 30 European countries, detailing pricing, terms, and negotiation practices for "Big Deals" with publishers. The report highlights increasing subscription costs, open access trends, and challenges faced by universities in negotiating sustainable deals. Key issues include the growing financial burden on institutions and the need for transparency and collective bargaining to address the imbalance between publishers and research institutions.

The report breaks down the state of "Big Deals" for academic journal subscriptions in various European countries as follows:

1. Austria: Austrian institutions engage in large consortia deals, with open access being a central negotiating point.
2. Belgium: Focuses on striking balance between subscription costs and open access, with national efforts to manage costs.
3. Denmark: Institutions here take a strong stance in negotiations, advocating for open access.
4. Finland: Has been active in renegotiating deals to lower costs and increase open access provisions.
5. France: French institutions aim for transparency in pricing and have seen some success in shifting toward open access agreements.
6. Germany: Germany's academic sector is known for strong negotiations and pushing for open access as part of deals. Many deals have been struck with transformative components.
7. Ireland: Irish institutions are in the early stages of large-scale negotiations but show increasing interest in open access deals.

8. Italy: Focuses on cost control and ensuring equitable access for smaller institutions.
9. Netherlands: A leader in open access negotiations, with Dutch universities known for securing favourable terms with publishers.
10. Norway: Actively works on reducing overall subscription costs while maintaining or expanding access, with growing support for open access.
11. Portugal: Portuguese institutions focus on achieving affordability and maintaining access while negotiating better deals.
12. Spain: Aims for better transparency and reducing costs, with increasing pressure to incorporate open access.
13. Sweden: Sweden is highly active in negotiating open access deals, and their national strategy prioritizes affordability and access.

Each country's approach is tailored to their respective national priorities, focusing largely on affordability, transparency, and promoting open access publishing models.

## Challenges and Criticisms of the "Big Deal"

Several key issues underpin the criticism of the "Big Deal" model:

- **Rising Costs:** Publishers have increased subscription costs over the years, often at rates significantly higher than inflation. This trend has reduced the purchasing power of academic libraries<sup>4</sup>. The growing financial burden of "Big Deals" means that many libraries have been forced to cut other essential services or resources to maintain access.
- **Inflexibility:** Institutions may be required to subscribe to a bundle of journals, many of which are irrelevant to their specific research areas. This limits libraries' ability to customize their collections according to the needs of their researchers<sup>5</sup>
- **Access Inequality:** While the "Big Deal" may offer greater access to subscribing institutions, non-subscribing entities, especially in low-income countries, are often excluded from accessing crucial research, exacerbating global inequalities in scholarly communication<sup>6</sup>.

## Advantage of "Unbundling" Big Deals

Universities are increasingly scrutinizing the value they derive from Big Deal licenses, leading to negotiations for transformative agreements that facilitate open access, while others opt to break down these bundled deals into a la carte options to cut costs and foster competition<sup>4,7</sup>. Unbundling in academic publishing has significant broader implications, particularly for the relationship between universities and major publishers. Here are the key implications:

**Cost Reduction for Institutions:** Unbundling allows universities to negotiate access to individual journal titles rather than paying for a comprehensive Big Deal license. This can lead to substantial cost savings, as evidenced by institutions like SUNY<sup>1</sup> and Iowa State<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/04/13/suny-cancels-big-deal-elsevier>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.inside.iastate.edu/article/2020/04/30/elsevier>

University, which reported reductions in fees of up to 70% and 41%, respectively. Such financial benefits can enable libraries to allocate resources more effectively.

***Increased Negotiation Power:*** By breaking away from bundled agreements, universities gain leverage in negotiations, allowing them to seek more favourable terms and explore a wider array of publishing options. This shift encourages competition among publishers, potentially leading to better pricing and service offerings.

***Fostering Open Access:*** Unbundling creates opportunities for universities to consider open access publishing on its own merits, rather than as an add-on to subscription services. This could lead to the development of "pure publish" agreements, where institutions can negotiate directly with various open access providers, promoting a more diverse and competitive publishing landscape.

## Latin America & The Big Deal

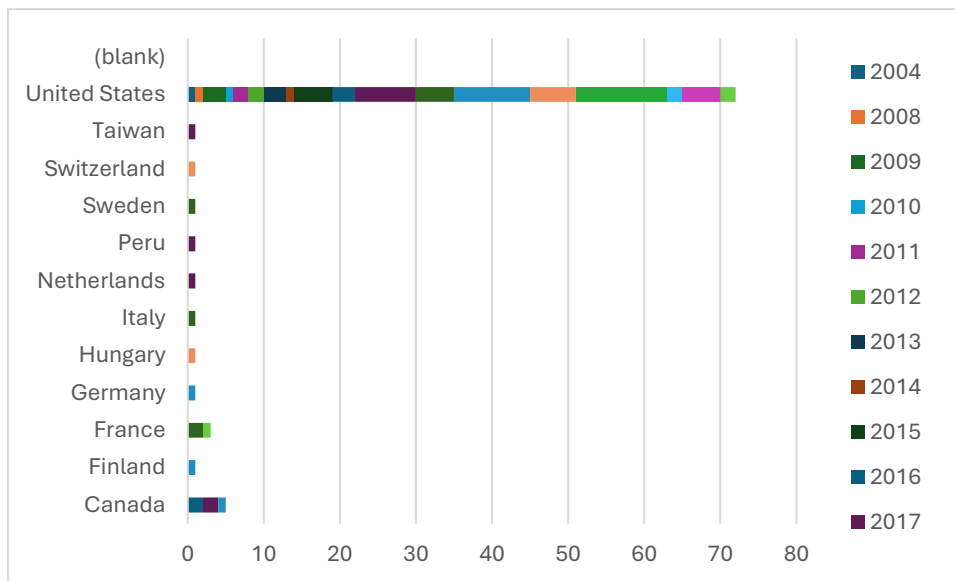
The First Regional Big Deals Survey 2019 <sup>3</sup> reports that 11 Latin American countries collectively spend over USD \$100 million annually on information resources, primarily directed to five major publishers, with a significant shift in negotiation expectations influenced by the Open Access movement. This survey revealed that these nations collectively spend over USD \$102 million annually on information resources, not including individual university subscriptions. Notably, a substantial 79% of this expenditure is directed toward agreements with five major academic publishers. The survey highlighted the pivotal role of governments in these negotiations, with 46% of them participating in what are termed "Big Deals." Universities and consortia follow closely behind, involved in 36% of these negotiations. Additionally, over half (55%) of the countries have established committees responsible for overseeing negotiations for electronic resources, often consisting of information specialists and consortium representatives.

Interestingly, while 73% of the countries surveyed have national open access strategies in place, only a small portion of Big Deal contracts incorporate provisions for open access. Furthermore, the reported total annual expenditure likely underrepresents the true financial commitment, as comprehensive data collection on contracts and Article Processing Charges (APCs) remains inadequate. This lack of thorough data gathering presents challenges in fully understanding the landscape of academic publishing and access to information resources in the region. Despite robust government and university involvement in negotiating Big Deals, challenges remain, such as the lack of data collection on expenditures for Article Processing Charges (APCs) and the need for tailored public policies to improve scientific communication in the region.

The study highlights the importance of incorporating open access clauses in future contracts to better serve national strategies for academic resources and underscores the urgent need for improved policies and strategies to strengthen scientific communication and make Latin American research more visible. <sup>8</sup>

In 2017, scientists in Germany, Peru, and Taiwan faced significant challenges accessing Elsevier journals due to failed licensing negotiations and funding cuts. In Germany, the

DEAL consortium sought a nationwide open-access agreement but was unable to reach terms with Elsevier, while Taiwanese universities collectively boycotted the publisher over high fees. In Peru, the National Council for Science, Technology, and Technological Innovation (CONCYTEC) struggled to maintain its Elsevier subscription due to cuts in federal government funding, rising subscription costs, and the increasing availability of free alternative copies of academic articles online. Additionally, Peru's economic growth disqualified it from the Hinari program, which offers discounted journal access to developing countries. As a result, federal licenses for Elsevier's Scopus and ScienceDirect databases, valued at \$3.3 million, were not renewed. This left Peruvian scientists without access, leading many to turn to illegal platforms like Sci-Hub, underscoring the urgent need for affordable access to scientific research<sup>9</sup>.



*Big Deals cancellations: <https://bigdeal.sparcopen.org/cancellations>*

## Impact on Publisher Revenue Models:

As universities move towards unbundling, major publishers may face revenue declines, prompting them to reassess their pricing strategies. This could lead to a re-evaluation of how publishers package their offerings and the value they provide, potentially resulting in more transparent and equitable pricing models.

**Market Dynamics:** The trend towards unbundling may disrupt the current dominance of major publishers like Elsevier and Springer Nature, who have historically benefited from bundled agreements. As universities explore alternative publishing routes, new entrants may emerge, fostering innovation and diversity in academic publishing.

**Strategic Partnerships:** Libraries may seek to form strategic partnerships with publishers that align with their goals, such as enhancing open access initiatives. This could lead to more tailored agreements that meet the specific needs of institutions while also supporting the publishers' business models.

**Long-term Sustainability:** The shift towards unbundling may encourage a more sustainable academic publishing ecosystem, where the focus is on delivering value to institutions and researchers rather than maintaining high subscription fees. This could ultimately benefit the dissemination of knowledge and research outputs.

Unbundling represents a significant shift in the academic publishing landscape, with potential benefits for cost savings, negotiation power, open access promotion, and market dynamics, while also challenging traditional revenue models of major publishers.

## Open Access Mandates and Development in Latin America

Approximately two-thirds of Open Access investments in Latin America are sourced from public funding and international cooperation, mainly facilitated by national science agencies and universities. Since the 1980s, the region has established various regional subject repositories and multidisciplinary journal portals to enhance access to research outputs. Notable initiatives such as SciELO and Redalyc provide over 1,000 peer-reviewed journals at no cost to authors and users. Additionally, the number of institutional repositories is on the rise, with over 290 currently registered, which helps to elevate the visibility of local research.

Recent legal mandates in countries like Argentina and Peru now require publicly funded research to be deposited in Open Access repositories, further improving content availability. The creation of the La Referencia network aims to connect these repositories across several Latin American nations, promoting interoperability and accessibility. However, challenges remain, particularly in internet connectivity, which was only 52.4% on average in 2015, limiting broader access to Open Access resources.

The region has made significant strides in developing Open Access initiatives that provide free access to full-text scholarly and scientific publications from Latin America and the Caribbean for both authors and users. Key among these initiatives are multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal portals, primarily funded by public resources, which enable journals to enhance their online presence, gain international visibility, and improve editorial quality. As of September 2015, approximately 2,000 of the 10,529 Open Access journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) were from Latin America and the Caribbean, with around 1,000 from Brazil alone. Notable platforms like SciELO, established in 1997, and Redalyc, launched in 2002, collectively offer over 1,000 peer-reviewed journals in Open Access. These portals are also developing bibliometric indicators to complement traditional metrics used for evaluating researchers in the region. In addition to these regional portals, national platforms such as Brazil's SEER and institutional repositories at universities like the University of São Paulo, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and the University of Chile further contribute to the visibility and quality of scholarly output in Latin America.

Furthermore, national and regional thesis portals, often featuring electronic theses and dissertations, are common in digital repositories registered in ROAR and OpenDOAR, with significant initiatives in Brazil, Chile, and Peru promoted by UNESCO. Subject-specific

digital repositories have emerged since the 1980s, largely supported by United Nations agencies, and have evolved to include links to full-text resources. Examples include health-focused repositories like LILACS and BVS, agricultural databases such as AGRIS and SIDALC, and various others covering education, public management, and social sciences. More recent regional efforts, like Relpé for education and FLACSO for social sciences, as well as participation in international repositories like arXiv and E-LIS, further enrich the Open Access landscape in the region <sup>10</sup>

## Benefits of Open Access Publishing

Open access articles have been shown to significantly enhance research impact. Studies demonstrate that OA articles receive more citations than their subscription-based counterparts. For instance, comprehensive reviews found that open access articles garnered, on average, 18% more citations <sup>11,12</sup>. This increased visibility can lead to greater international collaborations, as researchers from diverse geographical locations can easily access and build upon one another's work.

Furthermore, the open access model has been linked to increased funding opportunities. Research indicates that grant agencies and funding bodies often prioritize projects that promote open access dissemination of results. For example, Wellcome Trust and The Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation now require all publications based on their funding to become Open Access <sup>13,14</sup>

## The Role of National Policies

To maximize the benefits of open access publishing, countries can adopt comprehensive open access policies. These policies can incentivize universities to publish in open access formats while ensuring that they have continued access to subscription-based journals. For instance, countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden have successfully implemented national strategies that promote open access publishing. These strategies not only streamline funding processes for OA initiatives but also establish clear guidelines for institutions regarding publication practices

A well-structured national open access policy can lead to a more equitable distribution of research outputs. It can ensure that publicly funded research is accessible to the public, fostering a culture of transparency and knowledge sharing. Additionally, such policies can reduce the financial burden on universities, as they can often negotiate better terms with publishers at a national level compared to individual institutions. <sup>15</sup>

## The Move Towards Open Access and Transformative Agreements

As the drawbacks of the "Big Deal" model became more apparent, there was a growing push towards open access (OA) to address issues related to the accessibility and affordability of scientific research. Open access aims to make scholarly articles freely available to the public, reducing barriers for readers. However, transitioning from a subscription-based system to a fully open access model has proven complex.

To facilitate this transition, many institutions have adopted transformative agreements. These agreements, often called "read and publish" or "publish and read" deals, are hybrid models designed to shift payment structures from subscription-based access to open access publishing. Under transformative agreements, institutions continue paying for access to journals, but they also cover article processing charges (APCs) for their researchers to publish open access articles <sup>16</sup>.

In a detailed article "The evolution and revision of big deals: a review from the perspective of libraries" <sup>17</sup> provides an in-depth analysis of the changing landscape of scientific publishing, focusing on the role of article processing charges (APCs) and the growing shift toward open access models. It highlights how APC prices have become a critical factor in scientific publishing, impacting authors' decisions and funders' budgeting strategies. For instance, prestigious journals tend to charge higher APCs, which can limit access for researchers with smaller budgets. The study also discusses how this pricing model creates disparities among institutions and countries, with wealthier organizations being able to afford high-cost journals, thus exacerbating inequalities in access to publication. It also examines how transformative agreements, which bundle subscription and open-access publishing, are becoming popular, though their costs and effectiveness remain points of debate.

Several countries, like Germany and the Netherlands, have been early adopters of transformative agreements, pushing for more transparency in pricing and more equitable access to open access publishing. However, the impact of these deals on APC pricing trends and overall costs for academic institutions remains unclear <sup>18</sup>.

The role of funders and institutions in guiding publishing practices is also crucial. There is a growing movement to promote more sustainable models that balance costs with the need to make research accessible. Efforts to align APCs with scientific value rather than perceived prestige are highlighted, but they are still in their early stages <sup>19</sup>. Overall, calls for more transparent pricing, wider adoption of transformative agreements, and policies that ensure equitable access to scientific knowledge, regardless of researchers' institutional or financial background. This shift is seen as critical for fostering a more inclusive and effective global scientific community.

In response to these challenges, the academic community has shifted toward open access (OA) to reduce barriers to scientific knowledge. This transition is often facilitated by transformative agreements, also known as "read and publish" or "publish and read" deals, which combine subscription access with open access publishing. These agreements cover both reading access to journals and article processing charges (APCs) for publishing OA articles (Fyfe et al., 2017).

## Overview of Early Adopters

Countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway have emerged as pioneers in negotiating transformative agreements, which play a crucial role in helping institutions manage costs while responding to the increasing demand for open science. These agreements facilitate a shift from traditional subscription-based models to open access publishing,

aligning with global initiatives like Plan S. Launched by cOAlition S, Plan S aims to ensure immediate open access for research funded by public or private grants while allowing authors to retain ownership of their copyrights.

Despite the progress made through transformative agreements, concerns regarding long-term sustainability persist, particularly related to escalating Article Processing Charges (APCs) and equitable access. Gruenpeter (2021) offers an insightful overview of these agreements, detailing their purpose of transforming the scholarly publishing landscape. The report outlines various national strategies for implementing transformative agreements, supported by case studies from Germany, Norway, and Sweden. Legal analyses presented in the study delve into critical aspects of these agreements, such as eligibility criteria, fee structures, and access rights. It underscores the necessity of transparency and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure a successful transition to open access publishing.

For transformative agreements to be effective, they must not only facilitate open access but also ensure perpetual access to previously published materials, thereby meeting the diverse needs of academic institutions. Collaboration among libraries, research institutions, and funding bodies is vital in negotiating these agreements to foster a sustainable open access framework. Moreover, ongoing monitoring of compliance with open access mandates and the adaptation of funding strategies will be essential to support this critical transition effectively

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Some examples:

1. **Germany:** The case study from Germany highlights the work done by the Max Planck Digital Library (MPDL), which has played a central role in negotiating transformative agreements with major publishers. Germany's focus has been on making research outputs open access by redirecting subscription expenditures toward publishing fees. The country has emphasized transparency in public fund use and sought to create sustainable models for scholarly communication.
2. **Norway:** In Norway, the Directorate for ICT and Joint Services in Higher Education and Research (Unit) has negotiated transformative agreements with publishers. The country has prioritized open access to publicly funded research, with an emphasis on managing publishing costs efficiently. Norway's agreements reflect a growing commitment to open science, aligning with the global push toward transparency and accessibility.
3. **Sweden:** Sweden's approach, led by the National Library of Sweden, has focused on achieving full and immediate open access for publicly funded research outputs. Sweden has been actively involved in initiatives like Plan S, which mandates that scientific publications must be openly accessible. Their transformative agreements aim to align national open-access policies with international standards.

These case studies illustrate different strategies in negotiating transformative agreements, but they share a common goal: advancing open access and ensuring cost-effective use of public funds in scholarly publishing. These countries have contributed significantly to the global

movement towards open science, setting examples for how others can approach the transition from subscription models to open access <sup>21</sup>.

## Advantages of Transformative Agreements

Transformative agreements represent a strategic response to the challenges posed by the traditional "Big Deal" model of journal subscriptions, offering a clear pathway toward achieving open access in scholarly publishing. These agreements specifically address several key concerns, making them an attractive option for academic institutions.

Cost Containment is a primary benefit of transformative agreements. By negotiating fixed rates for both access and publishing, these agreements enable institutions to manage their budgets with greater predictability. As Borrego et al. (2021) highlight, this predictability is essential in an era where research funding can be uncertain, allowing institutions to allocate resources more effectively without the fear of escalating costs associated with traditional subscription models.

Increased Open Access is another significant advantage offered by transformative agreements. These arrangements not only facilitate a gradual shift toward open access but also ensure that publisher revenue streams remain intact. Many transformative agreements stipulate that a certain percentage of articles published by researchers from participating institutions must be made openly accessible. This requirement is crucial in advancing the global open science movement, as it enhances the availability of research findings to the public while allowing publishers to maintain financial stability (Esposito, 2020). By increasing the volume of openly accessible research, transformative agreements contribute to a more equitable dissemination of knowledge.

Moreover, transformative agreements are designed to align with researcher needs. They provide dual benefits by allowing continued access to subscription-based content while enabling researchers to publish their work as open access without incurring additional fees. This aspect is particularly important, as many scholars face financial barriers when trying to publish open access, which can limit their ability to disseminate their research widely <sup>22</sup>. By removing these financial obstacles, transformative agreements encourage a broader range of researchers to participate in the open access model, ultimately enriching the academic community and enhancing the impact of research.

In summary, transformative agreements serve as a vital mechanism for addressing the limitations of the "Big Deal" subscription model. By containing costs, increasing open access, and aligning with the needs of researchers, these agreements not only facilitate a smoother transition to open access publishing but also contribute to a more sustainable and equitable scholarly communication landscape. As academic institutions continue to navigate the complexities of publishing, transformative agreements will play an essential role in shaping the future of open access.

## Challenges and Criticism of Transformative Agreements

While transformative agreements signify a positive advancement in the transition to open access publishing, they also present a series of challenges that warrant careful consideration.

One notable concern is cost shifting. Critics argue that while transformative agreements aim to alleviate the financial burden on libraries by moving toward open access, they often shift costs to researchers and their institutions in the form of Article Processing Charges (APCs). This change can perpetuate the cycle of rising costs, particularly for institutions with high publishing outputs, as highlighted by Fontúrbel & Vizentin-Bugon (2020). As more researchers publish their work open access, the cumulative APCs can strain institutional budgets, potentially leading to financial challenges similar to those faced under the traditional subscription model<sup>23</sup>.

Additionally, inclusion and equity issues arise with transformative agreements. These agreements may not adequately address the needs of all institutions, especially those with limited financial resources. Smaller institutions and those located in low-income countries often struggle to cover APCs, creating barriers for their researchers who wish to publish open access. This disparity can exacerbate existing inequities in scholarly publishing, as noted by Piwowar et al. (2019). If certain institutions cannot afford the costs associated with open access, their researchers may be disadvantaged, limiting the diversity of voices and research outputs in the academic landscape.

Finally, there are concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of transformative agreements. The viability of these agreements as a lasting solution to the broader issues of inequity and cost escalation in academic publishing is still under scrutiny. Some experts argue that transformative agreements may only provide a temporary fix rather than addressing the fundamental flaws in the publishing system (Suber, 2012). Without a more radical overhaul of the existing framework, the academic community may continue to grapple with the challenges of access and affordability.

In conclusion, while transformative agreements represent a significant move toward open access publishing, the challenges of cost shifting, inclusion and equity, and long-term sustainability must be critically addressed. For these agreements to truly fulfill their potential in democratizing access to research, stakeholders must work collaboratively to develop solutions that ensure equitable participation across all institutions, particularly those that are most vulnerable in the current publishing landscape.

## Transformative Agreements in Latin America

Transformative agreements (TAs) in Latin American universities are emerging as a key tool to increase open access (OA) to scientific research. For instance, Colombia has been at the forefront of this movement with its "Consortio Colombia" agreement. This consortium includes 59 higher education institutions and 3 research centers, aiming to expand access to scientific content through collaboration with international publishers like Springer Nature. The transformative agreement signed in 2022 with Springer Nature allows researchers in

Colombia to publish their work in over 2,000 hybrid journals, fostering global academic communication while promoting open access publishing.

<https://group.springernature.com/gp/group/media/press-releases/springer-nature-first-transformative-agreements-americas/20071678>

Another notable example comes from Brazil. Although not highlighted in recent transformative agreements like Colombia, Brazil has long been a strong advocate of open access through platforms like SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online). SciELO has made strides in enhancing the visibility of Latin American research, particularly in health and environmental sciences, though it operates independently from transformative agreements.

<https://www.springernature.com/gp/researchers/the-source/blog/blogposts-open-research/how-transformative-agreements-support-our-oa-transformation/18228320>

Mexico also plays an essential role in advancing OA in the region. The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has been part of several consortia aimed at increasing access to scientific publications. However, comprehensive transformative agreements, like those seen in European or North American institutions, are still relatively scarce in Mexico, as publishers and institutions work on establishing sustainable OA publishing models.

<https://group.springernature.com/gp/group/media/press-releases/springer-nature-first-transformative-agreements-americas/20071678>

These initiatives reflect broader trends across Latin America, where institutions increasingly recognize the importance of OA for advancing scientific research and reducing information inequality. However, the region still faces challenges, such as varying levels of investment in research infrastructure and navigating the high costs associated with some OA publishing models.

## Impacts of Open Access Mandates in Latin America

The current Open Access (OA) movement significantly impacts academic publishing negotiations in Latin America in several ways:

- 1. Transformation of Negotiation Expectations:** A substantial 82% of surveyed countries reported that their expectations regarding Big Deals negotiations have evolved due to the importance of the Open Access movement. This shift reflects a growing awareness and demand for more equitable access to research outputs.
- 2. Inclusion of Open Access Clauses:** Many countries are now actively seeking to include open access clauses in their contracts with major publishers. Despite 73% of the surveyed countries having national open access policies, 91% of the Big Deal contracts reviewed did not incorporate these aspects. This highlights a gap between policy intentions and actual contractual practices, indicating a need for more robust negotiations that align with OA principles.
- 3. Government and Institutional Involvement:** National governments are primarily responsible for negotiating Big Deals (46%), with universities and consortia also playing significant roles (36%). This collaborative approach is essential for leveraging collective

bargaining power against large publishers, particularly in light of the rising costs of subscriptions.

**4. Focus on Cost Control and Integrity of Collections:** Countries expressed concerns about cost reduction and maintaining the integrity of contracted collections. The OA movement has prompted institutions to prioritize negotiations that not only reduce costs but also ensure that access to research is maintained and improved.

**5. Challenges with Major Publishers:** The survey revealed that a significant portion of expenditures (79%) is directed towards five major publishers, with Elsevier being identified as particularly difficult to negotiate with. The pressure from the OA movement is pushing institutions to reconsider their reliance on these publishers and explore alternative models.

**6. Emergence of Alternative Access Routes:** The challenges posed by high subscription costs and limited access have led to increased use of alternative access routes, such as inter-library loans and platforms like Sci-Hub. While these methods provide temporary solutions, they underscore the urgent need for sustainable access models that align with OA principles.

**7. Call for Public Policy Interventions:** The survey authors emphasize the necessity for specific public policies to address the failures in the scientific communication market. They advocate for a more structured approach to negotiations that incorporates OA strategies, ultimately aiming to enhance the visibility and accessibility of Latin American research.

The Open Access movement is reshaping the landscape of academic publishing negotiations in Latin America by fostering a collective push for more equitable access, influencing contract terms, and highlighting the need for effective public policies to support scientific communication.

## The Future of Journal Subscriptions and Open Access

The transition from the "Big Deal" subscription model to transformative agreements represents a pivotal shift in the landscape of academic research access and dissemination. This movement is driven by the collective recognition among publishers and institutions that transformative agreements are vital for progressing toward a fully open access future. These agreements, which typically combine subscription access with open access publishing provisions, aim to balance the financial needs of publishers with the growing demand for accessible research.

Despite the promise of transformative agreements, there remains an ongoing debate about their effectiveness in addressing deeper systemic issues within scholarly publishing. Concerns about affordability persist, as some institutions find that the shift to paying Article Processing Charges (APCs) can lead to financial burdens that replicate the challenges faced under the traditional subscription model. Additionally, issues of accessibility and equity are paramount, as transformative agreements may not benefit all institutions equally. Smaller institutions and those in low-income regions often struggle to cover APCs, potentially leaving researchers from these backgrounds marginalized in the open access movement.

Looking forward, discussions around alternative open access models are gaining momentum. Notably, the *Diamond Open Access* model is emerging as a compelling alternative. In this model, neither readers nor authors are required to pay for access or publication, thereby eliminating the financial barriers associated with traditional APCs. By relying on alternative funding sources—such as institutional support, grants, or sponsorships—diamond open access aims to create a more inclusive and equitable landscape for scholarly communication (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013). This approach could democratize access to research and ensure that a diverse range of voices is represented in academic discourse.

Additionally, *Community-driven Publishing* initiatives are gaining traction as they prioritize collaboration among researchers, institutions, and funding bodies. These initiatives often focus on grassroots efforts to establish platforms that cater to specific academic communities, promoting the dissemination of knowledge without the constraints of traditional publishing models. By fostering a collaborative environment, community-driven publishing can further enhance inclusivity and accessibility in scholarly communication <sup>24</sup>.

In summary, while transformative agreements mark a significant step toward open access, the academic community must remain vigilant in addressing the challenges of affordability, accessibility, and equity. Exploring alternative models such as diamond open access and community-driven publishing can provide viable pathways for a more equitable future in scholarly communication. As discussions in this area evolve, stakeholders must collaborate to create sustainable solutions that not only advance open access but also ensure that all researchers have the opportunity to share their work with the global community.

## Conclusions

The "Big Deal" model of journal subscriptions has long been a cornerstone of the academic publishing landscape, allowing institutions to access a broad range of journals through a single subscription. However, this model is increasingly perceived as unsustainable due to escalating subscription costs and the resulting restrictions on access to research. As budgets tighten and the demand for open access grows, many stakeholders are calling for a re-evaluation of how academic knowledge is disseminated and accessed.

### Cost-Effectiveness of Transformative Agreements

Transformative agreements can provide a cost-effective solution for universities navigating the dual demands of subscription access and open access publishing. By aggregating institutional purchasing power, universities can negotiate more favourable rates with publishers. This collaborative approach not only enhances access but also supports a sustainable model for open access publishing.

Moreover, as institutions transition to OA, they can reduce overall subscription costs. A study by the European University Association found that TAs can lead to savings of up to 30% in total expenditures related to journal subscriptions and open access fees <sup>25</sup>. These savings can then be reinvested into research initiatives, infrastructure, and support services for researchers, further amplifying the impact of open access publishing.

The transition to transformative agreements marks a significant development in the quest for open access. These agreements often combine subscription fees with provisions that allow for the open access publication of research outputs, effectively serving as a bridge between traditional publishing models and the ideals of open science. By negotiating fixed fees for both access and publishing, transformative agreements aim to provide institutions with more predictable costs while simultaneously increasing the number of research articles that are freely available to the public. This approach aligns with the goals of initiatives such as Plan S, which seeks to ensure that publicly funded research is immediately accessible<sup>26</sup>

Despite their potential, transformative agreements also present challenges that must be addressed to achieve equitable access to scientific knowledge. For instance, critics argue that these agreements can shift the financial burden from libraries to researchers and their institutions, particularly in the form of Article Processing Charges (APCs). This shift can exacerbate financial disparities, especially for smaller institutions and those in low-income countries, which may struggle to afford the costs associated with publishing open access<sup>18,27</sup>

Furthermore, while transformative agreements aim to increase access to research, there are concerns about their long-term sustainability. Some experts caution that these agreements may merely serve as temporary fixes to deeper issues within the publishing ecosystem, including the need for more radical reforms that address the root causes of inequity and cost escalation in scholarly publishing<sup>28</sup>.

To create a truly sustainable and equitable open access environment, further efforts are required beyond the implementation of transformative agreements. One promising avenue is the exploration of alternative open access models, such as diamond open access, where neither authors nor readers pay for access or publication<sup>29</sup>. This model seeks to eliminate financial barriers and ensure that all researchers, regardless of their institutional affiliation or financial resources, can contribute to and benefit from open access.

In conclusion, while the transition to transformative agreements represents a significant step toward open access, it is imperative that the academic community remains proactive in addressing the associated challenges. By fostering inclusive dialogues and exploring innovative publishing models, stakeholders can work towards a more equitable and sustainable framework for scholarly communication that ensures access to scientific knowledge for all institutions and researchers globally.

## Recommendations

As the academic community increasingly recognizes the necessity of transitioning to open access publishing, a strategic approach is essential to overcome the inherent challenges of high subscription costs and limited access to research. To achieve this, a set of comprehensive recommendations has emerged that focuses on strengthening collaboration, enhancing negotiation strategies, and promoting transparency. By fostering collective bargaining among universities, consortia, and national governments, institutions can leverage their combined

purchasing power to negotiate more favourable terms with publishers. This collaborative effort not only empowers individual institutions but also aligns with the broader goal of making scientific knowledge accessible to all.

Furthermore, proactive measures such as incorporating open access clauses in contracts, developing national policies, and establishing systems for data collection can significantly improve the negotiation landscape. Training negotiators on effective strategies and leveraging existing regional initiatives can enhance the visibility of research outputs while fostering a culture of advocacy and awareness. Engaging in international collaborations also plays a crucial role in creating a united front against the challenges posed by major publishers. By implementing these recommendations, the academic community can work towards a more equitable and sustainable model of scholarly communication that benefits researchers, institutions, and the public alike.

1. **Collective Bargaining:** Strengthening collaboration among universities, consortia, and national governments can enhance collective bargaining power. By forming larger coalitions, institutions can negotiate more favorable terms with publishers, leveraging their combined purchasing power.
2. **Incorporating Open Access Clauses:** Actively including open access clauses in contracts can shift negotiations towards more favorable terms for access to research. Countries should prioritize negotiating for Green Open Access provisions, which allow for the self-archiving of articles, and explore Gold Open Access options that may offer discounts for bulk agreements.
3. **Data Collection and Transparency:** Establishing a centralized system for collecting and processing data on expenditures related to subscriptions and Article Processing Charges (APCs) can provide institutions with valuable insights. This data can inform negotiation strategies and help identify trends in pricing and access.
4. **Developing National Policies:** Governments should create and implement specific public policies that support open access and fair pricing in academic publishing. These policies can guide institutions in their negotiations and ensure that they align with national research priorities.
5. **Training and Capacity Building:** Providing training for negotiators on effective negotiation tactics and the intricacies of academic publishing contracts can empower institutions to advocate more effectively for their interests. This could include workshops, seminars, and sharing best practices among institutions.
6. **Leveraging Existing Initiatives:** Engaging with successful regional initiatives like SciELO and LA Referencia can enhance visibility and access to Latin American research. Collaborating with these platforms can also strengthen the case for fairer negotiations with publishers by showcasing the value of regional research output.
7. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishing monitoring systems to evaluate the outcomes of negotiations can help institutions learn from past experiences. This can involve assessing the

effectiveness of different strategies and adjusting approaches based on what has been successful or unsuccessful.

8. **Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns:** Raising awareness about the importance of open access and the challenges posed by high subscription costs can mobilize support from stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, and the public. Advocacy efforts can pressure publishers to reconsider their pricing models and negotiation practices.

9. **Engaging in International Collaborations:** Forming alliances with institutions in other regions facing similar challenges can create a united front in negotiations with major publishers. Sharing experiences and strategies can lead to more effective approaches and potentially influence publisher practices on a global scale.

By implementing these strategies, Latin American institutions can enhance their negotiation power, ultimately leading to better access to academic resources and a more equitable publishing landscape.

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