Leibniz-Informationszentrum
Wirtschaft
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for Economics

Press Release

Elsevier boycott: Academic spring in Germany slightly rainy

A ZBW survey shows that German economists sympathize with the Elsevier boycott and Open Access, but still support the established reputation and ranking systems

Kiel/Hamburg, 16. May 2012: Right now scientists from around the world are boycotting the Elsevier publishing house. The dominant magazine publisher stands accused of monopolizing scientific content by only making it accessible to the public for astronomical subscription prices. In contrast to this, the Open Access idea holds that all publicly financed research findings should be made accessible for free. In early May, the ZBW held a survey regarding the current Elsevier boycott and the subject of Open Access which found that the established system of expensive subscription magazines is indeed unpopular, but is largely upheld because of a shortage of alternatives.

By now the boycott appeal against Elsevier has been signed by more than 11,500 scientists worldwide. Natural scientists are the main supporters of the operation. The ZBW – German National Library for Economics – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics has asked scientists from all over Germany as to their position towards the Elsevier boycott (for more information visit: www.thecostofknowledge.com) and their opinion towards the Open Access movement.

All in all, 813 economists participated in the survey. 8 per cent of those questioned signed the Elsevier boycott. 39 per cent of the scientists deliberately decided against participating in the protest. A further 8 per cent were neither informed nor interested. The lion's share of those questioned, 46 per cent, had not heard about the Elsevier boycott before the start of the survey on 2 May 2012, but consider to participate.

On the subject of Open Access, 73 per cent of the participants stated that they essentially support the idea but due to the lack of alternatives mainly publish their work in classical subscription magazines because of their greater reputation and better ranking.

Only 6 per cent of the participants already publish their work in Open Access journals. Another 6 per cent of scientists do not think that the Open Access idea is sustainable and will continue to publish their future work in classical subscription journals. Nearly 16 per cent do at least sympathize with the Open Access movement and are interested in alternative publication models.

46 per cent of the scientists participating in the survey work in institutes for economics, another 39 per cent in institutes for business studies and 15 per cent in other fields of economical expertise. The interviewees were either professors (34 per cent) or academic staff (63 per cent).

Young researchers indicated that they are reluctant to join the boycott for fear of the negative impact on their further career. One of the participants stated: “Boycott is only an option for tenured professors. A young scholar would criminally endanger his personal future if he did not publish in the magazines of Elsevier, some of which enjoy a very high reputation.”

About the ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics:
The ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics is the world’s largest information centre for economic literature, online as well as offline. Today the institution holds more than 4 million volumes and subscribes to 32,000 periodicals and journals. In addition, the ZBW provides the fastest-growing collection of Open Access documents on the internet: EconStor, the digital publication server, currently gives free access to more than 37,000 articles and working papers. EconBiz, the search engine for international economic information, allows students and researchers to search among nine million datasets. The ZBW edits two journals in economic policy, *Wirtschaftsdienst* and *Intereconomics*, and in cooperation with the Kiel Institute for the World Economy produces the Peer Review Journal *Economics* based on the principle of Open Access. The ZBW is a member of the Leibniz Association and has been a foundation under public law since 2007.

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