



Kamila Markram interview: Changing the way academics work

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Frontiers has the ambition to change the way academic publishing operates

[Kamila Markram](#) is a neuroscientist, autism researcher, CEO and co-founder of Frontiers, a community-oriented open-access academic publisher and research network. Since 2008, she has been the [Autism Project](#) group leader of the Laboratory of Neural Microcircuits, BMI, at EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland. Her husband, [Henry Markram](#), leads the [Human Brain Project](#). As scientists, Kamila Markram and her husband felt a lot of frustrations when publishing their papers. In this exclusive interview with *EuroScientist*, Kamila Markram explains how Frontiers, the open access academic publisher she co-founded, is designed to remedy some of the shortcomings of the academic publishing process.

New ways of publishing

Frontiers' ambition is to bring some fresh air to the traditional academic publishing landscape. "We thought: what would be the most ideal publisher ? ... So we decided to create this kind of utopia." Specifically, "we thought that we needed to change the mandate from the traditional peer review, which is really focused on what is an outstanding discovery--what is a significant or novel discovery--to rather [introduce] far more objective criteria," she says.

What makes Frontiers unique is the introduction of a collaborative peer review forum so that reviewers can interact directly with each other and exchange as many comments as they like. This brings some transparency to the process

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and could help avoid papers submitted for publishing being rejected by reviewers who compete for the same grant resources.

Frontiers kept on innovating in their quest for objective peer review criteria. In 2008, Frontiers was the very first publisher to introduce article-level metrics, and to account for the number of views, downloads and social buzz. They then developed a process called 'tiering', which involves analysing the most popular papers and asking the authors to write a focus review to make their work more accessible to the wider academic community.

Loop

To complement its publishing activities, Frontiers has developed a social network for scientists called [Loop](#) designed to make articles efficiently accessible to the community. This is becoming increasingly important as the science community grows--with an estimated 9 million researchers by 2020 competing for grant money, tenure positions etc...

Loop is thus "allowing people to build profiles, [link their] publications to these profiles and insert these profiles to wherever researches are." This means that Loop profiles will be integrated in pages such as those of Nature, following a deal with its publisher in January 2015. Markram and her team are also in discussions with several universities to integrate Loop profiles into universities' own web site. As a result of integration within areas of the web where scientists can typically be found, Loop enhances the visibility of scientists while their profile are connected to all their papers online.

Reaching out to young minds

Frontiers has also a public outreach programme to facilitate the interaction between scientists and a younger public, in particular. They have thus introduced a dedicated journal called [Frontiers for Young Minds](#). "The aim is to take the scientific discoveries that are published in Frontiers, make the authors translate them into a kid's language. Then, the children could actually do the peer reviews on these articles," she says.

This, according to Kamila Markram, is to demonstrate to the next generation that "scientists and academics are modern day heroes, so the earlier you actually get in touch with them, the more human race might benefit from it."

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