

**A personal record concerning the K-Theory  
journal  
by  
Wolfgang Lück**

This is a record of the recent events surrounding the journal “K-Theory” published by Springer and the new “Journal of K-Theory” to be distributed by Cambridge University Press. One can expect that these events will provoke a wide discussion.

In order to provide a foundation for this discussion and to clarify my own role, I shall record the facts known to myself and Prof. Ranicki. The evaluation of these facts is reserved for the expected discussion.

The whole business started for me with a telephone call from Dr. Heinze of Springer Verlag at the end of July 2007. He told me that authors were complaining that their papers were not appearing in “K-Theory”, although they had been notified the papers had been accepted some time ago, and Springer had received no information about these papers. Furthermore, Prof. Bak refused to provide any information to Springer, stating that he was no longer the managing editor, and that he was suing Springer. Together with Prof. Ranicki we agreed to become interim editors to continue “K-Theory” and deal with these complaints. We made the condition that the price of “K-Theory” be reduced to 50 cents per page, approximately halving it. Springer readily agreed to the reduction, effective 1.1.2008.

On 7th August 2007 the editorial board of the new “Journal of K-Theory” issued the following statement:

Dear fellow mathematicians,

The Editorial Board of “K-Theory” has resigned. A new journal titled “Journal of K-Theory” has been formed, with essentially the same Board of Editors. The members are A.Bak, P.Balmer, S.J.Bloch, G.E.Carlsson, A.Connes, E.Friedlander, M.Hopkins, B.Kahn, M.Karoubi, G.G.Kasparov, A.S.Merkurjev, A.Neeman, T.Porter, D.Quillen, J.Rosenberg, A.A.Suslin, G.Tang, B.Totaro, V.Voevodsky, C.Weibel, and Guoliang Yu.

The new journal is to be distributed by Cambridge University Press. The price is 380 British pounds, which is significantly less than half that of the old journal. Publication will begin in January 2008. We ask for your continued support, in particular at the current time. Your submissions are welcome and may be sent to any of the editors.

Board of Editors, Journal of K-Theory

On 13th August 2007 Prof. Ranicki and I issued the following statement:

In January 2007 the editors of “K-Theory” resigned, following a request by the then managing editor Professor Anthony Bak. As announced in August 2007, some of them are intending to start a new “Journal of K-Theory to be published elsewhere. Unfortunately no manuscripts submitted to “K-Theory” have been forwarded to Springer by the managing editor, since April 2006. We have been asked by Springer to act as interim managing editors, in the first instance to deal with these papers. We ask authors who have submitted papers to “K-Theory” which have not yet been published to please contact one of us as soon as possible.

Wolfgang Lueck (Muenster) lueck@math.uni-muenster.de  
Andrew Ranicki (Edinburgh) a.ranicki@ed.ac.uk

On 17th August 2007 Prof. Ranicki and I issued a further statement:

In this statement we, Wolfgang Lueck and Andrew Ranicki, want to give some explanations to the mathematical community concerning the journal “K-Theory” published by Springer and the announcement of a new “Journal of K-Theory” to be published by Cambridge University Press.

Three weeks ago we were asked by Springer to do two things.

- 1.) Can we take care of the submissions to K-Theory which were delayed by the former managing editor Tony Bak?
- 2.) Are we willing to try to reconstitute the board for K-Theory so that the journal can be continued?

1.) We agreed to do this without really knowing how urgent and unpleasant the problem was. On August 13th we issued a statement on the internet to ask authors of papers submitted to “K-Theory” whose papers had not yet been published to contact us, so that we could take care of them. From the answers we have received so far it is clear that not only had Bak deliberately withheld papers from Springer, but he also withheld information about the papers from editors and (worst of all) the authors themselves. By contrast, when the entire editorial board of Topology resigned from Elsevier in 2006 they made sure that all submitted papers were handled correctly, and to our knowledge no author suffered any delay.

We were also informed that Bak has started a legal proceedings against Springer, demanding a certain amount of money for himself. The editorial board of “K-Theory” were not informed of the lawsuit. The details will only be revealed once the lawsuit is finished. Although we do not know the details, we dislike the idea of an editor starting a legal proceedings against a publisher. There are more elegant ways of handling conflicts.

- 2.) When Springer asked us to relaunch K-Theory, we requested that the price should be reduced to 50 cents per page. Springer readily

agreed. Incidentally, Bak never discussed the price of “K-Theory”, either with Springer or the editors. However, since it seems to be clear that the new “Journal of K-Theory” will be launched anyway, we have decided not to try to continue “K-Theory”, but simply to make certain that all the papers which have been delayed by Bak can be published in a final issue of “K-Theory”. Authors of such papers are free to publish their papers anywhere they choose.

We think that this is the best solution for the community, which would not be best served by two journals in the field.

In view of the mess we are encountering and trying to clean up, we ask the question whether the new “Journal of K-Theory” can be launched with Bak as Managing Editor? This should not detract from the excellent work Bak did in setting up “K-Theory” in 1988.

We want to emphasize that we have no personal gain from our actions.

Wolfgang Lueck (Editor Topology 2002–2006, Journal of Topology since 2006, Math. Annalen since 1998 (Managing Editor since 2004), Comment. Math. Helv. since 2003, Geometry and Topology since 2005, Groups, Geometry and Dynamics since 2006)

Andrew Ranicki (Editor K-Theory, 1990-2007, Forum Mathematicum since 1998, Algebraic and Geometric Topology since 2000)

Up to now Prof. Ranicki and I have made contact with some 30 authors of papers which were submitted to “K-Theory” since April 2006 and accepted for publication, but which were not published, since (as is agreed by Prof. Bak and Springer) they were not passed to Springer by the managing editor. In some cases, the delay in publication has been more than a year. I gather from email correspondence with members of the “K-Theory” editorial board that at least some of them were ignorant of this situation until August 2007.

Some authors have informed me that they first found out about the resignation of the “K-Theory” editorial board and of the creation of the new “Journal of K-Theory” only in August 2007. They had concluded from previous correspondence with editors or the managing editors that their papers had been accepted several months (and up to a year) previously. A careful reading of Prof. Bak’s emails reveals that they do not include an explicit acceptance for “K-Theory”. Here is an example reported to me by an author. The author received a message from an editor in July 2006 that the referee had recommended a revised version of the paper for publication in “K-Theory”, and in September 2006 received a request for the file from Prof. Bak. The author emailed Prof. Bak in September 2006 to inquire if this paper was accepted by “K-Theory”. This email was ignored by Prof. Bak for eight months. The author’s further inquiry to Prof. Bak in May 2007 received the answer “the paper is being accepted” without an explicit naming of the journal.

To the best of my knowledge “K-Theory” never had a procedure for circulating to the editors and Springer information about submitted papers, whether they were accepted/rejected, and on what grounds.

In August 2007 Springer asked members of the editorial board of “K-Theory” to supply Prof. Ranicki and myself information about the papers they handled since April 2006. Only two editors have supplied us this information. Likewise, explicit inquiries by Prof. Ranicki and myself have been unanswered or refused.

As far as I am aware of, prior to May 2007 none of the editors of “K-Theory” informed Springer of their resignation. Some members of the board did finally officially inform Springer, but only in response to a direct inquiry in August 2007. I deduce from this that the negotiations with Cambridge University Press were concluded before Springer was informed of the resignation of the “K-Theory” editorial board.

The announcement of the new “Journal of K-Theory” was announced in August 2007. It usually takes at least six months to get a referee report, and in the favourable case for the author to revise the manuscript, and for the publisher to prepare the final version. The editorial board of the “Journal of K-Theory” have announced that publication will begin in January 2008. One can therefore surmise that the majority of the papers in the “Journal of K-Theory” will be papers originally submitted to “K-Theory”.

Prof. Bak gives the high price of “K-Theory” as a motive, which is plausible. He also mentions problems with production at Springer and a backlog, about which I cannot say anything, as I was not a member of the editorial board. I would be very interested to find out the details, once the court case between Prof. Bak and Springer is concluded. Those better informed than me should then report on these problems.

Since it is tempting to compare the K-Theory situation with the creation of the new “Journal of Topology” following the resignation of the editorial board of “Topology” published by Elsevier, I shall summarize their procedure: after a consultation of the editors of “Topology” we informed Elsevier and the public at large in August 2006, that we shall all be resigning in 31st December 2006. We provided an assurance that all manuscripts submitted until that date would be handled correctly. As far as I know, all the papers published by Elsevier in “Topology” after 1st January 2007 were handled by the previous editors. I have no indications that “Topology” has a new board.

The “Journal of Topology” was founded in the spring of 2007, and all papers appearing in this journal will have been submitted after the foundation. The first issue will appear on 1st January 2008.

The following statement of the Cambridge University Press was communicated on 5 September 2007 by Roger Astley at my request:

Cambridge University Press was invited by Tony Bak to provide services for a new journal to be founded in K-Theory and we have reached an agreement to do so. The details of this agreement are, like any similar agreement, confidential.

Tony Bak has set up a limited company, at his own risk and expense, to be the owner and publisher of the new journal until its ownership can pass to a non-profit foundation. This will oversee all editorial matters in conjunction with an Editorial Board from receipt of submissions through to finished typeset papers ready for press. Cambridge will play no part in the editorial process before it receives finished papers ready for distribution online and in print.

This is much like many other agreements we have with many organisations for whom we publish or distribute. Cambridge commits to provide a range of services, in this case printing, marketing, subscriptions and distribution, whereas editorial policy and processes such as the appointment of Editorial Board members are entirely the responsibility of the journal owner and Managing Editor.

As with any journal we would expect that papers are submitted to it and are accepted (or rejected) in line with common peer review practice. Cambridge has to date received no papers accepted for publication in the new journal and in line with accepted practice will not consider any paper that has been submitted elsewhere unless formally withdrawn in writing by the author(s).

Cambridge has entered into this publishing arrangement in good faith. We wholeheartedly support the launch of this new journal which we believe will be a success backed by a strong Editorial Board, and which we expect will resonate with the wishes of the mathematical community. Our intention is to publish from early 2008, and to make forthcoming articles available online as soon as possible. Our aim is to achieve a price of around GBP 0.30 per page.

The editors of the new “Journal of  $K$ -Theory” issued the following statement on 5th September 2007: (see <http://www.institut.math.jussieu.fr/~karoubi/Statement>)

After several public statements and news articles regarding the Springer journal “K-Theory” (KT), and the new “Journal of K-Theory” (JKT) to be distributed by Cambridge University Press (CUP), the mathematical community has become aware of ongoing changes. On behalf of the entire Editorial Board of the new JKT, we want to give as precise a picture of the situation as we can at the moment, especially to the authors.

It is very important to us that the authors should not suffer as a result of the transition. Those authors who submitted papers to KT before August 2007, regardless of whether the paper has already been accepted or is just awaiting review, have three choices:

- 1) Choose another journal.
- 2) Maintain submission with KT for final review if necessary and publication if accepted.

3) Transfer their article to the new JKT.

All authors who have not yet done so should please notify Professor Bak on the one hand, Professors Lueck and Ranicki on the other hand, about their choice, as soon as possible. For those who opt for choice (2), Professors Lueck and Ranicki have promised to take over the remaining editorial duties. We can guarantee that the authors who choose option (3) will have a smooth transition, with their articles progressing as if there has been no change. We will also do everything we can to help those who choose options (1) and (2). In particular, if the authors instruct us, we will be happy to forward to the journals of their choice the full information regarding the status of their articles.

In 2004, because of growing dissatisfaction with Springer, the editorial board of KT authorized Prof. Anthony Bak, the Editor in Chief, to begin negotiations with other publishers. The editorial board was unhappy with the poor quality of the work done by Springer, for example the huge number of misprints in the published version of the articles, the long delay in publication and the high prices Springer was charging. The negotiations came to a conclusion in 2007. A new journal, entitled “Journal of K-Theory” (JKT) will commence publication in late 2007. It will be printed by Cambridge University Press. Papers will appear earlier online, as ‘forthcoming articles’.

The title of JKT is currently owned by a private company. This situation is only meant as a temporary solution to restart publication of K-Theory articles as soon as possible. It is the Board’s intention to create a non-profit academic foundation and to transfer ownership of JKT to this foundation, as soon as possible, but no later than by the end of 2009, a delay justified by many practical considerations.

This shift towards more academic control of journals is not new. We follow here a path opened by *Compositio Mathematica*, *Commentarii Mathematici Helvetici*, and others (see for instance the interesting paper of Gerard van der Geer which appeared in the *Notices of the AMS* in May 2004). We believe that such changes can help keep prices low.

We trust in Prof. Bak’s leadership for the launching of JKT and forming, together with the editorial board, the foundation to house the Journal. The statutes of the foundation will provide democratic rules governing the future course and development of the journal, including the election of the managing team.

We hope to have provided a fair picture of the current situation, and we plan to issue another public statement when new developments come up. In case of further questions, please contact any of the signatories.

Let us conclude from a broader perspective: The editorial board is committed to secure the journal's quality and long-term sustainability.

Signatures

A. Bak  
P. Balmer  
S. Bloch  
G. Carlsson  
A. Connes  
E. Friedlander  
M. Hopkins  
B. Kahn  
M. Karoubi  
G. Kasparov  
A. Merkurjev  
A. Neeman  
T. Porter  
J. Rosenberg  
A. Suslin  
G. Tang  
B. Totaro  
V. Voevodsky  
C. Weibel  
Guoliang Yu

Springer have informed that they will shortly issue their own statement.

Wolfgang Lück, Münster, den 6.9.2007