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# Canadian Content, Internet Strategy, Citation Scores, and Revenue Implications: The Case of *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques*

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## Abstract

**Background** Choices facing a Canadian scholarly journal such as *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques (CPP/Adp)* include both its degree of Canadian content and its level of internet accessibility.

**Analysis** The “Canadian-ness” of *CPP/Adp* handicaps its upward citation score trend but is intrinsic to informing Canadian public policy. Internet open access would not likely boost citation scores but would likely enhance its policy role. Open access has large negative revenue implications.

**Conclusion and implications** *CPP/Adp* chose not to reapply for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Aid to Scholarly Journal program. The revenue loss of meeting the program’s new open access criteria, even with the permitted one-year embargo, was estimated to exceed the prospective grant. The *CPP/Adp* continues other timely ways to make content internet accessible.

**Keywords** Impact factors; Open access; Canadian subject matter; Journal grants; Article royalties; Journal subscriptions; Canadian public policy

## Résumé

**Contexte** Les choix pour une revue savante canadienne telle que *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques (CPP/Adp)* incluent à la fois sa proportion de contenu canadien et son accessibilité sur internet.

**Analyse** Le caractère canadien de *CPP/Adp* limite combien on le cite mais est indispensable par ce qu’il contribue à la politique publique canadienne. À ce titre, un libre accès à la revue sur internet ne ferait probablement pas augmenter son indice de

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citations mais améliorerait son impact sur les politiques. Le libre accès en revanche occasionnerait une baisse de revenus.

**Conclusion et implications** *CPP/Adp* a choisi de ne pas se réinscrire au programme Aide aux revues savantes du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines. *CPP/Adp*, en rencontrant les nouveaux critères de ce programme pour le libre accès—même avec la période d'embargo de 12 mois permise—perdrait davantage de revenus que le montant probable de la subvention. *CPP/Adp* a donc recours à d'autres méthodes opportunes pour rendre son contenu accessible en ligne.

**Mots clés** Indice de citations; Libre accès; Sujets canadiens; Subventions pour les revues; Droits d'auteur pour les articles; Abonnements aux revues; Politique publique canadienne

### Introduction

Using the case of the journal *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques (CPP/Adp)*, this article considers two decisions Canadian scholarly journals must make explicitly or implicitly: 1) How much of the content should be about Canada? 2) How accessible should it be on the internet?

To begin answering these questions, this article provides context through a brief description and history of the journal. With respect to its origin, publisher, editorship, authorship, and subject matter, the journal is almost entirely Canadian. Hence the journal is best thought of as the “journal of Canadian public policy.” It is less accurately thought of as the “Canadian journal of public policy,” a title that would convey that a significant number of articles might emphasize non-Canadian subject matter<sup>1</sup> and might also increase the proportion of authors from outside of Canada. The article then considers the possible implications of the journal's form of “Canadian-ness,” in particular with respect to citation scores and the fact that citation links across related Canadian journals are weak. It does not dismiss the importance citation scores may have, rightly or wrongly.

The following section considers open internet access as an alternative way to build citation scores. It is not clear whether this would be effective. While open access may not have much direct effect on access by academics and hence on scholarly impact, it does, however, seem likely that it would promote the journal's other important goal of informing Canadian public policy. But any benefits gained must be weighed against revenue losses. It is expected that the journal's revenue sources—individual subscriptions, institutional subscriptions, and royalties paid by access services such as Project MUSE, EBSCO, and JSTOR—would be vulnerable to a move to open access. *CPP/Adp* made the unusual decision<sup>2</sup> to accept the loss of not reapplying for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Aid to Scholarly Journals program due to SSHRC's new open access criteria, because even if the one-year embargo permitted by the criteria were implemented, it was estimated that the subscription and access-service royalty revenue loss would be substantially larger than any grant received. While SSHRC policy clearly cannot be designed to fit the needs of one journal, it is noted that *CPP/Adp* might well move to open access with a program that provides additional funds to journals that go to zero-embargo open access. If *CPP/Adp* could afford it, zero-embargo open access would be particularly appropriate for such a public policy jour-

nal. From the perspective of the SSHRC program, it would seem logical that better open access<sup>3</sup> be eligible for increased support.

The article ends with a brief summary and conclusions.

### **A brief history and description of the journal**

*CPP/Adp*'s mission statement reads, "Since 1975, Canadian Public Policy has been the foremost peer-reviewed journal examining economic and social public policy issues in Canada. It is directed at a wide readership including policy researchers, decision makers and advisers in governments, businesses, unions, non-government organizations and universities" (Canadian Economics Association, n.d., par. 1). The journal is available in print and online; it often lists itself as *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques (CPP/Adp)* to emphasize that it publishes articles in French as well as English and provides abstracts of all articles in both languages. To promote the public discussion of its content, the journal provides open access to every article for about one month after publication, and some articles that may have particular current relevance are given permanent open access. The University of Toronto Press publishes the journal four times a year, with around 25 to 30 articles per year. The webpage includes instructions to authors and reviewers, as well as information about recent issues, indexing, subscriptions, prizes, and journal policies.

From the beginning, *CPP/Adp* was intended to be multidisciplinary. While it was founded as a separate registered charitable organization by the Canadian Economics Association (CEA), other sponsoring organizations were the Canadian Political Science Association, the Canadian Association of Law Teachers, the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association (now separated into two distinct organizations), the Canadian Association of Geographers, the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada, and the Canadian Association for Business Economics. These other organizations play no role in the journal operations. Their members receive a small, symbolic reduction in subscription rates. (The CEA makes a cash transfer to *CPP/Adp* to purchase subscriptions for all CEA members.)

The role of the CEA is to appoint the editor, treasurer, and a multidisciplinary set of four associate editors (typically, as is currently the case, two economists, a political scientist, and a sociologist). As is typical, all the current associate editors and the treasurer have Canadian university affiliations. The current editor (and author of this article, writing as an individual and not on behalf of the journal) is an economist with a Canadian university affiliation, as has been the case with all eight of his predecessors (who, interestingly, have been from seven different universities, with only the University of Calgary represented twice).

The editor, treasurer, and associate editors serve as the official board of the charitable organization and are responsible for operational decisions, with day-to-day administration delegated to the editor and the treasurer. The editor manages some manuscripts but assigns many to associate editors. Referee reports are usually solicited; desk rejects are rare. Final editorial decisions (save those involving a conflict of interest) are made by the

editor, giving due weight to the recommendations of the associate editors, who are typically more expert on an article's topic. From time to time the editor will select a guest editor if special expertise is needed. Very occasionally, outside groups sponsor supplementary issues, with guest editors soliciting articles subject to the standard editorial and peer-review processes of the journal and the article-by-article approval of the editor.

Rachel Shan and Michael Veall (2017) provide an authorship/content analysis of the first 41 years of articles in the journal, considering the period from 1975 to 1980 and then all subsequent five-year periods up to 2011-2015. Most relevant for the discussion here is that the percentage of authors with primary affiliations outside Canada was always small. For example, for 2011-2015, about two percent had primary affiliations in the United States, and fewer than one percent had primary affiliations outside Canada and the United States.

It will prove relevant for future discussion that Shan and Veall (2017) also found that 85-95 percent of *CPP/Adp* authors during the period studied were university or college academics, with the remainder largely from government. They also noted that over the period studied, the percentage of articles in French dropped from 11 percent to three percent (or about one article per volume); the proportion of women authors increased from less than five percent to about one-third; and while there were no obvious regional authorship trends over time, there was a mild tendency for Québec to be under-represented (with the large majority of Québec authors from French-speaking universities).

Turning to subject matter, Shan and Veall (2017) found that the proportions of articles on gender issues and on Indigenous issues rose over time, while the percentages of articles on transfer payments and environmental issues had no discernible trend. They classified articles as pertaining to the federal, provincial, or municipal governments and found the federal proportion falling over time to about 45 percent, the provincial proportion rising over time to just over 45 percent, and the municipal group proportion maintaining a steadily small residual. They classified about 70 percent of the articles as primarily in the field of economics, with most of the remaining ones either in political science or sociology.

Analyzing the 162 articles from 2016 to 2019 (after the Shan and Veall study period), seven percent were not substantively Canadian in subject matter, and just under 10 percent of the 354 authors had non-Canadian affiliations. If a supplementary issue that focused on bringing Canadian- and Chinese-authored work together is omitted, those values fall to just three percent (which all had references to Canada) and five percent, respectively.

### **Implications of the nature and degree of *CPP/Adp* "Canadian-ness"**

Turning to citation scores, *CPP/Adp* has a 2018 Clarivate Analytics impact factor of 0.899, a value that has more than tripled in the past 10 years. (The *CPP/Adp* impact factor for 2018 is the number of citations of *CPP/Adp* articles from 2016 and 2017 in 2018 issues of journals included in the Clarivate list divided by the total number of articles *CPP/Adp* published in 2016 and 2017.) While some would applaud the increase, others

would point out that in the *CPP/Adp* Clarivate group, Public Administration, the journals *Climate Policy* and *Public Administration Review* have impact factors five times as large. And it seems likely that the journal's predominantly Canadian authorship and Canadian subject matter will limit the growth of its citation scores.

The issue is similar to that discussed by Étienne Charbonneau, Luc Bernier, and Nicholas Bautista-Beauchesne (2018) in a criticism of the journal *Canadian Public Administration* published in that same journal. One of their key points was that the journal's 2016 impact factor (the impact factor has increased significantly since then) was much lower than the value for the *Australian Journal of Public Administration*. In a responsive commentary, Michael Howlett (2018) listed a number of explanations that cumulatively indicated, "we may not be doing as poorly as suggested but we still probably could be doing better" (p. 407). But he also points out a naming issue similar to the one touched on in this article:

As a former editor of the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, I can attest that many potential authors do not submit to *CJPS* because they think of it as the Journal of Canadian Political Science. This is even more of a problem with a journal named "Canadian Public Administration." (p. 410)

The same issue (not necessarily a "problem") would apply to a journal named *Canadian Public Policy*. Another important point is raised in the parallel commentary of Alisdair Roberts (2018), who argues that some Canadian authors' success in what he calls the "MPA [mainstream public administrators] club" comes at the price of "compromises about the questions they address and the methods they apply" (p. 417). Furthermore, he argues, "most of the time, Canadians will not select the topics of conversation. The agenda will be determined by institutions, journals and scholars that already have status within the club. Canadians must adhere to the agenda even if topics do not seem important in the Canadian context" (Roberts, 2018, p. 417).

For *CPP/Adp*, the most relevant topics for Canada might also not "adhere to the agenda" set elsewhere. But in any case, as *CPP/Adp* has clearly gone the route of Canadian-ness both in authors and in subject matter, what are the costs?

The effect on the impact factor cannot be dismissed.<sup>4</sup> It is one of two numbers that, along with the acceptance rate (36.7% at *CPP/Adp*, taken as a three-year average), are most commonly used to describe journals quantitatively. Hence impact factors may be used for academic decisions such as tenure and, therefore, make a difference for the kind of research that Canadian academics choose to pursue. In turn, the quality of articles, authors, and reviewers likely depends on a journal's impact factor.<sup>5</sup>

Without arguing that such a course is desirable, if indexed Canadian journals cited each other in published articles it would obviously boost their citation scores. But the low rate of cross-citation is remarkable. In the calculation of the Clarivate Analytics impact factor for 2018, among the journals *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques*, *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économie*, *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, and *Canadian Public Administration/Administration*

*publique du Canada*, there were only eight cross-citations. Citations in articles in *CPP/Adp* comprised four of the eight,<sup>6</sup> which seems very low for a journal that focuses on Canada and describes itself as multidisciplinary. Perhaps engaging more reviewers from different disciplines for each manuscript will help. The journal strives to do this already but will try harder.

### The open access decision

Another way to improve a journal's citation scores is through increasing internet access. However, in the case of *CPP/Adp*, online access is available in virtually every academic library in Canada. It appears that most academics in developed economies have some access through services such as EBSCO, JSTOR, or Project MUSE, although it is difficult to determine the size of remaining gaps. Hence while open access can clearly increase information dissemination, it might well not make a huge difference for *CPP/Adp* citation scores. And there is the downside that changing to open access will almost surely reduce *CPP/Adp*'s subscription and access-service royalty revenues, probably precipitously, and hence may damage the quality and viability of the journal. Others have examined those trade-offs and the context behind them. See, for example, Rowland Lorimer (2014), who emphasizes that to command "the attention of key users, publishers require sufficient revenue to add value in all publishing functions, from professional editing and layout through to strategic marketing and planning" (p. 1). The trade-offs have recent salience for *CPP/Adp* given that it was, along with all Canadian journals, presented with the decision in 2018 of whether to apply for continued SSHRC funding through Aid to Scholarly Journals, which was conditional on new open access criteria.

The main new criterion was that a condition of application was a plan to provide, within two years, open access to content dating from June 1, 2016, with a maximum of a one-year embargo on newly published material. It is noteworthy that there was not a large enhancement of funding. In the case of *CPP/Adp*, the expectation was that the grant size would not change; it would remain about \$30,000 per year. Hence from the journal's narrow financial perspective, there was no new funding that would offset the loss of other revenues.

The board of *CPP/Adp*, after substantial discussion with the board of the CEA, decided not to apply. As noted, the main sources of revenue for the journal are institutional subscriptions and royalty revenues from Project MUSE, EBSCO, and JSTOR. Both of these revenue streams are threatened by open access, perhaps particularly so because, as noted above, the journal provides open access to all articles for a month after publication to promote public discussion. Indeed, it was estimated that even if the one-year embargo permitted by SSHRC were implemented, these revenues would fall by an amount that would soon exceed the amount of a potential SSHRC grant. A related concern was that the decision is essentially irreversible. After the subscription base and royalty relationships were affected, they would be difficult to restore. The journal would become much more dependent upon the successful application to the SSHRC program, which could be changed or even eliminated in the future.

If open access had been achievable without such a large expected revenue loss, the journal would likely have applied to SSHRC and, if successful, become open access. This is

not to criticize SSHRC, which cannot set its priorities to match those of a single journal. Still, the type of open access most appropriate to *CPP/Adp* as a public policy journal is immediate open access with no embargo. Hypothetically, if SSHRC ever did decide to devote more resources to the Aid to Scholarly Journals program, it would be advantageous to *CPP/Adp* if it put incremental funds into zero-embargo open access journals. This seems much more in tune with modern internet expectations.

It is difficult to evaluate the correctness of the *CPP/Adp* decision because the counterfactual is so difficult to determine. Despite the reduction in revenue from the loss of the grant, the journal has been able to continue a policy of providing open access for all articles for one month after publication. It continues to provide open access for articles of exceptional current public interest,<sup>7</sup> although it is now more careful in such designations. Unfortunately, it was necessary to discontinue its previous policy of free open access for research funded by the federal research councils. Such research would now come under its policy of open access for any article for a fee of \$1,000. With the exception of sponsored supplementary issues, which are open access because the fee is included with the sponsorship, few authors pay this fee. It plays no part in any editorial decisions.

The main beneficiaries of open access would be the potential audience of unaffiliated individuals or those at smaller institutions inside or outside Canada. However, if *CPP/Adp* had moved to open access with a one-year embargo but could then no longer afford its policy of offering one-month open access upon publication and unlimited open access for articles of particular interest, it is not clear that the audience would be better served.

### Summary and conclusions

By no means uniquely, *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques (CPP/Adp)* is Canadian in origin, languages, publisher, editorship, and subject matter, as this article documents. Accordingly, even though the journal has tripled its impact factor over the past ten years to 0.899, its Canadian emphasis means that further increases will become increasingly difficult. If Canadian journals were less siloed, there would be across-the-board increases in cross-citations. Whether one embraces citation scores or not, higher numerical impact factors for Canadian journals would probably encourage scholarship on Canadian topics.

Open access would probably not substantially increase the citation scores of *CPP/Adp* because most interested academics already have access through institutional subscriptions or access services, such as Project MUSE, EBSCO, or JSTOR. Nonetheless, it would be very desirable to improve the dissemination of the journal through open access and that is an argument to meet the SSHRC Aid to Scholarly Journals open access criteria in order to be eligible for continued grant support. Unfortunately, it was estimated that even with a one-year embargo, as permitted by SSHRC, open access would likely have reduced the journal subscription and access-service royalty revenues by considerably more than the grant amount. As it stands, by not pursuing a SSHRC grant with its open access criteria, *CPP/Adp* has been able to preserve first-month open access for all articles along with some further selective open access. This framework better fulfills its mandate as a public policy journal than across-the-board open access delayed by a one-year embargo.

This is not a criticism of SSHRC policy, which cannot be evaluated based on the experience of a single journal. Still if incremental dollars were to be added to the SSHRC Aid to Scholarly Journals program, it would more likely draw *CPP/Adp* into the program – and thereby improve that journal’s internet accessibility – if there were higher payments for journals that did not use a one-year embargo. If the goal of the policy is to promote open access, it would seem logical that better open access be better rewarded, particularly as the pace of modern scholarship and knowledge dissemination accelerates.

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### Notes

1. An example of a Canadian journal with little specifically Canadian content would be the *Canadian Journal of Mathematics*, because mathematical theorems and proofs are not influenced by national boundaries. An example closer to *CPP/Adp* is the *Canadian Journal of Economics*, which publishes some subject matter that is not specific to Canada and at least implicitly must decide on a Canadian/non-Canadian subject-matter mix.
2. It is difficult to know whether or why other journals chose not to continue transition funding; 123 journals were supported in the most recent competition with the new open access requirements, as compared to 135 in the previous competition.
3. Open internet access means unrestricted access to content free of charge. The SSHRC policy requires open access to journals it (and hence the Canadian taxpayer) subsidizes. Besides the one-year embargo, it permits article processing charges with a slight reduction in per-article subsidy (but no change to the maximum subsidy), and a two-year transition period to full implementation in March 2021. It mandates access to actual journal content and not just access or permission to post final submitted manuscripts, sometimes called “green” open access.
4. It is also subject to what economists call Goodhart’s Law, sometime stated as “When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure” (using the words of Strathern, 1997, p. 308). Still it is common (see Card & DellaVigna, 2017) in the economic analyses of journals to use the citations of an article as a measure of its quality.
5. Arguably, a stronger impact factor would be at least a partial antidote to the decrease in junior academic economists publishing in *CPP/Adp* (Simpson & Emery, 2012).
6. If we replace *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* with *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, the number of cross citations drops to seven, of which five are in *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques*.
7. A recent successful example was the article by Philip Leonard (2017) on school junk food bans, which received coverage on national radio and television broadcasts and on the front page of major newspapers.



## Websites

Administrative Sciences Association of Canada, <https://asac.ca/#myaccount>  
Canadian Anthropology Society, <https://www.cas-sca.ca/>  
Canadian Association for Business Economics, <https://www.cabe.ca/jmv3/>  
Canadian Association of Geographers, <https://www.cag-acg.ca/>  
Canadian Association of Law Teachers, <https://www.acpd-calt.org/>  
Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work, <http://www.cassw-access.ca/>  
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Canadian Public Policy, <https://www.economics.ca/cpages/cpp-home>  
Canadian Public Policy (University of Toronto Press), <https://www.utpjournals.press/loi/cpp>  
Canadian Sociological Association, <https://www.csa-scs.ca/>  
EBSCO, <https://www.ebsco.com/>  
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JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/>  
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