

# Study on the ASPP and the Situation of Scholarly Books in Canada

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# INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP) offers up to 180 publication grants of \$8,000 and 5 translation grants of \$12,000, paid directly to the publisher once the book is published. Since its founding in 1941, the ASPP has supported the publication of over 8,000 books.<sup>1</sup>

The ASPP is a joint initiative of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (Federation) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), which directly support book publishers and the dissemination of Canadian research in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). SSHRC provides the program with annual funding of \$1,808,550 in the form of a “publications and administration grant” paid to the Federation.<sup>2</sup> Of this amount, \$1.5 million is paid directly to publishers of scholarly books.

The purpose of this study is to:

- Describe the program’s achievements since 2005, the year of its last evaluation;<sup>3</sup>
- Assess the importance of books as a fundamental element of HSS research, particularly in Canada;
- Understand the role of the ASPP in this ecosystem.

The study concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at supporting the ASPP, the Federation and SSHRC in their mandates to support books as vehicles for knowledge building and dissemination.

It is divided into five parts:

- I - Program profile: mission, operations, number of works funded, publishers eligible for funding, etc.
- II – The situation of HSS books: supply, demand, usage
- III – HSS book funding in Canada
- IV – The ASPP’s contribution to Canadian scholarly publications
- V – Some suggestions for improving support for scholarly books

This report, written in 2018 and not published at the time, was updated in 2021; it was only a partial update, since it relied only on the data available and updated at the time. The analysis covers the period from 2005-2017 and 2005-2020, wherever possible. The following resources were used in this study:

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<sup>1</sup> November 2021, data provided by the Federation.

<sup>2</sup> The program appears in the SSHRC awards search engine as “Aid to Scholarly Publications Program - Publications and Administration Grant.” The grant is associated with the sub-program Connection - Individual, Team and Partnerships Knowledge Mobilization Grants. [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/award\\_search-recherche\\_attributions/index-eng.aspx](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/award_search-recherche_attributions/index-eng.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> The last evaluation of the program, called the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program until 2012, when it was renamed the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, was in 2004. Report prepared by Goss Gilroy Inc., provided by the Federation

- Bibliometric analyses based on data from the Web of Science corpus,
- Analysis of ASPP administrative data,
- Analysis of various external datasets,
- A review of the literature and reports on related issues,
- Consultation with 10 publishers, through interviews (3) or in writing through an online questionnaire (7):
  - 6 university press members of ACUP/APUC (1 French, 5 English),
  - 4 non-university publishers specializing in non-fiction (2 French, 2 English).

This consultation took place in 2018. In compliance with our agreement with these publishers, the excerpts from consultations and the data provided to us have been anonymized. The term "publisher" refers both to the respondents and the publishing house that they represent. Quotes appear in red as follows:

|| *Quote*

As expressed by other authors, data on the book industry in general, and on scholarly books in particular, are incomplete, inaccessible, not easily comparable, or even non-existent. Fortunately, the place and future of books within the research and scholarly communication ecosystem is a subject of widespread concern. Many recent reports and articles have drawn the same conclusions, and despite limited available data, these allow us to establish an adequate understanding of the trends and challenges currently facing the scholarly book publishing industry.



## I. OVERVIEW OF THE ASPP (2005-2020)

This section briefly introduces the ASPP and provides an overview of the program in terms of titles funded, books published, disciplines covered, publisher recipients, and language of publication.

### ASPP HISTORY AND MISSION

When it was established in 1941-1942, the ASPP was initially financed by private sources: a \$5,000 grant was offered by the Rockefeller Foundation to the Canadian Social Science Research Council - one of the predecessors of the Federation - established a year earlier.<sup>1</sup> Ford and Carnegie also provided support (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2004, p. 5). It was not until 1958 that the program became publicly funded, by the Canada Council for the Arts (Stebbins, 2001, p. 454). Created in 1957 to “promote the arts, humanities and social sciences,” the Canada Council was divided in 1978 into two separate entities: the Canada Council for the Arts and SSHRC (Harvey, 2011), both of which continue to support publishing as part of their broad mandate.

Public support for what was then called the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program was, “as now [in 2001], [...] justified, in part, by the small market in Canada for scholarly books and the specialized nature of many of the subjects they reported” (2001, p. 455). A stated goal was to enable the flow of knowledge and contribute to the advancement of societies by providing compensation to offset their lack of commercial viability.<sup>2</sup> Today, market and specialization considerations are no longer part of the ASPP mission, which is now more general:

*Funding is awarded according to the ASPP’s mandate to assist the publication of books of advanced scholarship in the humanities and social sciences that make an important contribution to knowledge<sup>34</sup>.*

However, the program still has a national focus insofar as the authors – or at the very least, the subject of their works and – their publishers – must be Canadian.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See also the 75th anniversary page of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences: <https://www.ideas-idees.ca/about/history>, consulted on May 23, 2018 [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

<sup>2</sup> Documents from 2003, cited in the program evaluation report prepared by Goss Gilroy (2004, p. 5): “The ASPP is designed to assist in the publication of works of advanced scholarship which make an important contribution to knowledge, but which are unlikely to be self-supporting.”

<sup>3</sup> ASPP Frequently Asked Questions <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>, consulted on January 9, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Translators note: quote originally provided in French

<sup>5</sup> “Authors who are neither Canadian citizens nor Canadian permanent residents, but who use Canadian sources and deal with a Canadian subject, may in certain cases qualify for a grant.” Otherwise, ASPP-funded books must be written or edited by Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada. For collective works [...], at least half the principal editing team and half of the contributors must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents. [...] ASPP-funded books must be published in Canada since ASPP grants are paid out only to eligible Canadian publishers.” (*ibid.*) The guidelines for qualifying and the competition procedure are available on the FAQ page

The competition was renamed in 2012. While the acronym ASPP stayed the same, the name changed from *Aid to Scholarly Publications* to *Awards to Scholarly Publications Program*. This change was meant to highlight that ASPP grants are intended to recognize the excellence of books and their authors and are awarded to authors and not publishing houses. This means that authors can change publishing houses and still keep the grants awarded for their books.

## ELIGIBILITY AND PROCEDURE

The following are eligible for the competition: monographs, collective works, critical editions, critical bibliographies, reference works and documentary collections. The minimum length of eligible works in French or English is 40,000 words, including references. Digital books are also eligible. Open-access publication is encouraged – but in principle only, since there is no incentive for this type of publication.

In addition to meeting Canadian eligibility criteria, the works must have been approved by at least two peer reviewers. The publisher sends at least one review report to the Federation at the same time as it submits the manuscript to the competition. The Federation will see to obtaining the second report if it is not provided by the publisher. In exceptional cases where authors submit their manuscript themselves, the Federation will handle the recruitment of the two reviewers in order to respect the single-blind peer review process. Every month, the Publications Committee ranks the applications based on the peer review reports and the authors' responses to their comments. Funding for the work will depend on its relative position in the ranking and the funds still available.<sup>1</sup> The Academic Council is asked to intervene upstream of the process in cases where the eligibility of the works is uncertain.

Since 2006, the ASPP has been funding the translation into English, French or a Canadian Indigenous language of monographs or collective works (in electronic or print format) written and published in one of these languages. However, translations from one Aboriginal language to another are not eligible. The eligibility conditions and procedures for translations are similar except that the peer reviewers must decide whether the book should be available in another language and the translation grants are determined by the Academic Council, which meets twice a year for this purpose.

The publisher receives the grant money – \$8,000 for a book and \$12,000 for a translated book – after its publication, which must take place within three years of the application's approval.

As in the case of journal articles, it is the peer review that will determine whether books are considered “academic” or “scholarly”:

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mentioned above. (<https://www.federationhss.ca/sites/default/files/2021-08/aspp-eligibility-criteria-publishers-en-2021.pdf>, consulted on January 9, 2022).

<sup>1</sup> The guidelines for qualifying and competition procedures are available on the program's web page: <https://www.federationhss.ca/sites/default/files/2021-08/aspp-publication-guidelines-authors-en.pdf>.

*Academic books [...] [are] scholarly works, usually but not always written by members of the academic staff of universities, which are written as contributions to knowledge and understanding of an issue or topic, and which are peer reviewed by other scholars before publication (Jubb, 2017, parag. 28).*

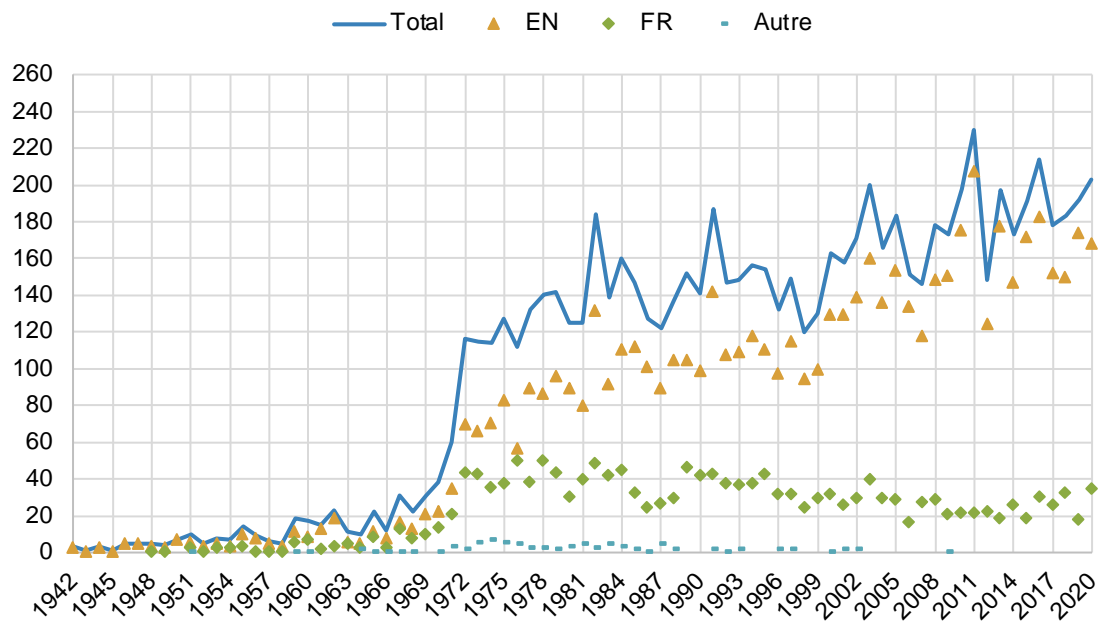
This subdivision of the nonfiction books category into “peer reviewed” and “non peer-reviewed” likely goes unnoticed outside academic circles.

## SUSTAINED PRODUCTION

Since its establishment, the program has contributed to the publication of over 8,000 books (Fig. 1), including 2,592 for the period under review (Fig. 2). These 7,479 books include:

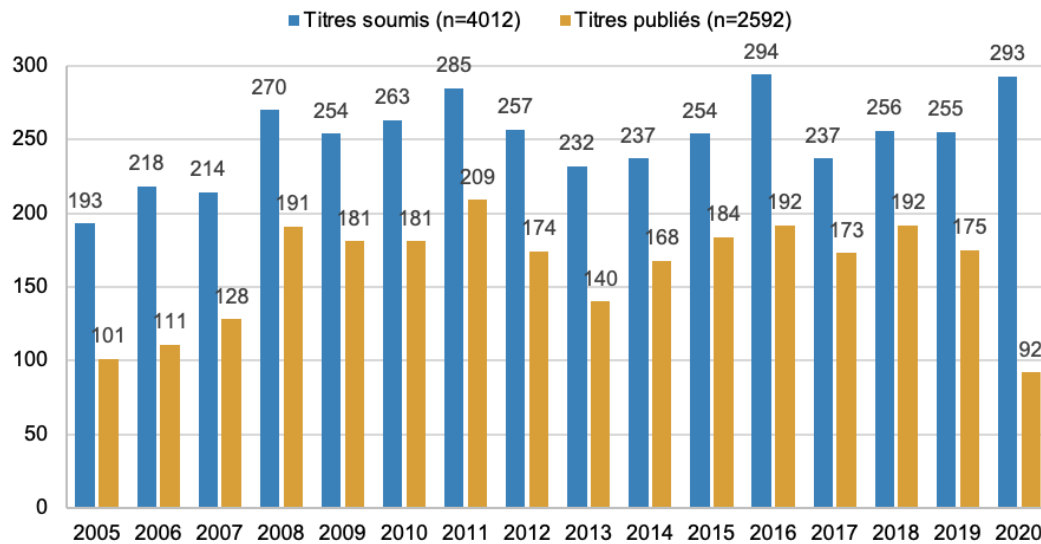
- 8,085 English titles,
- 1,753 French titles,
- 94 bilingual English-French titles or titles in another language as permitted by the program in the past (German, Latin, Spanish)

Fig. 1 - Number of publications supported by the ASPP (1942-2020)



The budget allocated by SSHRC to the Federation must support the annual publication of 180 unpublished works and since 2006, the publication of 5 translations. It must also cover the program’s administration costs. The Federation must, among other program-related tasks, process the applications, which in some years can reach 300 (Fig. 2). In any case, the annual average is 180 titles, including translations (167 titles to be precise, if we exclude the year 2020, which is probably incomplete).

Fig. 1 - Number of titles submitted and published by year of submission (2005-2020)



Reads as follows: of the 193 titles submitted in 2005, 101 have been published. The years 2019 and 2020 were likely incomplete, as publishers had up to three years to publish the book after the grant announcement.

From 2006, when the translation component was created, to 2020:

- 75 grants could have been awarded (5 per year);
- 75 applications for translation grants have been submitted: 57 from English to French, an average of 5 per year and a maximum of 11 requested in 2015 and 2016;
- 56 have been approved and 46 translations have been published.

In other words, the funds intended to fuel intellectual exchanges between linguistic communities have not been exhausted.

## DISCIPLINES

While all the HSS disciplines are eligible for the ASPP, some are better represented than others (Table 1, more than one discipline per book). History books (19% of disciplines for titles submitted and titles published) and literature (8.7 and 9.3% respectively) clearly dominate. Goss Gilroy's evaluation report (2004, pp.13-14) already noted this trend. The ASPP's disciplinary mapping is also consistent with bibliometric analyses of book use in the research ecosystem - see Part II of the report.

The correlation between percentage of titles submitted and percentage of titles published is highly consistent within disciplines, as are success rates for each discipline. This indicates that the program does not favour certain disciplines over others. The lowest publication rates are in the least represented disciplines, for which the figures are less exhaustive.

Table 1 - Disciplines of titles submitted to the ASPP and published with ASPP support (2005-2020)

Discipline*	Disciplines of Titles Submitted		Disciplines of Titles Published		Publication rate**
	Number	%	Number	%	
History - Canadian Post-Confederation	1,023	10.7%	693	11.3%	68%
Political Science	840	8.8%	538	8.8%	64%
Sociology	741	7.8%	463	7.5%	62%
Cultural Studies	732	7.7%	473	7.7%	65%
Women's Studies	524	5.5%	371	6.0%	71%
History - Non-Canadian	432	4.5%	273	4.4%	63%
Native Studies	387	4.1%	264	4.3%	68%
History - Canadian Post-Confederation	351	3.7%	230	3.7%	66%
Anthropology	339	3.6%	205	3.3%	60%
Law	339	3.6%	243	4.0%	72%
Philosophy	315	3.3%	183	3.0%	58%
English Literature	312	3.3%	219	3.6%	70%
Religious Studies	293	3.1%	195	3.2%	67%
Education	244	2.6%	128	2.1%	52%
Geography	237	2.5%	161	2.6%	68%
Political Economy	234	2.5%	151	2.5%	65%
English Literature - Canadian and Post-Colonial	219	2.3%	159	2.6%	73%
Communication	212	2.2%	132	2.1%	62%
Public Administration	183	1.9%	103	1.7%	56%
Art History	183	1.9%	108	1.8%	59%
Film & Theatre Studies	154	1.6%	106	1.7%	69%
French-Canadian Literature	149	1.6%	99	1.6%	66%
French Literature	142	1.5%	85	1.4%	60%
Psychology	100	1.0%	47	0.8%	47%
Social Work	97	1.0%	60	1.0%	62%
Asia-Pacific Studies	88	0.9%	63	1.0%	72%
Criminology	83	0.9%	52	0.8%	63%
Gay & Lesbian Studies	78	0.8%	60	1.0%	77%
Slavic Studies	72	0.8%	46	0.7%	64%
Economics	67	0.7%	32	0.5%	48%
Linguistics	54	0.6%	25	0.4%	46%
Classical Studies	47	0.5%	33	0.5%	70%
Music	46	0.5%	26	0.4%	57%
Canadian and Post-Colonial English Literature	43	0.5%	22	0.4%	51%
Germanic Studies	39	0.4%	26	0.4%	67%
Hispanic Studies	34	0.4%	22	0.4%	65%
Italian Studies	30	0.3%	15	0.2%	50%
Archaeology	23	0.2%	12	0.2%	52%
Business Management	15	0.2%	8	0.1%	53%
French Can / Québec Literature	13	0.1%	11	0.2%	85%
History - General	12	0.1%	3	0.0%	25%
<b>Overall total</b>	<b>9,526</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6,145</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>65%</b>

## CANADIAN SUBJECTS

As mentioned earlier, the competition was designed and justified by the desire to offset the low commercial potential of highly specialized books aimed at a limited market (Canada). One would therefore expect Canadian subjects to be well represented. A quick review of the number of times certain key words appear in the published titles<sup>1</sup> shows that a large proportion of ASPP-funded books focus on clearly identifiable Canadian subjects, and that this proportion increased between 2005 and 2020. However, this is only an estimate, as the same title can contain several keywords.

The increased prevalence of Canadian subjects may be partially explained by the fact that publishers must be Canadian to qualify, a criterion that does not appear to have previously applied; until the end of the 1980s, foreign publishers, especially U.S. and European, are listed among the publishers in this program. It should be noted that a greater proportion of books now address Indigenous issues; this subject moved from 4th to 2nd place, behind the keyword "Canada" which remains firmly in first place.

Table 2- Canadian subjects (1942-2004 and 2005-2020)

Keywords	1942-2004		2005-2020	
	Occurrences	% of titles published	Occurrences	% of titles published
canad*	892	17.33%	759	28.79%
québ* - queb*	267	5.19%	108	4.10%
ontari*	128	2.49%	41	1.56%
nativ* - amérind* - autocht* - aborig*	59	1.15%	146	5.54%
columb*	49	0.95%	23	0.87%
montr*	45	0.87%	32	1.21%
toront*	40	0.78%	26	0.99%
prairi*	22	0.43%	20	0.76%
alberta	21	0.41%	9	0.34%
scot* - écoss*	18	0.35%	12	0.46%
edw*	14	0.27%	5	0.19%
manitob*	11	0.21%	4	0.15%
hudson	7	0.14%	3	0.11%
brunsw*	7	0.14%	4	0.15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,580</b>	<b>30.79%</b>	<b>1,192</b>	<b>45.22%</b>

<sup>1</sup> A title might contain several keywords.

## PUBLISHER RECIPIENTS

### A productive trio

Three publishers account for the vast majority of ASPP-funded titles (Fig. 2 and Table 3: The University of Toronto Press, UBC Press and McGill-Queen's University Press alone account for more than 73% of ASPP-supported books between 2005 and 2020. The 4th -ranked publisher (Wilfrid Laurier University Press) only produced 4.5%, an 18% difference from the 3rd -ranked publisher, UBC Press.

Fig. 2 - Breakdown of ASPP-funded titles by publisher (2005-2020)

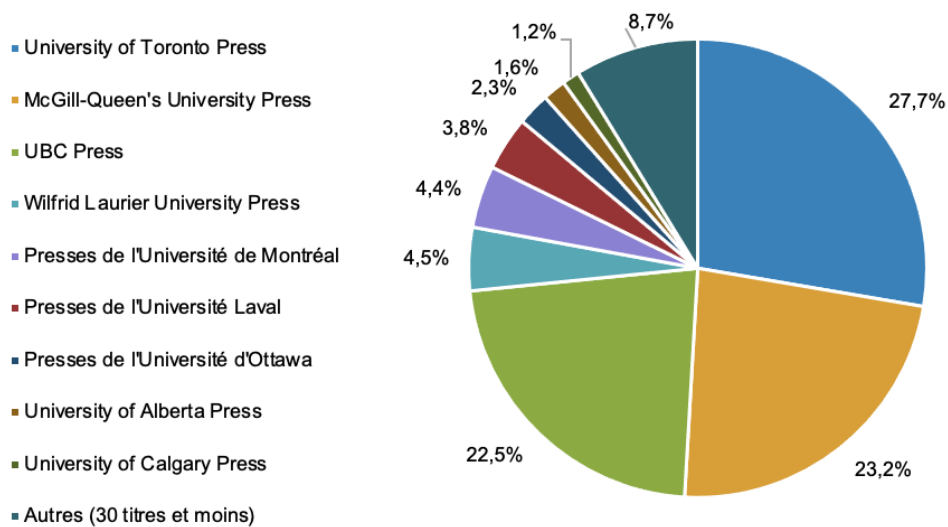


Table 3 - Publisher recipients of ASPP grants between 2005 and 2020

Publisher	Titles Published		
	Number	%	Cumulative %
<b>University of Toronto Press</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>
<b>McGill-Queen's University Press</b>	<b>683</b>	<b>23.2%</b>	<b>50.9%</b>
<b>UBC Press</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>73.4%</b>
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	131	4.5%	77.9%
Presses de l'Université de Montréal	129	4.4%	82.3%
Presses de l'Université Laval	112	3.8%	86.1%
University of Ottawa Press	68	2.3%	88.4%
University of Alberta Press	48	1.6%	90.0%
University of Calgary Press	36	1.2%	91.3%
Boréal	30	1.0%	92.3%

Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies	28	1.0%	93.2%
University of Manitoba Press	24	0.8%	94.0%
Septentrion	17	0.6%	94.6%
Athabasca University Press	15	0.5%	95.1%
University of Regina Press	14	0.5%	95.6%
Nota bene	13	0.4%	96.1%
Fernwood Publishing	13	0.4%	96.5%
Others (11 titles or fewer)	103	3.5%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,938</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Is this concentration specific to the ASPP or does it reflect the structure of the scholarly book market? Unfortunately, we have no way of answering this question (see methodology considerations above). We can only say that it is not a recent trend in the competition. Total ASPP output has reflected this domination by the "Big Three" since its establishment in 1942, although less strongly now than in the past (Table 4), with a remarkably constant presence by the University of Toronto Press, which is also the longest-standing publisher (1901).

Table 4 - ASPP recipient publishers, works published between 1942 and 2020

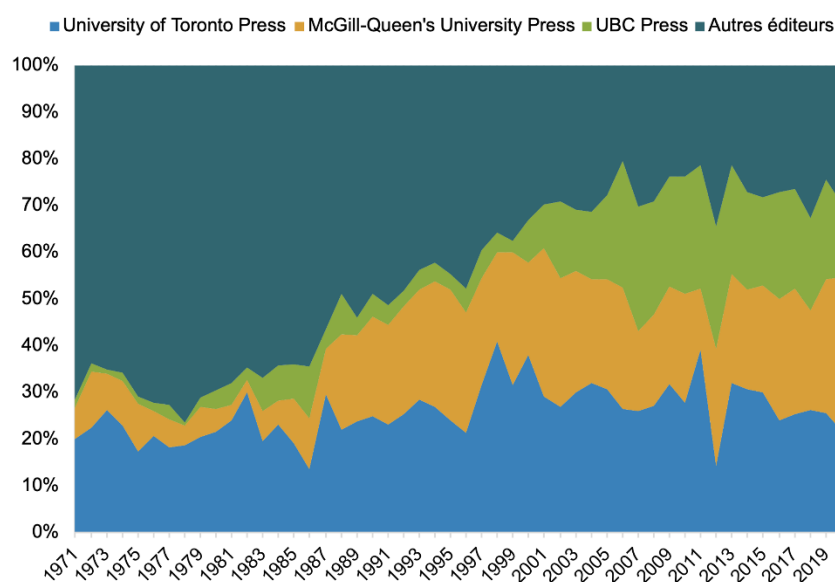
Publisher	Titles Published		
	Number	%	Cumulative %
<b>University of Toronto Press</b>	<b>2,188</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>
<b>McGill-Queen's University Press</b>	<b>1,470</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>45.2%</b>
<b>UBC Press</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>56.8%</b>
Presses de l'Université Laval	357	4.4%	61.2%
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	354	4.4%	65.6%
Presses de l'Université de Montréal	351	4.3%	69.9%
University of Ottawa Press / Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa	197	2.4%	72.4%
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies	139	1.7%	74.1%
Boréal	104	1.3%	75.4%
Bellarmin	88	1.1%	76.5%
University of Alberta Press	86	1.1%	77.5%
Hurtubise HMH	82	1.0%	78.5%
University of Calgary Press	67	0.8%	79.4%
Fides	58	0.7%	80.1%
ECW Press	57	0.7%	80.8%



Septentrion	53	0.7%	81.4%
Presses de l'Université du Québec	48	0.6%	82.0%
Others (41 or less titles)	1,452	18.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,085</b>	<b>100%</b>	

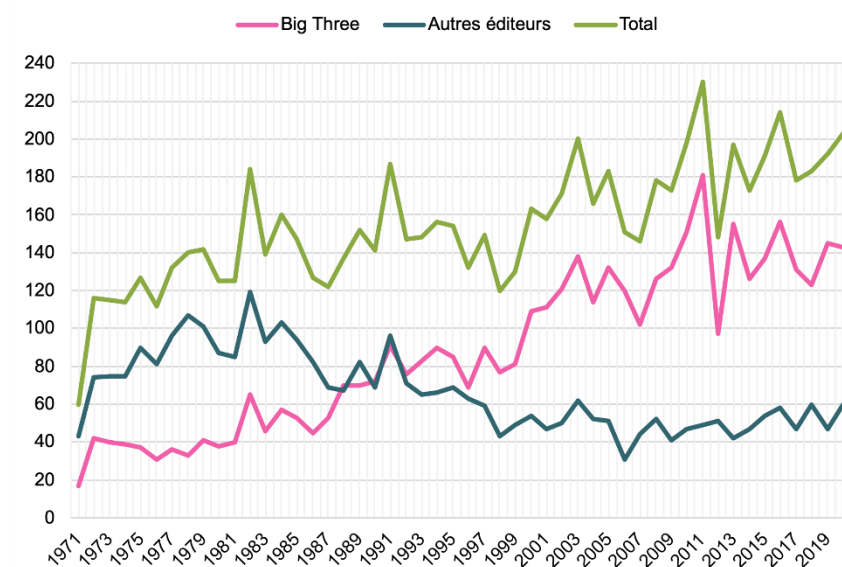
Grant distributions for the period when all three presses were active, i.e. since 1971,<sup>1</sup> confirms that their dominance has increased over time (Fig. 3). The turning point was in 1988 (Fig. 4). In that year, the three presses published 71 titles, while all other publishers combined published only 67 titles.

Fig. 3 - Percentage of titles published by the Big Three and other publishers (1971-2020)



<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1963, the McGill Press merged with Queen's University Press in 1969; the University of British Columbia Press was founded in 1971 (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/university-presses/>). The first ASPP-funded title from UBC Press appeared in 1971.

Fig. 4 - Number of titles published by the Big Three and other publishers (1971-2020)



With an average of 51, 43 and 41 award-winning titles published each year from 2005 to 2020, for an average annual contribution of \$408,000, \$344,000 and \$320,000 for UTP, McGill and UBC, ASPP is essentially equivalent to a publication grant for these publishers, despite the fact that this is not the program's primary purpose – as reflected in its name, "*Prix d'auteurs*" / "*Awards to Scholarly Publications*".

While their success rate - particularly for UBC Press - is higher than the average success rate of other publishers (8%), the Big Three's dominance is primarily explained by the number of titles they submit to competition: over 69% of dossiers processed between 2005 and 2017 were submitted by them (Table 5).

Table 5 - Dossiers processed and results by submitting publisher (2005-2020)

Publisher	Dossiers processed*		Dossiers Approved		Success Rate
	Number	%	Number	%	
<b>University of Toronto Press</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>70.7%</b>
<b>McGill-Queen's University Press</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>71.9%</b>
<b>UBC Press</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>86.1%</b>
<i>Big Three</i>	<i>2,639</i>	<i>71.9%</i>	<i>1,984</i>	<i>74.1%</i>	<i>75.2%</i>
Presses de l'Université de Montréal	173	4.7%	129	4.8%	74.6%
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	165	4.5%	119	4.4%	72.1%
Presses de l'Université Laval	134	3.6%	86	3.2%	64.2%
University of Ottawa Press	112	3.1%	66	2.5%	58.9%
University of Alberta Press	91	2.5%	55	2.1%	60.4%

University of Calgary Press	64	1.7%	36	1.3%	56.3%
University of Manitoba Press	36	1.0%	30	1.1%	83.3%
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies	30	0.8%	24	0.9%	80.0%
Boréal	28	0.8%	25	0.9%	89.3%
Athabasca University Press	25	0.7%	18	0.7%	72.0%
University of Regina Press	23	0.6%	14	0.5%	60.9%
Nota bene	19	0.5%	14	0.5%	73.7%
Fernwood Publishing	17	0.5%	12	0.4%	70.6%
Others (16 or less titles)	116	3.2%	67	2.5%	57.8%
<i>Publishers other than the Big Three</i>	<i>1,033</i>	<i>28.1%</i>	<i>695</i>	<i>25.9%</i>	<i>67.3%</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,672</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,679</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>73.0%</b>

\* Dossiers submitted minus those still active, rejected before the end of the process or submitted directly by the authors.

## Three types of publishers

Publishers that benefit from the ASPP can be divided into three broad categories:

- University presses, including learned societies;
- Specialized publishers whose catalogue consists primarily of nonfiction, academic or other books (e.g. Septentrion, Fernwood, Nota Bene);
- Generalists that publish other genres besides nonfiction, which is not published often (e.g. Boréal, XYZ, Fides).

As expected, university presses are the primary beneficiaries of the ASPP. Between 2005 and 2020, over 98% of ASPP-supported books were produced by university presses. A look at the language of the works reveals that this concentration is primarily due to English titles: slightly more than 28% of French titles are published by non-university presses, compared to 1.5% of English titles (Table 6). Even if we eliminate the effect of the Big Three (2,145 of the 2,539 titles published), university presses still account for more than 90% of the English title output (356 of 394 titles).

Table 6 - Breakdown of funded titles and publishers by publisher type and book language (2005-2020)

Publisher type	Titles published			Number of Publishers		
	All n=2937	EN n=2539	FR n=397	All Languages	EN	FR
University presses	94.8%	98.5%	71.5%	28	20	8
Generalists	3.1%	0.5%	19.6%	19	4	15
Specialized	2.1%	1.0%	8.8%	15	8	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>

A look at the number of ASPP-funded publishers (second part of Table 6) shows that English presses publish more books, but are also greater in number: 20, compared to 8 presses which published in French. This accurately reflects the Canadian university publishing environment. Three French-language university presses are active in the ASPP, the presses of Université Laval, Université de Montréal and Université du Québec (239 titles during the period); these are also the only French-language member presses of the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP). The other 5 are English-language presses that occasionally publish in French (16 titles) and University of Ottawa's bilingual presses (29 titles).

## APPLICATIONS AND PROCESSING TIMES

### Responsibility for submitting applications and success rate

As previously mentioned, the ASPP is not a funding body for the publishing community but a program to support authors and the publication of books. As such, authors are free to submit a grant application themselves. However, the Federation strongly recommends that authors first find an eligible publisher and allow it to submit the manuscript to the competition in order to increase their chances of success (better-prepared manuscripts), and accelerate processing time, since the Federation will not have to obtain all peer review reports itself (given that publishers must provide at least one of the two - at the same time as the manuscript).<sup>1</sup>

In fact, few authors submit applications to the ASPP on their own. Of the 3,849 dossiers reviewed between 2005 and 2020 (Table 7), 5.3 % were submitted directly by the author, with success in less than half of those cases (93 titles out of 205). When applications are submitted by a publisher, the success rate is over 71%, mostly due to university presses, which submitted 94.3% of the titles. With just 84 and 68 dossiers

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/aspp/authors> [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

submitted during the period, it is difficult to draw well-founded conclusions on the performance of generalist and specialized publishers.

Table 7 - Dossiers processed and success rate by book language and submitter (2005-2020)

Submitter	All dossiers				EN				FR			
	Processed*		Approved	Success Rate	Processed		Approved	Success Rate	Processed		Approved	Success Rate
	Number	%			Number	%			Number	%		
Author	205	5.3	93	45.4%	72	2.2%	41	1.7%	132	19.8%	51	13.2%
Publisher	3,783	98.3%	2,679	70.8%	3,251	97.8%	2,344	98.3%	533	80.2%	336	86.8%
Press	3,631	94.3%	2,581	71.1%	3,211	96.6%	2,318	97.2%	421	63.3%	264	68.2%
Specialized	84	2.2%	49	58.3%	34	1.0%	22	0.9%	50	7.5%	27	7.0%
Generalist	68	1.8%	49	72.1%	6	0.2%	4	0.2%	62	9.3%	45	11.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,849</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,772</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>3,323</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,385</b>	<b>71.77%</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>58.2%</b>

\*Applications processed are dossiers submitted minus dossiers still active.

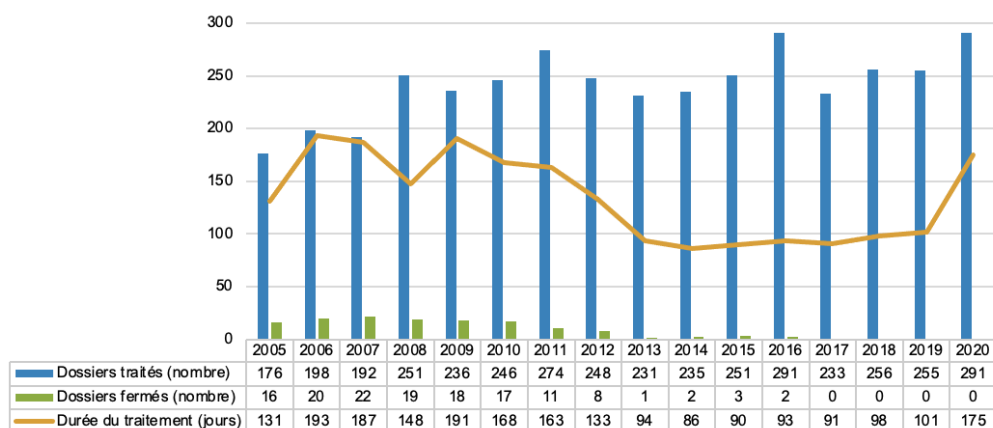
## Processing time

Since 2013, at least one of the peer review reports has been submitted by the publisher at the same time as the manuscript. While members of the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP) have had this option since 2003 through an agreement with the Federation (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2004, pp. 10-11), the process has now been generalized, leading to a significant reduction in the processing time for submitted dossiers:

- 2005-2012: 164 days
- 2013-2017: 104 days

Dossiers submitted in 2013, the year when the new evaluation procedures were implemented, were evaluated in 94 days on average, versus 133 the previous year (Fig.6) There was an uptick in processing time in 2020 (175 days) – an effect of the pandemic.

Fig. 5 – Number of processed dossiers, number of interrupted dossiers, and average dossier processing time by year of submission (2005-2020)



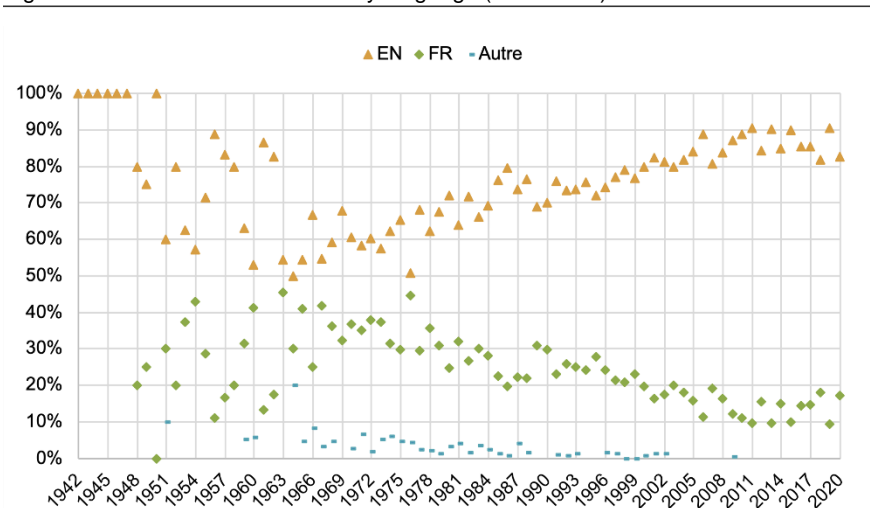
Dossiers processed are dossiers submitted minus active and unsuccessful dossiers.

The process has almost completely eliminated the number of interrupted dossiers, i.e. those closed before the end of the process, in some cases at the request of a publisher or author awaiting a verdict who did not wish to postpone the book's publication.

## LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION

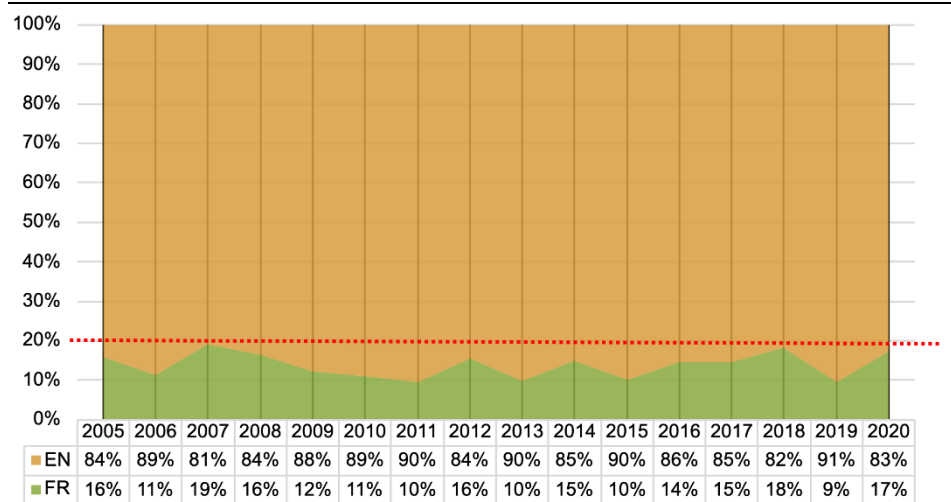
As mentioned, the ASPP subsidizes far more English titles than French titles (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7) which is perfectly normal given the linguistic situation of the country. Of the 8,085 books published since the program was established, 5,727 were published in English (77.2%) and 1,753 in French (21.7%). Another 94 books (1.2%) were bilingual French-English or in a third language. After coming close to parity, French publications have steadily decreased since the mid-'70s.

Fig. 6 - Breakdown of funded titles by language (1942-2020)



To reflect the actual linguistic breakdown in Canada and academia, the proportion of French titles should be over 20%. In fact, we are below that number (Fig. 8). According to the 2016 census, French is the mother tongue of 21.4% of Canadians and 23.4% of the population speaks French at home (20% exclusively or mostly).<sup>1</sup> Based on student population, French-language universities represent 25% of the Canadian university community in 2021.<sup>2</sup> In 2018, the same calculations using 2017 figures yielded a percentage of 18.70.

Fig. 7 - Breakdown of funded titles by language (2005-2020)



In 2005-2020, French language books represented 13.5% of titles published with ASPP support (Table 8).

Table 8 - Breakdown of titles submitted and published by language (2005-2020)

Year of submission	Titles Submitted						Titles Published		
	Applications			Success Rate*			n=2938		
	All	% EN	% FR	All	EN	FR	Year of publication	% EN	% FR
2005	176	89.2%	10.8%	59.7%	61.8%	42.1%	2005	84.2%	15.8%

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, "English, French and official language minorities in Canada," from the 2016 census, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016011/98-200-x2016011-eng.cfm>.

<sup>2</sup> Estimate based on Universities Canada data, *2021 full-time and part-time fall enrolment at Canadian universities*, <https://www.univcan.ca/universities/facts-and-stats/enrolment-by-university/>, viewed January 10, 2022 The following institutions were identified as Francophone: École de technologie supérieure, École des hautes Études commerciales, École nationale d'administration publique, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Polytechnique Montréal, Université de Moncton, Université de Montréal, Université de Sherbrooke, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Université du Québec à Montréal, Université du Québec à Rimouski, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Université Laval, Université Sainte-Anne, Université TÉLUQ. The calculation also included 30% of the University of Ottawa's enrolment, based on the percentage reported by the university in 2019 (*Une responsabilité collective. Plan d'action pour la francophonie à l'Université d'Ottawa*, published by Linda Cardinal, 2019, [https://www.uottawa.ca/president/sites/www.uottawa.ca/president/files/plan\\_daction\\_pour\\_la\\_francophonie\\_-\\_30\\_janvier\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uottawa.ca/president/sites/www.uottawa.ca/president/files/plan_daction_pour_la_francophonie_-_30_janvier_2019.pdf), p. 22)

2006	198	78.3%	21.7%	57.6%	58.7%	53.5%	2006	88.7%	11.3%
2007	192	77.1%	22.4%	72.4%	73.0%	69.8%	2007	80.8%	19.2%
2008	251	83.3%	16.7%	79.7%	78.5%	85.7%	2008	83.7%	16.3%
2009	236	83.1%	16.9%	78.0%	83.2%	52.5%	2009	87.3%	12.1%
2010	246	86.2%	13.8%	76.0%	76.9%	70.6%	2010	88.9%	11.1%
2011	274	86.5%	13.5%	78.1%	78.9%	73.0%	2011	90.4%	9.6%
2012	248	91.9%	8.1%	73.0%	74.1%	60.0%	2012	84.5%	15.5%
2013	231	91.3%	8.7%	62.8%	62.1%	70.0%	2013	90.4%	9.6%
2014	235	87.2%	12.8%	74.5%	73.7%	80.0%	2014	85.0%	15.0%
2015	251	87.6%	12.4%	74.5%	75.9%	64.5%	2015	90.1%	9.9%
2016	291	81.8%	18.6%	69.4%	69.3%	70.4%	2016	85.5%	14.5%
2017	233	85.0%	15.0%	75.5%	75.8%	74.3%	2017	85.4%	14.6%
2018	256	82.8%	17.2%	80.9%	80.7%	81.8%	2018	82.0%	18.0%
2019	255	85.1%	14.9%	77.6%	77.0%	81.6%	2019	90.6%	9.4%
2020	291	81.4%	18.6%	78.4%	77.6%	81.5%	2020	82.8%	17.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3864</b>	<b>84.9%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>73.6%</b>	<b>74.0%</b>	<b>70.9%</b>	<b>86.4%</b>	<b>86.4%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>

\*Calculated on the basis of dossiers reviewed (3,268 English titles and 584 French titles), i.e. not including those still active or closed before the end of the process.

Is this under-representation due to the quantity or quality of titles submitted to the competition? Does it reflect the linguistic distribution of the scholarly book market in particular?

In terms of quantity and quality, fewer French applications are submitted (around 15%) and their success rate is also lower (Table 8), regardless of who submits the dossier (Table 7). Moreover, it will be recalled that on the French side, dossiers are more often submitted by authors, for which the ineligibility and rejection rates are higher (Fig 9 and 10).

Fig. 8 - Submitters of French titles (2005-2020, n=677)

■ Auteur  
■ Éditeur

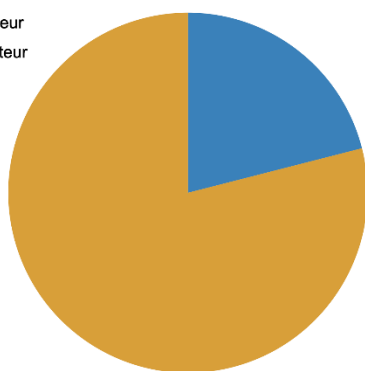
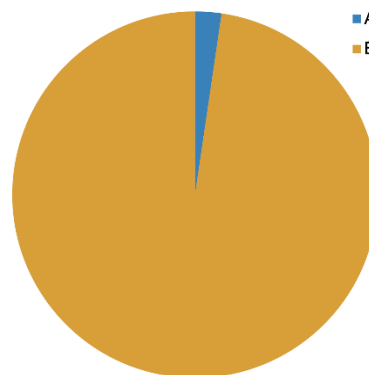


Fig. 9 - Submitters of English titles (2005-2020, n=3345)

■ Auteur  
■ Éditeur





Could the low percentage of French titles be explained by the form of the competition which, in using the peer review practice with which university presses are familiar, seems to be geared mostly to them? Since there are only three French-language university presses and one bilingual press (University of Ottawa), many authors may prefer to send non-fiction books to other publishers - whether specialized or generalist - which are less inclined to turn to the ASPP and whose evaluation practises and criteria are different (reading committee decision, commercial perspectives). These publishers—generalists in particular—can fund their nonfiction books with more lucrative collections and are therefore less dependent on the ASPP.

Finally, efforts to publish in French should be seen in the more general context of the academic field, where a desire for more visibility, impact or peer recognition may encourage French-speaking researchers to favour English. This is already the case for articles (Acfas, 2021), and may also apply for books, although according to the same report, the humanities and social sciences are less affected by anglicization. The ACFAS survey reveals that, even outside Quebec,<sup>1</sup> French still dominates in these disciplines. Of the scholars who had published a book, 56% had published in French. This rate was 63% in HSS, compared to only 37% in the natural sciences (*ibid.*, p. 60).

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The Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences should be credited for its efforts to harmonize the linguistic distribution of ASPP support with Canadian and university language distribution (see estimate Fig. 8). This emphasis on French stems from observations of an imbalance favouring English in analyses conducted in 2018 (first version of the ASPP and Scholarly Book Report, unpublished).

The Federation's figures for 2020-2021 show a significant increase in supported French-language works (see table below).

Table 9 – Recent trends in the breakdown of supported works by language

	2017-2018		2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021		2021-2022	
Books in English	153	83,15%	156	84,32%	167	91,26%	137	74,86%	148	82,22%
Books in French	31	16,85%	29	15,68%	16	8,74%	46	25,14%	32	17,78%
<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>		<b>185</b>		<b>183</b>		<b>183</b>		<b>180</b>	

Source: Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Report on the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, Program year 2021-2022, June 2022.

We can also see a substantial improvement in the success rates for French-language publications in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (see Table 8), owing to in-house changes by the Federation.

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<sup>1</sup> The sample included 515 French-speaking researchers from academic institutions outside Quebec.

As to whether the linguistic breakdown of ASPP-funded titles is in line with that of the Canadian book publishing industry and scholarly books in particular, as previously stated, it is impossible to say due to lack of data. However, judging from the amounts paid by the Canada Book Fund (Table 8), which Canadian Heritage calculates based on domestic and international sales, it is safe to assume that French-language publishers (all types of works combined) are not being left behind in terms of book sales. It bears mentioning, however, that the minimum sales to qualify for funding is lower for French-language books, which could lead to over-representation.<sup>1</sup>

In the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the latest data published by the Book Fund, publishers identified as Francophone received 54% of the grant (compared to 15% and 10% of the ASPP, respectively, based on year of publication of supported titles, see Fig. 8). In the sub-category of publishers who *also* received ASPP grants during the 2005-2017 period, French-language publishers also fared better than their English counterparts.

Table 10 - Canada Book Fund Support for Publishers (2014-2015), broken down by main catalogue language

	Publishers funded by the Canada Book Fund			and the ASPP between 2005 and 2017		
	Number	Amount Received	%	Number	Amount Received	%
English	126	13,723,127	45.72	15	1,917,145	47.87
French	120	16,239,218	54.11	15	2,037,419	50.87
EN/FR	1	50,560	0.17	1	50,560	1.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>\$30,012,905</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>\$4,005,124</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Canada Book Fund, list of 2014-2015 recipients of Support for Publishers, <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/fra/1450356457855>, and ASPP administrative data. The 2018 Book Fund url is obsolete as of January 2022; we were unable to locate any old or updated data, and Heritage Canada did not respond to our inquiries.

<sup>1</sup> "In the reference year, you must have eligible net sales of own titles of at least \$50,000 or \$30,000 for official-language minority and Indigenous publishers," Canada Book Fund, "Application Guidelines – Support for Publishers: Publishing Support," modified on February 23, 2021 <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/book-fund/publishing-support/application-guidelines.html>, consulted on January 10, 2022)

## II. HSS BOOKS: SUPPLY, DEMAND, USAGE

How is the HSS scholarly book industry faring? Is it in crisis? Is the end near as some might say? Are these types of books being written and published as much as in the past? Are they still being read and purchased? What place do HSS books have in scholarly communications?

The demand for these books will be approached from three angles:

1. The market in general, measured by sales;
2. Academic libraries, where demand is twofold: by the library through acquisitions and by the university community through loans;
3. Demand by researchers-teachers who use and write such books.

Assessing demand is difficult. All the studies conducted on the matter, in the U.S. and Europe, arrived at the same conclusion: “There is a dearth of comprehensive and reliable data on supply and demand for academic books”(Jubb, 2017, paragr. 11). Besides not being systematically compiled or standardized, industry data are incomplete and access is often fee-based. The actors (publishers, distributors, retailers) are reluctant to provide their figures when asked. One must therefore find other ways to compile useful data or consider research and analyses conducted elsewhere - using equally resourceful methods (Jones et Courant, 2014) - and that can only be assumed to shed light on the Canadian situation. As such, we will be extremely prudent in interpreting the few statistics available.

### **SUPPLY: OUTPUT IS ON THE RISE**

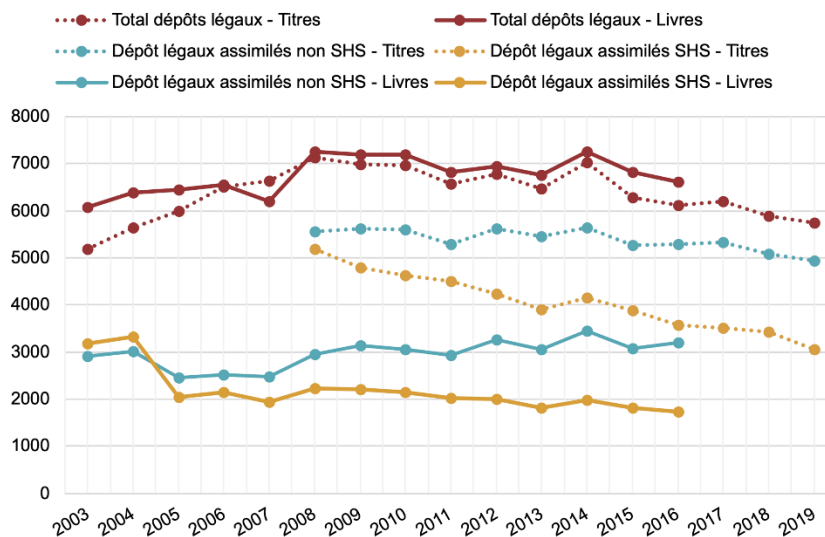
#### **Legal deposit in Canada: HSS books are fairly stable and output by university presses is up**

A workaround for the lack of direct data on publishing output is to look at legal deposit. All publishers are required to send one or two copies of their new publications to Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and, for Québec publishers, to the Bibliothèques et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ). Therefore, these bodies can in principle offer a fairly accurate picture of the sector, since they receive and catalogue everything that is published. In practice, things are not that simple. As one LAC official explained, catalogue data do not distinguish non-fiction and scholarly books from other books (for example, the title record does not indicate if the author is an academic) and the subject headings do not correspond to the ASPP disciplines (see list in

). However, every year since 2003, BAnQ has produced statistics on Québec publishing based on publications received for legal deposit. Unfortunately, LAC does not do the same. The data compiled below therefore apply only to Québec. It is also difficult to compare these data over time, due to changes in how BAnQ publishes its statistics<sup>1</sup>.

Of all the books deposited with BAnQ each year, we excluded "non-HSS books", i.e. books whose subject categories definitely do not correspond to ASPP disciplines (e.g. graphic novels and comic books, novels, natural sciences, etc.). With this approach, we can observe how HSS production performs in comparison to non-HSS production. However, the comparison is only approximate given that the BAnQ categories do not clearly distinguish between nonfiction books, practical guides and popular works. In some cases, an HSS category was eliminated - for instance, "Psychology, occult sciences" - because the number of titles and average circulation was too high to suggest that the works consisted predominantly of nonfiction or scholarly books.

Fig. 10 - Legal deposits at Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (2003-2019)



Note: "Titles" includes all books and journals received in legal deposit, with no distinction between them.

Source: Calculations from BAnQ's annual reports *Statistiques de l'édition au Québec*, particularly Appendix 3 "Publications des maisons d'édition commerciales - livres" for 2003 to 2016, and from "Statistiques de l'édition - Évolution du nombre de titres sur 10 ans (livres et brochures)" provided by BAnQ for 2008 to 2019. Since 2017, BAnQ has modified the format of its annual statistics; it no longer includes a subject breakdown of titles deposited and does not distinguish between books and brochures. To estimate the total annual output of books, it was

<sup>1</sup> BAnQ, *Statistiques de l'édition au Québec*, [http://www.banq.qc.ca/a\\_propos\\_banq/publications/publications\\_electroniques/statistiques\\_edition/index.html](http://www.banq.qc.ca/a_propos_banq/publications/publications_electroniques/statistiques_edition/index.html). The annual reports provide very detailed statistics for 2003 to 2016, less so thereafter. BAnQ provided the data directly for subsequent years (2017 to 2019, and the ten years before that), but differently structured, which makes it difficult to compare and account for the different curves in Fig. 11. The 2003-2007 annual reports provide a breakdown of legal filings by subject category, differentiating between books and brochures. The data provided by BAnQ does not distinguish books and brochures.

assumed that yearly output of print titles (including both books and brochures) from commercial publishers should be mostly books (Annual Reports, 2003 to 2019).

The production of HSS-identified titles is falling more rapidly and more severely than production of non-HSS titles, which are also in decline, and HSS is dragging down overall production. This statement is made with due caution in the analysis.

We can now try to isolate subject categories that seem to imprint their trends onto the curves. The decline in HSS *titles* in 2005 is attributable to the "Sociology" category: more than 400 were published in 2003 and 2004, compared to just 178 in 2005. The economy, education and law are equally affected, dropping from 319 to 93, 266 to 106 and 252 to 119, respectively, between 2004 and 2005. The numbers never recovered. The less extreme decrease in non-HSS output in 2005 is due to a drop in the "Medicine" category (514 titles in 2004 versus 256 in 2005). Otherwise, output is driven by a steady increase in the publication of novels (464 in 2003, 1,181 in 2016) and children's literature (273 to 467).

The *title* curves indicate a particularly steep decline in publications on HSS topics, while the non-HSS curve is very stable. The HSS curve is influenced by the decline of publications categorized as "Languages, linguistics" (851 in 2008, 355 in 2019), perhaps because dictionaries are in this category and the widespread use of online tools has made them more dispensable? The "Sociology" category also continued to decline, stabilizing in 2013.

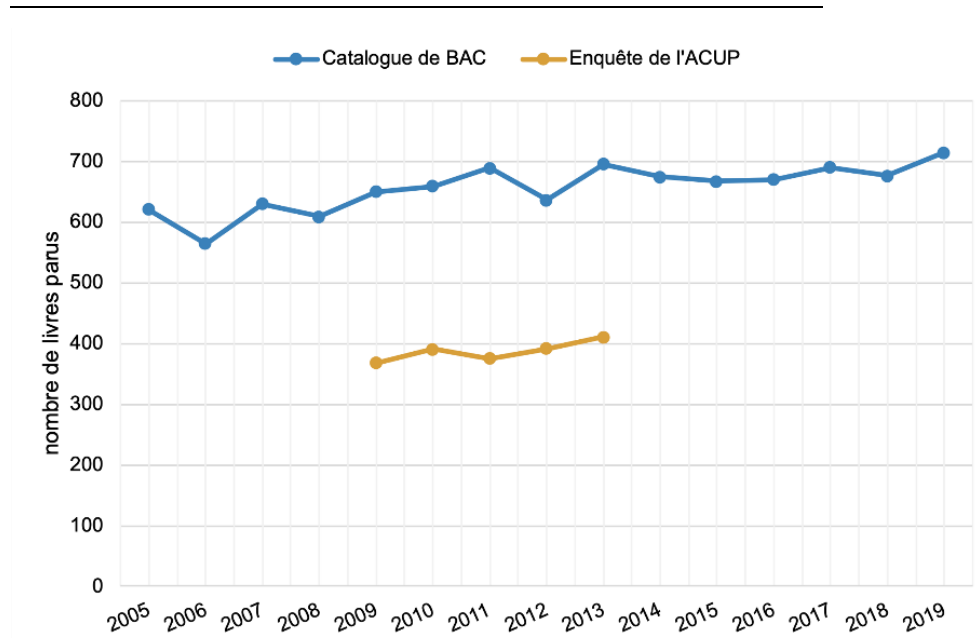
The output of scholarly publications for Canada (Fig. 11) can be approximately determined by estimating the output of ACUP members.<sup>1</sup> To do so, we counted the number of ACUP books held by LAC - which were assumed to have been acquired by legal deposit - and that appeared in Canada's National Union Catalogue, Voilà.<sup>2</sup> One press provided us with its output figures for part of the period; these were used in the calculation. For validation purposes, the figures provided by the ACUP/APUC for 2009 to 2013 were added to the graph. (2014, p. 21) The number of titles published varies widely - here again, data were acquired indirectly and are prone to errors, duplication, etc. - but the trend is consistent: output is increasing.

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<sup>1</sup> Except for Nunavut Arctic College Media, with only two titles listed in Voilà, which does not at all represent the catalogue on the publisher's site. It also bears mentioning that the University of Regina Press was launched in 2013 and its output has been nearly 20 titles per year since 2014.

<sup>2</sup> [https://help.oclc.org/Discovery\\_and\\_Reference/LAC/OCLC\\_information\\_and\\_resources?sl=en](https://help.oclc.org/Discovery_and_Reference/LAC/OCLC_information_and_resources?sl=en)

Fig. 11 – Estimated annual output of Canadian university presses (2005-2019)

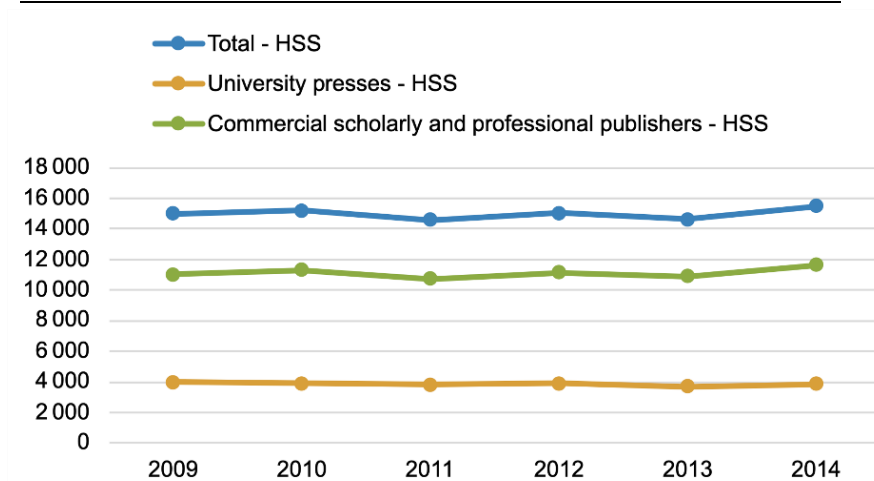


Source: ACUP (2014) and estimated from the records of books held by LAC, listed in the Voilà catalogue. The year 2020 was not included in the calculation, to accommodate a possible cataloguing backlog.

## Similar trends abroad

The analyses of Greco et al. on scholarly books in the U.S. (2012; 2016) also indicate stable output that is trending upward rather than downward (Fig. 12). However, given that the period analyzed was very short (2009-2014), a long-term trend cannot be confirmed. Here, the authors relied on new books distributed on the U.S. market - including the output of Canadian publishers - to determine the output and price of scholarly books. For the purposes of the analysis, the data were compiled by separating HSS and non-HSS books, in other words, those that fit into categories covered by the ASPP and those that do not.

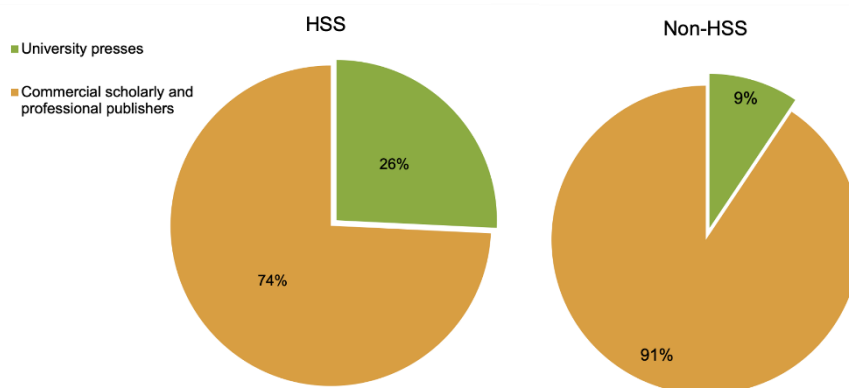
Fig. 12 - New scholarly books on HSS topics distributed in the U.S. (2009-2014)



Source: Calculations based on Greco *et al.*, 2012 and 2016.

Greco *et al.* distinguished between books published by university presses and other publishers. A look at different publishers' output shows that commercial publishers produce a larger proportion of non-HSS books (finance, mathematics, sciences), which are also the most expensive. And the most lucrative in terms of profit margin and units sold? The authors found that the suggested retail prices of commercial publishers, all disciplines combined, are on average higher than those of presses, "perhaps 'leaving money on the table'" (Greco *et al.*, 2012, p. 365).

Fig. 13 - Distribution of new books by scholarly book category and publisher type, United States (2009-2014)



Source: Calculations based on Greco *et al.*, 2012 and 2016.

Other analyses of British and U.S. situations confirm that the output of scholarly books has always - some analyses date back to the 1970s - trended upward, unlike demand (Anderson, 2014a; Crossick, 2015; Gatti et Mierowsky, 2016a; Jones et Courant, 2014; Jubb, 2017). Publishers adapt; they reduce the average print run to reflect sales

projections but not the number of titles published. The four largest British publishers<sup>1</sup> published 2,523 monographs in 2004 and 5,023 in 2013, i.e. almost twice as many (Crossick, 2015, paragr. 32). These authors speak of a dangerous situation of overproduction.

## **COMMERCIAL SALES: ARE HSS BOOK SALES STABLE OR DECLINING?**

Book sales are a first indicator for assessing demand – or at least part of the demand given that the consumption of scholarly books also involves their consultation in libraries (physical and digital) and online reading, on Google Books for example. Unfortunately, here as elsewhere, “Comprehensive and reliable statistical data on sales of academic books is notable mainly by its absence”(Jubb, 2017, paragr. 283). This is competitively sensitive data which many publishers are reluctant to share, including some Canadian presses contacted for this report. However, it is a mistake to judge them on sales figures, as these presses were originally founded *“precisely because it was apparent that there was no market for that work within conventional publishing channels”* (Fitzpatrick, 2018). As regards retail sales reports, demand-related data can only be accessed for a fee. The inability to access raw data limits opportunities for exploitation and analysis.

## **Canadian HSS book sales are stable but the data is difficult to interpret**

Canada has two information systems on book sales: BookNet Canada (BNC) for the English market and Gaspard for the French. With the exception of weekly bestseller lists published in newspapers, access to publishers’ sales reports and analyses is fee based. Our attempts to contact Gaspard went unheeded. We were only able to get BNC to prepare, for the initial iteration of this report in 2018 (unsuccessfully in 2021), a *Non-fiction Market* dataset for categories akin to ASPP disciplines, namely: *Business & Economics, History, Language Arts & Disciplines, Law, Literary Criticism, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Social Science*. The goal was to:

1. Obtain a snapshot of book sales in general and of HSS books in particular;
2. Gauge the general public’s interest in scholarly books and in particular those supported by the ASPP by checking whether any titles made the bestsellers list (annual top 20 in each category).

According to the BNC, the data covers 85% of the English Canadian market, with the following limitations:

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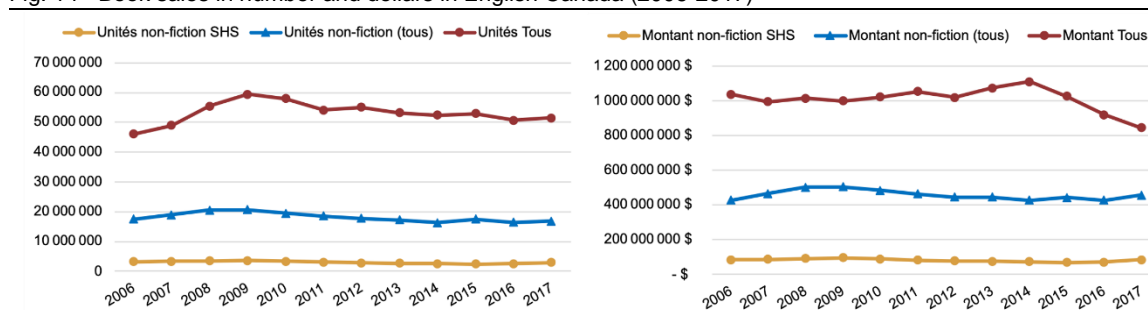
<sup>1</sup> Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan.



- Only data on retail sales are collected: sales outside this channel, to institutions and libraries or to academic bookstores, are not recorded;
- Sales are for printed books only;
- Just as for legal deposit records, the descriptors do not make it possible to distinguish nonfiction and scholarly books from more commercial titles;
- The first full year is 2006.

A look at the HSS book situation shows that demand is fairly stable, whether expressed in units or dollars, and more stable than the overall market or the *non-fiction* market in general (Fig. 14). The drop in overall sales revenue in this market can be explained by a sharp drop in the average selling price: from \$23 in 2006 to \$16 in 2017. By contrast, the price of HSS and non-fiction books increased, but only by \$3 (respectively from \$26 to \$29 and \$24 to \$27, respectively).

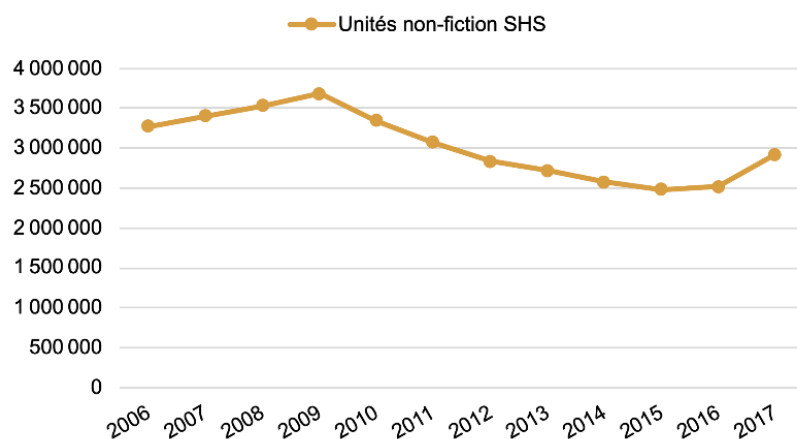
Fig. 14 - Book sales in number and dollars in English Canada (2006-2017)



Source: Calculations based on data provided by BookNet Canada.

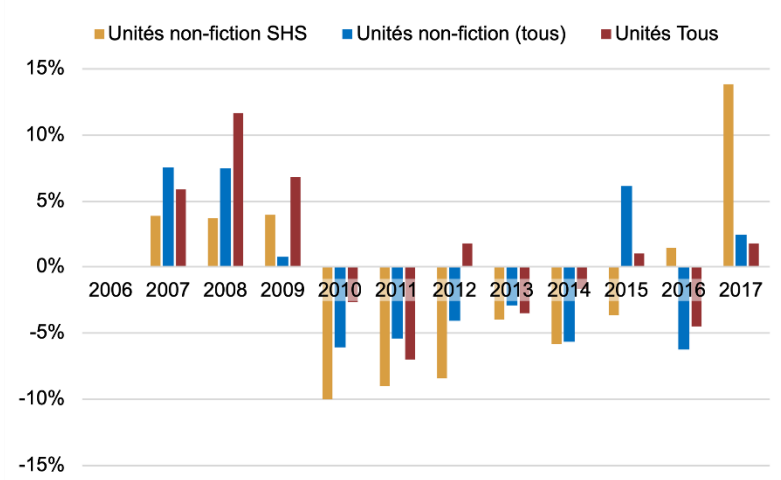
However, the scale effect can be misleading: the large orders of the general market (tens of millions of units) and the HSS market (millions) have a smoothing effect on the latter. A look at the HSS market shows a clear downward trend (Fig. 15). Similarly, a look at the percentage change in units sold shows that the market is experiencing annual fluctuations of -10 to +15% (Fig. 16).

Fig. 15 - Number of HSS books sold in English Canada (2006-2017)



Source: Calculations based on data provided by BookNet Canada.

Fig. 16 - Fluctuation in number of books sold in English Canada (2006-2017)



Source: Calculations based on data provided by BookNet Canada.

Once again, it is difficult to identify substantive trends by examining only a 10-year period. It would therefore be necessary to continue the observations to see whether the increase in 2017, which was very strong for HSS books (+13.87%), was anecdotal or will continue over time. It is difficult to know what caused this sharp increase since no category recorded a significant increase that year (see Table 10): the relative weight of the categories is overall very stable.

Table 11 - Percentage of HSS book units sold in English Canada by category (2006-2017)

	Business & Econ.	History	Psych.	Social Science	Political Science	Philosophy	Language Arts & Disciplines	Literary Criticism	Law
2006	32.1%	26.2%	7.5%	12.0%	8.3%	6.3%	4.2%	1.9%	1.6%
2007	33.0%	23.5%	7.5%	16.0%	8.8%	5.3%	3.3%	1.3%	1.2%
2008	33.4%	24.1%	10.9%	12.2%	8.1%	4.3%	3.4%	2.3%	1.4%
2009	34.7%	24.4%	13.7%	8.7%	7.0%	4.6%	3.5%	1.8%	1.7%
2010	38.1%	24.2%	10.9%	8.0%	8.8%	4.2%	3.1%	1.4%	1.4%
2011	39.0%	23.7%	12.2%	8.2%	7.8%	3.9%	2.5%	1.3%	1.2%
2012	37.2%	25.4%	11.9%	9.0%	7.2%	3.9%	2.7%	1.2%	1.5%
2013	34.2%	26.8%	15.7%	8.5%	6.2%	3.7%	2.5%	1.2%	1.2%
2014	36.5%	27.0%	12.1%	8.9%	6.7%	4.0%	2.5%	1.2%	1.0%
2015	35.3%	26.6%	13.1%	9.3%	6.9%	3.9%	2.5%	1.4%	0.9%
2016	35.1%	28.0%	12.6%	9.1%	7.0%	3.7%	2.2%	1.3%	1.0%
2017	34.3%	28.1%	11.1%	11.0%	7.3%	3.7%	2.0%	1.8%	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.2%</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>7.6%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>

Source: Calculations based on data provided by BookNet Canada.

This table shows that the public is especially interested in business (35% of units sold between 2006 and 2017) and history (25.5%). The latter statistic is good news for the ASPP given that 20% of the disciplines associated with funded works are historical (see Table 1).

These sales figures point to the public's greater interest in particular subjects as opposed to scholarly books. We are faced here with the same limitations as in the analysis of legal deposits: all types of writings are found in these categories. For example, in 2017, the two bestsellers in Business & Economics were *Tools of Titans: The Tactics, Routines, and Habits of Billionaires, Icons, and World-Class Performers* (published in 2016) and *Tribe of Mentors: Short Life Advice from the Best in the World* (2017) by Timothy Ferriss. In history, the bestseller was a book by a professor from Hebrew University of Jerusalem: *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari (2011, 2014 for the English translation). In psychology, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011) by Daniel Kahneman, 2002 Nobel Prize laureate in economics and Princeton University psychology professor. In social science, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (2017), a book written by University of Houston professor Brené Brown dealing with "professional development" was, however, research based.

From this, we can at least conclude that first, the public has a certain appetite for scholarly reflection, and second, there is no reason universities can't produce bestsellers.

## Sales abroad are down per title and overall

Notwithstanding the paucity and poor quality of available data, the literature still agrees on the following trends:

*[...] declining sales for academic books in the arts and humanities, particularly at the per-title level; increases in prices per title; constraints on library budgets for book purchasing; and reduced exposure to consumers.* (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 230)

Some interesting statistics can be drawn from the report by Michael Jubb (2017) in which he compares the situations in 2005 and 2014 in the United Kingdom (pp.130-132). The data have many of the same limitations as BookNet's for Canada, i.e. the sales are for retail and printed book only.

As we saw from the press output in Canada and the U.S. (previous section), based on the number of titles in stores, the supply of scholarly books is increasing (Fig. 17). However, the number of units sold is decreasing, albeit less drastically for university presses (Fig. 18). But this may be because they cannot go any lower... A look at the number of units sold out of the number of titles in print shows that the average of 26 copies sold in 2005 fell to 18 in 2014. For all publishers combined, the average number of copies sold fell from 100 to 60 (Fig. 19). Although these are averages and substantial variations exist among disciplines, we can still obtain an idea of the market situation.

Fig. 17 - Scholarly books in print in the United Kingdom (2005 and 2014)

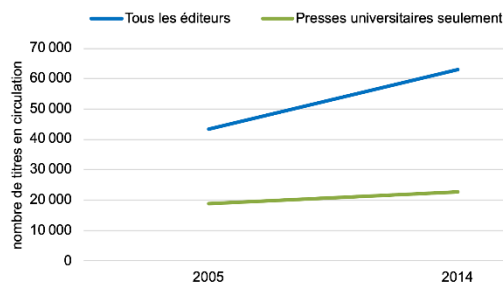
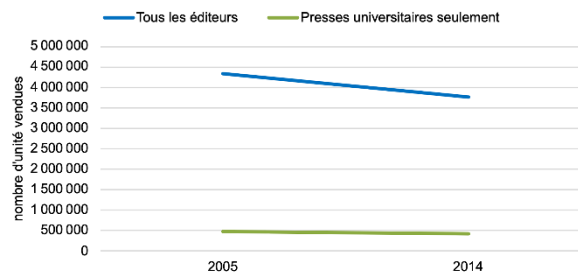
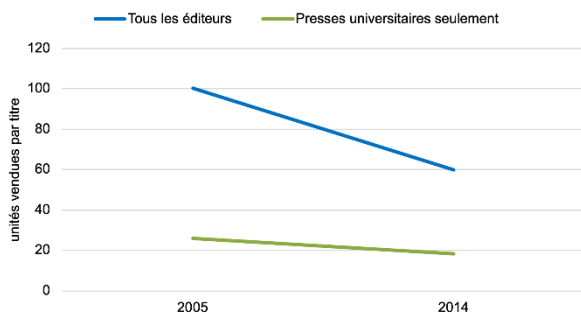


Fig. 18 - Sales of scholarly books in the United Kingdom (2005 and 2014)



Source: Calculations based on Jubb, 2017.

Fig. 19 - Average number of copies sold per scholarly book in the United Kingdom (2005 and 2014)



The sales statistics presented in this section provide information on the demand:

- by individuals
- for printed books
- for books other than scholarly (see BookNet Canada statistics).

These figures provide an imperfect picture of demand or of a book's success since many scholarly books find their buyers and readers in libraries.

## DEMAND FOR SCHOLARLY BOOKS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Academic libraries allow us to examine demand for scholarly books in two ways: through their acquisitions (sales) and through the book loans to and consultation by users, i.e. probably students. Past the postdoctoral level, it seems that HSS researchers tend to buy rather than borrow books (Collins et Milloy, 2016, p. 46; Tenopir et Volentine, 2012, p. 64; Wolff et al., 2016, p. 26-27).

### Acquisition budgets are down

As we have seen, retail sales have fallen sharply in the United Kingdom. Looking at sales in general, thus including library purchases, many authors have found the same thing:

Publishers now sell barely half of the 2,000 copies they used to sell of a given monograph. All the "first" specialized books (reworked theses that feed the U.S. tenure system) that used to sell 700 copies and thus cover publishing costs now barely sell 300 copies<sup>1</sup> (Bielstein, 2015, p. 190).

*[...] lifetime sales are often estimated to be from 200 to 400 copies- 200 to 400 copies—sold primarily to university libraries.* (Gatti et Mierowsky, 2016a)

Not only can these statements not be corroborated due to lack of data, they are also difficult to interpret, for example, the authors never specify whether they are speaking of books in general or only their printed version.

This decrease, lamented by the publishing industry, is often blamed on subscription costs for scholarly journals, which are cutting into academic library budgets that could be devoted to books. Admittedly, academic libraries are the primary buyers of scholarly books, or more specifically, the primary customers of university presses, accounting for nearly half their sales. Here again, there is no data to substantiate this percentage, which seems to vary widely from one discipline to the next (Anderson, 2014b).

While it is difficult to validate sales per title statistics and measure the impact of libraries on press sales, we can at least examine their acquisition budgets.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

Since the 1990s, the narrative has been that university presses are feeling the effects of the serials. A study by Jones and Courant on a sample of U.S. university presses and libraries from 1975 to 2010 show instead that commercial journal publishers have long been unfairly blamed when in fact it is the increased output of university presses that has given the impression that demand is decreasing:

*[...] the decline starts much later than is commonly asserted, starting only in 2000, and thus coinciding less with the serials crisis than with the succession of economic downturns that have squeezed university funding since the turn of the century. [...] This finding leads us to ask why, if library purchasing from university presses was rising until the early 2000s, the leaders of university presses have been claiming that libraries started slashing their purchases of university press monographs around 1992 and, moreover, have been making such claims since the late 1990s, before any sustained decline had occurred at all. [...] It seems that even as libraries continued to increase their average and overall purchasing from the sample presses throughout the 1990s, the presses were accelerating their title output at a much higher rate. Because of this, from the press perspective, it may have seemed as though libraries were purchasing fewer books. [...] throughout the period, libraries were purchasing a decreasing number of university press books per title published, even though they were not purchasing any fewer university press books in total and in many cases were purchasing more. (Jones et Courant, 2014, p. 57)*

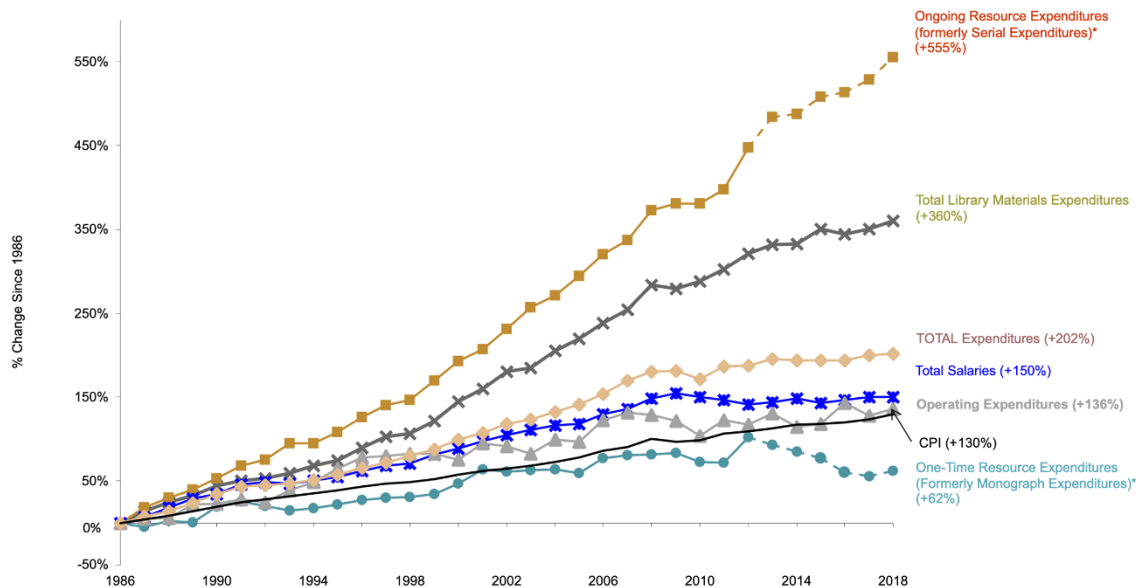
Thus, there has been a relative decline in sales, in terms of copies sold per title, but not in sales overall.

The following graph (Fig. 20) shows that between 1986 and 2018, the book budgets for members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), an American association with 16 Canadian libraries among its 124 members,<sup>1</sup> increased (+62%), albeit far less sharply than the budgets for serials (+555%). However, these budgets are now declining.

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<sup>1</sup> Listed on an interactive map: <http://www.arl.org/membership/list-of-arl-members>

Fig. 20 - Expenditures of members of the Association of Research Libraries (1986-2018)



\*Trend line was extended with data from Ongoing and One-Time Resource Expenditures.

Source: Association of Research Libraries, *Expenditure Trends in ARL Libraries 1998-2018*,  
[https://www.arل.org/arل-statistics-survey-statistical-trends/](https://www.arl.org/arل-statistics-survey-statistical-trends/).

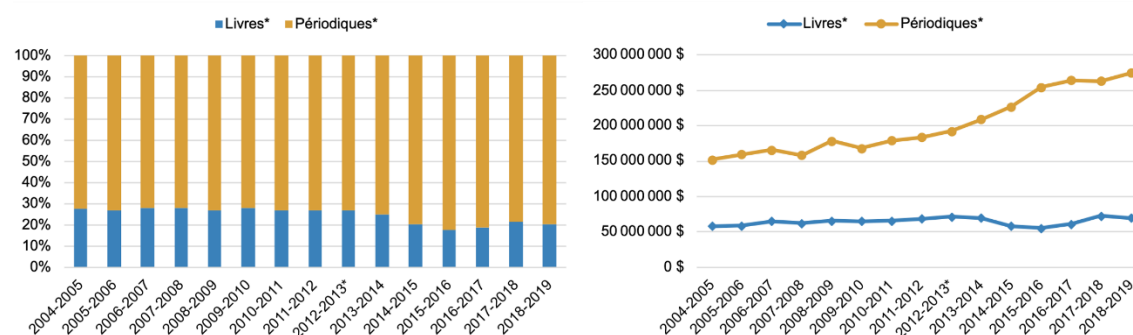
## Book budgets are also down in Canada

What is the situation in Canada? Using annual reports from the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL/ABRC) since 1976, we compiled data on the acquisition budgets of the 27 universities where complete statistics for the period under review were available.<sup>1</sup>

The Jones and Courant findings (2014) are valid for Canada: while it is a fact that the share of the budget devoted to serials is increasing, it is also a fact that investments in books have not been massively reduced (Fig. 21).

<sup>11</sup> The 27 universities are: Carleton, Concordia University, Dalhousie, Guelph, Manitoba, McGill University, McMaster University, Memorial, New Brunswick, Queen's, Regina, Saskatchewan, Simon Fraser University, Université de Montréal, Université de Sherbrooke, Université du Québec à Montréal, Université Laval, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, Victoria, Western Ontario, Windsor, York University. All the reports are available at: <http://www.carl-abrc.ca/measuring-impact/statistics/>.

Fig. 21 - Budgets of Canadian university libraries devoted to books and serials (2004-2019)



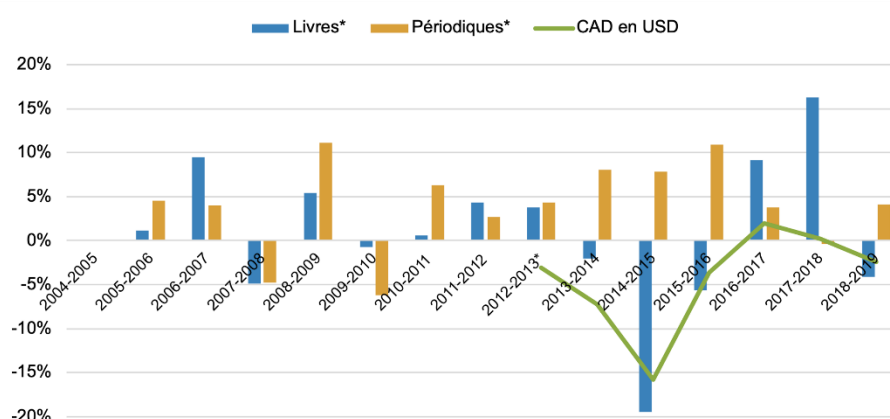
\*Following ARL's 2011 revision of expenditure categories, the categories "*Total Monographs* - Total des monographies" and "*Total Serials* - Total des périodiques" were replaced in 2012-2013 by "*One time resource purchases* - Achats ponctuels de documents" and "*Ongoing resource purchases* - Achats permanents de documents," which they cover imperfectly

(<http://www.libqual.org/documents/admin/12instruct.pdf>).

Source: Calculations based on CARL's annual statistics.

Until 2012-2013, the acquisition budgets even slightly increased. A sharp decrease occurred in 2014-2015, probably due to the decline of the Canadian dollar against the U.S. currency, as seen in the following graph (Fig. 22).

Fig. 22 - Fluctuation in book and serial acquisition budgets for Canadian university libraries (2004-2019)



\*See note in Fig. 21.

Source: Calculations based on CARL's annual statistics. Bank of Canada exchange rates.

These figures do not, however, tell us *how many* different titles are purchased. We can neither deny nor confirm that fewer copies per title are being sold, nor rule out the



possibility that budget increases are being absorbed by higher book prices<sup>1</sup> - which are further exacerbated by fluctuations in the Canadian dollar. It is also unclear whether all disciplines and publishers are equally affected (do libraries favour Canadian subjects and publishers?) or if, on the contrary, some have not been subject to reduced investments. We will have to check whether the downward trend continues in the future and ideally, obtain a breakdown of the budgets by discipline.

Stating that this is just the continuation of a long-time trend, one large university press acknowledges the overproduction situation where library demand is out of step with supply:

*The major challenge to the scholarly publishing industry is the declining sales of scholarly books to libraries, primarily university libraries and institutional libraries of record, but including other kinds of research and public libraries. This is not a recent occurrence: it is a trend that has been ongoing for approximately 25 years, but has reached a particularly acute point. Library budgets have not grown in step with the output and availability of published scholarship [...] Our records show that most of the books we published in the 1990s and before could draw on sales revenue from a library market that accounted for 4-5 times the sales that we can expect from libraries for a given scholarly book published today. (university press)*

Three other presses (of the six interviewed) all cited declining sales to libraries and changes in their acquisition patterns as reasons for concern.

Some authors are absolutely sure that the future will confirm the fact that libraries are moving away from books:

*And while it's true that the relentlessly increasing cost of science journals results in money being redirected from monographs budgets to serials budgets, that's only half the story. [...] in most research libraries there is solid, constant, and demonstrable demand for scientific journal content, and the same simply can't be said for scholarly monographs. In other words, even if annual journal price hikes were minimal, many research libraries would likely be directing acquisitions money away from monographs anyway. (Anderson, 2014a)*

The reason? A decline in the use of books combined with new purchase decision-making models.

## Use of printed books is declining

Library book loans and consultations are another way to gauge the interest in scholarly books. However, this approach is of limited usefulness because it is not representative of the entire university community. As previously mentioned, academic staff rarely use the libraries and prefer to buy their own books.

To be complete, library data should be compiled on:

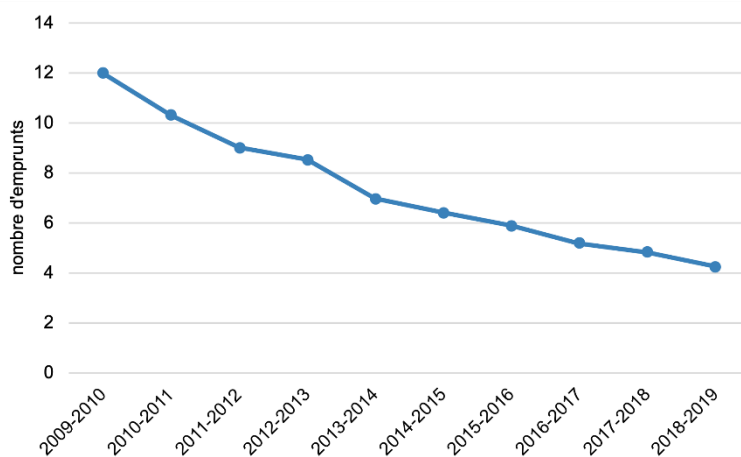
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<sup>1</sup> ARL produced a graph in 2011, which unfortunately has not been updated, with the following three pieces of information: increase in acquisition budgets since 1986, in the number of monographs purchased and their average price. <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/monograph-serial-costs.pdf>

- Physical and digital loans
- On-site consultations
- Online consultations and downloads

CARL's annual statistics on physical loans show a sharp decline in this type of loan. While students borrowed an average of 12 books per year in 2009-10, they borrowed 4 in 2018-2019 (4.23), a threefold decrease.

Fig. 23 - Average physical borrowing per student in Canadian university libraries (2009-2019)



Note: Number of loans in relation to number of students. Note: The calculation method seems to have changed in 2009, precluding comparisons with earlier ratios.

Source: CARL annual statistics.

No study (in North America) refutes this trend, which is also observed in on-site consultations deduced from re-shelving statistics, which are not recent. Anderson (2014a) cites a 1979 University of Pittsburgh study "*which reported that roughly 40% of the books acquired by that university's library ten years previously had never circulated, and concluded that each of those books had only a 2% chance of ever being checked out in the future.*" Another study (Ohio University libraries, 2011) revealed that only 6% of books accounted for 80% of loans. The problem of "books that have never been borrowed" does not affect only academic libraries and scholarly books but public libraries and other media as well (Poissenot, 2016). However, it is surely more problematic for the scholarly book, specialized by definition, and for its publishers, whose markets are more limited.

The demand for scholarly books - as measured by its in-library use - has therefore always been weak. We simply did not know this.

*This has always been the case, but for at least a century the problem was obscured by the inefficiencies of an analog, print-based information environment. No more. (Anderson, 2014a)*

And it's a fact that we can no longer ignore:

*As more and more libraries engage in collection analysis, much of it prompted by funding conditions and space pressures, they are realizing that large proportions of their monograph collections have never circulated, creating yet more pressure to stop buying (printed) books that sit unread on open stacks. (Little, 2018, p. 219-220)*

Demand has been weak and continues to weaken. We have no reason to think that it will not get worse since the Web is becoming the primary “library” of the world with Google as its primary catalogue (Bradley-St-Cyr, 2018, p. 146; Epron et Vitali-Rosati, 2018, paragr. 38; Wolff et al., 2016, p. 12), and since reading habits are shifting to shorter formats (Bielstein, 2015, p. 189).

## **Demand-driven acquisitions that favour digital**

In the early 2010s, collection development shifted from a systematic and exhaustive just-in-case approach to a more selective patron-driven *just-in-time approach*: “focus on [...] seeking to ensure that the library acquires and retains the books that are the most relevant to its users’ needs.” (Deegan, 2017, p. 62) Acquisitions became PDA (*patron-driven*), DDA (*demand-driven*), and EBA (*evidence-based*). In this model, users are given access to a corpus of digital books and a firm purchase from the supplier is made based on the number of consultations. For example, the purchase may be triggered after two consultations of a given title or after a given user views, prints or downloads at least 10 pages of a work.<sup>1</sup>

We also know that digital acquisitions are preferred, although the data are difficult to interpret, either because they aggregate all electronic resources, be they journals or books, or because they no longer distinguish between a book and a journal. As such, since 2012-2013, CARL’s statistics - based on the ARL survey model - have used general categories, such as “One-time resource purchases” and “Ongoing resource purchases” — which are treated as equivalent to books and journals, respectively, even though they align with those categories imperfectly<sup>2</sup> — to replace the categories of “monographs” and “serials”, which are themselves broken down into “print” and “electronic.” Between 2004-2005 and 2011-2012, the last year for which the information exists, we found that the budget for printed books was still higher than for e-books, but the latter was increasing. (Fig. 24)<sup>3</sup>.

The study conducted by eBound in 2015 also found:

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliothèques de l’université de Montréal, “Bilan du projet pilote d’achat initié par l’usager (PDA),” September 24, 2015. Document kindly provided by the Direction des collections.

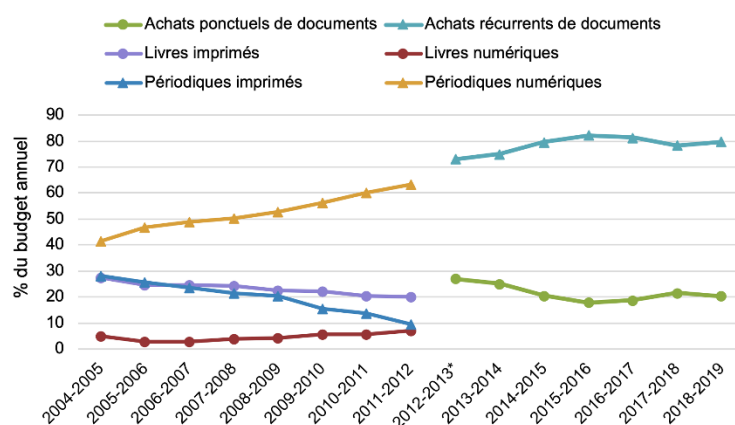
<sup>2</sup> [http://www.arlstatistics.org/About/Mailings/stats\\_2011-12](http://www.arlstatistics.org/About/Mailings/stats_2011-12)

<sup>3</sup> See also the preliminary report by Ithaka S+R, showing that printed books still dominate in U.S. academic libraries: 96% of acquisitions (Daniel et al., 2018), with the following limitation acknowledged by the authors themselves: “The issue is that a substantial share of electronic books are not purchased as individual titles, but rather as titles bundled into e-book packages. Additionally, they are sometimes obtained through models that are closer to subscriptions than firm purchases.” (<http://www.sr.ithaka.org/blog/where-did-all-the-e-books-go/>). The remainder of the study is due in the fall of 2018 and should answer the following questions: “How many books are academic libraries acquiring on average per year, and is there any notable trend in the number of acquisitions? In which formats and through which methods are academic libraries acquiring books? Have these patterns seen any change from 2013 to 2017?”.

- *Materials budgets for most public libraries are keeping pace with both inflation and population growth. This is not the case for university and college libraries. [...]*
- *Canada's post-secondary libraries spend significantly higher percentages of their materials budgets on electronic databases than do Canada's public libraries. (Roberts et al., 2015, p. 8)*

In terms of overall trends, the latest CARL statistics point to a decreased share of budgets dedicated to one-time purchases, and thus likely to books.

Fig. 24 - Breakdown of book and serial acquisition budgets for Canadian academic libraries, by format (2004-2019)



\* Change in acquisition categories, see note in Fig. 21.

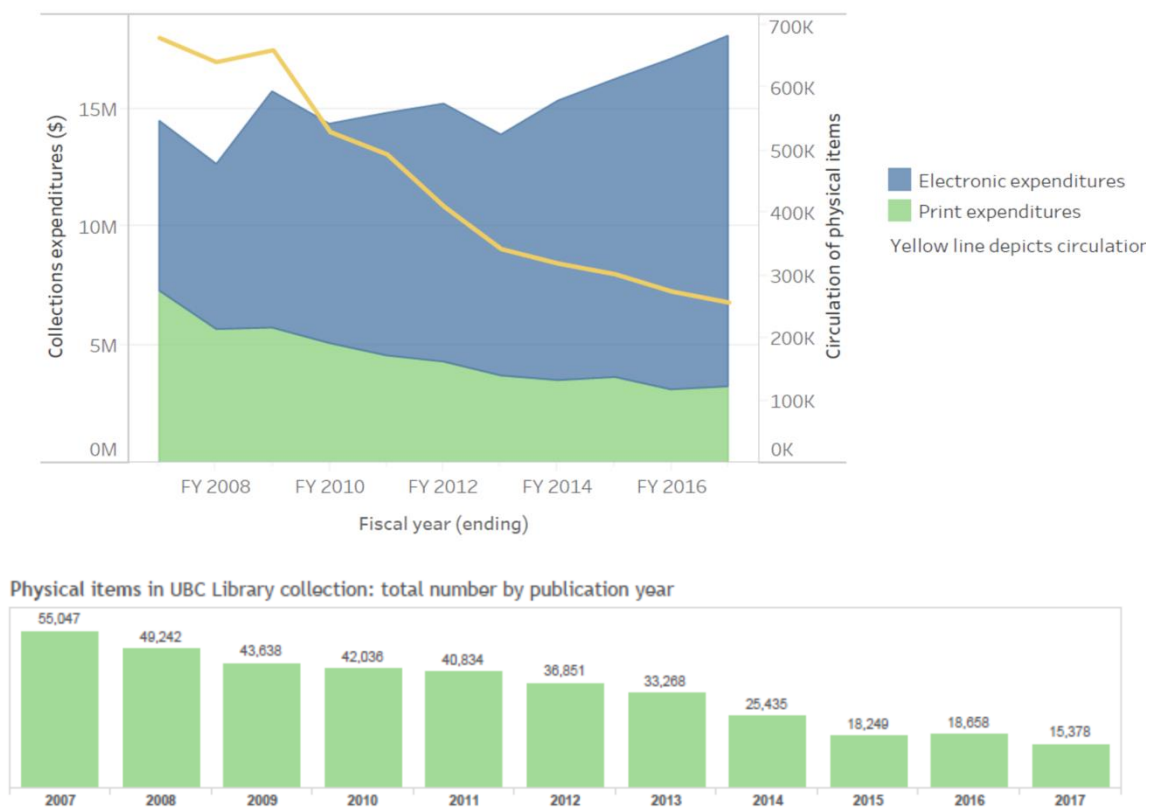
Source: Calculations based on CARL's annual statistics.

CARL's analysis of the change in UBC's collections and expenditures (2018, p. 4-5) attests to this preference for digital, which is reflected both in the budgets and number of printed books added to the collection (Fig. 25) - the yellow curve in the first graph also confirms the decrease in physical loans in Fig. 23. Same trend, although with some opposing elements, in another academic library:

*I'd say that in the humanities and social sciences, we buy one out of three books in electronic format. We'd be prepared to buy a lot more e-books in these disciplines, but buying them from publishers is not easy – the model for institutions, for all sorts of reasons, is either non-existent or lacking or comes with major access constraints. Unfortunately, at the moment, the only e-books that we are able to buy in these disciplines come from publishers that we find questionable (Taylor and Francis, Sage Publications Inc., Wiley, etc.). In my opinion, the scholarly book in Canada, particularly in French, also has a format problem: in 2018, it's harder to access a print book than an e-book<sup>1</sup>. (Collections Department, by email. Our emphasis.)*

<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

Fig. 25 - Breakdown of UBC Library acquisition expenditures by format (2008-2016 fiscal years) and number of printed books acquired (2007-2017 publication years)



Source: CARL/ABRC, 2018

This tendency for libraries to favour digital over print is more than a trend, it's a fact, at least in the U.S. (universities and colleges) where, in 2019, *"For the first time, the percentage of library budget spent on e-books has risen to nearly the same level as print books. This reflects the general trend of increased spending on all forms of electronic resources and decreased spending on all types of print resources"* (Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020).

There is little doubt that the pandemic has confirmed and probably even accelerated the digital shift.

Without going into technical details, while the preference for e-books and for demand-driven acquisitions is good for libraries and users (lower costs, greater supply, reading needs met in a more targeted and efficient manner), it does have financial consequences for publishers:

*[...] purchases are delayed, or may never take place, as compared to the 'just-in-case' library acquisitions model (which thus creates a cash-flow problem for publishers); short-term loans replace what might otherwise have been outright purchases [...]; and many sales may be lost*

*altogether. As a result, revenues fall. The fundamental problem for publishers is that while the DDA records distributed to libraries, and the titles in their DDA pools, have increased massively, the numbers of titles purchased—whether as print or e-books—have fallen; YBP data suggests that for American libraries they fell by 24% between 2011 and 2015 [...]. (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 297)*

The consequences are exacerbated by the fact that, for publishers, e-books - which often co-exist with their print versions - double part of the work and costs associated with production, distribution and storage.

## BOOKS IN ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Some observers are critical, or at least skeptical, about the future of the scholarly book as it currently exists, particularly books published by university presses less subject than other publishers to commercial success considerations and return on investment. They decry the absurdity of the demand-supply ratio:

*To a significant degree it [the existential challenge of the university presses] lies in the fact that, unlike most publishers, university presses provide a vital, high-demand service to authors and a marginal, low-demand one to most readers. (Anderson, 2014a)*

Or the absurdity of the level of service offered, of the “value proposition” of publishers in the Internet age, which, here again, exceeds market needs:

*But the development of the internet and, more particularly, the world-wide-web, may call increasingly into question whether “publishing” services need inevitably and invariably to be provided and packaged together in this way for the future. (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 56)*

But what about the relationship between scholarly books and the academic community for which they are intended? What role do scholarly books play in research activities? What is their use and what needs do they address?

We would have liked to measure the use of scholarly books in education by using data from Copibec and Access Copyright, which manage copyright royalties, the first for Québec, the other for the rest of Canada, as teachers are required to declare the works and articles used in their document collections. For confidentiality reasons, Copibec was not able to provide us with the requested information; Access Copyright did not respond to our request.

## The book in scholarly communication

Bibliometric analyses are one way to measure the importance of books in the research ecosystem. What role do books play in scholarly article bibliographies; how has their presence changed over time? Do book reviews, which reflect the importance of books in the research infrastructure, continue to be important topics in journals?

Limitations: This analysis provides insight into authors’ citation practices and the place allocated or left for books in journals. It must be taken for what it is: a partial view of how

researchers use books. How many books are read? How many fuel researchers' thinking without being cited in the bibliography? And how many are listed or mentioned elsewhere, in social media or website columns?

The following statistics are based on Clarivate Analytics' Web of Science (WoS) bibliographic database, which indexes more than 18,000 journals in all areas of science, social sciences, and arts and humanities.<sup>1</sup> While very impressive, the database has some limitations, particularly in terms of language. Journals in languages other than English are under-represented (Mongeon et Paul-Hus, 2016). However, while French-language literature is less visible, trends concerning the place of books should, *a priori*, be similar (but not the same) as the trends for English-language literature.

## Book use over time and in HSS disciplines reveals resilience in arts and humanities

To evaluate this use, we extracted WoS references to documents that do not have volume numbers. Although very simple (Larivière et al., 2006), this criterion allowed us to separate references to journal articles (which have a volume number) from references to other types of documents, mostly books, as they generally do not have volume numbers. While there are exceptions (journals without volume numbers and multi-volume books), this indicator allowed us to see more recent trends in researchers' book use.

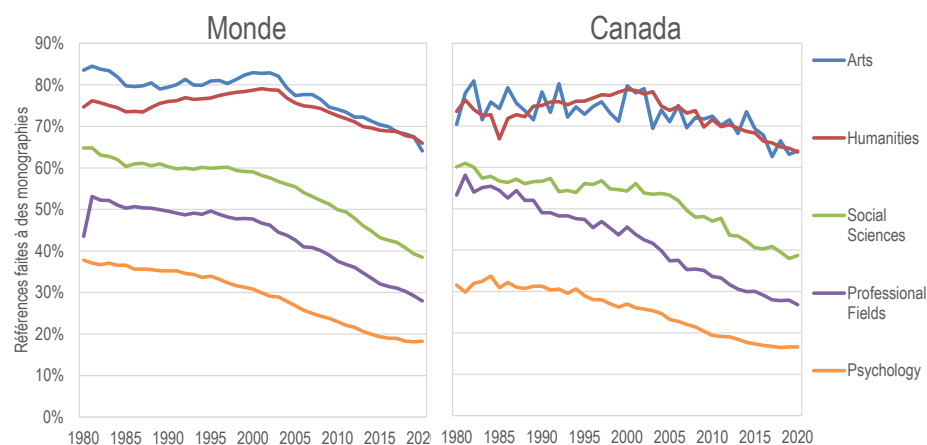
### *Proportionally more journals and fewer books except in arts and humanities)*

In journal bibliographies worldwide, the book-article ratio changed between 1995 and 2000 in favour of articles, which dominate today, except in the **arts** and **humanities** (history, philosophy, linguistics, literature, religion), where the decrease occurred later and the share of books is declining but still very high (close to 70% of citations) (Fig. 26). In Canadian journals, the tipping point occurred later, around 2000, and was practically simultaneous in all fields, except in professional fields, where the shift occurred earlier (between 1985 and 1990). In **psychology**, books were already cited less often than articles in the 1980s. This HSS field has a long tradition of scholarly communication in the form of articles, probably because of its association with the medical field. In Canada, the **professional fields** (communication, education, law, management, information sciences, social work), which initially trended with social sciences, followed the international trend in the second half of the 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/solutions/webofscience-platform/>, February 7, 2022

Fig. 26 - Percentage of book references in bibliographies by HSS field, worldwide and in Canada (1980-2020)

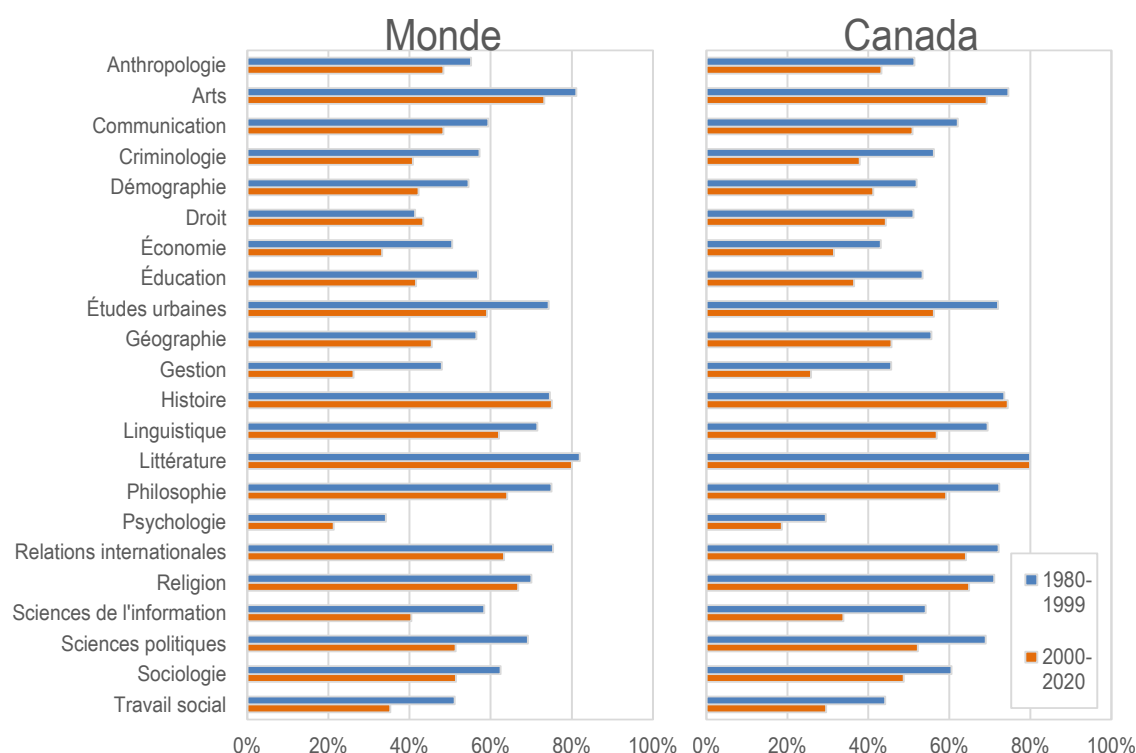


Source: Web of Science

In terms of disciplines, the portrait is more nuanced. A comparison of two periods (1980-1999 and 2000-2020) shows that, in certain specialities, books are just as or nearly as important today as in the past (Fig. 27). But it also shows that their share has not increased anywhere, except slightly in **history**. The general trend is downward both in Canada and the rest of the world.



Fig. 27 - Percentage of book references in bibliographies by HSS discipline, worldwide and in Canada (1980-2020)



Source: Web of Science

In **literature**, the presence of books is remarkably stable and central, accounting for 80% of references. **History**, the **arts** and **religion** also continue to prefer books. The decline of books in favour of journals is striking in **management, criminology, urban studies, political science and information science**. Presumably, primary work is disseminated in articles while books are syntheses, unlike literature, history, the arts and religion where books are the primary vehicle for disseminating knowledge. Since researchers tend to cite original works, they will cite more articles or books, depending on their specialty.

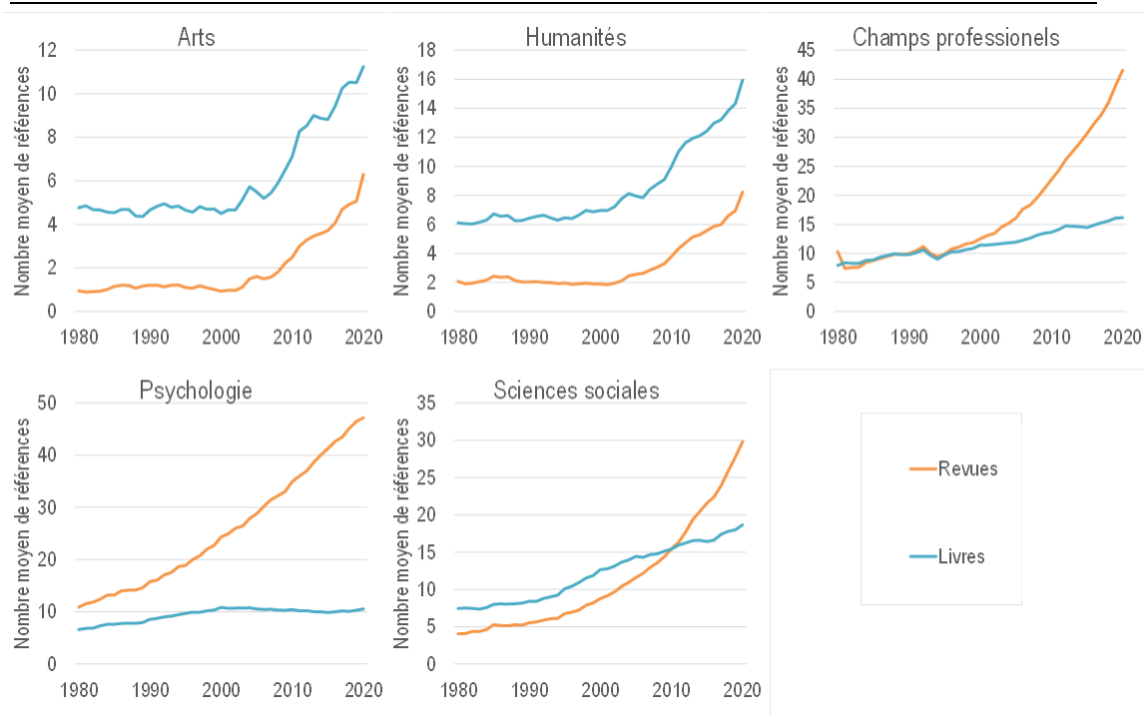
We find that the classification by discipline of titles submitted to the ASPP and published with its support (Table 1)—where history and literature dominate—is somewhat similar to the classification of disciplines according to the book-journal ratio of their bibliographies.

### *But more books in absolute numbers*

Therefore, *proportionally fewer* books are cited, but are they *fewer in absolute /numbers?* While the previous graphs provided information on trends for the entire WoS corpus, the following graph shows the average number of journals and books cited in articles in the corpus. This offers a better understanding of what is behind the book's relative decline: is there an increase in the absolute number of books cited, or are they staying the same or decreasing?

The news is good for books: the average number of books cited per article is increasing in HSS (Fig. 28), although in very different proportions depending on the field, and its increase is less than the increase in the number of journals cited.

Fig. 28 - Average number of book and journal references per article by HSS field, worldwide (1980-2020)



Source: Web of Science

In the **arts** and **humanities**, the number of books and articles cited is growing at a similar pace. In **psychology**, the curve is almost flat: there were barely more books cited in 2020 than in 1980, but there were far more articles. These graphs also show that there is a general tendency for researchers to expand their bibliographies but that their size varies by field, with the most references being cited in psychology.

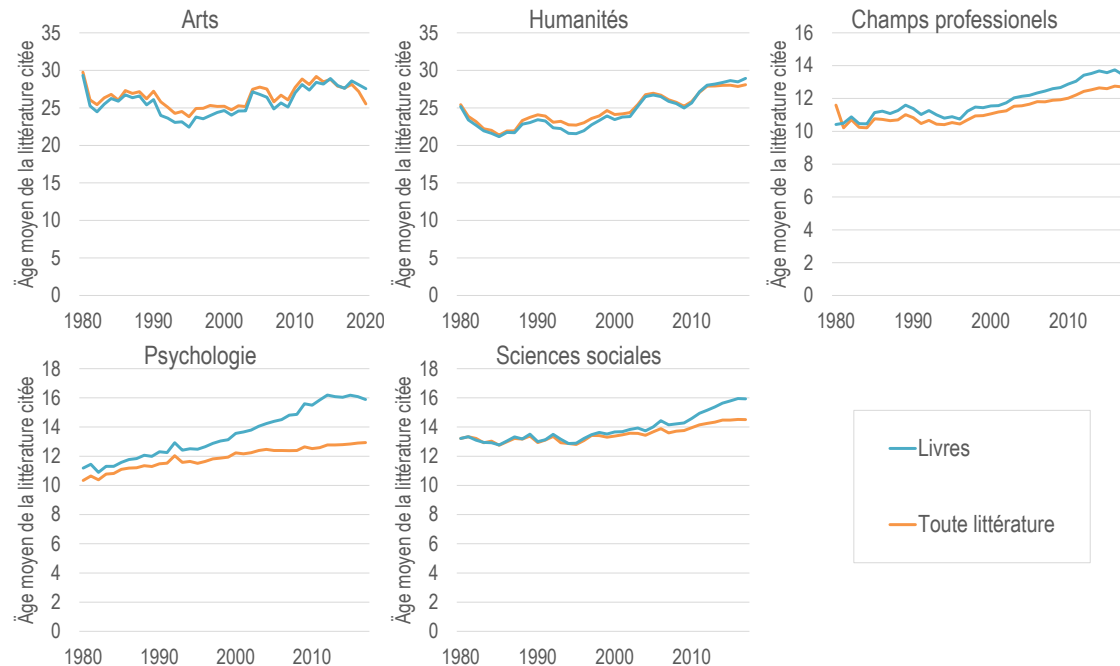
Here too, the news is good for books: researchers have not abandoned them - they continue to buy and read them at length (Crossick, 2015, paragr. 35, 42) - even if they cite them as references less often than journals. However, this does not tell us what books they are reading to allow us to conclude on the strength of the demand. Do they look for and read new books, or are they content to draw from an older corpus?

### *An aging literature*

A look at the average reference age will help us answer this question. The first finding: literature cited is aging more and more. However, in the fields of psychology and social sciences, the age curve of the books almost always exceeds the general curve, which aggregates the age of all references (Fig. 29). This general aging may be due to the increase in the average size of bibliographies (Fig. 28); there may be a cumulative

effect: researchers may cite more recent literature but also keep old references, which increases the average age.

Fig. 29 - Average age of books cited, by HSS field, Canada (1980-2020)



Source: Web of Science

Overall, the **arts** “rejuvenated” their corpus of books in the first half of the 1990s and then stabilized it. The **arts and humanities** are the two fields with the highest average age of references, almost 30 years for books in 2020. In **professional fields**, books and all literature have the lowest average age: about 14 years for books in 2020, compared to 10 in 1980. The **social sciences** have also stayed up to date: books cited were about 13 years old in 1980, versus 16 in 2020. In **psychology**, as in the social sciences, the age gap between books (16 years in psychology) and the literature as a whole is about 3 years. These fairly small age gaps between books and journals (the age of the latter is indicated in the “all literature” curve where they dominate) are very reassuring: researchers are *also* using books to update their knowledge and are interested in new publications.

The use of old books in the arts and humanities attest to the importance of the long tail phenomenon and consequently to the importance of preserving access to backlist titles. However, we don’t know if this use of old books translates into sales or use of an academic or, more likely, a personal library (Collins et Milloy, 2016, p. 46; Tenopir et Volentine, 2012, p. 64; Wolff et al., 2016, p. 26-27).

### *A digital shift beneficial to journals*

In most of the graphs (Fig. 26 to Fig. 29), the slopes of the curves tend to change between 1995 and 2000. Particularly striking is the change in the book-journal ratio. The changes may be due to the emergence of digital technology, which completely transforms the way knowledge is disseminated by increasing the speed of publication and access to resources. However, the different timeframes suggest that discipline-specific factors are involved, as these are related to different theoretical frameworks that are more or less conducive to the publication of articles. The timeframe is also explained by the lifecycle of references. The **social sciences** and disciplines in **professional fields**, which started publishing in journals later than **psychology** needed time to make articles the new standard for disseminating knowledge and to integrate them into their bibliographies.

### Journals are increasingly publishing fewer book reviews

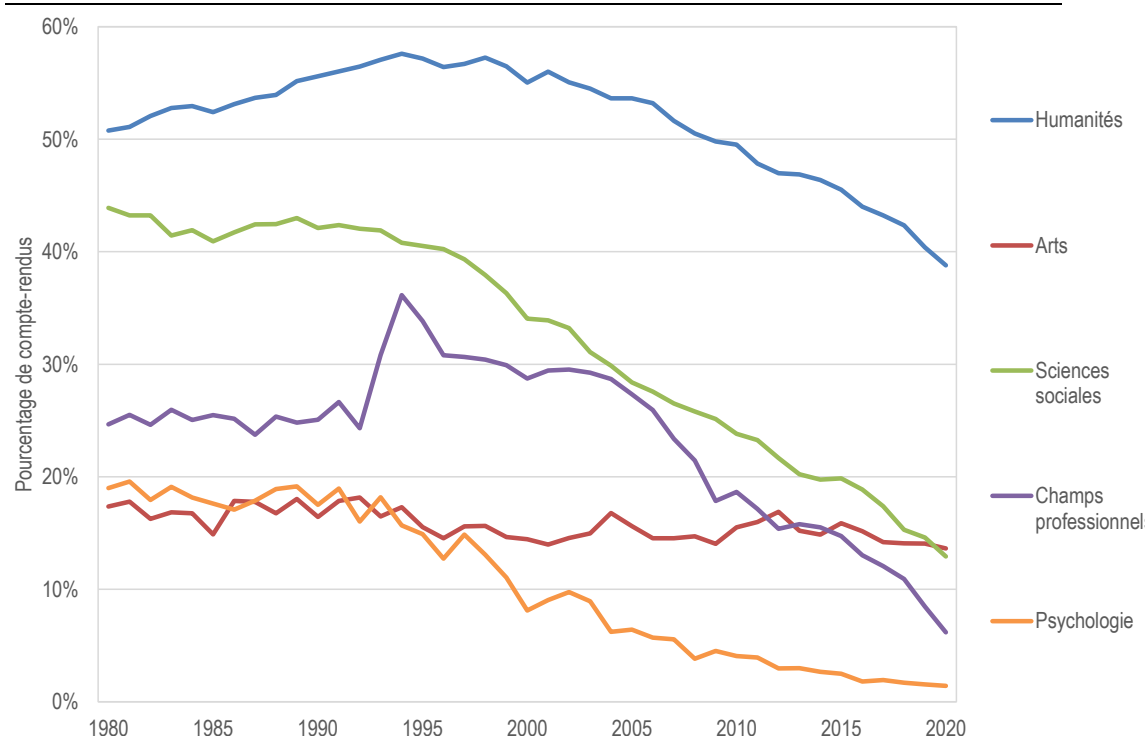
Reviews have historically been a space for discussing and evaluating knowledge, a place for scientific conversation. Journals are influential in promoting books and recognizing them as an important vehicle for circulating ideas.<sup>1</sup> The disciplinary dynamics of book reviews could thus be an indicator of the importance of books for the disciplines.

The following graphs show book reviews as a percentage of the content published by the journals indexed in WoS by HSS field (Fig. 30) and discipline (Fig. 31).

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<sup>1</sup> This section is based in part on Larrègue, J., Mongeon, P., Warren, J. P., Sugimoto, C. R., & Larivière, V. (2019). Reciprocity in book reviewing among American, British and Canadian academics. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, 44(1), 95-114.

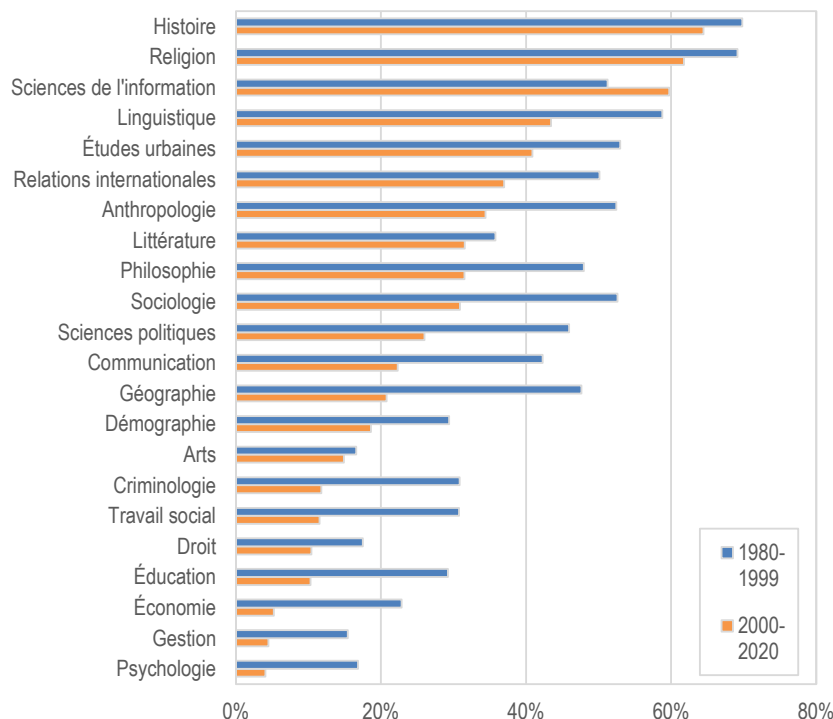
Fig. 30 - Percentage of book reviews by HSS field, worldwide (1980-2020)



Source: Web of Science

The percentage of reviews is down in all fields, although to different extents and over different timeframes. In **psychology**, where books have long been popular, reviews account for just 2% of content, after holding steady between 15% and 20% until 1997. This is also when the shift occurred in **social sciences** and in **professional fields**, where reviews declined from 44% and 35% to 13% and 7%, respectively. For the **arts**, the percentage is relatively stable during the period, at around 15%. In the **humanities**, book reviews account for a large share of the literature (39%), much more than in the other fields. However, the curve is on a downward trend, especially since the late 1990s.

Fig. 31 - Percentage of book reviews by HSS discipline, worldwide (1980-2020)



Source: Web of Science

**Information sciences** was the only discipline with a higher percentage of reviews between 2000 and 2020, compared to the previous period, with 60% of publications. Some disciplines dropped sharply: **sociology, science studies, political science, communication, geography, economics, social work**, etc. Judging from published reviews, books are still very important for **history and religious studies**.

Should we then conclude that in most disciplines, the book has lost its importance as a topic of discussion within academic communities? The answer would seem to be yes, because the decline in book reviews is symptomatic. Since it is happening at the same time as book references are declining in bibliographies, it appears that books have suffered the consequences of the digital shift.

## Scholarly books in academia

Those who are alarmed by the overproduction of books and who therefore worry about the viability of the industry lament the race for publication orchestrated by the system for evaluating academic achievements - and perhaps the conceit of authors who want to publish books:

*Scholars need to consider whether everything that they're currently producing in book-form really needs to be a book; perhaps there are other ways of cultivating the audience for research that might in many cases be more productive and less subject to the constraints of*

*book publishing's current economic model. And the other component is that institutions need to transform their systems of evaluation — particularly what in the U.S. manifest as policies and procedures for tenure and promotion reviews — to recognize that highly important scholarship can be produced in a wide variety of forms, and thus to stop overvaluing that one particular form. (Fitzpatrick, 2018)*

*The perceived incentives for academics to produce books in traditional form—in order to gain the scholarly credit and career rewards that follow from them—are now so strong that supply risks outstripping demand, in terms both of sales and of readership. This presents dangers to the whole ecology of academic book publishing. Finding ways to reduce the incentives to produce ever more books will require concerted action at senior level from all stakeholders. (Jubb, 2017, p. 17)*

These authors are referring to the situation in the U.S. and Britain. Are books still the key to an academic career? Or does the publish or perish mantra cause academics to forego books, which take longer to write and publish, in favour of articles, which are faster to both write and publish?

The answer is not simple and can vary greatly depending on the culture within the discipline, the country and even from one institution to the next (Crossick, 2015, paragr. 24-26; Research Information Network, 2015, p. 4-6), although one Canadian press notes a *“growing demand from the scholarly community to publish more Canadian content.”* As a factual measure of Canadian academic demand, we might consider analyzing the publications that appear in the Canadian Common CV<sup>1</sup> or on the university Web pages of academic staff, using the method employed by Sugimoto *et al.* (2016). Since this is well beyond the scope of this study, we will only present the conclusions of the literature.

In the UK, HSS researchers were asked which type of publication they considered most important for their discipline. As shown in the following table, articles were rated as "important" or "very important" more often than books in all disciplines except linguistics and classics, where both were considered equally important (99%).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ccv-cvc.ca/indexresearcher-eng.frm>

Table 12 - Importance of output type by discipline, United Kingdom (2014)

Question: Humanities and social science researchers may produce a range of outputs. Thinking about your discipline, please indicate how important it is to you to publish the following types of output. (% of respondents who answered 'important' or 'very important')

	Journal articles	Monographs	Edited books
Anthropology and Development Studies	100%	89%	76%
Architecture, Built Environment and Planning	100%	70%	60%
Area Studies	98%	96%	74%
Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory	97%	93%	73%
Business and Management Studies	98%	42%	41%
Classics	99%	99%	74%
Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management	97%	83%	55%
Economics and Econometrics	100%	42%	36%
Education	95%	54%	55%
English Language and Literature	98%	95%	78%
Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology	99%	80%	66%
History	99%	97%	71%
Law	100%	96%	60%
Modern Languages and Linguistics	99%	99%	78%
Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts	97%	95%	80%
Philosophy	98%	89%	50%
Politics and International Studies	100%	91%	54%
Social Work and Social Policy	98%	48%	48%
Sociology	99%	80%	59%
Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism	100%	83%	58%
Theology and Religious Studies	98%	96%	80%
<b>Mean response</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>66%</b>

Note: More marginal outputs such as critical publications, datasets, manuals and research-creation works were omitted from the table. Psychology was not included in the HSS.

Source: OAPEN-UK survey of humanities and social science researchers (2014), Annex 5 of Crossick (2015).

The same disciplinary variations observed earlier were found here as well. With the exception of law, the disciplines where the book is still perceived as an essential output form (over 95%, in green in the table) are also those identified in the bibliometric analyses (previous section) as placing the most importance on books: **area studies**, **classics**, **literature**, **history**, **arts** and **religion**. Conversely, **management**, **economics**, **social work** and **education** (in red), place the least importance on books.



Sugimoto et al. (2016) also found that in the U.S., economists listed fewer books or book chapters in their CVs than sociologists and political scientists, the study being limited to these three disciplines. The authors also found that researcher outputs become more diverse with seniority: researchers further along in their career publish more books and book chapters but without significantly reducing the number of articles produced. This suggests that in these three social science disciplines, the book is not central to career advancement and that articles are a better investment:

*Thus, it may seem that rank rather than cohort informs the choice of genre. Namely, it is hardly surprising that assistant professors who are working on obtaining tenure favor journal articles: Journal articles are quicker to produce than books and may carry more weight with university Promotion and Tenure committees who may be used to thinking in terms of journals and associated metrics<sup>1</sup>. (Sugimoto et al., 2016)*

An article analyzing the reasons for the decline of Australian scholarly books explains that unlike the United States, Australia pressures its researchers to produce articles rather than books. This situation exists in all disciplines. The problem is a “commercialization of universities,” and one has to wonder whether Canada has not also embarked on this path to some extent. Regardless of the answer, researchers here are certainly familiar with the race for grants.

*The incentive and disciplinary structures in place at universities [...] simply do not encourage the patient research and writing necessary for a sole-authored monograph. The research process is grant-driven, cross-institutional, collaborative, and assessed in accordance with national priorities (for example, national security). If a research grant is obtained there are immediate pressures to quickly produce research ‘outputs,’ explaining the frequent production of reports, conference proceedings, seminars, edited collections, literature surveys, industry and public-sector initiatives, and most of all, prized journal articles, rather than sole-authored monographs, as ‘outcomes.’ [...] What then, is the incentive to write a book rather than a few refereed journal articles, difficult as that might be? (James, 2011, p. 186)*

It would also be useful to know which disciplines accept or encourage theses by articles since this would indicate the value placed on long forms of scientific thought and on scholarly publication. One of the publishers we met, specialized in history, said he published many “non-thesis” theses.

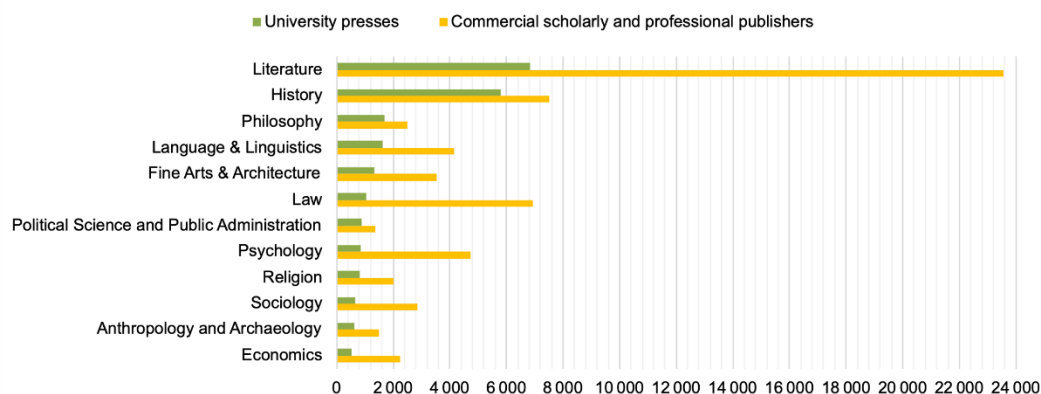
## **Books as a research tool and as a “technology of knowing”**

While there may be too many scholarly publications, it is not the case across all disciplines. When new titles distributed on the U.S. market between 2009 and 2014 (Greco et al., 2012; Greco et Spendley, 2016) are grouped by discipline, we find that literature and history are the most popular.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in English

Fig. 32 - New scholarly books distributed in the United States by discipline and publisher type (2009-2014)



Source: Greco *et al.*, 2016 and 2012. The original categories were clustered to better match disciplines used in bibliometric analyses.

Perhaps career motivations are involved. Or perhaps the evaluation criteria that require candidates to be able to use the publication of one or more works are in keeping with the culture of the discipline. In this case, books would be required because they contribute to the intellectual journey necessary to the objectives and methods of the discipline. Cause or consequence? The only way to find out is to ask authors what motivates them to write books.

There is no doubt that books are “a great technology of knowing” in which concepts can be developed at length, theoretical frameworks questioned and viewpoints challenged, and that allow this intellectual engagement and ideas to be exported “far beyond their original discipline, often into wider public debate” (Deegan, 2017, p. 42). Writing itself is part of the elaboration of thought, what Crossick calls “thinking through the book”:

*Monographs should not be seen simply as the way in which research findings are communicated, because the act of constructing and writing a book is often a core way to shape ideas, structure the argument, and work out the relationship between these and the evidence that has emerged from the research process. It would be wrong to claim that this process is unique to monographs, but it is one of their defining characteristics.* (Crossick, 2015, paragr. 18)

One publisher told us that many authors still view writing a book as an intellectual outcome and that they are frustrated about having to confine their thoughts to an article.

*We know an author whom we would like to publish. But she has young children; therefore, publishing articles or joining an author collective or writing articles with others is much more feasible for her. But she’s a thinker. She could write a book on her own, but how can she find the time for such an endeavour? She is well aware that this would be her crowning achievement and writing a book is one of her goals. It all depends on the type of intellectual, but those whose thinking has a broad-based social impact want books. They want to write books<sup>1</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in English

Sales and demand and even use in bibliographies should not be the only criteria used to decide whether books are relevant. We must continue to support the book as something that is necessary for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge, even if its form may be required to change. In any case, we must leave room for slow, long thinking. Thus, the book "makes an important contribution to knowledge," as required by the ASPP,<sup>1</sup> and doubly so: for the author and the reader, if they find and have access to books.

## A CRISIS OF CITATION, DISCOVERABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY?

... if the reader finds and has access to the book.

Overall, books are seeing a decline in usage by researchers, although this trend is less pronounced in arts and literature. We can advance at least four reasons for this decline:

1. Books are victims of the "publish or perish" imperative. In a context of pressure to publish, and even if the prestige associated with books is still important and in some cases a determining factor, time is playing against this format. In a given number of months, several articles are written versus a single book... which will receive fewer citations.<sup>2</sup>
2. In some disciplines, articles more readily disseminate research as it is practiced today. For example, the economy has become an empirical discipline that doesn't need many pages of a book to develop.
3. The more researchers disseminate their work through articles, the more bibliographies that reference their work is made up of articles.
4. Journals and books are not equally accessible. Articles are immediately accessible on line and easy to find. At best, books will exist in digital format; however, their dissemination, indexing and "discoverability" by search engines remain problematic.

We have seen that with the development of the web, books have started to lose their importance in bibliographies. We have also seen that libraries tend to focus on acquisitions in electronic format. The digital shift has brought about new requirements:

- The need for search engine optimization: a poorly referenced book may not be discovered.

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<sup>1</sup> ASPP mission, <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/aspp/fag>, consulted May 23, 2018 [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

<sup>2</sup> This is what our analysis indicates and is the basis for the advice of one arts editor: "My recommendation to researchers is: focus on writing articles for journals and 'wikis' - articles, not books, are the main impetus for publishing." [...] Art historians get their knowledge from articles [in the U.S.]. They should therefore concentrate on writing. A young researcher would be well advised to expand his field of influence and ensure his posterity by writing articles, non-fiction and reviews that are solidly argued in order to build a body of work that everyone in the discipline – or at least in his field – will and should have read" (Bielstein, 2015, p. 191).

- The need for accessibility: users want a sense of what is in the book before buying or borrowing it, or want to consult it in its entirety immediately online, as they can with journals. Otherwise, they will move on.

## The digital advantage: discoverability, accessibility, metric

With search engines, this discoverability is based on the quality of the metadata associated with each book. “[...] having high-quality, accurate metadata in the right places is just one part of driving demand and usage” (Mudditt, 2017, p. 48). This is extra work for publishers but is what allows books to find readers and buyers.

The actual content of the book must be discoverable, and ideally “searchable”. A visit to Google Books – the most popular platform – or Amazon’s “*Look Inside*” will certainly influence decisions to purchase the book:

*[...] e-availability is the best thing that could have happened to monographs: exposing the user to the insides of the books in the digital environment offers so much more additional opportunity for the scholarly community to dig out important writings and research in long-form scholarship, the way they’ve been able to do with journal articles for a long time, which have had the great synthesis in the article abstracts to help guide readers to relevant content – something books didn’t have, until now (for some platforms). [...] Users need to see what’s inside these books to understand the relevance, and we are really just in the early days of that exposure for monographs.* (Comment by Rebecca Seger, Oxford University Press (Anderson, 2014a))

This is indicated in an analysis (Nagaraj and Reimers, 2021) of the behaviour of paper sales of books from Harvard’s Widener Library that were digitized as part of the Google Books Project (+4.8%) – in this instance, titles published before 1923, i.e., in the public domain – and the impact of Amazon’s “*Look Inside*” feature on demand for books, in this case, more recent titles. The authors also note that this effect “*is stronger for more obscure books*” and that it primarily favours small independent publishers (*ibid.*, pp. 23 and 29).

Although readers will still often prefer the printed book (Deegan, 2017, p. 55-56, 73), the two formats, digital and paper, respond to different usages and are in fact complementary. With the endless possibilities offered by the digital format to make books as easily accessible and exploitable as journal articles have been for so long:

*While academics might seek to read some books in a relaxed setting, away from the screen and often taking handwritten notes, other books are simply used for dipping into in order to obtain a specific piece of information or analysis, to check a reference or to consult a bibliography. Indeed, researchers will even move between print and digital versions of the same text, using whichever is more appropriate to their research needs (Bulger et al, 2011). While the vast majority of surveyed academics prefer print (a preference that interestingly seems to apply across all age groups), there is no doubt that electronic and online resources like e-books and Google Books offer a useful alternative to scholars not wishing to spend time or effort in the library with physical books.* (Crossick, 2015, paragr. 36)

Another advantage of digital is that it measures a book’s “performance” on the market and its impact other than through sales figures. Web statistics provide information on the

number of consultations and downloads, the geography of its readership and even the channels through which the book was found. Given the many platforms on which a book can be distributed, these data are not easy to collect and aggregate, but at least it can be done. These statistics are useful from a marketing point of view in that they provide information about the market and demand; they are also useful for the entities (or researchers) funding the book and seeking to ensure it fulfills its mission to disseminate knowledge.

These statistics offer a metric that is far more relevant than sales, which is an incomplete and misleading metric.

### *Default digital, optional print, and economic viability?*

Therefore, given the benefits of well-indexed, well-disseminated and well-measured digital books - which are no small task to create - and given the small number of copies sold for often highly specialized titles, such as scholarly books, it may be time to make e-books the default format and offer users print-on-demand as an additional service for a fee (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 183).<sup>1</sup> Publishers would not only save on the cost of printing but on distribution (delivery) as well. Systematic printing would be reserved for titles that are expected to sell well or that are to be made available to the general public, on displays, in conventional retail channels.

This is already being done by the proponents of open access, on which their economic model is partially based. Based on the experience of Luminos, the open access collection of the University of California Press launched in 2015, the number of print-on-demand copies is comparable to paper sales in their traditional collection, i.e. an average of 200 copies (between 122 and 1,257 copies per title) (Mudditt, 2017, p. 45, 47).

UCL Press of University College London, whose entire catalogue is open access, also reported selling the same number of copies as typically reported by academic publishers (Speicher, 2018). The study, conducted in Switzerland by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Ferwerda et al., 2018b, p. 40), and the Canadian experiment by Athabasca University Press are also conclusive:

*Of all the misconceptions floating around about open-access publishing, what most concerns Ms. Killoh are assumptions that open-access presses publish exclusively in digital formats and that they give their books away, generating zero sales. "We sell print copies of our books. We have done some title-sales comparison analysis and our print sales are quite similar to other university presses," Ms. Killoh says. "We also sell digital copies. We do everything pretty much the same as any other university press except we place accessible and downloadable [PDF] copies on our website." (Samson, 2016)*

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<sup>1</sup> Amazon ([https://kdp.amazon.com/en\\_US/help/topic/G202059560](https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G202059560)) and Ingram (<https://www.ingramcontent.com/publishers/distribution-services>) already offer integrated solutions for storage, printing and distribution to online and brick-and-mortar merchants.

In 2014, an analysis by Amsterdam University Press (three-year sales, 513 titles, in Dutch and English) sought to determine whether free access to books affected the number of copies sold, taking care to distinguish between the sale of frontlist and backlist titles. The conclusion was that there is little impact on sales regardless of whether a book is offered in open access in addition to print (hybrid model and classic model). Open access books do not sell better and, if they sell less, the difference is negligible. The University's conclusion calls for changing the dissemination model:

*[...] publishers who do well from selling paper monographs could consider making their titles available on Open Access as a way to enlarge the number of readers. Publishers who are making losses on monographs may want to change their business model in a more radical way than adopting a hybrid model. (Snijder, 2014)*

However, the conclusions of this analysis must be considered circumspectly. On the one hand, the limited effect of open access on sales is probably due partly to the relative scarcity of works, or their confidential distribution: *"finding and acquiring an open access work requires a significantly higher threshold of information-and-Internet literacy than a regular commercial publication"* (Wright, 2018, p. 180). It could well be that books are bought by a library or a reader because they are unaware that an open access version is available (Collins et Milloy, 2016, p. 65). Or the reader may fall back on the printed version if the digital version is a poor substitute, for example, books available on Google Books (Nagaraj and Reimers, 2021), which cannot be downloaded, annotated or printed.

On the other hand, studies are conducted over periods too short to evaluate losses in backlist sales, which are important resources for researchers, as indicated by the average age of books cited in WoS bibliographies. According to some publishers, the "ratio of backlist to frontlist sales for a healthy university press should be about 60/40, with deep backlist accounting for at least 60 per cent of overall backlist revenue" (Bradley-St-Cyr, 2018, p. 152).

We eagerly await the outcome of a study commissioned by the National Endowment for the Humanities from AUPresses, the American Association of University Presses, on the effects of open access on sales of hard copies. This investigation, which should begin in 2022, will perhaps finally answer this question: *"Does Open Access Cannibalize Print Sales for Monographs?"* (Sherer, 2022).

## The problem with digital

In other words, scholarly books must still make the digital shift to take advantage of all the format's advantages, a shift that for various reasons is much more difficult to make than for journals. However, it is a must if books are to be used and cited more often. The industry operates in a very complex way that is detrimental to both publishers and readers:

*The array of intermediaries, their roles, and the relationships between them are complex and bring frustration on all sides. The roles of different players in enhancing demand, discoverability and access are difficult to disentangle, with negative effects on efforts to turn*

*potential into effective demand. Seeking and retrieving information about books is often confusing and frustrating. Metadata quality is variable at best, and there is a need to increase the range of metadata, with more information about the contents of chapters and sections, about authors, and about reviews and social media comments. Publishers, booksellers, and libraries need to invest more [...] in improving search and navigation tools to maximise discoverability. Together such changes could help to transform discovery. (Deegan, 2017, p. 62-63)*

This issue alone merits its own study because it involves many players and technical considerations, but we can already name the following difficulties, the effects of which can be summed up as follows: digital doubles the publisher's costs but not revenues. It generates less revenue (purchase on demand, aggregators' bundled offers) yet does not cost much less to produce, distribute and maintain (Wright, 2018, p. 180); books are therefore automatically and conventionally produced and distributed both in print and digital versions. Canadian publishers are in this position of having to support both formats:

*Publishers have to make books available in more formats simultaneously (including a consumer ebook format and a library ebook format) in order to make sure any sale is not lost. Some eBook platforms used by libraries are also used by publishers, but generate very little revenue: they ensure that an ebook is discoverable via library catalogues, but all libraries that list the book in their catalogue have not purchased the book. (university press)*

*Publishing is in a state of transition to electronic from print, and the Canadian publishers are in the challenging position of having to support both formats. [...] The need to publish in multiple digital formats has increased costs in a number of ways. The complex systems required to both publish and distribute works is an important factor. One of the greatest increases in costs is due to the requirement to hire both more staff (to for example, create and maintain web sites and create metadata and manage all editorial tasks using electronic systems) and to recruit staff with skills that demand higher wages. (university press)*

The main challenges confronting books by digital technology stem from:

- Metadata
- Marketing, distribution, preservation
- Production

## Metadata and enrichment

Metadata, and more generally all referencing work, will make a book discoverable, whether on the web or in commercial and library catalogues. These data must be kept up-to-date and be as complete as possible. Metadata was around long before digital technology but its advent has made it critically important.

Books operate on two major indexing standards: ONIX (Online Information Exchange), the standard for retailers and wholesalers, and MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging) for records and library cataloging. The publisher usually creates and updates the ONIX file for each title. Produced by libraries, the MARC record is often at least partly derived from the data provided by the publisher when the title is submitted to legal deposit. Initiatives exist to ensure the interoperability of formats so that various types of records

can be derived from the same set of metadata.

However, the publisher is responsible for the quality and currency of the data.

Scholarly publishing should also be able to respond to the need for impact measurement and recognition of specific contributions to the research community by adopting good practices and adding certain identifiers to the indexing standards. For example, a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) to unambiguously refer to the source version of the book; identification of authors by their ORCID number (Open Researcher and Contributor ID); and identification of the authorities that helped fund the research that gave rise to the book by their FundRef identifier.

The book file should contain these same identifiers and other metadata and take advantage of enriched markup to facilitate its referencing and data mining of its content to ensure its external and internal discoverability. The semanticization of content at a high level of granularity offers many opportunities but also creates a lot of work.

## Marketing, distribution, preservation

The work surrounding metadata is partly linked to the multiplication of distribution channels and is duplicated depending on the format (print or digital) and platforms that distribute them for sale or for loan, a complexity created by the new technologies (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 144). It is also due to the shelf life of HSS books, which requires updating of the data and constant adaptation to digital developments. The advantage here is the technological stability of ink and paper.

*The works have a longer tail (i.e., modest but enduring sales as backlist titles) and less predictable usage patterns, meaning they recoup investment over a longer period and less predictably than do STEM publications. To achieve these gains over time comes with the price of maintaining physical stock. [...] Digital works, however, require more constant intervention and maintenance than stable print inventory in a warehouse, including a constant investment in metadata and conversion standards for software such as Kindle, Overdrive, Adobe, and Kobo. Much of the work in fulfillment now involves chasing down erroneous metadata and revising for the latest versions and software demands. (Wright, 2018, p. 180)*

Multiplying the distribution channels and disseminating a publication everywhere in a more targeted way to increase its probability of being discovered is part of the book promotion strategy:

*Of course, having high-quality, accurate metadata in the right places is just one part of driving demand and usage. [...] For now, the best solution seems to be having our content hosted where it is most likely to be discovered [...]. (Mudditt, 2017, p. 48)*

It is an expensive strategy in terms of time and effort, to prepare the files, keep them up-to-date and then track sales and consultations. But it is also something publishers simply have to do, apart from marketing considerations, if, at the very least, they want their books to appear in public, university and college library catalogues. There is no integrated solution to reach the commercial and library networks. The situation is



especially complicated at the university and college levels where different distributors and acquisition models coexist and where libraries deal with both aggregators and directly with publishers (Roberts et al., 2015, p. 31). However, since 2013, APUC/ACUP member presses have had a distribution agreement with eBOUND, the terms of which are constantly being negotiated with libraries via the RCDR/CRKN (ibid., pp. 37-38).

A publisher told us that he would love to see the emergence of a new profession, a kind of digital content broker, equivalent to the print agent-distributor, to handle the complexity:

*When I want a bookstore to sell my books, I'm not the one who goes to see them to negotiate; it's my agent-distributor. But there's no such person for digital content. De Marque, OpenEdition, OCUL, eBound, JSTOR..., I have to negotiate with all of them. I have to send them my collection, negotiate the DRM so that it's the same for all the aggregators, handle exclusivity requests for certain titles... I'd be more than happy to pay someone to do that for me like my distributor and agent do for print publications. [...] If I were young and entrepreneurial, I'd open a business that does just that. It would be so easy. This type of service is badly needed in the publishing business, not only for academic publications but for books in general<sup>1</sup>. (university press)*

## Multiformat production: resources needed to innovate

Another problem with digital-paper duplication is the need to produce several versions of the same book in several formats: a file optimized for printing, a PDF file optimized for electronic distribution, and an ePub, ideally an HTML file for online reading. To our knowledge, there is no satisfactory integrated solution to generate all these formats from a single source file, mark it up and associate the necessary metadata. The publishing world is attempting to introduce web-inspired (HTML + CSS), modular, interoperable and multi-format publishing chains, but the industry has not yet widely adopted any successful practical approach.

Pending the technological maturity of these new practices and tools, publishers continue to struggle with inefficient production processes and a costly search for solutions. Some publishers are calling for the ASPP to become a program that could support technical innovation in terms of economic models and forms of scholarly communication:

*The challenges include a drastically changing landscape-all the way:*

- *from library purchasing models*
- *to user access to Open Access to the growing need for different formats*
- *and approaches to long-form text in a digital age.*

*It's a true struggle and there is not one easy solution. [...] If anything, we need greater flexibility to infuse our publications programs with creativity and innovation. [...] I think it would*

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

*be hugely beneficial if the ASPP could move toward a block-grant structure of grant delivery<sup>1</sup>.  
(university press)*

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

### III. COSTS AND FUNDING OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN CANADA

This third part of the report describes the funding resources and needs of the academic publishing field. How much does it cost to publish scholarly books? What revenue do publishers have to pay for these costs? What funding programs are available for publication, for authors and publishers, and how do they work? To what extent are they dependent? What role does the ASPP play in this landscape?

It's difficult to estimate the average cost of a book and its revenues (sales, in particular) because costs vary enormously from one work to another, meaning that there is no average, and because publishers are often reluctant to disclose expenses and financial statements, which contain sensitive business data. Our estimates are based on information that some publishers were kind enough to share and on the literature, which tries to shed light on this topic while acknowledging that “the costs of scientific publications are completely opaque.” (Nordhoff et Kopecky, 2018, paragr. 5)

#### THE COST OF SCHOLARLY BOOKS

Scholarly books are expensive to produce, more expensive than academic journals or works of fiction. Unless there is a compromise on excellence, these costs cannot be reduced, a fact that cannot be ignored. These costs are related to the book as an object, in its form and content, and to the structure entailed in its production, promotion and dissemination.

#### Direct and indirect costs

A publisher pointed out the enormous amount of work required for nonfiction versus fiction:

*Editing a novel will cost \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 max. The cost to edit an ASPP-funded title is \$1,500, \$2,000, \$2,500. And these are just the editing and review costs. After that, the project load is much heavier. Then, in terms of graphics, there is the table processing, which is very long. Graphics costs are much higher too. For a novel, the cost is \$3.50 a page, whereas here, it's going to be \$17 or \$18 per page because it's more complicated. There are footnotes, tables and figures to place. After that, there is all the editing work, which is also long. We have to go through the entire scholarly apparatus. We check the notes, conformity with the bibliography, etc. It takes much longer. It's really time consuming<sup>1</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

According to this publisher, the cost directly attributable to production of a title, excluding printing, is often around **\$8,000**, whereas it rarely costs more than \$4,000 for a novel. A print run varies from 500 to 700 units for non-fiction, compared to 2,000 to 3,000 for a

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

novel. Two other publishers (specialized and press) peg the production cost at **\$9,000-\$10,000** per title, this time including the cost of printing and digital processing.

We're talking about production costs here, in other words, costs directly attributable to the production of the book (editing, project coordination, review, layout).

In 2016 Ithaka S+R released a vast, comprehensive study on the monograph publication costs of U.S. university presses. (Maron et al., 2016) The study involved 20 presses and the publication of 382 works during the 2014 fiscal year. APUC/ACUP confirmed that the amounts and cost structures documented in the study could realistically be applied to Canadian presses.

When converted to Canadian dollars,<sup>1</sup> direct production costs, excluding *Staff and Direct Costs*<sup>2</sup> (from which marketing costs have also been removed for comparison purposes), averaged **\$16,800** for publishers to which the Canadian presses can be likened.<sup>3</sup> Direct costs, however, are highly variable. They range, in Canadian dollars and including marketing costs, from \$9,761 for an anthropology book (248 pages, 9 illustrations) to \$125,585 for an archeology book (252 pages, 286 illustrations).

In Switzerland, the average cost is estimated at **\$15,618**, plus \$11,702 for the print version, including distribution and marketing (Ferwerda et al., 2018b, p. 46).

In 2014, APUC/ACUP calculated an average cost of **\$16,135** for its four largest presses (\$5,285 for evaluation/acquisition and \$10,850 for book publishing and preparation), consistent with Ithaka's findings (Association of Canadian University Presses, 2014, p. 19).

Regardless of the calculation, costs still exceed the "\$8,000 ASPP publication grant used to offset the cost of publication<sup>4</sup>".

Now let us consider all direct and indirect costs, i.e. manufacturing, printing, promotion, and dissemination/distribution costs, authors' rights, and publishing house overheads. One press estimates that direct and indirect costs add up to approximately **\$30,000** per title. APUC/ACUP came up with the same average in 2014 (**\$30,659**). The presses in the Ithaka study averaged **CAD\$42,187**.

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<sup>1</sup> All conversions were made in 2018.

<sup>2</sup> More specifically, "As the scope of the study does not include questions related to revenue, we did not capture the various costs that are triggered as a result of sales: royalty, distribution, sales, discounting, sales commissions, and so forth. Similarly, costs related to print production, warehousing fulfilment, and distribution were not captured. However, because even an entirely free digital file will require work and cost in order to go from publisher to its readership, we have included, where possible, costs related to distribution of and access to the file, including metadata creation, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and e-promotion" (Maron et al., 2016).

<sup>3</sup> The study classified presses into four groups, according to income, number of titles produced and employees. Most of the Canadian presses and publishers we met fell into the first group, two in the second and one in the third.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/aspp/publishers> [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

## Fixed costs

These costs do not include in-kind contributions, which presses often obtain, for example, space provided by the university, IT support, and the unpaid work time of the academic body. While not insignificant, these costs probably do not reach the proportions of “cheap labour” and free labour with which journals increasingly have to function given budget cuts and open access policies, a situation publishers very much fear they will have to contend with some day.

*If, instead of imposing an open access policy like they did for journals, SSHRC would consult the community to see what's really going on, they would find that students are not paid for all the time they invest, that it's increasingly difficult to recruit faculty to oversee journals because they can't get a course release, their efforts go unrecognized and they invest an incredible amount of time to do it. Our academic journals right now are the product of cheap labour. And that's the truth. You do it because you believe in it; you do it as a service to the community. [...] They take away subscription revenues and think that the financial framework will magically recover. [...] And we're moving in the same direction for books; we all know that SSHRC will soon impose open access on monographs. It may not do so on all, but it will on some<sup>1</sup>. (university press)*

But the costs of a publishing house are not the same as the cost to publish a journal. First, the cost of marketing, sales and distribution is much higher for books (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 179; Kwan, 2011, p. 20), and as we have seen, even in a digital environment. Second, you cannot expect students or a management team of professors to meet all quality standards and carry out all publishing tasks, from acquiring manuscripts to disseminating them and organizing peer reviews<sup>2</sup>. Scholarly publishing is a profession that cannot be totally internalized within the university body:

*In this complex business of scholarly publishing, university press staff require a Renaissance-like blend of business acumen, marketing savvy, editorial ability, design sense, and people skills—a talent set unlike that found in any other part of the university, including the library, meaning that press staff must look outside the university for their own professionalization. (Bradley-St-Cyr, 2018, p. 147)*

Excellence and the management of complexity have an essentially fixed cost:

*There is only so much savings that can be realized in cost-cutting, overheads, and staffing before the quality of a given publication or a publisher as a whole is compromised. (presse universitaire)*

The need for the expenditure, which contributes to the quality of the scholarly communication and therefore to the creation of knowledge, must be recognized and financed.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the economic model of journals, refer to the study by Érudit (Larivière et al, 2021) and by . In particular, the study highlighted the significance of unpaid work and the roles of faculty and students in producing scholarly journals. Another report also highlighted the importance of in-house, and often volunteer, work (Lefebvre, 2018). Both of these studies explored the Canadian situation and focused on French-language HSS journals.

*The fable that standards can be maintained while slashing through the practices of a publisher is true from a managerial perspective only because it is blind to the value of these standards in generating intellectual capital. (Nelson, 2018, p. 167)*

## REVENUE

There are five types of publisher revenue:

1. Sales
2. Institutional support in the case of university presses
3. Author contribution
4. Grants, including from the ASPP
5. Reproduction rights

## Sales

This revenue component will not be discussed at length since HSS book sales were already discussed in Part III. Although they are quite low and continue to decrease, academic book sales still help balance a publisher's budget. Profit making is not the goal of presses or of some specialized publishers, which often operate as non-profits. The reason presses are adopting commercial business practices is not so much to generate revenue as to avoid losses:

*If a university press is run like a business, it is not because it expects or even hopes to make money; on the contrary, it is only because it strives not to become an actual money pit, which would certainly threaten its survival. The full costs of the 'dissemination of results' have always been supported by sales—not only to university libraries and not only in Canada—and thus rarely borne by the academy alone. (Bradley-St-Cyr, 2018, p. 147)*

In fact, *"most university presses in Canada, even those operating under an open access mandate, are working on at least a partial cost-recovery basis, although those expectations vary from institution to institution"* (Quinn et Innerd, 2018, p. 159). Sales revenues cover an ever shrinking proportion of costs, forcing publishers to find other revenue sources to balance their budgets.

*Sales of most scholarly monographs amount to decreasing proportions of revenue necessary for a given publication, or for a Press as a whole, to operate on a break-even basis. [...] the lost money must be made up for in other granting sources – whether an increased commitment from parent institutions, intensive fund-raising or grantsmanship, whether for each individual project, for a series of book, or the operation as a whole. Alternatively, some presses will pursue other revenue-generating activities to subsidize their scholarly publishing program (publishing services, a strain of more market-driven publications outside of the scholarly mandate, publication and sale of reference works, etc.). (university press)*

We only had access to the figures of three publishers: one press and two publishing houses specializing in nonfiction HSS. There is no certainty as to their representativeness, but the differences in the contribution of sales to revenues speak for themselves:

- University press (2014-2017): 50%
- Specialized publisher (2005-2017): 51%
- Specialized publishers that have a fiction collection (2005-2017): 73%

## Institutional support

Presses receive two types of support from their parent university:

- An operating envelope
- In-kind support (e.g. space, administrative support, IT support)

This support is difficult to quantify. At Wilfrid Laurier University, in 2014, before the presses merged with the library in 2015, the university contributed 24.7% of total revenues, or about \$400,000

(Quinn et Innerd, 2018, p. 154). Athabasca University Press, which publishes open access only, states it receives 60% of its funding from its university (Fast, 2018). For the only press that agreed to provide us with its figures, the university's support represents 15% of its revenues (2014-2017, \$197,500 on average), support considered essential by its director:

*Yes, I receive a lot of money from the university. If I didn't, I would have to close up shop. In any case, I wouldn't be able to publish 40 books a year. I'd have to let at least two employees go, if not more. It would wipe out my team. Right now, we're seven full time<sup>1</sup>. (university press)*

This institutional support is crucial for lifting at least some of commercial pressures from the presses, as they affect independent university publishers. The latter consider presses to be in a privileged position:

*The only outside funding we get is through the sale of our books or the direct funding we receive. [...] Presses operate out of the university's premises for which they pay very little rent. They benefit from many university services such as copy services, the Internet, accounting and payroll services. It doesn't seem like much, but it's still something. They have a lot less financial pressure. [...] Let's just say they don't play by the same rules<sup>2</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

But the point of institutional funding - and direct research funding - is precisely to allow scholarly books to exist outside of commercial considerations and to allow presses not to have to function as a profit centre or even as self-sufficient entities. Through this support, presses are recognized as a service to the intellectual community and as a component of the research infrastructure.

Yet the funding and very existence of presses is called into question. The Laurel University Press (WLU Press) has experienced the tension between the university's managerial vision and the more holistic view of research as a group of stakeholders with shared responsibilities:

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French



On one side is the position represented by the Laurier IPRM<sup>1</sup> recommendation, which claims that the university press 'is not essential to the vision and mission of the university.' The other is a call to recognize the responsibility of universities to make a substantial commitment to the dissemination of scholarship [...] **This debate suggests a question politically unpopular in a climate of economic austerity: not whether university presses should be independently financially viable but whether they should be expected to be.** (Quinn et Innerd, 2018, p. 159, nous soulignons)

While some presses are in danger of disappearing, others are being created with the support of their institution. One such example is Concordia, which created its press in 2016, under the initiative of the library into which the press is integrated. It publishes open access books along with a print edition, distributed through the usual channels.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the presses reflects Concordia's commitment to knowledge transfer, and its desire to develop a form of knowledge transfer that adequately meets the challenges of technological change, economic pressures, and ethical considerations about open access to knowledge: "*Concordia University Press seeks to put into practice the first sentence of the 2002 Budapest declaration on open access: 'An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good.'*" (Little, 2018, p. 217).

Also worth mentioning are the University of Regina Press created in 2013 and Athabasca University Press in 2007.

## Author contributions

The principle of authors contributing to funding their work is not as systematic as the APCs (article processing charges) of certain journals, but it exists and represents a significant contribution to the economic equilibrium of publishers and presses in particular. The authors' contributions to the revenues of the three publishers for whom we had financial data are as follows:

- University press (2014-2017): 13%
- Specialized publisher (2005-2017): 0.20%
- Specialized publishers that have a fiction collection (2005-2017): 0.92%

Authors who do not want to submit their book to the ASPP competition - usually due to publication timing issues - or if their book does not receive a grant are encouraged to obtain funding from research funds or from their department. This sometimes leads to

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<sup>1</sup> "The institutional context leading up to the library–press merger was that, from 2012 to 2014, Laurier undertook an extensive program of prioritization, locally labelled Integrated Planning and Resource Management (IPRM), based on Robert C. Dickeson's methodology, outlined in his book *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*. The university also publicly stated that, like many Ontario universities, it faced a budgetary crisis in 2015, with a projected \$25 million deficit on its overall annual operating budget of over \$200 million. [...] *These factors contributed to the decision by university administration to phase out fully the press' institutional subsidy [...]*" (Quinn et Innerd, 2018, p. 154).

<sup>2</sup> Distribution and promotion will be handled by UBC Press, <https://www.concordia.ca/press/about.html>, consulted on January 17, 2022.



complicated financial arrangements and publication delays *"while the author and publisher devote their attention to raising funds from other sources"* (University press).

*Sometimes we have books that we accepted and that we really want to publish but can't because we don't have the minimum funding required.*

*So it's a condition to publication?*

*Of course. Otherwise I'd go bankrupt tomorrow! That's the unique nature of university presses: to publish stuff that's not profitable. The costs must be absorbed before publication<sup>1</sup>.  
(university press)*

This practise is surprising, considering that it runs counter to the sixth point of the ASPP publisher eligibility criteria: "Publishers which require authors to pay for, or to make a financial contribution toward publication costs, are not eligible for ASPP grants."<sup>2</sup>

This practise is less common among other publishers: *"If there's funding, so much the better, but I'll never ask for it. This is just not something we do"*<sup>3</sup> (specialized publisher). Another specialized publisher negotiates contributions on a case-by-case basis *"to avoid having to sell books at an exorbitant price"*<sup>4</sup>, for instance, when authors want to add colour or illustrations to their work, or organize an elaborate book launch. This principle was adopted by publishers such as Open Books Publisher in Great Britain: no BPC (book processing charges) are required for open access, but if a work is not *"in a state suitable for publication"*, the work needed to finalize the manuscript is charged to the author. The author is also responsible for any costs associated with the presentation of images and tables.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of author contributions to publishing is not in itself objectionable. Research must be disseminated, and it is only logical that research funding would cover its dissemination. Moreover, author contributions or GCP do not necessarily refer to self-publishing; books are subject to standard evaluations and quality criteria remain the same. However, the practise poses the same ethical questions as those debated in the discussions on APC (article processing charges). Applied systematically, BPCs or cost contributions will have the same consequences as APCs, that is, standardizing production and preventing the youngest researchers and more generally, those with no or little funding, from being published (Wright, 2018, p. 183).

Some open access presses, i.e. those which only publish in open access, still include BPC in their business model. As an example, Luminos requires a basic contribution of US\$7,500 and up depending on the complexity and length of the work; Ubiquity Press asks for £3,780 to £5,920, while UCL Press charges £5,000. The BPCs of established

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> ASPP Publisher Eligibility Criteria, <https://www.idees-ideas.ca/sites/default/files/sites/default/uploads/aspp/aspp-eligibility-criteria-publishers-en.pdf>, consulted on January 17, 2022 [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

<sup>3</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>4</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>5</sup> Open Books Publisher Author's Guide, p. 51-52, <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/shopimages/resources/OBP-Author-Guide.pdf>.

publishers (Cambridge University Press, Taylor and Francis, Palgrave) are higher, ranging from £6,500 to £11,000 (Jubb, 2017, paragr. 356-357).

## Reproduction rights

English-language publishers shared their concerns about the effects of the 2012 *Copyright Act* amendment which added, among other things, education to the exceptions covered by the law (s. 29): "Fair dealing for the purpose of research, private study, education, parody or satire does not infringe copyright."<sup>12</sup>

Legal proceedings are currently underway in which Access Copyright, the organization that manages Canada's collective reproduction rights (except for Québec) is attempting to exclude works for educational purposes from the "fair dealing" provision. In Québec, publishers are less affected by the application of the exception provided under this legislation. In 2014, all Québec universities - except Laval - renewed their reproduction licence with Copibec, the Québec equivalent of Access Copyright.

Between 2012 and 2017, Access Copyright saw revenues and distributions related to reproduction rights in the education sector drop by 89.1%, and by 78.1% for all sectors combined.<sup>3</sup> This loss of revenue for publishers - and authors who receive a portion of the proceeds - has been clearly and repeatedly identified by our respondents as one of the challenges facing books.

Among our three publishers - whose representativeness is unclear - reproduction rights represent on average between 2.5% and 3% of revenues. Although the percentage is low, when viewed in absolute terms, it can translate into a substantial contribution:

- University press (2014-2017): 2.42% (\$31,270)
- Specialized publisher (2005-2017): 2.56% (\$6,733)
- Specialized publishers that have a fiction collection (2006-2017): 3.17% (\$30,257)

## Grants

The grants available to scholarly publishers have three different rationales. They are awarded according to criteria of:

- Scientific excellence (ASPP)
- Contribution to culture (e.g. Canada Council for the Arts and provincial councils)
- Sales (e.g. Book Fund, OMDC).

More assistance, sometimes from the same granting agencies, is also available for export, digitization or marketing projects, employment assistance and tax credits - not available to publishers that are non-profit organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/page-9.html>, consulted on September 10, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>3</sup> Annual Report 2017, p. 12, [http://www.accesscopyright.ca/media/115217/access\\_2017ar.pdf](http://www.accesscopyright.ca/media/115217/access_2017ar.pdf).

We tried to find out which grants benefit publishers that have been most supported by the ASPP, to which we added lesser-supported publishers, some of which were interviewed for this report, to see whether the same funding opportunities were available to all of them (Table 12). The publishers were grouped by type - press, specialized and general. This information, which may be incomplete, was obtained from sites of granting agencies, publisher sites, accounting information provided by three publishers, and occasionally colophons.

Although the ASPP's main objective is not to financially support publishers (the program supports books), we considered their support to be a grant since it constitutes a sizeable structural resource for some publishing houses (see the number of titles funded in the table below and in Table 13).

Note: This 2018 chart was prepared when the report was first drafted and is not updated, nor are the following analyses, as the Arts Council's 2018 revised granting rules – excluding essays – probably changed the granting structure of some publishers we are concerned with. Assessing the consequences of this policy change would be beyond our mandate.

Table 13 - Granting agencies that supported ASPP-funded publishers between 2005 and 2017

	Scholarly	Cultural		Commercial	
	ASPP (titles, n=2332)	Canada Council for the Arts	Other arts councils and cultural funds*	Canada Book Fund**	Provincial Funds***
<b>Presses</b>					
<b>University of Toronto Press</b>	<b>668</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>UBC Press</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	
<b>McGill-Queen's University Press</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>	
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	114	x	x	x	x
Presses de l'Université Laval	103	x		x	x
Presses de l'Université de Montréal	81	x		x	x
University of Ottawa Press	45	x	x	x	x
University of Alberta Press	37	x		x	x
University of Calgary Press	29	x		x	x
Athabasca University Press	9	x		x	x

University of Manitoba Press	9	x	x	x	
Specialized Publishers					
Septentrion	17	x		x	
Fernwood Publishing	9	x		x	
Between the Lines	3	x	x	x	x
Remue-ménage	1	x	x	x	x
General publishers					
Boréal	21	x		x	x
XYZ	11	x		x	
Fides	10	x		x	

\*Ex. : Manitoba Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council. \*\*Which is part of the Department of Canadian Heritage and includes the Canada Books Fund, which oversees the "Foreign Rights Marketing Assistance Program". \*\*\*Ex. : Alberta Media Fund, Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC, Québec), Société de développement de l'industrie des médias de l'Ontario/Ontario Media Development Corporation (SODIMO/OMDC), Nova Scotia Creative Industries Fund.

Source: Sites of granting agencies, publisher sites, publishers (accounting data), colophons.

We see that all publishers receive funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Canada Book Fund, the two main federal granting agencies. These grants are not specific to HSS, which represents a threat to scholarly publishing and the essay in general, which are vulnerable to policy changes and evaluation criteria ill-suited to the specific market conditions they are exposed to.

The Canada Council for the Arts considers publishers on the quality of their editorial programming and their consistency with the Council's mandate to support the arts. As for the Book Fund funded by Heritage Canada, with its goal of supporting the book industry, it supports publishers on the basis of their sales figures: the more titles they sell (written by Canadian authors), the more funding they receive.

This complementarity of the assessment criteria - qualitative on one hand, commercial on the other - ensures balanced distribution of federal assistance to between publishers with cultural mission, including presses and other non-fiction publishers, and those with a more commercial mission. Or rather, this used to be the case, until the balance was upset by the Arts Council's new programming, the effects of which would begin to be felt in 2019.

*The Book Fund is based on sales, but scholarly books don't sell... We won't be able to get money from the Book Fund based on our sales. [...] The Book Fund and the Canada Council balanced each other out. On the one hand, we had the Canada Council, which helped publishing houses that did not sell a lot, and on the other, we had the Book Fund, which helped the big commercial publishers that did not usually get funding from the Council. And now, the Canada Council has broken the balance. We have small houses that will no longer*

*receive grants from the Canada Council but that also won't get them from the Book Fund either<sup>1</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

In 2017, the Canada Council revamped its programming to focus on supporting the arts and diversity, while narrowing its definition of what contributes to the "excellence and vitality of Canadian literature"<sup>2</sup>: non-literary essays are now explicitly excluded from its supported works.

In 2014-2015, the last year for which the Canada Book Fund has published its figures, the aforementioned publishers received the following amounts from the three major sources (Table 13):

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> [https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/guide/apply-to-programs/fields-of-practice?\\_ga=2.260803470.2045245622.1545098274-167365871.1545098274#](https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/guide/apply-to-programs/fields-of-practice?_ga=2.260803470.2045245622.1545098274-167365871.1545098274#)

Table 14 - Main grants received by ASPP-funded publishers (2014-2015)

	ASPP		Canada Book Fund (Publishing Support component)	Canada Council for the Arts (Block Grant Program)
	Titles (n=185)	Amount		
Presses				
University of Toronto Press	55	\$440,000	\$419,896	\$126,200
McGill-Queen's University Press	43	\$344,000	\$275,031	\$169,700
UBC Press	38	\$304,000	\$218,168	\$127,800
Presses de l'Université de Montréal	14	\$112,000	\$111,312	\$60,800
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	8	\$64,000	\$117,924	\$68,800
University of Alberta Press	6	\$48,000	\$89,541	\$73,200
Presses de l'Université Laval	5	\$40,000	\$174,094	\$51,800
Athabasca University Press	3	\$24,000	\$22,760	—
University of Calgary Press	1	\$8,000	\$25,786	\$26,900
University of Manitoba Press	1	\$8,000	\$43,862	\$67,300
University of Ottawa Press	0	—	\$50,560	\$43,200
Specialized Publishers				
Septentrion	2	\$16,000	\$101,854	\$88,300
Fernwood Publishing	0	—	\$16,758	\$46,900
Between the Lines	0	—	\$41,762	\$56,000
Remue-ménage	1	\$8,000	\$21,508	\$45,000
General publishers				
Boréal	1	\$8,000	\$225,678	\$123,200
XYZ	0	—	\$97,178	\$74,300
Fides	0	—	\$162,221	\$57,200

Source: <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/fra/1450356457855> and [https://canadacouncil.ca/about/public-accountability/proactive-disclosure/grant-recipients?\\_ga=2.25773246.2045245622.1545098274-167365871.1545098274](https://canadacouncil.ca/about/public-accountability/proactive-disclosure/grant-recipients?_ga=2.25773246.2045245622.1545098274-167365871.1545098274)

The top three sources of funding affect the revenues of our three publishers in the following way, as an annual average percentage:

	ASPP	Book Fund	Canada Council for the Arts
• University press (2014-2017):	6.51%	9.11%	4.69%
• Specialized publisher (2005-2017):	0.51%	19.64%	42.46%

- Specialized publishers that have a fiction collection (2006-2017): 0.92% 10.54% 9.18%

Although the 4.69% received from the Canada Council by university presses may seem low, the loss of this grant – \$106,500 for the 2017-2018 financial period – would affect their output capacity: *"If I lose the Council for the Arts, an employee has to go [in other words, one-seventh of the workforce]. It's as simple as that; the grant is the equivalent of one employee's salary<sup>1</sup>."*

## The ASPP: between grants and awards

As stated earlier, although this is not its stated purpose, the fact is that the ASPP provides significant funding for some publishers. For five presses, the ASPP amount received in 2014-2015 was greater than those granted by the Canada Book Fund and the Canada Council for the Arts (Table 13). Since we don't know the sales, institutional support and author contribution figures, we cannot determine the extent to which presses that receive substantial ASPP grants, and especially the "Big Three" – UBC, McGill-Queens and UTP (Table 12) – depend on the program, but we can see that SSHRC funds them indirectly.

In doing so, does SSHRC equitably fund all Canadian scholarly publications or does it support just a few publishers? In other words, does the distribution of ASPP grants reflect the structure of the scholarly publishing community in Canada, or does the program favour - perhaps in spite of itself - some publishers? To answer that question, we would need to know the qualitative and quantitative participation of each publisher in the market, data that we have seen is impossible to collect.

At best, with all the counting errors that come with "tinkering" with the data, it is possible to *estimate* the ratio of ASPP-funded titles to the overall publisher output observed in the previous tables. The estimate of funded titles comes from LAC's Voilà catalogue, from publisher-supplied data and from publishers' catalogues. The 2008-2019 period was considered the most complete in Voilà. General publishers were omitted because their non-fiction catalogues were too small for a meaningful ASPP/output ratio.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

Table 15 - Estimated percentage of ASPP-supported output (2008-2019)

	ASPP-Funded Titles (n=1980)	Titles Published	ASPP / Titles Published
<b>Presses</b>			
<b>University of Toronto Press</b>	635	2,057	<b>31%</b>
<b>UBC Press</b>	516	648	<b>80%</b>
<b>McGill-Queen's University Press</b>	509	1,235	<b>41%</b>
<b>Wilfrid Laurier University Press</b>	102	316	<b>32%</b>
Presses de l'Université de Montréal	98	409	24%
Presses de l'Université Laval	88	1,363	6%
University of Ottawa Press	51	231	22%
<b>University of Alberta Press</b>	41	99	<b>41%</b>
University of Calgary Press	26	140	19%
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies	21	111	19%
University of Manitoba Press	19	181	10%
Athabasca University Press	13	188	7%
<b>Specialized Publishers</b>			
Septentrion	12	418	3%
Fernwood Publishing	11	407	3%
Between the Lines	3	101	3%
Remue-ménage	1	126	1%

Source: Calculations based on LAC book listings in the Voilà catalogue, publisher-provided data and catalogues.

Assuming the output data are realistic, Table 14 clearly shows that the ASPP is crucial to many university presses. It also shows that the funding rate varies widely among presses. For example, the ASPP supports 80% of UBC Press's estimated output and only 6% of Presses de l'Université Laval's output.

In 2014, ACUP/APUC calculated that its members averaged a 41% funding rate for its titles (figures valid for 10 presses, English only, between 2009 and 2013). It also calculated that the ASPP provided these same presses with 34% and 37% of their revenues in 2012 and 2013 (Association of Canadian University Presses, 2014, p. 21).

The rate for the four publishers specialized in non-fiction is only 3%. As seen in Table 13, ASPP amounts for these publishers are trivial compared to other resources. For these publishers, this funding directly benefits a specific publication project and not the publisher as a whole; furthermore, these publishers submit few books to the competition (see Table



7). When asked why they did not apply, they offered the following explanations, adding that they regretted their decision:

- Lack of administrative resources to complete the dossiers and organize the peer review (which they do not routinely do), even though they recognize that the process cannot be simplified.

*You have to understand that independent publishing houses, [...] there's no outside funding other than the sale of our books or the direct funding we receive. What I mean is that university presses have access to management and administrative staff. For us, administrative staff is the last position we want to fill. If I hire someone for administration, I'm losing money. [...] Let's just say that the rules of the game are different for presses<sup>1</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

- The feeling that their editorial program and the book's style are not sufficiently in line with the program's expectations:

*There are some titles which, even if research-based, will be viewed as more suitable for the general public. I believe their thinking is that they have to fuel research. I think that for them, the primary audience has to be an academic audience<sup>2</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

- The delays caused by the process, which are not compatible with an editorial program that is reactive and in line with what's current.
- The ability to rely on revenue from collections or more commercial works to fund nonfiction.

They will submit works for which there is an obvious interest but that they know would be published at a loss due to lack of funding:

*Our criteria for submitting to ASPP is that the book makes an important contribution to scholarship, but is a scholarly text aimed at a graduate student or professor audience or will mostly be purchased by libraries. In short, the book makes an important contribution but will sell relatively few copies. (specialized publisher)*

## The Council for the Arts: "orphan" nonfiction

We have seen that the change in the Canada Council's program, which came into effect in 2017, threatens to upset the balance between the Book Fund grant, which is based on sales criteria, and the Council's grant, based on qualitative criteria. Although the Council has benefited from major renewed funding, for which publishers lobbied heavily, some of them find themselves in situation where a part of their catalogue is now not eligible for funding because of a much more restrictive definition of publishers and eligible works. The mandate of the Canada Council is "to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts",<sup>3</sup> and not to support culture in general. The publishers now targeted by the program are therefore "literary publishers," that is,

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>3</sup> <https://canadacouncil.ca/about>, consulted on September 12, 2018.

"Canadian publishers of literary books and magazines committed to developing and promoting Canadian literary writers<sup>1</sup>".

The Council, at least before the change, calculated the amount of the grant based on actual production costs associated with a list of titles provided by a publisher from which the Council selected eligible titles. Staffing was also weighted according to the overall quality of the editorial program. The precise formula has *"always been a secret [...] but it seemed to be equal. The biggest publishers received a little more, the smaller ones a little less; overall, it was proportional"*<sup>2</sup> (specialized publisher). The Canada Council regularly funded nonfiction unless the titles were supported by the ASPP, in which case they were automatically excluded from the calculation.

The publishers are concerned about the opacity of the new calculations and, in particular, about the more restrictive definition of the works to be considered by the Council. It is clearly stated that "the Council does not support academic or scholarly publications"<sup>3</sup> and that eligible non-fiction is limited to "literary non-fiction," which must meet the following definition:

For the literary nonfiction category, the work must present a text of personal reflection where the point of view and opinion of the author are evident. Eligible titles have a literary style and use narrative techniques. They must make significant contributions to literature, appreciation of works by Canadian authors or artists or knowledge of the arts.<sup>4</sup>

The Council further states that the following works, among others, are not considered literary non-fiction: "reference, academic, scholarly or educational publications [...], and conference papers, unless they make a significant literary contribution<sup>5</sup>".

Thus, nonfiction works in the humanities and social sciences are excluded - except perhaps for literary studies -, regardless of whether they are of an academic or a more general nature. This change in the program, the effects of which will be felt as of 2019, were the unsolicited comments of six of the publishers with whom we spoke:

*Changes to the Canada Council funding model, which are steadily pulling the program back from considering eligible non-fiction with any connection to SSHRC (whether the publication is funded directly or not) or scholarly conventions as methodology are increasing these financial pressures. (university press)*

The concern is financial, but more fundamentally, intellectual. Publishers see the Council's new criteria as editorial interference that could lead to cultural impoverishment for Canadian society:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/supporting-artistic-practice/literary-publishers>, consulted on September 12, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>3</sup> <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/guide/apply-to-programs/fields-of-practice>

<sup>4</sup> <https://canadacouncil.ca/glossary/literary-non-fiction>, consulted on September 12, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> See also: "Québec : sans subventions, quelles sciences sociales et humaines demain ?", Nicolas Gary, *ActuaLitté*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.actualite.com/article/monde-edition/quebec-sans-subventions-queelles-sciences-sociales-et-humaines-demain/90549> consulted September 12, 2018.

*With the Council's new funding model, there is no longer a link between output and grant, they decide. [...] You have to be multicultural, foster diversity ... basically you have to be a Canadian liberal. [...] The danger with the Council today... what they're doing is out and out editorial interference. They tell us what to publish<sup>1</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

*We know that with this new program, some of our titles will automatically be excluded from Council funding. [...] we're going to have to limit the number of titles in this category. [...] It starts with good intentions [to promote multiculturalism and diversity] but ends up influencing the choice of publishers<sup>2</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

Publishers of non-literary nonfiction, now grant “orphans,” considered turning to the ASPP, which is now the only funding opportunity not based on sales. There is great concern across the publishing industry, which is calling for policy changes and the creation of new funding tools:

*What is happening at the Canada Council is an aberration. I know this is neither SSHRC's or the Federation's problem, but at some point someone has to realize that there's a problem. [...] As I said, I can't blame SSHRC for not dealing with this issue. But if SSHRC considers presses as partners in the dissemination of research, it will have to realize that this reduced funding from the Canada Council will have a major impact on its partners and that we won't be able to do our job<sup>3</sup>. (university press)*

The provincial arts councils surveyed (Manitoba Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council) have so far not excluded non-literary nonfiction from their funding policy.

## THE SCHOLARLY BOOK, THE POOR COUSIN OF PUBLISHING AND RESEARCH

Scholarly publishing is therefore grappling, on the one hand, with costs that are difficult to compress without jeopardizing the quality of the editorial work and hence of books and, on the other, with insufficient and tenuous revenue sources that are difficult to find. It depends largely on outside funding that was not conceived to support it (Wright, 2018: 181). When asked about the challenges currently facing scholarly publishing, one publisher specifically mentioned this problem:

*[...] less support to non-fiction titles through the Canada Council for the Arts, support from Canada Book Fund determined by contributions to sales although some eligible presses are experimenting with delivery models that don't produce revenue (University press)*

Other difficulties cited were pressure to offer free content, the decrease in sales to libraries and an overly liberal application of the *Copyright Act*. This publisher perfectly summed up the problem that arises when a particular publishing field has to rely on grants that are not suited to its output or market, in other words, the manner in which the product reaches its users.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>3</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

In addition to the problem of recognizing the content already mentioned for the Canada Council, which no longer allows non-literary nonfiction, other criteria that determine publisher or book eligibility for grants are problematic for publishers of scholarly books and for university presses in particular. For example:

- Sales revenues when titles generate little or no sales as in the case of open access books;
- The payment of copyright royalties, equally problematic for open access but also for collective works where authors relinquish their royalties;
- Whether authors are Canadian citizens or permanent residents when the Canadian content of the topic could make a substantial contribution to the advancement of knowledge;
- The minimum print run of the book, which may be excessive compared to sales expectations and which exclude the strictly digital publication that publishers could aim for;
- Authors being prevented from making a financial contribution to the publication, which could cover BPCs.

Faced with these demands, two equally problematic reactions are possible: to "deacademize" its editorial program as much as possible to improve sales, with consequences for research as it is disseminated and constructed (Nelson, 2018, p. 167), or to withdraw the scholarly book from all commercial aspirations to reduce dissemination and distribution costs, thereby cutting itself off from its audience and from income. It is very tempting to remove scholarly books from the conventional - commercial - market, given its financial performance ("nobody buys them") and the ethical and pragmatic concerns regarding its accessibility ("books are digital objects first"). However, this cannot happen without completely destabilizing its economic model.

Publishers rightly call for caution and responsibility from research funding agencies, on open access policies that they might extend to books *"imagining that the financial framework is going to be magically replaced"* (university press) and on the widely overlooked financing of that final research step, dissemination:

*SSHRC supports every other aspect of the research process but seems disinterested in supporting their final requirement: the dissemination of that research. If SSHRC wants publicly funded research to be publicly available then it needs to support this last step. (specialized publisher)*

This call for caution and consultation was addressed in October 2019, in a formal statement from the Association of Canadian University Presses in reaction to a request for a "plan for the shift to open access in the ASPP" that SSHRC – which, let us recall, funds the ASPP – had asked the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences to develop, with the objective of "immediate open access (without embargo) for all ASPP-funded titles, with no increase in the budget allocation" (ACUP, 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

## IV. THE ASPP'S CONTRIBUTION TO CANADIAN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING AND PUBLISHERS' ASSESSMENT OF THE ASPP

In terms of quality or impact, the ASPP's contribution to the dissemination of Canadian knowledge is difficult to measure. Are ASPP-funded publications cited more frequently by researchers? Are they cited more often than other award recipients? Are they received more favourably by critics and the media? Are they important to researchers' careers? Do they sell better? What is their international reach, in terms of sales, usage and/or translation?

To answer these questions, data would have to be collected, analyzed and compared. The required data is sparse and would have to encompass both ASPP-funded books and a control group, i.e. un-funded books with similar characteristics. This is therefore a major task that could not be accomplished within the confines of this study. However, we did manage to collect some information that sheds light, admittedly very little, on the success of ASPP titles with researchers and the general public.

We can try to identify the ASPP's effect on Canadian scholarly publishing by surveying publishers on whether they use the program and on how it influences their output beyond the effects of its financial contribution.

### ARE ASPP-FUNDED BOOKS CITED BY RESEARCHERS?

Yes, ASPP-funded books are cited by researchers. Are they cited more or less often than other books published by the same publishers, and do the number of citations vary over time? Are the books cited mostly in Canadian journals or journals of Canadian interest? A more extensive and complex analysis protocol would have to be put in place to find the answer and eliminate any bias, a task that unfortunately is beyond the scope of this study.

A raw data analysis of the Web of Science bibliographies<sup>1</sup> - with the aforementioned limitations of the corpus - reveals that ASPP-funded books (1942 to 2016, 7,306 works) were the subject of 52,974 citations.

- The most cited book had 943 citations;
- 2,392 titles were not cited at all, including books too recent to appear in the bibliographies;
- 896 books were cited once, etc.; fewer and fewer books are being cited often.

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<sup>1</sup> Citations are captured when the following three criteria are met: reference year = book publication year; name of the lead author of the reference = name of the lead author of the book; at least one word of the title is found in the reference.

The book with the most citations by far (**Error! Reference source not found.**) is a translation of the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (*La Métaphore vive*, 1975). With 943 citations, this book, which would no longer be eligible for the program, shows what it means to be an international classic, bibliometrically speaking. Canadian books published during that same period have just 194 citations. An encouraging sign, two fairly recent books (2005 and 2007) appear in this top 20.

Table 16 - The top 20 ASPP-funded books (1942-2016) with the most citations in 2018

Titre	N. Citations
Ricœur, Paul (1977). <i>The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language</i> . University of Toronto Press	943
Pinkerton, Evelyn (1989). <i>Co-operative Management of Local Fisheries</i> . UBC Press	224
Johnston, R. (1992). <i>Letting the People Decide: History, Contingency, and Dynamics of Canadian Elections</i> . McGill-Queen's University Press	218
Valverde, Mariana (1991). <i>The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925</i> . University of Toronto Press	216
Hutcheon, Linda A.M. (1980). <i>Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox</i> . Wilfrid Laurier University Press	194
Van Kirk, S. (1980). <i>'Many Tender Ties': Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870</i> . Watson & Dwyer	187
Berger, Carl (1970). <i>The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914</i> . University of Toronto Press	173
Laurendeau, M. (1962). <i>La pensée causale : étude génétique et expérimentale</i> . Presses Universitaires de France	163
Goldie, Terry (1989). <i>Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures</i> . McGill-Queen's University Press	162
Hollander, Samuel (1979). <i>The Economics of David Ricardo</i> . University of Toronto Press	154
McKay, Ian (1994). <i>The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia</i> . McGill-Queen's University Press	154
Anderson, Kay J. (1991). <i>Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980</i> . McGill-Queen's University Press	151
Shell, Marc (1978). <i>The Economy of Literature</i> . John Hopkins University Press	150
Hollander, Samuel (1973). <i>The Economics of Adam Smith</i> . University of Toronto Press	143
Suits, Bernard (1978). <i>The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia</i> . University of Toronto Press	131
Cruikshank, Julie (2005). <i>Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination</i> . UBC Press	131
Thobani, Sunera (2007). <i>Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada</i> . University of Toronto Press	129
Harris, Cole (2002). <i>Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia</i> . UBC Press	127
Christianson, Paul (1978). <i>Reformers and Babylon: English apocalyptic visions from the reformation to the eve of the civil war</i> . University of Toronto Press	125
Tanner, Adrian (1979). <i>Bringing Home Animals: Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the Mistassini Cree Hunters</i> . Memorial University of Newfoundland	122

Source: WoS. Data extraction by Philippe Mongeon.

## DO ASPP-FUNDED BOOKS REACH THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

If we rephrase this question as "Does the ASPP fund bestsellers?", the answer is no. An analysis of HSS book sale charts (or more accurately, HSS-like book categories<sup>1</sup>) indicates the ASPP did not fund any books that would have made the top 20 bestsellers list. Between 2006 and 2017, among BookNet Canada-affiliated retailers:

- No ASPP-funded books made the bestsellers list;
- However, five publishers funded by the ASPP between 2005 and 2017 made the charts with 10 titles:
  - two university presses (four bestsellers):
    - University of Regina Press (recipient of four ASPP grants during the period) with three bestsellers<sup>2</sup> and
    - UBC Press (546 ASPP grants) with one bestseller;<sup>3</sup>
  - two general presses (five bestsellers):
    - Hurtubise (six ASPP grants), one bestseller,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Part III concerning the limitations of data collected by BookNet Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Neal McLeod, *100 Days of Cree* (2016); Charlie Angus, *Children of the Broken Treaty: Canada's Lost Promise and One Girl's Dream* (2015); Harold Johnson, *Firewater: How Alcohol Is Killing My People (and Yours)* (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum), *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nêhiyaw Legal* (2016).

<sup>4</sup> *Bescherelle. L'art de conjuguer*, oddly classified in the Social Science / Anthropology / Cultural & Social category.

- ECW Press (two ASPP), four bestsellers;<sup>1</sup>
  - One specialized publisher (with one bestseller): Septentrion (17 ASPP grants), a title in the publisher's collection reserved for fiction, oddly classified as Literary Criticism<sup>2</sup>;
1. Of these 10 titles, only the book published by UBC Press would have been eligible for the ASPP.

University presses, of course, defend their right to remain unburdened by considerations of commercial success, and even their duty to be free of them so they can better serve their specialist mission and support scientific excellence:

*[A top-selling author] came to see me with a project that X, his usual publisher [a general publisher], refused because it was too academic. They could have said yes and applied for an ASPP grant. And they should have, because I applied and got it. But it's that even with a grant, they felt that the book wouldn't make money. That's why they didn't want to publish it. [...] That's why the ASPP exists, to support works that otherwise could never see the light of day<sup>3</sup>. (university press)*

However, as that publisher explains, they also try to capture market share and sign on prestigious authors who rather to go to general publishers:

*however, once their career is well- established [...], many of them prefer instead to work with a general publisher. One reason is because at a certain stage, their work sometimes becomes less academic. The other is that the impact of a publishing house like X is greater in terms of distribution, whether here or in Europe. And we're the ones who lose out. I'm changing things a bit here, but the fact remains. I think of writers like [list of academic writers], who will go see X rather than turn to a press. And I understand them, because the dissemination is not at all the same<sup>4</sup>. (university press)*

## DOES THE ASPP HAVE A QUALITATIVE IMPACT ON SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING?

Beyond its funding effect, we can ask what influence the ASPP has on the output of publishing houses and ultimately, title by title, on Canadian scholarly publishing. This question is related to any use or non-use of the program by publishers and whether the ASPP meets their needs. On what do they base their decision to use or not use the ASPP? How do they comply with the program requirements, or do they bend the program to their needs? Do its eligibility criteria shape their editorial program? Do refusals discourage them from publishing certain titles? Finally, by virtue of its requirements and review process, does the ASPP affect the quality of published books?

<sup>1</sup> Maude Barlow, *Boiling Point: Government Neglect, Corporate Abuse, and Canada's Water Crisis* (2016); Marilyn Simonds, *Gutenberg's Fingerprint: Paper, Pixels and the Lasting Impression of Books* (2017); Paul Cherry, *The Biker Trials: Bringing Down the Hells Angels* (2005); Harvey Brownstone, *Tug of War: A Judge's Verdict on Separation, Custody Battles, and the Bitter Realities of Family Court* (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Allard, *Les Chroniques d'une mère indigne* (2007), published in the publisher's fiction collection.

<sup>3</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>4</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French



## How publishers decide whether to use the ASPP

How do publishers decide which titles to submit to the ASPP? Why do they not submit more titles or titles that qualify?

The answers to the question “How do you choose which titles to submit to the ASPP?” reveal two main attitudes:

1. Systematic or quasi-systematic submission: all works that comply with the ASPP’s mandate and eligibility criteria are submitted when *“the reports are definitive enough in their recommendations that it is possible for this process to proceed smoothly”* (university press). In other words, all books that have a chance of obtaining funding are submitted.
2. Submission based on expected non-profitability: works are submitted for which sales prospects are poor despite their high quality due to their academic character. This attitude is more common among specialized publishers.

There are a broader range of factors that keep publishers from using the program. They highlight the program's limitations and shortcomings.

### Lack of administrative resources

While they acknowledge that the process is not complicated, they still need to make the time to prepare the submissions and organize a peer review if it is not a regular part of their editorial work. The estimated time required for submission is one to six hours per dossier, depending on the project. And, according to one publisher, about 60 hours if you include the work surrounding the peer review - finding reviewers, compiling their opinions, and helping the author respond to the report and make the necessary changes to the manuscript. Four of the ten publishers interviewed (two presses and two specialized) stated that a lack of human resources kept them from submitting more titles or that the time taken to assemble the dossiers time that could be better used elsewhere.

*[...] the title-by-title submission process is old fashioned and a move to a block-grant approach would free up a substantial amount of creative time for our press. We can't afford to add new staff members, so we are always looking for ways to **not** do unessential activities and focus more fully on the authors and audiences. (University press)*

The cost in time to apply to the ASPP is the first argument in favour of a block grant, which most publishers view positively.

### Duration of the process

When publishers rely on their editorial boards to judge the quality of the works, the ASPP can add 12 to 18 months to publication time. For the others, the ASPP does not



significantly extend the time to publication - “*maybe three months at most*<sup>1</sup>” (academic publisher), unless the review reports require extensive work and multiple rounds of back-and-forth between the author and the reviewer.

As a result of these delays and the uncertain outcome of the competition:

- authors sometimes ask the publisher not to submit their work to the competition - and in such a case finance the book themselves, or
- the publisher himself foregoes the ASPP to keep output responsive and the editorial plan relevant.

Some publishers also mentioned time loss due to the need to comply with the conflict of interest rules, which makes it particularly difficult to recruit reviewers in highly specialized fields or in French-speaking areas, where the expert pool is smaller:

## Peer reviews and non-constructive feedback

“Bringing peer reviews up to standard” - and sometimes reviewer recruitment - is the longest and not necessarily the most useful part of the process. More critical reviews result in better books but compromise the final score assigned by the Federation's Publications Committee. Unanimous but less constructive evaluations will therefore be preferred. Two presses made the same comment:

*The largest time factor for us is working to the review dossier that we estimate will satisfy the program rather than what we feel the work needs from an editorial perspective. (presse universitaire)*

*What I dislike about the current ASPP program is that I, as a publisher, often spend less time worrying about the quality of the peer review reports I receive and more time worrying about whether the reports are positive enough for the book to receive ASPP. Because we seek to produce the best books out of the manuscripts submitted to us, I actually prefer quite a critical report. (university press)*

Another publisher wonders whether, to save time and not add insult to redundancy, thesis examiner reports could not replace the review.

*There's also the fact that it's a little ... I would say insulting; yes, insulting. We have manuscripts that are taken from doctoral theses, which have already gone through an entire evaluation process and we ask the authors to start over... At some point they get fed up with being asked to justify themselves again<sup>2</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

Finally, publishers consider it unfortunate that the ASPP's evaluation comes so late in the process, after the work is completed. This undermines the considerable effort already invested and is considered demoralizing by authors and publishers alike.

*On occasion, we have authors request not to participate in the program as they feel that it adds time to the editorial process; some have expressed that the process is often*

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

*demoralizing as a decision of whether or not a title will receive funding comes very late in the developmental cycle of a work, meaning that a publisher may be able to make an informed publishing decision until both author and press have sunk considerable resources into the project. (university press)*

Two specialized publishers almost gave up on the competition for this very reason: because they submitted unfinalized manuscripts to avoid duplicate efforts, they received negative feedback on the form, and therefore a negative score from the Federation.

*I met an ASPP agent three or four years ago who told me: "The big difference between French and English books is that English books are usually ready for publication whereas you send us manuscripts that aren't finalized." But that's the goal of publication assistance, you don't edit before. You ask me to pay for editing work, but what do I do if I don't get the grant? I find this all really strange. [...] The review form should clearly state "Do not make editorial recommendations. Focus only on the content, on the value of the work you are asked to evaluate<sup>1</sup>." (specialized publisher)*

The evaluators will follow ASPP policy in this regard. It is clearly stated that: "A work must be complete before it can be considered for ASPP funding."<sup>2</sup> By judging books once they are completed, the ASPP cannot really influence the quality of the books it funds. Perhaps the Federation should rethink this requirement and ask reviewers to evaluate the substance and potential of the work and not the editorial work that remains to be done.

In truth, the purpose of the grant is unclear. The Federation should specify the purpose of a publication grant which is not meant to contribute to publication costs related to editorial work: "ASPP grants are designed with the assumption that publishers will assume all editorial, copy editing, and design costs."<sup>3</sup>

## Conservative reviews

The peer review process is also criticized for its conservatism, or rather the conservatism expected by publishers. Since the evaluation reports must be very positive in order to obtain the best possible score from the ASPP, publishers will "self-censor" the titles they submit.

*We have often found ourselves caught editorially between pushing for accessibility in writing and approach and the perception of a lack of scholarly rigour, which is a false dichotomy. We have also hesitated to put forward work which is ground-breaking in terms of form or*

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/aspp/fag>, consulted on September 14, 2018 [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

<sup>3</sup> And more specifically: "Eligible publishers must oversee and assure the carrying out of editorial changes and revisions. Publishers must also assume full responsibility for book design, press preparation, and production. These matters are relevant to grant applications because ASPP grants are designed for publishers on the assumption that they assume editorial, copy editing, and design costs," ASPP Publisher Eligibility Criteria, section 5, <https://www.idees-idees.ca/sites/default/files/sites/default/uploads/aspp/aspp-eligibility-criteria-publishers-en.pdf>, consulted September 14, 2018 [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>]..

*methodology, as these works often have a challenging, although deeply useful, peer review process. (university press)*

*There are some titles which, even if research based, will be viewed as more suitable for the general public. I believe their thinking is that they have to fuel research. I think that for them, the primary audience has to be an academic audience. [...] The truth is that we're always seeking to reach more than a strictly academic audience. It's part of the publisher's mission, and I think that it's part of the reason authors, even academics, want to publish with us<sup>1</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

The titles submitted for competition will therefore be the most conformist and not the most original, innovative or controversial in form and content.

## Grossly insufficient funding for translations

While the \$8,000 for books is almost universally perceived as insufficient, the \$12,000 for translation *"does not come close to covering the costs of translation"* (specialized publisher) and is considered laughable:

*Twelve thousand dollars for a translation is a joke. It doesn't even begin to cover the cost. Because in fact, it costs \$8,000 to produce the book, leaving only \$4,000 for translation, which for a 300-page monograph costs \$25,000<sup>2</sup>. (university press)*

In other words, translation projects are submitted to the ASPP only if their funding has been secured elsewhere. This may explain why the envelope for translations is not used up (see Part I, Output section). Publishers lament this lack of resources for translations, which limits the exchange of ideas between linguistic communities in a bilingual country.

## Are non-ASPP-funded projects abandoned?

Does the ASPP allow certain titles to see the light of day? Does it fund books that would not have otherwise been published? Put differently, are publishers abandoning projects rejected by the ASPP? The answer for the most part is no: the book is published anyway.

## No: the decision to publish is made before applying to the ASPP

As mentioned earlier, publishers only submit books they are confident will receive a high score from the ASPP publishing committee. However, the ASPP's opinion comes late in the editorial process and publishers want to avoid duplicate efforts. Therefore: *"Although we respect the decisions of the ASPP and its editorial board, we only bring projects to the ASPP that we already intend to publish"* (university press).

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

The ASPP is thus less a condition for publication than a tool to secure funding that will go into the publisher's general accounts.

## Finances are the only reason projects are abandoned

Of the ten publishers interviewed, four said they were sometimes, but very rarely, forced to abandon a project. In cases where they were, it was either because the necessary funding was not secured before applying for the grant or because the authors were unable to raise the funds. If they do so, as they have all pointed out, *"it is for purely financial reasons"* (specialized publisher):

*I'd say we abandon about 5-7 projects a year [sur une soixantaine de publications] for lack of obtaining an ASPP grant. The primary reason is financial. Margins are too tight for us to underwrite scholarship that, however strongly we believe in its quality, has a limited market. (university press)*

It appears that the result of an ASPP failure is less frequently an abandonment of the project than a *"significant delay in publication while the author and publisher devote their attention to raising funds from other sources"* (University press).

## DOES THE ASPP MAKE BOOKS AND CANADIAN PUBLISHING BETTER?

In terms of the quality of funded books, based on the publishers' comments, the answer is no, the ASPP does not make books better, because only quality works are submitted to the program.

As we have seen, publishers submit titles that they have already planned to publish and will often publish them regardless of the ASPP's decision. As well, for most publishers, the peer review required by the process is already part of the editing process. The review is conducted systematically by university presses but also by most specialized publishers.

To a certain extent, the ASPP is even perceived as counterproductive in terms of qualitative added value. As we have seen, peer reviews are formatted to secure the ASPP grant and not, as publishers lament, to improve the book:

- Positive reviews are sought whereas more critical reading improves the quality of the book and its reception by the public:

*It heads off problems discovered in editing, it increases the likelihood of the book having an impact in its field, and often the book receives more positive reviews and enjoys a wider readership when a reviewer has taken time to really advocate for the future reader of the book. (university press)*

- This is the same reason publishers do not submit more original or nonconformist books, books that could actively fuel academic conversations and public debate.

Asked directly about the qualitative differences between funded and non-funded books in terms of domestic and international sales, translation requests, awards received, media coverage and recognition, the publishers either replied that there is little difference between them or that they don't know. Books only seem to do better in terms of the awards they receive: four out of eight publishers said they received more awards; three said they received the same number, and one didn't know. However, one publisher told us, in scholarly publishing, unlike fiction, awards do not guarantee success but show recognition for the author and the publisher: they make no difference in terms of sales.

When asked, "*Would you say that the ASPP makes a difference in the quality of the book? That the books are better than they would have been without going through the whole process?*", only one - a specialized publisher - replied that the process helps to improve the quality of books. The others answered "no" or "not really"; the quality depends entirely on the work done internally and on the publisher's output overall, regardless of the ASPP.

*I don't mean to be rude, but the peer review process is an internal process and our Publications Board is a tough board, so the quality of the books themselves is the result of in-house work, and it doesn't benefit from the excellent/very good/ good ranking given by the ASPP juries. Those assessments are essentially fund/don't fund decisions that do not add to the editorial quality of the texts. (university press)*

That said, they unanimously welcomed the ASPP's financial contribution.

*Editorially, I think our Press holds books to as high standards as the ASPP. We conduct our peer review in a way that it meets the ASPP's criteria, but do so independently. Undoubtedly, books that go through the ASPP process and receive the grant, benefit from the outcomes this produces: high production values, resources for copyediting the book professionally, funding for successful marketing, and to help price the book as accessibly as possible. (university press)*

The ASPP may not influence publishers' editorial policy and the quality of their books, but there is no doubt as to the ASPP's contribution. The ASPP helps disseminate Canadian knowledge, not so much by the support it provides on a per title basis but through the total funding that its awards represent for the publishing community:

*The Federation provides absolutely critical funds to support the publication of Canadian-authored books. Without the program's support, Presses would run larger deficits than most already do. (university press)*

Because it contributes to this form of academic freedom, i.e. the freedom to write and publish outside the constraints of commercial profitability - "*That's why the ASPP exists, to support works that otherwise could never see the light of day*" (university press) - the ASPP is a vital resource for Canadian scholarly communication and research in terms of funding: "*subsidies are not only intended to balance budgets but are also deeply connected to a process of organizational knowledge accumulation*" (Nelson, 2018, p. 171).

## V. RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT BOOKS AS A COMPONENT OF THE HSS RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

In Canada, as elsewhere, scholarly books generate less sales, are less profitable, have a more limited readership and yet continue to be produced in ever greater numbers and at ever higher costs. The increasingly uncertain revenues are not enough to offset these costs. Scholarly books are in a complex phase marked by rising costs, declining revenues, overproduction, and changes in demand and consumption with the result that new economic models, technical standards and forms of scholarly communication are needed. Books, a long form of communication that are different and complementary to the article format, should be recognized as integral to the infrastructure of HSS research, and should be supported as such — even if, and indeed especially because, it is bound to change. These difficult times are a time not only for reinvention but for careful re-examination of the conditions of their existence.

Publishers view themselves as a link in the research production chain and as such must maintain their output level:

*I can't reduce the number of books I publish. I would not be helping the scholarly community or SSHRC by publishing fewer books. The goal is to maximize the dissemination of knowledge<sup>1</sup>. (university press)*

However, our analysis of demand, usage - and various observers (Anderson, 2014a; Bielstein, 2015; Crossick, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Gatti et Mierowsky, 2016b; Jubb, 2017) - point instead to an overproduction, particularly in printed books (decrease in sales). This should not lead us to reconsider the importance of the book in HSS and limit its funding but, on the contrary, to better support publishers who have to follow the transformation of the book format in order to better adapt it to the demands and needs of authors and readers.

*While the obvious move from print to digital texts is an obvious shift, less obvious is the ways in which scholars' expectations of how they can communicate with one another as well as larger publics, and the evolving role of long form scholarship, which is still a cornerstone for many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. [...] Responding as a scholarly publisher to these changes in a manner which does not jeopardize the importance of vetting and peer review, but allows it to most effectively evolve to the needs of contemporary scholars is a significant challenge. (university press)*

The recommendations in this conclusion are based on our analysis of the book situation, a complex situation for which we have attempted to identify the main issues, and on the analyses conducted by the publishers themselves, their challenges, their needs and the solutions they propose. Publishers have clearly expressed their wish to be supported

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French



and guided in the transformation of the scholarly publishing ecosystem. They are also unanimously grateful for support programs such as the ASPP, pleased with the manner in which it is administered by the Federation (process timeframe, fairness of decisions), and the competence and availability of its agents. However, they all believe that the program should be reviewed, and most of them support major changes: *"If anything we need greater flexibility to infuse our publications programs with creativity and innovation"* (university press).

More broadly, the publishers call for accountability from the research community, and in particular from the SSHRC. The responsibility for funding all stages of research, including the final stage of dissemination. As well as the responsibility not to impose measures without a careful assessment of their effects or without having consulted all players. This applies specifically to open access. *"It is ethically reprehensible for decision-makers to impose a paradigm shift without knowing its impact<sup>1</sup>,"* says a university publisher, who nevertheless supports the principle of open access.

The recommendations are spread over a time horizon divided into three periods:

1. In the near term, renew the funding and make adjustments that are easy to implement.
2. In the medium term, change the program into a block grant.
3. Organize a joint reflection process with a view to guiding scholarly books through their transformation, which will produce its effects in the longer term.

We hope that these recommendations will provide useful basis for the reflections of the Federation, SSHRC and the other actors in the community including authors, researchers, universities and educational and research institutions, libraries, granting agencies, booksellers, agents and distributors.

## **IN THE NEAR TERM: INCREASE GRANT AMOUNTS AND OPEN THE PROGRAM TO OTHER GENRES**

As regards improvements to the program, publishers would first and foremost like to see an increase in the grant amounts. They also expressed a desire for greater flexibility in the types of books that can access funding.

### **Increase the basic grant and but under no circumstances decrease the number of books funded**

There is an urgent need to rethink the amount of the basic grant (\$8,000). Publishers are in a precarious financial position, due to a chronic lack of resources, declining revenues and rising costs (see Part III). In addition, the grants have not been adjusted since fiscal

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

2005-2006<sup>1</sup> - it was previously \$7,000. If for no other reason than inflation, "[t]he subsidy, in concrete terms, decreases from year to year. Because my costs are increasing<sup>2</sup>" (university press). At the very least, the re-evaluation of grant amounts should "reflect the costs of inflation [...] also needs to acknowledge demands in the industry for better support for authors" (specialized publisher).

Amounts suggested by publishers consulted in 2018 varied from \$9,000 to \$15,000.

If the increases only reflect inflation, the grant amount should have been \$9,780 in 2018 and \$10,564 in 2021<sup>3</sup>.

One publisher, however, found the current amount fair while another found that \$5,000 would be more "fair" because \$8,000 covers his production costs, because he receives other grants and because the book is also funded by its sales. Note that these comments were made by specialized publishers, which publish more commercially profitable works than presses.

If, however, the funds allocated to the Federation by SSHRC were to remain the same, publishers would rather see the number of books funded remain the same than more money awarded to fewer projects. Similarly, if funding were increased, then if forced to decide between supporting more books and increasing the amount of money allocated to each book, respondents would rather see more books supported at the current amount. However, the ideal scenario would be an increase in both the amounts and the number of awards.

## Increase funding for translations

Since 2006, the ASPP has offered five \$12,000 awards annually to support translations; however, it is struggling to use up this \$60,000 envelope. In 15 years (2006-2020), 75 translation awards could have been granted. In reality, only 75 applications were submitted, 56 approved and 46 actually published (see Part I, Production section).

In his analysis of translations funded by the ASPP since its inception, Jean-Philippe Warren (2016, p. 243) concludes that:

The desire to see more sustained translations of HSS works is met with a major obstacle, that of the dynamics of the scientific fields of each national region. [...] Publisher interest in translating scholarly books has been declining since the 1980s with the result that the ASPP has supported very few translations in the last 40 years.

This waning interest stems more from financial considerations than disciplinary dynamics. Many lament that the Federation's grant simply does not allow them to

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<sup>1</sup> SSHRC Awards Search Engine, [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/award\\_search-recherche\\_attributions/index-eng.aspx](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/award_search-recherche_attributions/index-eng.aspx), consulted on September 15, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>3</sup> Inflation from \$8,000 in 2006. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>, consulted on January 16, 2022.



consider such projects, even less so now that the Canada Council for the Arts no longer funds translation of non-literary non-fiction.

*We have not applied for a translation grant through ASPP because the fund is not big enough to cover the cost of the translation. [...] If scholarly books are to be translated in Canada, we need ASPP to cover the actual costs of translating books.*

In short, the ASPP plays only a small role in the intellectual exchanges between Canada's linguistic communities. As one university press put it, *"Either SSHRC fully assumes this role and funds it properly or the Federation pulls out entirely<sup>1</sup>."*

The publishers surveyed suggested that translation grants should be \$20,000 to \$25,000. Or, the Federation could calculate the amount in the same way as the Canada Council, at \$0.18 per word, plus the basic amount (currently \$8,000).

## Support alternative scholarly books

Books are also how research leaves academia to reach out to another audience. SSHRC has clearly demonstrated its desire to encourage the transfer of knowledge so that society can benefit from the fruits of research - which it funds - as have academia and researchers. Consequently, some writers turn to more mainstream publishing houses to disseminate their work or strive to write more popular books.

*The academic writers we publish are authors who want to reach out to a larger audience and to help effect social change. Of course, this is not the case with all SSHRC authors. [...] Sometimes, we're asked for recommendation letters describing the impact of their book; it's part of their researcher dossiers. We're pleased when this happens<sup>2</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

The ASPP can either remain an "elitist" program, focused exclusively on scientific excellence and scholarly communication among peers or broaden its mission by also supporting nonfiction geared to a wider audience or whose form and subject matter are less academic.

Doing so would allow more nonfiction publishers to apply to the competition, which would be a welcome change in light of the Canada Council's new policy. It would also support and reward the efforts of presses which, without compromising their scholarly rigour, would like to occasionally publish works geared to a wider readership and encourage more novel approaches:

*We have often found ourselves caught editorially between pushing for accessibility in writing and approach and the perception of a lack of scholarly rigour, which is a false dichotomy. (university press)*

The principle of an approach to funding scholarly communication which also aims to increase the social and cultural impact of research by making it available a wider

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

audience was reaffirmed in 2017 by the Canadian Scholarly Publishing Working Group, of which SSHRC, the Federation and ACUP/ APUC were a part:

A coordinated national funding approach must take into account the full costs of the dissemination of scholarship to the widest possible audiences, within and beyond the academic community, in order to leverage the full scholarly and cultural impact potential of the initial investment in research<sup>1</sup> (Groupe de travail sur l'édition savante au Canada, 2017, p. 18).

It is therefore a question here of recognizing and supporting the book as a vehicle for the transfer of knowledge, of recognizing the efforts made by publishers to preserve this role, and of encouraging researchers to restore their faith in the scholarly monograph.

*There is not more or less value in the specialized scholarly monograph than there is in the scholar writing a book for a public that stretches beyond his or her discipline, colleagues, and graduate students, but scholars are also using the book in significant numbers (and are being actively encouraged by many scholarly publishers to view the genre as a flexible form that can bring the best of a field or research to a varied public) to contribute to critical public discussions, to make their work available to a large number of citizens, and to concretize a genuine social good by writing a book. It is disappointing that some parts of learned communities seem to have lost faith in the book as a form, at least as one way of pointing to the achievements of their discipline. (university press)*

Doing so may also correct the underrepresentation of French books in the ASPP (see Part I, Linguistic Representation) by encouraging specialized or general publishers to submit more titles to the competition. It seems that French-language academics, historians in particular, readily turn to these types of publishers to have their works published (Chenier et al., 2015, p. 294).

If the ASPP's mission were to expand, books could be submitted in two categories: scholarly/popular books and innovation. The instructions to the reviewers would be adjusted to reflect the characteristics and objectives of each of these two genres.

Perhaps the "popularization/innovation" component could obtain funding from a source other than SSHRC to compensate for the lack of funding from the Canada Council for the Arts.

## IN THE MEDIUM TERM: CLARIFY THE ASPP'S MISSION

As we have seen, the influence of the ASPP on scholarly publishing stems less from its granular funding, per title, than by the total funding that ends up forming a publishing grant for a number of publishers (Table 13). The ASPP is suffering from ambiguity: it is an award for authors and a de facto grant for certain publishers, but a grant that's inefficiently distributed - in an *"old-fashioned"* way, to quote one press - and that does not not improve output quality and may actually be detrimental to it (see publishers' opinions on the program in Part IV).

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<sup>1</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

Almost all of the publishers interviewed (9 out of 10) readily called for changing the ASPP into a block grant or responded favourably to this suggestion. Less favourably viewed were suggestions to create a writing grant, to set up a fund to support promotional activities, or to pay reviewers.

It bears mentioning that in 2004, a block grant - reserved for presses - was already one of the “options for the future” proposed in the conclusions of the program assessment carried out that year. Its relevance depends on how SSHRC plans to clarify its program’s dual identity:

*In light of these conclusions, and the rather broad objectives set for the program, SSHRC may wish to more precisely define ASPP objectives and to adjust the program’s design and delivery mechanisms accordingly. The following are options that SSHRC may consider in its assessment:*

- *If the ASPP is primarily an authors’ program [...]*
- *If the primary aim of the program is to support the development of Canadian scholarly presses, it may be more effective as a block grant program to scholarly presses. This option is particularly favoured by publishers. (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2004, p. 55-56)*

The program known back then as “Aid to Scholarly Publications Program / Programme d’aide à l’édition savante” was renamed in 2012 “Awards to Scholarly Publications Program / Prix d’auteurs pour l’édition savante” to underscore its mission to support authors. The ambiguity, however, remained.

## Block funding to improve scholarly publishing

Block funding is preferred for the time it saves but particularly for the flexibility it provides for allocating the amounts. It would enable publishers to be more innovative, to devote more resources - in time and money - on adapting to the changes taking place in their environment, on innovating on a technical level (see in particular Part II, the section on discoverability and accessibility) and editorial level:

*We’re are trying new methods and ways to respond to a dynamic and diverse market. We would benefit from having a greater amount of flexibility to explore new models, publish different types of publications in varying delivery modes, and so on. I understand that the ASPP can’t just say “Here you go, here’s the money” but block funding would be an excellent first step in promoting agility and creativity in a publishing realm that is desperate to connect to its audience and find new ways (along with the old ways) to do so. (university press)*

*An option would be to consider an entirely new program. The Federal Government recognizes the importance of innovation. A program that would effectively support innovation by making Canadian content broadly available to university, college and public libraries would be consistent with the Government’s objectives. Such a program would require new funding, however in the context of many government initiatives would be a relatively modest investment. (university press)*

*This will enable scholars and publishers to work together to innovate with agility in our areas of professional expertise—form, scholarly review, dissemination and broad discoverability—to*

*meet the needs of the scholarly, publishing and reading communities we all serve. (university press)*

Publishers need to be given more free rein to reinvent the old ways of doing things - the legacy model (Gatti et Mierowsky, 2016a) - in which the ASPP, through its funding per title, supports publishers, but that, as we have seen, responds poorly to demand and audience needs.

By simplifying the editorial production of books (allowing them to receive more critical and therefore more constructive reviews) and thanks to its flexibility (an amount that they could use as they see fit) and ease (one application per year), block funding would benefit publishers by:

- Freeing up resources that could be invested in editorial and creative work, in supporting authors, in promotional activities, etc., which provide books with added value;
- Allowing for more responsive and timely programs that are more relevant to social debates by no longer subjecting the production calendar to ASPP decisions;
- Allowing for the possibility of publishing books in less canonical and more original forms, which will potentially generate more debate and interest outside of academia;
- Give publishers more freedom to innovate, including:
  - Searching for new forms of scholarly communication and peer review,
  - Implementing tools and processes to ease the transition to better referenced, better distributed and more accessible digital books,
  - Searching for new economic models and partnerships,
  - Innovating in the areas of promotion and communication,
  - Developing monitoring tools and metrics.

## Eligibility criteria and amount calculations

Since the Federation and SSHRC cannot effectively say *"Here you go, here's the money"* (university press), the criteria for grant eligibility and the calculation grid will have to be designed carefully, and certainly in consultation with publishers - both university presses and non-press publishers.

The current eligibility criteria have not been criticized by the publishing community and could probably be kept as is but with some adjustments. For example, point 6 in the publisher eligibility criteria,<sup>1</sup> concerning financial participation of authors, would need to be revised or reformulated, since this practise is common in the presses.

It would also be useful to define what is meant by "book" since, as the idea is to open the door to innovation, publication forms will change or multiply, for example, take the form of applications or websites. Eligible books may have to meet criteria regarding length (compliance with current standards of at least 40,000 words, including references),

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.idees-ideas.ca/sites/default/files/sites/default/uploads/aspp/aspp-eligibility-criteria-publishers-en.pdf>, consulted September 14, 2018 [defunct, currently: <https://www.federationhss.ca/en/programs-policies/aspp>].

finalization (there will be no more changes to the text) and legal deposit.<sup>1</sup> A maximum ratio could be set for funded titles – experimental forms relative to more traditional books – to ensure a certain stability for the publishing community until sufficient information is gathered to gauge the public’s response to the new forms. A ratio could also be defined for popular works if the idea to create a grant for this category were adopted.

Grant distribution could be inspired by the method once used by the Canada Council for the Arts, based on publishers’ output reports.

- Publishers would provide:
  - A list of eligible titles published during the year,
  - The category of each title (classical, experimental, popular),
  - Proof that they have been peer reviewed,
  - The production costs associated with each title,
  - A presentation of their past and future editorial program, accompanied by indicators to assess the qualitative and quantitative impact of their output (a list of indicators could be provided by the Federation),
  - Information on other initiatives taken to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and the vitality of scholarly communication.
- The Federation, through its Publications Committee would assess:
  - The eligibility of the submitted titles,
  - The overall quality of the publisher’s output and activities: excellence, contribution to the development of knowledge, originality, relevance, coherence, etc.
- The amount of the grant would be calculated on the basis of production expenditures and weighted by “merit points” reflecting the quality of the publisher’s contribution to Canadian scholarly communication.
- A maximum amount would be set to prevent the grants from ending up in the hands of just the largest publishers.

This approach recognizes both the quality of the books produced and the quality of the work put in by the publishers, whether academic, specialized or general:

*Yes, that would be a good thing. It would be a block grant for university presses; this would allow us to submit a few titles and also allow us to submit the other titles to the Canada Council<sup>2</sup>. (specialized publisher)*

For the Federation, the advantage is twofold. The first is administrative simplification. The second, and most important is that it would make it easier for them to evaluate and support excellence in scholarly publishing:

*Transitioning the program to a block grant would enable a wholistic evaluation of a publishing program and its standards, rather than granular evaluation on a project by project basis, offering the possibility of more flexibility, speed and consistency of support. (university press)*

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<sup>1</sup> The legal deposit of digital publications in HTML, XML, PHP and other formats is already an option offered by BAnQ ([http://www.banq.qc.ca/services/depot\\_legal/depot\\_numeriques/index.html](http://www.banq.qc.ca/services/depot_legal/depot_numeriques/index.html)); deposit with LAC is done on a case by case basis (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/legal-deposit/Pages/online-digital-publications.aspx>).

<sup>2</sup> TN: quote originally provided in French

This solution would reconcile the two logics that underpin the ASPP: support for academic excellence (award logic) and support for academic publishing (grant logic).

## IN THE LONGER TERM: SUPPORT A CHANGING ECOSYSTEM

We have seen that scholarly books face countless challenges, and the actions needed to overcome them cannot be carried out by publishers alone. Nor can they alone identify the actions needed. Collaboration is required to conduct a holistic assessment of the situation and to develop and implement strategies. Canadian scholarly publishing needs the strength of conviction and must rally to develop a common action plan. Publishers have shown themselves receptive to dialogue and collaboration.

Many of them have identified SSHRC and the Federation as potential advocates for recognizing the book, for restoring it to the academic community:

*It is disappointing that some parts of learned communities seem to have lost faith in the book as a form, at least as one way of pointing to the achievements of their discipline. It should be critiqued, interrogated, held to account and to high standards, but it should also be celebrated rather than dismissed. (university press)*

The Federation and SSHRC could also organize a large consultation to reflect on the best ways to guide scholarly books through the changes imposed by the situation:

*Publishers and scholars need the ASPP program and SSHRC to support them in creating a sustainable environment for the publication of scholarly material. [...] I would like to see university presses as allies in the work of creating a sustainable environment. [...] Few of the presses have the ears of Provosts and Presidents across the country, ears that would be needed for a systemwide change to support for scholarly communication. Perhaps with the help of an influential body that understands the government's perspective, like the Federation and SSHRC, we could come together to discuss these options, better understand one another's perspective, and share our knowledge. (university press)*

## A consultation to reflect and discuss

As we have seen (Part II), while Canadian books need to improve and rationalize their digital existence, the process and resources for doing so are extremely complicated to imagine and implement. Faced with this complexity and a lack of mature solutions on different levels (e.g. format, publishing tools, distribution, promotion, preservation, marketing, financing) and to find effective, lasting solutions, consultations and discussions must be undertaken at the Canadian level.

The discussions here are less about the editing dimension of publishing (making books) and more about the dissemination and preservation dimensions (making them public), which are part of the core functions of publishing (Bargheer et al., 2017, p. 208).

It is about understanding the needs, implications and consequences for all the stakeholders in the book chain, not just publishers, in order to act in an informed, intelligent and productive manner. The stakeholders in the book chain include:

- Publishers;
- Authors;
- Researchers;
- Users;
- Libraries;
- Brick-and-mortar, digital, academic and general interest bookstores;
- Distributors;
- Publishing and research granting agencies;
- Universities and educational and research institutions;
- Consortia and associations representing these stakeholders.

Each one should ask themselves following questions:

- What are their needs in terms of scholarly communication, dissemination of knowledge, contribution to knowledge, and research?
- Are these needs mutually compatible or contradictory?
- How can they be met?
- What contribution can they each make?
- How can contradictions be overcome?

This consultation could lead to a national strategy for scholarly publishing that would not be limited to reflecting on the future of books but would include journals and other forms of scholarly communication that are part of the same ecosystem. Research libraries have already expressed the desire for such a strategy through CARL:

*We need a national Canadian strategy in the international context of scholarly publishing [...] The academic publishing sector in Canada – learned societies and publishers, universities, academic libraries, granting agencies, infrastructure providers – has the expertise and ability to create a truly authoritative Canadian solution [...] that could serve as a model for the rest of the world. Most importantly, universities have the ability to work together and determine the best way to allocate their financial resources. [...] [We need to] develop a comprehensive strategy [...] The problems associated with scholarly journals are also found in these publication papers [journals, monographs, manuals, open educational resources ...] and the solutions are the same: technology adoption, collaborative activities and new viability models. (ABRC et al., 2016, p. 14-17)*

The thorniest issues that will have to be addressed are likely to be:

- Publisher funding and economic models, including partnership models that are developing with university libraries (as in the CRKN-Érudit agreement for journals);
- Digital distribution, particularly the opportunity to create a Canadian distribution platform for books to improve discoverability and accessibility;
- Open access.

## **Facilitate open access**

The distribution of scholarly books in open access could improve availability and accessibility, and thereby help restore their place in research activities – and maybe



even improve their sales (see Part II). This also respects the open access principle that the fruits of research should benefit all of society and be available to all "without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the Internet itself."<sup>1</sup>

Publishers are not adverse to open access in principle, far from it, and some presses are already practising open access, for some or all of their collections. When we consulted them in 2018, they were already convinced that the Tri-Agency Policy on Open Access to Publications<sup>2</sup> would eventually extend to books. However, they were concerned about the provision and asked to be consulted, heard and involved in the eventual expansion of free access to books, so government and the universities would not opt to destabilize their fragile economic structure and compromise their survival.

*I fear that what has happened to SSHRC-funded journals over the past few years is a good example of the unforeseen consequences of pushing poor consultation and poor understanding of the ultimate outcome of pushing a publishing model forward that did not acknowledge or likely understand the different pressures on Canadian journals and their various publishing support systems. (university press)*

The fears expressed in 2018 about a lack of consultation in the move toward open access were realized. In 2019, the Association of University Presses issued a statement "demand[ing] consultation with ALL stakeholders, and consideration of ALL impacts in such significant policy changes" (APUC, 2019).

However, in 2020, the Federal Government affirmed its intention to require open access for all research-supported scholarly publications, including books. The fourth recommendation of its "Roadmap for Open Science", released in February 2020, "aims to achieve open access by default, with no waiting period. It applies to new scientific articles in university-based scholarly journals from January 2022 onward, and to new federal scientific publications published from January 2023 onward." The roadmap states that "When a research project and the resulting publication are supported by multiple funders, the federal government is expected to adhere to the most open access policies" (Office of the Chief Science Advisor of Canada, 2020).

Publishers also fear that the debate will become polarized and that they will become the victims of greedy large academic publishers:

*[...] the OA focus has turned things into a stark black or white debate. [...] the clearer distinction has to be made is between largescale for-profit academic publishers and university presses and other not-for-profit publishers. (university press)*

*Too often university presses are thrown into conversations about commercial publishers. (university press)*

Discussions on open access should include teaching and research libraries to evaluate how, technically, open access can best meet accessibility needs (formats, platforms,

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<sup>1</sup> Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002), <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read>, consulted on September 16, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.science.gc.ca/eic/site/063.nsf/eng/h\\_F6765465.html](http://www.science.gc.ca/eic/site/063.nsf/eng/h_F6765465.html), consulted on September 16, 2018.



indexing, etc.). Academic and commercial distributors will also have to be consulted to determine the conditions and costs of the dissemination. How, for example, can the presence of the same title on a dual market (free and commercial) be organized (Wright, 2018, p. 185)? How, concretely, would a printed book be linked to its digital clone?

Libraries and the institutions they depend on, along with granting agencies, should also be included in the dialogue about the economic model needed to support free access. The participants in this debate would have to define a “fair” amount to cover the shortfall and eliminate the need for the book to be sold. The question is how to calculate this amount when HSS book sales are difficult to predict and are spread over long periods?

Here, the Federation could play the role it has taken on as “promoter and facilitator of Open Access publishing projects for monographs” (Fédération des sciences humaines, 2015).

The extensive consultation process undertaken by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI, a British funding agency) to establish its new open access policy is a model of how this can be achieved.<sup>1</sup> Released in August 2021, the conditions for its effective implementation in April 2022 for journals and January 2024 for books (free access after a 12-month embargo, distribution under a CC BY license, NC and ND licenses tolerated<sup>2</sup>), were also defined in consultation with stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

## An OAPEN-CA?

Canada could organize a study modelled on pilot studies conducted under the auspices of the Dutch foundation OAPEN - Open Access Publishing in European Networks<sup>4</sup> - in the Netherlands (OAPEN-NL), the United Kingdom (OAPEN-UK) and Switzerland (OAPEN-CH) (Collins et Milloy, 2016; Ferwerda et al., 2013, 2018b). The aim of these studies on HSS books is to compare the results in Europe and they are therefore fairly standardized. They analyze:

- Author and publisher perceptions of open access;
- The cost of producing books;
- The effect of open access on sales and consultations by comparing open-access books with non-open-access book control groups;
- The impact of open access on the academic environment.

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<sup>1</sup> « Over the past 18 months, UKRI has engaged with publishers, learned societies, researchers, academic library services and other interested stakeholders to inform policy development on OA monographs, book chapters and edited collections. UKRI's proposed policy position draws on this engagement, recognising the distinct space the academic monograph occupies as a way of communicating long-form research » (UK Research and Innovation, 2020, paragr. 91). For an overview of the entire process, see <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/open-research/open-access-policies-review/>, consulted on January 16, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> On Creative Commons licenses, see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=fr>, consulted on January 16, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-announces-new-open-access-policy/>, consulted on January 16, 2022

<sup>4</sup> The foundation is committed to open access to scholarly literature, which is defined as peer-reviewed books. Among other things, OAPEN operates the OAPEN Library and the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB), which is modelled on the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

The study would provide insight into the situation of Canadian scholarly books, whether or not available in open access. It would analyze, over several years:

- Sales in units per title and figures;
- Broken down by:
  - Geography (domestic, international),
  - Buyer (different types of libraries, individuals);
  - Distribution channel (academic, commercial, direct sales),
  - Format;
- Download, consultation and borrowing statistics, also according to their origin (geographic in particular);
- The discipline and language of the works;
- The year of publication of the titles to evaluate the long-tail effect;
- Bibliometric data and alternative impact metrics (altmetrics and others).

We are convinced that many publishers would be willing to participate in such a study.

Some have stated that they already document the behaviour and costs of open access books they publish. Concerning the other actors who would take part in the study (e.g. authors, users, libraries), their commitment to participate in an OAPEN-type pilot project creates fertile ground for the adoption of new paradigms.

With better knowledge of the conditions and effects of open access, Canada can proceed, or wait, to apply a policy already adopted by other governments, such as those in Switzerland and France.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the OAPEN-CH study was the basis for the Swiss National Science Foundation's *Regulations on the funding of Open Access publications*, implemented in 2017<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> France, for example, has decided to "Make it compulsory to publish articles and books resulting from publicly-funded research in open access". This is the first measure in the National Plan for Open Science unveiled by the French government in July 2018 (Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation, 2018, p. 5).

<sup>2</sup> The regulation came into force on October 1, 2018, <http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/Reglement-ueber-OA-Publikationsfoerderung-E.pdf>, consulted on June 13, 2018.

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