Recognize, Promote, Reinforce.

Recommendations from the Symposium québécois des revues savantes
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TO CITE THIS PUBLICATION
Observations and Recommendations

Several of the current issues in the scholarly publishing ecosystem are linked to research evaluation practices and the way professors are promoted, as well as to the lack of recognition and understanding of the role that journals play in the research cycle.

4 core recommendations are outlined:

1. For granting agencies:
   Maintain the funding level of support programs for journals by correcting for inflation and by extending their eligibility period to five years.

2. For universities:
   Implement teaching relief for journal editors across the board.

3. For journals:
   Create a horizontal, collaborative common structure of Québec scholarly journals that reflects their diversity.

4. For libraries and digital infrastructures:
   Provide coherent expertise to editorial teams notably on technical and legal issues.

Scholarly Journals, Essential to Research and Society

→ At the heart of the research cycle, scholarly journals ensure that new scientific knowledge is received and acted upon by different spheres of society.

→ Without Québec and Canadian journals, the ability to publish research about Québec and Canada would be severely compromised.

→ Rapidly evolving digital technologies force journals to constantly update their discoverability strategies.

→ Diamond open access, free for both authors and readers, is the path advocated for by independent journals to build a fair scholarly publishing ecosystem.

Quebec scholarly journals in numbers:

160 scholarly journals in Québec (800 in Canada)
50% publish exclusively in French
85% in the humanities and social sciences
75% of article views originate outside Canada*
2 out of 3 are disseminated in open access
< 5% owned by a for-profit company

*Number of journals disseminated on the erudit.org platform

Overview

Whether it is the Anglicization of scholarly communication, new standards around digital dissemination or funding, independent scholarly journals are currently facing several difficult challenges.
Due to the continuous evolution of digital technologies since their advent around thirty years ago and interactions between the internationalization of research and public policy, Québec-based scholarly journals operate in an environment undergoing profound changes. Today, this situation is characterized by the promotion of open access and the growing Anglicization of scholarly communication.

This document begins with an overview of the state of scholarly publishing in Québec, before presenting the recommendations developed during the Symposium québécois des revues savantes.
1 Context and Issues

Beyond certifying and safekeeping the scientific value of published articles, scholarly journals are at the heart of knowledge dissemination. They play a threefold role: they extend the reach of the published articles, generate new research questions and allow society to engage with new knowledge. Québec-based scholarly journals play a vital role in our ability to meet the major challenges of our time.

1.1 Highlights

The province of Québec has around 160 active scholarly journals, of which the vast majority (around 85%) cover the humanities, the social sciences, the arts and literature, while around 15% dedicate themselves to health and nature sciences. Around half of these journals publish exclusively in French, around ten publish exclusively in English, and the others are bilingual and plurilingual.

Approximately two thirds of Québec scholarly journals are in immediate open access, meaning that their content is available without cost. Among these, close to 30% are indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals, the reference database of open-access periodicals worldwide. This proportion is constantly growing.

Québec-based scholarly journals distinguish themselves by the central role they play in the dissemination of research on Québec and Canada, which are represented as objects of study two to three times more frequently than in journals based outside the country. Access to new knowledge about Québec and Canada would be severely compromised without these journals. They highlight the high quality of the research being conducted here and the contributions made by Québec’s academic community to advancing knowledge, while offering rigorous perspectives and analyses that support informed decision-making.

Scholarly journals are jewels in Québec’s scientific heritage!


1.2 Evolution of the Environment

Driven by two sources of major change, the emergence of digital technologies and the open access movement, the environment in which scholarly journals operate has undergone deep transformations in the last thirty years.

Digital Technologies

The current changes in scholarly publishing have their roots in the advent of the Internet and its rapid spread to many spheres of activity during the 1990s. The Internet’s unprecedented structure, based on hypertext links connecting documents in a criss-crossing pattern, had the potential to revolutionize publishing in general and scholarly publishing in particular. The Web, on top of making documents available in quasi-unlimited quantities, considerably increased the capacity for scholarly dissemination while allowing journals to reduce their costs, notably in printing expenses. Several public initiatives around digital publishing and dissemination emerged at that time, notably the very first version of Érudit in Québec, but also SciELO in Brazil, and Cairn and OpenEdition in France. In parallel, the creation of tools to manage open source code manuscripts, like Open Journal Systems, launched in 2002 by the Public Knowledge Project, reduced the workload for editorial teams while increasing the reach of published articles.

Uploading raw text to a web page is not enough to generate real reach for articles disseminated on the Internet: to have them display correctly, as well as to ensure that they appear in search engine results, their content and associated metadata must be processed in a specific way, supported by digital publishing chains. Moreover, the use of unique and permanent identifiers, used to identify not only journals (by ISSN) and articles (by Digital Object Identifier, DOI), but also other entities like affiliation institutions and authors, contributes to creating ties between publications and makes it easier to find things in the digital landscape. In this context, discoverability strategies are now a core element of scholarly dissemination.

Discoverability of Scholarly Journals

Discoverability is defined as “the potential for online content to be easily discovered in cyberspace by web users, notably by those that are not specifically looking for this particular content.” For scholarly journals, discoverability is driven primarily by the production of exhaustive and accurate metadata, but also by their indexation into generalist search engines (Google, Bing) or into specialized tools like Worldcat or Scopus.

Large Commercial Publishers: An Oligopoly

The international scholarly publishing landscape is dominated by an oligopoly made up of a few large commercial publishers: Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis. As research across the world is supported for the most part by public funds, the commercial practices of these multinationals have attracted a lot of criticism. They impose publishing or subscription fees that go well beyond the real costs of production and dissemination, and have profit margins that generally exceed 30%. In 2023, Elsevier’s revenue was over 15 billion Canadian dollars. These practices create substantial pressure on research budgets and jeopardize access to knowledge. These large commercial publishers take advantage of the unpaid work that researchers do when writing and reviewing the journal articles which go on to be commercialized.

Open Access

The movement for open access emerged in the early 2000s at the initiative of a group of researchers from around the world in response to the “Periodical Crisis.” This expression describes the critical situation that academic libraries found themselves in at the end of the 1990s. The subscription cost of periodicals belonging to large commercial publishers had increased to such an extent that they drained the acquisition budgets of libraries, leading them to forego these subscriptions, or even stop the purchase of monographs, thereby compromising access to scholarly publications for some academic communities. It is in this climate that the Budapest Open Access Initiative was formulated, a foundational declaration of what would become the open access movement. Its signees aimed to dissociate dissemination from commercialization when it came to knowledge sharing.


However, the major for-profit publishers rapidly adopted modified forms of open access to extract profits, notably through hybrid journals. Since open access leads to the abolition of barriers to reading, namely subscription fees, these publishers developed practices based on publishing fees, generally called article processing charges or APCs, which authors have to pay in exchange for the free dissemination of their articles. These publishing fees do not reflect the true cost of processing articles, but rather, they are established based on the reputation and size of the publishers, as well as market dynamics. Indeed, a commercial publishing oligopoly means that most scholarly articles are published by a very small number of businesses, creating a power dynamic which lets them impose increases to publishing fees that are disconnected from the actual costs. As they are taken from research grants or academic library budgets, APCs represent a misappropriation of public funds toward the bottom line of large commercial publishers, weakening the capacity of Canadian researchers to do their work by reducing the amount of funds that go to the research itself.

Diamond open access, with no fees for either authors or readers, was developed as a response to these commercial practices. It is funded collectively by every stakeholder in the scholarly publishing ecosystem and has been embraced by a growing number of public dissemination platforms across the world, notably in Europe and in Latin America. In Canada, Québec has moved more and more in that direction.

20 years after the Budapest Initiative, open access is now an integral part of the scholarly publishing landscape in Québec and elsewhere, and a growing number of journals have implemented it, notably to conform to public policies concerning research. In Québec, these policies are established by the Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) and by the three federal granting agencies. Scholarly journals are ultimately dependent on policies that apply to research teams, which require scholarly articles resulting from subsidized projects to be disseminated in open access. The journals must also adopt an open access model to be eligible for support programs managed by the FRQ Société et culture (FQRSC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).
There are several kinds of open access publishing, of which the following four are the most popular:

**Hybrid**

The article is published in a journal that requires a subscription, and authors have the option of paying publishing fees to have their articles disseminated in open access. This model has historically been adopted by commercial publishers.

**Gold**

Access to journals is free for readers, while authors pay publishing fees.

**Diamond**

No fees for both authors and readers, as neither the journals nor the dissemination platforms charge a subscription fee. Diamond access is funded by institutional support, grants, partnerships and membership fees (to professional societies or associations).

**Green**

The article is published in an institutional or field-based repository, with no access restriction. In general, the article is published in a journal that is not in open access, but which allows its presence within such a repository.

It’s equally important to mention the emerging practice of “transformative agreements”, by which academic libraries — and more often library consortia, or even states — negotiate readership access (subscriptions) as well as publishing access (publishing fees) for researchers affiliated with their institutions for the journals belonging to large commercial publishers, in exchange for one global payment. This model is rarely financially advantageous for the consortia and the libraries.

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Context and Issues
1.3 Three Major Issues

The Symposium québécois des revues savantes was organized around three axes, one for each current major issue in scholarly publishing in Québec, namely: (1) publishing in French, (2) the recognition of the role of journals in the research cycle and (3) the expertise of editorial teams.

Publication in French

As the domination of English on scientific communication is becoming more and more entrenched, we are witnessing a generalized linguistic impoverishment in the field. The capacity to publish in French is thus a major issue for scholarly journals in Québec and Canada. Discussions held during the Symposium touched on the systemic nature of the rapid decline in the number of articles published in French, which is directly linked to practices around research evaluation and academic career tracks, imposed by both universities and granting agencies. The metrics currently in use to calculate prestige, such as the Impact Factor, present a historical bias that favours English-language publications, still assigned a disproportionate value. In such a context, how do we reinforce the legitimacy of publications in French and bring them increased value?

The idea of translating Canadian scholarly publications has been around for decades, but the possibility that it could be done at scale reemerged with the rapid development of neural automatic translation. However, while automatic translation can contribute to expanding the potential readership of French-language publications, it is not a solution to the decline of the number of articles submitted and published in French in Québec scholarly journals. In fact, translation from French to English might compromise the visibility of French-language content, something that should give us pause as we consider this option.

Observations

→ Decline in the number of manuscripts submitted in French and relative rise in the number of publications in English

→ English-language publications overvalued in the evaluation of researchers

→ Difficulty in recruiting evaluators for articles written in French, particularly stark in some fields of the humanities and the social sciences

→ Desire to strengthen the role of scholarly journals in the French-speaking world
Recognizing the Role of Independent Journals

The role and reach of scholarly journals are often misunderstood, notably by their home institutions, and reduced to manuscript evaluation. In reality, journals play multiple roles, as they occupy a key position in the research life cycle. They ensure that new scientific knowledge is received and acted upon by different spheres of society, they inspire new research ideas, and they contribute to the safeguarding of knowledge.

More generally, independent journals are living spaces that energize their research communities, whether within editorial teams, among the authors being published, or through the peer reviewers that guarantee the quality of the articles selected for publication. Journal editorial teams play a key role in training young researchers by working closely with them on their manuscripts. These teams invest a lot of time in this task, which is often done unseen in the background, despite being essential to preparing the next generation of researchers.

That preparation also goes on within these editorial teams, as up-and-coming researchers contribute to manuscript processing.

How can we promote recognition and appreciation for the core role played by these journals in the production and dissemination of knowledge, its social impact, the training of young researchers and the vitality of research communities?

→ Relegation of journal management outside valued research activities
→ Lack of recognition for editorial work and its time-consuming nature
→ Uncertainty around building the next generation of journal teams
→ Progressive loss of the prestige associated with independent journals
→ Disproportionate prestige given to publishing in a journal belonging to a large commercial publisher

Observations
The Expertise of Editorial Teams

The expertise of editorial teams is especially crucial as they have been operating in a rapidly evolving environment for three decades. On top of their field-specific expertise, those who manage scholarly publications have to acquire several skill sets, from budget and operations management to publishing practices, manuscript processing, and dissemination and indexing standards. These skill sets, acquired over years, need to be constantly updated, which requires not only effort, but also time, a very rare resource in today’s academia.

In a context of rapid transformations to publishing methods and open access policies, how can we support these journals in maintaining and expanding their expertise, as well as passing it on?

A lot of time needed to learn best practices in digital publishing and to update that knowledge

Inequality in access to support services provided by libraries

Difficulty in maintaining expertise because of team turnover

Desire to implement diversity, equity and inclusion principles within journals, notably around the use of Native languages

Gap between the expectations established in programs by the granting agencies and the lack of training offered to editorial teams
The Symposium québécois des revues savantes led to the formulation of recommendations designed to strengthen independent scholarly journals in this context of major changes to their operating environment. This section presents some of the proposals put forward during this event, preceded by a discussion of the influence of current research evaluation practices on scholarly publication.
2.1 Research Evaluation: A Systemic Issue

Research evaluation is a process that aims to establish the relevance and the impact of activities being conducted by researchers, their teams and academic institutions. Quantitative research evaluation methods remain currently in use, despite their substantial limits. Indeed, these indicators rarely do correctly track complex concepts like impact or relevance, if only because those concepts lack clear definitions. Are we considering impacts within research communities, or the impact of an article on public policy or society at large? Moreover, the time necessary to observe the real impact of an article could very well exceed the typical length of an evaluation cycle.

The Impact Factor in particular is front and centre in current evaluation practices, despite the fact that it was not created to evaluate the scientific merit of research articles, but rather to help librarians to select which documentary resources to acquire. However, numerous researchers will consider that publishing in a journal with a high Impact Factor is better for their academic career, even though the negative effects of the excessive importance given to this metric are many and well documented. It shows a positive bias toward disciplines like the natural sciences and medicine, to the detriment of the humanities, social sciences, arts and literature.

The use of the Impact Factor for research evaluation purposes reinforces the hegemony of English in scholarly communications and reduces the presence of other languages and other sociocultural anchorings, which contributes to the decline in bibliodiversity in scholarly publishing.

The way researchers are evaluated and professors are promoted is the core systemic issue relating to the question of the recognition of Québec-based scholarly journals. A transformation of current practices is one of the key tasks that need to be undertaken to maintain the vitality of Québec and Canada’s academic ecosystem. Notably, it requires recognizing the diversity of activities, practices and communication methods that maximize the quality and impacts of research. To that end, a qualitative form of evaluation should be promoted, with quantitative metrics being limited to a support role. Researchers should not only be evaluated on their publications, but we should also consider editorial, supervision, teaching and public outreach activities, among others. Moreover, they should not have to play all these roles, as specializing in one or two should be considered acceptable.

The notion of research quality also implies that it is accessible and useful for society as a whole, and it is therefore important to highlight the value of publications in languages other than English as well as the importance of open access.

A Few Possibilities

1. A review of evaluation practices for researchers and research to prioritize qualitative evaluation practices and to give greater value to editorial activities and communications methods beyond scholarly articles.
2. Give due value to communications in languages other than English, and to those aimed at a wider nonacademic readership or audience.
3. Take inspiration from the principles established in CoARA and DORA, and implement them.
2.2 Recommendations for the Key Stakeholders in Scholarly Publishing

The recommendations in this section reflect proposals made at the Symposium québécois des revues savantes by members of the editorial teams present.

Public Institutions and Granting Agencies: Orient Policy

Granting agencies provide financial support to journals through two grant programs designed to help periodicals covering the humanities, the social sciences, the arts and literature: Aide aux revues savantes (CRSH) and Soutien aux revues scientifiques (FRQSC). As these agencies have policies which favour open access, their support has a prescriptive effect on journal practices, as journals need to conform to open access criteria to be eligible for these programs and to allow researchers to receive grants for publishing in their issues.

Main Recommendation

Maintain the funding level of support programs for journals by correcting for inflation and by extending their eligibility period to five years.

Secondary Recommendations:

1. Adapt evaluation practices of the research done in the humanities and the social sciences as well as of French-language publications to their own realities, to the benefit of knowledge and society.

2. Promote diamond open access when evaluating scientific policies.

3. Support the implementation of policy changes, in particular by supporting the training of editorial teams.

4. Provide compensation to students for their contribution to journal operations.
Universities and Scientific institutions: Strengthen Institutional Support

The vast majority of Québec scholarly journals operate independently from commercial publishers, being rooted in research circles and managed by professors. Through their departments or faculties, academic institutions offer a wide range of support to the journals affiliated with them, in the form of rebates, material resources, administrative staff hours and visibility in their official communications.

Main Recommendation
Implement teaching relief for journal editors across the board.

Secondary Recommendations:

1. Systematize the support provided by universities to their journals through cooperative efforts between libraries and research offices.
2. Credit student internships within journals.
3. Include peer review when evaluating research activities done by professors.
4. Increase the visibility of journals and articles within their own institutions, notably in institutional communications.
5. Impose a ratio of French-language articles in humanities and social sciences course outlines.
Journals: Organize into Communities

While they share a number of challenges and could certainly share as many solutions, Québec scholarly journals are atomized and their teams rarely interact with each other.

Main Recommendation
Create a horizontal, collaborative common structure of Québec scholarly journals that reflects their diversity.

Secondary Recommendations:

1. Develop tools to promote Québec scholarly journals and the research results they publish.
2. Produce and disseminate outreach tools (video capsules, social media publications, etc.) notably about open access.
3. Publicize existing training resources, notably those offered by libraries and digital dissemination platforms.
4. Contribute to getting the journals heard when it comes to their needs.
5. Create conditions for the sharing of best practices among scholarly journals.
6. Organize an annual event for scholarly journals.
Libraries and Digital Platforms: Enhance and Standardize Services

In this era of digital publishing and dissemination, the operations of Québec scholarly journals benefit from two sources of support and expertise. On one hand, you have platforms such as Érudit, whose support mostly applies to the journals disseminated by its infrastructure. On the other, some academic libraries have librarians who specialize in scholarly publishing and provide valuable support to editorial teams, but this is highly variable from institution to institution.

Main Recommendation
Provide coherent expertise to editorial teams, notably on technical and legal issues.

Secondary Recommendations:

1. Provide usage data, notably statistics on article views.
2. Make teams aware of the issues and best practices surrounding discoverability (documentation, training).
3. Design and offer training courses for journal management and leadership activities, given the rapid turnover of teams.
4. Organize the pooling of certain services (graphic design, communications, proofreading).
5. Support access to editorial management tools and their use (notably Open Journal Systems).
**Organization of the Symposium québécois des revues savantes**

The Symposium québécois des revues savantes, organized by Acfas and Érudit on November 20, 2023, in Montreal, brought together more than forty journal editors to freely discuss the issues that impact their editorial practices and their operations in general. A number of librarians specializing in scholarly publishing also took part in these exchanges, as they represent the privileged point of contact between the journals and their home institutions, providing support and advice. The day ended with a plenary session, aimed at sharing the main points coming out of the workshops for each of the three areas discussed. The event managed to bring together several stakeholders from the scientific publishing ecosystem in Québec, highlighting once again the importance of communication and consultation in ensuring the vitality of the field.

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- Jean-Sébastien Fallu – Drogues, santé et société
- Kristine Plouffe-Malette – Revue québécoise de droit international
- Léon Robichaud – Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française
- Denise Tousignant – Le naturaliste canadien

**THE WORKSHOP HOSTS**
- Samuel Dinel – Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations
- Marc-André Éthier – Revue des sciences de l’éducation
- Maude Laplante-Dubé – Bibliothécaire à l’Université Laval
- Pierre Lasou – Bibliothécaire à l’Université Laval
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- Acfas
- Érudit Consortium
- Fonds de recherche du Québec

All the participants!

**World Café**

The Symposium was organized as a series of workshops based on the World Café principles. World Café is a method designed to facilitate a constructive dialogue and a sharing of ideas and knowledge, by recreating a café atmosphere where participants can discuss in small groups. At regular intervals, participants change tables, while the person who hosts the discussion remains at their table to give a summary of the previous conversation to the new group. This process allows ongoing conversations to be enriched by the previous conversations in which the participants took part. At the end of the event, the main ideas are summarized during a general session where the proposals are put forward for discussion.
Appendix 2  List of the 44 Journals Represented at the Symposium

Animation, territoires et pratiques socioculturelles
Apprendre et enseigner aujourd'hui
Bulletin d'histoire politique
Cahiers de recherche sociologique
Cahiers Société
Captures
Circuit, musiques contemporaines
Communitas
Cygne noir
Documentation et bibliothèques
Drogues, santé et société
Enfances, Familles, Générations
Ethnologies
Études Inuit Studies
Frontières
Humain et Organisation
The International Journal of Whole Person Care Intervention
Le Naturaliste canadien
Les Cahiers de la Société québécoise de recherche en musique (SQRM)
Lex Electronica
McGill Law Journal / Revue de droit de McGill
Mesure et évaluation en éducation
Meta. Journal des traducteurs
Multimodalité (s). Revue de recherches en littératie médiatique multimodale
Nouvelles pratiques sociales
Partnership – Revue canadienne de la pratique et de la recherche en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l’information
Politique et Sociétés
Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations
Revue d’arbitrage et de médiation
Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française
Revue de l’Association québécoise des enseignants de français langue seconde (AQEFLS)
Revue des sciences de l’éducation
Revue internationale Animation, territoires et pratiques socioculturelles
Revue internationale des technologies en pédagogie universitaire
Revue québécoise de droit international
Revue de droit de l’Université de Sherbrooke
Revue québécoise de psychologie
Science of Nursing and Health Practices / Science infirmière et pratiques en santé
Sens public
Sociologie et Sociétés
Surfaces
Télescope / Management international
TTR – Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction
Vertigo
Appendix 3  A Few Pictures from the Event

Photos: All rights reserved © Denise Barria
Long live scholarly journals!