Mobilizing Knowledge in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Exploring Competing Articulations of Openness in Policy and Practice

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Abstract: Knowledge mobilization (KMb) is a policy discourse and framework used by major Canadian research funding bodies to promote and monitor the efficiency of knowledge transfer between the university and society. Since 2009, most humanities and social science (HSS) researchers applying for federal funding must complete a KMb module that describes their intended non-academic collaborators and audiences, planned outreach activities, and metrics to gauge their success. The ideals of public engagement set out in KMb policy are worthy ones for scholars to strive towards. The framework can also provide legitimation for a diverse range of research practices, relationships, and outputs. Applicants must think about sharing their work throughout the research process rather than simply at its end. This introduces a more expansive understanding of the relations of knowledge producers and their publics than is found in Canadian open access policies and mandates. Many practices commonly understood as open research, such as data sharing, diamond open access publishing, or sharing via blogs or podcasts, would be considered knowledge mobilization activities, as would practices of community-engaged research or knowledge co-production. KMb policy thus governs much of the making public of humanities research in Canada; however, it embodies conflicting ideas about the value of shared knowledge. Its emphasis on knowledge as transferable imposes temporal, material, and cognitive restrictions on scholarship. Critics of KMb dismiss it as performative and a tool of institutional governance or argue that it quantifies research as a return on investment. The critiques and possibilities of knowledge mobilization policy offer insight into wider contemporary struggles over the meaning of openness for HSS research. This article explores its impact on Canadian HSS scholars in relation to critical debates about changing relations of knowledge, labor, and value in humanities scholarship.

Keywords: scholarly communication, open research

Introduction

For publicly funded universities, the expression of their public value is a question of survival. State funding bodies address a national public whose expectations for academic research are framed in terms of improvement in their lives, whether through technological, scientific, or social innovation. In policy terms this value is located in the movement of knowledge between the university and the communities, industries, policymakers, and partners that will make such improvement possible. The concept of openness plays an important role in this value proposition, as it has long been used in reference to the public character of academic research. Over the past 35 years, openness in the academy has become particularly associated with open access discourses and policies. In Canada, humanities and social science (HSS) researchers are expected to comply with open access mandates and are also asked to produce knowledge mobilization (KMb) plans and reports as a part of the funding cycle. These requirements are part of a policy framework that aims to monitor how researchers are engaging with their intended audiences. KMb policy texts and requirements do not explicitly address the concept of openness but support a wide range of communicative and collaborative practices beyond those commonly understood as open access. The case of Canadian KMb policy offers insights into the tensions between openness as policy and as practice. This article explores these tensions and their impact on the work of Canadian HSS researchers.

Mobilizing Knowledge

State funding agencies have developed frameworks to understand and monitor the efficiency of processes that connect knowledge production and use. These frameworks usually rely on a tripartite frame that comprises "the creation of research/evidence/knowledge, the processes through which that knowledge is distributed or made available, and the uses made of it, with varying degrees of feedback and interaction among these elements to recognize that the process does not just flow in one direction" (Levin 2008, 7). In Canada, knowledge mobilization is the policy framework that monitors how research is produced with and communicated to publics within and outside the academy. All three national funding agencies develop their own KMb programs and guidelines. These are the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). SSHRC systematized its KMb requirements in 2010 with the launch of its latest funding portfolio. This clustered funding opportunities under the auspices of "Insight (research grants), Connection (conference, events, journals, and

other outreach activities), and Talent (graduate and post-doctoral awards)" (Milligan 2024, 79). SSHRC defines knowledge mobilization as:

> The reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia—in such a way that may benefit users and create positive impacts within Canada and/or internationally, and, ultimately, has the potential to enhance the profile, reach and impact of social sciences and humanities research. Knowledge mobilization initiatives must address at least one of the following, as appropriate, depending on research area and project objectives, context, and target audience:
>
> - Within academia: informs, advances and/or improves research agendas, theory, and/or methods.
> - Beyond academia: informs public debate, policies and/or practice; enhances/improves services; and/or informs the decisions and/or processes of people in business, government, the media, practitioner communities and civil society. (SSHRC, n.d.-b)

Knowledge mobilization is one of many conceptual models to emerge during the past few decades aiming to ensure the societal impact of academic research. Other "knowledge-for-action" models include knowledge utilization, diffusion, implementation, transfer, and translation, all of which represent ideas about the movement of knowledge, including about what moves (e.g., research findings, policy priorities, innovation), how it moves, its context, stakeholders, and criteria for success (Ottoson 2009). Prior to KMb, knowledge-for-action models prioritized the linear communication of research findings from theoretical to applied contexts (Gontcharov et al. 2021). The linear model was prevalent in conceptualizing communication not only between researchers and practitioners but also between researchers and wider publics. For example, traditional science communication practices assumed that researchers must fill the "deficit" in the public's knowledge, an assumption that is now in question (Simis et al. 2016; Roedema et al. 2022). Unlike linear models of communication, knowledge mobilization favors multi-way communication, aiming for a process of reflexive engagement between knowledge and society (Gontcharov et al. 2021). This approach draws from traditions of engaged scholarship and co-production that bring knowledge production practices into dialogue with the lived realities and knowledges of different communities and stakeholders (Beaulieu et al. 2018; Bandola-Gill et al. 2023). The shift towards greater reciprocity between knowledge and society comes in response to the growing complexity, unpredictability, and interconnectedness of social problems.

Knowledge mobilization requirements were made a part of SSHRC programs in 2010, and the policy language has been adopted more recently by the NSERC (2022) and CIHR (2024). All three bodies recognize that collaboration between knowledge

producers and users is essential to make research more accessible and to address social inequities. It also means that a wide variety of participants, activities, and outputs will be characterized as knowledge mobilization. SSHRC acknowledges this, stating that "knowledge mobilization is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users" (SSHRC 2023). This makes for a complex policy framework that has varying meanings and implications for different groups, such as for knowledge brokers who prioritize the translation of results for specific audiences, or for community-based researchers who prioritize the exchange of ideas (Provençal 2011, 23). As a result, KMb policy provides a rich site of inquiry for exploring the tensions between how openness is articulated in policy and in practice.

Knowledge Mobilization, Open Access, and Open HSS Research

Knowledge mobilization is not the only policy framework that governs open research in Canada. In addition to completing knowledge mobilization modules during the funding cycle, HSS researchers are expected to comply with the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications. Since 2015 this policy mandates that recipients of funding from the three federal granting agencies must make their publications freely accessible within 12 months of publication (Government of Canada 2016). In 2026, the policy will be updated to require that publications be made available immediately. The draft revised Tri-Agency policy aims to "ensure that all agency-funded, peer-reviewed research articles are immediately and freely available online to the research community, readers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, and the general public" (Government of Canada 2025). The draft policy applies only to peer-reviewed research articles. It acknowledges the value of other forms of scholarship but excludes them from its scope. Compliance with open access (OA) mandates is low in Canada, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. A 2022 study found that across disciplines only 44 percent of Canadian research published between 2015 and 2019 was available in open access (Paquet et al. 2022). In 2016, 79 percent of SSHRC-funded research papers were not available under any form of open access (Larivière and Sugimoto 2018).

The Tri-Agency policy reflects OA discourses of the past three and a half decades that have mostly prioritized free access to research that would otherwise be behind paywalls. These discourses have often motivated OA advocates to adopt technocentric approaches to making research open. For example, the Tri-Agency draft policy emphasizes that barrier-free access is necessary for knowledge reuse. When the policy was

first announced in 2015, the Canadian Minister of Science and Technology stated that "societal advancement is made possible through widespread and barrier-free access to cutting-edge research and knowledge, enabling researchers, scholars, clinicians, policy-makers, private sector and not-for-profit organisations and the public to use and build on this knowledge" (Government of Canada 2015). Barrier-free access is necessary, but the text of the draft revised policy affirms that online access is wholly sufficient to ensure public benefit, offering a technological solution to an economic problem.

Unlike the Tri-Agency policy, the KMb policy framework recognizes a diversity of communicative processes and products. The SSHRC Guidelines for Effective Knowledge Mobilization suggest open access as a strategy to increase the visibility of research results, but this is understood as only one among many possible ways of reaching potential knowledge users (SSHRC 2023). Rather than mandate what outputs to share and how, KMb modules ask scholars to define their own research activities, outputs, impacts, and metrics. When applying for funding, researchers must complete knowledge mobilization modules that specify how they will reach their knowledge users, the anticipated outcomes of their interactions, and the metrics that will determine the success of these connections. Examples of indicators provided by SSHRC (2023) include "citation indicators, the number of newsletter/blog subscribers, and the number of recommendations to policy-makers that have been adopted." In many programs grantees are also asked to complete an end-of-grant Achievement Report and to elaborate on all of the activities, collaborations, audiences, and outcomes that resulted from the project. For example, the SSHRC Insight program Achievement Report asks researchers to identify all the forms of knowledge mobilization they have engaged in. The following options are offered:

- Academic dissemination (Essentially, a one-way flow to other scholars in or near your field(s) of research)
- Knowledge transfer (Transferring knowledge to scholars in other fields of research)
- Knowledge translation (Writing or presenting research findings in more readable or useable forms; e.g., writing for a wider or more diverse public)
- Knowledge exchange (Exchanging or sharing knowledge with other disciplines or across sectors (two-way flow); e.g., workshop or conference)
- Knowledge brokering (Facilitating the flow of knowledge between others)
- Knowledge synthesis (Pulling together existing research in a useful form for other researchers or organizations)
- Co-production (Building research teams or alliances that generate new knowledge based on an ongoing exchange of knowledge)
- Networking (Organizing ongoing networks of scholars and/or other experts to mobilize knowledge) (SSHRC, n.d.-a)

Both KMb and OA policies aim to improve flows of knowledge between academia and society in order to understand and address complex social problems. In 2021, the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science made an important contribution to the policy context surrounding the societal benefit of research. The Recommendation promotes an approach to openness that emphasizes accessibility, inclusivity, and transparency. It refers not only to open access to knowledge but also to increased participation in its production, defining open science as an "inclusive construct that combines various movements and practices aiming to make multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone, to increase scientific collaborations and sharing of information for the benefits of science and society, and to open the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community" (UNESCO 2021). This document shifts the dialogue about open research beyond the question of access to center social justice. In Canada, the 2020 Roadmap for Open Science also makes inclusion a core principle (Office of the Chief Science Advisor of Canada 2020). The government's "open science lifecycle" includes community engagement and feedback at each stage: ideation, data collection and analysis, publication, and knowledge mobilization (Government of Canada 2022).

It is perhaps unfortunate that "open science" is the framing under which these ideas about knowledge, society, and the public good are being debated and developed. Not only does it replicate a normative idea about the relative value of STEM and HSS research, but it leaves Canadian HSS researchers without such a holistic framework in which to advance their own ideas about open scholarship. These researchers engage in many forms of public scholarship that would not be recognized as "open" by existing OA policies. Today, scholars collaborate with a wide range of academic and non-academic partners and disseminate their research through a growing number of channels outside of what are considered traditional publishing venues, sharing textual and multimodal outputs via social media, blogs, websites, datasets, repositories, and a variety of both scholar-led and commercial publishing platforms. In their report for OCLC titled "The Evolving Scholarly Record," Lavoie et al. (2014) note that digital communication has made the limits of the scholarly record more mutable and dynamic and that its boundaries have been expanding beyond published outcomes to include materials generated in the research and publishing process. Previously invisible aspects of academic knowledge work are now circulating more widely and within less predictable channels of public discourse. Even parts of the research process not typically considered outputs can become public, such as drafts, plans and sketches, or raw media files, eroding the boundaries between process and product. The 2024 report "The Second Digital Transformation of Scholarly Publishing: Strategic Context and Shared Infrastructure" produced by the non-profit organization Ithaka S+R finds that publication

may now include multiple elements: for example, "a publication may be understood to incorporate the article identified as the version of record, related to a preprint in a disciplinary server, and multiple datasets in various repositories, as well as code, methods, protocols, and so forth" (Bergstrom et al. 2024, 13). The report refers to this process as "atomization," a term that could easily describe a growing diversity of non-traditional practices and outputs of HSS research, many of which would not meet the criteria for open access as mandated by the Tri-Agency policy.

As HSS scholars diversify their research publics and outputs, they expand both the boundaries of their disciplines and of the scholarly record. New categories of academic labor such as the digital humanities and research-creation foster different forms of connection than are typically associated with humanities research, sometimes involving community members in collective interpretive contextualization. For example, research may be produced and shared via digital media, or through performances or installations, drawing attention to the ambiguities between research input and output. These practices are part of a rich history of scholar-led experiments within the humanities that make publication itself a subject of critical inquiry. These experiments provoke debate and self-reflection about the power relations that govern both the humanities and digital media as well as about the fixity of publication forms, concepts of authorship and intellectual property, and new models of collaboration and credit, sustainability and care. Even the scholarly book, ostensibly the traditional output for humanities scholars, can be reassembled as a processual and dynamic, iterative and collaborative project (Adema 2021).

The publishing experiments of HSS researchers have made important, if overlooked, contributions to genealogies of open access (Moore 2020). Yet they have done so without appeal to any consensus construct of openness. In the humanities, "open research" implies much more than online access. The term can refer to a wide range of practices and political engagements that often challenge norms and inequities of knowledge production and dissemination grounded in a print past. Open humanities research can include "collaboration, citizen engagement, and making humanities research data, tools, software, and materials available in more findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR) ways" (Arthur and Hearn 2021, 831). As a result, debates about open research in the humanities tend to provoke more nuanced conversations about knowledge and the public value of research than documents like the Tri-Agency policy allow.

Many researchers have long argued for the potential of OA to advance social justice and inclusion. Academic knowledge production and publishing are known to favor well-resourced institutions and researchers, predominantly those working in English. Open access policies and practices have contributed to these epistemic injustices, but they can also be used to increase the engagement with and visibility of excluded knowledges (Chan et al. 2020). For OA to serve the purpose of epistemic diversity, it

must be repoliticized. Juan Alperin summarizes this in a 2016 interview about open access and inclusion: "Something is open when it manages to be inclusive of all of the people, voices, and institutions that want to participate. Access is not only about being able to read the content but is about being able to have a voice and shape the direction of disciplines, economic models and infrastructures that support the whole enterprise of scholarship. It is about making sure we include voices from the peripheries" (Albornoz 2016).

The inclusion of different voices depends in part upon what Denisse Albornoz, Angela Okune, and Leslie Chan (2020) refer to as "situated openness." They argue that openness itself does not remedy injustice but that negotiations about the conditions of openness can lead to mechanisms that address epistemic injustice. This is at odds with the Tri-Agency policy, which posits openness as a primarily technological condition—either the final product is accessible online or it is not. This approach "relies solely on public energies to find it and translate its utility" (Bayley et al. 2021, 6). Critics of OA policy argue that this technocentric solution demonstrates a lack of imagination that has limited the political potential of open access and obscured the critical entanglements of knowledge and power that structure scholarly communication (Istratii and Porter 2018; Piron 2018; Chan et al. 2020). OA advocate Leslie Chan has argued that open access "was far too focused on the journal article as the primary research output and who has access to that output. To me, an important part of Open Access should be an exploration of alternative ways for communicating research, aside from a traditional, published journal article" (Chan 2018, 180). Critical framings of open research as situated and inclusive are paralleled by KMb literature that recognizes the importance of reciprocity and co-creation in excavating the power dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination (Grenier et al. 2021; Golhasany et al. 2025). This contextual approach to openness is relevant, for instance, to the evolving practices surrounding Indigenous data sovereignty in Canada (Konczi and Bill 2024).

A critical and expansive understanding of openness is reflected in the work of different initiatives that aim to shape more nuanced and politically engaged understandings of open access. For example, the Radical Open Access Collective is a "community of scholar-led, not-for-profit presses, journals and other open access projects" that promotes "a progressive vision for open publishing in the humanities and social sciences" (Radical Open Access Collective, n.d.). The philosophy page of their website argues for the potential of scholar-led OA as a radical challenge to free market capitalism. This involves imagining openness as a heterogeneous concept that is not defined by a rigid set of practices. Rather than defining OA in concrete terms of how it will work and its place within existing circuits of exchange, the collective attempts to realign publishing with the diversity of values and practices of different research communities. Access is not framed as an egalitarian goal but as a way of articulating changing sets of

practices that are non-profit, collaborative, and experimental. The term "radical" is used to articulate diverse forms of scholarship without assuming a uniform understanding of knowledge, authorship, openness, or access.

The North American research network Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) promotes "open social scholarship," which they describe as "academic practice that enables the creation, sharing, and engagement of open research by specialists and non-specialists in accessible and significant ways" (Implementing New Knowledge Environments, n.d.). A founding premise is that access isn't enough; "research must also be presented in formats and in contexts that encourage public interaction and participation in a multitude of ways" (Powell et al. 2017, 3). This kind of "versioning," facilitated by digital technology, is understood as vital to community participation both in the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Arbuckle 2019). The workflow of digital projects, for example, is often granular, offering new points of participation for students, researchers, and the public. Thus, the INKE network proposes an understanding of openness that prioritizes these social dimensions rather than the simple fact of access.

The initiatives described above illustrate some of the ways that HSS researchers are reflecting on the meaning of open research. Their ideas about openness are entwined with practices of producing knowledge, not just the outputs. Many HSS researchers embrace openness as inclusive of both diverse forms of communication and also of knowledges, knowledge makers, and users. KMb provides a framework to potentially legitimize this diversity. Some of these open HSS research practices could be described as "critical knowledge mobilization," defined as "contextual and reflexive engagement in the production and sharing of knowledge that challenges the conceptual separation of science, technology, and society, and creates space for an open and inclusive research infrastructure where stakeholders can be both knowledge creators and contributors" (Grenier et al. 2021, 348). Critical discourses of open access and knowledge mobilization offer important context for articulations of open HSS research, even if the Canadian OA and KMb policy frameworks may not provide adequate support for increased public engagement. There remain significant barriers to engaging in knowledge mobilization for instance, particularly in relation to academic labor processes.

Knowledge Mobilization and Academic Labor

The relationship between openness and impact is complex and defies simple formulas. These two concepts arose in parallel, and their different goals and processes must be drawn together intentionally (Bayley et al. 2021). In the case of SSHRC KMb policy, this process is still unfolding, revealing conflicts between the open research practices of HSS researchers and the assessment practices that structure academic labor. An

important example is the status of non-traditional HSS research outputs that result from diverse knowledge mobilization activities. Even when HSS researchers secure funding for KMb, these activities are not always officially acknowledged by their departments or institutions. An analysis of a 2018 dataset of research, promotion, and tenure (RPT) documents across academic units in the United States and Canada shows that although RPT processes acknowledge a growing diversity of outputs beyond familiar textual forms, their value is not always consistent across institutions and units, or equivalent to traditional outputs (Alperin et al. 2022). Alperin et al. found that there remain institutional tensions between demands for public accountability and "the focus on 'high prestige' or 'high impact' publications by RPT committees" (Alperin et al. 2019, 2).

RPT processes play a role as arbiters of productivity and quality, often with unintended effects. Niles et al. (2020) surveyed researchers from 50 randomly selected universities in the United States and Canada about the relationship between the RPT process and their publishing decisions. They found an interesting disconnect between "an individual's values and the perceptions of others' values, including those doing evaluations in RPT committee" (Niles et al. 2020, 10). Individuals seemed to be motivated primarily by readership and peer exposure and perceived their peers to be "more driven by journal prestige, journal metrics (i.e., JIF and journal citations), and money (i.e., merit pay) than they are" (9). They conclude that "non-tenured faculty may be driven by traditional scholarly incentives, which they believe to be valued in the RPT process, leading to behavioral patterns that are inconsistent with their expressed drivers of publication decisions" (10). A 2022 white paper of the Humane Metrics in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HuMetricsHSS) Initiative presented findings from interviews with HSS scholars across the Big Ten Academic Alliance of US universities that echo these results. The white paper argues that values-based forms of evaluation are required that align institutional mission-based values with scholarly practices (HuMetricsHSS 2022). This values gap is also reflected in a survey of early-career academics in Canada. Acker and Webber (2017) note the unique labor conditions in Canadian universities, in which faculty are often represented by academic unions, work mostly in public institutions, and have high rates of tenure success. Though Canadian universities lack the centralized research assessment frameworks seen in other nations, academics are subject to other intensive forms of evaluation including RPT processes. Acker and Webber found that early-career academics engaged in strategizing, game-playing, and deferring gratification in order to navigate the demands of their pre-tenure careers. These pressures are amplified for pre-tenure faculty and racialized faculty (Acker and Webber 2017; Ramos and Wijesingha 2017).

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) aims to reform RPT processes at an institutional and policy level. Reform "might lead to a reduction of the reliance on publication prestige or easily manipulated citation metrics, a

restructuring of the peer review system, and even to an improvement in the quality, affordability, and flexibility of format in publishing venues" (Schimanski and Alperin 2018, 3). As of this writing, 26,124 individuals and organizations from 166 countries have signed the declaration. Sixty-seven of the institutional signatories are Canadian, including the major national research funding agencies (Declaration on Research Assessment, n.d.). A 2019 joint statement by these agencies states that:

> Research results and outcomes are multifaceted, can reflect multiple types of knowledge and ways of knowing and must be assessed on their own merit. High-quality research outcomes are achieved in many ways, including but not limited to: publishing research articles; reporting new knowledge (such as presenting at conferences and other venues); developing new technologies, producing software and intellectual property; sharing data; contributing to policy decisions; producing highly trained personnel and working in partnership with various sectors of society. Increasingly, funding agencies, research institutions, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, citizens and patients, and researchers themselves, agree on the importance of including a broader set of research outcomes and adopting assessment processes that recognize their value. (CIHR 2019)

In this statement "funding agencies, research institutions, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, citizens and patients, and researchers" are all grouped together as being in alignment, glossing over more contentious terms of this articulation. Despite a reference to multiple types of knowledge and multifaceted research outcomes, those listed have readily recognizable social or economic impact. This is not surprising, because as a public statement this text is addressed to all Canadians and seeks to frame their interests as a public in academic research. From a state funding perspective, there is a threshold of knowledge transferability required to meet these interests.

SSHRC cites its promotion of knowledge mobilization activities as an early example of its alignment with the DORA principles (SSHRC 2025a). Its KMb framework recognizes a wide array of processes and products that are eligible for funding. However, examples provided by SSHRC appear to favor dissemination activities, including "books, refereed journal articles, data sharing through online repositories, social media, dance, performances, oral histories, websites, films, plays, videos, exhibits, festivals, funding mechanisms, media coverage, op-eds, public service announcements, pamphlets, policy papers, reports, knowledge syntheses and workshops, or conferences and other events" (SSHRC 2023). In part this preference may reflect the difficulties of assessing KMb activities. Ben Levin, in a 2008 report on KMb for the Canadian Council on Learning and SSHRC, identified challenges with the tripartite model of knowledge creation, sharing, and use. One major problem is "how to deal with all the

complexities—of participants, timelines, processes, feedback systems and exogenous influences—that are recognised to be important" in knowledge mobilization (Levin 2008, 13).

Due to the complexities of knowledge mobilization activities, there is a need for capacity development for knowledge mobilization (Golhasany and Harvey 2023). Even the agencies responsible may struggle to evaluate their KMb frameworks with little empirical evidence to improve them (Powell et al. 2017). For funding applicants, KMb requirements can be confusing and conceptually challenging. Qualitative studies of researchers' perspectives and experiences with knowledge mobilization requirements reflect a lack of support needed to navigate these complexities (Provençal 2011; Barreno et al. 2013; Cooper et al. 2018; Fischman et al. 2018; Cain et al. 2019). Connecting meaningfully with non-academic partners can require unique skills that are not necessarily developed within an academic setting. Engagement with stakeholders and collaborators can require a multifaceted commitment over time that may conflict with an institutional focus on temporally specific projects and outcomes. Scholars report not investing adequate time in these connections, given the pressures to produce high-quality academic publications (MacKenzie et al. 2015). One result is that knowledge mobilization activities can become performative as researchers adopt the language necessary for success. Highlighting this, Cain et al. found that "Canadian academics perceive knowledge mobilization to be largely a tool of institutional governance for demonstrating organizational accountability" (2019, 41).

The requirements of the SSHRC KMb framework impose contradictory temporal framings for HSS research, each of which implies different understandings of open research and its value. On the one hand, the definition of knowledge mobilization emphasizes the reciprocal nature of knowledge production in collaboration with communities and knowledge users. Yet the policy also promotes the informational capacity of knowledge, its ability to flow across sectors and contexts. These different rhythms of knowledge mobilization reflect competing articulations of openness. Not surprisingly, time pressures are a frequently cited barrier to KMb. Daniel Coleman and Smaro Kamboureli argue that time is an essential infrastructure for scholarship: "Most humanities scholars depend on time more than any other resource to carry out their research, not to mention that there is a direct correlation between time and the quality or significance of knowledge produced" (2012, 266). Time pressures are relevant to the growing critiques of quantitative assessments of research impact in the humanities. The Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences released a 2017 report titled *Approaches to Assessing Impacts in the Humanities and Social Sciences* that emphasizes the temporal issue at the heart of this debate (Severinson 2017). The report argues that many research "impacts" may be collective and long-term and not associated with a single research product. For this reason, it makes the case for a combined quantitative and qualitative

approach to assessment. Qualitative approaches such as case studies, testimonials, and peer reviews offer more nuanced understandings of outcomes but also entail their own problems of subjectivity, transparency, and large-scale comparison (Severinson 2017). Or, as Eileen A. Joy describes this problem, "How do you measure the value of work in the Humanities and Social Sciences that often has small, highly specialized audiences but whose influence grows slowly over long stretches of time? You can't measure the impact of work whose influence ignites in the future" (Joy 2018, 30).

In addition to the barriers discussed above, Canadian humanities and social science researchers also report anxieties about translating complex research for a wide public and possible decontextualization or misquotation (Vasseur and Baker 2020). Such fears about sharing knowledge may have the unintended effect of undermining public support for research and institutions. In response, programs such as the SSHRC Storytellers Challenge or the Public Scholar programs now in place at many Canadian universities offer to prepare scholars to develop relatable research stories for non-academic publics (SSHRC 2025b). This is still not without its dangers, both for possible public backlash in a media environment permeated by disinformation and for the personal safety of scholars. In today's media landscape, public engagement, whether through formal or informal communication, can make scholars vulnerable, particularly those who are already marginalized on the basis of class, race, or gender (McMillan Cottom 2015; Morrison 2018). Sharing research in public channels can result in online harassment or doxxing, phenomena that are only recently beginning to be acknowledged at an institutional level in Canada (Ketchum 2023).

Knowledge Mobilization Policy and Competing Concepts of Openness

The SSHRC knowledge mobilization policy framework offers both opportunities and challenges for HSS researchers who engage in open scholarship, producing tensions between openness in policy and in practice. The framework is intended to encourage and engender new connections between knowledge and society, and the way that these connections are imagined and valued are central to competing concepts of openness. Connectivity has been important in articulating the changing role of the university as one of many interrelated sites of knowledge creation. Gerard Delanty (2001) argues that the significance of the university today is as a site of interconnectivity and knowledge communication as well as knowledge production. The diversification of connections is central to the university's role in public discourse—this involves increased communication and collaboration between academic disciplines, with non-academic communities, and with both state and non-state actors (Delanty 2001). As the university diversifies

its connections, it also standardizes its connective processes to measure the success of these ventures.

KMb policy reflects an interest in monitoring the public value of new forms of connectivity. New kinds of para-academic entities have played a role as mediators to ensure that these connections are fluid and productive. One example is Research Impact Canada (RIC), a network founded in 2006 by York University and the University of Victoria that helps "build institutional capacity to turn knowledge into action" through a "focus on sharing best practices, co-developing resources, and delivering training in knowledge mobilization" (Research Impact Canada, n.d.). This organization aims to upend previous practices of technology transfer: instead of patenting and licensing after a discovery or innovation, "knowledge mobilization would bring the industry partner in at the front end to consider their needs and engage industry throughout the process. Same with policy innovation with government partners, same with innovation in social services with community partners" (Phipps, n.d.). Meanwhile, Mitacs, a non-profit organization founded in 1999, has described itself as "the key link between private sector and post-secondary institutions, driving collaborations at home and abroad to develop projects which solve organizational challenges, and develop the nation's innovation capacity" (Mitacs 2023).

Knowledge mobilization has become a common-sense framework for conceptualizing new kinds of relations between the university, its partners, and its publics. The KMb policy framework recognizes a wide array of activities and relationships, but it also requires their expression in units—of attention, of adoption, of citation. This facilitates a specific model of the university as connector in which research is valorized as a return on public investment (Coleman and Kamboureli 2012). When policymakers emphasize the value of transferable knowledge, they impose temporal, material, and cognitive restrictions on scholarship, especially given the demands to quantify its transfer. For example, SSHRC end-of-grant reporting requirements such as the checkboxes in the Insight program Achievement Report impose a reductive accounting of KMb activities, with limited space for additional reflection. This reduction lessens the administrative burden on all parties but effects an impoverished representation of knowledge, converting it "from a social relationship into a deliverable; from a means into an end in itself" (Luka et al. 2015, 191). Many organizations resort to such simplified KMb metrics because conducting formal in-depth evaluations of knowledge mobilization activities is too challenging a process (Powell et al. 2017). As a result, complex, evolving, and contingent relations are translated into standardized and quantifiable units, such as binary responses to checkboxes. This can result in "perverse actions such as counting people in a room, or the number of hits on a product webpage, rather than real social impact (on perhaps a small but relevant audience)" (Grenier et al. 2021, 349). Universities are awash in such metrics. Bill Readings drew attention to the rise of transactional logics in

the university in his discussion of "excellence," which he described as an empty notion signaling only "the optimal input/output ratio in matters of information" (1997, 39). The measurement of impact, like excellence, depends upon equivalencies being made between different kinds of knowledge and knowledge users in the interest of representational efficiency.

The transactional logic of SSHRC KMb reporting requirements implies that knowledge is valued for its connectivity and transferability. In this logic, openness is a resource for contemporary forms of capitalism, and "open" research is valued for its capacity to flow across sectors. As previously overlooked aspects of academic labor are mined for value, similarities with other forms of creative and cultural work have been noted by some researchers, characterized by conditions of precariousness, surveillance, and time pressures (Gill 2014; Luka et al. 2015). The shared experiences of workers across creative/cultural industries and academia highlight the role of creativity itself in capitalism, both as a source of innovation and a communicative resource used to translate knowledge to new publics. Connectivity is essential to its value. Sarah Banet-Weiser and Manuel Castells argue that creativity and innovation "only yield extraordinary value added in all domains if their products are networked in an open source logic, in which the interaction in the network increases their synergy and ultimately their value in any way this value could be measured" (2017, 15). This "open source logic" is a result of digital communication and culture that allows creative processes to migrate into new domains and applications (Banet-Weiser and Castells 2017). In other words, the transferability of creativity and knowledge is the source of its value, and communication is the site of enclosure. This type of transformative connectivity reflects wider economic interest in creativity as a resource with limitless potential. SSHRC echoes this logic when they state that to reach potential knowledge users, "as a general rule, the broader the means used, the broader the impact" (SSHRC 2023). This reproduces a normative understanding of open research as interchangeable units of knowledge.

Critical discourses around open science, open access, and knowledge mobilization provide different perspectives on the value of connectivity based on the principles of diversity and inclusivity. In her book *Philosophy of Open Science*, Sabrina Leonelli reminds us of the social nature of connection; its relational, cognitive, and structural dimensions, which are rarely fluid. Leonelli proposes an understanding of openness as a quest for "judicious connections . . . that are always mediated by the exchange of objects and technologies but can never be subsumed to such an exchange" (2023, 43). This idea of judicious connections is in marked contrast to capitalist ideals of connectivity in which knowledge is smoothly transferred between contexts. A judicious connection implies that openness is situated and relational, an assertion that is echoed by other critical approaches to OA and KMb that repoliticize the value of connectivity. Amanda Grenier et al. argue that critical KMb is itself a process of innovation,

"a process of continuous and ongoing discovery where researchers can consider their own research culture and practices of engagement" (2021, 351). In their view, the value of knowledge is found in the processes of discovery—the "relationship building, confidence, trust, and a sense of belonging—processes that are not merely a by-product of research" (351). Unfortunately, many changes are still needed to support and encourage these processes, particularly changes to academic labor conditions that act as barriers to engaged scholarship and capacity building both for researchers and for those who evaluate their work in order to develop more robust shared understandings of openness.

The concept of knowledge mobilization and its policy implementations shape our ideas about the relations between academic research and society and how these should be strengthened. Discourses and policies regarding KMb make clear that public participation is necessary from the very early stages of research and then throughout the research life cycle. This is articulated in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science for instance. In this case, the category of "open science" presents an overarching framework for openness that seems to encompass policy priorities of both open access and KMb. In contrast, Canada's 2020 Roadmap for Open Science pays attention to a narrow range of research outputs, such as peer-reviewed publications and research data. As discussions about open science gain momentum in Canada, there is an opportunity to more meaningfully synchronize policy understandings of openness to truly be more inclusive and diverse—in terms of knowledges, participants, and publics. Leslie Chan et al. point out that these different dimensions of openness "to publications and data, to society, and to excluded knowledges" are rarely considered together (2020, 11). In particular, the Tri-Agency open access policy could expand in breadth to respond to the evolving open research practices of HSS researchers and publics. This would mean removing its focus on online access as the sole criterion of openness, instead drawing from the ideals of critical knowledge mobilization to recognize a wider range of societal interactions.

Conclusion

The concept of open research is dynamic, reflecting changing epistemic commitments, technological imaginaries, research and communication practices, and academic labor conditions. Open research practices are a defining feature of contemporary HSS scholarship, but these practices are often constrained by policy contexts that center concepts such as excellence, impact, and innovation. Canadian researchers must navigate these tensions in order to engage with diverse collaborators and publics. This article uses the

case of SSHRC KMb policy to explore the tensions between openness as policy and openness as practice. Although the policy language in question does not use or define the concept of open research, it offers a rich context for inquiry into competing articulations of openness. It is in many ways a response to ongoing transformations in academic labor and an attempt to account for new forms of public scholarship and the connections they forge between the university and society. While the Tri-Agency open access policy has clearly mandated online access as the defining feature of open research, the SSHRC KMb policy framework governs a complete range of possible interactions around knowledge production, sharing, and use. The framework aims to extend accountability to forms of knowledge and communication typically overlooked as being outside the bounds of the scholarly record. The emphasis on diverse collaborative and communicative practices draws attention to forms of cognitive, creative, and emotional labor that have not usually been important to research assessment: the work of building relationships with partners, collaborators, and communities. Integral to the funding cycle, KMb modules provide an avenue of institutional recognition and legitimation for these evolving relationships. At the same time, these relationships are tied up with normative ideas about innovation and impact. As a result, KMb policies aim to translate complex and collective forms of knowledge production and communication into quantifiable returns. Critical discourses and practices of open access and knowledge mobilization are providing the language and collective capacity to resist this framing. The resulting frictions help to shape evolving understandings of openness and open research.

Open Peer Review Reports

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