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## City Size and Academic Focus: Exploring Trends in Canadian Urban Geography, Planning and Policy Literature

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### *Abstract*

Between 1996 and 2001 almost half of the cities in Canada lost population. This uneven pattern of growth prompted an examination of the English-language urban geography, planning and policy-related academic literature, which determined that Canadian urban academic journals fixated on large, growing metropolitan areas. Revisiting this literature a decade later, large cities have continued to dominate the academic discourse. Although articles dedicated to smaller and mid-sized cities are still relatively underrepresented in the literature, research focusing on more than one size of urban area has grown tremendously reflecting an emerging interest in regional connectivity and a rise in the perception of urban areas as systems, rather than individual entities.

*Keywords:* urban change, academia, mid-sized cities, shrinking cities

### *Résumé*

Entre 1996 et 2001, près de la moitié des régions urbaines du Canada a perdu population. Cette croissance inégale a incité un examen de la littérature didactique sur la géographie urbaine, la planification et la politique afin de déterminer si les chercheurs canadiens sont conscients des problèmes de déclin et de la stagnation dans les zones urbaines. Revisiter cette littérature une décennie plus tard, les grandes zones urbaines ont continué à dominer le discours académique. Bien que les articles consacrés à zones urbaines de petites et moyennes tailles soient encore relativement sous-représentées dans la littérature, la recherche mettant l'accent sur plus d'une taille de zone urbaine a augmenté énormément. Cela reflète un intérêt croissant dans la connectivité régionale et une augmentation de la perception des zones urbaines comme des systèmes, plutôt que des entités individuelles.

*Mots clés:* changement urbain, académique, villes rétrécissement

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In 2008, Hall and Hall examined the increasing unevenness of the Canadian urban system and the overrepresentation of growth-related research in the urban geography, planning and policy-related Canadian literature. By classifying journal articles published between 1994-2005 according to their implicit or explicit viewpoint towards urban growth and decline, they were able to determine the prevalence of both growth-centric and metropolitan-centric research. The results supported their hypothesis that growth is overwhelmingly presented as expected and natural. They showed that urban research in Canadian academic journals is predominantly focused on large cities and that very few articles, only 4%, concentrated on small cities even though they made up 9% of the total national urban population. Furthermore, virtually no articles discussed decline or no-growth as ongoing trends requiring additional research. When decline was discussed, it was generally presented in the context of attracting growth and the anticipated challenges associated with growth management. The authors concluded by stressing the critical need for research on shrinking and no-growth urban areas in the Canada context.

Since the publication of this article there have been continued calls for more research on small, mid-sized and shrinking Canadian cities. Hartt (2016), Schatz (2010), and Warkentin (2012) have all highlighted the need for more research on Canadian shrinking cities. Each echoing Filion (2010) in that no effective planning model for shrinking Canadian cities exists. According to Hall (2009), Canadian urban research is heavily fixated on large urban areas and tends to ignore or discount peripheral depopulation and the associated costs. Donald and Hall (2015) assert that there is a pressing need for additional research on declining small and mid-sized cities. Denis-Jacob (2012) calls for more work on small Canadian cities, while Bunting et al. (2007) argue that mid-sized cities have received little consideration in either the policy or research literature. They assert that additional research would be timely as urban density issues are of increased policy concern for cities of all sizes.

In addition to calls from the academic literature, the need for additional research on small, mid-sized and shrinking Canadian cities is evidenced by the themes of recent academic and practitioner events and programs across Canada. In 2016, national not-for-profit Evergreen launched its Mid-Sized Cities Program. Their objective was to help Canadian mid-sized cities, which they recognize as being traditionally overlooked in urban research and policy discourses, to “become leaders of sustainable and inclusive city-building” (Evergreen 2017). And in September 2017, the Small and Adaptive Cities Conference was held at Memorial University. In the program, conference chair Tomas Sanguinetti (2017, 2) states, “research on small and medium-sized cities is routinely overshadowed by a focus on global or world cities.”

The flurry of activity regarding small, mid-sized and shrinking Canadian cities since the Hall and Hall (2008) study begs the question of if, or how, the academic focus of Canadian journals has shifted? Has the call for additional research on small, mid-sized and shrinking cities has been answered by Canadian urban journals? Or have Canadian urban journals continued to concentrate on growth and large urban areas? These questions lead to wider discussions surrounding the role of academic journals and the challenges and opportunities for Canadian urban journals moving forward.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we delve into the literature regarding small, mid-sized and shrinking Canadian cities. Next, we examine recent trends in Canadian urban populations across large, mid-sized and small cities. Third, we explain the approach, research methodology, and specific academic literature resources to be examined. Then we present the findings, which detail the proportion of published articles in Canadian journals stratified by urban size, geography and economic sectors. Lastly, we compare our findings to the original Hall and Hall (2008) paper to ascertain changes in the urban landscape and literature.

### Small, Mid-sized and Shrinking Cities

The Evergreen Mid-Sized Cities Research Collaborative, a group of over 20 researchers representing more than 12 Canadian universities and colleges, define mid-sized Canadian cities as those having a population between 50,000 and 500,000 residents (Sotomayor et al. 2017). Cities with populations within the range of 10,000 to 50,000 are classified as small cities, and cities with more than 500,000 residents are considered large cities. This categorization captures Canada’s unique urban geography—one that is comprised of many small cities and only a few large ones (McCann and Simmons 2000). In this paper we consider all census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), as defined by Statistics Canada<sup>1</sup>, to be cities. As noted in Table 1, in 2011 there were a total of 147 CMAs and CAs in Canada: 86 small, 53 mid-sized and 9 large. Large cities made up 64% of Canada’s urban population, while mid-sized and small cities contributed 29% and 8% respectively.

According to Seasons (2003), most Canadian mid-sized cities are located in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia and the majority of these are concentrated within the greater Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver regions. While considerable growth has been seen in the number of suburban mid-sized cities in the last few decades, many mid-sized cities are also central cities of urban regions (e.g. Kingston, ON). Seasons (2003) continues to explain that in other parts of the country such as Atlantic Canada, mid-sized cities are dominant urban centres (e.g. Halifax, NS) as they are located outside the sphere of any large metropolitan areas. According to the Evergreen mid-sized cities research collaborative (Sotomayor et al. 2017), mid-sized Canadian cities have been disproportionately impacted by globalization and deindustrialization. Furthermore, mid-sized cities are faced with challenges relating to aging and declining populations, slow economic growth, rising social inequality, shrinking tax revenue, and sprawl and car-oriented development (Flatt and Sotomayor 2015).

Like mid-sized cities, small Canadian cities are extremely diverse. Some are suburban communities within the commuter shed of mid-sized and large cities, while others are predominantly rural. Denis-Jacobs (2012) notes that many small Canadian cities are located in peripheral areas and suffer due to their remote location. As the Canadian economy has shifted away from staples, a new crisis of hinterland development has taken shape (Leadbeater 2009; Filion 2010). Leadbeater (2009) defines the hinterland to be any area beyond the commuter shed of a large metropolitan centre and has highlighted the precarious circumstances of small resource-reliant cities. The crisis of hinterland development is due to the increase in productivity and environmental limits in resource industries, massive increases in the concentration of both domestic and international capital, and major shifts in state policy resulting in cutbacks in employment and social programs. Together these changes have resulted in decreased employment, both in the quantity and quality of jobs, and consistent outflow of young persons from resource-reliant communities (Schatz et al. 2013). Filion (2010) predicts that some resource-based centres may benefit from international demand cycles, but generally most will decline.

Filion (2010) further hypothesizes that the future of Canada's urban system will be predominantly steered by demographic and global economic trends rather than explicit policy decisions. He argues that shifts impacting economic and demographic processes, and in turn policy decisions, will result in a highly polarized Canadian urban system. An urban system characterized by a few large urban areas experiencing high growth and many smaller areas caught within self-reinforcing cycles of decline. Polèse and Shearmur (2006, 41) echo Filion's argument and add that:

The proposition that geography and exogenous forces can overwhelm even the best-conceived local economic development strategies should now be uncontroversial. It is difficult to imagine how purely local strategies, no matter how innovative or collaborative, could alter the forces [contributing to decline]. The demographic transition is a fact, and it fundamentally alters the way in which future changes in the economic geography of nations will affect some regions. Some will decline.

Despite the emphatic nature of arguments such as Filion's (2010) and Polèse and Shearmur's (2006), Canadian academics and professionals have been reluctant to explore issues concerning slow growth, no growth and shrinkage (Schatz 2010; Hartt 2016). Hartt (2017, 1) defines a Canadian shrinking city as a "municipal district with a minimum population of 10,000 residents that has faced population losses for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of a structural crisis." Research and media coverage examining the causes, effects and potential responses to population shrinkage have gained momentum in the last ten years and have become established as a central research theme in both the European and American academic discourse (Audirac 2017). However, despite acknowledgement of a country-wide pattern of uneven growth by the Canadian urban geography and planning literature, Canadian urban political leaders mirror the academic discourse and continue to assume that continuous growth is normal and feasible while overlooking declining urban areas (Hall and Hall 2008; Hartt 2016). Canadian municipal officials have been found to ignore or, at best, observe without accepting urban shrinkage (Hartt and Warkentin 2017). The narrow growth focus of Canadian urban decision-makers has resulted in missed opportunities for important qualitative development (Donald and Hall 2015). Hackworth (2015) argues that the severity, and perceptions of severity, of Canadian urban shrinkage pales in contrast to the United States not due to its absence or the success of Canadian urban policy, but rather to the deliberate exclusion of people of colour. According to Hackworth (2015), the principal

factor that minimized urban tensions, conflicts and decline during industrialization and deindustrialization was the racial homogeneity of urban Canada. Despite this comparison to the United States, Leadbeater (2009) identifies Canada as especially vulnerable to shrinking processes because it has both a high level of urbanization and many communities reliant on natural resources. The continuing rural-urban migration, declining birth rates and looming aging population crisis magnifies this vulnerability further (Christensen et al. 2009; Hartt and Biglieri 2017; Statistics Canada 2016).

The findings of Hall and Hall (2008), the consistent calls for additional research, and the current (and forecasted) challenges facing small, mid-sized and shrinking Canadian cities all point to a need for additional research on these urban areas. In the sections that follow, we ascertain whether the urban size focus of the Canadian urban literature has shifted since 2005. Furthermore, considering the new crisis of hinterland development, we gauge how issues related to resource-based and manufacturing economies are represented in Canadian journals.

### Recent Trends in Canadian Population

Canada has been one of the fastest growing G8 countries over the last 15 years (United Nations 2015), growing by 6% between the 2006 and 2011 census (Statistics Canada 2014). As Canada has grown it has continued to urbanize and by 2011, 85% of Canadians lived in urban areas (Statistics Canada 2013). Table 1 details the specifics of changes in urban Canada from 2006 to 2011.

**Table 1: Change in Urban Canada, 2006-2011. Source: author's analysis of national census (Statistics Canada 2006, 2011)**

		Large Cities (>500,000)	Mid-Sized Cities (50,000 – 500,000)	Small Cities (10,000 – 50,000)	All Cities
Number of Cities	2006	9	50	84	143
	2011	9	53	85	147
Total Population	2006	16,213,411	7,295,724	2,113,435	25,622,570
	2011	17,548,422	7,813,057	2,073,486	27,434,965
Share of Population of Cities	2006	63.3	28.9	8.2	100
	2011	64.0	28.5	7.6	100
% Change of Class (2006-2011)		8.2	7.1	-0.1	7.1
Number of Declining Cities (2006-2011)		0	7	22	29
% Declining (2006- 2011)		0	13.2	25.9	19.7

Examining the changes in the Canadian urban landscape between 2006 and 2011, we see that the number of urban dwellers in Canada increased by 7%. Large cities (population greater than 500,000) saw the most considerable growth: 8% in five years. Mid-sized cities (population between 50,000 and 500,000) saw almost as much growth increasing by 7%. While in contrast, small cities (population between 10,000 and 50,000) saw a slightly negative overall percent change (-0.1%). The majority of the country's declining cities were small or mid-sized, as none of the large cities experienced population loss.

## Method

To determine the prevalence of small, mid-sized and shrinking cities in the Canadian, English-language urban geography, planning and policy-related literature, the following eight journals were examined:

- *The Canadian Geographer*
- *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*
- *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*
- *Canadian Public Policy*
- *Economic Development Journal of Canada*
- *Great Lakes Geographer*
- *Journal of Canadian Studies*
- *Plan Canada*

Seven of these journals were also included in the original Hall and Hall study. The only exception, the *Economic Development Journal of Canada*, was used in proxy for the *Economic and Technology Development Journal of Canada*, for which current issues could not be found. Only limited issues from the *Great Lakes Geographer* could be included as the journal ceased publication in 2006. For the remaining journals, issues were collected beginning where the Hall and Hall (2008) study left off and ended with the most current issue<sup>2</sup>.

All articles containing some reference to at least one Canadian city were included in the analysis. The articles were identified through a thorough examination of both the article title and abstract. If either explicitly or implicitly mentioned a city, the urban system, growth or decline, the article in its entirety was read to determine whether or not it should be included. Furthermore, if the title and abstract review was inconclusive, the entire article was read. Although time-consuming, this method was more robust than a keyword search because it allowed for the discovery of more subtle, implicit mention of cities, the urban system, growth and decline within the actual content of each article. Due to the thorough methodology, it is very unlikely that any article was incorrectly included. However, it is recognized that some articles may possibly have been mistakenly overlooked.

It is important to note two limitations of this study. First, the content of Canadian urban journals does not necessarily reflect the focus of Canadian urban scholars. Canadian academics at Canadian institutions publish on the topics of small, mid-sized and shrinking cities in international journals (e.g. Hartt 2016; Filion 2010; Seasons 2003). However, the same can be said for any other topic in urban geography and planning. With that in mind, we believe that Canadian journals do provide some insight to the focus of the Canadian urban academic landscape as articles in Canadian journals are predominantly authored by Canadian scholars. Furthermore, by focusing on Canadian journals and following the methodology of Hall and Hall (2008), we are able to analyze the change in the urban academic landscape.

Secondly, academic literature does not inherently need to reflect population trends and proportions. Following Hall and Hall (2008) we deem over- and underrepresentation of articles on city sizes based on the proportional representation of their populations. While this does provide the opportunity to give credence to calls for additional research, we recognize that academics (and journals) do not, and should not, base their output solely along such narrow lines. We acknowledge that the focus of academics is influenced by a wide range of factors, from their own experiences and motivation to the likelihood of obtaining government grants. The intent of our study is not to vilify journals or chastise Canadian academics; rather it is to highlight opportunities and potential research gaps. As Bunting et al. (2007, 28) note, “in singling out mid-size urban areas, we do not mean to imply that size per se is of singular importance over other features that influence urban form. We simply believe that the size dimension should be more fully investigated.” Similarly, our aim is to determine if opportunities exist for Canadian journals and academics to contribute to significant gaps in Canadian urban research.

## Findings

A total of 1518 articles were examined and of these articles 136 met the search criteria to be included in the analysis. All journals, with the exception of *The Great Lakes Geographer*, contained at least one article of interest. *The Canadian Journal of Urban Research* contributed the most articles (47.8%), followed by *Plan Canada* (16.2%), and the *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* (12.5%). Both *The Canadian Geographer* and *Canadian Public Policy* provided 8.9% of the articles, trailed by the *Economic Development Journal of Canada* (5.2%) and the *Journal of Canadian Studies* (1%). Articles were then organized by urban size, geography and economic sector.

### Urban Size

Urban size was used to classify the articles returned by the search query. Three classes of urban size were used: large cities consisting of urban areas with populations of at least 500,000; mid-sized cities consisting of urban areas with between 50,000 and 500,000 residents; and small cities containing populations between 10,000 and 50,000. Table 2 highlights the percentage of articles returned in each class as well as the respective share of the national population for each class.

**Table 2: Articles Organized by Urban Size**

Urban Size	% of Articles	Share of Population of Cities, 2011
Large Cities (>500,000)	60.4	64.0
Large and Mid-sized Cities	8.9	
Large, Mid-sized and Small Cities	12.4	
Total	81.7	
Mid-Sized Cities (50,000-500,000)	10.1	28.5
Large and Mid-sized Cities	8.9	
Mid-sized and Small Cities	2.4	
Large, Mid-sized and Small Cities	12.4	
Total	33.8	
Small Cities (10,000-50,000)	5.9	7.6
Mid-sized and Small Cities	2.4	
Large, Mid-sized and Small Cities	12.4	
Total	20.7	

Large cities were the sole urban area focus of 60% of the articles, but were referenced together with other sized cities in over 80% of the articles. As large cities only make up 64% of the population of all urban areas in Canada, they are over-represented in the Canadian urban literature relative to their population share. One third of all articles contained some mention of one or more mid-sized cities. However only 10% of all articles focused solely on them. Similarly, small cities were the sole subjects of just 6% of the articles. However, they were mentioned along with other sized cities in 21% of articles. This suggests that both small and mid-sized cities are also over-represented in the literature relative to their respective 28.5% and 7.6% share of the population of all cities. In both cases the majority of the article references came in articles addressing more than one size of city. Sole focus on large, mid-sized and small cities were all underrepresented relative to their proportion of the population. It is important to note that mid-sized cities were by far the most underrepresented as they make up almost 30% of the country's population, yet were only the sole focus of 10% of the articles.

**Table 3: Articles by Urban Size and Region (%)**

	Southern Ontario	Atlantic Canada	Northern Ontario	British Columbia	Central Canada	Quebec
Large Cities	34.7	2.5	2.5	16.5	20.7	23.1
Mid-sized Cities	47.6	19.1	14.3	0	19.1	0
Small Cities	36.8	15.8	15.8	31.6	0	0

When examining the articles on a geographic basis, it becomes apparent that the Canadian urban literature tends to concentrate on Southern Ontario. Table 3 shows that of the articles in the large city class, 34.7% were focused on Southern Ontario. For mid-sized and small cities, the focus on Southern Ontario was even stronger with 47.6% and 36.8% of the articles respectively. Inspecting the large cities class further at the metropolitan level (Table 4), Southern Ontario's dominance of the literature remains with 35.3% of the articles. The Greater Toronto Region (GTA) itself is the geographic concentration of a full quarter (24.6%) of the large city articles.

**Table 4: Large City Articles by Metropolitan Region (%)**

GTA	Vancouver-Victoria	Montreal	Calgary-Edmonton	Winnipeg	Ottawa-Gatineau	Quebec City	Hamilton
24.6	15.6	18	10.7	16.4	4.1	4.1	6.6

In their analysis of urban size and geography, Hall and Hall (2008) make note of the potential locational bias of academics. They point out that there are no graduate urban geography or planning programs in small cities and that mid-sized cities in fact have more programs than their proportion of the population. Two-fifths of all universities with graduate planning or urban geography programs are located in Southern Ontario, where Northern Ontario has none. The authors suggest that the location of university programs is a contributing factor in the overrepresentation of certain urban areas and the exclusion of others, asserting that it is perfectly reasonable and desirable for scholars to concentrate on their immediate surroundings. The curriculum of planning and geography university programs could also play a role. The courses offered to undergraduate and graduate students help shape the focus and interest of emerging scholars. Although the research on pedagogical focus in Canadian geography and planning is limited, in a study of planning curriculums, Hartt (2015) found that only 2% of accredited planning programs in North America offered a course in either decline or urban shrinkage. None of the courses were offered at a Canadian university.

### *Economic Sectors*

In order to gauge how, or if, Canadian journal articles focused on issues related to the new crisis of hinterland development, we examined the economic focus all of the articles included in the study. Of the articles examined, one-third (33.1%) of all articles contained an economic focus. 54% of *Economic Development Journal of Canada* articles addressed the economy. Unsurprisingly, this was the highest proportion of any of the journals examined. Of the articles included from *Canadian Public Policy* and *The Great Lakes Geographer*, none were focused on the economy and *The Journal of Canadian Studies* contained only one. This is foreseeable considering very few articles were considered from the latter two journals and that *Canadian Public Policy* focuses heavily on national level trends.

**Table 5: Articles by Economic Sector**

Economic Sector	% of Articles
Financial/Insurance/Real Estate/Business and Producer Services	31.1
Retail/Commercial/Entertainment	20
High-tech/Information Technology/ Telecommunications	17.8
Creative Class	15.6
Resource Extraction/Manufacturing	11.1
Tourism	2.2
Foreign Direct Investment/Corporate Head Office Location	2.2

As shown in Table 5, 31.1% of the articles addressing the economy were focused on financial, insurance, real estate, and business and producer (FIRE) services. The service economy (retail, commercial and entertainment) accounted for 20% of the articles. 17.8% of articles focused on high-tech, information technology and telecommunications and a further 15.6% referred specifically to the creative class. The high proportion of articles related to professional services and the service economy echoes the economic restructuring of Canada's economy away from resource extraction and manufacturing (which was the focus of only 11.1% of articles). Furthermore, it demonstrates the lack of focus on smaller, declining areas, as these areas often still rely on manufacturing and do not tend to have a concentration of high-tech or financial services (Schatz et al. 2013). As resource extraction becomes more expensive and environmental regulations more strict, many small, peripheral communities will continue to shift towards a service economy and the "creative class" will continue to relocate to large urban areas (Leadbeater 2009). This suggests that economic focus of scholarly articles will continue to concentrate on large cities and professional economies.

### Comparisons

Hall and Hall's (2008) study examined articles from Canadian urban, planning and geography journals between 1994 and 2005. In this paper we have replicated their study focusing on articles from 2005 to 2014. In this section, the findings in the two studies are compared.

Articles on large cities dominated the literature. In both studies, approximately 60% of the articles included focused solely on urban areas with a population larger than 500,000. However, articles dedicated solely to mid-sized cities decreased dramatically from 21% to 10%. This can be seen as an even more pronounced underrepresentation as mid-sized cities make up close to 30% of the nation's urban population. Articles that concentrated on all three sized cities—small, mid-sized and large—may account some of this loss. In the original study, only 0.7% of articles were found to discuss all three, but between 2005 and 2014 over 12% of articles examined looked at all three city sizes together. Hall and Hall (2008) found that articles focusing solely on small cities were particularly under represented and, as suggested by the title of their paper *Canada's Forgotten Interior*, this was a cause of concern. This trend continues to be true. However, the gap has been partially bridged as the percentage of articles focusing on small cities has increased from 4.4% to 5.9% while small city's share of urban population fell from 8.2% in 2006 to 7.6% in 2011. Figure 1 compares the percentage of articles by urban size.

The regional focus of articles discussing mid-sized cities saw a shift as the percentage of articles focusing on Southern Ontario grew from 37% to 48%, the percentage of articles focused on Northern Ontario almost doubled to 14%, and articles examining Central Canada more than tripled, going from just over 5% to 19%. The articles focused on small cities also gravitated more towards Southern Ontario as the percentage grew from 17% to 37%.

Despite the increased attention on Southern Ontario, when looking at specific metropolitan areas, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) waned in importance dropping from 39% of the articles in the original study to only 25%. A large portion of this difference was due to the increased attention on Winnipeg (from 6.6% to 16.4%) and Hamilton (1% to 6.6%). This follows the westward shift of Canada's center as oil and gas industries have continued to play a larger role in the nations economy during the period (Vaillancourt et al. 2015). That being said Southern Ontario still dominates urban academic discussions and Atlantic Canada continues to garner little attention.

Figure 1: Comparing Percentage of Articles by Urban Size

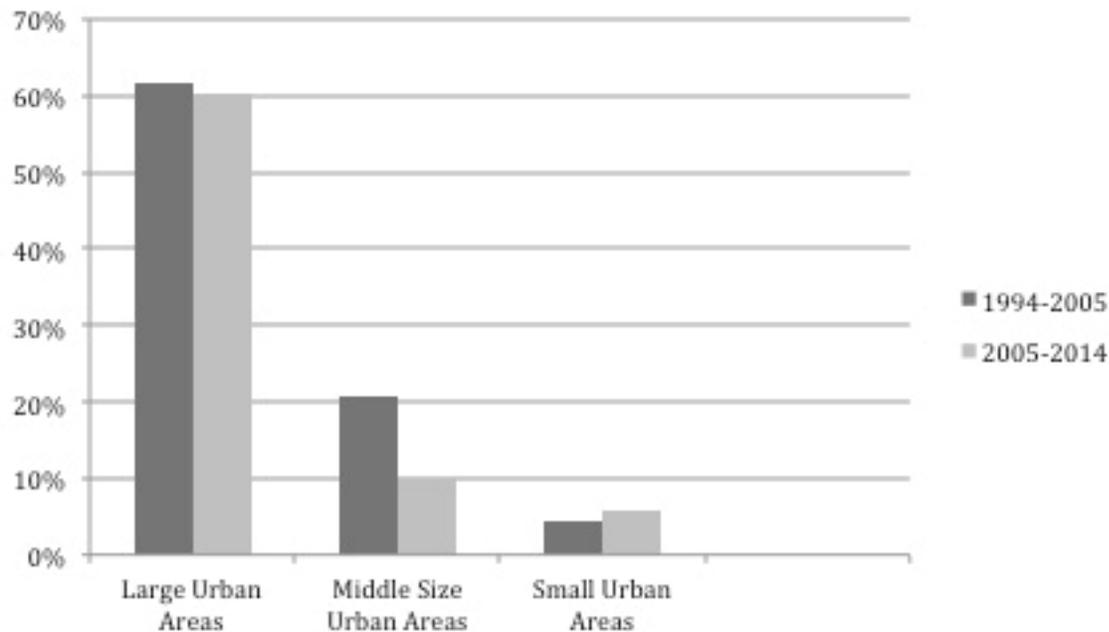


Figure 2: Comparing Percentage of Articles by Economic Sector

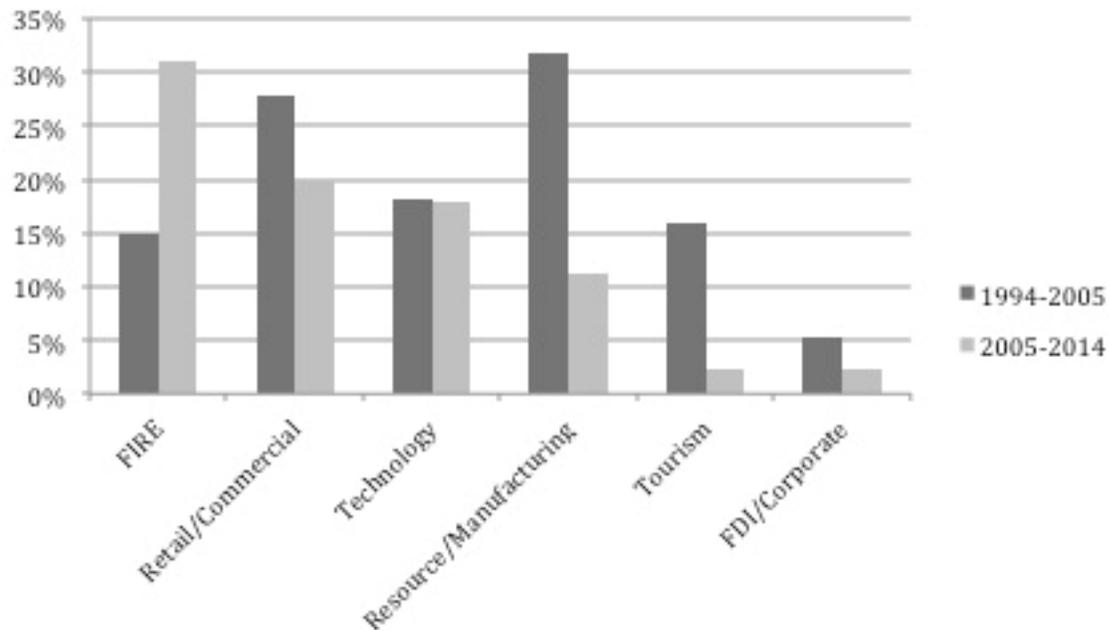


Figure 2 compares the focus of articles by economic sector and shows perhaps the most significant and telling changes occurring in urban Canada. The focus on the resource extraction and manufacturing sector has plummeted over the decade from 32% of the articles down to 11%. This is surprising considering westward geographic shift of article focus noted above. Despite the recent growth of the service-based economy (Vinodrai 2015), the results show that articles focused on retail, commercial and entertainment sectors have actually decreased from 28% to 20%. An even more severe decline was seen in articles on tourism, which have shifted

from 16% to 2%. In stark contrast, articles on the financial, insurance, real estate, and business and producer services sector have increased dramatically from 15% to 31%.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Scholarly research does not necessarily follow trends in the economy or population demographics. However, trends in the literature do provide insight to the general focus of academia. In 2008, Hall and Hall concluded that the Canadian English language urban geography, planning and policy-related literature contained an overwhelming prevalence of both growth-centric and metropolitan-centric research. They recognized a critical need for research on shrinking and no-growth urban areas in the Canadian context. Their call for more research echoed that of many other Canadian academics. Some have suggested that Canadian academics and practitioners have been reluctant to explore issues concerning slow growth, no growth and shrinkage (Schatz 2010; Hartt 2016), and that Canadian urban research tends to ignore or discount peripheral areas (Hall 2009). Donald and Hall (2015) contend that the growth-focus has resulted in missed opportunities. In this paper, we explored whether the Canadian urban academic landscape, specifically Canadian urban journals, have met the call for more research on these areas.

Our research examined how the focus of the Canadian urban literature may have shifted since 2005. A number of developments, both within and outside academia, could potentially have swayed the focus of the Canadian urban literature. The Great Recession and an increased economic dependence on oil and gas (until recently) influenced migration patterns and the fiscal health of government at all scales as well as private sector enterprises. Shrinking cities, urban exploring and other topics related to population loss garnered widespread attention as academic scholarship flourished in Europe and the United States. Cities, like Detroit, became the focus of countless articles, book and documentaries. However, in Canada large cities remained very much the focus of Canadian urban academic journals. Staying consistent with the findings from Hall and Hall (2008), we found that small and mid-sized cities continued to be underrepresented in the literature. But articles examining areas of multiple sizes became much more commonplace. This suggests a growing interest in regional geographies and systems.

Results showed that western Canadian cities did receive more attention than in the past, which could be due to the increased importance of the oil industry during the study period. However we also found that the resource extraction industry was the focus of significantly fewer articles than reported by Hall and Hall (2008). So although the geographic focus of the literature did shift westward, it was not due directly to a research focus on oil or resource extraction related industries. This shift could be attributed indirectly to the oil industry boom as the population of many western Canadian urban areas skyrocketed potentially leading to a number of rich research areas.

While academics may be publishing on small, mid-sized and shrinking Canadian cities in international journals, there remains an opportunity to highlight the challenges facing these communities by speaking to a primarily Canadian audience through Canadian urban journal. The growth-focus of North American urban planning, education and local decision-making may keep scholarly research entrenched in economic development topics and limit efforts to address the problems generated by depopulation. Even during a period of widespread depopulation in regions throughout Canada, attention to the challenges of decline were largely non-existent in the journals examined. With 20% of Canadian cities in decline and the attention of Canadian journals limited to the largest, most prosperous areas, it is difficult to get academics, students and practitioners engaged in meaningful debates concerning the broader challenges facing the nation. It is not the necessarily the mandate of Canadian journals or academics to follow population trends, deliberately address certain research gaps or answer calls for more research. However, there is an opportunity for Canadian outlets to offer perspectives on uniquely Canadian aspects of the large, and growing, challenges associated with small, mid-sized and shrinking cities.

As the Canadian population continues to urbanize, immigrants continue to settle in large urban areas and birth rates continue to fall in small and peripheral communities, there is a pressing need for more research on small and declining Canadian communities. It is easy to forget that millions of Canadians live outside of major, or even minor, urban centers. There remains a distinct lack of tools and resources available to decision makers in declining small cities and towns. However, the new academic focus on multiple sizes of cities is an important evolution. By recognizing that multiple urban areas work within a larger system, perhaps Canada's smaller and declining cities will be represented and our larger urban systems better understood. Considering the

recent population booms in Alberta and Manitoba and the current economic climate of the resource extraction industry, a renewed interest in population decline may be timely.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Area consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities situated around a major urban core. To form a census metropolitan area, the urban core must have a population of at least 100,000. To form a census agglomeration, the urban core must have a population of at least 10,000 (Statistics Canada 2012).

<sup>2</sup> At the time of analysis, the most current issues available were: *The Canadian Geographer*: 58(1); *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*: 35(1); *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*: 22(1); *Canadian Public Policy*: 40(2); *Economic Development Journal of Canada*: November, 2013; *Great Lakes Geographer*: Volume 13; *Journal of Canadian Studies*: 48(1); and *Plan Canada*: 54(2).

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