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FRQ Membership in cOAlition S: What are the Possible Consequences for Québec Journals?

by Caroline Winter | 1 April 2022 | English, Observations and Responses, Responses | 0 comments



This response to “[The Fonds de Recherche du Québec Join cOAlition S](#)” was written by [Simon van Bellen](#), Senior Research Advisor at [Érudit](#).

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On June 1, 2021, [the Fonds de Recherche du Québec \(FRQ\)](#) announced they had joined [cOAlition S](#), making them the first public organization in North America to apply the principles of Plan S, effective March 2023. An ambitious initiative launched in 2018 by a group of European organizations under the name [cOAlition S](#), Plan S aims to implement immediate open access to scholarly publications based on research projects funded by their members.

The Situation Faced by Québec Scholarly Journals

The FRQ’s commitment to Plan S will have significant repercussions for scholarly journals with publishers based in Québec. [The Society and Culture branch of the FRQ \(FRQSC\)](#) provides financial support for 36 Québec journals through the [Scientific Journal Support Program](#). In addition to support from the FRQSC, many of these journals also receive funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through its [Aid to Scholarly Journals](#) program.

The funded journals are non-profit and generally managed by small teams of researchers affiliated with universities or scholarly societies. Well anchored in their research communities, mainly in the social sciences and humanities, their primary language is French. Distributed through the [Érudit](#) platform, some of these journals have adopted the diamond route to open access, without article processing charges (APCs). Others are still published with a rolling paywall of 12 months, allowing them to comply with most

open access policies. These journals with 12-month rolling paywalls receive subscription fees through Érudit (about 1200 institutions subscribe to one or more titles). All of the journals distributed through Érudit receive financial support, regardless of their publication model, under the [Partnership for Open Access \(POA\)](#). Initiated by Érudit and the [Canadian Research Knowledge Network \(CRKN\)](#), the POA is an innovative model of collaboration between academic libraries and scholarly journals. In particular, the partnership enables financial support for OA journals and provides commercial journals with revenue while supporting their transition to OA.

The funded journals benefit from high international visibility: nearly half (45%) of the first authors of published articles are from abroad, particularly from French-speaking European countries, and around 70% of article views are from abroad. Thus, Érudit enables exceptional international visibility for these journals.

The Many Challenges

Even before the initiation and development of Plan S, many editorial teams were facing significant challenges. As was demonstrated by [a report](#) published in 2021, the recognition by many research institutions of the work done by Québec journals' editorial teams is declining. The availability of human resources and stable funding remains an important issue, and editorial teams must be cognizant of the rapid transitions happening within the world of scholarly publishing. This represents a challenge when the sector is undergoing significant change, characterized by the development of open access and the criteria associated with it. The [decline of French](#) in scholarly publication and the fragility of the financial support from the institutions with which journals are associated add to the challenges facing Québec journals. The precarious situation of *Enfance en difficulté*, based at Laurentian University, as discussed in [an article in *Le Devoir*](#), is a good example of the context facing many of these Canadian journals published in French. In this context, support from funding organizations and research institutions is essential for maintaining the country's French-language scholarly journals, particularly during the transition to open access.

Ensuring compliance with Plan S in March 2023 presents an additional challenge for many Québec journals—even those that are already open access. Plan S includes [a set of requirements](#) related to copyright management, the use of particular licenses, the compilation and sharing of publication statistics, the creation of metadata following certain standards, and indexing in reference tools such as the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#). Although the guidelines have not yet been released, the FRQ's adoption of Plan S will likely require that funded journals meet these requirements in order to remain eligible for funding. Despite the fact that the majority of journals distributed by Érudit are already open access, without embargo, less than 10% of journals on the platform—and only one funded by the FRQSC (out of 36)—currently comply with Plan S.

The effects of adopting Plan S will, however, reach beyond these funded journals and may well affect any scholarly journal in Québec: the thousands of researchers and students in Québec whose projects are funded by the FRQ will now be required to make their research articles open access without embargo, as is already the case for many European researchers. Québec journals that are not funded will be motivated to become compliant in order to remain a publication option for all researchers subject to the mandate of cOAlition S.

A Key Role for Research

The benefits of open access are well established. Open access enables an accessibility to Québec research for the entire population, and it enables French research in the humanities and social sciences to have international influence. The journals distributed via Érudit play a key role in access to knowledge, and at a cost much lower than the for-profit alternatives: downloading an article published on Érudit costs Québec universities about 40 times less than an article distributed by major commercial publishers. In this

respect, the Québec journals deserve additional support to be able to adapt their existing business models. While Plan S proclaims to be beneficial for the dissemination of research at all levels, we must ensure that this does not come at the expense of the already precarious financial situation of Québec scholarly journals.

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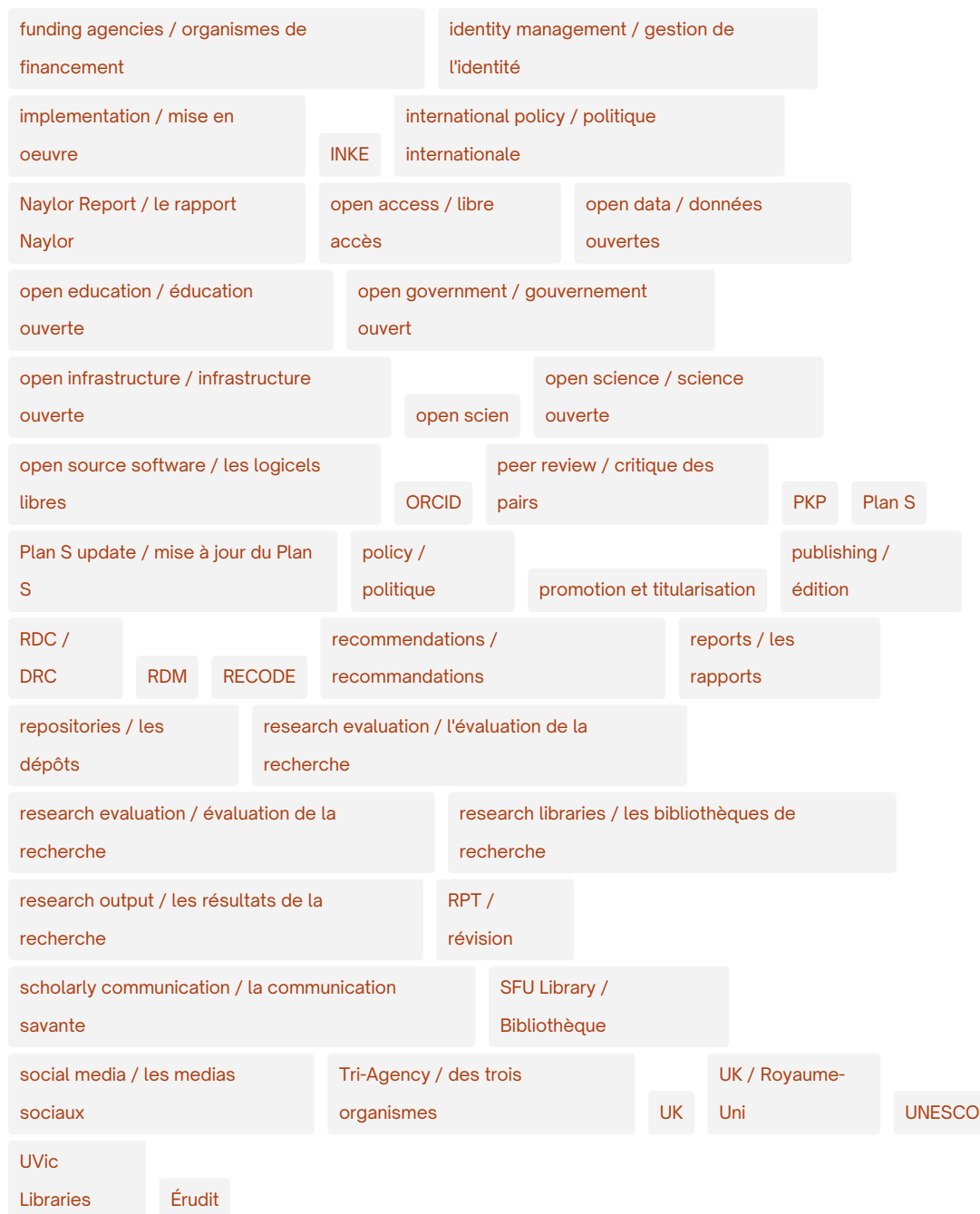
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