THE DATA MATTER

CRDCN QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

FIRST QUARTER - MARCH 2024

CRDCN
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Welcome to the first issue of *The Data Matter* for 2024!

In this issue, we provide a closer look at some of the software used by CRDCN researchers to assist them in their projects and continue our ongoing series of articles profiling CRDCN Academic Directors – this time with an interview featuring Dr. Shahin Shooshtari of the University of Manitoba.

We also provide you with information about upcoming events where you can connect with the CRDCN and data partners in 2024, as well as some insights into our researcher activities, past and present.

Lastly, we spoke with Michael Veall, the CRDCN's Principal Investigator and the Editor of the journal *Canadian Public Policy* on the journal's 50th anniversary and their plans to celebrate this golden milestone.

Thank you for your readership and we wish you the best as the academic year draws near a close this spring.

Ryan Murphy
Editor, *The Data Matter*

If you have any feedback or ideas for future articles or themes, please reach out to us at <u>info@crdcn.ca</u>.

Software spotlight: A look at the GIS software used by CRDCN researchers

Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN) researchers use an array of different software in their work of sifting through and organising data in their projects.
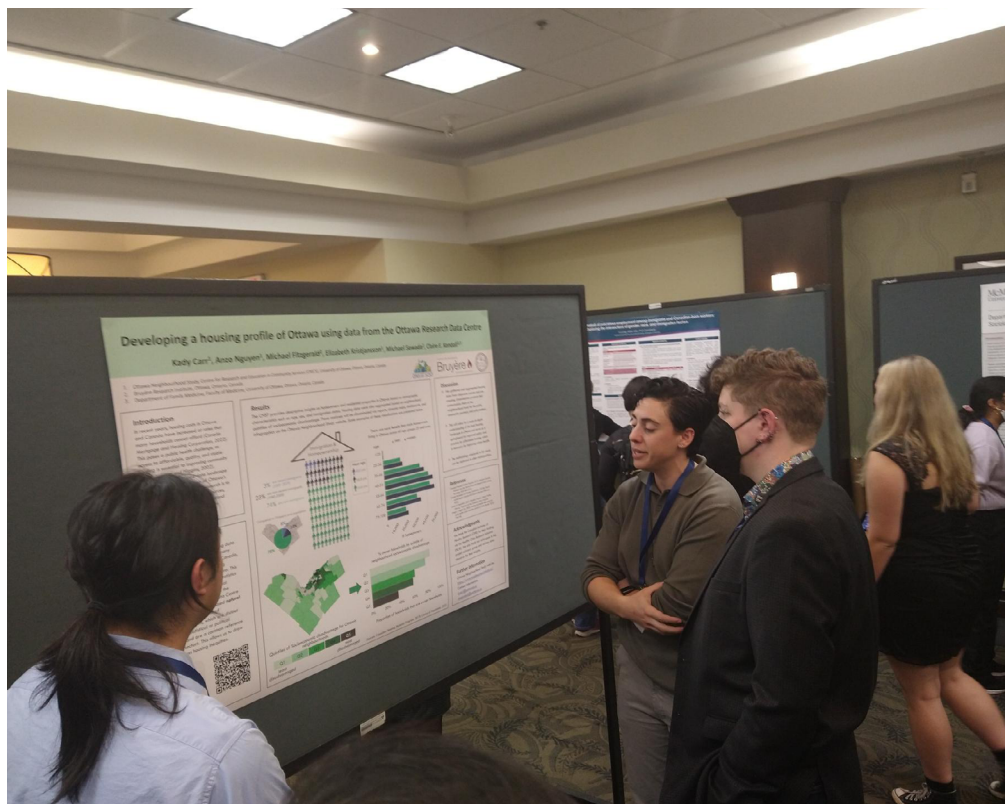
Among the types of software in use are geographic information systems (GIS) software, such as ArcGIS, the product of Esri Canada. Esri has been a supporter of the CRDCN, providing access to this particularly useful software to researchers in CRDCN facilities.

ArcGIS has been a tool of choice for Andrea Craig, Assistant Professor of Economics at University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO) and the Academic Director of UBCO's RDC.

Kady Carr and Anzo Nguyen present their work at CRDCN 2023.
Photo: Michèle Anderson/CRDCN

"I use ArcGIS to calculate variables from GIS data. For example, I use land use data and census tract boundaries – both vector datasets – to calculate the percentage of each census tract that has residential land use," says Craig. "Then I merge these variables with RDC data at the census tract level to include in my analyses. Similarly, I use public transportation schedules, specifically general transit feed specification (GTFS) data, and GIS data of the road network to calculate public transportation times between different census tracts."

Craig says using ArcGIS allows her to calculate variables for inclusion in her analyses that wouldn't be available otherwise, including some critical ones such as public transportation times.

"So far, I have used vector data for my projects. For a work in progress, I'm learning to work with raster data, which will expand the possibilities of data to use."

What prompted Craig to choose ArcGIS over other GIS software were the tools available in the software that work well with public transportation data. "Another feature of ArcGIS that I really like is the Model Builder, which allows users to create Python syntax from drop down menus."

The work Craig has completed, like many projects completed by CRDCN researchers, can have tangible impact on policy decisions. For example, Craig and colleague Alex Chernoff discovered while working on a project that the SkyTrain expansion in Vancouver benefits higher-income households more than lower-income households when housing price changes from the expansion were incorporated.

Another project related to housing – and using

GIS software – has been completed by [Ottawa Neighbourhood Study (ONS)](#) of the University of Ottawa (funded by Bruyère Research Institute). Kady Carr and Anzo Nguyen presented findings related to this project at the CRDCN conference in Hamilton in November of 2023. For their project, they used ArcGIS StoryMaps, with embedded maps mostly created in ArcGIS Pro.

"Our project focused on housing as a social determinant of health in Ottawa; more specifically, we aimed to develop a comprehensive profile of housing in Ottawa and its neighbourhoods using existing datasets," says Nguyen, Research Coordinator at the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study. "This profile would be disseminated to policymakers, service providers, non-profits, and the general public, to raise awareness on the state of housing in Ottawa and to support data-driven decision making on the issue. With these goals in mind, we chose to develop our final housing profile using ArcGIS StoryMaps. It allowed us to communicate housing data in a way that was interactive, engaging, and provided the big picture."

The software allowed them to communicate complex data to a wide audience, notes Carr, a Manager with the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study. "Our project was very data-rich, integrating both geospatial and non-geospatial data from various sources. Our challenge was not only presenting this wealth of data but doing so in a way that was both engaging and easy to digest," says Carr.

Adds Nguyen, "We found that ArcGIS StoryMaps met these requirements with its ability to combine interactive graphics, maps, dashboards, and text in an immersive format. Compared to static graphics or one-page infographics, the immersive, scrolling format of a story map [is] well-suited as a dissemination tool. We were able to develop a unique, data-driven narrative that flowed from one topic to the next."

The tools developed by the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study are used by a number of partners in municipal government and community organisations to inform strategic planning and decision-making, notes Nguyen.

"In addition, we developed our housing profile in collaboration with an advisory group who worked with us to ensure that the end results reflect the needs of relevant stakeholders. For example, we learned about new relevant datasets and or timed our data release with the anniversary of Ottawa's housing emergency declaration because of the advisory group."

He says he can foresee their work having an impact on housing policy decisions in Canada's capital city.

"For example, the City and service providers can use our housing profile to better understand which neighbourhoods face particular issues in housing affordability and dwelling conditions, and tailor housing policies accordingly. In addition, housing advocacy groups may use our data to underscore the urgency of the city's ongoing housing crisis, creating dialogue around the issue as a vehicle for change and policy movement on the issue."

Working on tangible subjects that affect the daily lives of Canadians, such as housing and transportation, are just some of the areas tackled by CRDCN researchers.

You can read more about their work in our [collection of Research-Policy Snapshots](#), a one-page look at published research and its potential impact for policymakers. You can also review our [armchair discussions that took place at the CRDCN 2023 conference](#) on the topics of housing and health care data.

What you need to know

- Esri Canada's ArcGIS is a geographic information system (GIS) software and one of several different programs used by CRDCN researchers.
- Academic Director Andrea Craig is using the software to calculate variables in GIS data and finds the software helpful to visually represent statistics
- Kady Carr and Anzo Nguyen of the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study used the software to produce a comprehensive profile of housing in our nation's capital.

Manitoba RDC Academic Director a natural fit for the role

On July 1, 2023, leadership of the Research Data Centre (RDC) at the University of Manitoba changed hands, as longstanding Academic Director Dr. Evelyn Forget passed the torch to trusted colleague Dr. Shahin Shooshtari.

As part of our ongoing series of articles profiling CRDCN's Academic Directors, we spoke with Dr. Shooshtari about her role and the RDC at University of

Dr. Shahin Shooshtari.
Photo: CRDCN

Manitoba.

For Dr. Shooshtari, who is a Professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences, her use of the RDC both as a researcher and instructor played a part in her taking on the role.

"I was approached by Dr. Forget to assume the role when she stepped down after nearly two decades of dedicated service," says Shooshtari. "Dr. Forget selected me as her replacement, recognizing me as 'one of the most dedicated users of the RDC' due to my roles as a researcher and instructor. As an instructor, I teach a graduate-level research methods course focused on utilizing Statistics Canada survey microdata through the RDC."

The University of Manitoba RDC is home to about 100 researchers, working on about 80 active contracts, she says. The main topics of focus are mental health and economics, but she notes a few researchers are examining the topics of Indigenous populations, environmental effects on health and the housing issue.

Like all our Academic Directors and researchers, Dr. Shooshtari is eager for the launch of the virtual Research Data Centre (vRDC).

"We are excited and getting ready to take part in the virtual Research Data Centre (vRDC), which is a very exciting initiative. The CRDCN and Statistics Canada have been working with partner universities to develop this new platform, to provide researchers with access to survey microdata and other linked data across the country," she says.

Overall, Dr. Shooshtari says her goal as Academic Director is to advance the mission of the RDC and promote high-quality research to produce knowledge that is key to evidence-based policymaking and practice.

"To achieve this, we have outlined several objectives including expanding access, enhancing support, strengthening partnership, and promoting innovation. For example, we are excited [to] work with colleagues towards the vRDC to broaden access to data and resources," she says. "We hold workshops and webinars to increase awareness about the RDC and send regular updates to researchers on new datasets available at the RDC. The provision of on-site technical support by our senior data analyst, Dr. Ian Clara, has played a pivotal role in fostering disciplinary and interdisciplinary research at the RDC. Additionally, we offer the Manitoba RDC Graduate Fellowship to students utilizing Statistics

Canada microdata through our centre for their graduate work. I am fully committed to collaborating with my colleagues within the CRDCN to harness collective resources and expertise in pursuit of these objectives."

It's clear that the Manitoba RDC and its researchers have been left in good hands, with an Academic Director that has a passion for research and the advancement of knowledge.

To learn more about the Manitoba RDC and all RDCs in our network, visit our website.

What you need to know

- Dr. Shahin Shooshtari assumed the role of Academic Director on July 1, 2023.
- She was selected for the role by outgoing AD Dr. Evelyn Forget, as a long-time Network user and educator within the RDC.
- Her goal is to advance the mission of the RDC to promote the high-quality research being produced.

Canadian Public Policy journal commemorates golden anniversary

This year, the academic journal *Canadian Public Policy* will mark its 50th anniversary of publications. To help celebrate the occasion, there will be a special 50th volume launch event taking place at the Canadian Economics Association (CEA) Annual Meeting at Toronto Metropolitan University in May. The event will also feature a lecture from Donn. Feir from the University of Victoria.

Michael Veall, Academic Director of the Research Data Centre (RDC) at McMaster University and Principal Investigator of the Canadian Research Data Centre Network, also serves as the Editor of *Canadian Public Policy*. We sat down with him to discuss his role, the history of the journal and the 50th anniversary event.

"At the CEA meetings at Toronto Metropolitan University on Thursday, May 30, we are going to launch the 50th volume special issue. All of the papers in the special issue have been given as public lectures in some venue – some at the previous CEA meetings, some at the meetings of other social science organisations," says Veall.

"May 30 is the CEA's 'Embrace Day', which has an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Professor Feir's paper in the volume concerns Canada's policies towards Indigenous Nations – it was a natural choice. They have been an active CRDCN researcher in the past and I expect that research has informed their views. But this paper goes beyond data analysis and questions the foundations of the research and policy discussion on these important topics. I know that these are issues that CRDCN is actively engaging."

Speaking to the role of Editor, Veall has served in that capacity since July 2015 and expects his term to end next year in June 2025.

"Before I was Editor, I had published in the journal frequently and when I was asked, decided it was a good time for me to contribute on the editorial side," he says. "I really like the tradition of the journal as established by previous editors. It is carefully peer reviewed and nonpartisan, so we do not participate in the cut and thrust of day-to-day political discussions. But the articles in the journal inform policy by using the tools of various disciplines to explore issues in depth."

In addition to publishing in the journal and serving

as Editor, Veall has also refereed a number of papers in the journal.

The fact that the CEA is feting the journal at its annual event speaks to the longstanding ties between them.

"The initial sponsor and financial supporter was the CEA, although a number of other social science organisations were also in support," says Veall. "While economics content is the largest component, the journal remains multidisciplinary frequently publishing papers by sociologists, political scientists and others in policy-related disciplines. The founders and first two editors were the late economists John Vanderkamp and Tony Scott."

In the special 50th Volume issue being released in May, the story of how many others within the CEA contributed to the journal's long-term sustainability will be shared in an article by Herb Emery, a former Managing Editor of the journal and the current Vaughan Chair in Regional Economics at the University of New Brunswick, and Wayne Simpson, a Professor of Economics at the University of Manitoba and a Research Fellow in the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary.

Many excellent papers have been published in the journal since its inception, the most famous of which has CRDCN ties, as it was written by a longstanding former Academic Director, Evelyn Forget. In 2011, Dr. Forget, Professor of Economics and Community Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba, tackled the topic of the Manitoba basic income experiment of the 1970s.

"Professor Forget is also an RDC user and served many years as the Academic Director of the Manitoba RDC," Veall says. "The research carefully compared the hospitalization data of residents of Dauphin, Manitoba, who were all recipients of an experimental basic income during the mid-1970s, with residents of similar Manitoba towns who were not part of the experiment. The study's results are used by proponents of basic income as part of a broader argument that a basic income could improve health outcomes and reduce health costs."

Veall also notes that Forget's paper is a significant part of a long tradition within the journal of papers that study the pros and cons of various kinds of income transfer programs.

"On a different topic, in the summer/fall of 2020, the journal published three issues on the pandemic.

These issues won the journal two awards," he says. "The most influential papers studied labour market changes, documenting that the impacts of the pandemic increased inequality, correctly predicting that the pandemic employment recession would be more short-lived than was commonly expected at the time, and providing early estimates of the extent of the work-from-home phenomenon while forecasting how it would persist. One of these papers has been downloaded over 30,000 times from the journal website alone."

The journal and the CRDCN are also intertwined by the fact that many of the journal authors work in the RDCs.

"Both the journal and the RDCs attract empirical researchers. For example, in the upcoming 50th volume special issue, all but one of the eight articles have an RDC author," says Veall. "Even when such authors don't use RDC data in a particular paper, their RDC findings often influence their work."

Canadian Public Policy and CRDCN also host twice-yearly webinars that feature recent papers from the journal. All past webinars can be viewed on the CRDCN YouTube Channel, and there is still time to register for the next webinar happening on March 28.

Michael Veall, Editor of *Canadian Public Policy*.
Photo: Georgia Kirkos/McMaster University

What you need to know

- *Canadian Public Policy* celebrates its 50th anniversary this May.
- As part of the commemoration, the 50th volume issue will be released at the Canadian Economic Association meeting at Toronto Metropolitan University and Professor Donn. Feir will be giving a special lecture.
- Links between the CRDCN and CPP include an ongoing webinar series and CRDCN Principal Investigator Dr. Michael Veall serving as Editor of the journal.
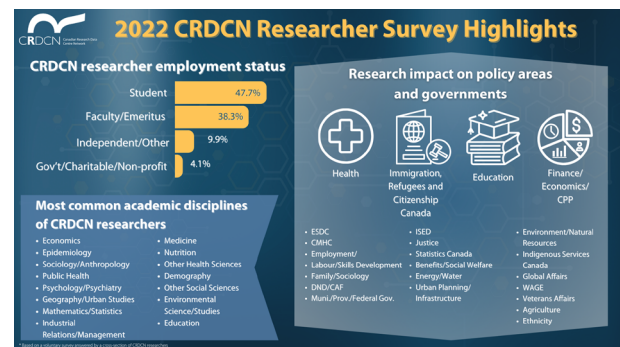
Congress Expo 2024

The Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN) will be co-hosting a booth with Coalition Publica at this year's Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Congress.

Congress takes place at McGill University in Montreal between June 12 and 21, 2024, with the CRDCN/Coalition Publica booth will be part of the Expo portion of the event between June 18 and 21.

Learn more about the Expo at Congress and see a full list of exhibitors here.

CRDCN Researcher Survey results

If you haven't already read about the results from the 2022 CRDCN Researcher Survey, this is your last chance before the 2023 survey results come out this spring! Please click it to view it in more detail.

IASSIST & CARTO 2024 comes to Halifax

Our colleagues at the International Association for Social Science Information Service & Technology (IASSIST) are headed to Halifax this May!

Hosting with the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives (CARTO), IASSIST & CARTO 2024 runs May 28-31 at the Halifax Convention Centre.

Early-bird registration is open until March 27!

The gathering will bring together Canadian and international data professionals to navigate the future of data services. The event showcases data professionals and services supporting discovery and access in data libraries, archives, services and repositories working with a range of data types and disciplines.

Register today at the official website for the event or any of the workshops. You can also view the full program and featured speakers.