



East Bound

Au tour de l'Atlantique

Talking Atlantic Books  L'édition au Canada atlantique
June 5-7 juin 2019 | St. John's, Newfoundland/Terre-Neuve

Eastbound / Au tour de l'Atlantique 2019 Conference Report

Date of event:	June 5-7, 2019
Location of event:	St. John's, Newfoundland
Number of Persons Attending:	77
Sponsors and Partners:	Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, New Brunswick's Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Nova Scotia's Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage, Innovation PEI, Department of Canadian Heritage, Province of Quebec's programme d'appui aux relations canadiennes, Marquis Book Printing, Friesens Corporation, Atlantic Provinces Library Association
Website:	www.atlanticpublishers.ca/eastbound

The annual Eastbound conference offers a venue for writers, publishers, librarians, booksellers, book media, industry infrastructure organization managers and government officials responsible for public policy relating to Canadian books and reading to come together to share their experience, knowledge, and ideas.

Though the conference encompasses a broad range of topics, each year there is a central focus to the event. In 2019, the focus was on the potential for libraries, bookstores and publishers to work together to increase public awareness of the books being written and published for local, regional and national Canadian readers, and to increase leisure reading of those books.

While most participants were drawn from the world of English-language Canadian books, the conference was bilingual and offered a unique opportunity for participants from French-language publishing in Canada. Events proved that the English-language world of books can learn much from the innovative policies, programs and structural measures which sustain and support writing and reading of Canadian books in French.

The 2019 Eastbound conference was held in St. Johns, simultaneous with the annual conference of the Atlantic Provinces Library Association. Librarians were invited to join in sessions. Three sessions were held jointly with the APLA, at their conference venue.

The data: Canadian-authored book reading in Canada

There is extensive data available on the presence of Canadian-authored books in English Canada, and important new information is becoming available to improve understanding of reading awareness and choices. BookNet Canada provides data that measures sales of Canadian-authored books in retail channels, and presented up to date data at Eastbound. Market share is 12-13% in all retail channels including independent bookstores, retail



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chains, other retailers, and library wholesalers. Independent bookstores outperform other retailers substantially, and this industry sector achieves sales of 19-20% Canadian-authored books. The independent bookstore sector is collectively a relatively small sector of all retail. Data gathered by the Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association show that independent stores account for just 13% of total book purchases in Atlantic Canada.

Public libraries are second to book retailers as a source of the books people read, but libraries reach a substantial percentage of the population across the country and in Atlantic Canada – 48% of adult book readers in the region visit a public library at least once a year, and 29% report visiting every few months. Reliable data has not been available on the role of public libraries in providing their users with Canadian-authored books. However, a new service developed and about to be launched by BookNet Canada provides librarians, and the book trade generally, with the first view of the Canadian content of the books circulated by public libraries. An early data sample compiled by BookNet and presented at Eastbound showed an average of 7% of books borrowed from public libraries were Canadian authored. This very low number attracted comment and discussion at Eastbound. There was considerable surprise that library performance differs so greatly from retailers, particularly independent bookstores. It was pointed out that there has been a substantial decline in overall reading of Canadian-authored books from the higher levels of 2005 when research measured the share at 27%.

The Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association has conducted regular book reader surveys over the past four years, and several recent surveys have gathered information on the role of public libraries. Data presented at Eastbound by APMA chief marketing officer Alex Liot went beyond showing the high use of public libraries in the region. As noted, libraries are a source of 9% of the books people read. In their presentations and contributions at Eastbound, public librarians explained how they see their role as providing readers with the books they want – responding to reader demand. The approach involves seeking to match library collections with reading tastes and interests, as documented by circulation statistics.

A second important function of public libraries documented by the APMA research is that libraries create awareness of books. Not only do they respond to demand – they create reader demand. In fact, the APMA research presented to Eastbound reports that books they discover in their library visit on the shelves or in displays (50%), even more frequently than going to borrow a specific book (42%).

The APMA research probed library users' evaluation of the books their libraries offer them to read. Library users consistently report a very positive view of library collections, supporting the view that libraries are successfully matching overall collections with reader interests – 77% report being satisfied or very satisfied with the book selection offered. However, when users are asked to evaluate the presence of local, regional and



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Canadian books on their public library's shelf, the findings show that there is considerable room for improvement. 33% of users are very satisfied with overall book selection, but only 15% are very satisfied with the selection of local, regional, and Canadian books in their library. Another 45% of users are satisfied with overall book selection, but only 33% are satisfied with the local, regional and Canadian selection.

Creating awareness of Canadian books – the role of media

Eastbound brought together some key media players responsible for generating awareness of books. The single most important media in this area is CBC, specifically CBC Radio and CBC digital. APMA reader surveys (Dec 2018) show that half of all book readers in Atlantic Canada (48%) are also active CBC audience members, with local radio (particularly morning and afternoon shows) having a larger collective reach than high-profile national radio programs. Tara Mora of CBC Books noted that CBC, as a public broadcaster, has a mission to “inform, enlighten and entertain”, and that an important component of this mission is to create awareness of Canadian authors and Canadian books, particularly emphasizing diversity in the world of Canadian writing. She noted a More Canada report recommendation that 50% of CBC book coverage be Canadian authors, and said that even though this is not currently measured she believes the current number would be significantly higher.

CBC's role extends well beyond radio coverage, of course, and includes events associated with broadcasts like Canada Reads, and an extensive digital presence on the CBC website. A single newsletter, intended for writers only, has 4400 subscribers. With 13 staff members, the CBC Books unit's main limitation on its role in creating awareness of Canadian books is the availability of resources.

Judith Periera, books editor of the Globe and Mail, explained her approach to book coverage and the balancing it involves between informing readers about international books and Canadian books. The Globe has invested in analytic software that provides feedback on readership of content relating to books, and one finding is that book reviews are the least read of the various kinds of coverage the Globe provides of books and authors. The Globe has found that its readers place high importance on its coverage of books, and this helped generate the recent decision to combine book coverage with the arts section, taking it out of its previous home in the Pursuits section of the Saturday newspaper. Globe editors are actively exploring measures to expand book coverage and to do so digitally. An example is the book club announced in 2019, with tied-in events featuring Canadian authors.

Contrasting the print coverage of books in English Canada with the situation in French Canada, participants noted that there is considerably more coverage of books and authors in the Montreal newspapers than is now found in English Canada. Nevertheless, in



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Quebec too there has been a reduction in television coverage of books, and the book world is exploring the use of digital media and social media to generate greater awareness of books, particularly targeting younger readers.

Media participants in Eastbound stressed the importance of book publishers undertaking professional, high-quality promotion of their books. The print and broadcast media are very dependent on book promoters as their source of awareness about new books.

Innovative book publishing in a digital environment

Book publishers across Canada are responding in innovative ways to the challenges created by a decline in traditional book distribution channels (particularly independent bookstores) and the rise of digital formats. Among the responses discussed:

- Self-publishing by authors, with help from book industry professionals selling specific services (like book editing and book promotion) to authors for individual book projects
- Treating new books as collectible art objects with high production values, small print runs, priced in ways that reflect their value as collectables
- Vertical integration from publishing to book retailing, traditional in many European countries, being tested by book publishers opening retail stores in Halifax and Toronto
- Extension of publishing from print to digital, and from a simple extension to ebooks to the very demanding format of audiobooks produced by the originating publisher

Innovation by media and public libraries

The Eastbound conference heard reports from broadcast media, public libraries, and publishers about innovative projects to increase awareness and reading of local, regional and Canadian books.

Newfoundland Reads. CBC Newfoundland, Newfoundland public libraries and Newfoundland publishers have worked together to do a project which parallels CBC's highly successful Canada Reads project, featuring Newfoundland writers and CBC Newfoundland. The project included an agreement to make the contending books available for unlimited ebook reading through public libraries. The participants learned from their experience about how to maximize the impact of the initiative, with a view to



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generating greater readership of the featured titles, greater awareness of the featured books, and higher sales in bookstores as well as increased circulation through public libraries.

Read Local in Nova Scotia. This project has put 1500 copies of Atlantic-published books into all Nova Scotia public libraries, and has generated a total of 37,000 circulations of these titles during the project to date since 2014. The project used a function of the Overdrive circulation management software allowing libraries to offer local content which they purchase directly from the publisher, without Overdrive earning a commission on the sale. In 2018-19 there was an experiment with a single featured title available for unlimited downloads during a week-long period, which generated 687 circulations or an average of 172 copies borrowed per title.

These projects demonstrate that innovative measures to create awareness and provide better access to local, regional and Canadian books in public libraries stimulate interest, demand, and readership. They also illustrated the complexity involved in developing successful innovations which achieve measurable results that move the needle in terms of overall reading of Canadian-authored books.

The tension between maximizing circulation and creating awareness of local/regional/Canadian books

Public library systems in Canada each have collection policies and practices. Though there are elements that are common to public library system collection policies, they are 'owned' by the library and reflect librarians' understanding of their role as public institutions accountable to a library board of citizen members, or an elected city council. Librarians differ in the specifics of these policies, and in the approach they take to explaining them to the public – and to interest groups such as writers or publishers.

This was illustrated in a panel discussion featuring managers from Halifax Public Library and the West Vancouver library. Both managers explained their approach to collection building and management that are designed to make the best possible use of available funds, to respond to the reading interests of their users successfully. The standard measure of success is circulation. Strategies to make the best use of funds for collections often include buying the widest possible range of different titles, together with the systems that move books quickly to a location where a library user is seeking that title. Librarians have to anticipate user interest and demand, making buying decisions in advance of publication of books based on what interest they anticipate for each title. Libraries are limited in their ability to generate demand for a book, since when they are successful the book is on loan, not on the shelf to create awareness (in contrast to bookstores, which use multiple copies to spark the interest of browsers).



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Library participants pointed to a simple fact about awareness of Canadian-authored books, which is the absence of any common design element to telegraph to library users (and to librarians) that a book is Canadian-authored.

The participants agreed that public libraries should be able to increase the share of Canadian-authored book reading from the 7% level documented in BookNet Canada's new library data service.

There is a dramatic contrast between the position of Canadian-authored books in English Canada and French Canada. Dominique Lemieux of the Maison de la Literature reported that in Quebec 55% of the books borrowed from public libraries are published by Quebec publishers, and 35% are written by Canadian authors.

The contrast between public libraries and independent bookstores was also highlighted by Eastbound participant Ben Minett whose bookstore in Guelph, reported that 64 of the top 100 titles in his bookstore in 2018 were by Canadian authors, representing about 30% of sales. He reported that this market share reflected the store's efforts at highlighting and promoting Canadian-authored books, and suggested that public librarians could use similar methods to achieve similar results.

Public librarians highlighted their role in promoting local/regional/Canadian authors and their books, particularly through events held in library spaces. Small regional library systems are often very active in events. The connection between events and collection decisions was not clearly addressed.

The discussion of panel members, and participation from Eastbound attendees, did not lead to any consensus outcome about how the tension between circulation maximization and creating awareness and providing access to Canadian-authored books could be easily resolved.

Bookstores as community builders

Independent bookstores declined drastically during the period when their markets were attacked by chain bookstores and online stores. A dominant retail chain, the emergence of big box retail in the book business, and the emergence of the new business model of online retail posed huge challenges. Discounts were used to buy market share. English Canada saw several hundred of independent bookstores shut their doors.

But some independent bookstores survived. Many of these survivors are now running stable businesses, that are modestly profitable. Thanks to a made-in-Canada software solution built for independent bookselling (BookManager), these stores have new efficiencies and better ways to carry on their business and to reach and hold their



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customers. In fact the independent bookstore sector is now showing growth. In many communities, there are successful startups. Bookstore closures still happen, but they are relatively rare. In Nova Scotia alone, there are three successful startups, two based in Lunenburg and one (a seasonal bookstore) in River John.

Independent bookstores are characterized by very strong connections to their local communities. These connections vary greatly from place to place, and store to store. But the overall pattern is clear: an independent bookstore is a community cultural facility, similar to a private art gallery, or to a public concert hall or theatre or library. Bookstores survive and prosper by intensifying their role in contributing to their community's cultural life. They do so in a wide and imaginative range of ways.

The Eastbound independent bookstore participants included Lexicon Books (Lunenburg), Bookmark (Halifax and Charlottetown) and Bookshelf (Guelph). A summary list of community building activities undertaken by these stores includes:

- A reading series featuring an improvisational music group and a poet duo, reading together
- A writing festival, sponsored jointly with the local public library system
- A teen book club
- Taking books to where readers are found, by attending community events and displaying, promoting and selling books as these events
- Book launches, book discussions, author readings, signings etc.
- A charity book drive, using funds from the sale of damaged books to donate to a local school
- Combining a bookstore with a café
- Combining a bookstore with a movie theatre showing indie films
- Offering theatre space alongside a bookstore for events such as burlesque shows, drag shows, and a wide range of events all tied to books
- A website and newsletter with reviews, articles, videos and podcasts by local area residents
- Multiple events of all kinds – readings, discussions, brunches, launches – featuring authors

This is not an exhaustive list. Rather, it illustrates the many ways that bookstores go beyond their base activity of offering readers a curated selection of new, recent and classic books. The list also highlights how valuable to a town or city a successful independent bookstore can be in terms of organizing a wide range of activities and events that bring community people together.

Along with these community building activities, independent bookstores are notably more successful than any other book distribution channel in generating sales of Canadian-



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authored books. They offer leisure readers, as well as professional book buyers such as public librarians, school librarians and teachers, a discovery and showcase function where potential purchasers can encounter books they want to check out, and where they can discover relevant books they are unaware of.

Public libraries and independent bookstores: capturing synergies

Independent booksellers and public librarians have a common mission: to encourage book reading, and to get interesting and appealing books into potential readers' hands. They also have a common commitment to the community where they are located. Bookstores live or die based on the support they get from their local market. Public libraries prosper when they are well supported by local municipal councils and provincial governments, and by the citizen voters those governments depend on.

It may appear that independent bookstores and public library systems live in very separate worlds. Actually, it turns out that connections are being made. Library systems sometimes look to local booksellers for advice on collection gaps, and on missing items which local readers are asking for. Libraries and bookstores collaborate on local writing festivals and events – one example is the Lunenburg Lit Fest, another is Halifax's Word on the Street, hosted by the city's library system. West Vancouver's library asks local booksellers to come to book events and sell copies of featured books. The West Van library buys its indigenous books from indigenous booksellers. Ottawa Public Library buys its French-language children's books from a local Francophone bookstore.

The outstanding example of this synergy in action, and the benefits that can flow (as well as the issues raised) is Quebec's accredited bookstore policy. Under this policy, all publicly funded institutions including school libraries, public libraries, university libraries and others are required to purchase their books from accredited Quebec bookstores. Prices are regulated by policy, so retailers cannot compete on price or discount. To benefit from this flow of public purchases, Quebec bookstores have to maintain a substantial inventory of books by international authors – and of Canadian authors. There are regulations regarding purchase and display of all new Canadian-authored books published in Quebec, and other requirements. Though the regulations are complex and tough, the bottom line is that Quebec today can count 280 accredited bookstores across the province. Virtually every town and village in Quebec has a bookstore. And those bookstores have a broad offering of new and recent Canadian and international books. (This bookstore infrastructure is key to Quebec's success in retaining high levels of reading of Canadian-authored books over the past 10 years, while their share in English Canada has declined by 44%.)

The Quebec model has had a spillover effect in Francophone New Brunswick. With no similar legal requirement to do so, public libraries there purchase a lot of their French-



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language books from local bookstores. This helps support New Brunswick's French-language independent bookstores.

Developing measures that would strengthen existing independent bookstores, and encourage startups of new stores, by channeling library purchases to bookstores that stock broad inventories of Canadian and international books is a public policy opportunity. There are many practical questions which come up as soon as this idea is tabled. Public libraries currently purchase from specialist library wholesalers and from Amazon. Libraries look to their current suppliers for more than books – the extra services can include book selection, cataloguing services, and processing of books to make them shelf-ready. Buying from bookstores would have to be coupled with measures to provide those services in a cost-effective way. Overall this is a measure that offers many appealing results – bigger and better independent bookstores in towns and cities fortunate enough to have them now, new bookstores in the many communities lacking them, a far richer array of appealing new local, regional and Canadian books on bookstore shelves for browsing, discovery and purchase, more reading of these books, more local employment, and a tighter community relationship for both libraries and bookstores.

How to address the decline in Canadian-authored book reading

The slow but steady decline in the share of leisure reading represented by Canadian-authored books in English Canada is a new topic for everyone in the book trade to address. The discussion was sparked by the research and analysis carried out by the 20+ book trade professionals who participated in think tank sessions in 2017-18, leading to the publication of the *More Canada Report* in December 2018. The report provided concrete data for a development that industry insiders had sensed, but had not been documented. It also presented an analysis of the reasons for the decline. The report also presented a large number of concrete recommendations for measures which would turn the situation around.

How is the book industry responding to the report and its recommendations?

The national publishers' association, the Association of Canadian Publishers, formed a steering committee in early 2019 which was to make recommendations on how to follow up on 38 of the report recommendations.

Eastbound participants agreed that there is a need for a single common definition of what constitutes a Canadian-authored book, and an identifying label for those books.

There is a need for a national conference bringing together booksellers, publishers, librarians, book suppliers, and others.



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There is an overall need for a marketing campaign that would reinforce the positive attitudes of Canadians towards Canadian authors and books, and which would create a new level of demand and preference for these books in the book market. A successful campaign would reinforce measures by libraries to offer more Canadian-authored books, and for large retailers to shift their policies towards favouring local, regional and Canadian books over imported titles.

Breakout sessions, allowing participants to dig into the specifics of steps that could be taken, produced a wide range of concrete ideas and actions, including:

- New collection funding for public libraries to augment the purchase of diverse, indigenous, and other Canadian authors through independent bookstores
- Measures to channel public and school library purchases through local independent bookstores
- New measures from the the Canada Book Fund administered by the federal Department of Canadian Heritage to offer bookstores access to grants to increase their current spending to promote Canadian authors and books -- \$30,000 per year was a suggested figure
- Tracking the success of independent bookstores in achieving higher sales of Canadian authored books using functionality already available to them in their BookManager software
- Enhancement of provincial cultural policies supporting measures to give local readers ample access to books by local, readers and Canadian authors in public libraries
- Measures to identify Canadian books in libraries, in library catalogues, on the shelves, and in promotions, and encouragement for libraries to highlight local, regional and Canadian titles in all their promotion activities
- Measures to give local, regional and Canadian books identity in digital book circulation systems, and to give priority to those books in the awareness and promotion activities of digital collection management systems

For concerted action to be taken across these many fields, a policy document for government cultural and economic policy-makers is needed which summarizes the situation, makes the case for new measures, identifies options, and evaluates these options. This is the background which government officials require if they are going to address this issue in a meaningful way, promptly.

Government publishing policy participants at Eastbound underlined the need for publishers and others involved in books to crystallize the analysis of the decline in Canadian authored book readership, and to formulate concrete measures