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# A more national representation of place in Canadian daily newspapers

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*In their design and content, North American daily newspapers construct a complex representation of the locality they serve and its place in the world. That construct involves the quality and quantity of local news, relative to news in other geographic categories, and how stories from each category are displayed in the newspaper's pages. This article describes a content analysis that quantified and compared the representations of locality and place in the print versions of two Canadian metropolitan daily newspapers between 1894 and 2005. The results show a marked increase in both the number of national stories and the priority given to national news in the final decades of the 20th century, mirrored by a sharp decline in the number of local stories and the priority accorded to them in the Ottawa Citizen. The same trends were seen to a lesser extent in the Toronto Star, a longtime champion of the local. The article concludes with a discussion of possible reasons for this phenomenon and its relationship to political and technological developments in the final decades of the 20th century and the start of the 21st.*

Keywords: media geography, place, local, newspapers, content analysis

## Une représentation de plus en plus nationale du lieu dans les quotidiens canadiens

*Les quotidiens nord-américains construisent, tant par leur conception que dans leur contenu, une représentation complexe de la localité qu'ils desservent et de la place que celle-ci occupe dans le monde. Celle-ci se traduit par la qualité et la quantité de nouvelles locales en proportion des nouvelles liées aux autres catégories géographiques, et par la façon dont les reportages sont classés selon les catégories et présentés dans les pages du quotidien. Cet article fait état d'une analyse de contenu visant à quantifier et comparer les représentations de la localité et du lieu dans les versions papiers de deux quotidiens de régions métropolitaines du Canada publiés entre 1894 et 2005. Les résultats révèlent que la forte croissance du nombre de reportages d'envergure nationale ainsi que la place prioritaire donnée aux nouvelles nationales au cours des dernières décennies du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, vont de pair avec la baisse nette du nombre de reportages locaux et de la priorité que le quotidien Ottawa Citizen leur avait accordée. Si on repère cette tendance également dans le quotidien Toronto Star, elle est moins prononcée compte tenu que ce quotidien a longtemps défendu les couleurs locales. L'article se termine par une discussion sur les raisons qui pourraient expliquer ce phénomène et son rapport avec les évolutions politiques et technologiques au cours des dernières décennies du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle et du début du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

Mots clés : géographie des médias, lieu, local, quotidiens, analyse de contenu

## Introduction

One of the elements long considered essential to every news story is place: the *where* in the traditional 'five Ws' (who, what, where, when, why) that

reporters are trained to include in every story.<sup>1</sup> This makes news media ideal objects of study for researchers interested in changing conceptions of place in the modern era.

Newspapers, in particular, have a long history in North America as locally based enterprises (Bogart 1989; Kaniss 1991; Dornan 2003; Wallace 2005), and

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<sup>1</sup>For example, these widely used textbooks still include the concept: McKercher et al. 2011; Harrower 2007, 2013; Brooks et al. 2010.

Canadian newspapers resemble those in the United States (U.S.) in this and many other respects (Sotiron 1997; Buchanan 2010). National newspapers, while common overseas, are relatively recent arrivals on this continent.

Thus, in the metropolitan daily newspaper in Canada, local news coexists with news from other places, constructing a representation of the locality the newspaper serves and its place in the world (Buchanan 2009).

This representation is not necessarily indicative of how *readers* perceive or relate to the locality. As Hall (1980) pointed out, media messages may be “encoded” by their senders with certain meanings and values, but they are “decoded” by individuals, each of whom brings to the reception of the message a different set of attitudes and values. Nevertheless, media representations can be helpful indicators of changing attitudes, values, and trends—in this case, concerning place and the local.

## Purpose

As a vast literature in geography, sociology, and anthropology reveals, place is an important part of the human experience (e.g., Tuan 1974, 1977; Agnew and Duncan 1989; Massey 1994). In the modern era, increasing intrusions into local space and culture by external influences, combined with easier travel and communication with distant places, have been theorized as weakening people’s ties to place (Giddens 1990, 1991) and/or changing their relationships with the local (Entrikin 1991; Massey 1994). This study set out to examine whether, and how, representations of the local place changed over the 20th century in two of Canada’s leading metropolitan newspapers.

A number of media scholars, particularly those whose work derives from the theories of Marshall McLuhan, have documented how electronic media altered human experiences of place as television became the dominant medium in the mid- to late 20th century (Epstein 1973; Meyrowitz 1985, 2005). There has been less research on changing experiences of place in newspapers, possibly because print was perceived as a static, linear medium. The work of graphic design scholar Kevin Barnhurst (1991, 1994) and colleagues helps us to envision the newspaper differently. Not linear at all, the daily press offers a graphic compendium of events and

trends, organized in a hierarchy of design by editors, whose role is as much curator as copyeditor. Each day’s newspaper is a graphic representation of a moment in time and place, arranged in accordance with the “news values” of the day<sup>2</sup>—that is, the values that guide editors in assigning stories to be covered, selecting them from among the many other sources available, including wire services, and displaying them in the newspaper (Harrower 2007, 2013; Brooks et al. 2010; McKercher et al. 2011).

Almost every list of news values includes *proximity*. That is, news editors have long assumed that people are most interested in things that happen close to home (Rosenstiel and Kovach 2007). As Barnhurst (1994) and Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) have documented, the newspaper incorporates these and other values, practices, and traditions into its design.

Taking up the challenge of examining changing news values and practices in U.S. newspapers over time, Barnhurst and Mutz (1997) performed a longitudinal analysis, over the 20th century, of how three U.S. daily newspapers covered the traditional ‘five Ws’ in every story. In the *where* category, they discovered a significant trend toward “more broadly defined locations” (p. 35). As time went by, the geographic areas depicted in stories focused less often on specific locations such as street addresses and instead on wider areas, ranging from the city or town to the state, the region, or the nation. Barnhurst and Mutz developed a “distance index” that assigned low scores to specific addresses, and progressively higher ones for towns/cities, states, regions, and nations. A graph of the mean scores on this index showed a “significant increasing linear trend toward more broadly defined locations” over time (Barnhurst and Mutz 1997, 35).

The present study examined a somewhat broader construct, one that would situate the local in relation to other places, as the newspaper does. News from all geographic categories factors into the representations of place that newspapers construct in their pages. Residents get a sense of their locality’s place

<sup>2</sup>There is a vast literature on news values. The list by Brooks et al. (2010) in their popular introductory textbook, starts with three broad criteria used to judge the news value of stories: relevance, usefulness, and interest. It lists six subsidiary elements: impact, conflict, novelty, prominence, proximity, and timeliness. Harrower (2013) lists seven criteria: impact, immediacy, proximity, prominence, novelty, conflict, and emotions.

in the wider world, how it compares to other places, as well as its past, present, and future, through news media (Burgess 1985; Eyles and Peace 1990; Massey 1994; Rantanen 2003). They participate in the “imagined community,” as Benedict Anderson (1991) defined it. Indeed, the success of the traditional, locally based North American newspaper is evidence that imagined communities are not necessarily national, as Anderson envisioned, but begin wherever news media help to tie communities together (Wallace 2005).

This research arose from a perceived lessening of commitment to locality on the part of some daily newspapers in the 1990s and 2000s, when staff cuts made it difficult to cover once-standard local beats such as municipalities and school boards (Canada 2004, 2006). While a significant body of research has addressed declining foreign news reporting by Canadian news organizations (Canada 1981; Kariel and Rosenvall 1995; Soderlund and Lee 1999; Soderlund et al. 2002; Canada 2004), the fate of local news has not received similar attention.<sup>3</sup>

A goal in taking a quantitative approach to this research<sup>4</sup> was to represent the results in a series of charts that might give clear visual evidence of the status of local news in these two newspapers over a broad sweep of time. The *proportion* of local stories, relative to those in other geographic categories, as well as the relative *priority* given to different geographic categories in the newspaper, are important elements of the newspaper’s representations of place. Through these elements, the newspaper constructs a picture of the locality and the things that happen there, in the context of the world.

## Placing the local in newspapers

To study how representations of place in newspapers have changed over time, one must first establish what forms these can take. Based on the work of Barnhurst and Nerone (1991, 2001), Nerone and Barnhurst (2003), Tuchman (1978), Walkom (1983), Kaniss (1991), and Wallace (2005), as well as

three classic works on newspaper design (Barnhurst 1994; Harrower 1998; Moen 2000), a detailed list was developed of the practices newspapers use to represent place. These take two basic forms: elements of the newspaper’s overall form or design, and elements within stories.

The sheer number of local stories, relative to those in other categories, sends a message to readers about their community’s importance in the context of the wider world. It also matters where those stories are in the paper’s design. In the modern newspaper, every story has an encoded priority that signals its place in the hierarchy of news. Key signals of priority are the size of the story’s headline and the story’s placement: What page is it on? On the front or inside? Where on the page? Other ways of flagging a story as interesting or important include giving it more space than other stories, and adding a photograph or other illustration (Budd 1964; Barnhurst and Nerone 1991, 2001; Barnhurst 1994; Harrower 1998; Moen 2000).

Some newspapers give high priority to local stories in their design, signalling their importance on the front page and in a variety of sections, from business to sports to entertainment. In Canada, the *Toronto Star* is famous for doing this (Buchanan 2009). At the opposite extreme would be a newspaper that segregates local stories from the rest, with little local news getting priority “play” on the front page or in other sections.

Photographs can also depict place, but only if context is included. If readers see largely decontextualized faces and objects, they are not getting a feel for the place where those photographs were taken (Machin 2004). Captions can help to provide context.

Other techniques for representing place occur within stories. These include placelines (also called datelines) as well as place mentions and full descriptions of places. The placeline is the capitalized place name at the start of a non-local story, indicating where the story came from. It’s a feature that many readers do not notice, but it can influence them nonetheless. Because local stories usually lack placelines, they distinguish stories about Us from stories about Them (Rantanen 2003).

The names of places—particularly when mentioned repeatedly or using alternative names—have not just locational, but also symbolic value. They often reflect local history: the names of important figures in the city’s past or present or the names of businesses, natural features, and local wildlife.

<sup>3</sup>Kariel and Rosenvall (1995) purported to study local places as well as national and international; however, they defined local stories simply as those without placelines. This study found many local stories with placelines.

<sup>4</sup>Qualitative observations were also done, but are not reported here. See Buchanan (2010) for the complete study.

These are the techniques this study focused on, whereby newspapers represent place. What is omitted also can be important. A key question in representation theory is what gets left out (Tuchman 1978; Hall 1997). Some stories are like close-up photographs, including no place at all.

## The study

Content analysis was used to collect qualitative and quantitative evidence to document trends through the entire 20th century. This method is ideally suited for systematically examining large amounts of text (Krippendorf 2004). It enabled the study to capture the “sweep of change” (Barnhurst and Nerone 1991, 2) in the variables studied over time. The analysis examined every article in each of the newspapers selected for the study sample (including columns, letters to the editor, editorials, and other opinion pieces) because local context can appear in every section. The study was microscopic rather than macroscopic: it examined a small number of newspapers in detail. But it developed a method that could be used in future to examine other publications.

Two Ontario newspapers were analyzed: the *Toronto Star* and the *Ottawa Citizen*. The *Star*<sup>5</sup> was chosen because of its express commitment to local news, which began with the hiring of Joseph Atkinson as the paper’s editor in 1899 and continued following his death in 1948. He established the Atkinson Principles, still posted on the newspaper’s website and frequently cited as its guiding philosophy (Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. 2012). As journalist Walter Stewart wrote in an article about his experiences working there, the *Star*’s primary concern in any news story is, “What does this mean to Metro<sup>6</sup>?” (Stewart 1980, 123). This philosophy made the *Star* an ideal control newspaper in that its priorities are well known, clearly expressed, and place local news high on the list.

The *Ottawa Citizen* was the most appropriate choice for comparative purposes for several reasons. It was not possible to choose another Toronto

newspaper because the only one that existed throughout the study period, the *Globe and Mail*, became a national newspaper.

Ottawa and Toronto are comparable in being capital cities—Ottawa has long been Canada’s political capital, while Toronto is the preeminent business capital of Canada. Toronto is also the political capital of Ontario, Canada’s largest province (Careless 2009). Thus, both cities have experienced comparable national and international influences—Toronto largely in business and culture, Ottawa largely in politics and culture—which other Ontario cities did not to the same extent. Another reason for choosing the *Citizen* is that it became part of the Southam chain within three years of the time the *Toronto Star* began to publish regularly: the Southams purchased the *Citizen* in 1897<sup>7</sup> and the *Star* began regular publication in 1894. This allowed comparisons between a newspaper that was independent for most of the time period under study (the *Star*<sup>8</sup>) and one that has been part of a national chain (the *Citizen*) during that time.

Because both newspapers were from Ontario, all except local stories were selected from the same basic pool. Thus, the amount of “play,” or priority, given to local news would be based on the *same set of alternatives* from other geographic categories.

The sample was drawn from three time periods, randomly selecting one “constructed week” from each paper in each time period. Thus, each time period included one randomly selected Monday (same date in both newspapers), one randomly selected Tuesday, one randomly selected Wednesday, etc., through Saturday. In Periods One and Two, there were no Sunday newspapers; in Period Three both had Sunday editions for at least part of the time, so a Sunday was added to the constructed week for Period Three.

The leading researchers on sampling methodologies for content analysis in newspapers (i.e., Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy, and colleagues—so described by Neuendorf 2002) recommend the constructed week system of randomly selecting each day from a

<sup>5</sup>The paper’s name in 1892 was *The Evening Star*, but changed in 1900 to *The Toronto Daily Star*. It became *The Toronto Star* in 1971 (Honderich 1992).

<sup>6</sup>Metro was the paper’s preferred term for the Toronto metropolitan area at the time.

<sup>7</sup>In 1897, the *Citizen* became the second Southam newspaper; the chain grew to include many Canadian dailies. The chain was sold in 1995 to Hollinger, which in 2000 sold most of its holdings to CanWest Global. In 2009 CanWest’s newspapers were purchased by Postmedia Network Inc. (Canadian Press 2010).

<sup>8</sup>TorStar Inc., which owns the *Star*, recently spawned a regional chain in Southern Ontario.

different week of the study period because each weekday's newspaper has different characteristics. A two-week sample, drawn from a single year, is usually recommended for constructed weeks (Lacy et al. 1995; Riffe and Freitag 1997; Lacy et al. 2001). Because this study examined every article in the newspaper—rather than just the front page or stories that mentioned certain words or concepts, as most content analyses do—the sample size was considered large enough with one week from each newspaper in each time period. The basic unit of analysis was the article, and there were 3,745 articles from the *Star* and 3,384 from the *Citizen*. The constructed weeks ranged from a low of 869 articles (the *Citizen* in Period One) to a high of 1,479 articles (the *Star* in Period Two). See Table 1 for details.

A further modification to the usual selection process was that each constructed week was drawn from a time period of between 30 and 40 years (Table 1), rather than a single year, on the assumption that there was a fair degree of consistency within each time period *in the indicators being measured*. It is admittedly a broad assumption, but remember that the coding focused, for the most part, on elements of design and layout. In deference to the extensive work done by Barnhurst and Nerone on the history of newspaper design in North America, this study used the time divisions they suggested for the period under study, for the evolution of modern newspaper design. These are the Victorian (which Barnhurst and Nerone call Industrial), from 1894 to 1929; Professional, from 1930 to 1970; and Corporate, from 1971 to 2005 (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001). Before accepting these time periods as applicable to Canadian newspapers, published Canadian sources were consulted to confirm that similar design features were in use at the same time (Kesterton 1967; Rutherford 1978, 1982; Walkom 1983; Sotiron 1997; Buxton and McKercher 1998).

Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) do not specify exact cut-off dates for each time period in their scheme because, they say, the transitions occurred gradually. However, the nature of this analysis required specific start and finish dates before random selection of the constructed weeks. The decisions on these start and end dates were made carefully; a short account of the reasoning follows.

The first period, the Victorian, runs from 1894 to 1929. Rutherford (1978) calls this “the golden age of the press” in Canada, an era he considered to run

**Table 1**  
The study sample

Period One: 1894–1929		
Date of newspaper	n for <i>Toronto Star</i>	n for <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>
Mon. May 17, 1920	205	203
Tues. March 21, 1905	158	132
Wed. Dec. 27, 1922	215	172
Thurs. Oct. 23, 1902	128	129
Fri. Aug. 5, 1898	43	87
Sat. Aug. 28, 1915	139	146
Total N	888	869
Period Two: 1930–1970		
Date of newspaper	n for <i>Toronto Star</i>	n for <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>
Mon. Apr. 17, 1933	29r0	196
Tues. Nov. 5, 1968	159	157
Wed. Feb. 8, 1967	183	183
Thurs. Oct. 24, 1940	336	253
Fri. June 5, 1953*		209
Fri. Jan. 22, 1954*	185	
Sat. Nov. 29, 1941	326	284
Total N	1479	1282
Period Three: 1971–2005		
Date of newspaper	n for <i>Toronto Star</i>	n for <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>
Mon. Nov. 22, 1982	148	152
Tues. March 13, 1984	276	194
Wed. Dec. 4, 2002	163	190
Thurs. April 15, 1993	202	189
Fri. May 11, 1973	218	171
Sat. Feb. 11, 1995	231	231
Sun. July 29, 2001	140	106
Total N	1378	1233
Total n entire sample: 7129	Total n, <i>Toronto Star</i> : 3745	Total n, <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> : 3384

The sample included the randomly selected dates listed above; entire editions of both newspapers were coded. n = number of articles in edition.

\*Note: An error, undiscovered until after the coding process was complete, meant the date of the Friday paper in Period Two was January 22, 1954 for the *Star*, and June 5, 1953 for the *Citizen*.

from Confederation in 1867 through to the 1930s. While other historical research does not support a single period starting as far back as 1867, a start date of 1890 or thereabouts is supported. This is a distinct period, Rutherford explains, because the print media were “almost unchallenged by other

media” (1978, 38) during this time, they were already well established in this country, and literacy rates were quite high. During this period, Rutherford does refer to a “general mutation of newspapers which began during the 1890s” which ended “during the 1920s” (1978, 48). It is this “mutation” to which other researchers have more recently drawn attention. Although their start and end dates vary somewhat, Sotiron (1997), de Bonville (1988), and Walkom (1983) lend support to the inclusion of a Victorian period with a range from 1890 to the late 1920s.

Another reason for introducing a new period in 1930 was the rise of radio, which became an important new source of news around this time, as well as newsreels in film. Period Two, the Professional era, therefore begins in 1930 and, still following the Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) scheme, runs through to the 1970s. The choice of 1970 as the end date for this period was guided by three major reports that emanated from the Canadian federal government in the latter half of the 20th century: the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media in 1970; the Royal Commission on Newspapers in 1981; and the Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications’ study of the mass media in Canada, which released an Interim Report in 2004 and a two-volume Final Report in 2006.

Technological change made the period after 1970 a new era in Canadian journalism: in the succeeding decade, newspapers began to use computers for many functions. The 1970s saw the introduction of cold type, which obviated the need for linotype machines. “For the first time in the history of mass circulation newspapers, journalists will be in a position to control the entire apparatus of production,” hailed the Royal Commission on Newspapers (Canada 1981, 185–186). In fact, Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) and McKercher (2002) document that the opposite happened: the changes ushered in more corporate control. But this was not apparent in 1981.

The year 1980 is widely considered a watershed in Canadian newspaper history because two prominent newspapers—the *Ottawa Journal* and the *Winnipeg Tribune*—were closed on the same day by different chains, leaving each city with one major newspaper where it had previously enjoyed two competitive English-language dailies. However, as the Royal Commission on Newspapers (1981) reported the following year, the changes that led to this event had begun a decade earlier. It was the culmination, rather than the beginning, of a period of newspaper

closures, mergers, acquisitions and consolidations that whittled down the number of independent Canadian newspapers from 39.6 percent of total English-language circulation in 1970 to 25.7 percent in 1980<sup>9</sup> (Canada 1981). As it turned out, 1980 was not the end of this consolidation any more than it had been the beginning. Its continuation saw the proportion of independent English-language newspapers drop to 17.4 percent in 1994, and to less than 1 percent by 2000 (Canada 2004).

All these consolidations and increases in corporate control made it apparent that the period from 1971 to 2005 was a single era in Canadian journalism, which was named Period Three: Corporate.

The random selection of the sample was done using the Microsoft Excel function called RAND-BETWEEN, which selects random numbers between two endpoints. Two columns of figures were generated for each time period: one for the week (a number between 1 and 52) and one for the year (a number between 1894 and 1929, inclusive, for Period One, for example). Thus, when selecting the Monday, if the numbers that came up first were 34 and 1898, the Monday of Week 34 of the year 1898 was selected, using the Time and Date website ([www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com)) with a custom request for a Canadian calendar with numbered weeks. This procedure was done for each weekday in each time period. If a holiday or other inadvisable date was indicated, the next set of numbers generated by RANDBETWEEN was selected instead. At least one newspaper in every season was included in each constructed week, and at least one date from each decade or portion of a decade (e.g., the 1890s was considered a decade although only the years 1894–1899 were sampled).

A total of 19 editions of each newspaper were selected,<sup>10</sup> in which all editorial content (i.e., everything except advertising) was examined: a total of 3,745 articles from the *Star* and 3,384 from the *Citizen*, resulting in a total sample of 7,129 articles. Some might consider that only 19 editions of each newspaper would not capture enough of the 112 years in the sample. However, given that each edition was from a different year, those 19 years

<sup>9</sup>An even more dramatic drop occurred in the French-language sector, where independents accounted for 50.8 percent of total circulation in 1970 but only 10 percent a decade later (Canada 1981).

<sup>10</sup>The odd number results from Sunday editions, introduced in Period Three.

represented 17 percent of all the years in the study period, and included at least one newspaper from each of the 12 decades.

The 112-year time span under study begins just as local news was becoming an important feature of metropolitan newspapers in North America (Kaniss 1991), and ends in what Giddens (1990, 1991) and others have called the late modern era. During that time, several new media came into the field: radio, television, and the Internet, each of which affected, but did not supplant, the role of newspapers. Table 1 shows the editions, dates, and number of articles for each newspaper examined.

It has been suggested that the inclusion of war years and other major world events, or national events such as Canada's Centennial, might skew the results toward world or national news. There are two answers to this objection: one, that both newspapers included the same dates with the exception of one year (Table 1). And two, that to eliminate these years would also skew the sample. Important events, be they local, national, or international, happen at many different times, and one cannot achieve a fair sampling of the news over more than a century without encountering some major events. However, an attempt was made to eliminate days when events might skew the results by completely taking over the news: for example, the days following September 11, 2001 (the World Trade Center attacks); November 22, 1963 (the first Kennedy assassination); June 2, 1953 (the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II); June 6, 1944 (D-Day in World War II). As it is obvious if some event of this sort is taking over the news that day, those papers could be eliminated, just as any paper for which every story and page was not clearly visible was eliminated, during sample collection. For these reasons, the principal investigator always had a few backup dates, randomly generated using the procedure described above, to substitute in the event that this happened.

The same problem could occur on the local front. Indeed, the *Toronto Star* from March 13, 1984, included one of the suburban news supplements the *Star* produced for a period in the 1980s. It was determined that the *Star* was producing these supplements regularly, at the time, with different ones distributed on different days of the week. For that reason, the supplement's contents were considered a legitimate part of the *Star's* local news content.

## Key concepts and their operationalization

Nerone and Barnhurst (2003, 111) call the newspaper "a network of represented relationships," which readers enter as an environment. This makes it possible to state that the newspaper on any given day offers an environment, at a fixed moment in time, in which the amount of local context can be observed and measured.

That "local context" was quantified by examining:

1. the *proportion* of local stories in the newspaper, relative to stories in other geographic categories (provincial, national, international);
2. the prominence, or *priority*, of local content relative to content in other geographic categories; and
3. how those two things changed over time.

### The priority factor

If we accept that the newspaper is a hierarchical arrangement of stories, then a change in the relative position of local news can be measured using design features as indicators. Design experts such as Barnhurst (1994), Barnhurst and Nerone (2001), Harrower (1998, 2007), and Moen (2000) point to these features, each of which was assigned points (indicated in parentheses), with the most points indicating those highest on the priority scale<sup>11</sup>:

- Headline size: largest on the page (3), medium (2), or smallest on the page (1);
- Placement on the page: top (3), middle (2), or bottom of page (1);
- Amount of space devoted to the story (column inches divided by number of columns on page), including pictures, graphics, headlines, and any portion continued on another page.
- In Periods Two and Three, stories also got bonus points for prominent placement in the newspaper as a whole: 2 points for front-page placement; 1 for placement on another section

<sup>11</sup>The Priority Factor has an antecedent in Budd (1964), who developed an Attention Score to rank the "play" that stories receive in newspapers. It assigns points for headline size, placement on the page, story length including photos or other art, and placement in the newspaper overall.



front.<sup>12</sup> These points were not applicable in Period One because for much of that time, front-page or section-front placement was not indicative of priority.<sup>13</sup>

At first, the scores were not comparable between time periods because an increasing number of design features were developed over time to indicate priority, and the lengths of individual stories increased markedly over the 20th century. The SPSS software offered a solution for this. It could take results for any category and time period, and perform a “banding” exercise to determine which totals were small, medium, or large (or for story lengths: short, medium, and long). In this way, all scores were made comparable between time periods.

### Geographic categories

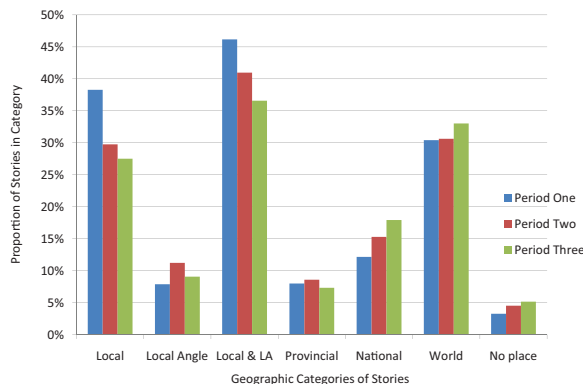
Perhaps the most important concept in this research was the idea of *local*. This was defined as the newspaper’s readership, which, when combined with the people who produce the newspaper, form what Nerone and Barnhurst (2003) call a “network of represented relationships.” The operational definition of *local* was the newspaper’s circulation area. Fortunately, there is an objective, annually updated, description of the changing circulation areas for the two newspapers in the sample. The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) has, since 1915, annually verified newspaper circulation areas and figures in Canada. There were no records prior to 1915, so the 1915 circulation area was used for the three editions in the sample from prior to 1915.

- *Local* stories were defined as ones that took place within the ABC circulation area for that year.
- The designation of *provincial* referred only to stories concerning Ontario places, provincial issues, or sports.
- Stories from other provinces in Canada (except for stories from West Quebec, which was part of the *Citizen’s* local circulation area) were coded as *national*. Stories were also coded as national if

they concerned federal politics, national business, national sports, or other events at the national level.

- *World* stories concerned international places, people, events, and/or issues—they could either be about events that happened in a country other than Canada, or stories about international affairs that took place in Canada.
- One further category was offered: *no place*. These stories tended to concern topics like fashion, cooking, health, or decorating. They could also be fiction stories that mentioned no real place.

There was one secondary geographic designation possible: *local angle*. If stories focusing on national, provincial, or international topics or events happened to occur within the local area of the newspaper, they were still considered national, provincial, or world stories. But coders were offered an additional option to designate the story as having a *local angle* if it focused on a local person, place, or issue. The story had to give particular attention to the local person, place, or issue; a mere mention was not sufficient. Such stories had a dual designation: *national with a local angle* or *world with a local angle*. In the data analysis, local-angle stories were sometimes, when appropriate, considered part of the paper’s local content for discussion purposes only. The distinction was made clear in all graphs and charts. (See Figures 1–4, noting columns Local, Local Angle, and Local & LA.)



**Figure 1**

The proportion of stories in each geographic category in each time period in the *Toronto Star*.

Note: In all figures, the category Local & LA sums the proportions in two categories (Local and Local Angle) to show all local content.

<sup>12</sup>No bonus points were assigned for placement except on a section front.

<sup>13</sup>As Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) and Canadian scholars of this period of newspaper history (Rutherford 1982; Sotiron 1997) point out, the Victorian front page was not a showpiece, but rather, the last page to be printed.

### Intercoder reliability

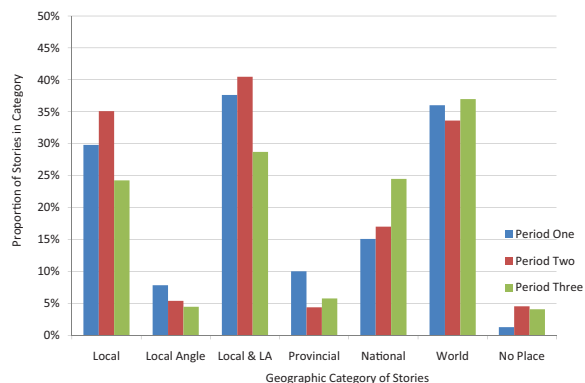
Because many of the variables in this study were being operationalized for the first time, the training period for the three coders involved testing pilot versions. The process was interactive and extensive, taking several months. Amendments to the coding scheme were made when questions proved confusing, and some questions were dropped entirely. While some variables in this study were simple facts (a story's length, a headline's size), others required a judgment on the part of coders. For example, some stories involved more than one geographic category and the story did not focus on one. A rule was made to choose the larger category (e.g., if it was provincial and national, choose national). Rules were codified to deal with such ambiguities.

Eventually, the results showed an acceptable level of inter-coder agreement, scoring a Krippendorff's *alpha* of at least .70 on each question, and an average score of 0.9284 at the start of the coding. A test done two-thirds of the way through the coding produced a Krippendorff's *alpha* of 0.8970. The decline may have been due to the length of time it took to complete the entire coding process, which was more than a year. There was no further test of reliability done after the coding was completed, as this was not generally called for in the methodological research done by the principal investigator (Lombard et al. 2002, 2005; Neuendorf 2002; Krippendorff 2004; Hayes 2005a, 2005b; Hayes and Krippendorff 2007).

## Results

The quantitative data (Figures 1–4) show marked drops in the proportion of local news and the priority given to it in both newspapers after 1970 (i.e., in Period Three). The *Citizen* shows a much larger drop. There was an equal and opposite increase in national stories in both papers. All differences between time periods in the local, local angle, and national categories were statistically significant at the  $p \leq .05$  or  $.01$  level, and in some cases, the  $.001$  level.

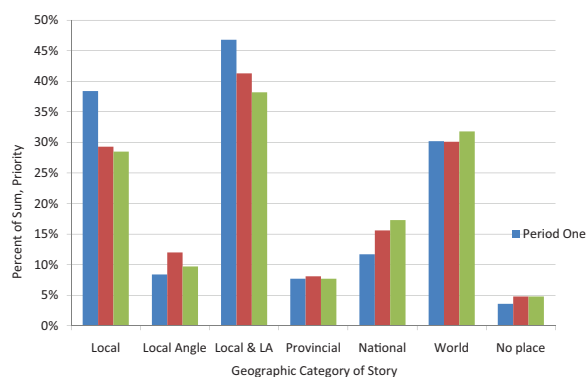
Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the proportion of stories in each geographic category. The charts show a column for each category, with the three time periods side by side for comparison. The category called Local Angle is also shown, both on its own and in the category called Local & LA, which totals all the local content in the newspaper.



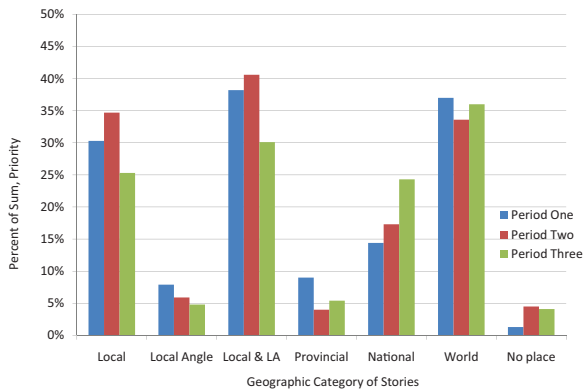
**Figure 2**  
The proportion of stories in each geographic category in each time period in the *Ottawa Citizen*.

Figures 3 and 4 show the priority given to each geographic category, using the same structure used for Figures 1 and 2. The totals were calculated as a percent of sum. That is, once the Priority Factor was calculated for each article, those scores were totalled for each geographic category in each time period in each newspaper. The total for each geographic category was divided by the sum of all the Priority Factors in that newspaper in that time period, and the dividend was multiplied by 100 to give the percent of sum.

Between Periods One and Two, one can see a decline in local content in the *Star* that does not



**Figure 3**  
The priority given to stories in each geographic category in each time period in the *Toronto Star*, using the percent of sum of all Priority Factors obtained by stories in that category.



**Figure 4**

The priority given to stories in each geographic category in each time period in the *Ottawa Citizen*, using the percent of sum of all Priority Factors obtained by stories in that category.

appear in the *Citizen*. In fact, the *Citizen's* local content, and priority given to it, increased between Period One and Two. This is largely a function of circulation area: up to 1915, the *Citizen* had a much smaller circulation area, covering only the city, than the *Star*, whose circulation area extended well outside the city. The *Citizen* expanded its circulation area after 1915 to an area comparable to the *Star's*.

This study also included a qualitative component, which examined the stories' content as well as the priority given to certain characteristics of each city, but there is not room to discuss these results fully in this article. Two interesting trends can be noted: first, a tendency to segregate local news in a special section, starting in the 1960s, rather than mixing it with other news. Second, there was an increasing tendency to use tightly focused photographs, without context, in the final two decades of the sample. For more detail on the qualitative observations and the much fuller pictures the newspapers painted of Toronto and Ottawa, see Buchanan (2010).

## Discussion

The study's basic research question—*How did the representations of place constructed by these two newspapers change over time?*—was answered clearly by the data. They became more national and less local, and both trends were substantially stronger in the *Citizen* than in the *Star*. The clear

decline in local aspects of place during the 20th century, even in the Canadian newspaper most committed to the local, is a phenomenon that should be taken seriously by all who value place and locality. That it occurred in the *Star* as well as the *Citizen* is in keeping with theories that point to the weakening and/or disruption of ties to the local as a feature of modernity. However, there are several other relevant phenomena, any or all of which may have contributed to the results.

The much larger decline in the *Citizen* could be related to chain ownership, and points to a need for further research. One can readily imagine the temptation for a national chain to produce national stories: one reporter's work can be published in every paper. Local news is more expensive: only one paper can use most stories. Yet even if further research were to demonstrate that chain ownership was part of the reason, it would not explain the decline both newspapers shared, or the fact that almost all of what was lost by local news was picked up by national.

Arguably the most interesting finding was that both newspapers were constructing more national representations of place. Why, we must ponder, did this happen? Why did it accelerate after 1970? And what else, besides chain ownership, could account for the large difference between the *Star* and the *Citizen*?

Several phenomena are likely to have influenced the results, each of which will be discussed in turn: Canada's prolonged national unity crisis, changing news values among journalists, the two papers' differing roles vis à vis non-local readers, the rise of television as the dominant news medium during Period Three, and the increasing role of digital media toward the end of the study period.

### National unity

It is no exaggeration to say that Canada, as a nation, was fighting for its life in the late 20th century. Period Three of this study kicked off in January 1971, shortly after the October Crisis of 1970, when Quebec separatists kidnapped the British Trade Commissioner and murdered a provincial cabinet minister. While the terrorist group that staged the kidnappings was essentially undone by these events, Quebec soon saw the rise of a legitimate political party working for sovereignty, and Canada's ensuing national unity crisis remains unresolved. News

coverage of these events was heavy, and most of it was classified as national in this study (Soderlund et al. 1980; Winter et al. 1982; Taras 1993).

Certainly, these events help to explain the rise in national news in both newspapers in Period Three, as well as some of the higher level of national news seen in the *Citizen*. Ottawa is both the national capital and a city located on the Ontario–Quebec border. The *Citizen's* circulation area includes a small region of Quebec, where interest in national unity stories was presumably highest. But even *Citizen* readers on the Ontario side of the border, where many work for the federal government and national organizations, would have a stronger interest in stories about these topics than would Toronto-based readers of the *Star*, located at some remove from the most severe potential impacts feared from Quebec secession.

### Changing news values

Most responsibility for constructing the newspaper's representation of place falls on the editors, who assign and select the stories and determine where they go in the paper. Changes over time in these elements often reflect changing news values. Barnhurst and colleagues' extensive research on the "new long journalism" demonstrates that evolving news values have led to different approaches to all of the "five W" elements in news stories, including the "where," which has broadened considerably. This is part of a trend toward longer, more analytical stories rather than the concise, event-centred reporting of the early 20th century (Barnhurst 1991, 2011; Barnhurst and Mutz 1997). In our sample, editors after 1970 seem to have valued a story's proximity less than did their predecessors.

It is worth noting that both the *Star* and the *Citizen* serve readerships larger than their official circulation areas, particularly since the 1990s when their content became available online. The *Star* is Canada's best-selling newspaper and has been for some time (Canadian Newspaper Association 2004, 2008; J-Source 2013). Its print edition is sold all over Ontario and in some cities outside the province, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations reports used in this study to establish circulation areas. Although the *Star* does not promote itself as a national newspaper, this province-wide readership does give it a mandate to report on events in Ontario's capital city to outsiders. The *Citizen*, as the major newspaper in the nation's capital, does not

circulate as widely in print form, but has for many years supplied national political news to the entire chain from its parliamentary bureau via an internal wire service. So while the *Star* was valued by non-local readers apparently for its local stories, the *Citizen's* national stories were presumably shared the most.

Another influence comes from television, which has contributed to what Schudson (1995) calls a nationalization of U.S. news culture. This is even more true in Canada, whose national broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada, has a requirement in its mandate to "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity" (CBC Radio-Canada 2013). Television's rise as the dominant news medium has been shown to have altered news values even among print journalists (Schudson 1995). Newspapers started to make their stories longer and more analytical, in part to differentiate themselves from television (Barnhurst and Mutz 1997). Thus, newspaper stories became, in the latter part of the 20th century, less event-centred and more focused on interpretation and context. Part of that process has been to broaden the "where" element in news stories to larger places. The shifting emphasis from local to national stories seen in this study could be an example of that trend.

Toward the end of the study period, digital media began to introduce further changes in news values and journalistic practices. Meyrowitz (2005) uses the term "glocality" to describe what is happening to people's experience of place today, when online, mobile, and social media routinely bring simultaneous communications from around the world into locally based experiences. Much like Massey's (1994) concept of disruption, Meyrowitz's glocality is a local experience layered with external inputs that alter the individual's sense of place. But Meyrowitz foresees potentially stronger attachments to place in the new media ecology (2005). This might account for the next phenomenon: the rise of "hyperlocal" news.

There has been a proliferation, in most parts of North America, of online news media serving a single suburb or several of them together (Schaffer 2010, 2012). While community newspapers have served that need for quite some time, the Internet has given community news a new name—hyperlocal—and, it might be argued, enhanced its visibility. The founders of online hyperlocal news sites claim that people want more local news than daily newspapers and local broadcasters are able to supply. They also want news that is more tightly focused on their

communities, rather than the larger metropolitan area (Schaffer 2010, 2012). It is possible that this trend has worked both ways. That is, the growth of community and hyperlocal publications might have influenced metropolitan dailies to leave the field, to some extent, and let the smaller publications take over some local coverage. This could be driven, in some cases, by the fact that some news chains own both types of publications in a single metropolitan area.

## Conclusions

The preceding discussion presented several possible explanations for the trend toward increasingly national representations of place in Toronto's and Ottawa's daily newspapers. But why does it matter? After years of laments that Canadians lacked a sense of national identity, some might find it encouraging to see more national news, and priority given to it, in two of the country's leading daily newspapers.

Yet it is important, at the same time, to consider what could be lost if this trend continues. Aurora Wallace (2005) documents the essential role of daily newspapers in building a sense of community in a variety of North American places—from the small town to the nation, from urban to suburban to rural. Phyllis Kaniss (1991) shows how daily newspapers have helped to unify large urban areas by focusing on the “symbolic capital” of the downtown, even though most readers live in the suburbs.

Local news binds communities and promotes a sense of attachment to place, in other words. What will happen if those place attachments, rather than extending to large urban areas, instead fragment onto a jumble of hyper-localities, as the new trend to hyperlocal news might portend? And what about the many areas that would be left out in such a system because they are not of interest to advertisers (e.g., Lindgren and Wong 2012)?

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) sums up the myriad cultural practices that sustain the local: customs and rituals ranging from the making of pathways, buildings, and roads, to the acknowledgment of births, marriages, deaths, and changing seasons. All these things have traditionally been documented and shared by local news.

“Locality is an inherently fragile social achievement,” Appadurai warns. “Even in the most intimate, spatially confined, geographically isolated situa-

tions, locality must be maintained carefully against various kinds of odds” (1996, 179).

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