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Canada's Academic Research and Development in UAS: A Survey

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Unmanned aerial systems (UAS) hold great promise for applications as diverse as natural resource monitoring, infrastructure inspection (pipeline, railways), agriculture, mineral exploration, journalism, and search & rescue operations. This is perhaps the most vibrant sector of the aerospace industry, growing more quickly than any other segment. It is forecast that the UAS sector will continue to experience strong growth for the next decade. Given Canada's vast geographical landscape (e.g. the Arctic) and natural resources, the Canadian commercial or civil UAS market is expected to grow rapidly. Canada has a long and successful history of leadership in aviation. Canadian companies and research institutions have also emerged to take leading roles in the growing civilian UAS research and development, nationally and internationally. This survey paper provides a recent overview of Canada's research capacities in UAS, especially to cover the landscape of Canada's academic networks, and research institutions in this area.

Keywords: survey, Canada, R&D, UAS

1. Introduction

Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) hold great promise for applications as diverse as natural resource monitoring, infrastructure inspection (pipeline, railways), agriculture, mineral exploration, journalism, and search & rescue operations. This is perhaps the most vibrant sector of the aerospace industry, growing more quickly than any other segment. It is forecast that the UAS sector will continue to experience strong growth for the next decade, and the UAS technology is positioned to become disruptive in many different application areas. While the majority of the UAS market has historically been dedicated to military and security applications, the bulk of the predicted growth will come from civilian and commercial applications. Given Canada's vast geographical landscape and natural resources, the Canadian UAS market is expected to grow rapidly. Canada has a long and successful history of leadership in aviation. Canadian companies and research institutions have actively participated in the growing civilian and commercial UAS research and development, even take leading roles in some areas, nationally and internationally.

This paper attempts to provide an overview of Canada's research capacities in the UAS sector, especially to cover the landscape of Canada's academic networks and research institutions in this area. In other words, the focus of this report is placed upon the 'research roadmap' within Canada's landscape. A long-term, more ambitious goal of such a survey exercise is to identify strategic themes in UAS research and development that are vital to build strong capabilities in selected areas with international reputation. It will also offer some guidelines to discover and create opportunities in the UAS sector that will propel Canadian aerospace companies and research community forward into a prosperous future in this field. It may encourage Canadian researchers to bring their unique expertise and collectively span all key scientific and technological areas related to the research and development of versatile UAS platforms for civil applications. With these viewpoints, the research survey will focus on the following key aspects:

- UAS research and development categorized by regions, research areas, and development applications;
- a list of Canada's major academic units, and research institutions that have a dedicated UAS portfolio; and
- statistical data analysis based on the roadmap.

2. Scope and Method of Survey

The survey is conducted to cover research and educational institutions and academic networks (centres) in Canada. The scope is limited to search for staff members of research interests, expertise, or affiliation with the UAS sector. Please note that industry players in the UAS sector are very active and are often taking a leading role in research and development, especially at the higher technical readiness levels (TRL) in terms of product or service development. The industrial activities are not included in our survey, as our mission is to build the research capacity roadmap from academic perspective. We have taken the

following search approaches to build our database:

(1) a thorough search of UAS related research was conducted through the website of the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) of Canada (2013-17)[a], where research grant competition results are available to public;
(2) a comprehensive search of UAS related research was conducted going through postsecondary institutions (universities and colleges) across Canada, based on the "Universities Canada"[b] membership list, as well as provincial list of educational institutions;
(3) a representative search of technical publications by Canadian authors on topics related to the UAS research, by going through two major professional societies' publication archives in the field: the International Electrical and Electronics Engineering (IEEE: IEEE Explore), and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA: AIAA ARC).

Based on the above scope of search, the rest of the report is divided into four sections. Section 3 covers Canada's research capacity in the category of UAS development disciplines, where the subjects are classified by aeronautical science and engineering disciplines. Section 4 presents Canada's research capacity in the category of UAS application areas, including both commercial and defence domains. Section 5 describes Canada's research capacity categorized by the geographical landscape. Finally, Section 6 makes a list of major academic units, research centres or networks that have a dedicated UAS portfolio.

3. Research Capacity by UAS Development Disciplines

First, we categorize Canada's UAS research capacity by the following development disciplines, where the subjects are classified according to standard aeronautical science and engineering disciplines:

- aerodynamics (AER),
- guidance, navigation and control (GNC),
- aircraft design and manufacturing (ADM),
- propulsion (PRP),
- structures and materials (SNM), and

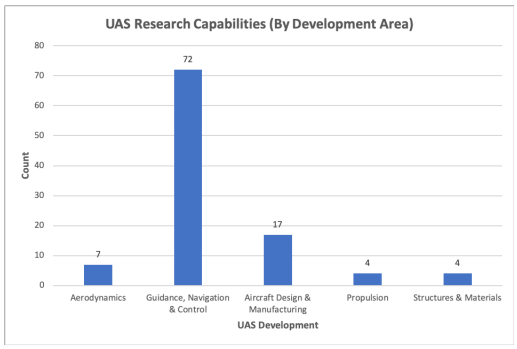

Fig. 1. UAS research by disciplines

These research and development areas are categorized for two reasons: 1) they cover technology disciplines that are common in aerospace science and engineering, therefore they are compatible and convenient for comparative study; 2) these technical areas are considered directly contributed to UAS development. It helps to distinguish from R&D related areas that are user-based, application oriented. The latter scenario will be covered in the next section. Based on the scope of search, 127 researchers are identified to have UAS portfolio, where 104 researchers are involved in the UAS development categories.

7 out of 104 researchers are identified in 'aerodynamics'. The UAS aerodynamics research and projects include: Aerodynamic characterization and improvement of an unmanned helicopter (Ghaemi); Multidisciplinary Design Optimization (Suleman); Whirl-tower Open Loop Experiments and Simulations with an Adaptive Pitch Link Device for Helicopter Rotor Vibration (Nitzsche); Climatic Wind Tunnel, Hemi-Anechoic Chambers, shaker table, UAS Testing Ground, UAS Proving Ground (Ekmekci); Drones for enabling computational environmental flow dynamics studies (Bitsuamik).

4 out of 104 researchers are identified in 'propulsion'. The UAS propulsion research and projects include: Multidisciplinary design optimization of UAVs (Suleman); Hybrid Power Plant Design (Gueaicb); Dynamic Characterization of Brushless DC Motors and Propellers (Lanteigne); Fuel cell power systems for UAS applications, Lightweight High-Performance Fuel Cells for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Propulsion (Zhou).

4 out of 104 researchers are identified in 'structures and materials'. The UAS structures and materials research and projects include: Composite Materials (Mertiny); Multidisciplinary design optimization of UAVs

[a] *http://www.nserc.ca*

[b] *http://www.univcan.ca*

(Suleman); Printed unmanned aerial vehicles using paper-based electro-active polymer actuators and organic ion gel transistors (Grau).

Quite a few (17 out of 104) researchers are identified in 'aircraft design and manufacturing'. The UAS design and manufacturing research and projects include: Scalable Highly Maneuverable Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for Confined Spaces (Ramirez-Serrano); Multidisciplinary design optimization of UAVs (Suleman); PrecisionHawk conducted to improve the state of the art in UAS systems, remote sensing and airspace safety (Furgeson); Marine Robot Autonomy, Developement of Autonomous Vehicles (Sato); Design and Manufacturing of Biologically Inspired Micro Aerial Vehicle Wings Using Rapid Prototyping (Laliberte); Design of a Novel Auto-Rotating UAS Platform for Underground Mine Cavity Surveying (Marshall); Design, Construction and Testing of a Novel UAS Platform for Cavity Surveying (Mitchell); BitDrones: Towards Using 3D Nanocopter Displays as Interactive Self-Levitating Programmable Matter (Vertegaal); Design and testing of foam-inflated wings for small unmanned aerial vehicles, study of Micro Aerial Vehicles in Confined Spaces (Bramesfeld); Omnicopter, Disturbance Rejection (Nokleby); Long-range Communication Framework for Autonomous UASs, Design and Control of a Quadrotor Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, UAS Based System for Real Time Flash Flood Monitoring in Desert Environments Using Lagrangian Microsensors, Hybrid Power Plant Design (Gueaieb); Hybrid power plant, energy efficient path planning, trajectory optimization, pitch control of tilting bi-rotor, Dynamic Characterization of Brushless DC Motors and Propellers, Height Estimation of a Blimp Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Using Inertial Measurement Unit and Infrared Camera (Lanteigne); Synchronized Swarm of Unmanned Vehicle Systems for Large-Scale Dynamic Applications, Forest Fire Monitoring, VTOL fixed-wing AV, Formation Control, Autonomous Soaring SUrveillance, Visual-based surveillance and sensing using multi-UASs, Fault-Tolerant Control (Liu); Printed unmanned aerial vehicles using paper-based electroactive polymer actuators and organic ion gel transistors (Grau); Aircraft Modeling and Simulation (Botez); UAS for water survalliance (Pomeroy).

The majority of researchers is identified in the development category of 'guidance, navigation and control', which is not surprising. GNC has played a critical role of providing enabling technology in the UAS research and development. Instead of covering every single research topic, projects are divided into the following subjects:

- vision-based (enhanced) research to enable/improve autonomy (Barczyk, Barfoot, Kelly, Dudek)
- UAS in unstructured (uncertain, confined, GPS denied) environment (Lynch, Ramirez-Serrano, Bramesfeld, Mehrandezh)
- UAS Navigation (Barczyk, Furgeson, Li, Atia, El-Rabbany, Nokleby, McCabe, Waslander)
- path planning (Sasiadek, Lanteigne, Liu)
- collision/obstable avoidance (de Ruiter, Liu, Desbiens)
- UAS performance (Vaughan)
- localization and mapping (Najjaran, Kelly, Polushin, Jenkin)
- flight control (Shi, Liu, Zhang, Mann, Etele, LiuX, Givigi, LiuG, Schoellig, Maggiore, Mills, Berkane, Roberts, Nahon, Sharf, Ny, Paranjape)
- sensing (Al-Tahir, Coleman, De Silva, Gong, Straznicky, Glen, Armenakis, Mackenzie, Remmel)
- coordination, formation, cooperation (Liu, Mann, Pan, Tayebi, Kirubarajan, Cheng, Shen, Abdessameud)
- operations (O'Young)
- intelligent algorithms (including NN, AI) (Liu, Schwartz, Ouyang, Necsulescu, Meger, Eramian)
- Simulation, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, (Chung, Botez, Grant)
- communicaitons (Gueaieb)

4. Research Capacity by UAS Applications

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) hold great promise for applications as diverse as natural resource monitoring, infrastructure inspection (pipeline, railways), agriculture, mineral exploration, journalism, and search & rescue operations. This is perhaps the most vibrant sector of the aerospace industry, growing more quickly than any other segment. In our survey of Canada's research capacity in the category of UAS applications, the similar pattern was discovered. The following 8 subjects are covered for potential applications, out of 89 applications specified:

- infrastructure
- environment
- natural resources
- agriculture
- public safety
- delivery
- defence (military)? and
- arts

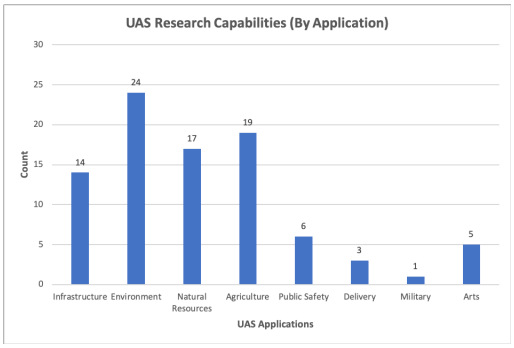

Fig. 2. UAS Research by Applications

Infrastructure applications include but not limited

to: pipeline inspection, power line inspection, construction, mapping. Some projects are:

- innovative mapping applications (Wang, Najjaran)
- remote sensing (Fisher, McLeod, Armenakis, Zhang, Théau)
- terrestrial photogrammetry (Tannant, Ferworn)
- special (inaccessible, indoor) infrastructure (Hildebrand, McCabe)

Environment applications include but not limited to: Disaster Monitoring, Forestry, Hydrology, Wildfire, Wetland Inspection, Environment Monitoring. Geography, geology are also categorized here. Some project topics include:

- image and video analysis (Ray, Robichaud)
- intelligent algorithms (include DL, AI) (Ray, Meger, Théau)
- mapping, survey (McDermid, Shahbazi, Hill, Shaw, Shea, Jenkin)
- remote sensing (Eaton, Daggupati, Armenakis, Pomeroy)
- precision applications (Leblon)
- modeling, database (Kovacs, Aaron)
- GNC (Liu, Zhang, Schoellig)

Natural resources applications include but not limited to: mining, wildlife. (McDermid, Shahbazi, Wang, Reich, Coops, Hunt, Najjaran, Runesson, Dech, Braun, Hassanein, Marshall, Mitchell, Franklin, Schoellig, Théau

Public Safety applications include but not limited to: search and rescue, surveillance (Najjaran (Liu, Armenakis, Jain, Mehrandezh, Paranjape).

Agriculture applications include but not limited to: farming. Examples include: vineyard (Jamieson), cattle (Church), precision agriculture (Leblon, Walters), soil moisture/nutrient (Aaron), vegetation (He).

Arts applications loosely assemble the following: media, culture, entertainment, journalism.

5. Research Capacity by Regions

Given Canada's vast geographical landscape (e.g. the Arctic) and natural resources, the Canadian commercial or civil UAS market is expected to grow rapidly. Canada has a long and successful history of leadership in aviation. Traditionally the aerospace sector is concentrated in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. As UAS research and development emerges, we are pleased to find that research activities are active across provinces, becoming a national trend.

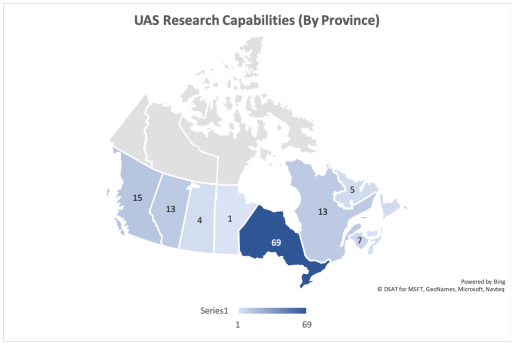

Fig. 3. UAS Research by Regions

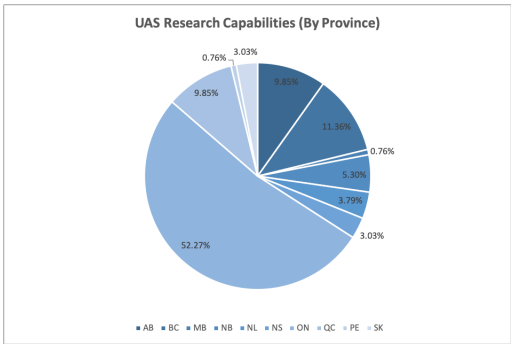

Fig. 4. UAS Research by Regions: Distribution Percentage

Please note, the distribution may not be accurate for a couple of factors. 1) it has a bias weight reporting on the province of Ontario, due to the author's personal knowledge; 2) the researchers in Quebec are much smaller than expected, perhaps due to language barriers during the scope of search.

Based on the previous survey of research capacities in terms of disciplines and applications, the regional distribution can further be broken down into their respective development disciplines and applications, give a more comprehensive perspective.

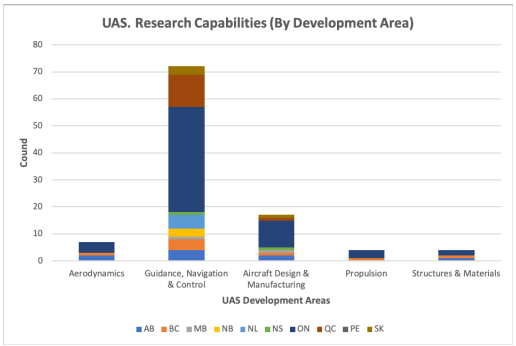

Fig. 5. UAS Research by Regions with Development

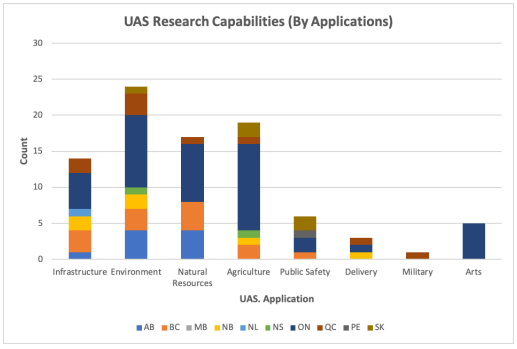

Fig. 6. UAS Research by Regions with Applications

Canadian researchers have emerged recently to take active or even leading roles in the growing civilian UAS market nationally.

6. UAS Flight Training Schools

UAS training has become a critical component in the market. We added a new survey of drone flight schools across the country, discovering the total 97 flight schools. It also indicates the active development in Canada in this sector.

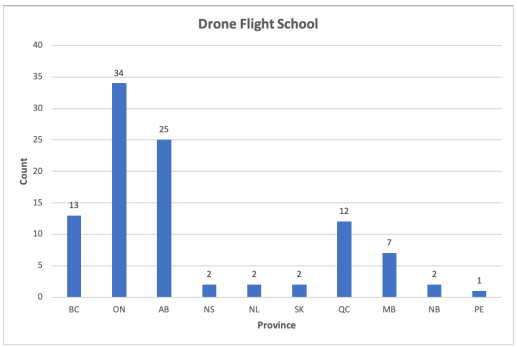

Fig. 7. UAS Flight Training Schools

[c] *http://carre.utoronto.ca/*

[d] *http://www.uvic-cfar.com/index.html*

[e] *http://ace.uoit.ca/uav/index.php*

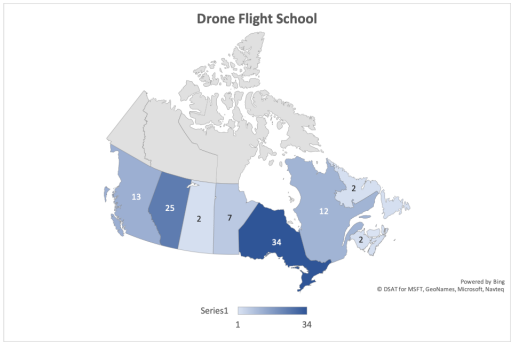

Fig. 8. UAS Flight Training Schools by Provinces

7. UAS Research Centres and Specialist Groups

Based on the scope of search, a number of UAS research centres, specialist groups are identified with dedicated UAS profile. The following list is organized alphabetically.

CARRE [c] The University of Toronto's Centre for Aerial Robotics Research and Education (CARRE) was established in May 2015 to meet the demand for engineers and scientists with the highly interdisciplinary training needed to contribute to the burgeoning field of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and aerial robotics. The objective of CARRE is to become an internationally-recognized centre for aerial robotics and the nucleus of aerial robotics research and teaching at the University of Toronto. The development of commercial UASs requires a broad array of technical skills, across multiple disciplines - CARRE brings together aerodynamicists, structural designers, materials engineers, propulsion experts, control specialists, and roboticists, to design and develop state-of-the-art aerial robotic platforms. CARRE is able to leverage the range of expertise available at UTIAS, partner institutions, and industrial collaborators.

UVic CfAR [d] The UVic Center for Aerospace Research is an organization devoted to the promotion of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for commercial and research applications. UVic CfAR is available to partner with industry in order to apply research in the area of unmanned aircraft to real world applications. UVic CfAR develops application specific solutions using our wide range of capabilities and industrial partners. This includes design, ground and flight based testing or manufacture.

The **ACE Centre for UAV Research**, located at the University of Ontario Institute of Science and Technology [e] utilizes the most sophisticated climatic wind tunnel and testing chambers in the world to push the UAS industry into new territories. At this epicenter of UAS research and product development, [the centre] helps researchers and manufacturers discover what it takes to handle the harshest climates on earth from frigid northern storms to the hottest desert heat.

Centre for Innovation and Research in Unmanned Systems. [f] Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) is supporting innovation and new technology development through its Centre for Innovation and Research in Unmanned Systems (CIRUS). Researchers with SAIT's Applied Research and Innovation Services department, faculty from SAIT's School of Construction, students and industry partners converge in this cross-disciplinary environment to address challenges, create efficiencies, and develop and test new products and applications. CIRUS will expand the role unmanned systems play in data acquisition and management, and create organizational efficiencies across a variety of sectors and regulatory environments.

The **Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems** (CCUVS) [g] is a federally registered not for profit company (2007), located in Medicine Hat, AB whose purpose is to facilitate sustained, profitable growth in the Canadian civil and commercial unmanned systems sector. CCUVS is governed by a Board of Directors, drawn from across Canada, representing academia, industry and government and working primarily in the air unmanned systems environments. Head office staff members are based in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

National Research Council Canada's **Civilian Unmanned Aircraft Systems program**. *https://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/index.html*

Unmanned aviation systems have the potential to accomplish tasks faster, safer and more reliably than their manned equivalents. The Civilian Unmanned Aircraft Systems (CivUAS) program proactively aims to develop, advance, de-risk and certify innovative UAS solutions for key industrial sectors in Canada. With a proven ability to partner with industry on research and technology development across multiple disciplines, the CivUAS program plays an important role in supporting the emergence of unmanned flight into the commercial aviation sector. The program further offers an unmatched technology infrastructure and complementary technical expertise that will foster the integration of UAS technology into key sectors such as oil and gas, defence and security, agriculture, natural resources and critical infrastructure environment.

The **Uninhabited Aircraft Systems Training, Innovation and Leadership Initiative** (UTILI) [h] is lead by Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, Queens University, ÉTS, and Universit de Sherbrooke. In this Industrial-stream CREATE program, running from 2019 to 2025, it will "train engineers and scientists in the safe and effective operation of Uninhabited Aircraft Systems (UAS) or 'drones' ".

It is worth pointing out the following organizations and societies that are affiliated with UAS research and development in Canada.

- **Transport Canada** [i] is a federal institution, "leading the Transport Canada portfolio and working with our partners. Transport Canada is responsible for transportation policies and programs. We promote safe, secure, efficient and environmentally responsible transportation". TC is actively involving government, academia, and industry to develop the policies and guidelines in the UAS sector.
- **Unmanned Systems Canada** [j] Mission statements: "to represent the interests of the unmanned vehicle systems community which includes industry, academia, government, military, and other interested persons; to promote public awareness, education and appreciation for the Canadian unmanned vehicle systems community to itself, to Canadians and worldwide."
- **Standards Council of Canada**[k] The Standards Council of Canada (SCC) is a federal Crown corporation responsible for promoting standardization in Canada. It reports to Parliament through the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. It

[f] *http://www.sait.ca/*

[g] *http://www.ccuvs.com/*

[h] *https://carleton.ca/utili/*

[i] *https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/transport-canada.html*

[j] *https://www.unmannedsystems.ca/about-us/*

[k] *https://www.scc.ca/en/about-scc/what-we-do*

leads and facilitates the development and use of national and international standards and accreditation services in order to enhance Canada's competitiveness and well-being. Its mission "involves working with our stakeholders and customers to promote efficient and effective standardization that strengthens Canadas competitiveness and social well-being. Everything we do is aimed at improving Canadians' quality of life." The TC20/SC16 Unmanned aircraft systems is the Canadian mirror committee representing Canada in the International Standards Organization (ISO) for UAS standards development.

- **Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute** [l] Vision and Mission: "to advance the art, science, engineering and applications relating to aeronautics, space and related technologies in Canada; to provide a focus for communications and networking for aeronautics and space communities in Canada; to assist members in developing skills, exchanging information, and sharing talents in their areas of interest; to promote Canadian competence and international competitiveness in aeronautics, space and related technologies and their applications; to foster national pride and international esteem for Canadas accomplishments in aeronautics, space and related technologies."
- **Aerospace Industries Associations of Canada** [m] AIAC is the voice of Canada's aerospace industry. The mission is "to understand, build consensus and provide leadership on policy issues of interest to the industry, also work to increase Canadas profile on the world stage by communicating our air and space accomplishments and by promoting Canadian aerospace companies in foreign markets."

8. Conclusions

This article presents the landscape of Canada's research capacity in Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) development. The coverage is described by three different perspectives: development disciplines, applications, and regions. In terms of disciplines, the roadmap is charted 5 major technical aspects: aerodynamics (AER), guidance, navigation and control (GNC), design and manufacturing (ADM), propulsion (PRP), and structures and materials (SNM). The research focus is placed on GNC (68%), the research direction points to the integration of UAS, and intelligence of UAS development. In terms of applications, the roadmap is charted by 9 commercial and civil application domains, including infrastructure, environment, natural resources, agriculture, public safety, delivery, arts and defence (military). Research and development is consistent with Canada's landscape and resources, over 83% applications cover infrastructure (16%), environment (27%), natural resources (19%), and agriculture (21%). In terms of regional distribution, the findings are: 53% located in Ontario. The rest are evenly distributed between western (AB, BC, MB, SK 24%) and Quebec and maritime provinces (22%).

Acknowledgement

This paper was originally developed as a report commissioned for Transport Canada's Innovation Policy Directorate to provide an overview of Canada's research capacities in UAS in 2018. With rapid growth in the field, much update has been made since and is presented here in this paper. The author would like to acknowledge his graduate students in the updated version of 2020 - Ms. Shangyi Xiong and Ms. Han (Flora) Fu, for their data collection, as well as the graduate students in 2018 for their initial data collection and analysis, Ms. Han (Flora) Fu, Mr. Joshua Furtado, Mr. Silas Graham, Mr. Blago Hristovski, Ms. Katharina Krieger, Mr. Kelvin Wu, and Mr. Yih Tang Yeo.

Hugh H.T. Liu is a Professor of the University of Toronto Institute for Aerospace Studies and currently serves as the Director of the Centre for Aerial Robotics Research and Education (CARRE).

[l] *http://www.casi.ca/*

[m] *http://aiac.ca/*