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Introduction Grey Literature

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0.1 Definitions

Knowledge generation in any field of studies begins with clear, accepted or at least conventional definitions of terms. Through the years, a number of uncontrolled terms have been used to describe the phenomenon of grey literature. This has not really contributed to the understanding, use, and application of grey literature. In 1997, the definition of grey literature often referred to as the ‘Luxembourg Convention’ took a sharp turn – emphasizing for the first time the supply side of grey literature, that is its production and publication both in print and electronic formats. This break from the previous quarter century, which narrowly focused on the demand side and the problems of bibliographic control, indexing, cataloging and retrieval finally placed grey literature in its fuller perspective.

The definition of grey (or gray) literature accepted during the Third International Conference on Grey Literature in Luxembourg reads “… that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers”.

During the Sixth International Conference on Grey literature in New York City, a postscript was recommended to that definition and shortly thereafter added: “i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body.”

Another definition is from the U.S. Interagency Gray Literature Working Group, "Gray Information Functional Plan," 18 January 1995, which defines grey literature as "foreign or domestic open source material that usually is available through specialized channels and may not enter normal channels or systems of

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publication, distribution, bibliographic control, or acquisition by booksellers or subscription agents".3

In fact, the term traditionally covers three categories of documents – conference proceedings, reports and doctoral theses – often printed in small numbers. Nevertheless, the borderline with “white” or “conventional” literature is permeable, since some conference proceedings are published by commercial publishers as monographs or in serial publications such as journals. The same holds true for some reports. Likewise for doctoral theses, especially in the humanities and social sciences, some are found on the commercial publishing market.

However, regarding the multitude of other documents that circulate outside conventional publishing, the lack of “commercial control” raises real problems for academics and scientists as well as for information professionals when it comes to locating and acquiring them. The lack of “commercial control” and promotion also often implies a lack of “bibliographic control”. In other words, these documents are often inadequately referenced in catalogues and databases, so that searches through this category of scientific information require specialized knowledge on sources and grey circuits.

0.2 A short history

Library and information professionals have been contributing to studies on grey literature for nearly 30 years now, compiling a rich corpus of articles, reports and conference papers.

The Grey Journal from TextRelease/GreyNet in Amsterdam, the only current journal dedicated to this topic, published some 100 articles since 2005. Another serial, The International Journal on Grey Literature, was edited by Emerald (former MCB University Press) but ceased publication in 2001. Most other articles on grey literature are published in serials in library and information sciences or journals from other scientific domains such as The Lancet, Marine Policy, or European Psychiatry. And to date, only one other monograph has been published on grey literature.4


The more than 250 authors and researchers in the field of grey literature, who have contributed to the above conference programs form as it were the WHOIS in Grey Literature along with the host and sponsoring organizations, whose financial contributions guarantee the continuity and longevity of research programs and projects in the various sectors of government, academics, business and industry.

The TextRelease website provides biographical notes for over 75 academics, scientists and professionals who work and publish in the field of grey literature.

Five outstanding personalities made lasting contributions to specific areas in the field of grey literature in the four decades from 1960 to 2000: Alvin M. Weinberg (United States) author of the famous “Weinberg Report”, Vilma Alberani (Italy) organizer of a national program for grey literature, Charles P. Auger (United Kingdom) who provided the first Roadmap of Grey Literature Systems and Services, Ulrich Wattenberg from the German Max-Planck-Gesellschaft who specialized in the infrastructure of grey literature for the Japanese scientific and technical information, and Andrei Zemskov (Russia) from VNTIC, the National Public Library for Science and Technology, where he explored the free access of information and grey literature.5

We can distinguish five periods for the development of research and the development on grey literature.

1. They begin with the years leading up to 1979 in which numerous uncontrolled terms such as ephemera, fringe literature, fugitive literature, non-conventional literature, non-published literature, report literature, research outputs, small-circulation literature, unconventional literature, unpublished literature, etcetera were coined to capture the growing phenomenon.

2. The period 1980-1990 covered the development and launch of national and international programs on grey literature (1985 is the year in which the European network EAGLE was created).

3. 1990-2000 included the creation of GreyNet, the Grey Literature Network Service (1993 is the year in which the first international conference on grey literature was convened).

4. The years 2003-2005 covered the re-launch of the Grey Literature Network Service showcasing new projects in the context of the explosion of digital resources, the movement for open access to scientific and technical information, and the Web2.0 (these research results were presented at GL conferences in Amsterdam 2003, New York 2004, and Nancy 2005. This growth occurred notwithstanding the fact that EAGLE and its SIGLE database (System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe) was discontinued in 2005.

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5. The current timeframe from 2006 onward is one in which new cooperative research initiatives in the aftermath of EAGLE-SIGLE are on the rise.

One of the recent projects is the OpenSIGLE project, an initiative powered by INIST (France) to provide access to former SIGLE records in an open source context. In the spring of 2008, GreyNet signed on to the OpenSIGLE Repository in order to preserve and make openly available research results originating in the International Conference Series on Grey Literature. And, in so doing, the OpenSIGLE Repository has become the intersection of more than 25 years of bibliographic information on grey literature with 15 years of research in the field.

Another initiative is the collaboration of researchers in the field of grey literature on institutional levels involving cross-country and international partnerships. And yet another recent initiative was the pilot for a distance learning course on grey literature for (post)graduate students, one that was accredited by the University of New Orleans (UNO) and which is now available to other academic institutions.

0.3 Typology

We indicated earlier that the term grey literature traditionally refers to reports, conference proceedings and doctoral theses.

Reports are the most numerous by far among the different types of grey literature in the OpenSIGLE database. But the ‘reports’ category covers a wide variety of very different documents: institutional reports, annual or activity reports, project or progress reports, technical reports, reports published by ministries, laboratories or research teams, etc. Some are disseminated by national and international public bodies. Others are confidential, protected, or disseminated to a restricted readership, such as technical reports from industrial laboratories. Some are voluminous, with statistical appendices, while others are only a few pages in length.

In the other categories, citation analyses offer a tremendous range of grey resources. Besides theses and conference proceedings, they also include unpublished manuscripts, newsletters, recommendations and standards, patents, technical notes, product catalogs, data and statistics, presentations, personal communications, working papers, house journals, laboratory research books, preprints, academic courseware, lecture notes, and so on. GreyNet in fact maintains an extensive online listing of document types, which are categorized as grey literature.

6 See chapter 9 in this monograph.

However diverse, these documents all share one thing in common, they contain unique and significant scientific and technical information that is often never published elsewhere. The lack of descriptive referencing and adequate circulation is therefore, as we have said earlier, a real problem for scientific communication.

The Internet, however, is now altering the entire landscape. Not only because of changing user behavior, but also, and especially, because more and more grey literature is being published on the Web. As one study from the German Centre for Information in the Social Sciences has pointed out, the switch from paper to digital does not necessarily mean that more grey literature is appearing. Instead, the Internet has radically changed access and distribution methods, accentuating the ephemeral and volatile nature of grey literature. This same study also drew attention to the fact that many journals and the journal articles contained therein can be categorized as grey literature i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body. The fact that in Europe, for more than two decades the SIGLE database did not identify journals and journal articles as grey literature may account in part for the apparent neglect of these two types of grey documents.

And yet, another special type of grey material is also likely to gain more importance. Until now, raw data – the basis for many scientific publications – are widely unpublished and inaccessible. Today, public research organizations are starting to develop national and international strategies for the control and archiving of these files, the data, and statistics.

0.4 Challenges

Grey literature will remain a challenge for information and documentation professionals as well as an interesting field for research activities in at least six areas:

The need for a new definition: The traditional definition of grey literature needs to be further refined and/or redefined by way of an accurate analysis of new means of access and distribution, in line with Mackenzie Owen’s observation that “Grey does not imply any qualification (but) is merely a characterization of the distribution mode”. What we see is that the current ‘Luxembourg’ definition moved from emphasis on the acquisition of grey literature to the production of grey literature. And now, the definition should reflect both.

The need for a new ‘value chain’: In the Netherlands, Roosendaal has in the past few years, been examining the process whereby universities re-appropriate publications. In his work, he highlights the radical changes taking place in the

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The ‘value chain’ of scientific publication. This type of research and evaluation of scientific publications brings to the forefront major issues in the context of emerging STI trends. What is the future of peer review? Which “quality label” applies to working papers or scientific communications on blogs or in open repositories? Does the community approach of Web 2.0 offer a viable solution for the need for quality standards of non-commercial STI materials? The impact of new technologies in information and communication on the dissemination of non-conventional literature is a complex matter and the potential field for research is vast. To date, research and analyses have only broken ground giving way to a vast and virtually untapped field of investigation.

The need for an economic model: Collecting, distributing and searching grey literature all come at a price, which may in fact be much higher than for journal article and book searches. To date, there is no clear economic model in this area and further analysis is needed in terms of investments, direct and indirect costs, acquisition prices, and the like. The case of EAGLE underlines the need for public funding and a sustainable economic model to guarantee the bibliographic coverage as well as full-text, enriched dissemination of grey literature.

The need to oversee archiving practices: New technologies for information and communication facilitate resource archiving in general, and there is strong incentives from the “open access” movement. Nevertheless, the question of “who should archive what, where, when, and for how long” has remained largely unanswered. Aware of information policy and the concomitant financial aspects involved, answers are rather urgently needed, even if they now were only able to address part of grey literature resources.

The need to clarify the legal aspects: The legal status of grey resources and rights in their use (deposit, archiving, distribution, etc.) is a major challenge for the future of this form of STI publishing. The national and international legal environment is evolving rapidly, and all restrictions, exceptions and technical constraints (e.g. digital rights management, interoperability etc.) of the new laws on intellectual property, author’s rights and copyright also apply to grey resources. Nevertheless, very few documentary analyses have addressed legal aspects in the field of grey literature and their subsequent economic consequences.

The need for education and training: Over the past years, training courses, guest lectures, seminars and workshops have been organized by information professionals on the topic of grey literature. Most of these endeavours have undoubtedly had some impact on this field of information. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, an accredited college course on grey literature is carried out via the University of New Orleans’ (UNO) distance education program since 2007. Education and training is fundamental to the future of grey literature - not only for LIS students and their instructors but also for information professionals and practitioners in government, as well as business and industry.

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10 See chapter 1 in this monograph.
11 See chapter 6 in this monograph.
0.5 Further Considerations

In concluding our introduction to this monograph on grey literature, we offer the reader still other prospects in need of further reflection. And, we are confident that they will be duly addressed in the subsequent chapters in this book.

**It seems likely that**

Grey literature will not disappear, but will continue to play a significant role alongside commercial publishing. Our research has led us to believe that information discovery into the various types of grey literature available in print and electronic formats is ever increasing.

The borderline between “grey” and “white” (commercial) literature will become increasingly indistinct, particularly in an environment that is moving towards open access to STI.

The proportion of “grey” documents published on the Web will continue to increase. We see this development closely linked to the production of grey literature in digital environments, as well as to retrospective activities leading to republication.

The Internet will encourage a greater diversity in the types of “grey” resources available such as (raw data, personal notes and comments, lectures, newsletters, product catalogues, etc.).

**It also seems likely that**

Bibliographic control of grey literature will remain problematic despite the trend towards standardization of digital documents. We find that this has everything to do with the application and use of standards, which are in transition.

Open archives will offer more appropriate services and functions for at least some segments of grey literature i.e. preprints, doctoral theses, and reports. We mention these three types of grey literature, because they have come to form special collections making them more visible in and for repositories.

Some organizations – especially in the public sector (e.g. national libraries and STI centers) but also in the private sector (e.g. Elsevier, Google, etc.) – will develop tools and services to aid in the efficient exploitation of grey resources on the Web. This in all likelihood is based on the response by such organizations to research efforts by the global grey literature community.

**However, it seems unlikely that**

Searching and collecting grey literature will become as straightforward as it is for journals and books in the traditional publishing sector. We adjudge that the increase in grey over commercial publications is the main explanation for this.

New tools for collecting, depositing, and archiving will make grey literature less ephemeral and volatile than in the past. Our research indicates that until an organization formulates a policy on grey literature backed by budget appropriations, the implementation of technology cannot be guaranteed and thus the environment in which grey literature has coexisted in the past will remain unstable in the likely future.
Part I, Section One
Producing and Publishing Grey Literature

“Grey does not imply any qualification (but) is merely a characterization of the distribution mode”1. The current ‘Luxembourg’ definition moved from emphasis on the acquisition to the production of grey literature. The first section in this book looks at three studies on the production and publishing of grey literature in the field of scientific and technical information written by academicians in economics, library and information sciences.

In the Netherlands, Roosendaal among others has examined the process whereby universities re-appropriate publications. He highlights the radical changes in the value chain of scientific publication triggered by the potential that information and communication technology offers the author and reader. His chapter revisits work carried out in 2003, emphasizing new business models for scientific publishing.

One of the conclusions is that “research and higher education institutions are the natural candidates to initiate the development of new business models and structures. This is foremost an organisational and not a technical challenge. A major organisational challenge will be to absorb the library consequently into the research organisation.”

The second chapter, ‘How to assure the quality of grey literature, the case of evaluation reports’ is in essence Weber’s study on the quality assurance system by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. ‘Report quality’ is defined by the quality of processes, tools, and conduct applied throughout the study. The study does not claim a universal system for all producers and types of grey documents but considers that “a basic set of steps for guiding the production of quality output” could improve the overall quality of grey literature. Could such a system be generalised? Well, the recent debate on quality and reliability of grey research reports2 gives emphasis to the relevance and actuality of this analysis.

The final chapter of this section offers an overview of the production and processing of another category of grey literature. Južnič from the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia draws on experiences, initiatives, and projects from different


2 ClimateGate: the mistake on glacier melting introduced in the 2007 UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report.
countries: United Kingdom, France, Slovenia, India, South Korea, etc. and develops a framework for electronic theses and dissertations. Južnič anticipates that “it will be exciting to see (...) grey literature (...) become the core of higher education activities and a centrepiece of a university’s reputation.”

In the compilation and editing these three chapters, it was not our intention to provide a coherent and exhaustive economic or social theory on the production and publishing of grey literature. Rather instead, to suggest to the readership that they keep in mind certain key questions drawn from the authors’ works, namely:

What is the specific function of grey literature in the communication process of scientific communities? How does the Internet impact this function? What is or could be the role of academic libraries in the production and publishing of grey literature? And, how does one guarantee an acceptable level of quality for grey documents?