

## Grey Literature in an Open Context: From Certainty to New Challenges

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### Abstract

1997 grey literature was defined at Luxembourg as “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”. Distinction between commercial (white), non-commercial (grey) and other (dirty) literature seemed easy. Six years later, the landscape of scientific and technical information has radically changed. What is the place of grey literature between continuous electronic resources, open archives and new economic models of scientific literature? Is there any place left? The authors describe the evolution and relative decline of traditional grey literature from a French perspective and present some actual trends in the processing of grey literature by INIST-CNRS.

### A fairy tale of grey

Once upon a time, in a land called GreyNet ruled a mighty King whose name was Dominic. His TransAtlantic Kingdom reached to both sides of the Ocean, and its borderlines were well defined.

Outside was white literature, were serials and books easy to find, heavy price increases each year, commercial dissemination by publishers and vendors, the “dictate of the marketplace” and impact factors.

Inside were reports, conference proceedings, theses and other scientific and technical material often hardly to find. Inside were learned societies, research organizations and libraries, universities and corporate R&D, low-budget projects, rather nice and idealistic people sharing “common values about grey literature and (...) committed to preserving it” (Gelfand 1996).

Once upon a time, people knew more or less what grey literature was about. Because it was difficult to find, some created directories, reports or databases in order to facilitate access to these non-conventional, fugitive, and sometimes ephemeral publications.

In this Golden Age of Grey, studies stressed the importance and quality of this literature, of its strategic relevance for scientific and technological advances in all kind of subjects (see for example some recent articles: Conn et al. 2003 and Weaver et al. 2002 for the biomedical sector, Ramalho Correia & De Castro Neto 2002 for mathematics and agriculture, and Denda 2002 for women’s studies).

This was the era of large-scale and political projects. On the European level, EAGLE was created to facilitate the visibility of and the access to grey documents of the member states (see Wood & Smith 1993, Lankenau 1997). In France, the government decided 1990 the financial support of a national experiment for the centralized collection, description and dissemination of public reports that was conducted by a special committee under the responsibility of the Prime Minister (see CCDA 1995).

At INIST, we organised the acquisition, dissemination and archiving of French grey literature, building a unique collection of 300,000+ scientific reports, conference proceedings and dissertations in Sciences and Humanities, and most of them grey. As a member of EAGLE, we contributed to the SIGLE database (10% of the records are from INIST); as the French national ISRN agency, we tried to implement the international standard for report production and identification (see Schöpfel 2000).