

Uniform requirements for Grey literature? Proposal for the adoption of a “Nancy style”

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Background

In the last international conferences on Grey Literature (GL), the Internet “sea change” suffered by GL was deeply analysed under its different nuances, coming to the conclusion that the characteristics initially associated to this production have been completely upset. The main advantages of the Net regard information retrieval, document usability and availability against an increased level of responsibility for its authors and issuing organizations.¹

This 7th International Conference on GL is devoted to open access, the movement exploring the most effective and affordable strategies for serving the interests of research, researchers, institutions and societies that support research, as stated in the famous Budapest meeting in 2001, the starting point for the development of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI). The purpose of that meeting was to accelerate progress in the international effort “to make research articles in all academic fields freely available on the Internet”.² Since then, the BOAI has been developing successfully all over the world and involves different kinds of publications from pre-print to journal articles.

In this context, GL has now all rights to be included among the useful documents to be shared by the global scientific community and represents the greatest challenge in the information transfer process. Yet, in many cases, it will benefit from a proper re-styling to be exploited at best: when a document containing unique and precious information meets a formally correct production in absence of profit implications, success is guaranteed. This International Conference helps us to find the way.

GL: no more a supporting but a leading role

Journal articles and books have always been playing the role of main actors in the scientific publication arena. Information transmitted by these means is accurate, refereed, correctly promoted, traceable and available for all those who have the privilege of working in a research institute or can otherwise afford the cost of purchasing it. On the contrary, up to now, GL has been generally considered of minor importance, mainly because it was difficult to retrieve, poor in formal quality, produced in limited number of copies, and addressed only to small groups or “invisible colleges”: it was a Cinderella that is now going to become the leading actor on the information stage.

Since the beginning of the 80s, after the York Seminar³, with the production and diffusion of a specific standard for technical reports, the ISO 5966/82⁴, the formal requirements for a correct presentation of GL started to be applied by issuing organizations, thus contributing to improve the quality of documents and their retrieval through bibliographic databases.

In the 90s thanks to the wide use and development of Desk Top Publishing (DTP) programs and later the diffusion of the Internet, GL production underwent a further impulse towards a better quality and availability. The interest for GL has been widely increasing at all levels: the “grey” attribute has no longer negative implications, but remains only to identify a genre that is now completely different from its first samples produced before the 80s (technical reports of very poor editorial quality but high information level).

In this framework, now that the ISO 5966 is out of date, we believe that it is important to give all GL producers the possibility to dress up their Cinderellas with a flick of a magic wand. How? Producing a “Nancy style” from seven mice and a pumpkin, meeting at GL7!

¹ De Castro P, Salinetti S. Quality of grey literature in the open access era: privilege and responsibility. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 2004; 20(1): 4-12.

² <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/>

³ Alberani V, De Castro P. Grey literature from the York Seminar (UK) of 1978 to the year 2000. *Inspesl* 2001; 35(4): 236-47.

⁴ International Organization for Standardization. *Presentation of scientific and technical reports*. (ISO 5966/82). Geneva: ISO; 1982.