

From SIGLE to OpenSIGLE and beyond: An in-depth look at Resource Migration in European Context

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Abstract

In 1980, some major European scientific information centres established the "System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe" (SIGLE) to provide access to European grey literature and to improve bibliographic coverage. August 23, 2006, the Luxemburg Register of Commerce and Societies published the liquidation of the association EAGLE that produced the SIGLE database until 2005.

Nevertheless, the former EAGLE member consented to preserve the European co-operation for grey literature and to transform the 1980 model into a sustainable network in the emerging environment of open access to scientific information.

The first step was to archive the SIGLE records in an open and freely searchable database, conform to the OAI metadata harvesting protocol. The French INIST developed OpenSIGLE based on MIT software (DSpace) and loaded most of the SIGLE records in a simplified XML format.

The communication provides an overview of the short history of SIGLE and EAGLE and describes how this unique resource was moved from a traditional host to an open access environment, giving the database a new look while preserving essential features characteristic for SIGLE.

1. EAGLE, a short history

In 1980, some major European scientific information centres established the "System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe" (SIGLE) to provide access to European grey literature and to improve bibliographic coverage (see Wood & Smith 1993).

The SIGLE database covered all scientific domains, STM, social sciences and humanities. In 2005, it contained 855,260 records from 16 countries and the European Commission; UK, German, French and Dutch records represented 90% of the overall input. 63% of the records were reports, 32% were theses and dissertations, and the other records were conference proceedings, data files and translations.

From 1980 to 1985, SIGLE was funded by the Commission of the European Communities (CEC). When CEC financial support ended in 1985, the national centres formed a network for the acquisition, identification and dissemination of grey literature called "European Association for Grey Literature Exploitation" or EAGLE, who became the producer of the SIGLE database.

EAGLE was created as a non-profit making association situated in Luxemburg. In the beginning, membership was limited to the member countries of the European Union (former European Community) but this limitation was abolished in 1995. In the end, 14 countries participated actively, and discussions on partnership were going on with other potential members, especially with East European and North African countries.

The economic model of the association was based on initial funding by the European Commission, from 1985 onwards on membership fees and royalties from servers and products (CD-ROM, records). The SIGLE database was distributed by BLAISE, STN, EI and Ovid (Silverplatter) and in the early nineties by SUNIST in France. Records were also sold to organizations like NERAC for specific use.

Costs were generated by the management of the association and mainly by the operating agent, whose task was to merge the national files into a unique server file every month.

2. Challenges and dead-ends

Twenty years after its creation, EAGLE faced four major challenges:

Internet and new technologies of information and communication: SIGLE offered no solution for online cataloguing, metadata harvesting, links to full-text and other resources.

Organisational structure: EAGLE was unable to take important technical and organisational decisions. Main members resigned from the association or intended to do so.

Coverage: National input became increasingly unrepresentative of the national production of grey literature, and input was continuously decreasing. Electronic documents were not referenced in the database.

Economic model: Investment for the development of the database was not provided.