

# 'Let's Reduce the Noise and Raise Awareness' A New Approach to the Field of Grey Literature



## Grey Literature is a Driver and Vehicle in Knowledge Transfer

<p>THE SAME OLD THINKING    THE SAME OLD RESULTS</p>	<p>Literature → Humanities → Unpublished → (grey) literature → Not peer reviewed → Non-conventional → Document type →</p>	<p>Information Social Science Published grey literature Review process Archetypical Doc. Type &amp; LIS field</p>	<p>NEW MINDSET ↓ NEW RESULTS</p>
<p>WASTE</p> <p>Information Loss</p>	<p>Information Overload</p>	<p>OPEN ACCESS</p>	<p>F<sub>indable</sub> A<sub>ccessible</sub> I<sub>nteroperable</sub> R<sub>eusable</sub></p>
<p>Metadata</p>	<p>Works</p>	<p>People</p>	<p>Organizations</p>
<p>PID Graph</p>	<p>GreyNet</p>		<p>Wait... there's More!</p>

**A New Approach to the Field of Grey Literature; Let's Reduce the Noise and Raise Awareness**

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**Seminar • Training**

# A New Approach to the Field of Grey Literature 'Let's Reduce the Noise and Raise Awareness'

Dominic Farace, GreyNet International

## Introduction

By drawing public awareness to grey literature without at the same time incorporating the results of studies over the past thirty years would be counterproductive. A campaign of public awareness with a new focus on grey literature is required. However, such an initiative can only be achieved in collaboration with the many grey literature stakeholders led by the publishers in grey literature, who are on the forefront of research and innovation in their specific domains of science. GreyNet International owing to the support of its associate members has over the past three decades sought to promote and undertake research, publication, open access, education, and public awareness of grey literature. Emphasis on its supply side was always its starting point from which the field could confront the problems voiced by the demand side and adequately address them.

The aim of the seminar is twofold: to confront an outdated mindset regarding grey literature by discussing its development as a field in information science; and, to establish how grey literature serves as a driver and vehicle in the generation and transfer of knowledge. The didactic approach carried out follows upon the line of questioning used in a survey carried out in 2020 and reused in 2023.

## Didactic Approach

An online survey comprising ten questions/statements dealing with grey literature is carried out by the seminar participants on their laptops or mobile phones. The results are compiled and used during the seminar.

The ten questions/statements were answered on previous occasions by two other survey populations: (1.) Varied stakeholders in grey literature and (2.) Grey Literature Publishers. The results from these two seminar populations will provide for comparison and further engage the audience.

Each of the ten survey questions/statements will receive instructor's commentary, which is then accompanied by GreyNet's own approach or response to the survey questions/statements. Graphic slides and the use of internet will be included in the presentation.

Questions and comments by the seminar participants are welcome throughout the seminar and will only be limited by the time available for completion of the seminar. Seminar follow-up is welcome and can be initiated via email.

## Q1: Grey literature resources should be open access compliant

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	63%	90%	
Agree	27%	10%	
Uncertain	10%	0%	
Disagree	0%	0%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	



The Open Access movement is active and has progressed over the past quarter century. This movement is initiated and carried out via the supply-side of grey literature *i.e.*, by the producers and publishers of grey literature. Even prior to the Open Access Movement these were the organizations in government, academics, business and industry. They carried with them the name corporate author and were considered the guarantors of the quality of their information.

The Open Access movement was important for the development of the field of grey literature in that the corporate authors came to be seen as publishers. This has much to do with the fact that recognized commercial publishers also began to publish open access journals. Hence, the label of publisher came to apply equally to those in the field of grey literature.

From another perspective, the Open Access movement and the compliance implied was furthered by the transition from print to digital publishing. Grey literature already known by its multiple and diverse document types came to witness the influence the open access movement had on the grey literature document and publication trail. This trail perhaps could begin with a research proposal leading to a conference paper accompanied by a data paper that later might become published as a journal article. The presentation of the work might appear published as an audio-video recording and the accompanying research data may appear published in a data archive. In all accounts, this document trail is openly accessible and, in many cases, has signposts indicating the parameters involving e.g., Creative Commons licensing.

GreyGuide Repository				GreyGuide Portal				
Proposals / Abstracts	Biographical Notes	Conference Papers	Data Papers	Conference Proceedings	Conference Slides	Conference Posters	Conference Videos	Published Datasets
GLA Collection	BIO Collection	GLP Collection	RGL Collection	Document Share	Document Share	Document Share	Repositories TIB AV Portal	Repositories DANS Data Station SSH

**Q2: Loss of information is a waste and is a problem especially for grey literature**

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	56%	60%	
Agree	37%	40%	
Uncertain	6%	0%	
Disagree	1%	0%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	



Information loss has been a problem in the past for grey literature. Small print runs without bibliographic documentation were an obstacle to its acquisition, collection, and subsequent access. These grey resources were difficult to find and thus were unable to reliably contribute to the information chain and to knowledge generation. With the advent of digital publishing, grey literature rose on the radar of researchers. Successful efforts owing to retrospective cataloging, the use of software to scan and convert print to digital text enabled grey resources to be recovered and made discoverable, citable, and reusable.

## GreyNet's Retro Projects

**Content Recovery**

*Emerald 2009 (UK)*

- Conference Proceedings

**Enhanced Publications**

*DANS Archive 2011 - ... (NL)*

- Datasets and databases

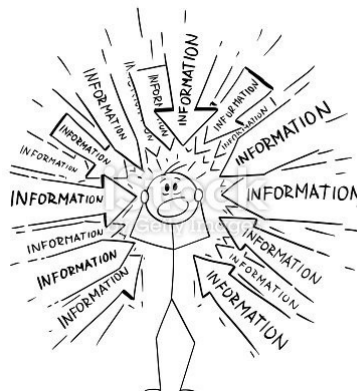
**CiteGrey Project**

*TIB AV-Portal 2022 - ... (DE)*

- Conference Recordings

**Q3: Information overload contributes to the underuse of valuable grey literature**

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	35%	40%	
Agree	39%	30%	
Uncertain	18%	20%	
Disagree	8%	10%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	



As more grey literature in its multiple and diverse formats become digitally available on websites, databases, institutional and federated repositories in rapid tempo users can be overwhelmed by the mass of information. This requires the addition of metadata richer than basic bibliographic information that not only enhances access but at the same time allows the researcher and end-user the opportunity to assess the potential value of these grey resources prior to downloading them.

Today, researchers and students can no longer be expected to have covered a comprehensive review of the literature dealing with their study. Systematic literature reviews, pathfinders, LibGuides, and synopsis journals are examples of grey literature document types that assist researchers.

## Confronting Information overload with Grey Literature Resources

Systematic    Précis    Path-    LIB    Data    Synopsis    Etc.  
Reviews    Articles    finders    Guides    Papers    Journals

### Q4: The dated mindset regarding grey literature is as much a barrier as broken links

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	25%	40%	
Agree	37%	20%	
Uncertain	32%	30%	
Disagree		6%	10%
Strongly Disagree		0%	0%



Without due consideration of the studies that have been carried out in the field of grey literature over the past three decades, without due consideration given to the technological developments that have impacted this field of information, many authors inadvertently reiterate dated ideas taking them at face value and thus perpetuating an outdated mindset regarding grey literature.

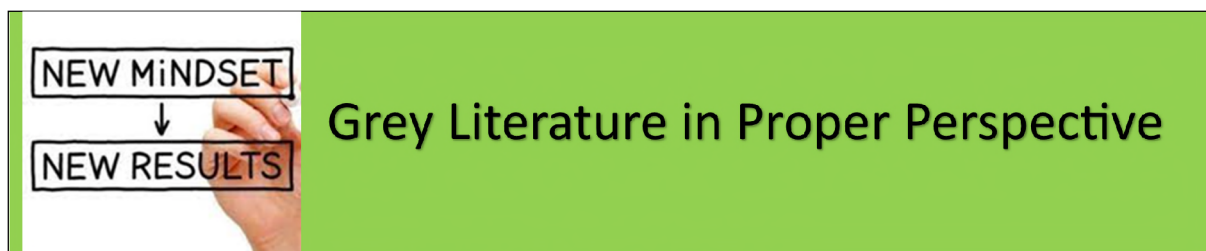
When a researcher or end user runs into a broken link on the Internet this gives cause for frustration and even distrust of the source. Is it not after all, the source of the information that should guarantee its sustainability and open access?

Up until now, the dated mindset proves an obstacle for grey literature. It is fostered among information practitioners such as librarians and documentalists, whose earlier training maintained the then status quo. Relatively few may have been provided the opportunity and or stimulus to experience continued education in their field of study. In order to initiate and accomplish change among those ingrained

mindsets, education and training in schools and colleges not only in library and information studies but also publishing, communication, and marketing is needed. This can best be accomplished by reducing the noise that interferes with its understanding.

The fundamental starting point is to understand that grey literature does not belong to the subject of literature but to the field of information. Grey literature belongs to the social sciences and not the humanities. Grey Literature is a compound noun not an adjectival phrase. The number of hits to “grey literature” (6.180.000 results) and “gray literature” (825.000 results) in a search on the Internet culminating in over 7 million records deserves serious consideration. And, if you stop to think that this is a fraction of the real number on the internet given that most are not assigned the keyword or carry it within their title.

We can look at other misnomers attributed to grey literature that deserve reconsideration. To begin with: that it is not published, that it is not peer reviewed, that it is difficult to access, etc. Furthermore, a clear distinction should be recognized between the field of grey literature belonging to information science and the single entity that is a grey literature document type. Taken together, this would avoid much confusion.



- Literature → Information
- Humanities → Social Science
- Unpublished → Published
- (grey) literature → grey literature
- Not peer reviewed → Review process
- Non-conventional → Archetypical
- Document type → Document type & Field of information

**Q5: Persistent identifiers PIDs maximize the use of grey literature**

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	36%	60%	
Agree	43%	30%	
Uncertain	18%	0%	
Disagree	3%	10%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	



Along with rich metadata that is added to grey literature publications the addition of assigned digital persistent identifiers is increasing. These include the DOI for the published document making it online accessible from the landing page in whatever repository it is housed. The ORCID, which is the unique digital identifier assigned an author or researcher that carries with it all of the variations in the individual’s name such as the name with or without middle names or initials. By way of the ORCID, the author’s body of work as well as biographic data can be captured and stored. The ROR ID, which in a way is an enhanced ISNI (International Standard Name Identifier) embodying an actionable digital persistent identifier assigned a research organization. This PID can be seen as a guarantee of the source of information and data from where they originate. Access to the ROR-ID likewise provides access to other PIDs and data such as the organizations website, the GRID (Global Research Identifier Database), Wikidata, GEONames ID, and when available the Funder ID.

Recently, the PID graph or knowledge graph has been developed with the aid of software that crosslinks the DOI, ORCID, and ROR ID demonstrating the interrelatedness of data not only facilitating their findability and accessibility but also allowing for their interoperability and further reuse. In a way, the PID graph or knowledge graph is in itself a manifestation of FAIR principles: findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable.

## GreyNet’s Adaptation of PIDs

GreyNet International is a [DOI Minter](#) via TU-Delft DataCite

GreyNet’s author and researcher base includes the [ORCID](#)

GreyNet International has a [ROR ID](#)

A Number of GreyNet’s Associate Members have a [Funder ID](#)

### Q6: Knowledge transfer is the primary function of grey literature

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	36%	40%	
Agree	40%	50%	
Uncertain	13%	10%	
Disagree	11%	0%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	



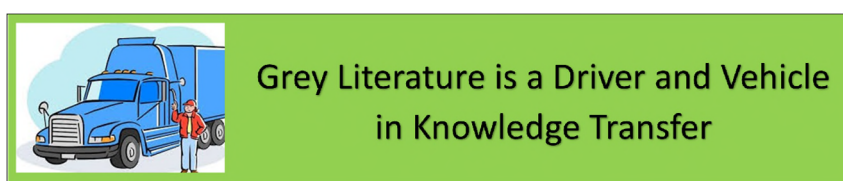
Grey literature is both a driver and vehicle in the transfer of knowledge in all fields of science and technology including the humanities.

As a driver grey literature is in the forefront of information produced on all levels of (non)government, academics, business and industry.

As a vehicle grey literature serves in publishing and disseminating that which is produced in diverse and manifold document types in both textual and non-textual formats in all fields of science and technology including the humanities. If we accept this line of thinking, then by way of publishing grey literature one realizes its primary function i.e., knowledge transfer.

As a driver grey literature is integrally associated with research and innovation. It is current and comprehensive and while these qualities are its assets it is vulnerable in that to avoid the label ephemera it must undergo cataloging, indexing, the addition of (rich) metadata, and assigned PIDS.

As a vehicle, it clearly identifies the document type in which it has been published. Document types often belong to collections and series. Some document types are often associated with certain sectors of information or fields of science e.g., pre-prints (physics), working papers (economics), etc. Many of the document types appear in Wikipedia. They have a standard structure and often indicate their frequency of publication.



GreyNet Use Case:  
Circular Economy



GreyNet Use Case:  
Climate Change



**Q7: More consideration should be given to the accessibility of grey literature in its early production and subsequent publication**

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders <i>No Response 3%</i>	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
Strongly Agree	61%	70%	
Agree	29%	30%	
Uncertain	7%	0%	
Disagree	0%	0%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	

**CIP**

Cataloging in Publication



Metadata

**ISBN**

International Standard Book Number

**ISSN**

International Standard Serial Number



Persistent Digital Identifiers

The role of grey literature publishers much like that of commercial publishers is to provide value added information to publications in advance of their dissemination. Today, this involves the inclusion of rich metadata and actionable persistent identifiers. This enhances their value for research as well as for the overall readership.

The introduction of enhanced publication further demonstrates the value of cross linking in the publication trail. The research data associated with its full-text can appear openly accessible in a data archive even prior to the publication of the manuscript. Likewise, the video recording of a conference presentation can be published in an Audio-Visual portal prior to its publication as a conference paper. Similarly, the preprint of a conference paper can already appear published and openly accessible in a federated or institutional repository well in advance of its publication in the conference proceedings.

Together, these boost the **altmetrics** (alternative metrics e.g., social media with mentions on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, online news sites. exports to citation management systems like Mendeley or Zotero. downloads of full text articles, software, etc.) linked with publications, which also increase the standing of publishers – both grey and commercial.

The more accessible a publication is upon its introduction in the information chain the greater the potential impact it can have. This is of course the significant benefit that open access offers grey literature. This linked to the metadata immediately available to the researcher and end user is today no longer seen as an added benefit but rather become a precondition.

Not only are grey literature publishers responsible for the inclusion of metadata related to publications but also the authors and researchers are invited, if not mandated to do so. When they are provided with standardized online templates accompanied by scope notes, this can both enhance the quality of the publication, while decreasing the time in which their work becomes openly accessible.

## GreyNet’s Community of Practice: Pre- and Post-Publishing

**Enhanced Publication**  
(Publishing trail)

**Rich metadata and actionable PIDS**

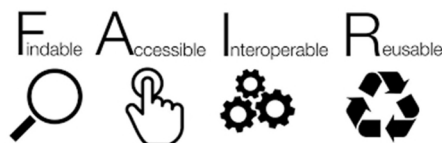
**Public Data Archiving**

**Allow for altmetrics impact**



**Q8: With grey literature research, the reusability of data(sets) is more important than their replicability**

	<b>Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders</b> <i>No Response 1%</i>	<b>Grey Literature Publishers</b>	<b>Seminar Respondents</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	
<b>Agree</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>33%</b>	
<b>Uncertain</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>56%</b>	
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>11%</b>	
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	






Today, it is expected that research data associated with a manuscript is openly accessible just as the published full-text. This not only allows for verification but also for subsequent reuse of the data. While some repositories may not be sufficiently robust to house a large volume of research data, by cross-linking it to a data archive that does, allows for open access to both the full-text and research data i.e., the enhanced publication.

To facilitate this, data papers - yet another grey literature document type - has surfaced. Via this brief, concise, and link intense publication the compliance not only with open access but with the overriding FAIR Principles (2016) of findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability are clearly demonstrated.

In all likelihood, before a researcher or team of researchers would consider the task of replicating a study involving datasets, they would first consider the work that it requires and its potential value for reuse. Before such an undertaking, consideration would first be given to the expenses required for both human and material resources. One might in fact ask how many studies actually undergo replicability? The field of grey literature does not belong to the natural sciences but rather to the social sciences. It is not carried out in laboratories, where replication is expected if not required. Hence, it should not be a requirement that research results issuing from grey literature first be replicated before they can be reused.

Perhaps, with regard to the replicability of grey literature the same position should be taken as with peer-review. Given that the review process carried out from publisher to publisher varies considerably, it is perhaps recommended to state the review process that the publication underwent, and thus allow the researcher and end-user to decide whether or not to cite and/or reference it in their work?

**GreyNet In-house Research Projects  
that implement FAIR Principles**

<i>Ongoing since 2011</i>	<i>Ongoing since 2017</i>	<i>Ongoing since 2018</i>
		
Enhanced Publication Project	Data Papers Project	Open Data engages Citation and Reuse

**Q9. By drawing public awareness to grey literature, barriers facing it will have more prospect in being resolved**

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>20%</b>	
<b>Agree</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>40%</b>	
<b>Uncertain</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>30%</b>	
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>10%</b>	
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	



By drawing public awareness to grey literature without at the same time incorporating the results of studies over the past 30 years would be counterproductive. A campaign of public awareness with a new focus on grey literature is required. However, such an initiative can only be achieved in collaboration with the many grey literature stakeholders led by the publishers in grey literature, who are on the forefront of research and innovation in their specific domains of science and communities of practice.

GreyNet International owing to the support of its associate members has over the past three decades sought to promote and undertake research, publication, open access, education, and public awareness of grey literature. Emphasis on its supply side was always its starting point from which the field could confront the problems voiced by the demand side and adequately address them. Speaking on behalf of GreyNet’s community of practice, I maintain that by formalizing a consortium of grey literature publishers, barriers can be overcome. An initiative undertaken earlier this year with the PUBGREY Registry can be seen as a first step in this direction. The time appears right and the opportunity presents itself during the upcoming 25<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Grey Literature this November in Amsterdam.

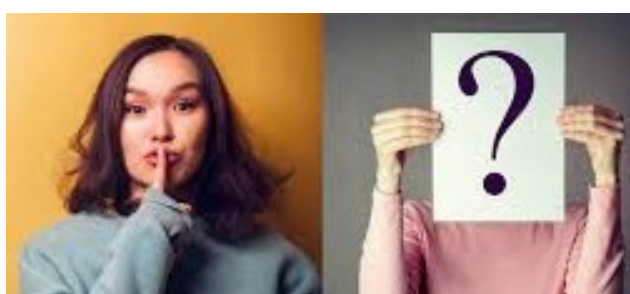
GreyNet would seek to facilitate the process called for; however, it alone does not have the financial and human resources adequate to take the lead such an undertaking. This would require the support and influence of an entity far more renowned. In the early ‘80s, the European Commission provided funds for the launch of the European Association for Grey Literature Exploitation (EAGLE) in which the SIGLE database was developed and maintained. This database has had a series of name changes from SIGLE to OpenSIGLE to OpenGrey. It has well over a million bibliographic records that are now openly accessible via GreyNet’s collection in the DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities. While the data has not been lost, it has not been grown and updated since its closure in 2020.

### GreyNet’s Campaign in Raising Awareness to Grey Literature



**Q10: Optional: please enter your name, email address, and any other comments or recommendations that would be of benefit to this survey. Thank you!**

	Varied Grey Literature Stakeholders	Grey Literature Publishers	Seminar Respondents
<b>Confidential</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>Anonymous</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>0</b>	



With a survey, the more the population is defined and the more respondents are willing to provide their contact details, the better the researcher is able to analyze the survey results and, in some cases, further advance their study.

GreyNet's surveys always allow the respondent to choose if they wish to identify themselves or remain anonymous. The respondent stands assured that when the survey data is published in the data archive in which it is housed there is a guarantee that the identity of the respondent is withheld. Only GreyNet as the research organization maintains the respondents' contact details.



Grey literature has certainly benefited by way of open access compliance, data archiving, rich metadata, actionable digital persistent identifiers, and the creation of new grey literature document types such as data papers, systematic reviews, pathfinders, etc. How much more would grey literature stand to gain by an active recognized international organization that is focused on the field of grey literature and willing to take the lead well into this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Seminar Takeaway**

The expected takeaway from the seminar depends in part on the participant's initial familiarity with grey literature. An individual's change in response to his/her answers on the survey at the start of the seminar is a personal takeaway. However, what the instructor holds out to the participants is an understanding that grey literature is a field in information science, that the publishers of grey literature are both drivers and vehicles in science, technology, and humanities, and that the FAIR principles of findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability provide a roadmap for grey literature well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.