Online bibliographic data bases and grey literature: a Dutch approach

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1. Introduction

It is estimated that about 15,000 "grey" publications are issued in The Netherlands per year. 4,000 of these are scientific and technical publications. To give an indication: it is estimated that 25,000 "scientific" journal articles from Dutch authors or corporate sources are included in online bibliographic data bases; there are about 15,000 regular "white" publications in The Netherlands per year, of which only a small part is on science and technology. (It must be remembered that this figure shows Dutch publishing, the figure showing Dutch authors may be quite different.) On this bases I estimate the Dutch information output on science and technology to be 30,000 - 35,000 items per year. (fig. 1)
This amount of grey publications from The Netherlands may seem enormous, but this number will only increase in the near future. Although there are efforts to increase the publication of regular, white literature instead of grey literature, various factors augment the publication of grey literature:
- speed of publication;
- ease of publication;
- omission of refereeing, which sometimes leads to copying practices and always to administrative procedures and time delay;
- grey publications do the job required: to present one's research results to patrons or colleagues or other interested parties.

For many people publishing is a must (publish or perish), and grey publications are accepted and acceptable. Electronic mail facilities enable scientists and engineers to communicate very easily. With the advance of computer linking electronic scientific communication will become more common practice in a few years.

The amount of grey publications may begin to decrease then. In this paper attention is paid to the way in which problems with the grey literature-problems are dealt with in The Netherlands.

Problems with scientific grey publications are:
- its scientific value is not guaranteed (there is no refereeing system!);
- there is too little attention drawn to newly published grey documents: the announcement-problem;
- users searching for information on a subject have less chance to be referred to a pertinent grey document than to a white document: the catalogue-problems;
- availability and document delivery may be poor: the availability-problem.

The first problem, the scientific value, is of less relevance to the library. The users ask for this type of document, therefore we should provide it.

Availability of grey publications

Only a part of the problem of (scientific) grey publications is visible for the librarians. Based on figures from the early 1970's it was estimated that for reports requested by external users at the library of Technische Hogeschool Delft (THD, Delft University of Technology) the percentage of satisfied requests was considerable lower - roughly 50% lower - than the percentage satisfied requests for 'white' monographs. The library of THD functions as national library for technical and related sciences, and has a rather predominant role in supplying documents on technology, etc. for our country. This figure therefore indicates that document supply in The Netherlands as a whole for this document type was very poor.

But the number of requests for grey publications must be relatively low. This part of the problem is nearly invisible for the librarian.

I mentioned the announcement-problem; the author is not likely to
advertise his product and a commercially-thinking editor is absent. So many users searching for scientific information must be unaware of a grey publication that is highly relevant for him or her, and subsequently do not request it. Thus: the grey literature problems are big, they are even bigger than the librarians perceive them, and I expect it to grow even further in the next few years.

Subject data bases

Users often use scientific grey documents like they use journal articles, so there are good reasons to have grey documents on science and technology referred to in reference journals and in the international online bibliographic data bases that specialise on one scientific discipline or subject, but that may accept various document types.

Quite a few online data bases refer to grey documents, in varying amounts. There are data bases where up to 30% of the documents referred to are some kind of grey literature. These data bases do a great job for grey publications.

However, grey documents may not be actively acquired by the data base producer. It is not certain whether a data base producer will include the acquired grey documents in his data base, either. A user is often unable to obtain a document referred to in a data base. And lastly there are varying policies between data base producers on grey documents in their data bases, there is no standard or uniformity.

I see no satisfying solution for the grey documents-problem in the online 'subject' data bases.

NTIS

Some of the problems of grey documents are solved, or at least mitigated, by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Technical Information Service (NTIS). The NTIS data base has a very broad subject ("technical") and specialises in one document type (grey documents). This is clearly in the interest of the user.

For whitening grey documents NTIS has the following characteristics:

1. NTIS was and is willing, if not to say eager, to get grey documents from many countries. For a long time it has been the U.S. government policy to try and acquire grey documents from industrial countries. Staff members from NTIS, and even its Director, have visited The Netherlands at various times and expressed the willingness to include Dutch scientific grey documents in the NTIS data base.

2. NTIS catalogues grey documents fast: less than two months time for English language documents and for documents in Dutch only slightly longer.

3. The grey documents are announced properly in NTIS's reference journal Government Research Announcement and Index (GRAI) and other NTIS publications.

4. NTIS makes the grey documents available. Microfiches published by NTIS are available from NTIS and from many libraries, documentation centres and NTIS-agents all over the world. In The Netherlands, for example, large collections of the NTIS materials are in Delft at THD and at ECN.
5. The NTIS data base, with the references to the grey publications, is frequently accessed. We presume the NTIS data base will not often be the first choice of an online search specialist, but a second or a third choice to search. (In The Netherlands in 1981 an online search specialist accessed an average 2.4 data bases per query (2)). Nevertheless, the fact that it is used makes it attractive to get one's documents into it. The NTIS data base can be searched on many hosts, see (3).

NTIS has something to offer. In exchange for grey documents NTIS offers price reductions of some 50% of the foreign price for all NTIS products and services (NTIS charges us the US price rather than the foreign price), an attractive possibility to those subscribing to the NTIS microfiches, etc. NTIS accepts the great majority, but not all documents for their data base.

SIGLE

The praiseworthy initiative to build a Western European data base on grey literature is well-known (4). A comparison of SIGLE (and its successor EAGLE) and NTIS gives the following differences:

1. The cooperation in SIGLE is pan-European; cooperation with NTIS is bilateral with the U.S.A. (This political argument is difficult to handle for library organisations).
2. SIGLE takes records of all scientific documents, whereas NTIS restricts to natural sciences and technology, NTIS has only marginal coverage of medicine and social sciences.
3. With SIGLE copyright problems do not exist. If an author wants to secure copyright, although it is for a grey document, NTIS is not acceptable.
4. With SIGLE a library organisation has to do the bibliographical and subject cataloguing itself, according to the SIGLE (= INIS or AGRIS) format.
5. The usage of the SIGLE data base is only a fraction of the usage of the NTIS data base.
6. Delivery of the documents retrieved via SIGLE is not guaranteed and may be cumbersome.
7. The financial benefit to an organisation cooperating in the SIGLE-frame is only marginal.

There is at this time no cooperation between NTIS and SIGLE.

Structure in The Netherlands

In view of this analysis, The Netherlands has chosen for cooperation with NTIS for the grey publications on science and technology.

Of the scientific and technological grey documents acquired for (acquired, but most are free) the purpose of having them referred to in an online data base, we offer some 90% to NTIS. The remainder will be catalogued in SIGLE-format and offered to SIGLE, together with records of grey documents on the life sciences and social sciences.

A standard arrangement, the so-called Memorandum of Understanding
(MoU), has been drafted. The contents of the MoU are basically described in the paragraph on NTIS. The MoU also deals with the right to reproduce and sell NTIS documents in The Netherlands, plus a few minor points. 11 Dutch organisations now have signed the MoU with NTIS.

In 1983 and 1984 1320 grey documents have been sent to NTIS from The Netherlands via THD. To this should be added the grey documents that came into the NTIS database via NASA or via EDB, or via other ways. Altogether organisations in The Netherlands supply about 1000 documents per year now.

Cooperation

Of course, a joint effort to the grey literature problems must be preferred to doing the job on your own. The 11 organisations that signed the MoU form the "Working Party NTIS Netherlands". THD holds the position of secretary. We try to acquire grey documents on science and technology from all over The Netherlands. Each of these 11 organisations has intensive contacts with a small or large number of government organisations or industrial firms that produce grey publications on science and technology. Many grey publications producers have relatively few bonds with the "Depot van Nederlandse publikaties" (Depository of Dutch publications), and so are more inclined to work with the members of the Working Party. A study in 1983 by the Bibliotheekraad (Library Council) showed that the depository missed many items that had been acquired for NTIS. We act now as an intermediary for the depository and they now also have these documents.

Of the documents acquired by any one of the Working Party, one copy can be kept in the collection of that Working Party member, according to its collection forming profile. A second copy is sent to THD. THD ensures that a copy is sent to NTIS and included in the NTIS database. Documents acquired by any member-covering topics within the scope of the NASA database are not sent directly to NTIS but to NASA, via the member NLR. Cataloguing and announcement is taken care of via NASA. Via an exchange agreement between NASA and NTIS these grey documents are referred to in the NTIS-file, too, and are available at NTIS. In the same way documents acquired on topics within the scope of the INIS or EDB-data base are sent to the member (KNAW or) ECN. Cataloguing and announcement is taken care of via INIS and EDB. Via an exchange agreement between INIS and EDB, and EDB and NTIS, these grey documents are referred to in the NTIS-file, too and are available at NTIS.

This procedure is possible by virtue of the exchange agreements, and it clearly in the interest of the user. It is also necessary. Worldwide, organisations can get access to the NASA database only if documents are offered to NASA. Concerted with the NTIS-arrangement all Dutch organisations now have unlimited access to the NASA file. Something like this is also valid for the EDB database.

There is no exchange relation between e.g. IRRD, MARNA or Delft Hydro and NTIS. A part of the Dutch grey publications in these data bases that cover sciences and technology are therefore sent
As such, cooperation is a weak base. It is very difficult to activate an inert partner, and other problems exist. A strong point for The Netherlands is that libraries are cooperating on more than one project. Zandvliet presented a paper on the star-project in the technical union catalogue at the IATUL-Conference in Essen, two years ago, outlining a national periodicals collection (6). This is another cooperation-based project, and cooperation on various fronts makes good cooperation more probable.
Future developments

- The evaluation of our cooperation with NTIS must be positive, continued cooperation is planned.
- As indicated, I foresee the number of scientific grey documents to increase in the next few years, and then to decline due to electronic communication facilities.
- Cooperation between NTIS and SIGLE would be welcome, agreements between NTIS/SIGLE and other data bases would be welcome, too.
- We plan to promote the addition of an English abstract, written by the author, to Dutch-language grey documents on science and technology.
- Plans to allocate more staff - up to 2½ persons - and KNAW plans more staff, too, in order to acquire the main part of the 4000 Dutch grey scientific and technical publications, that are published each year. The Working Party published (1,7), but we need a lot more PR. More personal contacts, however time-consuming, are necessary.
- Having established the role of a University of Technology to input in a grey-literature-data base, we plan to emphasize this role.

ECN - Stichting Energieonderzoekcentrum Nederland (Netherlands Energy Research Foundation), Petten.
EDB - Energy Data Base
INIS - International Nuclear Information System
IRRD - International Road Research Documentation
KNAW - Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences)
NASA - National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NLR - Nationaal Lucht- en Ruimtevaartlaboratorium (National Aerospace Laboratory)
NTIS - National Technical Information Service
SIGLE - System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe
THD - Technische Hogeschool Delft (Delft University of Technology)
References


