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# Grey Literature from Archivist's Viewpoint

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## **Abstract:**

The contribution shall deal with the issue of gray literature in archives. The author shall concentrate on differences in understanding gray literature from the viewpoint of an archivist and the viewpoint of a librarian and certain intersection of both professions in this area. The contribution shall mention manners of obtaining gray literature in the archive practice, it's depositing in archive funds and collections and methods of its subsequent processing and making available to readers.

## **Contribution:**

### 1. Introduction

I must admit that when being addressed to give a paper which should mediate grey literature from archivist's viewpoint to participants of this forum, my knowledge of grey literature was rather vague. For this reason, please do not see me as an expert on grey literature, which could hardly be found amongst archivists. See me as a practical archivist, who has realized with surprise that she daily encounters grey literature in the course of her ordinary work.

When I tried to find out what is included into the phenomenon of grey literature, I soon realized that there are significant differences ensuing from different nature of work of libraries and archives. Although both these institutions are memory institutions, which are engaged in collecting, registering and making accessible documents of cultural heritage, the ways in which they fulfill their subject of activity is quite different in both institutions.

In my contribution I would like to focus on a certain explanation of what an archivist considers grey literature, what kinds of grey literature are found in archives what types of archives collect grey literature, to what type of archive funds it is deposited, what methods are used for obtaining grey literature in archivist's practice and what are approaches to its processing and making accessible.

### 2. Archivist's understanding of the concept of grey literature

I shall start with an archivist's understanding of the concept of grey literature. One of the definitions says that grey literature is half-published documents which are not published in a standard manner, and therefore are not available on standard book market (e.g. diploma and dissertation theses, research reports, internal documents, official publications etc.)<sup>1</sup>. If I start with this definition, I logically conclude that from my viewpoint this is not literature, but archival documents. For me it is not decisive whether these are published or non-published documents; this is irrelevant for an archivist. For me it is significant that the above-listed documents are typically found in archives.

In order to have a better idea of what an archival document and archival collection are, I shall mention a definition under the current wording of the Act on Archives. An archival document is "such a document that was selected for permanent preservation in the public interest with respect to its time of origination, content, origin, external features and permanent value given by its political, economic, legal, historical, cultural, scientific or information significance, and was included into the archival records; archival documents are also seals, stamps and other material objects related to an archival fund or collection, which were selected and included into records with respect to their time of origination, content, origin, external features and permanent value given by their political, economic, legal, historical, cultural, scientific or information significance."

An archival fund is a "set of archival documents, which originated by selection of documents created by activity of a certain natural or legal person, state organization unit or self-governing territorial unit."<sup>2</sup>

An archive does not accept all archival documents arisen from activity of the relevant originators; it only accepts a selection of them. Mostly, archival documents are included into archival funds according to their originator, and the structure of an archival fund usually reflects originator's organization and activity.

If we detach ourselves from the terminological confusions, which may cause certain misunderstanding between an archivist and a librarian, and proceed to the concrete content of the concept of grey literature, we shall find out that documents denoted as grey literature are found in most archives in the Czech Republic.

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<sup>1</sup> "Half-published documents which are not published in a standard manner and therefore are not available on standard book market (e.g. diploma and dissertation theses, research reports, internal documents, official publications etc.). There are specialized information systems for research and distribution of grey literature, e.g. SIGLE database)."

*KTD : Czech terminological database of library and information science (TDKIV) [online]. Prague : Národní knihovna České republiky, 2003. Available at: <http://sigma.nkp.cz/cze/ktd>*

<sup>2</sup> Act No. 499/2004 Coll., on Archives and Records Service as amended

### 3. Kinds of grey literature in archives

#### a) Annual reports

First, these are annual reports that originate from activity of a large number of originators, whose funds are deposited in archives. The circle of originators of annual reports is large. We can mention public bodies (various state organizational units, state allowance organizations, state enterprises, self-governing territorial units, schools, health insurance companies, public research institutions etc.) and a number of private-sphere originators (various business companies, professional chambers, foundations and foundation funds, political parties and initiatives, trade union organizations, charities and public benefit associations). Under the Act on Archives, these originators are obliged to keep these documents and enable their being selected as archive documents. Annual reports are expressly mentioned as archival documents in the Annex to the Act on Archives.

#### b) Corporate literature

Second, there is a rich area of the so-called corporate literature, which is often referred to by archivists as “originators’ own promotional materials and documents”. These are their own documents, journals, catalogues, prospectuses, brochures, leaflets etc. They are published by business companies as well as by the similar range of originators I mentioned when speaking of annual reports. To get a better picture, we can remember political parties and their rich promotional materials for election campaigns or promotional materials of various hobby groups and associations (e.g. youth, environmental and sports organizations), which refer to their own activities and projects.

All of this corporate literature is considered archival documents and as such it is also included into collections of the network of public and private archives in the Czech Republic.

#### c) University qualification works

The issue of university qualification works, which serve as a basis for obtaining a university qualification, academic degree or scientific and pedagogical title, is interesting, too. Seen from the point of archival science, which considers an archival document a document with a historical value, not all final theses are automatically considered archival documents. They should be stored for twenty years and only after this period elapses, archival documents should be selected from them. This does not apply to PhD theses which are always considered archival documents, and thus are intended for permanent preservation.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a tendency to

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<sup>3</sup> This issue is regulated by the still valid Instruction of the Ministry of Education of CSR of 24 June 1987 ref. No. 19151/87-491, which issues the Rules of Discarding Documents for universities, colleges and other subordinated organizations.

consider all university or college final-year theses as archive documents in the future.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from specialized archives which include university archives, academic theses are also found in the network of state regional archives, state district archives that report to them, as well as archives of self-governing territorial units and the National Archives. They are often a part of personal collections of important personalities or collections of defunct schools and enterprises, and there are separate collections of final-year and PhD theses, which are kept in district archives.

#### d) Technical and research works, studies and projects

Another group of documents which are usually included to grey literature are technical and research works, studies and projects. Such works are considered archival documents by archivists and as such they get to the network of archives throughout the Czech Republic, mainly as part of archival funds of various business entities or research divisions of various institutions.

#### e) Legislative documents

The last group of documents I would like to speak about and which are sometimes included into grey literature, are legislative documents, i.e. laws, decrees, directives and regulations. They originate particularly from the activity of supreme bodies of the Czech Republic, and for this reason they are archived in the relevant state archives. Apart from that, numerous internal regulations or directives are deposited in archives, and this concerns basically any originator, be it public institutions or private institutions.

This list of grey literature kinds deposited in archives is not and cannot be complete. However, in my view it suggests that the so-called grey literature in the form of archival documents is really found in Czech archives.

### 4. In what ways the grey literature gets to archives

Mechanisms, in which grey literature gets into archives, again ensue from the Act on Archives. The archivist has to make the so-called selection of archival documents first. It means he or she has to estimate the value of the documents, to decide on their inclusion into archival documents and to register them accordingly. This happens in two manners: either within the discarding proceedings, which are carried out mostly in public institutions, or by a selection outside the discarding

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<sup>4</sup> The duty to publish final-year theses was enacted in the amendment to Act on Colleges and Universities, Act No. 552/2005 Coll., § 47b, which became effective on 1 January 2006. This duty implies that colleges and universities are obliged to keep such theses. It should be included into the rules of discarding documents of colleges and universities.

proceedings, which is usually made by private originators, natural or legal persons. In case of private originators the archival documents are usually received by archives pursuant to deeds of gift, deposit agreements or purchase agreements, unless this is a founder's archive or the archive documents were found; in such cases agreements are not concluded. Archive documents originated in public institutions are handed over for final deposition to public archives after some time, in accordance with the law.

As a matter of interest, I would like to mention that documents deposited in museums, libraries, galleries, memorials, public research institutes and universities as a result of their acquisition and collecting activity, which meet criteria according to the Act on Archives and which are included into the registry of archive documents, are considered as archive documents selected within the discarding proceedings.

#### 5. What is the period since origination of grey literature and its deposition into archives

This period relates to the fact that a document becomes an archival document after its permanent value is assessed by an archivist and it is selected as an archival document.

In case the selection of archival documents is carried out in the discarding proceedings, the basis for selection are documents whose discarding period has elapsed and that are not necessary for the originator's activity any more. The most usual discarding periods are five-year, but can be much longer. The truth is that originators usually need archival documents for their activity for a relatively long time, and therefore the documents are deposited into archives with a substantial delay. All this despite the fact that the discarding period does not commence on the date of the document origination, but on the 1 January of the following year after clearing or closing the document.

The selection of archival documents outside the discarding proceedings in private originators is not subject to any strict deadlines. In the Act on Archives it is spoken of an agreement between the originator or owner of the document and the relevant archive on deadlines. There is no strictly set or recommended period. It is only stipulated that in case the originator is dissolved, enters into liquidation or becomes bankrupt, the originator shall apply for the selection of archival documents immediately.

It follows from the above mentioned that archival documents, which comprise grey literature, too, get to archives with a certain delay which is standard and usual from the archivist's point of view. However, I assume that seen from the librarian's point such delay is significant and sometimes almost disastrous, mainly with respect to further accessibility of such archive documents, in this case of grey literature.

## 6. Manners of processing grey literature and making it accessible in archives

### a) Conditions of accessibility

From the definition of grey literature, as I used it in the introduction to my paper, it follows that for its description, the aspects of publication and accessibility are important. In the environment of archives we rather speak of public availability and accessibility.

In general we can say that only archival documents older than thirty years and all publicly available archival documents are accessible for inspection in our archives. There are exceptions from this provision, contained in the Act on Archives. It does not apply to archival documents originated before 1 January 1990 ensuing from activity of governmental bodies, state security bodies under Act on the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and on the Security Services Archive, as well as of social organizations and political parties associated in the National Front and to archival documents that had been publicly available even before an application for their inspection was filed, and to archival documents that had been publicly available before they were designated as archival documents.

Also originators of archival documents or their legal successors may inspect archival documents without limitation.

Inspection of archival documents may be denied in case the physical condition or state of their processing do not enable it.

It is apparent that speed of making archival document publicly available, apart from those publicly available before being designated archival documents, is hindered by a number of legislative obstacles. I am afraid that the same shall hinder prompt accessibility of grey literature deposited in archives of the Czech Republic.

### b) Manners of processing and making accessible

Unlike libraries, which make accessible to the public individual works or documents, which are described on the level of individual items, the situation in archives is completely different in this aspect. The database of the Central Registry of National Archival Heritage (PEvA)<sup>5</sup>, contains “only” short descriptions of whole archival funds and collections, i.e. it has a character of one of the types of archival aids, a guide. Grey literature is traceable there; however, with difficulties and without precision.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/vozidla/peva/index.php>

The main and most common type of archival aids, serving for making archival funds and collections accessible, is the so-called inventories, which again do not describe individual archival documents, but they operate on the level of an archival unit, which is a certain basic logical whole in the arrangement of an archival fund and collection. On this level, grey literature should be easily captured; however, the level of its description may vary. Inventories exist both in printed and in digital form. Some archives, such as e.g. the National Archives, create their inventories primarily in the digital form and they digitize old aids. This is done in the application called the Archivist (formerly Janus). The application is accessible through Badatelna.cz portal.<sup>6</sup>

The last most detailed archival aid for making archival documents accessible is the catalogue, which describes each individual archival document. However, catalogues are not much frequent in archives.

At present I am not aware that any archive would focus on making grey literature accessible in the electronic form as full texts. It is possible that archives will join certain projects in the future; however, at present there are a number of legislative and technical obstacles.

In relation to the introduction of electronic records service in the area of public administration, where archival documents start to originate primarily in the digital form, and with the planned establishment of the National Digital Archives I think there is a certain prospect of future faster accessibility of grey literature located in archives.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.badatelna.cz>