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What about OTDs? Are They Grey? Some Comments on Scientific Heritage and Grey Literature

Schöpfel, Joachim; Prost, Hélène; Ćirković, Snježana
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national repository of grey literature



What about OTDs? Are they grey?

Joachim Schöpfel¹, Snježana Ćirković², Hélène Prost³

¹University of Lille, France

²Austria

³CNRS, France

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GL and ETDs

Grey literature is “produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers, i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body” (ELIS)

“research and technical reports, briefings and reviews, evaluations, working papers, conference papers, **theses**, and multimedia content” (Pisa)

SCHÖPFEL, Joachim -
RASULI, Behrooz. 2018. Are
electronic theses and
dissertations (still) grey
literature in the digital age?
A FAIR debate. In *The
Electronic Library*. 2018,
36(2): 208-219.

Grey literature and heritage

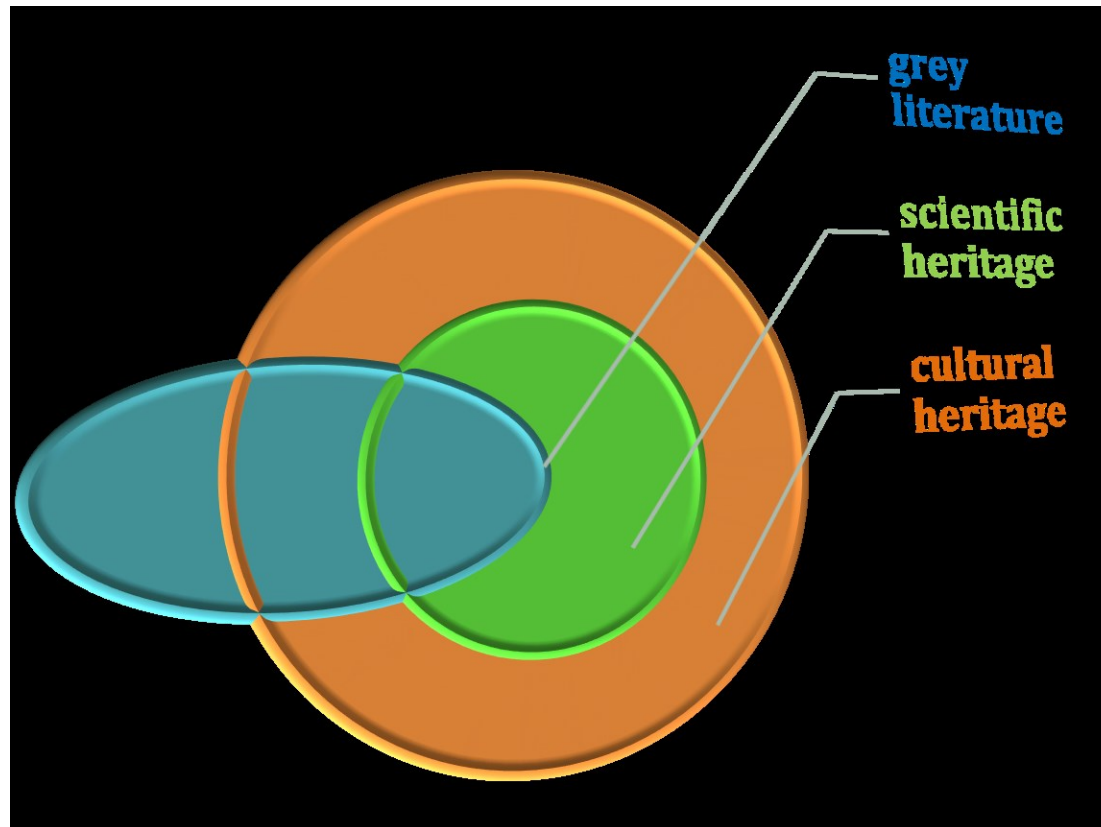
- Grey literature is about dissemination and acquisition
- Mostly current items
- But also heritage collections
- *eg Holocaust literature, urban planning, Polish underground literature, Newton's journal, Iceland research publications, Serbian culture of enlightenment, Yizkor books, private collections in the Prado Museum, Australian Baptist heritage collection, Virgin Islands heritage collection...*

“What the scientific community as a whole perceives as representing its identity, worth being passed on to the next generation of scientists and to the general public as well”

- produced by scientists
- of interest for scientists
- scientific information

What does grey means here?

Grey scientific heritage



- some heritage is described as grey
- one part of this is scientific heritage but not all
- theses and dissertations are part of this grey heritage

Specific features

- at risk of being lost
 - endangered due to their small production numbers and preservation challenges
 - unknown by scientists (and other readers) but not by librarians
- not “hard to get” but “hard to discover”
- not “somewhere out there” but already in collections

Why invest in older grey literature?

Why invest in grey scientific heritage?

- Preventing the risk of being lost
 - preservation in digital archives
 - accessibility
- Joining together distributed collections
- Making accessible hidden parts of collections

- Standards
 - to improve findability, interoperability and reusability
- Legal aspects
 - public domain
 - no enclosure
 - licensing

By the way, when does current literature becomes heritage?

- public domain
- 50 years after publishing/release
- Gutenberg era (print natives)

Challenges of grey scientific heritage

Findability

- identifiers
- metadata

Accessibility

- open access
- standard formats

Reusability

- open formats
- open licensing (or public domain)

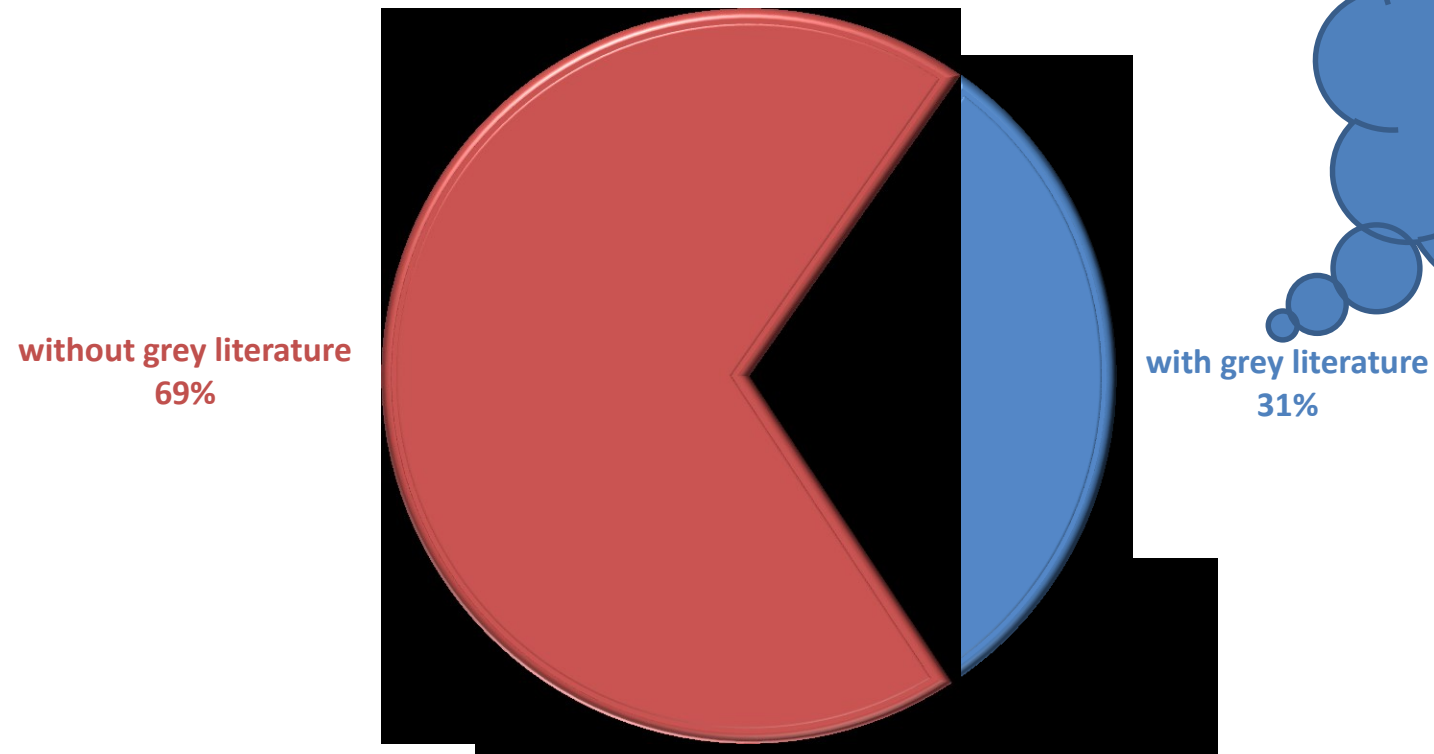
ODTs

Part of older theses and dissertations

Online service	Until 1950	Until 1900
Trove	6.4%	0.5%
BASE	1.5%	0.7%
DART-Europe	1.0%	0.4%
TEL	0.5%	0.0%
NTK GL Repository	0.2%	0.0%

The French digitisation program 2013-2014

PART OF PROJECTS WITH GREY LITERATURE (N=123)



some of them with older theses and dissertations, representing at least one third of all items

Features of ODTs

- a small part of academic collections
 - yet a significant part of those collections for which an investment has been asked (French program)
- one part already in the public domain while other items still protected by intellectual property rights
- interest for today's research depending on the discipline
- a unique testimony for the history of science and academic life

Grey heritage and ODTs

- ETDs are scientific grey literature
- OTDs are grey scientific heritage
 - part of scientific output, intellectual work and valuable for scientific and historical research
 - limited availability, lack of description and risk of being lost
- Some OTDs are less grey than others
 - need care and curation by information professionals, especially in academic and research libraries which are in the frontline to increase their findability, accessibility and potential reuse
 - cf. Australian universities: some already 100% digital (or selective), others only thinking about

ODTs as part of the world scientific heritage

- The challenge of grey scientific heritage is conservation and dissemination in open access for the scientific community
 - not only for scientists but also for interested citizens
 - not only for humans but also for machines
- As the number of older theses and dissertations is by definition limited, we may be hopeful that one day all or most of these documents will be searchable and available on open repositories or via academic portals, as an essential contribution to the world scientific heritage



<https://www.rg.mpg.de/bibliothek/dissertationen>

Thank you !

Corresponding author:

joachim.schopfel@univ-lille.fr

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