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► **To cite this version:**

Joachim Schöpfel. INIST: Tracking grey literature in a changing environment. GL 4. New frontiers in Grey Literature. 4th International Conference on Grey Literature, Oct 1999, Washington (DC), United States. pp.199-202. sic_00090056

HAL Id: sic_00090056

https://archivesic.ccsd.cnrs.fr/sic_00090056

Submitted on 12 Jan 2007

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INIST : Tracking grey literature in a changing environment

by Joachim Schopfel

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Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Chairman,

I'm glad to be with you today and to represent INIST, the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information in Nancy, France. There are many French projects concerning non-conventional literature but to this day, there has been no clearly defined policies. In other words, we have to deal with "low policy, low economics". INIST is an element in a greater national and international context. Our contribution has to be set within the rapidly changing context of documentation and information. But, even if our situation may be slightly different from other institutions, there are at least some common problems and issues.

(1) INIST

First, let me give you some basic information on our institute :

INIST, the French institute for scientific and technical information, is one of the major European scientific information centers. Our goals are to collect, process and disseminate the results of scientific research. Our current acquisition policy is to acquire all material likely to be used by the research, higher education and industry communities, regardless of subject and language.

Nevertheless, as a part of the CNRS, the French national center for scientific research, our most important mission is to work for and with the French scientific community i.e. the main public research organizations, universities, industrial R & D units and so on.

Our principal activities are database production (Pascal and Francis), document supply and scientometrics research. Our databases contain nearly 15 million bibliographic records in science, technology, medicine, social sciences and humanities. Our library covers about 24 km of shelf space. The major part of INIST document resources are serial publications. About 9,000 serial titles are currently received by INIST, with another 14,000 titles in our holdings. 400,000 articles are digitized every year.

Copies from all these documents can be ordered from our online service platform (www.inist.fr). The documents which INIST does not possess are supplied via a network of more than 100 European referral libraries.

(2) Grey literature at INIST

Our “non-conventional” collections include about 100,000 doctoral dissertations, 60,000 conference proceedings and papers, 56,000 scientific reports. Currently, we receive more than 10,000 grey documents each year.

In the changing context of database production, e-journals and the evolution of the web, INIST is engaged in a collective reflection on its acquisition policy, services and products. I would like to outline some of the perspectives for non-conventional literature.

1. **Electronic documents:** Until now, we have limited our acquisitions to print documents, spending much time on traditional library activities like cataloging. Today, most non-conventional literature exists in electronic format. Therefore, we are re-orienting our grey acquisition policy to an “all-electronic” policy. Examples : some weeks ago, INIST started to encourage its partners to submit report or dissertation files by email ; we are working on a web portal in order to simplify submission of e-documents ; there are national projects for electronic dissertations and theses in which INIST could play a major role. And of course, we are engaged in “metadata discussions”
2. **Access providing:** Until now, we have owned in our collections most of the documents needed for our databases and document supply. Today, this approach has reached its limits, as the example of NTIS shows. There are too many documents, on the web and elsewhere, for us to deal with, considering our limited financial and technical resources. In the era of the Internet, we do not need to have all the documents in our holdings. Instead, we have to know where to get them. This means

a systematic search on the web and a direct relationship with the main producers of grey literature. Here, I hope the GL compendium project will be helpful.

3. **Consulting and assistance :** Down the road, this also means assisting grey literature producers, in order to facilitate the search for this special type of documents. Two years ago, INIST became the French national ISRN agency. The International Standard Report Number contributes to the identification of report producers ; it facilitates document management and identification in databases and catalogs; it may also contribute to the creation of URNs. Last but not least, we are contributing to the standardization of report presentation.
4. **National public research :** I said that we did not need to have all the documents in our holdings. That is true. But there is one exception. INIST plays a specific role for French public research. We produce the science and technology part of the national thesis database, we collect scientific reports from public administrations and other research organizations, and proceedings of the major French conferences. La Documentation Française proposes an access to the administrative reports via an online database; currently, we are exploring the opportunity of a public STM report database on the web, together with other partners.
5. **CNRS database:** Today, we are also involved in a project of a CNRS database of the publications from the CNRS research units. Tomorrow, this may include pre-prints and other unpublished papers. Creating and providing a sort of web gate to these documents is a part of our role as keeper of our “ documentary heritage ”. In the future, such a database will also be a kind of guarantee against “ dirty-grey documents ”.
6. **Links:** It may be possible to link this documentary database to information on French experts and research units in science and technology.
7. **European level:** Facilitating access to French research production includes participation in the European EAGLE network. INIST is the French input center for the SIGLE database. Next time, I think we should discuss the future of this database in the context of the internet, the full text, and free access.
8. **Education and training:** The changing landscape of information and documentation calls for new skills and abilities. INIST is implementing an expensive program for the training and development of its workforce, together with ENSSIB, the major French

Library Science school at Lyon, and other institutions. INIST participates in the higher education of documentation specialists; each year we welcome trainees for research and other projects, we acquire French dissertations in information science, and we are creating at INIST a kind of “ library-laboratory ” linking higher education, user training, documentation, informatics and research. Assuming its role in the national research context, INIST will organize in 2000 the 2nd conference for the CNRS documentation specialists where grey literature will certainly play an important role.

To conclude, I would like to insist on the dual function of INIST in knowledge mediation :

- on the one hand, we provide and facilitate access to grey literature wherever it may be, on the web or elsewhere ;
- on the other hand, by archiving French grey literature, we act as keeper of a special document heritage,.

We all know that the lifetime of non-conventional literature is rather short. In the era of electronic documents and in a culture of ephemerality, it may be necessary to save at least some of these documents from oblivion and extinction.