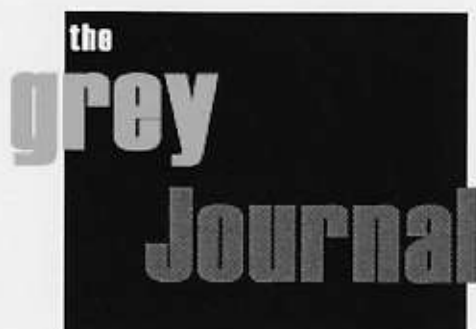


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## From Science to Policy and Decision Making: Investigating the Use and Impact of Grey Literature of Governmental Agencies Focussed on the Environment A Research Project

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Bertrum H. MacDonald and Peter G. Wells (Canada)

Publication is currently an extensive phenomenon because it is easily achieved with widely accessible digital technologies. Annually, many millions of publications are generated worldwide. However, distribution and access to these publications can be problematic, even in the presence of increasing open access systems, the Internet, and powerful search engines. Readers of *The Grey Journal* know that vast quantities of publications produced outside of the networks of mainstream commercial and academic publishers may languish unused even when the publications can be of great value. If unaware of the existence of important scientific and technical assessments found in this "grey" literature, policy-makers may make decisions in an untimely manner or overlook risks that could or should be managed more effectively or not act at all even when they should. Production of grey literature is central to the publishing practices of many organizations. But is that literature ever used to maximum efficiency? Are the extensive resources (in some instances upwards of \$1 million per title) devoted to the production of such publications justified?

In April 2007, we were awarded a three-year, CAN \$137,327 research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to study the use and impact of grey literature on environmental subjects produced by national and international governmental agencies. Building on previous work (MacDonald, Cordes & Wells, 2004; MacDonald, Cordes & Wells 2007) our research will focus on the Canadian federal department, Environment Canada, and two intergovernmental organizations, the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, and the UN advisory body, the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP). These three governmental bodies represent national, regional-international, and global settings where grey literature is prominent.

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the place of grey literature in knowledge diffusion, our research program will address four main questions: 1) Do publication characteristics of grey literature influence its discovery, use, and impact? In particular, what is the impact of scientific and technical grey literature produced by governmental and intergovernmental environmental organizations? 2) In public policy decision-making contexts are research reports published as grey literature perceived differently than research published as papers in scientific and technical journals (even when grey literature may undergo similar quality checks as journal papers)? 3) Since diffusion and use of information can be tracked in a number of ways, how should the impact of grey literature be measured and assessed? and 4) Given significant current developments in digital publications and search technologies, how should publications be designed for effective discovery and ultimately for impact?

Through the use of a suite of research methodologies (citation analysis, content analysis of public policy documents, interviews of key informants in public sector management, and surveys) we aim, with our team of graduate research students, to develop a thorough understanding of information and knowledge diffusion and use in public sector contexts. We anticipate that our findings will reveal the roles of grey literature in such settings and will highlight how scientific communication occurs in public policy decision-making where the dynamics of knowledge generation and use are different than in wholly research environments, a context currently missing in scientific information communication models. In addition to extending understanding of research communication and knowledge use, the findings of our research will offer insights relating to digital publication designs, diffusion mechanisms, and knowledge management for publishing bodies, for information systems designers (e.g., search designers), research scientists within either wholly research settings or public policy arenas, public sector managers, governmental bodies, and research funders. We believe that our research will be of importance to many organizations that communicate with audiences through grey literature.

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## About the Authors

**Bertrum H. MacDonald** is the Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Management at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. He holds a BSc (Biology) from Acadia University, and an MA (History of Science), MLS, and PhD (Information Science) from the University of Western Ontario. He is the Editor of *Electronic Resources for the History of the Book in Canada / Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada* project [www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca](http://www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca), funded by a \$2.3 million grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. His research focuses primarily on the dissemination of scientific information among Canadian scientists and engineers (both historically and currently) and on the history of scientific and technical publishing in Canada. In 2001 he was named a Dibner Library Research Scholar at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. In recognition of his significant contributions to the bibliography of Canadian science and technology he was awarded the Marie Tremaine Medal by the Bibliographical Society of Canada in 2000 and is the GreyNet Award Recipient in 2004. Email: [bertrum.macdonald@dal.ca](mailto:bertrum.macdonald@dal.ca)

**Pierrette Paillassard** is a librarian in charge of theses and dissertations in the field of the Communication and Information Sciences, and conferences in Humanities and Social Sciences. She is also administrator of the open archive "mémSIC". She was member of the AFNOR expert group who prepared the TEF metadata scheme. Email: [pierrette.paillassard@inist.fr](mailto:pierrette.paillassard@inist.fr)

**Joachim Schöpfel** is Head of the E-publishing and Document Supply Department at INIST-CNRS and Lecturer on Scientific Information at the University of Nancy. Email: [joachim.schopfel@inist.fr](mailto:joachim.schopfel@inist.fr)

**Robert Schroeder** is a reference and instruction librarian at Portland State University and the Coordinator of Information Literacy. He has been actively involved in many cooperative ventures for the past thirty years. Email: [schroedr@pdx.edu](mailto:schroedr@pdx.edu)

**Gretta E. Siegel** has worked as a librarian since 1984 at universities, research institutes, and with state and federal agencies and Indian tribes. Her interests center on issues concerning access to information in the sciences and include topics such as the economics of scholarly communication, access to grey literature, subject mapping, and information literacy for graduate students. She has also made several trips to Cuba to observe and participate in their informaticization efforts. The author currently works at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon as their Science Librarian, Coordinator of Graduate Student Services, and Coordinator of Scholarly Communication Outreach and Initiatives. The author holds degrees in chemistry, biochemistry and biophysics, and information science. Email: [siegelg@pdx.edu](mailto:siegelg@pdx.edu)

**Christiane Stock** is the Head of the Monographs and Grey Literature service at INIST, in charge of repositories like LARA (reports), mémSIC (master's theses in information sciences) and OpenSIGLE. She was member of the AFNOR expert group who prepared the TEF metadata scheme. Email: [christiane.stock@inist.fr](mailto:christiane.stock@inist.fr)

**Manorama Tripathi** was born in India in 1972. She graduated from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. She was a Senior Research Fellow at B.H.U., Varanasi. She taught at Delhi University for two years. Her areas of specialization are Classification, Information seeking behavior. She intends to pursue research in Open access to Grey literature. She has over 10 papers to her credit. Email: [manoramatripathi2@Yahoo.com](mailto:manoramatripathi2@Yahoo.com)

**J.K. Vijayakumar** is Assistant Director of Library at American University of Antigua in West Indies. He holds MLISc with First Rank from Annamalai University and submitted Ph D thesis at Bundelkhand University. He was with INFLIBNET Centre in India since 1998 and contributed to its various innovative programmes aimed at modernizing Indian academic libraries. He is the recipient of IFLA Travel Grant - 2004 and participated in IFLA Conference-2004 in Buenos Aires, Argentina and IFLA Pre-conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and selected as IFLA/OCLC Fellow - 2002 for participating a specialised training programme based at OCLC in USA. He also received InfoShare Membership Award of ASIS&T and Travel Grant from IATUL. He co-edited International CALIBER 2004 proceedings and widely published 30 technical papers and reports at international and national level. He is standing committee member in IFLA - UN Section, life member of SIS, ILA, IASLIC, KLA, GGSS, ISOC etc. His areas of interest are Digital Libraries, ETDs, Web Integration, Digital Repositories, Internet and Online Resources. Email: [vijayakumarjk@yahoo.com](mailto:vijayakumarjk@yahoo.com)

**Peter G. Wells** has recently retired from Environment Canada, though he is still there as a volunteer research scientist. His main affiliations are Professor and Adjunct Professor, Marine Affairs and Environmental and Resource Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS., and Adjunct Professor, Environmental Programs and the Acadia Centre for Estuarine Research, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS. He has been very involved in a recent study on the grey literature of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment (GOMC), comparing it to the previous study of GESAMP literature. The primary focus of the research team at Dalhousie is to examine the output, distribution, use and influence in policy and decision making of the grey literature of marine environmental intergovernmental groups, particularly the influence as the literature is expanding rapidly, while the ecosystem health and biological diversity of coastal seas and the oceans in many parts of the world are declining even faster. Email: [peter.wells@ec.gc.ca](mailto:peter.wells@ec.gc.ca)