

The secrecy of grey unveiled. Grey literature and the freedom of information.

By Cees de Blaaij

This paper examines the relationship between political culture and information control. What does 'freedom of information' mean? Governmental institutions produce a diffused body of grey literature. Some parts of these vast grey information resources are accessible but a significant number are not for a number of reasons. On one hand the public in democratic societies has a right to know as formulated in freedom of information laws. On the other hand problems of national security do prevent and restrict access to grey resources. Secrecy has to be maintained because it concerns the quintessential function of the state.

There is a public need to know if open government is the preferred political culture. But in an age with an ongoing war on terror, governments are understandingly less eager to stimulate an open society. Openness might harm the national security. This article evaluates

- a. The historical background of government and grey information resources in relation to freedom of information.
- b. The working of the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) in the United States and Europe in general and the public access to grey governmental resources.
- c. More specific the impact of the war on terror on the principles of open government and the access to grey resources.

Indicators show that government secrecy has continued to rise since September 11, 2001. However some progress has been made. In general the use of the different freedom of information laws in democratic countries to obtain information from the government continues to rise.

Research method is analytical/comparative based on literature and governmental reports.

drs. Cees de Blaaij

Collection Manager/
Manager Digital resources
Academic Department
Zeeuwse Bibliotheek

Kousteensedijk 7
4331 JE Middelburg

P.O. BOX 8004
4330 EA Middelburg

Telephone: +31-118-654339

Email: c.deblaaij@zeeuwsebibliotheek.nl