

FACTORS IN THE ACCESSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT
PUBLICATIONS: A STUDY BASED ON LAND USE PLANNING
PUBLICATIONS FOR THE CITY OF TORONTO

LES FACTEURS D'ACCESSIBILITE AUX PUBLICATIONS GOUVERNEMENTALES:
UNE ETUDE SUR LES PUBLICATIONS POUR LA VILLE DE TORONTO
RELATIVES A LA PLANIFICATION DE L'EMPLOI DU TERRAIN

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ABSTRACT

Publications from the provincial, metropolitan, and city levels of government relating to land use planning in Toronto, Ontario, were studied to develop a methodology for determining what factors are involved in the bibliographic, physical and intellectual accessibility of government publications and to assess their relative importance in facilitating or limiting access. Factors considered were bibliographic coverage, availability in print and microform, price, deposit status, sources of distribution, limits or restrictions on distribution, location of reference copies, publication in languages other than English, links between publications, and inclusion of tables of contents and indexes. Lack of bibliographic coverage was the most limiting factor in access to this group of government publications, which achieved only approximately one-third of their potential coverage. Next most limiting was availability of copies for distribution, with just over half the publications available in print or microform. Availability of reference copies was the least limiting, with publications in an average of more than three-quarters of the locations considered for the study.

RESUME

L'auteur a analysé des publications des niveaux provincial, métropolitain et municipal relatives à la planification de l'emploi du terrain à Toronto, Ontario, dans le but de mettre à jour une méthodologie qui permettrait d'une part, d'identifier les facteurs déterminants dans l'accessibilité bibliographique, physique et intellectuelle aux publications gouvernementales et d'autre part, de déterminer leur importance relative pour en limiter ou en faciliter l'accès. Les facteurs suivants ont été analysés: l'étendue du champ bibliographique, la disponibilité en texte imprimé et en microforme, le prix, le dépôt, les sources de distribution, les limites ou les restrictions sur la distribution, la localisation des copies de référence, la publication en langues autres que l'anglais, les liens entre les publications et l'inclusion des tables de matière et des index.

Le manque d'étendue du champ bibliographique était le facteur le plus limitatif quant à l'accès aux publications gouvernementales qui ont rejoint à peu près le tiers de leur clientèle potentielle. En deuxième lieu, vient le facteur de la disponibilité des copies pour distribution - un peu plus que la moitié des publications existait en texte imprimé ou en microforme. Le facteur le moins limitatif était celui de la disponibilité des copies de référence - les publications se trouvaient, en moyenne, dans plus que les trois-quarts des endroits visés dans cette étude.

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Publications from the provincial, metropolitan, and city levels of government relating to land use planning for the City of Toronto, Ontario, were studied to determine what factors were involved in their bibliographic, physical and intellectual accessibility, and to assess the relative importance of each in facilitating or limiting access.

The study was based on a research design, suggested by Fry (1970), using the three types of accessibility to information identified by Brough (1953). Government publications were defined for the purpose of the study as:

Any government document made available for circulation beyond the confines of the government other than to those advising or doing business with the government on the subject matter of the document. (Ontario, 1976)

The study was carried out by determining which government agencies had major responsibility for land use planning for the City of Toronto, and then locating and examining documents which were published, commissioned, and/or distributed by those agencies. Agencies included were, at the provincial level, the Ministry of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Ministry of Housing, and the Ontario Municipal Board; at the metropolitan level, the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board and its successor, the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Department; and at the city level, the Toronto Development Department, Housing Department, City of Toronto Planning Board, Committee of Adjustment, and Housing Standards Appeal Committee. Names of agencies are given as they were when data collection was begun, in September, 1977; several have been reorganized since. Details of methodology can be found in Phillips (1980).

Of the 677 publications located which met the criteria for inclusion in the study, nearly 85% were from the municipal level of government. The Toronto Planning Board alone accounted for a majority of the publications in the study, nearly 60%, while the Metropolitan Planning Department was the next largest contributor, with just under 15%. Provincial and other city agencies followed, with the three administrative agencies contributing less than 3% among them. Results of the study are therefore largely in terms of municipal publications.

More than 90% of the publications were monographs, with the remainder serials and pamphlets. Documents ranged in length from one to 541 pages, with mean of 50 pages and median of 24 pages. There was a total of nearly 26,000 pages in the study.

A major hypothesis of the study suggested that availability of bibliographic coverage would be a more limiting factor than availability of the publications themselves, and this

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was confirmed by the findings. Publications were on the average entered in just over one-third of the bibliographies in which they were eligible for coverage, while just over half the publications were available for distribution in print or microfiche or both, and reference copies were available in an average of more than three-quarters of their potential locations. That is, bibliographic accessibility was more limiting than physical accessibility.

Bibliographies included in the study were the principal ones covering provincial and municipal government documents in general, documents in the field of urban and regional planning, or documents of a specific agency. They included Canadiana, the Ontario Government Publications Monthly Checklist, Profile and Urban Canada (which have merged and changed title to Microlog since the study was conducted), Index to Current Urban Documents, the Metropolitan Toronto Municipal Reference Library's Selected List of New Titles (now its Acquisitions), and bibliographies from individual agencies. Each was searched for entries for documents in the study which were eligible for entry.

Analysis indicated that actual bibliographic coverage was well below potential bibliographic coverage. This appeared to be true from whatever point of view bibliographic coverage was examined - government level, specific agency, or subject. Many of the bibliographies contained entries for only a minority of the publications eligible for inclusion.

Mean number of bibliographic entries located for documents in the study was 2.05, with median of 1, while mean number of possible bibliographic entries was 5.52, with median of 6. When figures were converted to percentage of bibliographic coverage, the mean was 48.13% at the provincial level and 34% at the municipal level (metropolitan and city combined), giving a mean of 36.26% for the study as a whole.

Nor did the study indicate much overlap in coverage. When coverage of pairs of bibliographies was compared, overlap was generally well below 50%.

A number of factors in accessibility to the documents themselves were studied.

Both in-print and out-of-print documents were included in the study. In-print documents were those which were still available for distribution in hard copy in September, 1977, when data collection was begun, regardless of publication date. The oldest document still in print was published in 1964. Out-of-print documents were those which had been published from January, 1973, to September, 1977, and were no longer available for distribution in hard copy. Availability of the publications in microform was also considered.

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Nearly half the publications in the study, 315 or 46.53%, were not available for distribution in either print or microfiche, when the study was conducted, and a further 91, or 13.44%, were available only on microfiche. In September, 1977, only slightly more than half the previous year's publications and three-quarters of the 1977 publications were still available for distribution. The research supported complaints from librarians that government publications, and especially those from the municipal level, go out of print quickly.

There appeared to be a relationship between bibliographic coverage and the availability of copies of publications for distribution. Documents which were available in both print and microfiche formed the majority of those entered in four, five, six, or seven bibliographies, while of the 315 publications which were not available in either print or microfiche, 201 were entered in only one of the bibliographies searched, and 47 appeared in none at all.

While nearly half the documents were no longer available for distribution, percentage of publications in the study for which reference copies were available was high.

Information was collected on the location of reference copies available to the public within the agencies and their libraries, in the Metropolitan Toronto Municipal Reference Library, and, for provincial publications, in the Ontario Bibliographic Services Centre. The Municipal Reference Library had reference copies of nearly 85% of the publications, from all three levels of government, including 90% of the documents no longer available for distribution in hard copy. There were reference copies of 75% of the provincial publications in the Ontario Bibliographic Services Centre. Just over 70% of the publications were available for reference within the agencies themselves, in their libraries when they had them.

Other factors in physical accessibility to the publications were also considered.

A deposit system was a factor which the literature had suggested would greatly improve access, but in the present study, just over 50% of the provincial publications had actually been available as deposit items. Deposit publications were, however, significantly better represented in the Municipal Reference Library collection than non-deposit publications.

Centralized distribution, through the Ontario Publications Centre and the Ontario Government Bookstore, accounted for by far the majority of provincial publications, with the provincial agencies unique distributors of only a very few publications. Further, those distributed by the agencies were mainly pamphlets

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explaining government policies or programs, rather than more substantial material such as research reports. There was no centralized distribution at the municipal level; documents could only be obtained from the issuing agencies.

Price of the publications in this study could not be considered a limiting factor in accessibility. Mean price of the in-print documents was only \$1.50, and 43% were free. Very few of the publications in the study carried any restriction on distribution or use, and where restrictions did exist, they did not completely prevent access to the document. This was a result to be expected, given the definition of government publication used for this study.

Factors in intellectual accessibility considered included language of publication, links with other documents, and inclusion of indexes and tables of contents.

Only six of the documents were in languages other than English, three in French, one in Portuguese, one in Chinese, and one multilingual. All were also available in English.

About 40% of the publications had some sort of connection with other government documents, such as forming part of a series, or being a condensation, draft, or supplement of another document.

Users of government documents appear from the study to be justified in complaining about lack of indexing. Only 11 indexes were located for the 677 publications in the study, for nearly 26,000 pages of information. This lack of indexing cannot really be justified on the grounds that many of the publications were too short to require it; the mean number of pages per publication was 50. Tables of contents were better supplied, but even they were included in a minority of the documents in the study, just over two-fifths.

The need for adequate information if the public is to be involved in the land use planning process has been recognized, and there is evidence of significant effort on the part of government agencies to provide this information. Studies of groups of government publications from other agencies and subject areas could show different results.

However, the research reported here suggests that reference copies may be available to the public for a high proportion of government documents. Presumably pending and proposed legislation on access to government information will make many more documents available.

But availability of reference copies was identified in this study as the least restricting of the major factors in

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accessibility. Consideration will have to be given to such factors as methods of providing bibliographic coverage, adequate copies for distribution, and increased indexing, if access to information legislation is to be truly effective in increasing availability of government information.

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