

ACTIVATE Project – Questions after first secondment

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1. Can you tell us more about your research work in your home institution?

At my home institution my research activity is relatively limited, due to the fact that the great part of my work there is devoted to teaching activities (classes, exams, supervision of thesis etc.). My research work depends in fact on the possibility to have time to spend in libraries and archives where I can have access to sources - the necessary premise for historical investigation. Also, my research work is tied to the involvement in research groups operating at local or national level, in which my home institution is involved. As a member of associations of historians (SISLAV - Italian Labour history association; Siscalt – Italian Association of historians dealing with Germanophone contemporary history; SIS - Italian Women Historian Association), I also have the opportunity to contribute to research activities and participate in scientific initiatives in the fields of contemporary history, labour history and social history.

2. How did the secondment take place inside your broader work/research practice?

Do you think the secondment helped you reflect on it?

The secondment at the FES matched perfectly my research interests and practice. There I could find archival sources which meet research topics I'm dealing with in recent times. During the month spent at the FES I had the possibility to delve in depth into the great and varied number of sources stored there. Besides that, I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the complex work and the several processing steps that sources must go through to make them accessible to researchers (and to the public in general). It was highly instructive to meet, day after day, people working there, in charge of specific tasks, telling you about the specific work they have to do in processing documents or objects to be archived – ranging from the selection and evaluation of sources to their material preparation. I was thus able to get an idea of the complexity and variety of aspects that characterize the life of an archive. I could realize how vital archives are, especially the archives at the FES, which are huge in terms not only of quantity but also in terms of the variety of the type of documents stored. This deeper awareness was important to think of archive as real actors in producing historical knowledge.

3. Did the secondment help your research in a surprising way?

Surprising was to have the possibility to find so many kinds of sources, so that I could collect materials useful for at least three of my current and future research prospects.

4. How did your secondment take place in the ACTIVATE project?

The secondment took place with respect to the activities planned in WP2, WP3 and WP4. As for WP2, I will contribute to Task 2.5: Workshop #5 “Invisibility/Power imbalances” by presenting a paper on my experience at the FES with respect to the subject *practices of historical knowledge production*.

As for Work Package 3, Task 3.3.: Reflections on structure and objects regarding the online exhibition on materiality and politics, I will elaborate on inspiration I received by the exhibition on the German photograph Jupp Darchinger (*Jupp Darchinger - Das Auge der Republik*, Bonn 12.6. - 14.9. 2025), an exhibition that has been organized by the FES itself and at the opening of which I had the privilege to take part, since the opening took place during my stay in Bonn. The exhibition has stimulated some useful reflections on the political dimension that can be ascribed to photographs as a communication means. Some of the pictures I saw at the exhibition can be thematized and used for implementing Task 3.3. As for WP4, see please my answer to question 6.

5. Did the secondment help you create a stronger link with your host institution?

Can you share how?

Absolutely. The FES is a non-academic institution which is highly engaged in activities concerning contemporary history, labour history, social and cultural history of the 20th and 21st century. Archivists are supported by a huge number of historians, and during my stay there I got in touch with non-academic historians whose research interests met my owns. I'm sure that contacts established there are and will be helpful to develop further forms of collaboration in the next time. Should my home institution host secondees from the FES, I would certainly involve them in teaching activities and projects taking place there.

6. Can you describe how the work you performed during your secondment will contribute to the elaboration of the final exhibition on feminism?

This last question does refer to an activity foreseen by WP4. I now know that the FES does possess and store many "items" that can be integrated on the final exhibition on feminism. Following my research topics, I found sources concerning the participation of women groups at some of the UN Conferences on Women that took place between 1975 and 1995. For example, I found sources testifying to the great interest some women politicians and activists in and around the SPD (Social Democratic Party) had in participating in the mid-term UN Conference on women that took place in Copenhagen in 1980. Some women members of the SPD were highly interested not only in the issues addressed by the UN Conferences; they also wanted to implement issues of gender justice – equality was the key word – within the political life of the party. These sources testify to the difficulties of German women to find a place within a traditionally male dominated political party as well as their determination to change the status quo, by finding ways and strategies to strengthen the presence of women and the recognition of their role in the political institutional arena. I could find out names of German women whose political and intellectual biographies seem to have been somehow forged by worldwide events such as the UN Conferences on Women. I think this question – the role of UN Conferences on Women in forging global feminism - could be addressed by the final exhibition on feminism.

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