

ACTIVATE Winter School: Archiving and analyzing materiality

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Background of Winter/Summer Schools in ACTIVATE

The training of ESRs gets special attention in ACTIVATE. Three 4 to 5-day training seminars will be organized during the project around the topics approached in the Research Work Packages. The Schools are primarily aimed at the ESR in the Consortium – but in order to attract new ESRs and to raise awareness around new perspectives and sources on political activism among young scholars and archivists, we aim to open the training seminars up to ESRs from other countries and institutions, as well as to PhD and Master's students from the projects partner institutions. Therefore, **each consortium partner should be part of the school**. Additional participants will be invited directly.

Archiving and analyzing materiality

The first ACTIVATE Winter School focusses on the materiality of historical sources. By taking on this perspective, the Winter School at FES Bonn aims to integrate the archival as well as the curational perspectives into the research process: with different presentations, case studies and discussions as well as new formats of exchange and knowledge production, material sources will be explored in multiple ways.

With its focus on materiality and metadata, the program aims to address issues, that will also be explored further in the projects' online exhibition on the material culture of transnational activism through political objects. The ACTIVATE exhibition aims at regarding political objects not as static artefacts, but as dynamic entities that are embedded in social practices of dissent. The Winter School benefits from and is also intended to drive forward the discussion on the selection of political objects for the ACTIVATE online exhibition.

The discussion regarding the definition of and research approaches to various forms of materiality, whether objects or ephemeral material, led in past Activate discussions to a very broad definition on what constitutes a political object. In fact, anything can become a political object. This depends on its use and the point of view, as well as the specific perspective of the observer (curator, archivist, researcher or activist). Thus, three ways of dealing with the question turned out to be useful:

- 1) The political nature of an object is determined by the producer, who creates it for a specific use in a political context; at the same time, the object becomes political through these specific actions.
- 2) Objects can be politized by any user of these objects through the practice they exercise.
- 3) Objects are given a political attribution in their “afterlife”—that is, after they are no longer in active use—by other actors, who define these objects as political, e.g. as memento.

Not only questions of definition, but also—in particular—the handling of metadata, contextualization, and background information on the history of the objects pose a challenge for researchers, archivists, and curators alike when engaging with objects for the study of historical topics. The Winter School's concept and program is designed to incorporate the outcomes of discussions and learnings from previous ACTIVATE activities, e.g. the results of the first workshop on political objects. Furthermore, the school strives to address and delve deeper into issues and questions from ongoing Activate projects to create synergies not only between Work Packages but also among the different perspectives of the Activate archivist, researchers, curators and activists.

Metadata, in particular, play an important role as the foundation for research and often shape the researcher's perspective without the researcher even realizing it. The question of what constitutes a political object serves as the starting point for the Winter School Program. Building on this, the question of the incorporation of politics in material culture has to be linked to a common reflection on how objects are actually recorded and described. We will discuss both the metadata required for research and the substantive questions regarding the role of materiality in historical understanding. These two perspectives converge at the starting point of source criticism and then **follow the different paths of dealing with objects as object of research, as object to be archived and as object to be musealized**. These three approaches take different perspectives and will be brought together in a fruitful exchange during the course of the Winter School in Bonn.

The School's leading questions are:

1. What metadata is helpful, and what is necessary for source criticism?

In this regard, we bring together contributions from the three different perspectives of archivists, researchers and curators, also in a broader, transnational context. In particular, we will look on best practices from archives and museums. Especially, the concept of "records in context" (RiC), released by the International Council on Archives (ICA) as an innovative approach to describing sources will be discussed for this special challenge, as it is considered an extremely innovative tool for this specific need. Its non-hierarchical but provenance-based model will be explored in particular for productive implementation into the archives' cataloguing workflows. As RiC is designed for records, it will also be reflected on the need for specialised metadata schemes for museums and further GLAM institutions like LIDO (Lightweight Information Describing Objects). RiC could serve as new inroad into historical research by delivering contextual metadata which might be particularly important for political objects. The context of various national practices and guidelines will also play a key role in this debate.

2. How are political objects integrated into the history of politics in terms of their respective material characteristics?

Here, especially researchers are asked to bring forward examples of how they research objects and what role materiality plays. As basis serves our broad definition of political objects (see above: intentionally political, politicized by use or politically used / attributed in its after life). To what extent does the inclusion of objects within research broaden perspectives, ensure visibility and representation, and shape narratives? What kind of historical questions can political objects answer, that written sources alone cannot?

3. How do collecting policies and practices influence the writing of an history of activism?

How is the historical value of an object defined and ultimately conveyed? How do researchers incorporate it into their work, how do archivists determine it in their appraisal processes, and how do curators ultimately address it in the context of exhibitions? Archives and museums have different ways and policies to collect and they tell the stories of objects in various ways. It will be interesting to explore questions related to collection logic, presentation, and the contextualization within exhibitions. In this context, the focus is to understand how and why archives and museums deal with (political) objects in the way they do and what historians can learn from these perspectives for their research. Also, the role of activists come into play.

These three key questions are reflected in the school's program, which will be organized to last 4 days (two half-days and two full days).

To apply, please respond and include a brief description of your research interests or projects and a short CV, using the subject line “Activate: Winter School” to public.history@fes.de

If you have any questions, please contact laura.valentini@fes.de



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