

# news and miscellanea



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## ***Frauen in Bewegung* – Building Up an Online Documentation and a Digital Collection on the History of Austrian Women’s Movements, 1918–1938**

**Lydia Jammerneegg and Natascha Vittorelli**



*Frauen in Bewegung* (Women in motion) is a joint endeavour of Ariadne, the Women’s and Gender Documentation Centre at the Austrian National Library, and the Department of Contemporary History at Vienna University.<sup>1</sup> For a total of two years (2006–2008) the project was financed by the *Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung* (Austrian Science Fund). Under the leadership of Helga Hofmann-Weinberger (Austrian National Library) and in cooperation with Johanna Gehmacher (Department of Contemporary History, Vienna University) *Frauen in Bewegung* has been conducted as an interdisciplinary project. While Lydia Jammerneegg was responsible for the documentary part of the project, Natascha Vittorelli dealt with the historiographical components. In doing so, the documentation and historiography of women’s movements were closely interlinked. The following description focuses on the documentary part of the project and explains the aims, the structure and some of the results of the documentation and digitalisation work, which is presented on the web.

### **The Aims of *Frauen in Bewegung***

A few physical archives in Europe have been providing material on the history of women’s movements for quite some time now, among them the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women’s Movements in Amsterdam, the Archive of the German Women’s Movement in Kassel, and the Archive for the History of the Swiss Women’s Movement (Gosteli-Foundation) in Worblaufen. *Frauen in Bewegung* responded to the current lack of a comparable institution in Austria by setting up an online documentation and digital collection. The project aimed at providing a comprehensive overview of the Austrian women’s movement in the period 1918 to 1938 on



the web. Files or holdings scattered over a number of libraries, collections and archives in Austria are now concentrated virtually in one site to constitute a comprehensive centre for documentation and reference. Relevant material was evaluated, filed and made accessible online. The online documentation and digital collection of the history of women's movements is displayed through texts, pictures and digitalisations. The exposure of sometimes lesser-known documents of women's history might inspire further research on the history of women's movements.

### **The Structure of *Frauen in Bewegung***

The web presentation consists of two major fields: the documentation of historical data and the online presentation of digitalised sources. The structure of the online documentation follows and reflects central topics of the historiography on women's movements by indicating individuals, women's associations/organisations and women's journals. The online documentation evaluates and records biographical details of *individuals*, including all variations of their names, different information on life data, professions and activities as well as functions and memberships in women's organisations. As far as relevant information could be discovered, a biography for each person was included. Careful attention to such details enables the site to show the dense network of relations and interconnections among protagonists and associations on a national and sometimes transnational level. Networks are visualised through links between persons, as well as between persons and associations. Moreover, for individual persons one can also find references to primary literature, secondary literature, images and links or references to archival material. The documentation of *women's associations/organisations* is arranged in a similar way. Data and information about some three hundred individuals and organisations are exhibited.

The webpage presents inventory descriptions of the history of women's movements located in relevant holdings in collections, libraries and archives all over Austria, including the Austrian provinces. In rare cases complete archival holdings exist, which were documented. Otherwise, we located and recorded files about the foundation, by-laws, names of board members, anniversaries and so on, giving evidence of the existence and activities of various organisations.

The documents that are digitalised and published online in a full text version include statutes, women's journals, periodicals (annual reports or proceedings of women's organisations, anniversary publications etc.) as well as photographs and posters – all connected to the history of Austrian women's movements. For historical women's journals, content indexes of the articles have been included as well. The digitalisation of documents is restricted by copyright law. This means that digitalisation was limited to the holdings of the Austrian National Library. Copyright law also guarantees the protection of works for a period of seventy years after the death of the author and therefore prevented the publication of a number of quite relevant works and authors. Further criteria for digitalisation were a poor physical state of the documents, as well as damage from use as a result of frequent access. For reasons of conservation and long-term archiving, as soon as documents are digitalised the physical documents may not be retrieved any more and are inaccessible to library users.

## Conceptualising Nation and Religion

Geographically the project is limited to the territory of the Republic of Austria. The criterion for selection of individuals was not Austrian citizenship, but at least a period of residence in Austria during the years 1918 to 1938. The selection criterion for associations/organisations was the location of the registered office on the territory of the Republic of Austria. We tried to identify all ethnic minorities, although ethnic and national belonging was not a selection criterion, but we were able to trace and include only organisations publishing in German. For the large Czech minority of Vienna no documents or information on corresponding women's associations could be detected so far. The same applies to the Austrian provinces of Styria and Carinthia, where in the registers of associations of the province archives no Slovene women's associations could be discovered.

We included all religious denominations in our investigation – Catholic, Old Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and Islamic – but were able to locate only Catholic, Old Catholic, Jewish and Protestant women's associations. According to the further selection criteria of either promoting women's interests towards emancipation or self-identifying with the term 'women's movement', only Jewish and Catholic women's associations were finally integrated in the documentation.

## Challenges of Interdisciplinarity

Scholars often call for interdisciplinarity in such projects, but it is a goal sometimes difficult to achieve. To illustrate the challenges to the interdisciplinarity of *Frauen in Bewegung*, we have chosen one concrete example, focusing on the term 'women's movement' and the difficulties and differences in using it.

We sought to construct an interdisciplinary project by bringing together two approaches: documentation sciences and historiography. Numerous historical studies deal with the history of women's movements and thereby seem to document their existence pretty well. But within these studies the term 'women's movement' itself is rarely questioned. What actually is meant by women's movements and what exactly is designated by this notion often remains vague. For our project, this general problem of women's movements historiography was intensified by the fact that no agreement seems to exist on the very existence of an Austrian women's movement in the interwar period at all. Historiography can successfully get around a clear notion of the term 'women's movement' or can start analysis by questioning this term.<sup>2</sup> But a digital collection and online documentation needs concrete criteria and at least a preliminary definition that its work would be based on. Therefore, setting up content standards for the documentation was a central concern of the project. Because transparency of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion was seen as crucially important, the working procedures were written down and placed online.

The selection criteria for entry into the digital collection and online documentation were conceptualised rather extensively. Included are: individuals or associations/organisations promoting women's interests in an emancipatory way – with claims for

equal rights, references to experiences of injustice on the basis of gender, etc. This encompasses individuals and women's organisations that: (a) articulated common interests – not only, but of course also, of women – publicly; (b) sought to acquire new spaces for women (e.g., occupational fields to which women were denied access before); and (c) worked to improve the status and position of women in many respects including in artistic, literary or architectural regards. Furthermore, we included individuals, associations/organisations and publications that self-identified with the term 'women's movement'. This means also women's party organisations or religious women's associations.

We drew a line at including individuals, organisations and publications that were pan-German or National Socialist from their founding. Although there is a current tendency to coin a so-called '*völkisch-nationaler Feminismus*', which could at best inadequately be translated as 'nationalist feminism', we did not consider these activities to possess emancipatory potential. Nevertheless, we did include those that shifted political and personal positioning, according to the criteria outlined above. To give an example: in 1906 the *Vereinigung arbeitender Frauen in Graz* (Association of Working Women in Graz) was founded as member of a women's umbrella organisation. According to the by-laws, this association engaged in women's education and representing the interests of working women. At the general assembly in 1913, the decision was taken to change the name of the association to *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein in Graz* (General German Women's Association in Graz). At the same time the statute was reformulated, including some minor changes in content. Another change was implemented when, in 1922, the association was again reorganised and renamed *Deutscher Frauenbund Graz* (German League of Women in Graz). Following the new by-laws, only 'German women of Aryan provenance' were allowed to become members.<sup>3</sup> This way, the process of an originally liberal women's association changing into a racist one could be recorded.

## Prospects

The online project emerged from a preliminary project elaborated by Ariadne, which investigated the history of women's movements prior to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.<sup>4</sup> Together with this preliminary project, *Frauen in Bewegung* creates a central web portal for documentation and digital filing, as well as a source of information on the history of women's movements in Austria and, with some restrictions, for the Habsburg Monarchy. Since the database was only developed for the period 1918 to 1938, both parts cannot be made available in a common web presentation (yet) and for now constitute two separate areas. Certainly a consolidation of both project periods into one single database would be desirable. Whether this can be carried out it is not possible to state at present. A major further goal would be the evaluation and integration of non-German-speaking women's movements of the Habsburg Monarchy, covering their activists, associations and publications, and including them into *Frauen in Bewegung*. Although it has become apparent that there are further possibilities of expanding and deepening the project, at the moment no continuation is planned.

### ◆ About the Authors

Lydia Jammernegg, MA, is a librarian and historian, affiliated with Ariadne, the women's and gender documentation centre at the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Together with Sonja Edler, Julia Köstenberger and Brigitte Noelle she built up the online exhibition '*Frauen wählet!*' 85 Jahre allgemeines Frauenwahlrecht in Österreich ('Women vote!' 85 years of women's vote in Austria), 2004; see: [http://www2.onb.ac.at/ariadne/projekte/frauen\\_waehlet/](http://www2.onb.ac.at/ariadne/projekte/frauen_waehlet/). She recently published: *Frauen in Bewegung (1918–1938) – Reflexionen über dokumentarische und historische Zugänge* (Women in Motion [1918–1938] – Reflections about documentary and historical approaches), in *Wie Frauenbewegung geschrieben wird* (How <the history of> women's movements is written), ed. Johanna Gehmacher and Natascha Vittorelli, Vienna: Löcker, forthcoming in 2009. E-mail: [lydia.jammernegg@onb.ac.at](mailto:lydia.jammernegg@onb.ac.at)

Dr Natascha Vittorelli is a historian, affiliated with the Department of Contemporary History, University of Vienna. Her publications include *Wie Frauenbewegung geschrieben wird* (How <the history of> women's movements is written), co-edited with Johanna Gehmacher, Vienna: Löcker, forthcoming in 2009; *Frauenbewegung um 1900. Über Triest nach Zagreb* (Women's Movements around 1900. Via Trieste towards Zagreb), Vienna: Löcker, 2007; and 'Mapping the Balkans. Irritation als Methode' (Mapping the Balkans. Irritation als method), in *Geschichte lehren an der Hochschule. Reformansätze, Methoden, Praxisbeispiele* (Teaching history at universities. Approaches, methods, practical examples), ed. Rainer Pöppinghege, Schwabach am Taunus: Wochenschau Verlag, 2007, 173–179. E-mail: [natascha.vittorelli@univie.ac.at](mailto:natascha.vittorelli@univie.ac.at)

### ◆ Notes

1. 'Frauen in Bewegung: 1918–1938. Biographien, Vereinsprofile, Dokumente' (Women in motion. 1918–1938. Biographies, organisational profiles, documents), at: <http://www.fraueninbewegung.onb.ac.at>

2. Cf. Natascha Vittorelli, *Frauenbewegung um 1900. Über Triest nach Zagreb* (Women's movement around 1900. Via Trieste towards Zagreb), Wien: Löcker, 2007.

3. 'nur Deutsche <Frauen>, somit arischer Abkunft'. Deutscher Frauenbund Graz, Statuten, Statutenänderungen, Korrespondenz, 1906–1937 (German League of Women in Graz, Statutes, changes in the statutes, correspondence, 1906–1937), in: Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv, LReg. 206 Fa-018/1937.

4. 'Frauen in Bewegung: 1848–1918. Diskurse und Dokumente der österreichischen historischen Frauenbewegung' (Women in motion: 1848–1918. Discourses and documents of the Austrian historical women's movement), at: <http://www2.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/index.htm>