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## Writing European Feminisms: FRAGEN and Answers

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## **Writing European Feminisms: FRAGEN and Answers**

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### **Abstract**

*While gender equality as an object of policy making has originated in the feminist movements of the second part of the 20th century, this connection has not yet been the object of serious systematic study. FRAGEN aims at opening up the material that would be necessary for such an analysis. With the help of subcontractors for each country, FRAGEN has compiled an analytical data base of European texts from the women's movement. The database developed in FRAGEN needs to balance two goals. One was to create a database of the original texts on gender+ equality frames that have emerged from feminist movements in Europe. The other was to organize and facilitate open access for researchers to this database. Over the last three years European women's libraries and scholars from all over Europe have been working together on the Fragen project, which is part of the European research project QUING (Quality in Gender + Equality Politics). Making this information available will allow for comparative research into the history of feminist ideas in different European countries. A general outline of the project is given.*

In my paper I like to give you an overview of the FRAGEN project:

- The aim of Fragen
- The partners
- The way we worked
- The result so far: a website and database
- Plans for the future

## Introduction

Preserving the cultural heritage of women and women's movements has been the focus of the institute I represent: Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. For more than 75 years we have been collecting this heritage and made it accessible and available via our academic library and archive. Besides we promote research based on our collections. For an impression of our rich resources , visit [www. Aletta.nu](http://www.Aletta.nu)

Today I am going to tell you about one of the projects we did to make the cultural heritage of women's movements in the EU accessible and available: The FRAGEN project: [www.Fragen.nu](http://www.Fragen.nu)

The FRAGEN project is part of the European research project QUING (Quality in Gender + Equality Politics), which compares gender equality policies across Europe. Quing includes several subprojects; one of them is FRAGEN.

In 2008 we were asked to coordinate the FRAGEN project. Although we actually had many questions, we were excited about the great challenge ahead of us. For the first time core feminist texts which have been influential in the development of feminist movements in Europe would be selected, digitised and brought together in a database. Moreover this project would give us the opportunity to work with international colleagues from all over Europe.

In January 2009 we started the project.

**The aim of FRAGEN** (the abbreviation comes from **F**rames on **G**ender) is:

- To create a database of the original texts on gender+ equality frames that has emerged from feminist movements in Europe.
- To organize and facilitate open access for researchers to this database.

Through this, comparative research into the history of feminist ideas in different European countries will be made possible.

## **Finding partners in 29 countries; 18 libraries/archives;**

The first thing we had to do, was identify and contract suitable partners in all EU member states, plus Croatia, Turkey, who would like to participate in this project. Our institute has always been very active in the field of international cooperation. We participate within networks like WINE (Women's Information Network Europe, the network of women's and gender libraries in Europe) and ATGENDER. (The European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation is a professional organization in the field of international gender studies) . So primarily we contacted our colleagues abroad: women's or gender information centers and gender studies departments from universities in EU countries and persuaded them to participate in this project. It took a lot of effort. Since the budget for individual partners was not high (the 'all in' amount for one delivered text was € 500,--) and a substantial amount of work had to be done by the partners, it wasn't that easy to get people on board. Moreover partners were not so sure about the focus of the project. How on earth would it be possible to collect the most relevant feminist texts in Europe? There are so many relevant texts! And who decides what is relevant or which text has been influential? What is a feminist manifesto? But once some sheep crossed the bridge, the rest followed.

**Altogether we worked with 29 partners**, a 100% coverage of all EU countries + Turkey and Croatia. (see map EU) 18 Partners are so called women's libraries or archives; the other 11 are gender studies / or other/ departments of universities. Each partner signed a contract through which they declared to do all work needed according to the criteria of the project.

## **The selection process**

For each FRAGEN partner the first step in the selection process was to identify at least three to five prominent national experts on the feminist movement in their country that are knowledgeable of various strands of feminism. These experts can be academics, but also feminists, feminist collectives, platforms or assemblies that are

representative of the feminist movement in their country. The partners should give a short explanation why they consider these experts to be the most suitable. These experts were asked to nominate five to ten important 'feminist texts' that originate in their country and to give arguments for their proposals connected to the criteria. Out of this so-called 'long list' of proposed texts, the experts ultimately created the 'short list' that was chosen for the FRAGEN database. This short list could contain a maximum of ten texts per country. The long list is also put on the Fragen website, to increase transparency and to solicit proposals of other texts that would need to be included.

Most partners started the process of selecting texts in November 2009, after attending a training workshop in Amsterdam.

Carol Quin from *Ireland* wrote:

*'I really didn't know what to expect when I attended the initial training workshop in Amsterdam in November 2009, but the enthusiasm, commitment and collegiality of the Aletta team was such that when I left I was deeply committed to the whole FRAGEN mission! On returning back to Ireland I set about sourcing and contacting relevant experts in the field of Women's Studies. I was assisted in this by the fact that Women's and Feminist Studies are taught in the University where I work, and I had over the years come into contact with a lot of academics working in this field. I didn't want the election process to be limited to academics however, so I contacted activists as well as another archivist to assist in the process.'*

In Germany, Ursula Nienhaus of FFBIZ initially had little faith in the project, but after consultation with several colleagues from Austria and Germany, decided to give Fragen the benefit of the doubt. She reports on the selection of experts: *'we asked five different professors for history and/or gender studies for further cooperation. We got only two positive answers and thus decided that Ursula who is a professor of history and gender studies herself in addition to her position as the head of the FFBIZ had to do for the third. Fortunately all three were at that time residents of Berlin. We arranged an exchange with (the experts) Karin Hausen and Ilse Kokula 'to*

*whom we had to explain the whole “impossible” mission again on the one hand and to promise just little work to be done by each of them at their homes’*

## **2. Which criteria for selecting texts for FRAGEN were defined?**

The partners should select 10 texts per country, according to the following criteria, which came from a need to cover as many as possible political positions on the feminist problematic, and, of equal importance, a need to include as many intersections with other inequalities as are present in a specific context.

- ***the nature of the texts***: the database will include feminist manifestos<sup>i</sup> and texts that have functioned as a feminist manifesto and/or got the status of a manifesto afterwards.

- ***Time period***: the selected texts must originate from the late sixties (of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) till the present.

- ***Location***: the first focus should be on texts that originate in each country. We know very well however that sometimes very important texts have been ‘imported’ and translated from elsewhere. The texts should preferably originate in each country, but we do not completely exclude others.

- ***historical relevance***: this means the degree to which a text has had an impact on the nature and success of feminist movements in a certain country, and the degree to which it is seen to have impacted on changing gender relations. The selected texts must be among the most relevant ones in their context.

- ***diversity of approaches***: this criterion covers the various strands of feminism as they are seen to exist or have existed. The database should include a variety of positions, including the most radical ones. Both popular and marginal ideas should be taken into account, and the selection should be made keeping in mind that there might have been strong ‘struggles’ between different voices, and even processes of exclusion.

- ***a focus*** on (at least one of) the three issues that are in the centre of the QUING analysis of gender and equality policies, namely intimate citizenship<sup>ii</sup>, non-employment<sup>iii</sup> and gender based violence<sup>iv</sup>. As this is only the start of the database, the texts should preferably focus on (one of) the three issues, but we do not completely exclude others.

**-multiple inequalities:** priority is given to those texts that articulate gender as intersected or combined with other inequalities such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, class, disability, citizenship status, among others.

With these criteria and guidelines in mind all partners started the selection process. After the selection, the copyright to publish the texts online had to be obtained, consequently the texts had to be digitized, uploaded and coded within the database.

## **Methodology**

All documents in the database are published in the language of the participating countries. To make it easier to compare and contrast the selected texts a coding system has been used, based on the Quing methodology. This coding system or survey, which is in English to facilitate the access for the users of the database, had to be filled out for all texts included in the Fragen database. So alongside the bibliographic description and the digital version of the text an analytical description is available for every text.

The coding system contains several questions -with double choice, multiple choice or free answer options- regarding: the historical relevance of the text; the topic(s) of the text, according to Beijing's 12 critical areas of concern; the use of 'gender' in the text; causes for gender inequalities; the intersection of gender with other inequalities, such as ethnicity, religion, class. The survey also asks if the text contains a call for action, the content of this call and who is addressed by this call. Another question in the survey relates to the framing of feminism, in which each document is classified by its feminism(s) type(s), as defined by Judith Lorber.

This seems like a piece of cake, but in reality this was a huge effort. To guide the partners in the process we developed several manuals, like a manual for the selection of texts, a database manual, a copyright and digitization manual. Moreover we started a blog to, facilitate easy communication and exchange of experiences.

In the meantime the project management developed the Fragen database and website to store the texts.

In the database a bibliographical description of the texts (like author, title publisher etc.) can be found, as well as an analytical description based on the QUING methodology. A full text copy of the document is uploaded in the original language of the text. The database is part of the Fragen website and is open to the research community. It is possible to search the contents of the database in various ways: by country, subject, author, title.

All partners have been working very hard : finding suitable experts to select the texts, arrange copyright to publish the texts online, digitise the texts, upload and code them. All in all about 500 people were involved in this project.

## **Conclusion**

Can the selected texts within the Fragen database be considered as the most relevant feminist texts of the participating countries?

Yes and No.

Within the limitations of the project (the small budget, limited time frame; the set criteria) all partners were committed to making this project into a success. Together they covered 29 countries, contacted more than 200 experts, selected, digitised and got copyright permission for approximately 250 texts, which are now full text, online available on the Fragen website and database. A tremendous achievement.

I like to finish with the conclusion of Croatia " the very short list of ten texts based on three precise sets of criteria is the fruit of compromises and can only 'give a flavor' of a particular national feminist movement and/or situation. The FRAGEN project and the database are just a beginning, I hope for a new European feminist intellectual adventure".

The great benefit of this project is not only the result in the end. It also lies in the international cooperation of 29 countries and the experiences of each partner. Just

some quotes to illustrate the impact of this project: *Belgium* states: 'Fragen felt as recognition of what was done during the second feminist wave'. And *France* reports: 'through the Fragen project, we are given the opportunity to offer a different view on what made the history of feminism in France'. Or, as *Ireland* puts it: 'I view FRAGEN as one of the most worthwhile projects I have recently been involved in, not only for the research value of the overall project, which speaks for itself, but for the lessons I have learnt in project management, communication and working in harmony to a common purpose.'

### **Demonstration of the database / future**

The FRAGEN website and database of core feminist texts I am going to present today, show a wonderful selection of great resources of the feminist and women's movement in Europe. This is not the end, this is just the beginning. Certainly if we look at the 'wish list' of the Fragen partners: if we can we like to:

- Extend the database after this project.  
At the moment (January 2013) there are plans to extend the database with texts from more Nordic countries, like Iceland, Norway, Greenland. Countries which are not part of the EU but would like to participate in this project.
- Include also 'old' texts or texts from the first feminist movement
- Include new media/resources, like websites and blogs

'One aim of the Fragen project was to make comparative research into the history of feminist ideas in different European countries possible'. By now researchers in Europe use this database and start to analyze the sources of feminism/women's movements in Europe. Professors in gender studies/women's studies use the database in their courses. At Atria several young academics/ interns from Italy, Spain, Turkey and Poland, analyzed the selection from their country. Their findings will be published on the Fragen website.

Thank you very much for your attention!

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<sup>i</sup> We understand by a feminist manifesto: "a written public declaration of principles, policies, or intentions, especially of a political nature, issued by non-governmental collective or individual actors, that articulates a position on gender relations either by specifying what is problematic about gender relations in a certain spatio-temporal context, or by specifying what needs to be done or changed in gender relations, including a call for action towards change in the direction of abolishing gender inequality". (Source: Conny Roggeband, Djurdja Knezevic, Mieke Verloo (2008), 'Essential' feminist historical writings? Problems composing a polyphonous canon)

<sup>ii</sup> Intimate citizenship concerns the policies of the state that regulate intimate partnerships. Within FRAGEN we focus on horizontal, not intergenerational partnership arrangements. "With a reference to Plummer (partly) we understand 'intimate citizenship' to be a set of policy frames that concern claims about the body, the traditional and nontraditional relationships and sexuality. These claims establish themselves as frames for a variety of politics of intimacy. These politics take shape around issues such as sexuality, reproductive capacities, (new) living arrangements, (new) families, care for the partner/s, ways of raising children, questions about identities and their representations and similar." [...] "Partnership could be tentatively defined as a set of living conditions and relationships with individual's intimate partners that are regulated/non regulated by and connected to the whole range of public policies, and hence are shaped by the gender (in)equality regimes within the arrangements of citizenship, and co-shape these regimes." (Source: QUING deliverable 15: LARG research guidelines, 2007, p.4)

<sup>iii</sup> Non-employment considers employment and other related policies (e.g. reconciliation of family and work, welfare, etc.) through an inverted perspective on how these policies construct subjects who are considered as legitimately employed or non employed, and what the gender implications of this construction are. (Source: QUING deliverable 15: LARG research guidelines, 2007)

<sup>iv</sup> Gender based violence includes "any form of violence rooted in structural gender based inequalities that results or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life of women, men or children based on their gender". (Source: QUING deliverable 15: LARG research guidelines, 2007, p.12)