



# Collection profile

2023

Worblafen, March 2023



## Initial situation

"No history, no future", this was the guiding principle of Marthe Gosteli (1917-2017), the tireless women's rights activist and founder of the archive of the history of the Swiss women's movement. Women in Switzerland were long denied a place in archives and thus in the history books. Due to the lack of political rights until 1971, they depended on their own para-state infrastructure in order to be able to influence social developments. The dense network of diverse women's organisations and women's rights activists that has developed since the 19th century bears witness to this. The Gosteli Foundation looks after the archive which documents this history and maintains a specialist library and a documentary collection. The archival materials produced by organisations and individuals comprise a total of around 1000 running metres of files, images, audio-visual records and objects (as of May 2023).

The archive of the history of the Swiss women's movement has grown historically, with strong links to the network of Marthe Gosteli. The bedrock of the archive was the 105 running metres of archival material collected by the umbrella organisation of Swiss women's organisation, the "Bund Schweizerische Frauenvereine", of which Marthe Gosteli was vice-president in the late 1960s. The library and documentation section can also be traced back to this organisation.

For almost four decades, the Gosteli Foundation was financed through the private funds of Marthe Gosteli. Occasionally, donations, legacies and contributions from foundations supplemented the funds. As a consequence, the services offered remained severely limited: the archive regularly had to delay or even cancel accessions due to lack of space or staff. Thanks to securing public funding as of 2021, the Gosteli Foundation now has the opportunity to expand its collection.

## Principles of the collection policy

The historically grown collection of the Gosteli Foundation needs to be led into the future. The guiding principle remains Marthe Gosteli's aspiration to represent the entire political, geographical, social, thematic and temporal spectrum of Swiss women's movements as well as their international interconnectedness.

Thanks to the new financial stability, the Gosteli Foundation can now invest in acquiring records, set strategic priorities and actively address collection gaps (e.g. French-speaking Switzerland, migrants, lesbian movement, women of colour, women's strike/feminist strike). At the same time, it is important to define and communicate the limits of the collection activities.

When accepting archival materials of regionally active women's organisations or individuals, the Gosteli Foundation consults with regional women's archives, with which it maintains good collaborations.<sup>1</sup> The Gosteli Foundation treats analogue and digital files equally and also archives audiovisual materials. Objects are only accepted in exceptional cases.

In addition to the content-related criteria, general archival criteria are applied in evaluating materials and transferring them to the archive.

Since its foundation, the collection of the Gosteli Foundation has been divided into three areas: the archive, the library and the documentation section.

<sup>1</sup> Namely the «Archiv für Frauen-, Geschlechter- und Sozialgeschichte Ostschweiz», the «Archives Contéstataires», the «Associazione Archivi Riuniti delle Donne Ticino», the «Frauenkulturarchiv Graubünden», the «Thurgauer Frauenarchiv», the «Schweizerische Sozialarchiv» and the «Centre Grisélidis Réal».



## A. Archive

The archive currently houses 270 archives of organisations, associations and societies as well as 230 estates of individual women. Additionally, it includes a small, separate collection of photographs (as of May 2023). The following principles apply to the accession of new materials.

### General archival criteria

*Material condition:* Records must be in a condition that allows for long-term archiving. If records are in poor condition, it may be necessary to reject them.

*Feasibility:* It must be possible to organise, arrange and describe holdings with a reasonable use of resources. In the case of organisational archives, the Gosteli Foundation works on the principle that the one-off costs for transport, storage materials and description, as well as part of the annual storage costs, should be covered as far as possible by the organisations.

*Unity of records:* The division of organisational archives as well as of personal estates is to be avoided. If archival materials are scattered, bringing them back together should be the aim.

*Authenticity:* Only authentic documents are accepted. Exceptions are possible if only copies or transcripts are available.

*Securing records:* In exceptional cases, the Gosteli Foundation takes over archives and estate holdings that only touch on the focus of its collection. This applies, in particular, to ego documents for which no other archive feels responsible.

### Archives of organisations

The Gosteli Foundation archives the files of women's organisations from all over Switzerland and endeavours to actively acquire materials in previously underrepresented regions if these are not covered by regional women's archives. In addition to formalised organisations (such as clubs, associations, foundations and institutions), the Foundation also archives more loosely organised and possibly only temporarily existing collective movements. In some cases, thematic and temporal focuses are defined in order to actively close gaps in the collection. Documents of state provenance are not taken over.

Thematically, the Foundation's collection activities know no boundaries. Whether women campaigned for political rights, for home economics, against violence, in specific professional fields or for other social issues that are important from their point of view is equally relevant and interesting for the Gosteli Collection. We also strive to archive holdings from feminist movements that distance themselves from the term "women", as well as from feminist men's organisations.

### Archives/estates of individuals

The Foundation archives the estates of individual women from all over Switzerland who played an important role in the women's movement, in politics, in the economy, in education, health, culture, science or other fields.

In its collection policy, the Gosteli Foundation does not apply the common criteria that only records of persons who were publicly active are important. All fields of women's activity are treated equal. If a field is already well documented, further accessions can be dispensed with.

In justified cases, the Foundation may also accept individual ego documents that do not form part of a larger estate.

### Audiovisual collection

In addition to written documents, the Gosteli Foundation also preserves audiovisual materials such as photographs, posters, slides, video cassettes and audio recordings. Most of these archival materials (estimated at 95%) are integrated into archival holdings (of organisations or individuals). There is, however, a small collection of photographs and posters that are not part of any holding and are therefore kept separately. The Gosteli Foundation will continue its efforts to collect, describe and digitise audiovisual sources in the future.



## B. Library

The Gosteli Foundation runs a specialised library with about 12,000 titles, initially founded with the library stock of the “Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine”. It is a reference library that can be used on site in Worblaufen; it does not include digital media or e-books. Its stock is growing thanks to specimen copies of users, gifts and books from archival holdings. In terms of content, the focus is on academic and popularised primary and secondary literature on the Foundation's subject areas (women's movement, women's history, women's issues and gender issues). Geographically, the focus is on Switzerland. The Foundation acquires important standard works or relevant specialist literature only in exceptional cases and makes no claim to the library being comprehensive. Works of fiction are included in the library in justified exceptional cases.

Also part of the library is a broad collection of grey literature (unpublished private prints and academic writings) an extensive collection of leaflets (approx. 5600 specimens) and a collection of journals. This part of the collection is of great importance to the Gosteli Foundation, as most its items are difficult or impossible to find elsewhere. For this reason, it is an area in which we want to expand and establish the systematic acquisition of materials. For the time being we will not develop a digital library service, instead concentrating on analogue books and reading on site.

## C. Documentation

The documentary section of the Gosteli Foundation is divided into two sub-sections: the biographical notes and the thematic dossiers. The collection strategy of this section is currently being revised and will be available in an updated form in 2024. The new strategy will clarify whether and how the biographical and the thematic documentation should be handled the future.

### Biographical notes

The biographical notes are a unique collection consisting of approximately 13,000 files on nationally and internationally active known and unknown women. The files include newspaper articles, biographies, obituaries, brochures and photographs. The collection was founded in 1924 by the Bernese journalist Agnes Debrit-Vogel and has been maintained continuously ever since. Debrit-Vogel wanted her collection to honour the achievements of women in all possible fields of activity. This principle is still followed in documentation practice today.

### Thematic dossiers

In addition to the biographical notes, the Gosteli Foundation has for many years maintained press documentation on specific topics. In addition to newspaper articles, it also contains flyers, newsletters and similar materials. The selection of topics has grown historically and has been continuously supplemented. This collection has not yet been described in the archival system.



## Criteria in overview

Collection area	Criteria	Questions
<b>Archive overall (organisations and persons)</b>	Material condition	Can the files be archived in the long term or is there a risk of their disintegration/destruction due to their material condition in the near future?
	Feasibility	Can the Gosteli Foundation cope with the volume of the archive holdings (space and personnel resources)? Can the costs of the accession be covered by the Gosteli Foundation or by third parties?
	Unity of holding	Is there already a partial holding of the same organisation in another archive?
	Authenticity	Are these authentic documents or are they copies/transcripts?
	Securing of records	Are they contemporary records of the women's movement or women's history? If the files are not taken over, can they be handed over to another archive or is there a risk of a significant loss in terms of maintaining records?
<b>Archive (organisations)</b>	Topic	Does the organisation belong to the women's movement in a broad sense? Is the organisation mainly made up of women or does the organisation work for women-specific or feminist causes?
	Geography	Is the organisation active in Switzerland or is it based in Switzerland? Is the organisation active in a region where there is another women's archive?
<b>Archive (people)</b>	Topic	Was/is the person involved in the women's movement or the feminist movement? Was/is the woman politically or socially involved in another area of society? Was/is the woman active in an area relevant to women's history that has not yet been represented in the Gosteli archives, or only incompletely?
	Geography	Was/is the person active in Switzerland? Did she live in Switzerland or was she otherwise connected with Switzerland?
<b>Library</b>	Topic	Is the book related to an archival collection of the Gosteli Foundation? Is the book about the history of the women's movement? Is the book a contribution to women's or gender history?



	Geography	Is the book about the women's movement in Switzerland or is there another reference (in terms of content or author) to Switzerland? Is the book very relevant to local debates on the women's movement or women's history?
	Scientificity	Is it a scientific or popular science book or is it fiction?
	Accessibility	Is the book or journal widely available in other libraries or only accessible in a few specialist libraries? Is it grey literature that is difficult or impossible to access in the library catalogue?
	Support	Is it a book made of paper that can be concretely tangible in the reading room?
<b>Documentation (biographical)</b>	Strategy incl. criteria still being developed	
<b>Documentation (thematic)</b>	Strategy incl. criteria still being developed	