

SESSION 4: Networking of women as a key of change in forestry

DOI 10.20315/SilvaSlovenica.0028.10



German Women in Forestry association: a success story

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Keywords: *women in forestry, association, history, past, survey, education, equity*

Extended summary

The German association “Frauen im Forstbereich e.V.” was founded in 1993 by forestry students in Göttingen, Lower Saxony. Its aim is to support gender equity, collaboration of women in forestry, education and studies about women in forestry and to improve women’s situation in family, at work and in society. Currently, there are about 170 members.

In Germany, women were allowed to study forestry during the Second World War to fill the programs and to replace the missing men. However, it was not until the 1970s that women fought to be allowed to work in the forestry administrations without military service, which was still indirectly exclusion for women. This has led to an increasing number of female students in Germany’s university forestry programs.

In 1986, around 30 to 40 female forestry students started meeting regularly in Göttingen and going on annual fieldtrips throughout Germany. The Göttingen network of female foresters initiated the now 31 years old association. In 2000, the “Frauen im Forstbereich” (Women in forestry) association convened their first international meeting.

At the turn of the century, reforms in forestry administrations began, which led to a hiring freeze. It was only till the late 2010s that retirements made new recruitments possible. Since about 1/3 of students were women, the share of women in the workforce increased as well. This has led to two generations of female foresters in the association, now working closely together and learning from each other. Apparently, some things had not changed in the last decades, like discussions on the compatibility of work and family or how to deal with sexist comments. Some examples: “Many more women should study, then men’s career opportunities will increase.” (1988), “Why aren’t you wearing a skirt? It would be much easier to look under it.” (2020), “You should just impregnate the women away” (1988 and 2022), “girl”, “sweetheart”.

In 2022, about 13% of the trained foresters in the state forest administrations were women, yet the share of female forest workers is far lower (4%). Compared to that, 34% of Bachelor students and 11% of forest worker trainees were women. Also, the number of women in leadership positions remains lower (Hintze, 2023). Women are still often encouraged to preferably work in research, education, forest inventory, or to assist instead of leading a forest district and rather not working with machines or road construction. Also, care work is still often seen as a women’s topic.

For the future, we would like to see mentoring for young women and female leaders, women's meetings, awareness trainings for male managers as well as parental leave and part-time work as the general norm for both women and men.

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