

## **From Utopia to Reality : The Austrian Network of Women's Studies Information and Documentation Centers**

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I am very delighted to have the opportunity to be here today and speak to you. Thanks to the Committee for having invited me to this conference. First of all, I would like to give you a short overview about this lecture.

- (1) some words about Austria, the country where I live and about the Austrian National Library as well as an introduction to the rise of the women's movement and studies in Austria.
- (2) background of interests and the process leading up to an Austrian Network of Autonomous and Institutionalized Women Specific Documentation Centers
- (3) origin, concepts, framework and daily work of ARIADNE our cooperation center for women specific information and documentation within an institution of famous reputation, the Austrian National Library.
- (4) the layout of a women specific database as main purpose of ARIADNE
- (5) the postulates concerning a well designed and functional network of autonomous and institutionalized women documentation centers.

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Austria is a small country in the heart of Europe. It may offer some male geniuses, who are famous all over the world: for example: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Sigmund Freud, Billy Wilder and Fred Zinneman, but I am especially proud of Gerda Lerner is a born Austrian. She is the famous feminist scholar of the United States who influenced us a lot and certainly many of you know her key-books: "The creation of patriarchy" and "The creation of feminist consciousness". Her fate has been connected to the terrible regime of nazism, and is part of the shameful role of Austria at that time. Gerda Lerner had to emigrate at the age of 19, and as experienced by so many emigrants - exiled to a foreign country and language - it took her a long time to feel ease with academic teaching and writing in a foreign language. For all emigrants and refugees arriving at the United States the Statue of Liberty was the "symbolic gateway". It was an Austrian woman, Hertha Pauli - she also escaped from nazi-terrorism - who wrote the history of "Miss Liberty" for the 100th anniversary in 1965. Fortunately for us as Europeans - I am glad to tell you that the Austrian people just decided to join the European Union - Miss Liberty has changed her symbolic value. I am representing the department ARIADNE located at the Austrian National Library and want to note, that this speech is elaborated together with my colleague Helga Hofmann-Weinberger and therefore I'll speak in her name too. We have got refund for this journey from our library - but it's always the same old story - the budget is kept down - so it was not enough for both of us. ARIADNE, our women's studies information and documentation center, is located in an institution, with historic heritage - with roots in the 14th century. That was the time when Christine de Pizan was born, the famous and excellent female writer from France. She was the first, we know about, who made a living from being a professional writer. Her feminist utopia "Le Livre de la Cité des Dames", is one of the treasures in our manuscript collection. It's a very long journey - from an imperial library with its patriarchal structures - where women as readers and librarians were for centuries invisible and ignored - to our modern institution, where library users interested in women's studies will find special service.

The foundation of ARIADNE is closely related to very important events during the last decades, responsible for a change of thoughts in our society with regard of women. The Old Women's consciousness-raising Movement at the turn of the century was badly destroyed by nazism and the Second World War. With some delay the New Women's Liberation Movement has been reflected in Austria after the Anglo-American, Scandinavian, and German countries. It was only at the beginning of the seventies, that some spectacular actions and performances of autonomous and courageous women started to attract attention to feminist issues. Provocative demonstrations against an inhuman's abortion law (§218) or Maria Mies, nowadays a wellknown feminist, driven in a wooden cage down a crowdy shopping lane in Vienna - as a symbol of oppressed women. The subject turned political, women's groups were established focussing on raising selfconfidence. The foundations were layed for great changes and modernization in women's lifes. Responsible for this kind of political waking-up was also the fact, that since 1971 the government was Social

Democrat. Like in other countries too we have a rather heterogenous scene within the Austrian Women's Movement. The establishment of a "State Secretary for Women's Affairs", which succeeded finally to become a Ministry was certainly an important step towards upgrading the value of women's interests on a general level. The autonomous feminist scene has already found an ironical term for this kind of official women's movement: "governmental feminism". Mrs. Johanna Dohnal, the minister, is the most successful and longest serving female member of the government. Important results of her work are: the achievement of equal rights for employed women; protection and social rights for pregnant women and mothers.

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In the eighties feminist consciousness moved also into the academic live. Women's studies and feminist theory and their interdisciplinary character spread all over the universities. Until now there is only one official professorial chair at the University of Innsbruck, which is explicitly called a women's research chair. But there are 3 institutions now in Austria, with the task to coordinate and support women's studies in participating universities and also off-campus autonomous feminist research activities. All these initiatives resulted in an enormous production of knowledge: articles, publications, dissertations, periodicals etc. However the institutionalized academic libraries could not satisfy the growing number of female clients. Feminist scholars asked very strictly for better information services on women's studies. Something had to be done.

That was the moment when the idea of ARIADNE was born. From the beginning we had the aim: first to be a rich source of women related knowledge and second to be a "mediatress" between university research and independent activities and third to tie networks. We could not ignore, that there were also some reservations from other specialized women working in related information and documentation areas, but we were full of hope: dividing our forces and tasks; avoid double work; no isolation, but supporting each other!

But now, let's go back to the roots, the beginning of our network project: As far as I know, the first initiative to deal theoretically with the issue of women specific information and documentation in Austria, was a feasibility-study for such a specialized institution, prepared by Andrea Fennesz and myself on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Research in the years 1986/87 ("Durchführbarkeitsstudie zur Errichtung einer Dokumentations- und Informations-stelle für frauenspezifische Literatur"). In this study we analyzed the status quo in Austria and other European countries, like Germany and the Netherlands, and worked out conditions and conceptions for the future functioning of such a new institution in our country. After this study followed a period of stalemate for over almost five years. But as it sometimes happens - parallel activities from different parts came up to the horizon: On the one hand in spring 1991 the Ministries took interest in the - in their opinion - "wild growing" documentation scene. "Green light" was given to the setting up of a new information center within the Austrian National Library. On the other hand we got in touch with a colleague, working in the women's sector of a political institution. She proposed to organize a first meeting, inviting all existing women's studies documentation centers in Austria - both, autonomous and institutionalized ones. This - I would say "historical" - meeting took place in the late summer 1991 and brought together, for the first time, all women working in the feminist information and documentation sector. It was a very heterogenous group: women from the radical feminist, autonomous side; women from commercial or public documentation centers (where women specific literature is only part of the collection); women from the established scientific libraries who wanted to intensify their holdings. Full of idealistic hopes, full of utopian ideas we presented a concept of a centralized and common "Austrian-wide Women's Specific Database", and provoked a big dispute! - Not only that the other women did not agree to this project, but also an endless discussion started about principles of working conditions and psychological aspects of autonomous and institutionalized women. Suspicions against any kind of centralization, fear to get absorbed by big public organizations, reservation against women from the bureaucracy, etc. We, from the National Library, as women with the rather secure background of a big institution did not expect this full range of emotions. We were surprised and somehow helpless in this situation. The meeting seemed to come to an unforeseen end. But after 2 1/2 days of discussions we all could minimize our prejudices and finally agreed to carry on with our exchange of ideas. That should happen in three steps: formulate conditions and needs for a cooperation in an Austrianwide network create an organizational framework for this cooperation (which finally led to the foundation of an association called FRIDA = Association for women specific information and documentation in Austria) prepare women specific projects in the information and documentation field

In the following years, this group met every two months. Every summer FRIDA organized a workshop on a special topic. At the beginning there were changing participants and still controversial discussions between the autonomous and the institutionalized members of our group. We can say now, after three years, that this process of knowing each other has led to a very constructive kind of cooperation. Lively signs are two concrete projects: the elaboration of a feminist thesaurus for Austria (called "ThesaurA") and a special guide for biographical research (called "BiographiA"):

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Now I'll go back to the Austrian National Library and to the genesis of ARIADNE. When we heard the starting signal, given from the Ministry of Science and Research, in 1991, we were very enthusiastic: after five years the main ideas of our project should become real! Two women, Helga Hofmann and me were asked to do this. In March 1992 we started with the incorporation of ARIADNE into the library's rules of procedure and book processing. The colleagues were kind, helpful and ready to cooperate - so we got our own premises, to speak with Virginia Woolf a "room on our own". We initially used other people's computers and interiors and worked hard on implementing our new concepts. We tried to include in our collection the recent developments of women's studies at the turn of the nineties and also considered the experiences made in the FRIDA-meetings.

We wanted ARIADNE to be based on three pillars:

- a women's specific database
- information retrieval
- network with Austrian and international centers

In order to cope with all these tasks we had to enlarge the acquisitions of women specific and feminist literature and periodicals at the National Library. After some time the numerous "lilac feminist" rider slips, in each ARIADNE-book were visible signs of our activities. At the same time we informed our colleagues about the new collection topic within our well-established and rather traditional institution. One of our first products was the ARIADNE-Newsletter: an annotated list of women related new publications, nowadays our "bestseller". We intended our female but also male users to get the best non-bureaucratic service. Our main tasks: collecting, establishing a database, informing - that's all for providing good services on women's studies!

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Now let me turn to the main focus of our work, the ARIADNE-Database: The source material is based on the holdings of the National Library. As already mentioned, we have tried, during the last years, to close the biggest identified gaps concerning women specific literature in our library. Actually we are ordering new books and material quite intensively. The documents selected are: "Austriaca" (literature written by Austrian authors or concerning Austria as a subject) and basic works on feminist theory, European as well as international ones. The source-material used are articles from journals, readers, proceedings, "grey literature" (which we mainly get from Austrian women's studies scholars to whom we keep close contact). Naturally we try to avoid duplication of work with others: in Austria we coordinate with the network FRIDA, on the European level the only, but very useful women specific database, that can easily get tapped via Internet is "KVINNSAM" in Göteborg (Sweden). They have been indexing already for ten years in a similar context - university library - and have now a great number of records (more than 30.000). KVINNSAM is our great ideal! We use it, know the list of journals covered and can therefore avoid a lot of double work.

We from ARIADNE started with a "learning by doing" database - very simply constructed. It includes now about 3000 records. Right now we are expecting our "long desired" software, the system is called "Allegro" and comes from Germany. As far as the cataloguing and the field structure of our database is concerned I will not annoy you with details - they are nearly the same as for any other database. As you may all know, an elaborated index is very useful for a satisfactory information retrieval. In particular we take care for accurate non-sexist subject-indexing, which considers the new vocabulary of women's studies, contrary to official authority files. The access to our database - the OPAC, a catalogue for readers - will be located in near future in the central catalogue-hall and should be self-explaining. To obtain a better structure we decided to separate our indexing into different types: (a) personal name headings, (b) topical headings, (c) corporate name headings, (d) title headings (literature, movies etc.), (e) geographical headings, (f) chronological subdivision. For personal, corporate, geographical names and title headings we use authority files. For our subject headings we are looking forward to our "ThesaurA"-Project.

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Coming to the end of my lecture I would like to point out some elements which seem important to us: We were in the lucky position to establish ARIADNE and the Austrian-wide network in parallel. The interaction between ARIADNE and FRIDA, the feed-back of the group has been very stimulating. A very eminent factor is also the intertwining of other networks, little and big ones. Until now ARIADNE is networking in four different systems: The Network FRIDA, a good team of autonomous and institutionalized documentation centers The Network of users and feminist scholars, who deliver and request materials of women's studies The Network of female librarians in research libraries, who are interested in women's studies and who are - partly - organized in the Austrian Librarians Association The Network with the 3 Interuniversity Women's Studies Coordination Centers

Our ARIADNE-postulates:

We made our experience within an institution and in the core of autonomous and institutions' women. This seminar appears to us the right place to pass some of them:

Patience and tenacity. Even centralised bureaucracies may offer surprises and act - after five years of "incubation"

Do not shy away from utopic proposals - maximum requests lead up to acceptable realisation

Proof of ability to argue - stay in communication

Develop structures, take responsibilities

And don't forget: it should also be fun to do feminist work and support consciousness-raising