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Glimpses into the life, the work and the ideas of Ilse Arlt

Summary of the main contents discussed at the 1st Ilse Arlt Kolloquium on October 6, 2007 at the Ilse Arlt Institute on Social Inclusion Research, St. Pölten

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The family background of Ilse Arlt

The background of Ilse Arlt increases our understanding of her personality and her work.

She was born the second of four children on May 1, 1876 in Vienna, where she also died at the age of 84 on January 25, 1960 due to an accident. Her grandfather was the world-famous professor for ophtalmology, Dr. Ferdinand Karl, Chevalier of Arlt. He wrote several internationally known papers on ophtalmology, was bestowed with decorations and received knighthood for his services by Emperor Franz Josef. He came from a humble background, and was one of eight children of a blacksmith from Obergraupen. He was originally destined to become a priest, but then decided to take up the study of medicine in Prague.

Ilse Arlt’s father, Ferdinand, Chevalier of Arlt was also an ophtalmologist. Her mother, Marie Hönig, Edle von Hönigsberg was artistically talented, educated as a painter and fluent in several languages. Her father was integrated in a large social circle of many scholars at first in Prague, then Vienna, and finally also in Graz. It was an upper middle class family with strong social engagements. Possibly the family’s interest in social issues was linked to their own humble background. Her mother’s background was Jewish (Ilse Arlt was Catholic), and would become a burden for Ilse Arlt.

Her unpublished biography in the possession of the Austrian Academy of Sciences shows that she must have been a very bright child with a lot of sensitivity and social interest. She mentioned a key event in her life at the age of five. Her swimming instructor from the Salzkammergut got into distress without any fault on his part and his house nearly came up for auction. She was so concerned by this experience with poverty and distress that she made her parents take action. This experience was decisive for her future and motivated her to deal with this issue for the rest of her life.

Contrary to her brothers she never received formal education, and was instructed by her mother according to the syllabus of the primary school. She also learned through her brothers and by listening to conversations of the family with scholars. She prepared herself for the state examination in Latin and English, and finally attended university as a guest student studying under eminent professors such as Eugen Phillipovich von Phillipsberg, national economist in Vienna, and Professor Ernst Mischler, statistician and social scientist in Graz.

She became a scientific assistant at the Statistical State Office of Styria, and got involved in the recently founded “Sozialer Bildungsverein” (social education club).
There she was given the section “Gewerbliche Nachtarbeit” (commercial night shifts) although she lacked the necessary higher education. In this time she wrote many articles, among others a contribution on housing issues for a congress in Munich.

Then she continued with her studies until 1905 in Vienna. She discovered that though there was significant progress in the technical and economic areas, there was a lack of basic knowledge in the field of the humanities. Other colleagues turned away from a purely descriptive science, however, she remained true to her mission. She finally became the first inspector for commercial issues in Austria-Hungary, however due to her delicate health she was not able to take this position.

Ilse Arlt continued to deal with working conditions of women, for instance in night shifts, relief for unmarried mothers, the right to vacation and recreation, social security for the sick, the invalids, and the unemployed, and she strongly advocated laws to safeguard these rights. She constantly maintained that poverty and need could not be solved without the necessary research and adequate training. In her opinion the education should include theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and skills as well as research.

In 1910 she made a presentation at the International Congress for Public and Private Work and Welfare in Copenhagen. There she introduced her concept of the profession of a welfare worker, an occupation she considered women to be especially talented for. In 1912 she founded the first welfare education school within the “Vereinigten Fachkurse für Volkspflege” (the united professional courses for public welfare). It consisted of a two-year training based on theory, practical experience and skill development, as well as knowledge of institutions. She promoted the founding of further schools and even taught in some of them.

She always saw her educational institution as a research institution with the goal of establishing foundations for social work policy and social policy. For this reason she wrote numerous articles and papers for a broad public, analyzed professional historical development in different countries and cultures with respect to poverty and attempts to give care and support.

In 1912 she wrote the book “Grundlagen der Fürsorge” (the basics of welfare service), and the First Republic honored her for her efforts by giving her the title of “Bundesfürsorgerat”. She was close to the social democratic thinking of her time.

In 1938 she was forbidden to teach due to her mother’s Jewish background. Furthermore, she was not allowed to publish, her educational institution was closed, her books were destroyed and her collection of material for a welfare museum (documentation center) was dispersed. Some remains were lost in the aftermath of the war. She became financially distressed, but contrary to her brother, Walter who was married to a Jewish woman, she did not have to leave Austria.

From 1945 on she revived her professional courses, but a lack of resources and her failing health forced her to close down the school in 1948. In 1954 she was honored with the “Doktor-Karl-Renner” research prize. In 1958 her last book “Wege zu einer Fürsorgewissenschaft” was published at her 80ieth birthday by the “Notring der Wissenschaftlichen Verbände Österreichs” (a scientific publishing house). In this book she continued to point out the need for further research, for the creation of
Ilse Arlt can be seen as an enlightened humanist, liberal in her attitude without being liberal in the political sense, in some ways still bound to her time, but also long sighted and emancipatory, when it comes to issues of the social, legal, and economical position of women. At the turn of the last century Ilse Arlt was 24 years old and as a young woman affected by the different (unequal) opportunities existing for men and women to participate in society and design her private and professional life. Despite coming from a family of doctors she did not receive formal education like her brothers. It is therefore surprising that she nevertheless succeeded in getting access to lectures at the university, for instance in the field of economics. She was
invited to domestic and international scientific presentations; she founded an acknowledged professional education and training institution; and she was politically, socially, and educationally active. One of her significant contributions was to view the employment of women as normal and advantageous without losing sight of the stress connected with worklife.

On April 8, 1911 Ilse Arlt wrote in the Neue Freie Presse: „Ist es nicht merkwürdig, daß jedes Talent eines Mädchens mehr Aussicht auf Ausbildung und Vertretung hat als der soziale Sinn? Daß diese segensreichste Begabung nur auf Umwegen oder unter Schwierigkeiten zur Entfaltung kommen kann?“ (Isn’t it strange that every talent of a girl has got more of a chance to receive training that the social mind? That this talent can only be developed indirectly and with difficulty?). In this article Arlt speaks up for the training of „welfare workers“. She sees this profession as serving the community and as a combination of the old female tradition of helping, the new desire of women to study, and the new duty of women to earn an income. To support the needy is considered by Arlt as „wesensechter Frauenberuf“ (a profession true to the nature of women). To improve the situation of the working class or working as an inspector, child carer or hospital carer, supervisor of child day care centers, in hostels, institutions, or working as a secretary for social issues – these things are all important social professions for women in Arlt’s opinion. Meanwhile social work has really become a female profession in Austria. Currently it seems desirable for many reasons to encourage men to become socially active and to deal with social issues. Additionally, we should aspire to get more women into managerial positions in social work – as Arlt also foresaw.

Peter Pantucek
Ilse Arlt’s thinking as a motivation for the current theory design and practical experience of social work

Peter Pantucek attempted to point out the significance of Arlt’s ideas and attitudes with respect to the foundation of a body of social work science.

„Wie bei allen Wissenschaften, die sich mit den Dingen des Alltags befassen, ist auch bei den gesellschaftlichen der ärgste Feind nicht gänzliche Unkenntnis, sondern die Gesamtheit von Fehlmeinungen, welche die ′landläufige Auffassung′ ergeben.“ (Arlt 1921:21f) (As in all sciences dealing with everyday life the greatest enemy of social sciences isn’t total ignorance, but the totality of wrong opinions which constitute „common sense knowledge“.)

Ilse Arlt was deeply convinced that welfare workers needed a scientifically oriented education and training. Scientific meant to her that the students should learn a scientific approach, not because they were expected to become researchers, but because it was required in the daily work with needy individuals. The relevance of Arlt’s ideas can be seen both in theory design and in her attitude of passion. In the field of social work passion has become a sign of unhealthy commitment. This prejudice has partly come from an interpretation of Schmidbauer’s book Die hilflosen Helfer (the helpless helpers); being committed or involved is seen by many social workers as a sure path to burnout. Keeping a distance to clients, a careful separation of work and private life appear to be the perfect path to psychological well being and are considered indispensable for a professional bearing. According to Pantucek this error should be corrected through a plea for passion in social work, as Ilse Arlt
requested in her essay „Sparsame Fürsorge“ (1931): „Die Hingabe an den Hilfsgedanken und die Liebe zu allen Unglücklichen sollte stark genug sein, um uns zur Verwertung jeden Fortschritts in der Umwelt zugunsten der Bedürftigen zu vermögen.“ (Arlt 1931:44) (Our dedication to the idea of support and the love to help all those in need should be strong enough to make use of all progress to the advantage of the vulnerable and needy.) Arlt speaks of dedication and even love, and of scientific rationality. Love for the unfortunate is not enough of course, but it is a pre-requisite for professional, effective support. However, there is also the knowledge that these resources are limited; that it is necessary to make use of the means of science; that the right kind of support requires science; and that frugality is necessary to satisfy the needs of more people. Ilse Arlt brings together two poles: economic thinking and what we call individualization.

If we want to make science according to Ilse Arlt’s view, what should our social work science and theory design look like? The following options should be resisted and excluded as unproductive: well adapted applied science, moralizing criticism, self-righteous indignation about assumed enemies as for instance neo liberalism or globalization, and economic managerialism that is only concentrated on the competitiveness of the organization without attempting to understand the field it is operating in.

How does Ilse Arlt see the science of welfare? Her book „Wege zur Fürsorgewissenschaft“ starts with a chapter on the so-called „Gesetzmäßigkeiten des Helfens“ (laws or rules of helping). She goes on to explain the characteristics of the subject of a science of welfare:

1.) „Jede, auch die beste Einrichtung bewirkt zwangsläufig unerwünschte Nebenwirkungen.“ (Every, even the best institution develops undesirable side effects.)

What does that mean for our research and our theory design? The undesirable, the unsuccessful, the side effects must become a self-evident gesture. We can learn from failures, the side effects will make us smarter. We have to become the best critics of social work, if we want to be its best proponents.

2.) „Meist ist die Zahl derer bekannt, denen geholfen wurde, nicht die der Übrigbleibenden.“ (Usually the number of those who have received support is known and not the number of those who have not been helped.)

The evaluation of social work performance therefore does not only mean focusing on the clients who have received help. It is necessary to see the whole picture of everybody who needs help.

3.) „Die Durchführung an sich guter Einrichtungen ist oft fehlerhaft oder mangelhaft. Immer fehlt die Leistungsbilanz, immer die Gesamtschau für jedes Individuum.“ (...) „Wann wird der Mensch, der in seinen Notwendigkeiten und individuellen Möglichkeiten genau erkannte einzelne Mensch, im Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung stehen, und nicht das Gefüge der Fürsorge?“ (Arlt 1958:17) (The implementation of institutions is often inaccurate or inadequate. There is no performance record, there is no overall view for each individual. When will the individual person be at the center of attention and observation, and not the body of welfare?)
The life of each client is the yardstick of support. We get into trouble in science when we take this statement seriously. The life histories of clients are not so easily accessible as the data of institutions, and it is difficult to analyze and interpret them.

4.) „Mangels eines anerkannten geistigen Forums können sich Fehlmeinungen jahrzehntelang breitmachen, ohne widerlegt zu werden, oder Gesetze werden erlassen, deren Überprüfung nicht erst durch die Wirklichkeit hätte erfolgen sollen, sondern durch planmäßiges Studium.“ (Arlt 1958:23) (Due to a lack of an accepted intellectual forum wrong opinions can exist for years without being disputed; or laws are made that should not have been tested in reality, but through a planned analysis)

Up to now there is no accepted intellectual forum. Social work is institution-bound. It lacks a form of organization that can define and enforce standards. The level of standardization is embarrassingly low. Core methods of social work are called differently by different authors. Diagnostics cannot be performed on the basis of accepted standards, because they do not exist. International comparison is difficult due to different legal systems and different terms and concepts. Therefore it is not surprising when standards for social work come from outside, for example from medicine. The classification system of ICD10 and ICF include social facts and problems that should have come from social work, from an accepted international intellectual forum. Even the professional associations of social work cannot decide about the professional standards of a system for social support. Social work would abandon the claim to a scientific professional code of practice.

From today’s quality perspective the fifth rule is particularly interesting; it states that the opinion of the beneficiary is missing, and that the law of offer and demand does not apply to social work. The sixth rule describes the fact that many emergency cases go unnoticed. The seventh rule says that innovations and new forms of support in welfare are reactions to severe emergency cases and longstanding improvisations. Rule number 8 says that the quality of welfare measures does not allow us to conclude the degree of implementation of support duties. Rule 9 points out that important ideas are often lost in social work and emerge at a later time.

Apart from the so-called „Gesetzmäßigkeiten des Helfens“ (laws or rules of support giving), it is important in practical work to enable happiness and reciprocity or service in return:

„Lebensfreude – dies ist eines der Kernstücke der Hilfe, ist das Kriterium, die unumstößliche Zielsetzung statt des bloßen Leidenlinderns. Das zweite Kernstück heißt Gegenleistung, nicht im Sinne einer Bezahlung, sondern in der Kunst, der Demütigung vorzubeugen, indem man den Befürsorgten seinerseits irgendwie helfen lässt.“ (Arlt 1958:38) (Happiness is a core element of help, a criteria, an irrevocable goal instead of merely alleviating pain or distress. The second core element is reciprocity or service in return, not in the sense of paying back with money, but to prevent humiliation by allowing the beneficiary to help in some way too.)

Arlt describes a critical factor according to which social work practice can be judged. Making happiness possible (in the sense of living life fully) is a rejection of all ideas that the needy have to be humble, show cooperation, and conform to the ideas of the institution. Happiness seems to be the pre-requisite for good social work science that should never be technocratic. Without it there is no measure or standard, emotional
knowledge about the possibilities of life is missing, there is no understanding for the detours to happiness under difficult and frugal conditions. Social work science requires a joy of life in its manifold forms. Experiencing this joy allows us to let others experience it as well and to recognize the potential of a whole life. If we want to understand the mechanism of support, we should look at the clients and not at support itself. How they act and behave, how they deal with organizations and their own lives.

Arlt does not only demand the possibility for happiness, but also the reciprocity of the clients. This is a means to avoid humiliation. She realizes that clients are people who develop self-esteem by contributing to others. Giving requires giving in return, so as not to be humiliating. Support programs that do not take into consideration that clients should also give are potentially humiliating.

Social work sciences can therefore never be only a science of deficits and the elimination of weaknesses, but also a science of the contribution of the poor, the vulnerable and the oppressed to society, a science of the possibility of making such contributions. (This triad can be found in the preamble of the Code of Ethics of the NASW of the USA: people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty)

In her book „Grundlagen der Fürsorge“ published in 1921 Arlt writes about „Unzulänglichkeit der Hilfe nach der Notform“ (da die „Elendsform einmal Wirkung, ein andermal Ursache sein kann“) (27) „von jeder Elendform zweigen nahezu alle anderen Elendsformen ab“ (ebd.). (The inadequacy of help for emergency cases, because every form of poverty or deprivation can be both cause and effect; every form of poverty or deprivation entails practically all other forms of poverty or deprivation.) One form of deprivation leads to another. Help that is only organized around emergency cases is therefore always inadequate. She writes that poverty, need for help is not a condition, it is a process. The situation of the clients can be understood from their life history.

The specialization of forms of support, the limitation of responsibilities of institutions to one form of need does not serve the client. Arlt does not conclude that specialized help should be given up, but she promotes her social welfare workers as professionals with a view of the whole picture of the client in his/her situation. This idea can be found in today’s case management approach. For social work science this means that the view of the real life situation of the clients of the development of situations is indispensable.

Arlt’s works are a plea to look at the social situation, economy as the prerequisite of life, of well being and of deprivation. To take a look at the individual whose life situation mirrors the social situation, and to take a look at the institutions of social welfare that exist in this conflicting field. Arlt is interested in the limits of the formulas and the possibilities of individualized help. We can form the following hypothesis: Social work begins where formulas stop being effective. And social work science is a science of the limits of formulas and the potentials of individualized help.
Maria Maiss

Social Work in the service of human well being and happiness

The focal point of Ilse Arlt’s efforts to develop a foundation for an independent science of welfare is the research of the phenomenon of poverty – phenomenon that was not fully comprehended with the descriptive methods of economical science at the beginning of the 20th century. She reacted to this lack of research with two fundamental epistemological positions:

1. She concentrates her research interest not only on the phenomenon of poverty, but also on the relation between poverty and happiness. She concludes that poverty is not a fact in itself, no condition determined by fate, but a process and multi-causal condition of deficiency that deviates from the norm of human well being. Poverty expresses a negation, and can therefore not be the starting point for positive work as attempted in welfare. Welfare work emphasizes the positive aspects, human growth. For this reason welfare cannot be restricted to the alleviation of sorrow and distress, but has to promote happiness. (cp. Arlt 1958:38)

2. The second position states that research of poverty must start with the analysis of basic human needs or requirements for prosperity. They should be derived from the observable and measurable prosperity deficiencies. (cp. Arlt 1958:60). Arlt chooses an anthropological perspective that looks for the common features and prerequisites of the humane lifestyle. This position is important because general human entitlements and rights with respect to the satisfaction of natural needs can be derived from a plausible common prerequisite for a humane life or happiness.

Arlt considers the question how the phenomena of poverty and happiness (on the micro and macro level) relate to each other and how this relationship can be influenced by the art of an economical lifestyle and need satisfaction. Arlt coined the term „schöpferisches Konsumieren-Können“ (the ability to consume in a creative way). What does she mean by that? Arlt is against today’s predominant idea of consumption as the primary motor of production. Consumption means human needs satisfaction, development and unfoldment. Consumption is inextricably connected with desire, understanding and judgment. „Konsum ist eine schöpferische Potenz, jedoch nur der freigewählte, eigenständige Konsum.“ (Arlt 1958:74) (Consumption is a creative process, but only when it is chosen freely and independently.) Whether we see ourselves as victims of a primarily other-directed, bureaucratically, politically or commercially directed way of consuming or if we see consumption as an act of self determination meaning reasonable and creatively designed needs satisfaction and development of the personality, determines how we design welfare and social work interventions and services. According to Arlt’s arguments we must then orientate ourselves to the needs and current as well as potential strengths or resources of the different socially rooted, networked and connected people. This rejection of an orientation to the deficits is the source of Arlt’s postulate that the goal of professional welfare/care/social work should be the increase of happiness resulting from the awareness of one’s own powers, and not the alleviation of distress (cp. Arlt 1958:38).
In her needs theory Arlt distinguishes 13 need categories:

1. air/light/warmth/water
2. nutrition
3. habitation,
4. body hygiene
5. clothes
6. medical help and nursing
7. accident prevention and first aid
8. recreation
9. family life
10. education
11. administration of justice
12. training for economic efficiency
13. intellectual nurture (morality, ethics, religion)

As can be seen these needs are connected with each other in different ways. The quality of the satisfaction of one need influences the quality of the satisfaction of another and human prosperity in general. The satisfaction of needs can run danger of becoming luxury, and it can also run danger of going beneath a level of distress. This level of distress is defined by Arlt as a level of deprivation of basic needs that must not be exceeded, because it will lead to serious damages of the individual and his/her environment (cp. Arlt 1921:33).

From this level of deprivation that is observable and can be empirically determined Arlt concludes the main task and responsibility of professional welfare workers: It is their duty in each individual case to distinguish between a simple and yet adequate satisfaction and a possible deficiency of certain needs. In this way they can determine if there is a need for quick action, and they can identify the existing resources to satisfy needs which can be drawn on by welfare benefits (cp. Arlt 1931:42).

For Arlt the science of needs comprehends general basic human needs as well as adequate and fair ways of satisfying needs and is the main foundation of knowledge for professional welfare services.

This is the basis for determining form and scope of a service. However, this science of needs also constitutes the social legitimation of all professional welfare services. Welfare service according to Arlt does not only serve the disadvantaged people in a society, but also contributes to the socio-cultural development of a society: „Der Kulturzustand eines Landes wird nicht nur durch seine Höchstleistungen bestimmt, sondern durch seine Grenznot, d. i. die tiefste geduldete Entbehrung; (...) Unter dem Versorgungszustand ist jedoch nicht die fürsorgerische, sondern die bedürfniskundliche Begutachtung zu verstehen, die den Befriedigungsstand aller Bedürfnisse erhebt.“ (Arlt 1958:80) (The cultural level of a country is not only determined by its achievements, but also by its level of deprivation; care is not only conceived as a welfare service, but also as a needs assessment which serves to satisfy the needs of everybody.)

Some of the points of criticism mentioned by Arlt against a reductionist approach in poverty research remind us of a modern socio-philosophical debate by the Indian
Whereas Arlt was trying to define the basics of an independent science of welfare through her theory of needs, Sen and Nussbaum have tried to determine the criteria that can measure quality of life in different nations. Their research proceeds from a critical rejection of an approach to express the development level and quality of life through the gross domestic product per capita. This method only allows to calculate average rates. They give no information about the distribution of national wealth. Sen states that the value of public goods cannot be estimated correctly, as long as they are seen separate from the human abilities and skills which serve their development and execution. Political concepts of distribution and quality of life analyses should therefore ask: What opportunities of development of core human skills and abilities are achieved for each individual through the distribution of goods. (cp. Sen/Nussbaum 1993a:1-6)

Martha Nussbaum described these human skills and abilities and tried to show the connection to general characteristics of human lifestyle. As a consequence she designed a philosophical and developmental as well as ethical theory of a good life in which the necessary conditions for an individual lifestyle are described. These conditions include adequate development and education of the following skills and abilities: - being able to live one’s full lifespan; - the chance to have physical and psychological health and integrity, and the unimpaired use of cognitive, sensory and emotional abilities; - the ability to enter into relationships with people and things outside of ourselves; - the ability to develop one’s own ideas about what is good and how to plan one’s life (including work, recreation, social, and political engagement); - the ability to live for and with others, and to have a social basis of self-respect; - the ability to have contact with other species and nature; - the ability to enjoy recreational activities, and - the ability to choose one’s way of life in one’s own environment and one’s own context.

Both Arlt and Nussbaum are not satisfied with merely describing the theory of a good life. She sees the potential abilities as values per se, inalienable rights, basic rights for development. By viewing the individual basic abilities as immeasurable value for a fulfilled life her list of skills and abilities becomes a critical standard to determine the quality of life. It exceeds Arlt’s list of basic needs in some ways and is therefore significant for social work planning and interventions.

Both Arlt and Sen conceptualize their approaches from the background of economic concerns, issues of welfare economy and the improvement of individual and social opportunities of development. Both emphasize the interdependency between economic and individual freedom. Sen identifies the abilities as „substantial liberties“, thus pointing to the material conditions that must be included when talking about emancipation and empowerment. Sen’s suggestions for a differentiated description of human development for which he received the Peace Nobel Prize for Economy are his „Human Development Index“ (HDI). In contrast to this success Arlt’s deliberations were practically hushed up in the last fifty years.
Brandstetter pursued the question what Arlt’s ideas about needs-based poverty research have contributed to the theoretical and practical social work approach to poverty in the rural areas.

It should be noted that every attempt to describe poverty in rural areas must be aware of the fact that what we commonly call rural area is a heterogeneous social reality. The term of location needs to be redefined, because the radius of people living in rural areas has increased and everyday life is less likely to be restricted to a specific location. Moreover, services and care provisions are increasingly offered supra regionally. In the few research papers on poverty in rural areas we find the following statements:

Social problems, particularly those concerning poverty, are seen as external to the village. In the opinion of the rural people problems such as domestic violence, social assistance and unemployment mostly concern the newcomers. Chassé notices a tendency to deny among the local politicians. According to his findings social problems have to be solved in the village context through well-tried forms of individual, family, and village support.

According to Wiesinger the outcomes and consequences of poverty in rural areas are linked to shame which leads to additional psychosocial stress. The interviews about social problems conducted during the Equal Project on quality in social work confirm that the topic is off-limits. Many community representatives who are responsible for the social services lack the adequate categories and terms to assess, target and prevent social problems and their multi-causal conditions and interdependencies.

According to Arlt applied poverty research in social work has the duty to „eingetretene oder drohende Schäden zu erkennen, die unmittelbaren oder entfernteren Ursachen und ihre weiteren Wirkungen zu verstehen, (..) Verständnis für das Tempo der Lageverschlechterung zu schaffen. Die Analyse sämtlicher günstiger oder ungünstiger Faktoren, die Kenntnis der möglichen und der vorhandenen Hilfsweisen, die Wege zu ihrer Einleitung; das Überprüfen ihrer Wirksamkeit“ gehört zu den Aufgaben der Fürsorge. (Arlt 1958) (recognize damage, to understand imminent or later causes and their effects, to promote understanding of a deterioration of circumstances. The analysis of positive or adversarial factors, a knowledge of possible and existing ways of giving support, and how to do it, and checking the effectiveness are all tasks and duties of welfare work.)

What might social work interventions look like that prevent poverty and promote prosperity in the rural communities and regions? Which ones discourage, which ones are accepted? Is it seen as a sign of political failure when a community needs social work services? What meaning can social work expertise and perspectives have when cooperating with community representatives on delicate issues? The questions also arises if the self-concept and image of social work requires more attention – towards a profession that is seen as a co-designer of social issues and not as a profession that appears only in emergencies. This extended self-concept matches Arlt’s view of a welfare service for the community. In line with Arlt’s thinking we must postulate the need to act sensitively towards the people and the context. This means it is important
to recognize and accept the distinctive features of different regions: welfare ideas
must come from the periphery (and should not be organized centralistically). In
contrast to a welfare system that is transferred from the city to the rural areas models
with a rural background succeed in local integration. Such models permit
identification and acceptance by the local population.

Johannes Pflegerl

The meaning of Arlt’s principal of „haarscharfes Erfassen der
Bedürfnisse“ (the precise comprehension of needs) for a more just
design of welfare services

Pflegerl establishes a relationship between the main results from a recently
completed Equal Project on qualitative standards in youth welfare and Arlt’s ideas on
quality in social work.

Background: Increasing cost-cuts in the social field lead to the fact that social
services are measured more and more according to criteria of efficiency and
effectiveness. In this context youth welfare institutions are also confronted with the
need for defining and legitimizing clear and transparent quality criteria. The goal of
the research project „Qualität in der Fremdunterbringung“ (quality in external care
and accommodation) was to develop criteria for quality care of children and
adolescents in residential homes and apartment-sharing communities. The
perspectives of the children and adolescents in question, their relatives, the social
workers, and the therapy staff working in these apartment-sharing communities were
taken into consideration.

Results: Good quality in external care and accommodation (cp. Hansbauer) not only
requires considering „what“ is achieved (result-focused, school leaving exam, ability
to leave in a shared apartment, integration into the labor market), but also „how“
(attitude, for instance of the welfare service institution) a service is offered. From the
view of the youth how this is done is generally speaking of greater importance.

Those working in this field need a lot of professionalism and personal competence to
be able to handle the children and adolescents in difficult situations.

Ilse Arlt pointed out possibilities how to develop concrete steps to help. She always
advocates a precise comprehension (Arlt 1958:54) of the needs of the individuals.
This can be seen in her early works. In 1923 she writes in Die Gestaltung der Hilfe:
„Um helfen zu können muss der Fürsorger jeden Fall klar erfassen. Seine Auffassung
wird sich zusammensetzen: aus dem Urteil über die Persönlichkeit des
Hilfsbedürftigen und aus dem über die Not. Letzteres Urteil beruht entweder auf den
Erscheinungsformen der Not oder auf ihrem Inhalt.“ (Arlt 1923:72) „Das dringendste
also ist, das genaue Erfassen des Einzelfalles vorzubereiten. Solange das nicht
geschieht, ist es so, als würde die medizinische Statistik Blattern und
Nesselaußschlag zusammenwerfen.“ (Arlt 1958:54) (In order to be able to help the
welfare worker must comprehend each case precisely. His understanding will consist
of his assessment of the personality of the needy person and of the poverty issue.
The latter depends on the visible signs of poverty or on the content or type of poverty.
It is therefore vital to prepare the case accurately. If you fail to do that, it is like putting
together chickenpox and hives.)
Pflegerl and his staff discovered this connection in the study without knowing about Arlt’s ideas. In cases where the social workers of the youth welfare office and the carers in the accommodations succeeded in establishing a trusting and respectful relationship and in understanding the needs of the children and adolescents, it was possible to take action and develop a manner of behavior that showed positive effects. In other cases in which the individual situation was not assessed adequately due to structural reasons such as a lack of resources from the youth welfare office or due to omissions or neglect of the professionals, blatant mistakes were made.

On account of these results Pflegerl calls for an alternative understanding of efficiency in external accommodation and care: Instead of measuring success based on a school leaving exam, integration into the employment market or the ability to live on one’s own, what is required is an understanding of efficacy focused on the process of needs assessment and appropriate help. In this way prosperity according to Arlt can be promoted.

In retrospect it was surprising for Pflegerl that the research approach had been in line with Arlt’s postulation. In her book *Wege zu einer Fürsorgewissenschaft* published in 1958 she asked: „Wann endlich wird, der in seinen Notwendigkeiten und individuellen Möglichkeiten genau erkannte einzelne Mensch im Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung stehen und nicht das Gefüge der Fürsorge“. (Arlt 1958:20) „Die Ganzheit des Lebens hat beständig vor uns zu stehen, der Mensch als Ausgangspunkt und als Ziel unserer Arbeit“. (Arlt 1958:61) (When will the individual finally be the focal point of attention and not the body of welfare. The whole of life is our focus, the human being is the starting point and end point of our work.)

Dismayed we may wonder why research has only recently promoted this approach and new projects are finally moving in this direction.

**Cornelia Frey**

**Ilse Arlt – an early systemic thinker?**

Cornelia Frey researched the connection between Ilse Arlt’s ideas and certain systemic concepts of social work. She assesses to what extent Arlt can be seen as a precursor of those methods of social work that proceed from the needs of the people and focus on their resources. She points out that the current resource-oriented approaches and concepts for action are not new, but can be found in Arlt’s work, although they were not influenced by her and cannot be traced back to her. To achieve human prosperity Ilse Arlt relies on welfare that focuses on the creativity of people as the main issue of her work. The implementation of these ideas includes ten pillars of her teaching which are as follows:

1. The goal of support planning is needs satisfaction
2. Solution and goal orientation must focus on prosperity
3. Increase of happiness
4. Person centered
5. Resource orientation and Empowerment
6. Contextualization
7. Decentralization and Social sphere orientation
8. Prevention
9. Evaluation
10. Participation


Frey concludes: Arlt did not postulate a systemic intervention in the narrow sense. The strongest links between her theory and the systemic approach in social work are in the concepts of empowerment, resource orientation and the model of salutogenesis.

Tom Schmid

The relationship between social state and social work

Tom Schmid focuses on the relationship between the social state and social work from the background of neo liberal ideology of competition. Social welfare, the core element of the social state, is also part of the neo liberal world of competition (see for instance Ganßmann, Barr), but there are considerable changes: in more and more areas the responsibility of the state shifts from providing services to safeguarding services. This means that social services and securities are not longer provided by the state, but by market-oriented enterprises (for instance private insurances, private nursing homes, etc.) or by organizations of the third sector (see Anastasiadis et.al. 2003, Anastasiadis 2006). The duty of the state is to make rules (e.g. pension laws) or to authorize market-oriented or nonprofit organizations and the partial or total financing of services.

Who will determine the standards of fairness for the social services and standards of integration in different systems of society? To what extent does social work – now being a contractor for social services on the free market – play a bigger role than before?

Assuming it would be possible to put social work into a powerful position in the socio-political discourse, what would be its responsibility and task?

According to Schmid the Austrian corporatistic social state model would conflict when it is not focused on the individual needs of people threatened by exclusion and requiring different inclusion and participation support services, but rather on general needs which primarily reflect the interests of participating actors and bodies.

The present social state model would be challenged to change into a more just and differentiated inclusion policy based on the regulating idea of needs orientation as postulated by Arlt in her welfare model. Arlt’s critical question was: „Wann endlich wird der Mensch, der in seinen Notwendigkeiten und individuellen Möglichkeiten genau erkannte einzelne Mensch, im Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung stehen und nicht das Gefüge der Fürsorge? (Arlt 1958:31) (When will the individual finally be the focal point of attention and not the body of welfare. The whole of life is our focus, the human being is the starting point and end point of our work.)

Possibly a person-centered approach of inclusion will become the core element of social work policy that will not contradict structurally-focused social policy, but complement it in those areas where a definition of needs is not sufficient, because
the needs are complex. On the other hand can a structural approach and a person-centered approach complement each other or must they contradict each other? And are this contradiction and the subsequent conflict perhaps necessary to prevent social policy and social work from merging?

Gertraud Pantucek

**The sustainability of Ilse Arlt`s Ideas**

What aspects of her work are currently particularly significant?

1. Her statement that there is a lack of experts in social work is still true today. Her call for more experts could, for instance, mean training „experts for integration and development” in the field of social work. They would be able to write comments, evaluations and expert opinions with respect to person-centered or structural interventions of officials, courts and politics, and to function as experts of social issues.

2. The idea and implementation of an „integrated training“ and „integrated practical experience“ of social work that observes and researches the diversity of life appears to be another topical point. The current re-design of the social work study program has initialized a lot of change in this respect. The integration of social pedagogy into social work is at present an open issue in Austria. Social work practice still distinguishes and draws lines between different forms of distress. This means that depending on the type of distress and need the client is referred to a certain institution. Instead of an integrated view and approach there are only very differentiated and specialized care services.

3. The demand to make poverty, distress and methods of support measurable and assessable and to define distress as a measurable gap from prosperity (cp. 1958:60) is a great challenge even for today’s social policy and social work. It serves to target new forms of poverty and a continuing increase of vulnerable people - especially children – in our rich welfare state, and consequently to be able to take action against them.

4. The commitment of Ilse Arlt to look truth fully in the face („der ganzen Wahrheit (...) ins Gesicht zu sehen“) and to research the condition of support activities (cp. 1958:3) is a constant requirement to make qualitative improvements. The quality – that is the condition – of social work is dependent on many factors and dynamic in itself, because it deals with soft facts such as relationships and development. It cannot be determined once and for all or only by the clients or service users, but has to be evaluated on a multi-dimensional level. Does the service offered succeed in achieving the goal in the best way possible, and where is there a need for change? This is a meta-question for quality control in social work. It is notable that Arlt talks about authorities that should check compliance with the principles of support. Her principles include speed, human dignity, benevolence, freedom, professional accuracy, practical conformance and cost-effectiveness. These principles correspond to the quality criteria of social work, for instance to the 12 quality characteristics of Maja Heiner (1996). Heiner considers both the personal basic principles in the field of social work important – for instance self-actualization, solidarity and justice – and the focus on professional quality. The latter can be determined as transparency, participation, alignment, accessibility, speed, confidentiality, individualization, normality, communication, respect, and friendliness.
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