

Sparkling Science >  
Science linking with School  
School linking with Science

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**Youth@Risk**

**Perception of Risk of Adolescents**

**Risks from a perspective of Adolescents,  
Science and Media**

**LEADING INSTITUTION**

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Austrian Federal Ministry of  
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## High costs for accommodation, road accidents and environmental risks: Results of the project Youth@Risk – Risk Perception of Adolescents

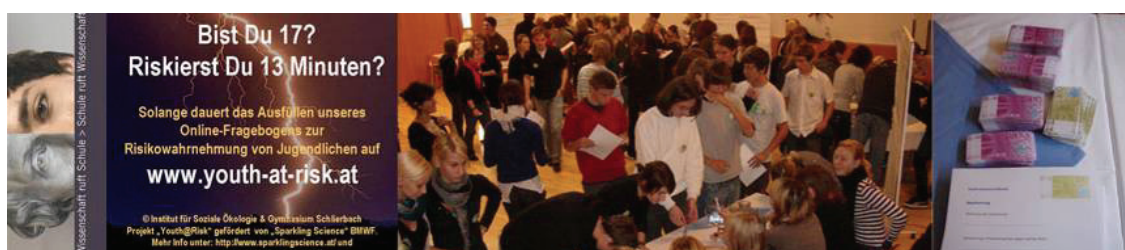
What type of risks do adolescents feel mostly concerned about? Does the media focus on risks young people classify as particularly relevant?

In „Youth@Risk“, high-school students and scientists jointly assessed the topic of subjective risk perception. The students of the compulsory optional subject Human Ethics and Social Studies of the Upper Austrian high school Schlierbach gained an intensive insight into scientific work and contributed significantly to the success of the project. “This is also a result the students can be proud of, this has been made possible by their co-operation“, a teacher said. Through active and dedicated engagement of the students as experts on youth life-style and youth language, the project produced exciting scientific results.

The first approach towards the complex topic „risk“ was based on an experimental game conducted at the Austrian high school Schlierbach as well as at the German partner school Bleicherode. The experimental game asked adults and adolescents to develop fictitious insurance and prevention policies. The outcome of the game enabled the project team to learn about the sources of information used by the young participants and the differing risk perception of adolescents and adults. For a school girl “the biggest surprise was that the grown-ups experience things totally differently“.

The outputs of the experimental games, brainstormings and group discussions conducted among high-school students were compiled into a **list of different risks**. This list was the basis for a questionnaire developed together with the students, which was used for a **nation-wide survey in Austria**. The survey included over 600 teenagers at the age of 17. Following concerns about high costs for accommodation and traffic accidents, environmental concerns were identified as risks adolescents experience most strongly. The interviewed teenagers placed group concerns before their own individual concerns. Also, the interviewees seem to have a high risk perception and awareness and take responsibility where they have the ability to act (such as use of drugs) and do not ignore structural risks (such as environmental risks). The adolescents try to keep the balance between self-realization and community orientation. As a result to the question how adolescents want to shape their future life, Willi Haas of the Institute of Social Ecology in Vienna states that “47 % of the interviewed teenagers plan to have a steep career, but also lots of free time for hobbies“.

In a **media analysis**, the Austrian Institute of Ecology examined the relationship between the frequency of reporting on certain risks and the assessment of these risks from the perspective of adolescents. Assisted by a student, the research focused on the two newspapers most frequently read by teenagers in Upper Austria and analyzed the frequency of certain themes.



It turned out that the influence of news coverage on risks on the risk perception of adolescents doesn't follow a visible pattern. Despite little reporting on the topic of environmental risks in the media, nearly all teenagers interviewed consider it very likely that they will be personally concerned by this theme. On the contrary, assaults on people, which are brought up most frequently in the media, are perceived as low-level threats.

The **literature research**, which was conducted by the Institute for Pharmaeconomic Research, provides a synopsis of the current status of the scientific work related to risk perception of adolescents. Furthermore, in accordance with comparative statistical data, the classification of certain activities as risks seems to be well founded. However, the probability to be affected by a certain risk is rated differently by the adolescents than the results shown by the statistical data.

Apart from the **close integration of the students** into the mentioned work projects, workshops on additional discussion focused on workshops about scientific methods as well as inputs of experts.


The project work was significantly characterized by the structural relation between co-operation in education and research. The complexity of the project required intensive co-ordination and communication and relied heavily on the readiness of all project partners to follow a multi-stakeholder process. The integration of the research project into the daily school routine has been a great challenge, particularly as the project wouldn't have been possible without the participation of the students, whose input and voices on methods and presentation formats of relevant topics have been critical. This challenge was mastered very well. "Despite all challenges with the integration of a long research project into the daily school routine and with ensuring the continuation of the project and its eventual completion, the project turned out to be very informative and educative and yielded good results" said a teacher of the partner school. The Institute for Education and School Development evaluated the challenges and achievements of the inter- and trans-disciplinary project team.

The main goals of the program '*Sparkling Science*' have been reached in more than one way: It was possible to get several students enthusiastic about research, even influencing their choice about their future university studies. Two students have already taken concrete steps into the direction of research by carrying out an internship in the participating scientific organizations.

Two students were able to use the project as catalyst to publish specialized papers on different topics of risk. One student attended two scientific conferences where she also delivered a lecture. In addition, she is also the co-author of one part of the final report of the project. Schools expressed interest for a continued co-operation, considering the proximity to scientific organizations as very positive.

The project has reconfirmed that the co-operation between science and education has a great potential for high synergy effects. Also, the results on risk perception of adolescents constitute a useful orientation tool for setting research priorities in the areas of risk and sustainability as well as public campaigns aimed at preventive risk measures.





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