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Science linking with School School linking with Science

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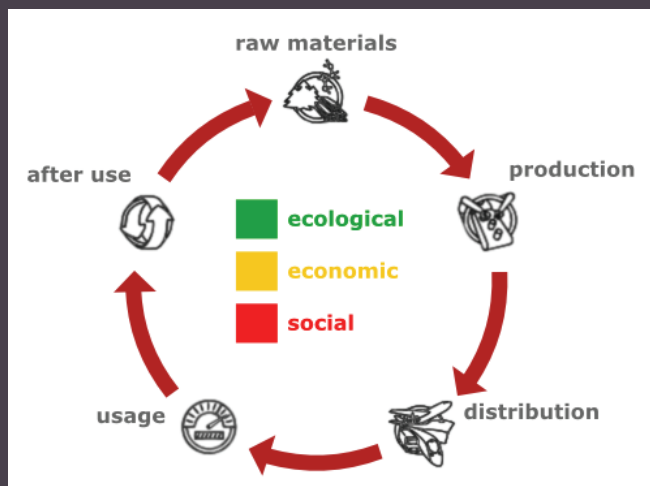
Ecoproduct for Youth Development of a Method for Sustainability Assessment of Products for Young People

LEADING INSTITUTION

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SCHOOLS INVOLVED

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Austrian Federal Ministry of
Science and Research

Project results and statements of teachers, pupils, and researchers

Part 1: Development of a methodology for sustainability evaluation of products

Through the first part of the project, a web-based platform was developed and made public at www.ecoproduct.at/youth. The platform addresses youth. It helps them to evaluate products based on sustainability performance. The core of the platform contains an evaluation methodology, which was developed and implemented through this project. Furthermore, it contains a forum for communication purposes and a database providing information about sustainability, electronic and textile products and the methodology itself. The layout of the platform was designed to attract young people and to transfer the holistic approach of implementing the three pillars of sustainability through the evaluation process.

Pupils evaluated their chosen products by doing research and product tests under supervision of their teachers and the university. They documented their evaluation process thoroughly. The documentation then was taken by the Vienna University of Technology (VUT) to verify and analyse the results. Feedback was given to pupils in case a correction of the evaluation was necessary. Feedback of pupils regarding the platform was implemented parallel to its use. Improvements of the platform were conducted for usability, structure, layout, and the visualization of the results.

The final product evaluation results were put into a publically available database. Consumers' awareness shall be raised towards sustainable consumption by providing them an easy-to-use tool for product evaluation and a database as a source of reference. A vital involvement about the own consumption patterns can be achieved by answering some questions about the impacts in the different life cycle phases of a product.

A final presentation of the research work of the pupils followed by dense discussions about the applicability of the platform and the methodology was carried out at the end of the first part of the project.

Statements of pupils (AHS) and teachers

"The researched data helped us to get a detailed insight into manufacturing aspects. However, this will not really influence our purchasing decisions, as functionality, price, and private style are still the main drivers for purchasing."

"The information gathered through the research is very valuable, as we now have a clear vision about manufacturing processes, distribution, and marketing. The project was a success and should be carried out in other schools too."

All teachers committed that the contents of project were almost new to them. Further, all of them are looking forward to integrate the outcomes into their lectures and to sensibilise their students regarding sustainability aspects in purchase decisions. All involved schools pointed out the good supervision of the VUT and the smooth organisation.



Part 2: Integration of quality and sustainability criteria (involved school BHAK 10 Wien)

After a general presentation from the VUT, where more than 60 pupils took part, two groups with four participants each were formed to do further research in the scope of the project. Results of the first research group contain a list with additional evaluation questions for the platform dealing with product quality. Therefore, the importance between sustainability and quality criteria was assessed in detail.

The second group has conceptualised criteria for a sustainability label for youth, which they named "Youth for Future".

Pupils worked for their projects in their lectures „Project management, Quality management and scientific working" as well as in their free time. Both groups did questionnaires (part of them online) for their work with more than 100 pupils from the BHAK 10. All participating pupils in the questionnaires were continuously updated about the results of the project. The final official project presentation is scheduled to take place in February.

Statements of pupils (BHAK 10) and teachers

"We tried to create a sustainability label that was capable of both, underline the sustainability aspect of a product and be trendy for youth. Youth are the future, that is why we named our label 'Youth For Future – YFF'."

"Our project clearly shows that in the scope of a business as well as in private life a sustainable life style is becoming crucial every day. Sustainability can be easily applied in daily life, for example by purchasing consciously or by a simple evaluation of the product before buying it."

"The cooperation with university through a research project broadens the minds of pupils and advances cross-linked thinking."

"The project has a direct link to the environment of youth. It facilitates practical-oriented work."

Statements of involved researchers

"Today's youth are tomorrow's decision makers; that is why we want to bring the concept of sustainable consumption and sustainable product development into schools." (DI Maria Huber)

"Contributions of pupils of BHAK 10 are scientifically valuable for the VUT. One of the project contributions has already been processed and submitted to the international design conference Design 2010. The other contribution will be processed and submitted to a scientific journal."

Differently to the first impression gathered from the workshops conducted in the AHS schools, the economic pillar seems not be the most important aspect of sustainability to youth. Young people are rather looking for high quality products which are environmental-friendly and respect social values. A considerable amount of questioned pupils does even not mind to pay more for such a product.

A further cooperation with schools in the field of sustainability is aimed, especially with BHAK 10, where further cooperation for Matura projects is planned. The success of the cooperation with schools can be measured through the motivated contribution of the students and the teachers, as well as the qualitative results for both, the platform and the scientific work of the Matura projects. How and how much the contents are further used in the AHS schools is not clear yet. Transferring the idea of sustainable consumption to youth remains a challenge. Nevertheless, they constitute a group that will be confronted with many questions in this regard in the future; some may find themselves in job positions where they have to take important decisions on sustainability issues. In this regard, awareness raising and the transfer of basic knowledge already in school are of essential need.





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