



Sparkling Science >

Science linking with School  
School linking with Science

PROJECT OUTLOOK, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2008

OUR ENVIRONMENT HAS A HISTORY  
Students in search for the roots of our  
environmental problems

**LEADING INSTITUTION**

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**SCIENTIFIC CO-OPERATION PARTNERS**

E. Dorner Publishing Company  
Austrian Educational Competence  
Centre Biology (AECC-BIO)

**SCHOOL INVOLVED**

HTBLA 10



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Austrian Federal Ministry of  
Science and Research

## Our environment has a history Students in search for the roots of our environmental problems

### Cooperation at eye level

“Our environment has a history“ supports students of a technical secondary school in independent scholarly research on Austrian environmental history. The research projects of the students are prepared in classes of history, German, biology and environmental technology during regular school hours. The research is then conducted primarily during the „project week“, held in the school each February. Students are introduced to scholarly research and issues of environmental history in several excursions. On the basis of these experiences, and supported by environmental historians and didacticists they develop research questions and research designs,. Thus, they introduce new topics to environmental history which are relevant to young people interested in technology. The products of the project distribute the results in schools and the scholarly community.

The project is monitored by didactics: Didacticists moderate common workshops and thus foster successful communication between school and academic scholarship. Concomitant research during the project week yields insights for future cooperation between schools and science. In addition, accompanying evaluation serves as quality control during the course of the project.

In order to ensure lasting effects of the projects, teaching materials on environmental history are developed and provided online for free download. To ensure a lasting effect, continuing education seminars for teachers on environmental history are prepared during the project. A university course will introduce the supervision of environmental history school projects into academic teaching.

### Why environmental history?

Environmental history contributes to the transformation towards sustainability by providing a long-term-perspective on the interaction between society and its environment. “Our environment has a history“ introduces environmental history to schools and produces new scholarly insights for an environmental history of Austria. Environmental history is currently poorly represented in school curricula. Also in academia, the field is new in Austria. Environmental history is therefore highly suitable for testing how to support research by school students. Students gain insights into scholarly research by designing, executing and documenting research projects in environmental history. Barriers between science and schools are dismantled, and students are sensitised to questions of sustainability.

*„In the course of the project it is particularly important to engage technical students into the search for the roots of our environmental problems. We invite them to reflect about the role of technology for our environment.“*

Verena Winiwarter, coordinator



## Initial Activities – finding our way to environmental history

„Our environment has a history“ officially started on September 22nd, 2008 with a Kick-Off event in the technical secondary school HTBLA 10. The project team, comprising environmental historians, didacticists, teachers and a representative from a publisher of school books, presented the project to two classes and invited them to co-operate. Both classes decided to get involved and committed themselves to working on an environmental history research project during their project week.

The students came up with ideas for research topics and put forward suggestions for excursions in which they could approach methods and issues of environmental history. In the first excursion, one class visited the Vienna Municipal Archives. In a tour guided by an archivist, they were introduced to the inner working of an archive. Subsequently they had the chance to work with original documents from the archive, supported by members of the scientific project team.

*„After the excursion to the Vienna Municipal Archives I am very interested in the project and I hope that the next excursion will help us to define a research topic.“*

Student, HTBLA 10

In a second excursion the students pursued their interest in different topics of environmental history by looking behind the scenes in Vienna's Technical Museum. A curator guided them not only through the exhibition on energy history, but also to mechanical workshops, offices and the library of the museum. The other class will approach environmental history in an excursion to the pictorial archive of the Austria National Library. „The project has been very well prepared and makes the students curious and eager to work on the *interdisciplinary topic of environmental history*. *After this successful start the project can contribute to the exchange between school and science, but also to a new learning culture at our school.*“ Irene Ecker, teacher, HTBLA 10

The concomitant evaluation by didacticists has started: In interviews with teachers, students and scientists the expectations from the project and from the cooperation partners were discussed. The transcripts of these interviews will allow for an assessment of the current state of the cooperation and will allow developing measures of quality control.


During a workshop in early December, the students will be challenged to define a research project on the grounds of their previous experiences with environmental history. They will work on this project during the project week in February, 2009.

*„The project is really cool!“*

Student, HTBLA 10







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