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Science linking with School School linking with Science

Interim Report, March 20th 2009

Ecoproduct for Youth

Development of a method for sustainability assessment of products for young people

LEADING INSTITUTION

Vienna University of Technology, Institute for Engineering Design,
Research Area Ecodesign

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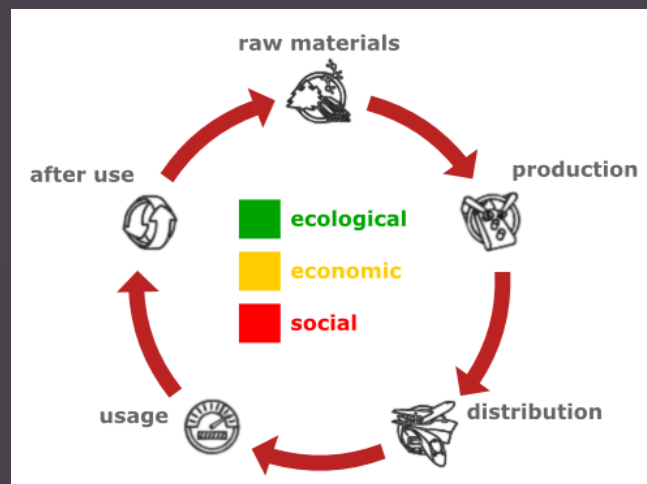
SCHOOLS INVOLVED

RG Parhamerplatz, Vienna

BRG Rahlgasse, Vienna

Sir Karl Popper Schule, Vienna

BHAK Wien 10, Vienna



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www.bmwf.gv.at

Austrian Federal Ministry of
Science and Research

Progress of the research project

The project started with an introduction about sustainable product design held at two schools (RG Parhamerplatz and Sir Karl Popper Schule) and at the Vienna University of Technology VUT (for BRG Rahlgasse, which participated with three classes). Later characteristics about the product categories textiles and electronic products were presented in order to communicate crucial aspects of global production and consumer activities in those two branches. Introduction into the method and usage of the online platform were also demonstrated.

An additional assessment platform at www.ecoproduct.at/youth has been developed for the target group. Compared to the existing platform at www.ecoproduct.at, the new one adapted to adolescents comprises surplus information material such as useful links and consumer tips as well as extended functionality, e. g. discussion forum. Further, the assessment method has been adapted to the target group. The platform has been re-designed to make it more attractive to the young users. Texts have been revised and a graphical layout underlines the focus on sustainability assessment over the whole life cycle and in the ecological, economic and social dimension of sustainability.

During the implementation phase of the platform in schools, the feedback of the scholars has been included and bugs have been fixed on a daily/regular basis. The publication of the assessment results will take place in April 2009 after accomplishing the re-design concerning structure, layout and usability.

The practical work for the scholars started with gathering detailed product information in shops, homepages of the companies, customer organizations and other sources of information. Before starting the assessment process, the project team tested the platform and accompanied the teachers in getting familiar with the platform. The assessment of the selected products under www.ecoproduct.at/youth was performed after the research activity and practical product tests that were necessary to answer the assessment questions. While answering the questions explanatory comments for each question had to be given such as information found and used including references, sources, links etc. These comments help to track the decisions taken for assessment and shall also assure comparability and traceability of the assessment results.

The assessment phase itself took place in self-organized working groups under the guidance of the teachers and the project team of the VUT. To ease the testing of products, tips for the product tests were prepared by VUT. In addition, meetings in the schools were organized to support assessment process. For ensuring the traceability of the results, the scholars had to keep records about their research results, the detailed product description as well as summarize the reasons for their assessment decisions.



Visits to DRZ – Disassembling and Recycling Centre, Caritas Wien, garbage upcycling design and a lecture about the social situation in textile industry held by Südwind underlined the practical character of the assessment questions and the assessment methodology respectively.

After the first assessment process, the results and the comments were analysed and reviewed by the project team of the VUT. The scholars had to implement the feedback into their work before finishing off the online assessment. To complete the project, a final presentation of the assessment results will be held at schools followed by a discussion about the informative value and practicability of the assessment methodology. Both, scholars and teachers will give their overall feedback concerning organisation and content of the project via an online feedback form that will present the basis for evaluating the project and redesigning the assessment platform.

With the scholars of BRG Rahlgasse three workshops with different focus were held: “sustainable consumption/sustainability label”, “assessment method/platform” and “sustainable product design/weighting of assessment questions”.

First scientific results concerning assessment questions and their individual weighting could be gained out of the latter workshop. By answering the questions the scholars got deeper involved with the product characteristics and the manufacturing companies. However, the critical look on the products was sometimes clouded by the image and popularity of the products. The majority named the economic aspects as the most important, followed by social and last – ecological aspects. The limited budgetary situation of the young scholars (income/outgoings, pocket money...) and the resulting understanding of the economic questions may explain this. Questions dealing with ecological aspects, i. e. environmental impacts, seem to be less understandable for them.


The majority of the scholars stated that they liked the project work and that they gained a lot of information both from the lectures and the own research process. The time-consuming research and the self-organized group work was not always easy going for them, but was classified as a positive experience on the whole.

Quotation of a scholar: *„The information we achieved in the course of the project is of practical value for us, because we gained insight into industrial production, manufacturing of products and a good deal more. We think that the project was very successful and such projects should be performed in much more schools and classes.”*

The teachers agreed on the enrichment of their classes through the valuable input of the project work. The majority stated that they have not been familiar with the topic before and that they found the project very interesting and informative. They are motivated to integrate the results into their future teaching activities and animate their scholars to consider sustainability aspects when purchasing products. Some teachers as well as scholars mentioned the improving potential concerning the clear meaning of some of the assessment questions and the length of the assessment procedure in order to simplify the process. The cooperation was seen very positive, the teachers and scholars felt well accompanied through the project by the project team of the VUT.

The feedback will be integrated into the re-design of the platform that will be open to the public in April/May 2009. Long-term co-operations are planned with the involved schools, two high schools showed particular interest in using the platform already during the next year again.

The second research part will start in April 2009, where scholars of the BHAK will spend time on integrating sustainability aspects into quality assurance matters.



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