



Sparkling Science >
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Project Outlook, 24.11.2008

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

Coordinator: DI Maria Huber

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Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft
und Forschung

Becoming aware of the consequences of our consumption activities and tracking product features

Features like price, functionality, design and image of a product mainly influence our purchase decisions. The effects a product has on its environment e.g. during its usage or referring from production processes are rarely considered respectively there are no information available. For a holistic sustainability assessment, environmental as well as economic and social aspects of products have to be considered. Therefore, a platform for sustainability assessment of products has been developed where consumers themselves have the possibility to evaluate and compare products with an easy to use method.

The platform on www.ecoproduct.at will be made accessible for a new target group within the Sparkling Science project in cooperation with three high schools. Young people are the customers and decision makers of the future. Although their financial means are limited, they present an important consumer group already.

“Ecoproduct for Youth” aims at winning the target group of young people for sustainability concerns. The platform will be extended with information material and communication tools and adapted for the consumer behaviour and special needs of the target group. This also comprises the redesign of the platform and creating a separate platform at www.ecoproduct.at/youth which is accessible to the involved school classes during the project and to the public at the end of the project in December 2009.

Within the project, pupils have to assess textile and electronic products along the whole life cycle in terms of sustainability. Questions concerning the ecological, economical and social impacts of real products have to be answered and evaluated. This comprises some research activity about the characteristics of and critical views on the chosen products. Such a knowledge base should enable the young consumers to include sustainability thoughts into their purchase decision of every day goods.

The theoretical basis of the assessment method should be used for developing criteria for a sustainability label which could present a guideline for concrete application in industry. A label created for young people combined with an attractive image might raise the awareness and demand for sustainable products within the target group. This presents a further step towards enhancing the sensibility of the future decision makers and customers.

One of the involved partner school is going to deal with sustainability matters within their final exam. Possibilities of integrating product based sustainability aspects into quality assurance based on existing norms like the Global Reporting Initiative or ISO 26000 have to be found and worked out. The project is partly building up the results of the other schools and draws the line between sustainable consumption and integration of sustainability aspects into industrial production.

Partner schools: RG Parhamerplatz, BRG Rahlgasse, Sir Karl Popper Schule, BHAK Wien 10



Selected statements from the project team

“We consider young people as the future decision makers. In the line of 'Ecoproduct for Youth', we are going to activate their view on aspects of sustainable product development and sustainable consumption and bring it into the schools. The web platform for sustainability assessment stays alive with the entries of its users. We are looking forward to the vital input and critical feedback of the pupils!” outlines project leader DI Maria Huber the motivation of participating in Sparkling Science.

Why partner schools participate in the Sparkling Science Project Ecoproduct for Youth **Mag. Christine Plihal, Subject Domestic Economy and Nutrition, RG Parhamerplatz:**

A central educational task of Domestic Economy is the guidance of pupils towards critical and environmental conscious consumers. Exactly this task is performed within the Sparkling Science Project. Pupils are motivated to make their personal purchase decisions not only based on economic and fashion aspects rather to view their consuming activity from various angles. In particular, sustainability aspects should taken into consideration which present an important factor in environmental education. In addition, insight in research work and the possibility of cooperating with pupils, teachers and scientists are given. Interdisciplinary education between Domestic Economy and Computer Science can be performed and social competences are supported by creating working groups.

Mag. Angela Ransdorf, Subject Religion and Biology, Sir Karl Popper Schule:

This project should enhance the sensibility of young people towards the sustainability of products. It not only fits into the Biology class where the main part of the work will be done, but also touches ethical and religious questions. This topic seems very much suitable for raising the young people's awareness concerning their responsibility for our and the following generations. They learn how to understand the affects of their personal purchase decisions, how to assess these affects properly and how to shift their consumer behavior towards sustainable products.

Mag. Schuster-Stephan, educational focus on Quality Management, Management Studies and Personality Development, BHAK Wien 10:

With taking part in this project the pupils get to cooperate with a University research institute within their regular education. They will be able to apply their accumulated knowledge and link different disciplines. A main benefit will be the critical look into the aspects of sustainability within their key educational element of quality management.

Expectations of the pupils on the project

We expect gaining insight in the properties and impacts of various products. Like how selected products are produced, what they consist of, how the price-performance ratio is to be evaluated or how the different environmental affects of the chosen products can be assessed. Besides, we would like to assess products in order to support other people with their product choice. We hope gathering new experiences for our personal lives via this kind of learning method. Additionally, we look forward to gain insight in the daily work of researchers.





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