

Tage der jungen Forschung
(open space for open minds)

Communications Project for the Federal
Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT)

Submission for the Austrian State Prize for Public Relations 2006

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1. START SITUATION

There are 500,000 too few researchers in natural sciences in the EU. Austria should have 48,000 scientists when compared with Germany, but in reality, there are only 32,000. The need to catch up is most acute in regards to young scientists.

2. CONCEPT

communication matters conceptualized the project "Tage der jungen Forschung – open space for open minds" for the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT) to combat this deficit. . The project took place on 16th and 17th November, 2005 in Vienna, as a pilot program. The project should be continued and expanded throughout Austria after its success in Vienna.

2.1 DIALOG GROUPS/ DEFINITION OF TARGETS

- Around 100 school students should get close, realistic, practical experience about research and researchers.
- The BMVIT wants to discover what young people think about research and what they imagine research to be like.
- The members of the Science Committee of the Austrian Parliament politically responsible for research should be informed of the results.
- The public should be informed about the project and the image young people have of science using the media.

3. STRATEGY

Mutual information exchange should be achieved through two-way, symmetric communication in a relaxed, group-dynamic process without hierarchy. The experiences gathered should help give the school students a realistic picture of science and give the BMVIT important information about the image young people have about research and science.

4. IMPLEMENTATION - SETTING OF EVENT

Around 100 school students in the penultimate, school year of their general secondary education in Vienna were brought together with 10 young researchers. The participants got their first close contact with research: Program:

- Morning Day 1: Introductions
- Afternoon Day 1: Laboratory visit in groups, open questioning possibilities
- Morning Day 2: Information swap, elicit school students' experiences
- Afternoon Day 2: Work out results, structure conclusions
- Formal conclusion: Presentation of results to public and media

- Informal conclusion: Party with participants and researchers

The two-day event was led by professional moderators (1 woman, 1 man).

4.1 INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED

The organizers strove hard to ensure a balance between the participants and researchers.

The following institutions were of assistance:

- Vienna City Schools Council (Stadtschulrat von Wien)
- ACV – Advanced Computer Vision
- CDG – Christian Doppler Gesellschaft
- FFG – Austrian Research Promotion Agency
- FTW – Telecommunications Research Center Vienna
- VRVis –Center for Virtual Reality and Visualization

4.2 School students/ Schools

All the school directors at general secondary schools in Vienna were informed of the project by the Vienna City Schools Council. In a two-month period, 83 students from 16 different schools registered for the project. Forty-three percent of those registered were female and 57 percent male (see video for participants).

4.3 Researchers

Ten well-known, young Austrian scientists (five women and five men) agreed to join the project team (for name and institute see video)

5. RESULTS

5.1 Experiences/ results

The moderators elicited the experiences and insights of the school students and structured them systematically on the morning of Day 2, following the experience and information day on Day 1. Questions to the participants:

- ***What did I expect?***
- ***How was it in reality?***
- ***What was the biggest surprise?***

5.2 Evaluation

Afterwards, the personal experiences of the participants were compared to the real perspective of the researchers, evaluated and structured.

What is good about a career in research?

Freedom, many different tasks, teamwork, flexible timing

The possibility to solve a problem, the importance/meaning of the work
Ability to travel, fun

Was is not good / bad?

A lot of uncertainty, too little money for research projects, too few chances at home
A lot of office work, poor salary
Little public recognition

What should be changed (to make research more interesting to me)?

More information in schools, for students, in the media
Image improvement for research careers, better teacher training
More funding, more money for researchers and research

5.3 Presentation of Results

At the end of the event, the results were presented in an open dialog between the school students, politicians and journalists present and with the help of the moderators. The politicians could hear the concerns and criticisms of the school students in a personal dialog, learn from this and answer. The school students also had the chance to agree with the explanations and arguments of the politicians present or to stick to opposite opinions.

In essence, what was arrived at was a to-do list containing what needs to be done to make a career as a researcher more attractive to young people and the public and to help combat shortages of young researchers in the longer-term. These discussions were made note of the journalists and transported to the public via numerous reports.

5.4 Politicians Present

BMVIT State Secretary Mr. Mainoni
Science Spokesperson Dr. Brinek
Science Spokesperson Dr. Magda Bleckmann
Deputy Science Spokesperson Johann Moser

5.5 MEDIA INTEREST, RESPONSE

Journalists and media covering science, education and schools were invited to the press conference. Those present included:

ORF 1, Radio, Science Department
“Die Presse”, daily newspaper
“SciQ”, science magazine
Universum Verlag, publisher of several science magazines

Further press activities / releases:

OTS report
APA report

5.6 Follow-up

A seven-minute film about the project was produced and sent to:

- the participants
- the researchers
- the participating schools
- the Vienna City Schools Council – with the goal of offering the film to all general secondary schools to allow the subject to be discussed in lessons
- the media
- all interested parties that could work as multipliers

5.7 Conclusion / Resumé / Evaluation

- All participants – school students, researchers, schools, the Schools Council, politicians, media – appreciated the project, saying it was “good”.
- About 80% of the participant target was achieved. Only 15 percent of all eligible schools in Vienna took part – a level which can be improved.
- The school students found Day 1 (the information day) excellent and would have liked more (visit to laboratories).
- The school students found Day 2 rather more “difficult”.
- The ministry got the results it was looking for from the project: “what do young people think about science, what is their opinion” – this section will not have to be repeated continuously if the project is repeated.
- The setting of follow-up events will be taken into account in these conclusions.
- There was a net budget of EUR 116,000 for this project, including personnel and equipment costs. The BMVIT was satisfied by the cost-benefit ratio.
