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WasserCluster Lunz - Biologische Station GmbH
Dr. Carl Kupelwieser Promenade 5
A- 3293 Lunz am See
Tel. 07486 20060 Fax 07486 20060 20
office@wcl.ac.at
www.wcl.ac.at

Historians reprocess history of Biological Station

How did limnologists 100 years ago develop their research questions? Which social backgrounds were behind it? How important was Biological Station Lunz in the history of limnology? Katja Geiger and Thomas Mayer deal at the moment with questions like these. The two historians from the University of Vienna were at WasserCluster Lunz in August in the course of preliminary studies for a FWF project and combed through the historic library in the Biological Station Lunz (BSL). First results are presented in October.



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„How limnology as a scientific discipline developed is scientifically not really investigated“, say Katja Geiger and Thomas Mayer. The two historians want to change that. In the last months they went over material in several archives, amongst others in the Austrian Academy of Science, the Max Planck Society in Berlin and at the University of Vienna. One of the most important archives they found in the historic library at the BSL. On the basis of development directions of the BSL, which was founded in 1905, could be retraced how limnology developed in general, say the two historians.

In the course of the preliminary studies, which were funded by the government of Lower Austria, the University of Vienna, the University of Natural Resources and Life Science Vienna and the WasserCluster Lunz, Geiger and Mayer combed through a lot of boxes at the garret of the BSL. They looked through letters, manuscripts, agendas of meetings and laboratory notes. „We were especially lucky, when we found the guestbooks“, say the two scientists. „Because the guest researchers did not only register in the guestbooks, they also wrote down reports of their work.“

Aim of the preliminary studies is to get an FWF project, which would last three years. In the center of the investigations there would be the BSL. The application for the project is going to be presented in the next weeks. First results of the preliminary studies are going to be presented in October. But one thing is already for sure: „Until the beginning of World War II the value of the BSL was significant. The best scientists from all over the world were guests in Lunz“, say the historians. But it seems, that after 1945 this top level sagged. „Why that happened would be a question we wanted to answer in the course of the FWF project“, say the historians, who hope for the acceptance of the FWF. Because in relation to which importance Lunz once had in the history of limnology, the history of the BSL was underprocessed, the two historians are convinced.