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_IN YOUR GROUP PROJECT

During the Opening Week, you work together in a team on your project. To take on the project work as a Questioning Mind can be helpful in many respects. In the following, you will find small exercises as well as questions that can help you in terms of team-building – even more so if you do not know each other well:

– Understanding

- What do you mean by that?
- Do I understand correctly that...?
- What does xy mean to you? What is your understanding of xy?

– Critical self-questioning

- What is my personal background from which I am speaking (own values, socio-economic background, conceptions of man, self-perception...)? And how does it relate to the background of the other?
- What mood am I speaking from? What feelings underlie what I am saying? Do I want to convey these feelings indirectly in what I say or do I want to communicate them directly?
- Am I open in my questioning attitude and interested in gaining knowledge or do I want to be right?
- Where am I unsure? Where do I want to share incomplete thoughts?

– Process questioning

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go, what is the objective?
- What do we require to reach this objective?

THE QUESTIONING MIND IN "VISIONING"

In the visionary video, as a project group, you work out a vision – i.e. a desirable future state – on your topic. The development of a vision has many creative parts. A Questioning Mind that accepts the openness of creative processes finds it easier to unbind itself from the usual question and thinking patterns and to become creative. What does that mean in concrete terms? The following exercises and questions show it. The nice thing about this is that there are no rules here; there is no right or wrong.

– Yes, but? Yes, and?

- Often times we tend towards doubting instead of towards acknowledging. For visioning, it can help to encourage oneself to acknowledge and think more deeply by responding to the idea of a group member with the question "Yes, and...?" instead of with "Yes, but...?", for example: Yes, and what exactly would that then look like? Yes, and what if we also did xyz? This questioning attitude that takes up the idea of another person in order to develop it positively instead of doubting it can sometimes work wonders.

– Make a wish

- It is not just when it is our birthday that we can make wishes. When developing a vision, too, the question regarding a very specific wish for the future can help to come closer to one's own ideas of a positive future scenario. To this end, ask yourself the following question in relation to your topic:
How are things to be in 2050?
You have a free wish – write it down, record it, create a mind map or create a small sketch. Not all good visions begin in text form.

– Questioning the visions

- Aside: What side stages does the vision have? What happens if you shift it to another place or another time? What new ideas occur to you?
- Sensational!: What would be a real sensation connected to your topic or vision? What would change? What would be possible which was not possible before? Let your fantasy run wild for a while.
- No cash no bash?: What would happen if money was not important? Which aspects would be affected, which would not? Which solutions come into question which would otherwise be unthinkable? Wallow in the possibilities (Ebertz 2009).

THE QUESTIONING MIND IN "CRITIQUE"

Criticism and critical thinking are closely connected to the abilities of the Questioning Mind. Expressing criticism stresses the questioning of the phenomenon to be criticised in order to understand it, to illuminate it from different sides and then to reach a judgement (see "Critique"). As part of your project work during Opening Week, you will critically analyse a topic and compose a critical commentary on this. Here, the following questions may be helpful to you:

- What is that? What sort of phenomenon is that?
What lies behind this concept?
- Is that correct? Is that true? Is that really the case?
What would we find out if we examined the claim?
- What answers does the text or presentation give to which questions? Can there be other answers to the question?
- How does that work? What happens if...?
What consequences does xy have?
- Which questions remain unanswered? Where are the boundaries to your vision/your central idea/your topic?
- Which questions have not yet been asked?

QUESTIONING MIND_

People are animals which ask questions: wanting to know something is part of being human and thus also the asking of questions (as philosopher Carl Jaspers, in Zillober 1972). The Questioning Mind describes – similar to the Cooperative Mind – an attitude I can adopt to the world and that we want to explore together during the Opening Week: an attitude with which we approach the world through asking questions. But what does that mean in concrete terms? On the one hand, a Questioning Mind shows itself in the asking of questions. On the other hand, a Questioning Mind lives from the willingness to take on new things without ready-made answers as well as to scrutinise one’s own answers and the things one has assumed and taken for granted. First, let us take a closer look at questions themselves. What is so exciting about questions? We could give an answer now. This already displays one of the core aspects of questions: chronologically, they precede an answer. According to the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, questions are also often more meaningful than the answers themselves (Gadamer 1975). They stand for the openness of human thought and at the same time, allow it; the openness of the asked exists in the undetermined of the answer (Gadamer 1975). On the other hand, it is the type of question that influences the view: it specifies what knowledge is being deepened and is indicative of one’s own thoughts and those of other people.

So where does the impulse to ask stem from? From knowledge which does not go together with other knowledge; from a disharmony between knowledge and experience; from missing information that we know is missing. Or from the desire to know something, from the need to want to know. An important catalyst for questions is therefore curiosity. Curiosity does not develop in a vacuum, but crystallises on prior knowledge, interests, irritations and the openness for thinking processes which go beyond the available knowledge. A further important trigger for questions is considered to be doubt: Is that really the case? Couldn’t it also be different? Questions hence go hand in hand with the desire to grasp the thing which grasps us (Staiger 1967).

Here, the second aspect of a Questioning Mind comes into play: the basic openness with which it immerses itself in the world. This openness does not refer only to the encountering of new things that arouse my interest and make me ask new questions. It also refers to the willingness to reflect on my own answers as well as my own thinking and actions. What am I actually doing? Why do I think this way and not differently? What questions remain hidden from me because things are self-evident to me? People ask questions within a framework or a horizon that is mostly unconscious. This horizon is set by the world which is familiar to me, i.e. what I as an individual with a particular situated viewpoint know of the world. Often, we first become aware of this particular horizon when we encounter others who ask other questions.

This openness can also mean living with the uncertainty of an answer or even the impossibility of an answer to questions. For example, the question as to what a human is will not be able to be answered so quickly. In 1903, Rainer Maria Rilke, a German poet, wrote on this observation: „Man muss Geduld haben mit dem Ungelösten im Herzen, und versuchen, die Fragen selber lieb zu haben, wie verschlossene Stuben, und wie Bücher, die in einer sehr fremden Sprache geschrieben sind. (...) Wenn man die Fragen lebt, lebt man vielleicht allmählich, ohne es zu merken, eines fremden Tages in die Antworten hinein.“ This does not result in no longer scrutinising any questions when searching for an answer. Rather, an openness thus sets in towards the process of acquiring knowledge, which can again produce new questions. For it is the questions which stimulate the activity of thought. In turn, thinking again yields new questions since a question is an impulse rather than a hole that can be filled with an answer (Lendle/Rammstedt 2017).

_IN ACADEMIA

The university is not just a place where knowledge is produced and communicated, a place of the generation and displaying of knowledge, for example in exams which demand knowledge. Research and teaching require questions – here, adopting a questioning attitude that is open to inspiration is central. Teaching and learning mutually enrich each other through communication and a questioning attitude is their life source. As a central element of academia, questions are verbal materialisations of curiosity and doubt, and are thus fundamental for academic processes.

This questioning basis, together with the social possibilities of a university, contributes to their being able to become an open space for fundamental questions, such as the questions of how we want to live as society and as individuals on a shared planet.

Academic disciplines can, however, essentially differ in the way, how and which questions are asked. This is a result of different ideas of mankind, ideals and standards which the disciplines are based upon. Even within one single discipline, very different questions can arise. Here is an example from economics: While neoclassical economics explores the question of how rational actors maximise their benefits, feminist economics seeks to tackle gender inequalities in and through economic thinking and practice (Exploring Economics).

One task of academics is to turn complex questions into manageable ones. Research questions should be framed in such a way that they can be realistically answered. The question, “How can I save the world?” is never found in a paper as a research question. Instead, researching the following question would be more feasible: To what extent could an unconditional basic income promote social cohesion in the European Union?

_IN SOCIETY

Adopting a questioning stance can help to understand different people and their motives for social actions. In a globalised world, this is of particular urgency in order to counteract discriminations. Due to digitalisation and global migratory movements, awareness is growing that we share the world with many people – relating is becoming more complex. One cannot directly understand every opinion; one does not share every political attitude. Here, the Questioning We – as a political group, community of researchers, etc. – helps to understand social phenomena, to question one’s own values in relation to them and to contribute to shaping society using the knowledge acquired.

The questions themselves also play a central role in this connection. Societies are confronted with questions which result from the way regional, national and global problems are intertwined. These questions are multifaceted and often complex, such as: How can artificial intelligences be developed in a way that supports ethical and moral decision-making while promoting social justice?

The problems are interrelated, the questions can no longer be handled separately. Even if this appears as a great challenge, these questions can be shaped through societal debates in such ways that solutions may arise. However, behind the obviously societally-relevant questions, there is always a crucial aspect which must be considered: What does a specific solution mean? What societal consequences will the suggested solution have? A certain perception of a problem and its solution also always reveal and influence who the person or group posing this question wants to be. For example, it makes a difference whether I, as an answer to the question of how anthropogenic greenhouse gases can be reduced, suggest to abolish humans, or whether I work on mechanisms for lower per capita emissions. In terms of human rights, the first solution is out of question. Not all solution options have such clear meanings but should be reflected upon.

Furthermore, different societal actors can have very different problem perceptions. Thus, they also ask fundamentally different questions, which manifest themselves in partially conflicting answers, findings and actions. An example of this is the Fridays for Future movement. While pro-lignite companies are posing the question as to how they can generate energy most efficiently from the excavation of lignite, climate activists are asking how global CO2-emissions can be reduced and how the global economic system can be reformed under the premise of climate justice. A public struggle around such questions is central for democracy.

Discussion of these kinds of questions requires the fundamental freedom in society to ask them and be allowed to discuss them. A look back at history reveals how vulnerable this fundamental right of freedom of speech is, such as during the time of national socialism or in the GDR. But even today we can observe how freedom of opinion and other fundamental democratic rights are being undermined, even within the European Union. Questions are powerful: they steer our thinking and thus also our actions. To be able to ask societal questions may not be taken for granted.