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AUTHORS: Johanna Hopp and Gesche Keding
EDITORIAL TEAM: Annika Weiser and Sven Prien-Ribcke

_AS A METHOD IN YOUR GROUP PROJECT

In the project work during the Opening Week, you develop a visionary video as a group – you thus present your vision in a video. But what exactly characterises a vision for the project work? And how do I begin visioning? In the following, you will find criteria for such a vision, which you can discuss with your group. By working along these criteria and through your continuous revision, you will be able to develop a "good" vision during Opening Week.

CRITERIA OF A "GOOD" VISION

– Based on detailed problem analysis
• What is the social challenge to which your vision responds? What is the underlying problem to the solution of which your vision can motivate?
-› First begin a problem analysis of your topic in order to develop your vision on this contextualised basis.

– Describes desirable future state
• Fulfils normative standards in the sense of criteria of a good life.

• Skidelsky and Skidelsky (2013) propose the following criteria, which you can use as a guide in the project work: health; safety; respect; personality as the ability to design and pursue one's own life plan; harmony with nature; friendship; leisure -› agreement on criteria and discussion as to what exactly they mean and what they specifically signify for your vision are a key component of the visioning.

– Is tangible, differentiated and motivating
• As far as possible, describe the vision as a concrete state, preferably: "In Germany there are only car sharing and free regional public transport" instead of: "People can move more sustainably".

• A vision is not a silver-bullet, nor a *perfect* solution. Rather it seeks to outline a desirable future state which reflects values and norms and motivates to take action.

• Ask yourself: What is it about your vision that enthuses? What is it about your vision that motivates other citizens to collaborate on its fulfilment?
-› Work out values and standards instead of pursuing an objective, analytical approach.

– Is comprehensive, harmonious and plausible
• A good vision relates to its context and reflects that it was contemplated with consideration of more than just individual aspects and solutions: What correlations between different areas of life result from your vision? Who would be affected by the changed situation and how?
-› Share your vision with as many people as possible in order to take their perspective on board.

• Are there contradictions within your vision, an *either-or*? Is the vision plausible? -› You may find analogies to other topic areas or successful examples from other countries that can serve as role models.

• The visioning should not give rise to a fantasy world – it should be realisable without a magic wand.
-› However, do not allow yourself to be thwarted by the reality in the sense of "Oh, that won't work anyway".

Is developed in a participative manner
• The vision is developed on a cooperative basis (see "Cooperative Mind") and carried by the project group.

• In the project group, you reach an agreement on how you, as a group, want to develop your vision and which criteria make up good visions in your view.

-› Finally, consider how you can present and communicate your vision in a video in such a way that you achieve the desired, motivational effect and that you lay it out in such a way as to be tangible for people. In this video, you will have the opportunity to envision the future, in the truest sense of the word. Try to tell a really good story. What does the future look like, exactly? How will the everyday life of a specific person in the future be arranged? Maybe even: what does the future sound like?

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VISIONING

VISIONING

Visioning is a possible way in which people can relate to the future. Additionally, visioning describes a method by which a decidedly desirable future state – a vision – is developed for a specific context. Visions are to be differentiated from other observations which are made with regard to the future. Scenarios, for instance, describe a *possible future*, an example for this being the various scenarios developed by the IPCC regarding the possible development of the global climate conditions (Börjeson et al. 2006). Forecasts describe a *probable* future, as in the weather forecast, for example. A vision, on the other hand, describes a *desirable* future. The type of visioning presented here has its roots in sustainability science and focuses on the question regarding a desirable future under the criteria of the good life. These are normative criteria: "normative" stands for the fact that some *is to be*. However, the objective of such a vision is not to force people to achieve it. Rather, it is characterised as an attractive setting that motivates to act and generates enthusiasm for change. It thus appeals to a person's creativity and creative power to envision something good for the future.

This conscious relation in thought to the future is, according to Peter Bieri, a condition of human freedom, as only in this way are people not subject to momentary experiencing and current needs (Bieri 2001: 127ff). However, the way people imagine the future has changed over time. There are two important historic turning points which have contributed towards our current understanding of the future and which, in a certain way, are prerequisites for visioning. It was only between the end of the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment at the end of the 18th century that people in the Western, Christian world first began imagining the future as open and as a process which could be shaped by humans. The idea of progress emerged. Prior to this, the future was thought of as the end of the world caused by the return of God to earth (cf. Koselleck 1989). A second turning point is connected to this in that the limitation of resources and the pollution of the environment began to be perceived more and increasingly entered into people's awareness in the 1960s. Thus, future began to appear as a problematic and simultaneously important point of focus, as is still the case today.

A vision is characterised as being tangible and sufficiently concrete. For example visions of this concrete type can refer to a specific region („my city"), situation ("a maths lesson in 2040") or a specific field of action ("the future of work on a shared planet"). They may expressly include a certain courage for change.

_IN ACADEMIA

Visioning in itself is not a purely academic activity. However, the way that participative visioning processes are conducted today is the result of many years of research into such projects, which are used especially in sustainability science and transdisciplinary research (see "Cooperative Mind"). For this reason, the configuration process towards a vision follows a specific structure and should also always be able to be reproduced by outside parties. This results, for example, in certain quality criteria that we can create in order to work out, scrutinise or further analyse a vision, in which you may test yourself as part of your project work.

Moreover, compared to other disciplines, something special happens in transdisciplinary research (cf. e.g. Vilsmaier and Lang 2014): here, the research also takes place during the ongoing visioning process. Researchers, planners and those involved in the process work together and learn from one another. Iwaniec and Wiek call this "reflective practice" (Iwaniec et al. 2014: 2). Another feature of the method of visioning in research practice is that, as far as possible, all affected actors are involved in it. Here, visioning goes hand in hand with cooperation (see "Cooperative Mind"). This approach addresses another aspect which is increasingly characteristic of sustainability science in particular, i.e. a strengthened orientation towards solutions. Here, the vision is a creative intermediate step on the path towards an innovative and comprehensive solution for a problem developed in a participative manner; one which goes far beyond the incremental improvement of a present failing.

An example of the role of visions in science can be found in the project "Zukunftsstadt Lüneburg 2030+" [Lüneberg Town of the Future 2030+]. Students, researchers and local stakeholder develop on a cooperative basis visions for the town of Lüneburg that arise, for instance, out of the following questions: How can we guarantee that there is enough affordable housing? How can mobility be made more sustainable? How can a welcoming culture be established for a variety of people? These questions offer a productive playing field for solution approaches developed in a visionary and cooperative way, which now have concrete influence on the town planning processes, allowing these visions to become reality (cf. Lüneburg 2030).

_IN SOCIETY

A visionary contemplation of the future can have a stimulating effect on democratic societies. Part of the promise of democracy is that you agree to the rules of good cohabitation and are able to work towards social change. In this understanding, rules possess validity in the sense of a social agreement but are to be understood as changeable in principle. The visioning format picks up on the theme of change and offers itself as a constructive behaviour, so that more citizens venture to participate. The underlying understanding is that democracies are dependent on opening up areas of experience for acting together – this is of particular importance in the context of a digitally-networked and globalised society.

However, the format of visioning alone does not guarantee a democratising effect. Therefore, in all participative processes, the central question is: *Who* decides *who* is allowed to take part? An example from 1950s New York shows that visioning can also be used for "solo planning efforts" and can counteract democratic participation: city planner Robert Moses developed the visionary idea of a ten-lane highway through Greenwich Village, for the construction of which several hundred houses were to be demolished. Led by city critic Jane Jacobs, a huge protest movement built up on the part of those affected, who demanded real participation and opportunities to actively help shape the process. Ultimately, the highway was never built.

This example shows illustratively that a vision possesses social viability only if it meets certain quality criteria, such as genuine participation of all involved in the process, as far as possible. Working out such visions together is more important today than ever, as it is necessary to investigate a crucial question with a view to a good life for all: Regarding the future, how do we want to live on a shared planet?

_AS A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

The visioning process also always involves an individual scrutinisation. Specifically, it is associated with the flow of questions regarding my personal wishes, ideas regarding the future, expectations and values. Here, however, visioning is distinguished from the occupation with everyday matters. We are met with future plans and predictions frequently every day that are not always positive; we worry or have expectations; we hope or fear. In differentiation from this, visioning allows to toy with personal ideas and thoughts regarding a good life. The mode of visioning allows me to put pessimistic scenarios aside and to switch off the doubting voice in my head. Instead of giving myself to doubts and worries about the future, I immerse myself in a mode of utopian thinking, of guiding my thoughts and ideas by means of positive images of how something could be.

In times of globally occurring crises, it can be difficult to maintain creative optimism (cf. Harari 2019). Visioning allows a creative mindset for approaching pressing matters of the future. By focusing on the "good", it can help to remain strong on acting instead of being paralysed by the supposed lack of alternatives to deadlocked conflicts of objectives, such as economy vs. environment. Testing myself in visioning can encourage me and others to take concrete action and can produce real ideas for future pathways – always with the question in the back of my head: Couldn't it also be *totally* different?