

A38 Joanna / Poland / Social Sciences

Interaction partner(s): German students
Moment of enquiry: WS 09/10
Experience of difference: Ritualised behaviours in lectures/courses

Joanna is an Erasmus student from Poland who is spending a year at a German university. She is shocked about some of the behaviour in the lectures and courses. She cringes every time the students knock on their desks at the end of a class. In her opinion, the knocking signals criticism and that the students are unhappy with the lecturer. In Poland, students thank their professor by clapping at the end of a class, and they also applaud if a student contributes to the discussion. Knocking on desktops would be considered rude and lacking respect for the lecturer. Of course, by now Joanna has learned that knocking is a way of expressing approval at German universities; she has got used to it and participates in it, but it continues to startle her somewhat.

1. Why does the Polish student dislike the knocking on tables at the end of a class?
2. Where does this custom of knocking on tables at German universities come from?