

Forschungsprojekt „Kollektives Gedächtnis als Basis einer Identifikation mit Europa“ – Discussion Guide in the UK

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I. Introduction and warm-up (approx. 8 minutes)

- Moderator welcomes the participants, introduces himself and explains the procedure (duration of group discussion)
- Short introduction to the topic: significance of events and people from the past, how they are and how they should be remembered generally, and their significance for you personally, for the people around you etc.
- Here, your personal opinion is essential to us. We do not need to know whether you are actually interested in history or know anything about it. Rather, we are interested in your personal opinion about the topics we will discuss today.
- There are no correct or wrong answers, there is only your personal opinion in which we are particularly interested today. Also, there is no obligation to reach a single conclusion and have the same opinion shared by all of the group.
- You can have and defend your own point of view, whereby it is essential to respect the opinion of each group member as their motives might differ. We do not necessarily need to come to a conclusion - don't have but please let everyone elaborate on their stance. This helps us with the analysis, too.
- Reference to mirror, videotaping, anonymity
- Reference to catering
- Short introduction of the participants:
- First name, age, place of residence, family status, occupation, hobbies

General comment for moderator:

Since this guideline contains a lot of follow-up-questions, it might be advisable, to refer to it explicitly during the discussion, e.g. by saying

"I just briefly have to check with my notes, because I cannot remember every single question"

"I just briefly have to check whether we touched upon everything that's interesting for us on this subject"

II. National Memory (approx. 40 minutes)

1) Particularly important events, people and media (approx. 30 minutes)

Comment: Here we would like to find out which **historic events** are being reported by the participants **without prior stimuli**, what their **associations and interpretations** are and how they frame them (rather national, rather international or rather universalistic).

Example: the fall of the Berlin Wall can be put in a national (as the end of the separation of Germany), international (as the end of the bipolar world order) or universalistic framework (as the end of communism). Therefore, at this particular point, the moderator should refrain from making any explicit international references!

The participants should be encouraged to elaborate in as much detail as possible on their associations, interpretations and explanations.

- **Post-it exercise:** Today, we are going to talk about history, about various historical events and people. When you think off the top of your head: Which historical events are still for society important today? What comes to your mind? What do you still consider important for society today??
- Please write down what occurs to you on the post-its in front of you – to help you remind later.

Moderator: Give the participants time to answer the question, encourage them to answer, everyone should write for themselves without pressure or coercion. While they are still writing, possibly support with the following statements:

- **Time frame:** Please think of everything that has happened in the past. This could have been back in the past, several centuries, from the last century, some decades ago, but also just a few months or years ago. Anything that is still important today.
- **Media frame:** It doesn't matter how you got to know about these events. Maybe you come to think of a film or television, maybe something you recall from your history classes at school, maybe it's stories your grandparents or other people in your family have told, maybe you've been to museums or memorials.

Moderator: When each participant has written down 3-4 post-it notes (approx. after 5 minutes), start to collect them and put them onto the flipchart. Do orally repeat just the historical events or people themselves. Maybe ask for a 1-sentence explanation if the example is unusual or unclear (see example below). Do not start questioning participants about their events one by one. The notes should be clustered by content, this can be done in dialogue with the participants (see example below)

Examples:

“King George V? What made you think of him? Why do you think he still matters today?”

“Should we place World War One right here, next to World War Two or is it rather two different subjects?”

Choose 2-3 clusters of events/figures to go into depth with the following questions. Possible candidates for clusters would be 1. World War II/Nazi time, 2. Berlin Wall/Communism/1989, 3. British Empire/Colonialism. However, the decisive factor is which events are most relevant for the group as a whole.

- What made you think of ...?
 - What comes to your mind when you think of ...?
 - What do you associate with ...?
 - How do you feel about... ?
 - What are the reasons why ... is still important today?
 - Why does ... still matter for you?
 - How did you get in contact with this topic for the first time?
-
- What do the others feel/think of ...?
 - How do the others see this ...?
 - How did the others get to know about the topic/person? Got in contact with the topic/person ...?

Moderator: *Go into depth by “breaking down” larger events into smaller “pieces” and apply the questions above on those smaller parts. (see example below)*

- World War II – that’s a huge topic. What do you think about more specifically when you think about World War II – are there any specific events? Places? Dates? Figures?

Important! *In case a vivid discussions about different views does not develop, maybe foster controversies*

ies between participants by prompting alternative opinions and interpretations (see examples below).

General examples:

- “Do you think this is rather positive or negative?”
- “Is it rather a good thing or a bad thing to remember ...?”

County-specific examples for the UK

On Colonialism – British Empire

- In one of the groups yesterday, someone said that it were better times, when Britain still ruled over a large Empire, when Britain still was a world power and that Britain did rather good for its former colony, in terms of infrastructure, legal system etc. Other people say that British colonialism was basically suppressing millions of people and that during Colonialism, crimes against humanity were committed. What is your opinion on that?

On memory of Holocaust and Colonialism

- In one of the groups yesterday, someone said that Colonialism and especially the slave trade should be remembered the same way as the Holocaust, e.g. by establishing a memorial day, and that Britain should apologise officially. What is your opinion on that?

On World War II

- In one of the groups yesterday, someone said that the British people should be proud of what British soldiers did during World War II and how they managed to defend not only Britain. Other people say that memory of the War should rather focus on hardships and human suffering on both sides. What is your opinion on that?

On 7/7 (2005 London bombings) – 9/11

- In one of the groups yesterday, someone said that the Islamist terror is still a threat which must be fought with all available means. Other people say that terror has mainly become a pretext for increasing state control and restricting freedom and rule of law. What is your opinion on that?

On Iraq – War on Terror (maybe Syria)

- In one of the groups yesterday, someone welcomed the fact that Britain is still one of the most important allies of the United States in their war on terror. Other people say that waging wars like in Iraq (or now Syria) was never justified, that it did more harm than good or that the war on terror had no actual outcome at all. What is your opinion on that?

2) Events that should be remembered officially (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: Whereas by asking the first question we aimed to learn more about what people remember, we now would like to get a better idea on how these people evaluate the official ways and strategies of dealing with the past.

Our Experience has shown that the answers to this question are rather sparse as only very few participants think on this level (“...how do I evaluate a society’s way of dealing with the past...”). Moreover, similar and correspondent statements can often be found when answering question 1. Therefore, the question should be kept very brief, i.e. if no one answers spontaneously, give one or two possible prompts and then go on to the next question.

- Some historical events and people are officially remembered, e.g. by building a monument, mentioning them in history books or establishing a public holiday like the Remembrance Sunday. Which of the events and people we have talked about should still be officially remembered today? Could you give any reasons?

Moderator: Projective exercise (depending on situation):

- Imagine you have a friend from abroad, who is not very familiar with the UK. You talk with him/her the most important public holidays: which public holidays would you mention? Reasons?

Moderator: Possible prompt (depending on situation):

- Is celebrating such a public holiday (like Remembrance Sunday or Commonwealth Day) important for politicians and diplomats only? Or is it a special day for you personally as well? Maybe something that might make you think about history?

III. Memories in/of other societies (approx. 20 minutes)

3) Perception of “our own” history abroad (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: This question has two purposes: firstly, pre-tests have shown that, when talking about such confrontational situations abroad, strong dynamics are being generated in a group. Also those participants, who had been less active before, suddenly have a lot to say. Secondly, this allows us to learn about the participants’ attitudes towards the history of their country and also, how they evaluate and interpret the perception of their country in other countries. However, when answering this question, participants often comment on the history, but also on the culture of remembrance of other countries.

- We have looked at various historical events and people mainly from our point of view, the view of the British. Changing the perspective, how/in which ways do you think is the British history perceived abroad?

Moderator: Start with open questions above and then prompt:

- Perhaps some of you have spent a longer time abroad, may it be on vacation or for work or education. Whilst being abroad, you are sometimes confronted with people who have a particular image of the British. It might also happen that you are directly approached for being British. Are there any particular experiences or stories/anecdotes?
- How do you think this image is related to the history of Britain?
- Do you think that the image of the British abroad is rather positive or negative? Why?

Comment: At this point, if this has not already happened yet (without stimulus), the discussion is supposed to be led away from a purely national level. At first, (questions 4-6) the questions deal with memories in (some) other countries later (questions 7-13) the questions address the problem of an international and/or European memory.

4) Significance of events for other countries (approx. 5 minutes)

Comment: This question is supposed to address events which have already been mentioned by the participants earlier (especially when answering question 1).

For us, it is crucial to know whether those events are considered important within a national context only or also beyond the national framework. The probes are supposed to encourage participants to elaborate on the reasons for their framing.

- We have talked a lot about memory and history by now. Thinking about the events and people we have discussed so far –are there any events that should also be discussed outside the UK, in other countries? Which ones?

Moderator: Possible probes (depending on situation):

- What are the reasons why these events should also be discussed in other countries?
- For which countries would this be particularly important?
- Why especially for these countries?
-
- Would you say that the history of the UK is not enough taken into account in other countries, would you say it's largely ignored? Or do you rather get the impression that people in other countries know enough about the history of the UK?

Moderator: Possible probe in case the participants think that their history is not sufficiently taken into account.

- Why do you think this is neglected too much? Which events should be given greater consideration in these countries? Where, in which countries should British history be given greater consideration and attention?

5) Significance of events from other countries (approx. 5 minutes)

Comment: *This question is about whether events from other national contexts (are supposed to) have significance for the home country. Here, we have made the experience that participants often feel required to demonstrate their knowledge of history in other countries, which in turn produces stress. If necessary, try to oppose/avoid this stress by Making it clear that we are not interested in knowledge but rather in the significance of historical events for the participants. Lack of (historical) knowledge is not a problem!*

- In our research project we conduct similar discussions in other countries as well. The events and people being mentioned often differ a lot.
- Which events or people from other countries come to your mind that should also be discussed in the UK and could also be important for the UK?

Moderator: *In case that the participants have already mentioned events that took place outside their own national context (“extra national events”) or in case they made corresponding references, the following question is a possible alternative to the ones above:*

We have already mentioned some events and people from other countries that are significant for you: in which way are these events also important for the UK?

Moderator: *If there are no or only very sparse answers:*

- What could be the reasons that we in the UK know so little about this?
- How important are such historical events from other countries for us today? For what reasons?
- Why does it matter at all that we deal with the history of other countries? We still have our own history. Yesterday, someone said, it would be enough if we dealt with our own history.

6) Significance of certain events from ES, POL, GER (approx. 5 minutes)

Comment: *The first question should focus on spontaneous associations and remarks of the participants. If nothing is said or when it is obvious that the participants are really need too much time to remember forgotten (school) knowledge – go on to the next question.*

- In our research project, we are particularly interested in three countries: Germany, Spain and Poland. Thinking of these three countries, do any events or people come to your mind that should also be discussed in the UK?
- For what reasons do you consider ... important?
- What do you associate with this event?
- For what reasons do you think that ... should also be discussed in the UK? How far does it affect us British?
-
- I would now like to briefly ask about certain events that have been mentioned particularly often in the three countries Germany, Spain and Poland. Please tell me briefly whether anything comes to your mind spontaneously or whether you have ever heard anything about it. These could be bits and pieces, little anecdotes... anything really.

Moderator: *The following questions should only be asked if no events of the respective country have been mentioned before.*

- Many people in Germany talked about the Nazi time. Does this ring any bells? Any ideas? What comes to your mind? To what extent and why should this topic also be dealt with in the UK?
- Many people in Poland talked about communist era. Does anything occur to you on this? What comes to mind? How far and for what reasons should this topic also be dealt with in the UK?
- Many people in Spain talked about the Spanish Civil War. Does this ring any bells? What comes to your mind? To what extent and why should this topic also be dealt with in the UK?

IV. European Memory (approx. 40 minutes)

7) Events which are important for the whole of Europe (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: From here onwards, the questions will deal with a (common) European memory. These questions are mainly designed to check the extent to which the participants leave their national framework and whether they make statements about history and remembering by framing them in an international European way. The question is also interested in triggering possible statements referring to a common European memory (and its likelihood).

Moderator: This question is not to be confused with question # 13. This one is NOT about the European Union, but about a possible transnational importance of certain events.

- Up until now, we have mainly talked about memories that are important for certain countries. One could for instance also think of certain topics that history textbooks all over Europe should cover.

What do you think? Can you think of any historical figures, events or developments that people all over Europe should get in touch with? Of course, you can also talk about events we have already mentioned.

Moderator: Possible probe (depending on situation):

- Why do you think it is important for people to know about ...?

Moderator: Obligatory probe:

- To what extent are these things important for Europe only or for the entire world? Reasons?

8) The mode of memory (approx. 10 minutes)

Comment: *In terms of content, this question focuses on different ways of dealing with the past (remembering vs. forgetting; remaining silent vs. reappraisal, etc.) We expect that a critical reappraisal of the past will be regarded as rather progressive whereas we assume that a classical heroic view on the past is going to be interpreted as backward.*

- We have talked about several aspects linked to memory and history now... What we haven't talked about yet is the way people deal with history or should be doing it. Basically, we can think of two ways of dealing with history: on the one hand, we can focus on the heroic deeds from our own history, like wars or battles that were won. On the other hand, there are more critical approaches towards one's own history. This would especially mean to tackle the "dark chapters" of history such as war or crimes.

Moderator: *Draw the poles "heroisation" and "critical approach" onto the flipchart and connect them with a line.*

- If you now think about how our own history is being dealt with in the UK: How do we British deal with history? Should we be proud of our own history or should we rather take a critical stance?
- Has our attitude towards history changed over time, compared to, say, 50 or 100 years ago?
- If this is the case, what do you think of this development?
- Do you think that such a critical view of the past is typical of certain countries or is it rather a general/universal trend?
- Some people say that Germany deals most critically with its own past. Do you agree?
- Some people say that Germany's way of dealing should be kind of a role model for other countries. What do you think about this?
- Some people say that sometimes you should let the past rest and not constantly poke around in old wounds. What is your opinion on this?

9) Establishment of a European History Museum (approx. 10 minutes)

Comment: *With this question we want to build a bridge for the participants so they can vividly and creatively express their ideas of a European memory but also of European history.*

Not only do national, international and inter-societal references become particularly clear at this point, but the participants are encouraged to describe their images of Europe (and its boundaries). Therefore we included the probe on Turkey.

The participants should answer this question freely at first, i.e. detailed answers rejecting the idea of such a museum are welcome, too.

If the participants do not “jump at” the idea of a museum (because they e.g. never go to museums themselves), there is an alternative → question 9a).

Background for moderator: *Such a museum is actually being planned under the title “House of European History”. Only mention this if a participant is familiar with the project.*

- We have already talked briefly about different ways to remember historical events, among other things, in a museum. Therefore, many countries have a national museum in which they exhibit the history of their country. What do you think of the idea of a museum to exhibit the history of Europe?
- What are the pros? What are the cons?
- How important is such a museum? Is there a need for it?
- In your opinion, what should be exhibited in this museum?
- Where should this museum be located?
- How would you arrange or organise such a museum (e.g. by certain subjects, by different eras, by different countries)?
- Should it rather be a European museum or a museum for the European Union?

- There are also European countries which are not members of the EU. Should they also be allowed to be part of the museum?
- How about Turkey for example?
- And how about Switzerland?

**9a) Backup: Introduction of a European history textbook
(approx. 10 minutes)**

***Comment:** This question is intended to serve as an alternative to question 9). If participants do not “jump at” the exemplary question about a European museum, you can ask them about a European history textbook. In other words, this question has the same purpose as question 9) so the probes are also the same.*

- Some historians have thought about writing a history textbook for the whole of Europe. Such a joint history textbook could be used in history lessons in all European countries.
- What do you think of this idea?
- What are the pros? What are the cons?
- How important is such a history textbook? Is there a need for it?
- In your opinion, what should be included in this schoolbook in your opinion? What must not be left out?
- How would you arrange or organise such a textbook (e.g. by certain subjects, by different eras, by each country)?
- There are also European countries that are not members of the EU. Should they be allowed to be part of the textbook?
- How about Turkey for example?
- And how about Switzerland?

10) The EU's politics of history (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: *This question presents two contrasting models of European politics of history. As it is fairly theoretical and “far from reality”, the participants may not understand the question or might have problems to react to it in the sense that it doesn't mean anything to them. Therefore, the possible probe is just a rewording of the first question. If this doesn't work either, proceed to the next question.*

- Our discussions in other countries have shown that people name very different historical events and that they have different views on history, too.
How do you think the European Union in Brussels should deal with conflicting views on events like World War II? Should they rather try to unify these different points of view in the sense of a “common view on history” or should they rather emphasise the differences between the different points of view?
- For what reasons?

Moderator: *Possible probe (rewording):*

- Thinking once again of the museum [history book] we just talked about –should the EU rather try to emphasise what the various countries have in common or should it rather underline the differences between each country?
- For what reasons do you favour this approach?
- Would you say that something like a common European view of the past is possible at all?

11) The Holocaust as a European event (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: *The purpose of questions 11-13 is to cover events that are named in the literature as possible points of reference of a common European memory.*

- Even though we may have touched some topics already, I would now like to talk about some events that the participants of other groups discussed in other countries.
- In some groups people said that National Socialism and the Holocaust are so important that it should be remembered in all European countries...
- Do you agree with that? Or would you rather say that it is a purely German issue?
- Why should all European countries commemorate this? Are there any arguments in favour or against it?
- Some people say that the Holocaust is unique and thus cannot be compared with anything that has ever happened. In your opinion, is the Holocaust comparable with other events or is it incomparable, unique? How and why?
- There are also people who say that we remember/bear it in mind commemorating National Socialism and the Holocaust too much already. Do you agree with that? Do you think we commemorate it too much? Or rather too little?
- Reasons for the respective position?

Moderator: *Only ask the following question if you get the impression of receiving lively answers to the previous questions.*

- What do you think then how could a European remembrance of National Socialism and the Holocaust look like? How would you design it?

12) Communism as a European event (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: *With the following question we want to find out whether Communism and National Socialism are considered to be equal or if people weight/judge them differently. Experience has shown that the first question will be answered very briefly, therefore, the probe is supposed to stimulate further comments and evaluations.*

- In some groups people said that the communist crimes committed in Eastern Europe and East Germany should be remembered in the whole of Europe. To what extent would you agree with that?
- There are people who say that National Socialism was much worse than Communism. Others in turn believe that both were equally horrific. What is your opinion on this?

Moderator: *Possible probe (if there are distinct views within the group):*

- How do the others see this?
- Do you agree or do you perhaps have a different opinion?
- What do you think of the position of [participant X]?
- What speaks in favour of the one or the other position?

13) Europe as a success story (max. 5 minutes)

Comment: *This question aims to find out to what extent the history of European integration could be a point of reference for a common European memory. However, when talking about the EU today, most respondents think of the current crisis. We would like the participants to perform an “overall evaluation” of the European project as far as possible and not to focus on the current crisis.*

- Now we have a final topic, the European Union. Europe is currently in crisis, but, if you now think of the history of the European Union as a whole, i.e. since the 1950s until today: To what extent could this be something people in Europe will remember all together/equally
- What are the pros? What are the cons?
- What is your opinion on the history of European integration? Do you consider it to be a success story?
- Some people say that the European integration is very positive. It has brought us more than 60 years of peace, economic prosperity, freedom of movement. Other people say that the European integration is rather negative. We are giving away too much independence. We cannot decide our matters by ourselves anymore but have to fight with other countries and with the bureaucrats in Brussels.

Moderator: *Possible probe:*

- To what extent are these elements suitable for the European Museum [textbook] we discussed earlier? Which elements of European unification do you find particularly positive?

V. Wrap up

- Thank you. That was the last question on my part. Is there anything you would like to mention that has not been discussed yet?

Thank you for your participation!