

Questionnaire

European Archive of Voices
A Project by Arbeit an Europa e.V.

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Topic 1: Home and Origin

Home and origin are difficult concepts to grasp while also trying to avoid the pitfalls of over-simplifying and doing justice to their complexity. We also need to be aware of the different meanings attributed to the words for home, origin and belonging in different languages. The concept of home comprises spatial, emotional, sensual, political and symbolic elements. It makes sense to begin exploring personal and biographical experiences and memories first, before moving to the questions of home and origin.

Home as memory

1. How would you describe your childhood?
2. What do you connect with the place where you grew up?
3. What was your vision of the future as a child? What were your dreams about the future? What were you most curious about as a child?
4. Can you tell me something about your grandparents?
5. Is there an object from your childhood that you've kept all your life?

Home and the outside world

1. Do you remember the first time you travelled abroad?
2. Did you talk about the war with your parents/grandparents?
3. Did you feel safe/free, as a child? Do you remember a time when you felt unsafe?
4. How did you perceive neighbouring countries? Which countries did you admire?
5. Is Europe something you knew existed as a child? When and how did you first hear about Europe?

Home as belonging

1. What does home mean for you? What makes you feel like home? What is a good word for that feeling of home? Are there any traditions or rituals that make you feel like home?
2. Did you (have to) leave home during your lifetime?
3. In which language do you feel most at home?
4. Is Europe home for you?
5. Where do you feel like you belong? How did the feeling of belonging change during your lifetime?

6. Did you ever feel alienated or estranged? Where and when?
7. How did your origin influence your life? Is your origin still important for you today?
8. If you could have chosen a different place in Europe to call home, where would that be?

Topic 2: Education

School – first years

1. What was the most important thing you learned at school?
2. What is your fondest memory from school? / What is the day you remember most from school?
3. What was a normal school day like when you were young? / Describe your way to school as a child.
4. Were you a good student?
5. What was your favourite book when you were a child?

University

1. Was there a key lecture or class at university that changed your life?
2. What did you study – and why? Choosing certain directions: Was it your choice? Were you supposed to study at all?
3. Where did you study? If abroad: Why?
4. How did you finance your studies?

If the interviewee did not go to university:

- You did not go to university. Was it your choice? If yes, why? If not: What were the reasons?

Relationship to Authorities

1. Have you had a teacher/role model that played an important role in your life?
2. As a child or student: Was there a moment when you questioned something you were taught? Was there a moment of doubt?
3. Did you fear something at school?

Education – general questions

1. Do you remember a key moment when your education was useful?
2. How many years of education did you have? Did you have to interrupt your education at a certain point? Where did you get your education from, if school was interrupted?
3. What did you dream of becoming when you were young?

European context

1. Tell us about your history/geography lessons? Which countries did you learn about – and which not?
2. What language did you speak at school? What languages did you learn – and why? When did you need them? What do/did they mean for you?

Lifelong Learning

1. Which values that you took for granted when you were young did you have to reconsider?
2. What other sources of knowledge – apart from school – were important in your life? Where did you get alternative knowledge from? Who did you learn most from?
3. Did you go back to school/university later in life?

Cultural Education

1. Who or what aroused your interest in culture? Do you remember a specific moment?

Family

1. What was a key lesson you learned from your parents?
2. What was your parents' attitude towards education? What education did they have?
3. What education did you wish for your children?
4. What knowledge/key message did you pass on to your children?

Topic 3: Work

To many people, working is more than just earning money. It is a way of achieving recognition and showing others that we are a valued part of society.

And yet, what work means to each of us as individuals is influenced by innumerable factors. It is intimately connected to how work was performed in our families and to how the societies we were raised in defined the value of work.

Furthermore, since World War II, not all countries in Europe have experienced the same levels of economic growth and prosperity. This, in turn, had and still has an impact on the opportunities people have – and it may change the way people perceive work in general. Also, as a result of a larger digital transformation in societies all over the world, we are witnessing yet another drastic change in our concept of work.

All of these points were constantly present in the discussions around work and led to the following example interview questions, which are clustered around three larger topics.

Meaning of work

1. How did you get your first job?
2. Who was your first boss? What did you learn from them?
3. When did you find out what you wanted to do in life? And how?
4. What did your parents do for a living?
5. Were you ever afraid at work?

Realization of dreams

1. Do you still remember what you bought with your first paycheck?
2. Do you feel that you ended up doing what you imagined yourself to be doing?
3. What are/were the achievements in your work that you are most proud of?
4. Were there instances in which you felt that the work you were doing was not valued enough? What was your reaction?
5. Are there things you would like to do differently? Which ones – and why?
6. How did your work affect your family?

Transformation of work

1. Can you recall the first time you used a computer? How did it influence the way you worked?

2. Have you ever worked abroad? If so, did that influence the way you worked?
3. What made your profession particularly difficult during the time of your career? How did that change throughout the years?
4. Would you choose the same profession again if you were 20?
5. What is your advice to the younger generations working in your profession?
6. (If the person has children: What do your children do for work?)

Topic 4: Political Awareness

Political awakening

1. In your childhood, what did your family talk about at the dinner table?
2. What were the big names of the day?
3. What were key moments in your youth? What are major political events? (Tell me a little bit about the situation you were in when event X happened; which figures come to your mind if you think of event X?)
4. Did you admire any politicians?
5. Were there any events that affected your private life?
6. How did you first come into contact with politics? (Did you go to demonstrations, were you part of a youth movement, do you remember any political songs or slogans?)
7. Do you remember any political debates that forced you to take a position? (What were political issues that you were passionate about? What were political issues you got into fights about?)
8. What (who) shaped your political viewpoints?

Political control

1. How much control did you have over the course of your life? Did history ever force you to change plans? Do you have the feeling that something in your life went completely wrong?
2. When you were young, what did war mean to you?
3. Do you have memories of crossing European borders?
4. When did you vote for the first time?
5. Is there a moment in your life when you keenly perceived your standpoint within the political spectrum?
6. Did you ever feel lonely with your political viewpoints?
7. Do you have the feeling that your voice is being heard?

Politics today

1. Do you think of yourself as political? What is it that makes you political?
2. What has really moved you in the past couple of years?
3. Do you think that you have political responsibility?
4. What does being a citizen mean to you?
5. Do you have a life partner who shares your political views? What are political viewpoints that you wouldn't accept from your partner?
6. What would bring you to the street to protest?
7. Who are the friends you can trust in difficult moments? Do you have such friends abroad?

Political identity

1. When do you feel European? When do you feel German/French/etc.?
2. In short, how would you describe the role your nation played in history?
3. Do you have trust in European institutions / politicians?
4. Do you remember singing or listening to the European anthem? What do you feel when doing so? What about singing or listening to your national anthem?
5. Is there something that Europe promises? Is there something that frustrates or frightens you about Europe?
6. How did you see the European Union evolve over the course of your life?
7. Did joining the EU affect your life?
8. What does it mean to be old in Europe?

Topic 5: Cultural Awareness**Travelling**

1. Do you remember your first trip abroad / your first trip by plane?

2. Do you remember the first foreigner you encountered in life?
3. Do you remember any disturbing experiences travelling through Europe?
4. Which European country/countries have you not visited yet?

General:

1. Tell us the soundtrack to your life; pick 10 songs or films that could represent you?
2. What doesn't belong to Europe?
3. Some say "Politicians destroy bridges, artists rebuild them". Do you agree?
4. Is Europe a political or a cultural project?
5. Do you remember any piece of art that changed your life?
6. Which piece of everyday electronics changed your life?
7. Did you learn more than one language? If so, when and how?
8. Do you feel that you belong to a culture/ethnic group that is not part of a national state / is not represented by it?

Media:

1. Do you remember when you first used the telephone / TV / internet, and what for?

Humour:

1. About what did you laugh most in your life, or which moment in your life made you laugh the most?
2. Tell us a very common joke of your country during your lifetime, maybe your adolescence.

Traditions

1. Which day of the year do you celebrate or worship most, and how?
2. Did you have any rites of passage (religious or based on other traditions, such as Carnival) in your life or in the life of your parents?

Iron curtain /east west

1. How did you come into contact with interesting pieces of art, music, film and literature that were banned in your country? Or could you not do that at all? Did you feel cut off?

2. Do you think your life would have been different if you would have seen or heard or read certain films or music or literature earlier in your life?

Topic 6: Freedom

Notions of freedom are very individually defined. In addition to obvious generational and geographic differences that must be taken into account, there is also the important distinction between freedom of movement and intellectual freedom that must be considered. Discussions of freedom ought therefore to begin with an exploration of the individual's personal interpretation of freedom.

1. Is freedom ultimately a relative concept?
2. At which points throughout your life have you yearned for freedom the most?
3. When, if ever, did you take freedom for granted?
4. Do you draw a line somewhere when it comes to freedom?
5. Have you ever fought for freedom, either individually or collectively?
6. How far would you go to protect your freedom?
7. Have you ever curtailed another person's freedom?
8. How is your freedom upheld?
9. What is your view of the temporal dimension of freedom? How do you see the relationship between past, present, and future?
10. How has your concept of freedom changed over time?
11. Have you ever been overwhelmed by freedom?
12. Do you feel a responsibility to share freedom?

Having asked these questions in an effort to ascertain the individual's personal attitude towards the concept of freedom, one can proceed to a more detailed discussion of freedom of movement and intellectual freedom.

Freedom of Movement

1. When did you leave your home country for the first time?
2. What was your parents' or grandparents' reaction to your travels abroad?
3. What do borders mean to you?

4. Is a lack of borders synonymous with freedom for you?
5. Was the abolition of borders in Europe an important moment for you? Has it fulfilled your expectations?

Intellectual Freedom

1. Where do you go to think?
2. Have you ever not been able to think?
3. Did you actively have to learn freedom of mind?
4. Does one have to experience confinement to really appreciate freedom of mind?

Topic 7: Looking into the Future

Alongside the change of life itself, the imagination of one's future, the future of society, of a country and even of a continent mutate during life. Expectations change as one grows older - not only because we cross a different season of life, but also in a historical (e.g. Eastern/Western Europe), economic and social context. The focus of this station was not how the interviewee sees the future now, but how she/he imagined it at a young age. During the discussions, it appeared important to explicitly point out this aspect to avoid misunderstanding. Most of us also agreed on the importance of asking questions which combine both *personal* and *political/social* views. Furthermore, many factors are to be considered while facing this topic: from the historical and social context at the time, to the inevitable alteration of one's memories, which occurs throughout the years.

Discussion led to the following questions, which concentrate on both personal and more general aspects:

1. Were you optimistic or pessimistic about your future in your twenties?
2. Were you able to decide to do what you wanted in your life?
3. Did you remember when you decided what you wanted to become?
4. Was there a time when the future was not open?
5. What did you expect for your children? What did your parents expect for you?
6. Did perspectives/expectations change across the decades, especially when considering the growth in wealth that followed World War II?
7. Did anything you considered impossible, happen in the end?

8. And did anything that you were sure would happen fail to happen?
9. Which hopes did you have for your country's society (or society in general)?
10. Did the existence/concept of Europe play a role in this respect? If "yes" which one? If "no", why?
11. Did you have any expectations for the development of a European society?
12. How did you think the living space (e.g. cities) would look in the future?
13. How did you imagine the year 2020?

Topic 8: Conflict and Resistance

1. Did you have enemies in your life? OR BETTER: Did you ever have the feeling that you were an enemy for other people?
2. What were important moments of danger?
3. Did you ever feel that you could not trust others?
4. Are the conflicts of Europe based on a narrative for Europe that is too strong OR too weak?
5. Do you think conflicts within Europe are "European conflicts" or "national conflicts"?
6. What is the bigger threat to the EU: Inner dynamics that contest the European project or other dynamics?
7. In retrospect, what are moments when you feel you should have resisted?
8. Have you ever participated in public demonstrations of resistance?
9. When were you proud of Europe? When did you feel ashamed for Europe?
10. How did you experience Europe as a source of peace?
11. How did you experience reconciliation processes in post-war Europe?
12. What are your experiences with borders?
13. Is the EU perhaps also a creator of new conflicts for the continent?
14. Does Europe, as a union, have a responsibility for people from countries it once colonized? / Has Europe learned a lesson from colonial times?

Topic 9: Religion

Personal level: experience behind emotion

In general, there is in Europe a fundamental difference between the generation born between 1920 & 1940 and our generation. For the older generations, religion was a *destiny*; for ours it is an *option*. Bearing this in mind, religion is primarily an interesting topic if there is a strong personal attitude. This attitude – either *benevolent* or *opposed* – evolves usually in view of contingency in personal life, i.e. illness, death or other questions of meaning.

1. What emotion do you feel when hearing the word “religion”: a.) depth, b.) indifference or c.) anger?
2. What role does/did religion play in your personal life? Which events changed your attitude to religion?
3. Was your family affiliated to church or another religious community?
4. Did you try to pass on your insights on this subject to other generations?

Regional/national level: context & conflicts

Regional and national contexts are very different concerning the role religion plays. Especially in the context of conflicts, religion plays a more interesting social role. In Eastern Europe, many Christian churches were opposed to Warsaw Pact governments and their attack on religious freedom. By contrast, Western European churches were not affected that much by anti-religious politics, so instead they faced secularization by economic growth and pluralization of lifestyles. In general, churches were challenged by changes of different forms of government, as they formed alliances to fascist, communist or democratic governments, dependent on context.

1. Was religion at your regional/national level a *dividing* or *connecting* force?
2. Were there occasions such as legal reforms or political events that changed the character of the mainline churches or main religious communities?
3. Did you oppose the strategy of your religious affiliation in important conflicts?
4. Did you experience individuals living their faith against their religious affiliation? What did they do, and how did they end up?
5. What do you feel when considering the current role of religions in your regional and national surroundings?

Continental level: Europe & Religion

Religion played an important role in European integration until 1989. Pro-European approaches by Christian democrats were deeply influenced by the

Catholic Church, pan-European exchange between East and West was practised in ecumenical networks. In 21st century debates about Europe and its “Judeo-Christian” principles, religious pluralism and the integration of Islam emerged. Although secularisation defined as decrease of religious practises can be seen all over Europe.

1. Is European integration *caused by, indifferent to or against* religion?
2. What are the roots of Europe? Does Europe have “Judeo-Christian roots”?
3. Do you attach importance to encounters with other religions?
4. How does migration change religious reality in Europe?
5. How is the relationship between God and Europe?

Topic 10: Europe in 50 Years?

1. What is your hope (expectation/...) for Europe’s future generations (your grandchildren/...)?
2. Do you think a lot about the future of Europe?
3. How do you imagine your country (home town/city/...) in 50 years?
4. Do you think there will be progress in Europe in the next 50 years?
5. What mistakes of the past do you fear will be repeated in the future?
6. Have your expectations (hopes/...) for Europe’s future changed throughout your life?
7. What is your pessimistic and optimistic view of Europe’s future?
8. *Ask a question about how interviewee’s profession, field of interest, etc. is going to change in the future. For example, ask a musician how the role of music in society is going to change in the future.*
9. What is the biggest threat (opportunity/...) for Europe in the future?
10. What impact does your generation have on future generations?
11. Which ideas and values have been important in your lifetime? And which ones will be important in the future?
12. Do you want to leave a message for Europe’s future generations?
13. Do you feel optimistic or pessimistic about the young generation of Europeans (the generation of your grandchildren/...)?
14. Do you want future generations to feel more European than French, Greek etc.?
15. Will there be a strong national identity in Europe in the future?
16. Do you fear that future generations might lose their national identity?
17. Do you think Europe is going to be closer to other continents in the future?

18. Will Europe be more closed or more open in the future?
19. What change do you hope (think/expect/...) the young generation will bring for Europe?
20. Do you see younger generations making mistakes that will have consequences in the future?
21. Do you think the rest of the world will change more than Europe?
22. Do you have any advice for my generation and me?
23. Did you try to have an impact on the future of Europe?