

CASE STUDY

The German Sensing Tour: Greenpeace listens to what Germans think of the future after Covid-19

As response to the first Covid-19 wave and the first lockdown Greenpeace Germany supported by Mindworks developed the 'Rainbow Tour'; a sensing tour that visited 37 cities in Germany and listened to more than 1,500 people to understand how people were psychologically and emotionally responding to the Covid crisis. The tour was also about how to possibly empower the public by listening to them, to mitigate negative emotions, and to orient Greenpeace Germany during such an unprecedented and challenging time.

Challenge

Covid-19 has changed a lot of things around the world, including travel, social and consumption behaviors, ways of working, and personal and country economics. Most of all it has influenced the way we see the world; there is more uncertainty, and less predictability and coherence. In these moments, systems restructure as much in the outside world (e.g. certain businesses struggle or disappear, others thrive), as they do within us (certain perceptions, norms and narratives fade, and others thrive). The experience has opened cracks in many people's worldviews and belief systems which has meant that to some degree, Greenpeace has to get to know their audience's again.

What's more, in times of disorientation, people also lose agency; losing the ability to make sense of the world feels disempowering.

As part of the project #lifeaftercorona, the climate and engagement team of Greenpeace Germany started a larger listening exercise (the Rainbow Tour) to help them orient towards how their audiences were responding to Covid-19. They wanted to understand the shifting emotions and perceptions of the German public, and empower their audiences by listening to them and mitigating negative emotions that are being triggered by the corona crisis.

The listening exercise can be seen as a good example of moving from the traditional broadcasting type of engagement, to a conversation-based type of engagement, which – among other things – helps bridge the gap between the daily experiences of the public, and our climate campaigning.

Strategy: Mindset Objectives [and/or] Theory of Change

The objective of the Sensing Tour was to engage the general public in conversations about their experiences during the corona crisis, and their expectations for the future. The aim of the conversations was to provide a moment of reflection for people, a way for them to express their thoughts regaining some agency of making sense of the world.. We also wanted to provide an experience to feel listened to, to mitigate negative emotions of for example loneliness and agency.

Engagement / Campaign Design

Other elements of the #lifeaftercorona project where a representative survey to assess the emotional status and attitude changes of the German public during the lockdown and a supporter engagement activity where people could write a letter to their future self to document their lockdown experiences and to reflect what changes in their lives they wanted to maintain

once life returned to a new normal. Letters were then sent back to them a few months later to remind them. All efforts combined were used to create an open conversation about experiences during the crisis, ways how people made sense of it and to assess the preparedness to sustain changes.

On 30th of May 2020 Greenpeace launched the tour in Berlin in conjunction with the release of the representative polling results. The tour then visited 37 cities. In each city, the local volunteer groups held events in public spaces so they could engage with a mixed audience. Besides targeting random pedestrians, Greenpeace Germany also used their supporter newsletter and Greenwire (Greenpeace's online engagement platform) to invite supporters to the local events. These events were supported by local media work that both explained the purpose of the tour, and published the results of the representative survey. The events were usually five to six hours long and there were usually two to three volunteers interacting with passersby at a given time.



Campaign Execution

Volunteers were trained to host conversations that avoided passing on Greenpeace messages, and instead focused on just listening to people's responses. The volunteers were provided with a set of questions (see below) that they could use to start and maintain the conversation, but they

did not have to use them. The conversations themselves were not recorded or documented; there was no intention to collect any answers to any of the questions.

At the end of the conversation, the volunteers invited people to capture the essence of the conversation by writing down what they considered important on a small flag (small pieces of fabric), making it clear this was optional. These thoughts (the flags) were then collected and attached to a 3 metre high rainbow structure in the event space. The purpose of the rainbow was to not only to visually attract people to the event (an image traditionally associated with Greenpeace), but the rainbow had evolved as a symbol of hope during the weeks of the lockdown.

Questions for volunteers to use (to support the flow of the conversation)

- How did you experience the lockdown? What did you miss? What did you not miss? What did you not miss that surprised you?
- What surprised you about what happened during the lockdown?
- What did you find most difficult during the crisis? Did the crisis have positive effects for you personally?
- Is there anything you learned during the lockdown that you would like to take with you into the time after the lockdown?
- Did you experience something new and unexpected during the lockdown?
- Do you think that we will see more crises of this size? How will you deal with them?

Audience Insights

The pre-tour representative survey showed that Covid-19 had changed people's willingness to make major changes in their lifestyles in areas like mobility or working from home. People also expressed their support for major political initiatives to create a more sustainable society. The results also indicated that the public clearly saw parallels between the corona crisis and the climate crisis. Other insights we got from the public survey included feedback that Greenpeace was viewed as a rather 'distant' organization; an organisation that is very fact-driven, but not very empathetic.

The responses from the Sensing tour thought flags were processed and interpreted by a student group from the Berlin University of the Arts. After reading a subset of the flags, they developed a coding system (see below for more details) to cover the core themes that emerged from what people wrote about how they saw their future.

These included:

- Mobility & Traffic
- Consumption & Nutrition
- Health & Care

- Nature & Environment
- Love & Togetherness
- Attitude & Values
- Economy & Work
- Sparetime & Longing

A small proportion of the flags could not be assigned to any of these major themes and therefore were categorised as "other". The flags were then sorted and the number of mentions of each theme was recorded. The themes were then translated into visuals as a way to creatively communicate the results at a public event in Berlin. .

Campaign Outcomes

The results were presented to the public at an event in October 2020. For the opening we invited a renowned researcher to discuss the insights of the tour with us (Prof. Reinhard Loske/sustainability expert). The event served two purposes, one to publicly share the results of our listening so that people who participated or had heard about it had access to the outcomes. The second was to communicate a narrative of a clear opportunity to shift to a more sustainable Germany when recovering from Covid 19. The project was also summarized in a short [documentation video](#) which was presented at the "Climate story lab" in Berlin on October 7th, to share our new methodology to make listening a part of story telling with other story tellers in the climate movement:

<https://www.humanrightsfilmfestivalberlin.de/de/forum/climate-story-lab-berlin> (see web stream Day II min 1.26–1.54)

The pre-tour survey had also revealed that Greenpeace was seen as 'distant' by large parts of the public. Shifting from broadcasting to listening was therefore also an opportunity to adjust our public image. By demonstrating that we are willing to listen and interested in what people think and feel, and by repeating this listening exercise in the future, we are aiming to build a more empathetic public identity. Responses from the public and the local media coverage showed that people were not only positively surprised that Greenpeace was listening but strongly welcomed this new initiative. We therefore decided to make listening part of our organisational DNA.

The next step will be to make the empathetic campaigning listening and audience research part of 2021 work around the German elections and to build up new campaign strands in the climate teams work.

Reflection

Our Greenpeace volunteers were quite divided in their responses to the project. Some local groups enjoyed the new way of engaging with the public and could very easily switch to a conversation format that focused on listening. Other groups struggled to get the idea of how change can be created through listening. They wanted to continue preaching Greenpeace's ideas as a way to convince people and therefore decided not to support the tour. If the whole group was unwilling to switch we could not host an event in that city.

During the debriefing we had with the volunteers, most told us that they enjoyed asking and listening to the public, as opposed to preaching. One volunteer told us that he was amazed at how easy it was to address environmental issues when listening to people; he found that people develop their own environment insights just by supporting their thought process with some guiding questions.

After this first encouraging experience we decided to invest in building more capacity in our local groups. In order to encourage more volunteers to understand the advantages of this new type of conversation-based engagement and the power of listening (and thus to increase the support for future listening tours), and also to build their listening and conversation skills we asked Mindwork to develop and host training for our volunteers and volunteer trainers. Online training happened from February to June 2021.

Endorsement

Sina Nägel (Engagement Lead, Greenpeace Germany) said:

"The rainbow tour clearly showed that we can start a new type of campaigning with our volunteers and the German audiences. We want to shift from preaching to listening and engage in real conversations. Since the rainbow tour was a huge success – without addressing a classical campaign topic or being placed in a campaign team – the engagement team already blocked a budget for a tour sequel next year to push the mindset-shift work with a new tour with a sensing approach. The whole #lifeaftercorona project was a push to elaborate new/other campaign methods in the Greenpeace Germany office."

One head of campaigns said that he has never seen a better media output from volunteers work.

A thank you note from a supporter that participated in the digital engagement part "A Letter to my Future Self" – Remembering the Times of Corona read:

"I would like to thank you very much for the letter from the past. It was very good for me to hear from myself. For me, such actions enrich my life. As I am writing to you now, I can see that this

[engagement] has also strengthened my solidarity with Greenpeace. I encourage you to create more similar actions in the future on such a personal level."

Mindworks or other tools / theories used

[Seven Ideas how to campaign for system change during the corona crisis](#)

Keywords

Conversations, engagement, listening, Letter to my Future Self, Corona-19, city tour