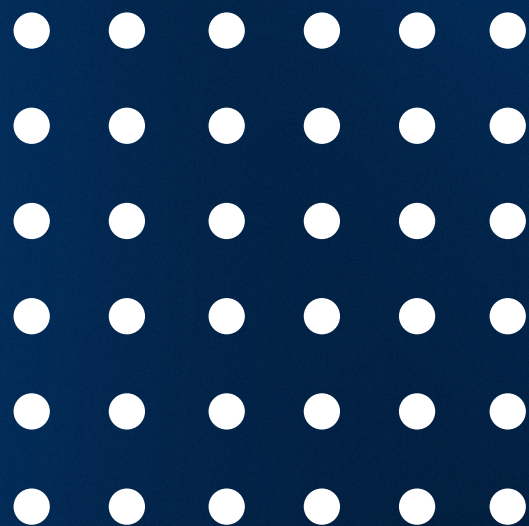


**TRANSFORMATION  
IN ENGAGEMENT  
AND  
ENGAGEMENT  
UNDERGOING  
TRANSFORMATION**



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# TRANSFORMATION OF ENGAGEMENT IN A WORLD OF UPHEAVAL

More than ever before, the world needs engagement in the truest sense of the word. Whether that be climate crisis, democracy crisis, global injustice: The multitude of crises of our time require our full commitment. As a society, we need to come together more to collectively address problems that cannot be solved alone.

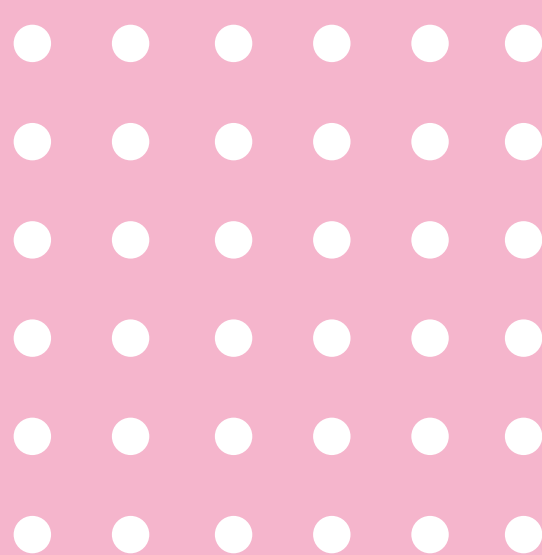
Civil society engagement plays an important role for our society, and is able to transform it at the same time: engagement is participation and co-determination. Engagement entails dealing with social negotiation processes on both a small and large scale. It makes embedding in the local neighbourhood as well as belonging to the global community a tangible phenomenon.

And engagement is undergoing transformation just like the world itself. An altered landscape of engagement, newly emerging forms of engagement - this transformation,

accelerated by the digital transformation, is becoming an integral part of engagement as well. With regard to a world of work undergoing transformation, in which automation and advancing digitalisation will render many jobs obsolete, we can also expect more people to go in search for meaning. In doing so, engagement could fulfil a new orientation function in the post-growth society.

These changes raise the question of how we can position engagement in a forward-looking way so as to unleash the potential of committed people for society in future, too. The spirit of the age appears to be ripe, and hence people are channelling their need for action in movements such as Fridays for Future or Black Lives Matter to shape a better world - and in a novel way. Yet, even established actors are willing to try out something new. It is high time that we think about engagement in a different way.

# ENGAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL WORLD



Questions concerning the future are often dealt with from the perspective of digital transformation. This is also evident in light of advancing digitalisation; after all, processes of change are encroaching on all areas of our lives.

In order to better understand the changes in engagement, it is helpful to break it down: digital engagement on the one hand and digitalisation of civil engagement on the other.<sup>1</sup> The latter refers to the transformation process of digitalisation when applied to engagement: social organisations are increasingly using technological capabilities to acquire voluntary workers, connect and integrate them in the cooperation or to introduce positions into the socio-political discourse.<sup>2</sup> The potential of digitalisation is also harnessed by the volunteers themselves, making location- and time-sovereign engagement possible today thanks to the use of digital applications for example.

However, digitalisation is also giving rise to completely new forms of engagement: digital transformation describes new manifestations of engagement, which would not be viable

without digitalisation. Wikipedia as a collaborative source of knowledge is one common example for this. What is more, a vibrant open source and civic tech community is refining the development of civil society alternatives – both with and through technical tools. This is leading to a new area of engagement, which tackles the issue of digitalisation itself.<sup>3</sup>

Digitalisation discourse mainly focuses on the level of digital structures and processes. Much more interesting and even more relevant are cultural aspects and people's attitude towards the world, however. The issue at stake here is how people can navigate a world undergoing transformation. This has to do with the abilities and inner constitutions with which people are equipped to deal with the world. Especially for social engagement, which thrives on people's motivation and voluntary activities, this question of this "internal dimension" is essential. If we refer to questions concerning the future in a digital world, people should be placed at the heart of debate. In order to make engagement fit for the future, we need to adopt a holistic perspective.

1 Cf. Kompetenzzentrum Öffentliche Informationstechnologie: "Digitales Engagement – Analyse der Förderprogramme auf Bundesebene" by Resa Mohabbat Kar, Stephan Peters, Lisa Bieker, Julian Fischer (2017); [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/Digitales\\_Engagement.pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/Digitales_Engagement.pdf)

2 Cf. Kompetenzzentrum Öffentliche IT - Fraunhofer-Institut für Offene Kommunikationssysteme FOKUS: "Digitales Bürgerschaftliches Engagement" by Ulrike Hinz, Nora Wegener, Mike Weber, Jens Fromm, p. 8; [https://wir-tun-was.rlp.de/fileadmin/wirtunwas/Ehrenamt\\_digital/Ideenwettbewerb\\_2018/Digitales\\_Buergerschaftliches\\_Engagement.pdf](https://wir-tun-was.rlp.de/fileadmin/wirtunwas/Ehrenamt_digital/Ideenwettbewerb_2018/Digitales_Buergerschaftliches_Engagement.pdf)

3 Cf. Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth: "Dritter Engagementbericht. Zukunft Zivilgesellschaft: Junges Engagement im digitalen Zeitalter" (2020), p 136; <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/156652/164912b832c17bb6895a31d5b574ae1d/dritter-engagementbericht-bundestagsdrucksache-data.pdf>

# A HOLISTIC VIEW OF ENGAGEMENT

## How can we holistically reflect upon engagement?

How can we gain a more in-depth understanding of the transformation in engagement so as to shape it?

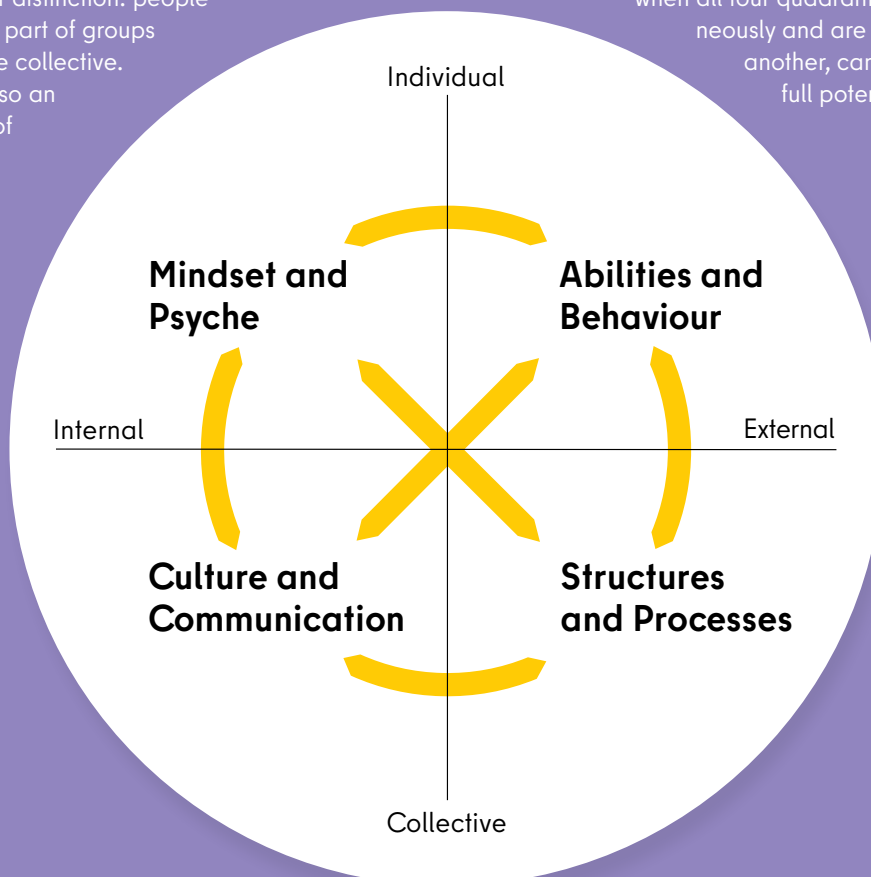
Just like the digitalisation discourse, this observation also needs to transcend what we can perceive from the outside: it is not enough to simply describe how organisations are formally structured if we neglect the organisational structure and the vibrant interaction that deeply defines an organisation. It is not enough to only determine how people behave if we fail to look at the motivation and attitudes underpinning this. If we want to reflect upon engagement and the people here, it is necessary to look at both the inside and outside.

If we have now expanded our view to the people, it is worth making a further distinction: people are individuals, yet as part of groups they also represent the collective. A glance at values, also an important dimension of

engagement, illustrates this: an individual may have his/her own values, but these only become a culture that is lived through negotiations with others. We need to integrate the individual and the collective at the same time.

In order to think holistically about engagement, we need to take all these levels and facets into account. Together, four quadrants can be derived from this: we can view the internal dimension of the individual as well as the collective; as well as referring to the external dimension of the individual and the collective. Ken Wilber developed this four-quadrant model in the framework of integral theory.<sup>1</sup>

This model should now serve as a framework of analysis to better understand the experiences of volunteers. Only when all four quadrants are viewed simultaneously and are in harmony with one another, can engagement unfold its full potential for society.

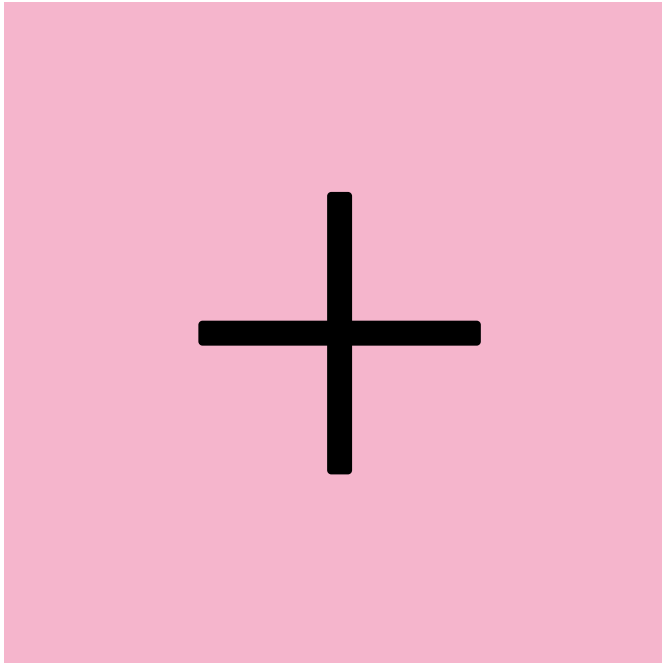


**The AQAL-Model (All Quadrants, All Levels)**

Fig. 1 Model according to Ken Wilber by Keks Ackermann, CC BY-NC 2.0<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ken Wilber: "Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution" (1995)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Joana Breidenbach, Bettina Rollow: "New Work needs Inner Work: Ein Handbuch für Unternehmen auf dem Weg zur Selbstorganisation" (2019)

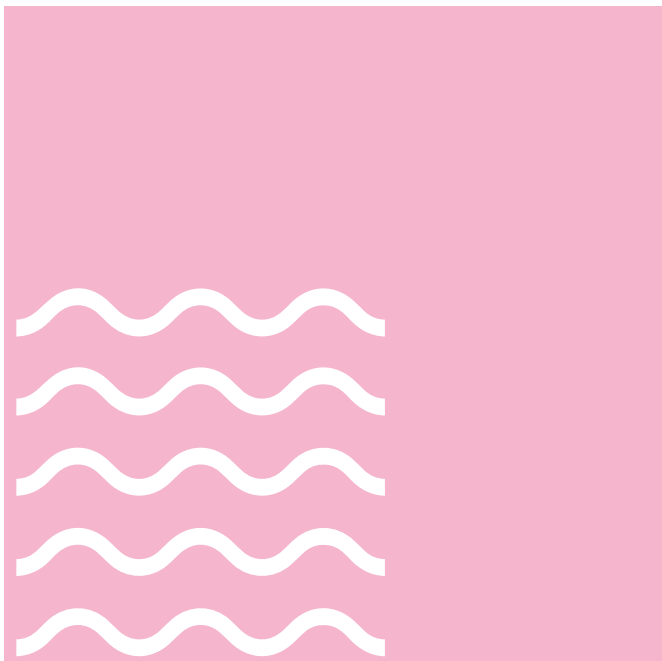


An ethnographic approach was selected so as to delve into the experiences of volunteers. Ethnography or field research refers to a research approach that combines different, primarily qualitative research methods with one another to get as close as possible to (everyday) cultures. If we conduct ethnographic research, we attempt to identify and reconstruct typical forms of interaction and life as well as practices and rituals underlying this culture.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of this research, volunteers from the context of the European Volunteering Capital Berlin 2021 campaign year were invited for discussions. The majority of them volunteer in Berlin, and some completely digitally. Discussions were held with ten volunteers from the following organisations:

- VfL Fortuna Marzahn e.V.
- Bürgerstiftung Berlin
- Quartiermeister e.V.
- SignDict
- Stiftung Unionhilfswerk Berlin

# DISCUSSIONS WITH VOLUNTEERS AND POSITIONING IN THE FOUR QUADRANT MODEL



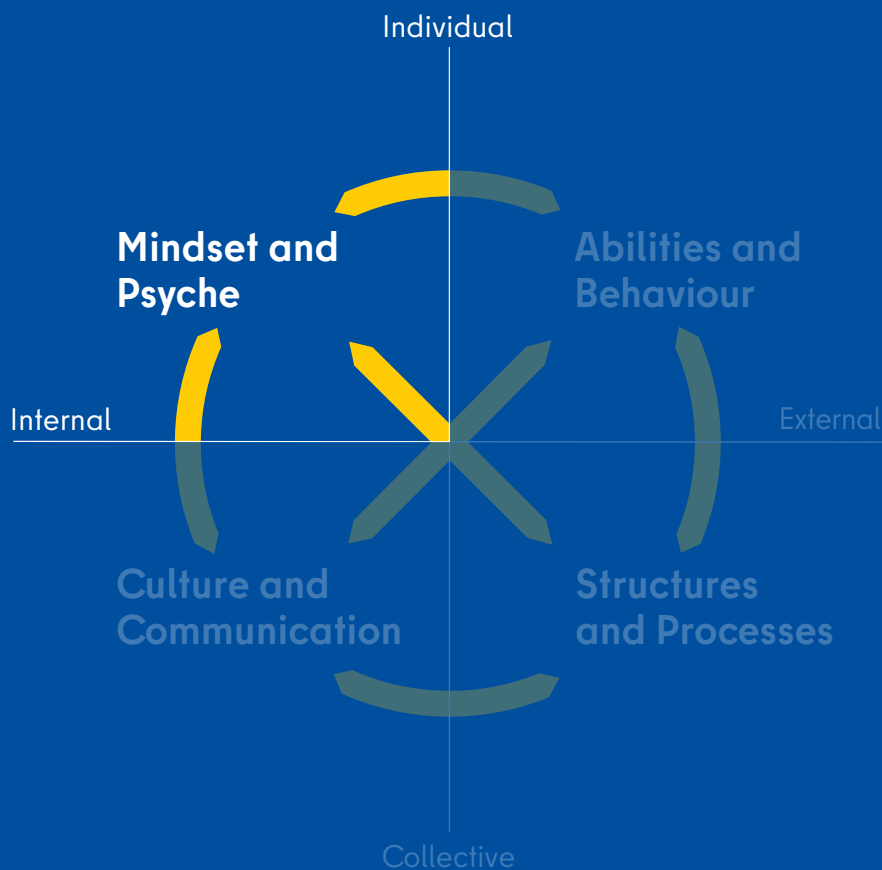
- codetekt e.V.
- Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland e.V. / Transparency International Deutschland e.V.
- Fridays For Future
- Extinction Rebellion
- Kooperative KIEZconnect e.V.

Although a guideline<sup>2</sup> was developed to structure discussions, this was not meticulously executed, the respective discussion partner largely determined the direction of the discussion and which aspects were addressed in detail.

Relevant aspects from the discussions will now be contextualised using the dimensions internal and external, individual and collective:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. RUB Methodenzentrum: "Ethnographie als Forschungsparadigma" by Nele Kuhlmann; <https://methodenzentrum.rub-uni-bochum.de/e-learning/qualitative-erhebungsmethoden/qualitative-beobachtungsverfahren/ethnographie-als-forschungsparadigma/>

<sup>2</sup> The key questions addressed the motivation of volunteers for the engagement, their own experiences in engagement as well as the role of values, to name a few.



# INTERNAL AND INDIVIDUAL

The volunteers' individual world of experience is characterised by what they **feel, think**, the **attitude** with which they view the world and also how their **mind** works. On the quadrant model, this area is located **internally with the individual**.

Engagement can serve to establish an identity. **Identification** with the activity and organisation is described as being extremely important, according to one volunteer: "the cause that I identify with forms the heart of my engagement." Identity is also connected to our **view of the world**. In engagement, reinforcing or comparing our own view of the world with that of others takes place on different levels. Thus, one person rather abstractly stated that engagement shows her how goodness is inherent in every human being. While another emphasised above all the power of encouragement from others: "as an activist, I often face resistance. "Then you ask yourself, "but am I wrong?" I don't often make friends this way. In engagement, I experience how we mutually support one another, then I realise: we're not a marginal group, we're part of society." Identification with a group can also develop from sharing the same challenges which creates a connection with other people - this point will be elaborated on in more depth later.

Engagement can lead to volunteers seeing the **world from a new or different perspective**, one volunteer commented on her commitment to the climate: "engagement has opened my eyes." While another referred to the specific social problem that needs to be solved: "it affords me the opportunity to really get to the heart of a problem." One volunteer spoke about a "unique quality, an energy that a person feels attracted to." Another confirmed: "there was this subject, and suddenly something jumps out at you." Another described the unforeseen inspiration: "I got a taste of it and then realised that engagement is a great thing. It allows me to delve into a new world." For some, engagement can act as a counterweight to a world that is perceived to be cold. For example, one volunteer initially shared the impression that the world is becoming more and more egoistic. He then conceded: "everything that I just found fault with, I experience differently in engagement. There, everyone is helpful, friendly and respectful."

Another volunteer described how encounters with people strike a deep chord with her, and dealing with other people's life stories ultimately sheds new light on her own history and hence on herself. The aspects described here are reminiscent of resonance theory propounded by Hartmut Rosa:<sup>1</sup> the sociologist describes resonance as a state of successful relationship with the world, a type of relationship in which mutual vibrations are created. These moments have the potential to befall us, deeply touch us and completely overwhelm us. Such moments must never be forced; resonance invariably goes hand in hand with a certain unavailability. Some of these aspects are reflected in the volunteers' descriptions: engagement enables (new) access to the world, the experience of another reality. **Engagement creates resonance.**

For some volunteers, their fascination for the cause or organisation led to them "being fully absorbed in the moment" and **losing track of time.** Some of them even claimed that it made them "forget the world". Such an experience, which in theory is also referred to as **flow**<sup>2</sup>, was impressively described by one volunteer: "ideas are flowing, and suddenly it gives rise to something different to what I thought. It's like a meditative process, a pleasant feeling. When you're where you want to be and look back, the time has gone, but the outcome is there." Another described how they sometimes get up on a morning, are on the go for seven hours for a campaign, and at some point, realise they have not yet eaten anything. "You're so focused on it that you forget everything around you." Yet, the flip side is to evaluate time as a negative factor: "for engagement, we need time: a resource that is too scarce." Or also: "time is more important than money, it is the limiting factor." A volunteer summarised this point reflectively: "engagement is a privilege that we have to afford." Hence, time sovereignty is a prerequisite for delving into these worlds of experience in the first place. The aspect of unavailability is inevitably linked to time, as expressed by two volunteers: "we never reach a point where we say: "we've now made it, now we can stop." I actually never reach the point of being able to stop." While the other emphasised: "in truth, we're never finished with a cause."

Engagement also gives a lot back. A volunteer expressed this excellently: "it gives me strength." Another emphasised that it gives her the courage to face life, from this feeling of championing something. The "strength of many" is also palpable in engagement. While engagement gave another a wonderful feeling of being alive, it enabled her to draw strength from chaos. What's more, engagement always inspires us to explore the **question of meaning.** "For me, it makes sense to become active." Another underscored the meaningfulness of advocating a cause that lies close to your heart.

Another depicted the following: "engagement is one piece of the jigsaw, contributing to the small things also makes sense." More on the ability to see the bigger picture later.

It is exciting to see what drives people to volunteer. In theory, the motivation to act is interpreted as "motive pluralism"<sup>3</sup>, that is because engagement can often be attributed to several motives or these cannot be clearly distinguished from one another. An interesting picture emerged during our discussions, too: the drivers behind engagement are varied and often fuelled by **feelings** perceived as both positive and negative. On the one hand, subjective experiences ranged from joy, freedom, fulfilment and satisfaction, self-efficacy, contentment right through to appreciation and (life) courage, trust and meaning. Whereas this was opposed by sensations of powerlessness, anger, a feeling of injustice, sorrow, stress, pressure and fears about the future. In many cases, individual persons manifested this mixture of emotions in ambivalent forms from both ends of the spectrum at the same time. However, volunteers are united by the determination to be active as a result of these emotions. One volunteer vividly described how she suddenly experienced a "wake up call", and her fear, rather than paralysing her, had a motivating effect. She also highlighted her anger about the status quo and sorrow about the state of the world. Another identified the driving forces from anger and feelings of powerlessness: "anger is invariably a driving force. When you spring into action because you can no longer sleep as the noise in front of your own front door gets too loud. You feel both frustrated and powerless, and yet this urges you to take action." Having been personally affected by a social problem may also urge us to want to solve this: "I myself am indirectly affected, and have many contact points with the issue. That's why I believe I'm particularly well placed to help find a solution." Another person was rather distressed due to being affected, but still wanted to do something: "I despair when I witness fellow human beings who don't see the same major problems. I'm taken aback when people close to me speak out against the vaccine and are so far removed from science. This also has a deleterious effect on our relationship, so I'd like to do something about it."

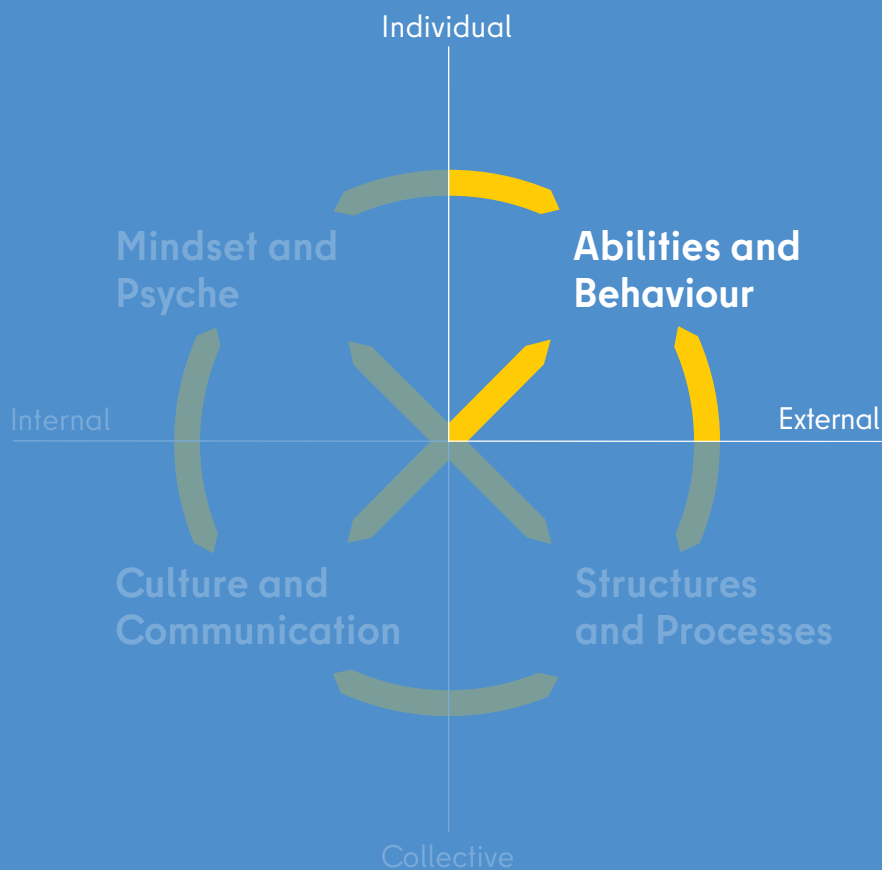
It is interesting to note that most volunteers indicated social grievances as motivation; they perceived their engagement as a mission – even as a duty – to alleviate these issues. In the course of discussions, they then emphasised that engagement gives them much joy and strength and they can experience all kinds of wonderful things. Only one volunteer expressed this positive connotation in her motivation for action: "I'm thankful that I have had a lot of luck in life. I can give that back through my engagement."

1 Cf. Hartmut Rosa: "Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung" (2016)

2 Cf. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: "Flow. Das Geheimnis des Glücks" (1990)

3 Cf. Bibliothek Forschung und Praxis: "Gemeinsinn und Solidarität: Motivation und Wirkung von Freiwilligenarbeit" by Elisabeth Kals, Isabel T. Strubel, Stefan T. Güntert 2021); <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/bfp-2020-0103/html>





# INDIVIDUAL AND EXTERNAL

The individual realm of perception mainly observes cognitive constitutions such as **knowledge, abilities** and competencies, but also visible **modes of behaviour**. On the quadrant model, this area is located externally and with the individual.

Engagement is closely tied to **self-efficacy**. The concept of self-efficacy was coined by the Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1970s. Here he described a mental capacity, the subjective certainty of a person to confidently master new or difficult challenges. This ability is based on experiences already gained, and each mastered requirement has a reinforcing effect.<sup>1</sup> In engagement, the expectation of self-efficacy is manifested in the form of a belief that they can make a difference: for instance, some volunteers described how they wanted to deploy their skills in areas of engagement where they can make a difference. “In the organisation, I can apply my strengths and interests in a positive way”, or:

I can make good use of my skills and participate in the transformation”, as well as: “I always look at what competencies I have that I can deploy in the most meaningful way. This gives way to a sense of satisfaction, which one volunteer described as follows: “engagement pays off when you feel you’re making a difference and therefore turning the world into a better place.” Another: “it’s a wonderful feeling if you’ve been working towards campaigns and then you see something about it in the news.” This satisfaction can also come about simply due to the certainty of having completed something: “I gain satisfaction from completing things that need to be done, ticking of a to-do list.”

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Online Lexikon für Psychologie und Pädagogik (Werner Stangl Wien-Linz-Freiburg): Keyword: ‘Selbstwirksamkeit’ (2021); <https://lexikon.stangl.eu/1535/selbstwirksamkeit-selbstwirksamkeitserwartung>



If we delve deeper, the desire to feel needed by others can also be satisfied in engagement: “when you’re alone and then have tasks in engagement, it can be greatly fulfilling.” I want to care, to be needed.”

Engagement is also used to **liberate us from a feeling of powerlessness**, as two volunteers described: “here I can shape something in a world in which I otherwise feel powerless” and: “organising yourself means escaping from this powerlessness. Becoming active yourself and taking responsibility.” Even if our own expectation of self-efficacy is not equated with a high external impact, it may help to ease our conscience: “after all, we cannot get up every day and say we’re in a crisis, we have to do something. Here I feel as though I’m able to do something. Although this alone will not stop the crisis, at least I know: I’ve done something.” **Acting on autonomy** seems to be an important factor, too: “In my engagement, I am left to my own devices, and believe in my own capacity to act.” This also intensifies the **development** of our own competencies: “my engagement endowed me with a new skill, I was no programmer, but I’ve picked it up and eventually got into it.” This might not just be about acquiring new skills, but personal development as well: “engagement is character-building, you develop as a person.”

Engagement can also contribute towards strengthening your own skills, **seeing the bigger picture**, and making it tangible. “My engagement is an analysis of the world, that’s where I see the overall picture,” or: “my engagement enables me to delve much deeper into topics and fields. It shows me how everything is connected.” Another underscored that his activity was not about remedying individual cases, but rather errors in the system. Another volunteer wrote: “I work for the children but I can see the bigger picture.” At the emotional level, this can make us feel as though we belong to something greater: “you then realise that you’re part of something greater.” This enlightenment and own position in the system seems to enable engagement.

“Here I can shape something in a world in which I otherwise feel powerless.”



# INTERNAL AND COLLECTIVE

In addition to your own internal world, the realm of experience also plays out in a common “we”. Aspects such as **communication, cultural elements** and the compatibility of your own value orientation with the **values of the collective** are relevant here. On the quadrant model, this area is located between **internal and collective**.

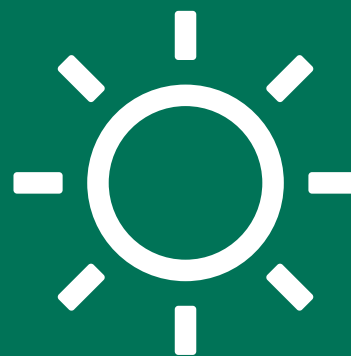
In engagement, the **alignment of values** is depicted as a key aspect. Values reflect morals and find expression in subjective perspectives on society. The bedrock of values in a society may vary; the negotiation processes for finding common ground in different perspectives seem to be one of the most important challenges of our time.<sup>1</sup> Values play a key role for engagement, since they motivate people to volunteer and are essential for cooperation with one another. Values mentioned during the discussions were: tolerance, solidarity, freedom, justice, equality and sustainability. Although these values appear to be intuitive, the interpretation and meaning of the individual values is subjective at first. For example, one volunteer said the following with regard to solidarity:

“for me, solidarity is intrinsically linked to justice. The categorical imperative, in other words “that could also happen to me”, is not decisive for me here, but rather: I support your cause because I deem it unjust, regardless of whether it could happen to me or not. That is what I consider to be solidarity.” Another directly linked sustainability with credibility, since this is measured by whether sustainability is only promoted or actually lived in all areas of life.

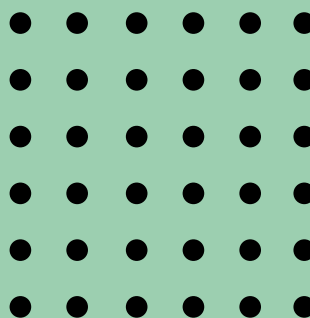
A value that was not explicitly mentioned as such, but was implicitly referred to as relevant, is **multiperspectivity**. In (history) didactics, multiperspectivity is a principle recognising that observer-independent insights are not possible because

<sup>1</sup> Cf. More in Common: “Die andere deutsche Teilung: Zustand und Zukunftsfähigkeit unserer Gesellschaft” von Laura-Kristine Krause, Jérémie Gagné (2019); [https://www.dieandereiteilung.de/media/nthpflnv/moreincommon\\_dieandereiteilung\\_studie\\_v1-0-2.pdf](https://www.dieandereiteilung.de/media/nthpflnv/moreincommon_dieandereiteilung_studie_v1-0-2.pdf)

they are invariably embedded in cultural and social perspectives or those shaped in other ways.<sup>2</sup> The empathetic change in perspective, on which multiperspectivity depends, is necessary for democratic coexistence. What is more, engagement makes it possible to experience a change in perspective: “I like listening to others when they talk, even if they are off-topic, about the subject. Learning about their views and problems is an enriching experience. This enables me to understand people’s ideas, goals and what they’re about.” Or: “I experience many other realities, which opens your eyes.” This can result in a person changing their own views and opening up: “my engagement has made me more open to opinions that don’t suit me. By facing up to it, I can be more supportive of some things.” Experiencing and tolerating other opinions, which is central for a functioning democracy, can be tested in engagement: “you inevitably need to be able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, practise empathy. You get direct feedback: “is that relevant for everyone or an individual interest?” This comparison is an integral part of whether something works in the public space.” But far more than that, engagement can, instead of revealing otherness, also strengthen the realisation of similarities: “engagement gives rise to something where you emerge from the othering. You gain an understanding of other speeds, and establish a new error culture.” With engagement, both can coexist, **equality and diversity**: it strengthens you when you realise others think in a similar way. And time and again it is a matter of getting to know new perspectives, expanding your horizons of experience and weighing them up with one another as opposed to insisting on your own argument, but also really listening to others.” Engagement makes a fundamental reality tangible: “everyone experiences each other as people, differences play a more minor role.” This volunteer perceived this so strongly that it made the above-mentioned othering<sup>3</sup> fade into the background for him: “in reality, we’re all equal and differences take a back seat.”



“I experience many other realities, which opens your eyes.”



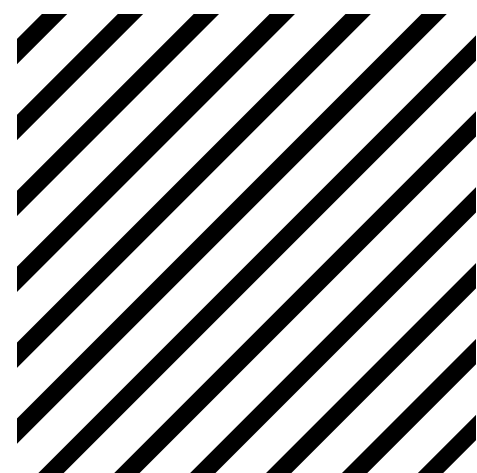
2 Cf. Wikipedia: Keyword: ‘Multiperspektivität (Geschichtswissenschaft)’ (15 Sep 2021); [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiperspektivit%C3%A4t\\_\(Geschichtswissenschaft\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiperspektivit%C3%A4t_(Geschichtswissenschaft))

3 Cf. Wikipedia: Keyword: ‘Othering’ (8 July 2021); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other\\_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other_(philosophy))

Engagement also presents the opportunity for **social mixing**, as reported by a volunteer: “with us it’s across the board, from the trainee right through to the professor.” Or another: “you come together with people outside your own discipline, with various classes, age categories, levels of education and professional backgrounds. This diversity is important because it combines different opinions and social benefits.” While another emphasised a vibrant welcoming culture: “all people are welcome here: refugees, long-time residents, newcomers. Everyone will be accepted. The connecting element is affiliation to the club, beyond that, differences such as ethnicity or sexuality are not important.” Yet, as positive as this image is depicted on the one hand, some volunteers criticise the lack of **diversity**: “diversity leaves a lot to be desired, we have fewer women than men in what is otherwise a very heterogeneous group.” Another reflected: “we’re not particularly diverse. Gender distribution is good, but this doesn’t apply to other aspects of diversity. After all, we talk about how we need to catch up.” Others were more specific: “we primarily work on this by reflecting upon our way of talking, which is already very high brow.” One volunteer placed the problem in a wider context: “we’re not as diverse as we’d like to be.” Our structure does not mirror society. Political engagement is a privilege that you have to be able to afford.” This reveals a key problem: although organisations can make engagement

accessible through an open attitude, simple language and deliberate invitations, integrating the engagement into the lives of potential volunteers is outside their control. A well-known phenomenon in engagement is the experience of **community**. Above all, the feeling of **belonging to a group** is important for many volunteers: “I have a strong feeling of belonging in the group. I also notice: “hey, here are other people fighting for the same thing. I’m not the only one fighting for this. This group feeling strengthens you.” Another confirmed that it is precisely this feeling that can motivate you to participate: “community feeling is a strong argument in favour of volunteering.” Another gains “strength from the group feeling”. The group needs this feeling to develop and then strengthen. Solidarity is important to me; I like spending time with people. For me, the driving force is to make people happy with my engagement.” Membership of the association is important, too: “belonging to the association is relevant for being together.” Another draws the comparison of a family structure and said: “here we experience a sense of cohesion, nobody is alone. The association is a community.” Another said: “This is where I cultivate personal relationships, close relationships. There are some people with whom I feel close on a personal level.” Another summarised: “you make real friends there for life.” In doing so, engagement fulfils a **very personal and at the same time social function** for people.

“Here we experience a sense of cohesion, nobody is alone. The association is a community.”



“I feel connected with friends, other activists, but also to the issue. That’s the main aspect bringing you together.”

A **connection** can also be formed via the activity or the problem itself to be resolved by society. This was reported by a volunteer who develops open-source solutions: “I’m primarily connected to the problem, which then transitions into a connection with the process for solving the problem, but sometimes I can tell: this solution is rubbish, then I focus again on the need, the problem in other words. I’ve a stronger connection to the problem than to the solution.” Behind the connection to the problem is also the connection to other people, the volunteer continued: “the problem then also links me to other people behind it. I like to connect people with one another, the easiest way to do that is: person A has a problem and person B has the solution. Working together on a solution gives rise to a shared identity with other people.” For another volunteer, more focus is placed on the issue: “I feel connected with friends, other activists, but also to the issue. That’s the main aspect bringing you together.” Another stressed that, in engagement, it is important for him to find fellow campaigners for an issue to advance collectively. Above all, a **common goal** creates **solidarity**: “the feeling of being an association, having a joint vision, which is to be effective for a fair economy and sustainable world. Another confirmed: “for me, solidarity goes beyond a common goal, beyond a thematic interest.” Engagement also creates **recognition** and **appreciation**: “engagement gives me a feeling of recognition. I experience approval, and that’s a very human feeling.” Another: “when I receive praise, the inner satisfaction of helping others takes hold.”

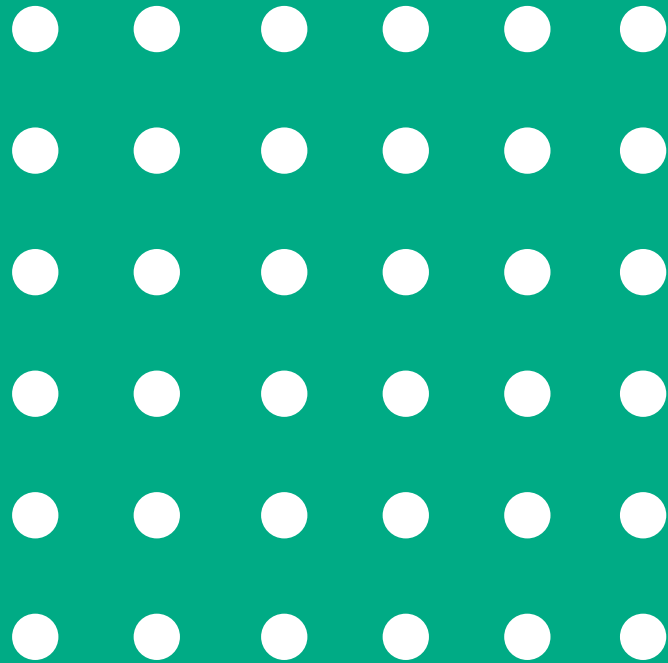
Recognition through awards is also important because this creates external recognition for what people in an organisation do. Engagement can also mean recognition of a problem, according to one volunteer: when I feel understood with a problem, I’m willing to jointly look for a solution.” Some volunteers even spoke of how engagement allowed them to play a different role and thus felt heard for the first time. One volunteer also emphasised the impact that this may have on others: “with my role in engagement I’m taken seriously for the first time. I have the feeling that I’m being listened to. And I’m talking about really being heard. People genuinely listen and reflect upon what I say.” Another spoke about the significance for others when having said: “we need to be seen and heard, also to motivate others.” However, some continued to feel as though their actions and the impact this has on society are being overlooked: “too little attention is paid to engagement. If activities pursued by associations and engagement were to fall apart, I don’t want to know what society would look like then.” Here it is clear: besides the beneficial personal appreciation that volunteers experience, more recognition is needed for the services that engagement fulfils for social cohesion. Although engagement plays a **pivotal role for people in a society**, it can only have a lasting effect if it is recognised accordingly.



## EXTERNAL AND COLLECTIVE

The collective realm of perception looks at the level of **structures and processes** and is completely anchored in the **external and collective**. As regards change processes, this area is often prioritised since it is the easiest to perceive and seems possible to shape.

“The world of work in engagement is a pleasant one, there’s no pressure.” Things are given time and space.”



**Structural and organisational** issues are fundamental for this realm. The unique aspect of engagement is that it is based on voluntariness and the often-cooperative execution of tasks.<sup>1</sup> That is why the enforcement measures of functional hierarchies – as they are mostly found in the professional context – are less effective in some cases. However, structures facilitate orientation. Some forms of engagement are characterised by rather flexible hierarchies that leave their volunteers a lot of freedom to **organise themselves**. One volunteer described how he particularly values the quality of work in engagement: “the world of work in engagement is a pleasant one, there’s no pressure.” Things are given time and space.” Another emphasised that he enjoys not having fixed tasks, and instead can apply his skills and capacities where needed. These loose structures enable flexibility, which in turn creates a sense of autonomy. Another stated: “I find being left to your own devices better than rigid guidelines.”

In social movements, people participate precisely because of the **less established structures**: for instance, one volunteer highlighted the advantages of being able to have an influence

there, even as a young person, given that roles are fluid and decision-making paths can be adapted. Yet, certain **levels of responsibility** require a **corresponding structure**: one volunteer stated that some areas of responsibility should not be “left to volunteers”. It would be better to carry out these tasks by salaried staff, but this would first require finance. Another volunteer disclosed that the tasks of volunteers actually exceed what can be achieved voluntarily: “my tasks are never ending, I have an authority to sign but must keep an eye on the legal consequences at the same time.” Here reference is made to salaried employees, who are supposed to ensure that rights and duties are performed so that volunteers can dedicate more time to their tasks as opposed to structural constraints. For instance, one volunteer claimed: “a reduction in bureaucracy is urgently needed. All these applications, it requires so much administration. That isn’t compatible with the structures prevailing here.” At the same time, assuming a specific (voluntary) post may also lead to it being carried out in a diligent manner: “I’m aware of the responsibility that I accepted with this post.” She then went on to say: “viewing it this way also gives me strength.”

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Federal Agency for Civic Education: “Das Ehrenamt. Empirie und Theorie des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements” by Bettina Hollstein (2017); <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/245597/das-ehrenamt-empirie-und-theorie-des-buergerschaftlichen-engagements>



# HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE OF ENGAGEMENT

## Tips for Organisations

A holistic approach is needed in order to position engagement in a changing world. The discourse, especially when it concerns digitalisation, often focuses on what can be seen from the outside. Only an enhanced view that also takes account of internal processes – both individual and collective – makes engagement visible and possible to influence in all its facets.

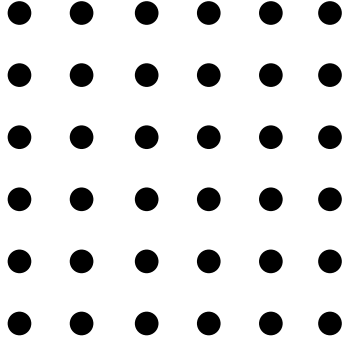
To ensure that organisations can also address these facets and consciously strengthen them, we now formulate some **key questions** that should serve as a source for inspiration. Where is there already clarity as regards assessing their position and the path that the organisation would like to follow? In what areas should an organisation look more closely, readjust or gather new impetus from outside? The following questions can guide organisations in this process:

### INTERNAL AND INDIVIDUAL

- As an organisation, to what extent do I support volunteers' examination of their internal attitude from which they view the world?
- What motivates the volunteers to cooperate with my organisation? Where do they experience meaning?
- Which subjective experiences do volunteers gain during their engagement? Which of them do they experience as positive, and which as negative?
- Do volunteers have a contact point in the organisation to whom they can turn with individual concerns?
- How can I support my volunteers to become more in tune with themselves, for example through offers such as guided meditation or other contemplative practices?

### INDIVIDUAL AND EXTERNAL

- How do my volunteers experience self-efficacy? How can I better turn expectations of self-efficacy into reality, for example by jointly developing and tracking goals as part of the engagement, or jointly reflecting on the organisation's effectiveness in the world?
- What function does the engagement fulfil for my volunteers? How can the engagement in my organisation do justice to this? Can I strengthen their autonomy by consciously granting volunteers a greater level of freedom?
- What skills are needed for engagement in my organisation? Can I support volunteers in (further) developing these skills? Is there even a personal path of development that I can develop and track together with the volunteers?



### INTERNAL AND COLLECTIVE

- How explicit are our values? Which individual value maps are exhibited by my volunteers, and which are shared values in the organisation? Do we also reflect these values in everyday interactions, such as in group meetings?
- To what extent is multiperspectivity a lived value? Can we also strengthen a change in perspective within the organisation by conducting an open dialogue on our volunteers' different worlds (of experience)?
- Do we sufficiently address diversity and equality? How diverse are we really? What efforts do we take to become more diverse, could for example a diversity training be helpful?
- Do we have a common vision and goals? Are all volunteers aware of these and do they agree, or might it be necessary to revise them?
- Have we established a culture of appreciation; do we give mutual (constructive) feedback?
- What creates community in our organisation? What does this mean for the individual volunteers, what do they need to (continue) feeling as though they belong?

These questions are not a solution in themselves. And yet, they can provide a starting point for addressing the organisation's longstanding challenges from a new perspective, and for bringing new knowledge about engagement in your own organisation to light.

### EXTERNAL AND COLLECTIVE

- What roles do hierarchies play in our organisation? How explicit are our structures? Do they provide the necessary orientation, or do they tend to curtail freedom of action?
- Which processes feel fluid and organic, which are rigid and need revising?
- Which areas of activity need clear (judicial) responsibility, which can be transferred to some volunteers to organise themselves as an experiment?
- How can I give the volunteers a sense of security when they feel overwhelmed by their responsibility? Can we jointly and openly discuss how to make adjustments so that areas of responsibility are commensurate with the workload?
- Are the levels of responsibility between voluntary and salaried employees divided in a meaningful way? As an organisation, can I transfer some tasks in the long-term, especially those with legal consequences, to salaried employees or at least support volunteers in corresponding positions through (external) consulting services?

This examination is primarily **reflective work** – only when it is carried out **by the organisation and in cooperation with volunteers** can engagement be positioned holistically. This would make engagement fit for the future and enable it to unleash its full potential in a changing world.

# MAKING ENGAGEMENT VISIBLE, APPRECIATING IT AND INSPIRING OTHERS: EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING CAPITAL BERLIN



## Berlin is European Volunteering Capital 2021.

With this title, the Centre for European Volunteering pays tribute to what Berlin and its people have achieved in voluntary engagement.

The four focuses of this campaign year are innovation, digitalisation, diversity and Europe.

The campaign year is organised by a project office under the sponsorship of the Schwarzkopf-Stiftung Junges Europa and betterplace lab. The 2021 campaign year takes place under the motto **#EntdeckeDasWirInDir** (DiscoverTheWeinYou)

The discussion paper “Transformation in Engagement and Engagement Undergoing Transformation” was developed as part of the European Volunteering Capital Berlin 2021 project.

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More information can be found on the website:  
[www.freiwilligenhauptstadt.berlin/](http://www.freiwilligenhauptstadt.berlin/)

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