

PARTICIPATORY METHODS TOOLKIT
A practitioner's manual

Technology Festival

Colophon

Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual
Method: Technology Festival

This is an extract of the publication 'Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual', a joint publication of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (viWTA).

The full version of the manual includes:

- Introduction about participatory methods
- General guidelines and tips for participatory methods
- Complete description of 13 participatory methods: 21st Century Town Meeting® ; Charrette ; Citizens Jury ; Consensus Conference ; Deliberative Polling® ; Delphi ; Expert Panel ; Focus Group ; Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation ; Planning Cell ; Scenario Building Exercise ; Technology Festival ; The World Café
- Brief descriptions of 50 methods and techniques

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Editors

Stef Steyaert (viWTA) and Hervé Lisoir (King Baudouin Foundation)

Author

Sara Heesterbeek (Rathenau Institute, The Netherlands)

Layout and printing

Belgian Advertising (B.AD)

Legal depot

D/2005/2893/19

ISBN

90-5130-506-0

With the support of the Belgian National Lottery

September 2005

TECHNOLOGY FESTIVAL

I. DEFINITION

A technology festival is a broad, easily accessible public event that is centred around one clearly defined subject. It is intended to provide a means for a popular and more comprehensive dialogue about socio-political issues that are complex, controversial and multi-faceted. Public debates about scientific and technological issues can be improved and enriched by organising a festival. By visiting a festival, people have the opportunity to immerse themselves in various aspects of the subject within a limited period of time. A festival consists of a balanced mix of information, amusement and activities that help to raise public awareness and opinion.

II. WHEN TO USE

A technology festival is particularly appropriate for complex issues that require a more active involvement of the broad public. It is designated to give people a neutral overview of the issue, a feeling of the richness of the subject, the various perspectives possible and the diverse ways in which modern society already deals with this subject in everyday life, politics, arts, media etc. A festival is not an appropriate means to substantially deepen the public and political discussion. However, it can certainly enrich an ongoing or stagnated discussion. It is possible to support political decision making through a festival, but to achieve this, a substantial part of the programme has to be deliberately designed for this purpose.

A technology festival can be usefully employed:

- to engage a large and diverse group (approximately 1000 visitors) of interested citizens in a specific subject
- to present a comprehensive overview of a complex, controversial and multifaceted subject
- to share and exchange knowledge about this subject
- when the subject influences the daily lives of the visitors in some way
- when a lot of information is readily available
- when different viewpoints can be easily defined and presented
- when different disciplines (politicians, practitioners, producers, consumers, stakeholders, ethicists, artists) already deal with this subject
- to provide the organisation with social visibility and a positive image

A technology festival is less useful when:

- the ultimate goal is to influence decision making
- the ultimate goal is to deepen the discussion
- the budget is too tight
- the availability of manpower is limited
- the location is not suitable for an extensive programme
- the subject is one-dimensional, reserved for a limited number of citizens or not controversial enough
- the subject is not on the political or social agenda, and is not likely to appear on it

It is important to keep in mind the connotation of a festival: visitors must have a choice to participate in various parts of the programme. Moreover, all parts of the programme must stand alone, because it is possible that some activities cannot be attended by everyone who would like to due to spatial or programmatic restrictions.

The first technology festival, 'The Night of Procreation', was organised by the Dutch Rathenau Institute in September 2001 on the topic of reproduction and infertility technologies. Due to the overwhelming success of this event, in both qualitative and quantitative respects, a second festival, 'Homo Sapiens 2.0', was organised in November 2003 to address the issue of 'human enhancement'.

III. PROCEDURE

TIP: The present description of the procedure is based on the way the first two technology festivals were conducted in The Netherlands. Therefore, many aspects of the design of the festival are dependent upon certain characteristics of the location (a science museum), the organisation (a technology assessment institute), time, budget, goal and the subject. While this overview attempts to generalise some aspects of a festival, most choices concerning time, budget, location, partnership will vary according to specific circumstances, making each festival unique. The judiciousness and feasibility of the decisions made can really only be determined during the festival itself.

A. Preparation

Subject:

The organisation of a festival begins with the determination and demarcation of the subject. A good subject is complex, generates different viewpoints and emotions, is of topical interest to a broad and diverse audience. In case not enough information about the subject is available at hand (a neutral overview, a basic study etc.), start the preparation of the festival by composing an information brochure. This requires extensive work, but this investment will prove worthwhile during the preparations, assignment of the programme, contact with participants, creation of the website and other means of communication..

TIP: Give the festival a catchy name that clearly refers to the subject and the content of the festival.

An information brochure should include the following information:

Introduction:

- the reason for organising the festival
- the goal(s) of the festival
- specific and non-specific target groups



Subject:

- description of the central subject
- demarcation of the subject
- detailed examination of the subject: the state of the art of the subject, the ongoing debate, the extensive network of people involved in this subject, the social and ethical issues on the individual and society at large, possible future scenarios.
- possible activities during the festival

Practical:

- composition of the festival team (with e-mail and phone numbers)
- short mission statement of the organisation and coordinates (can also be described in the introduction)

TIP: The Rathenau Institute used different sources of information for each technology festival. The Night of Procreation was closely linked to the presentation of three studies about procreation and infertility. These studies had been written by external researchers in advance and dealt with various aspects of the subject (historical, ethical, anthropological, demographical, juridical etc.). Since no comprehensive overview on human enhancement was available as background material for the second festival, the organising team composed the 'green booklet' an informational brochure that was divided into sub-sections on the enhancement of body, mind and offspring. The brochure focussed on the means of 'human enhancement'. (How can people be enhanced?), addressing ten different enhancing technologies: cloning, sex determination, pre-implantation genetic diagnostics, gene therapy, transplantation, cybernetics, cosmetic surgery, doping (in sports), nutrition, neuro-pharmaceuticals. It also addressed the scope of the subject (what exactly is it to be enhanced?) and examined social pro's and con's (ethical dilemma's on the individual and collective level, like medicalisation, normalisation, alienation, dependency, responsibility etc.).

Personnel:

The planning and project management of a technology festival form is the responsibility of a 'festival team', which consists of four to five persons. While each team member is responsible for a part of the organisation, those working on content and logistics must work together closely. The main responsibilities of these individuals are detailed below.

- General coordinator: Representative of the commissioning organisation that is ultimately responsible for the festival. He/she chairs meetings of the festival team, is responsible for the budget, and keeps the general overview.
- Content coordinator: Provides input (or information brochure) and is actively involved in the creation of the programme. He/she takes care of the content of different activities, ensuring a balanced composition of the programme and its separate parts. Depending on the magnitude of the festival, the content coordinator works together with several people that help to provide for accurate information, interesting persons, hot topics and current dilemma's etc. They function together as a content team. All ideas for activities should be approved by the general coordinator (for programmatic and budgetary permission), the practical coordinator and the representative of the location (feasibility and possible problems).

- Practical coordinator: Provides all logistics that are needed for the programme: produces a weekly update on the state of affairs with a list of participants and the latest programme, a list of all side activities, persons, technical staff etc. This person invites and maintains all contact with participants and provides them with information. He/she organises the overall timetable, briefing, information, food vouchers, travel expenses etc. for participants before and during the festival. In close consultation with the content coordinator it is decided what is needed and has to be organised for the programme.
- Communication coordinator: Takes care of the promotion: posters, flyers, website, press (free publicity!), advertisements and press activities during the festival.
- Representative of the location (in case the festival has to be organised externally): Delivers information about the venue (capacity, maps, fire regulations, itinerary, parking and loading regulations etc.) and the use of personnel (entrance, cloakroom, technical staff, security, catering, attendants etc.), and checks the programme on possible spatial problems or other bottlenecks.

Advisory committee

It is recommended to assemble an advisory committee of 5 to 7 persons who are knowledgeable about the subject in various ways in order to:

- ensure that all relevant issues and various perspectives are represented in a balanced and objective manner
- help explore the subject by giving advice about interesting developments, viewpoints, articles and persons
- give approval of the festival programme

This advisory committee advises three times during the whole preparation phase, the first time just after the subject has just been determined. This implies that the formation of the advisory committee has to be done at the very beginning of the whole process. The advisory committee can be asked for critical advice a second time when a first draft of the programme can be assessed. And finally the members can be assigned to several parts of the programme, for which they can serve as a walking encyclopedia for the content team.

Especially the first and second consultations are very important, and it is most fruitful to organise a physical meeting with all members, the general coordinator and content coordinator. At the first committee meeting the festival should be explained and the role of the advisory committee clearly defined. The members should be aware that their role is to assist and advise the content team. Advice on the separate parts of the programme (the third consultation) can also be given to the member of the content team working on this part directly by e-mail or phone.

Other people involved

Many people are involved in the execution of the festival:

- speakers: the programme of the festival is filled with lecturers (give basic information about the subject in a visually attractive presentation), moderators (conduct the debate), debaters (defend a position during a debate), writers (read a part of their work to the public), columnists (give their plain opinion), interviewers (interview interesting participants before an audience), comedians (deal in their own creative way with the subject) etc.
- attendants: are responsible for the organisation of a part of the programme in a room or hall. They supervise the access of the audience (max. capacity!!!), take care of and announce the speakers, take care of the audience, organise the microphones during interactive parts with the audience etc. They are assisted by a guard that is installed by the door, to prevent people from entering the room after the session has started, if it is a closed session.



- location managers: are located at a central spot and can be approached with practical questions about the location, the programme and scheme of the festival. Can contact people of the festival team if necessary.
- technical staff: help with all practical problems
- ICT support: help with multimedia presentations, video's etc., tape all lectures, debates, interviews, discussions etc.
- exhibitors: create an exhibition as part of the programme, or staff an information stand
- receptionists: welcome the visitors, hand over the programme and give information. The reception can best be divided in three parts: visitors, speakers, press.
- observers and evaluators: visit some parts of the programme to evaluate the festival. It is advised to give visitors when they enter a programme and an evaluation form, which can be delivered to the receptionist or posted in a box when leaving, or sent to a free address afterwards.
- journalists: attend several parts of the programme and write an impression about it. This will be used for the website and can be edited into a festival syllabus. It is important for the content and the communication coordinates to decide on the goal of the report and brief all journalists well about this. When working with multiple journalists, it is easier to appoint one delegate of the journalists.
- catering: serve food for all people involved (make a scheme who can eat at what time!) and the visitors.
- guards: are installed at every point where the entrance of people is limited, the audience has to be instructed, visitors have to be quiet etc.

TIP: It is important that all names and phone numbers of people that are responsible for one part of the programme are known, listed and distributed.

Planning of activities:

A festival consists of a well balanced mix of many different activities simultaneously. Depending on the subject, festival venue, the budget, manpower and time, the following activities can be organised during a festival:

- Presentations: People can be introduced to a subject most effectively through lectures on certain aspects of the subject. The state of the art, political and ethical viewpoints or future scenarios can all be communicated by interactive presentations. It is crucial that these lectures are visually attractive and that the lecturers give an interesting introduction. As the audience is broad and can't be defined beforehand, the presentation should offer a lot of basic information that visitors can use during the festival. A presentation should take 30 minutes and be followed by a 15 minute interactive question and answer session.
- Debates: A debate is useful to contextualise basic information (from a presentation) and to discuss various contrasting viewpoints. Debates can be organised in many ways, and a festival is a good opportunity to experiment with different methods. Polls in the audience, one-on-one quick debates, short interviews, a debate started by personal statements or experiences are all useful in setting the debate. The panel can be seated on stage from the start, or can enter the stage when their viewpoint is introduced. Irrespective of the set-up of the debate, the role of the moderator is always very important. (S)he has to be open minded, critical, sensitive to processes in the panel and audience and cooperative. A debate can last from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the scope of the subject and form.
- Interviews: An interview is a very simple and easy way to get to know more about personal experiences, motivations and convictions. Interviews can be conducted with the most interesting and talked-about participants, but also with relatively unknown people, because their viewpoints and experiences can be highly valuable.

- Polls: The visitors can be asked a question when they enter the festival, during parts of the programme, as input for the debate etc.
- Lab: Hands on experience can be very important when dealing with sophisticated, high-tech subjects.
- Meet the Profs: Simply moderated short session which gives the visitors the opportunity to directly ask questions to experts.
- Demonstrations
- Interactive workshops
- Exhibition
- Art
- Information market
- Speakers corner / soapbox
- Stand up comedy
- Film
- Theatre
- Quiz
- Contests (essays, debate, etc.)
- Music

TIP: Try to schedule basic presentations in the beginning of the programme. People will have the opportunity to inform themselves about issues that will be discussed during debates and other programme activities.

B. The Festival

The programme of a festival should be lively and abundant. Visitors select their own trajectory through the plethora of activities. This means that it is likely that not all parts of the programme can be attended. Choices have to be made. The two Dutch technology festivals were a one-day event that started in the afternoon and lasted until midnight or later. However, the activities can also be spread over a week.

The location is also subject to important choices. All activities can be organised in one place, but also spread over several locations within a city or over the country. When the organising party or a partner organisation is present all over the country, the festival can be organised at a national level.

TIP: Irrespective of the choices that are made about the magnitude of the programme, time and location, it is always very important that the atmosphere and content of the festival is perceived as a unity by the audience.

TIP: Keep in mind that some days of the week or the year are problematic for some people to attend because of pragmatic or religious reasons.

The programme

To provide an example of the composition of a festival, the programme of the festival Homo Sapiens 2.0 about human enhancement that the Rathenau Institute organised in 2003 is presented below.

LEGEND

 = lectures  = debates and panels  = interviews and talkshow  = cultural program

time	BALL ROOM	LUMIÈRE CINEMA	NEMO THEATRE	DA VINCI HALL
13.00		MAKEABLE BABY'S		
13.15		About choices before	HOMO XEROX About	
13.30		birth	cloning	
13.45				
14.00	COLUMNS	JUGGLING WITH GENES:		
14.15		Gentherapy	HIP HIP HURRAY FOR	
14.30			HUMA: About aging	
14.45			and immortality	
15.00		HOMO SAPIENS 1.0		NICE TALK
15.15	STAND-UP COMEDY	History of the	THE CHOSEN CHILD:	
15.30	Enhancement according	makeable Man	Debate on makeable	
15.45	Stand-up comedians		descendants	NICE TALK
16.00		MESSAGE FROM THE BRAIN		
16.15		Makeable conduct and		
16.30	COLUMNS	psychofarmaca	WHO CHOOSES, WHO	STRUGGLING GENDER:
16.45			PAYS? Debate on	About gender choice
17.00		HERSENKRAKERS EN	makeability and policy	
17.15		BREINBREKERS		
17.30		(untranslatable)	BECAUSE YOU'RE	IMMORTAL LIFE
		ABOUT NEUROSURGERY	WORTH IT? Debate on	About immortality
17.45			cosmetic surgery	
18.00	STAND-UP COMEDY	FROM HUMAN TO		
18.15	Enhancement according	HUMAN About		
18.30	Stand-up comedians	transplantation medicine	HAPPINESS ON	NICE TALK
18.45			PRESCRIPTION Debate	
19.00		AS GOOD AS NEW:	on pills for the psyche	NICE TALK
19.15		About (reconstructive)		
19.30		cosmetic surgery		





19.45			SCIENCE WITH A CONSCIENCE: Debate on the responsibility of science	TO SCORE! About drugs	
20.00	COLUMNS	CYBERNETICS Lecture on the future of human enhancement			
20.15					
20.30					
20.45			PLAYING GOD: Debate on enhancement and religion	NICE TALK	
21.00	STAND-UP COMEDY Enhancement according to Stand-up comedians	SMALL BUT BIG: About nanotechnology			
21.15					
21.30				NICE TALK	
21.45	COLUMNS	REVOLT OF THE HYBRIDS: Introduction to cyborgology	GENES FOR GOLD: Debate on top-class sport and (genetic) drugs		
22.00					
22.15					NICE TALK
22.30					
22.45					
23.00					
23.15					LATE NIGHT SHOW Closing event Homo 2.0
23.30					
23.45					
00.00					
00.15	PARTY dj's Rednose				
00.30	Distrikt Till 02.00 a.m.				

Events outside the Rooms

- Supermarket of the Future
- Pharmacy of the Future
- Brainmachine
- Metamorphose-machine
- Videolounge
- Exposition The Bizarre and the Beautiful
- Wonderlab
- Make a face
- Fashion and art
- Monologues

IV. RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

A. Timeline

The organisation of a festival is a very complex and time consuming process. The amount of time needed depends on many factors such as experience, competence, contentiousness of the issue, length of the project, magnitude of the festival etc. It is best when the organisation of a festival starts one year in advance.

B. Budget

Depending on various choices, the following parts listed can be budgetary items of a festival:

- location of the festival
- personnel
- audio-video-multimedia technology
- additional activities like an exhibition, demonstration etc. that have to be created for the festival
- travel costs for all participants
- communication and promotion
- materials and supplies
- decorations (physical and virtual)
- food
- accommodation for participants

TIP: The amount of time that the festival team works requires for preparation of the event determines a significant portion of the budget. Sometimes it is better to hire external expertise, because they can be more skilled in certain tasks and may require less time.

A festival can be a free event. In case an admission fee is asked, this must be in correspondence with the programme offered. It is advisable not to exceed the price of two good debates in a well-known debating centre.

V. ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

In order to organise a real festival, and not only an extended public activity, some things are of crucial importance:

- The spectrum of visitors has to be broad enough
- The number of visitors: sessions that are attended by only a few persons certainly do not add to the idea of a festival! Consider using smaller rooms or narrowing the available space to create a sufficiently full impression.
- The atmosphere: has to be relaxed. If people do not want to attend sessions in a certain timeframe, they must have the opportunity to be confronted with the issue in other surprising ways. Therefore, the installation of an interesting side programme is advisable.
- Arrange the programme of the festival around policy implications and choices in order to end up with concrete results and advice.