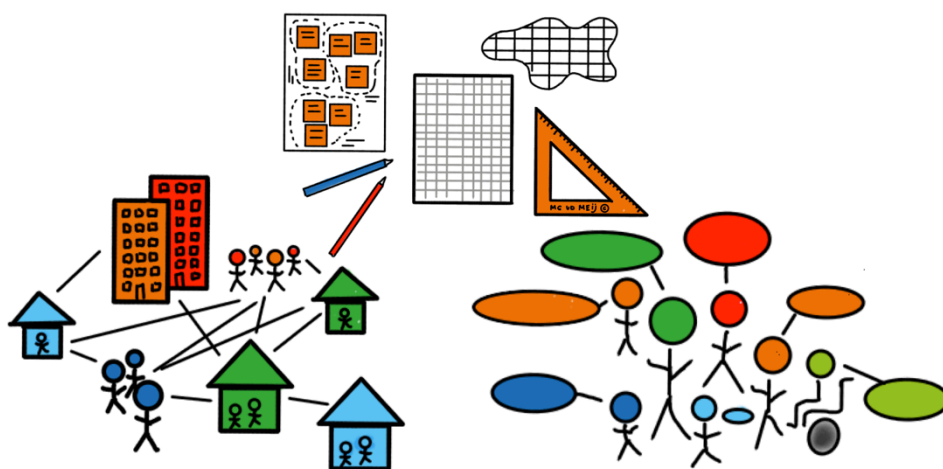




TRAINING AND REFLECTION MODULE

Designing multi-stakeholder events



In a nutshell

This document provides inspiration for designing multi-stakeholder events (to facilitate food system transformation).

What for?

The guideline helps you to work with communities

How long?

Applying the content of this document can take several hours, to several months or years

For whom?

Intermediaries in food system transformation

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Something to share?

Log in to the [platform](#) and leave a comment about this tool.

Date of creation: July 2020

How to cite?

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What will you gain from this?

Food system transformation facilitators, policy makers or researchers that use the inspiration material provided in this document, will be supported in creating and running (memorable) multi-stakeholders events, which in turn support setting up and running a (sustainable) network, platform or lab that can (eventually) contribute to food system transformation in a specifically targeted (local) context.

Participants of multi-stakeholder events that are designed with the inspiration materials provided in this document will be enter 'safe spaces' for inclusive and equal knowledge exchange, co-creation and participation in food system transformation.

Target audience

This document is designed for a variety of stakeholders with certain interest to be a driver in food system transformation. Users of this document can be intermediaries in food system transformation (including science centres), but also researchers, universities, or civil servants.

The targeted participants of multi-stakeholder events for which we provide inspiration in this document, are 'citizens' and 'stakeholders' (in the widest sense of the word) related to the food system in a specifically targeted (local) context

DESIGNING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER EVENTS

Principles of event design

When setting up and running a platform or lab for facilitating food system transformation, all your events are ideally organized and run in line with your intentions. When your platform or lab commits to (for instance) responsible research and innovation (RRI), pillars such as inclusion, equality, reflexivity, openness and/or anticipation are relevant design conditions for your events¹. Adhering to such pillars requires event design in which multiple stakeholders are included; either by means of heterogeneity within one event, or by means of a series of 'homogeneous events'. Furthermore, your events are likely to be focused on dialogue, knowledge exchange and/or co-creation between the multiple stakeholders.

"In the practice of stakeholder engagement or dialogue event design, many organizers of events (still) have a tendency to apply 'old-school' principles of event design. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the typical mistakes: a podium with expert doing talks, and rows or groups of 'other' participants that (only) get the floor during (lengthy) Q&A sessions. A good base for true dialogue – let be knowledge exchange or co-creation – is hard to find in such settings."

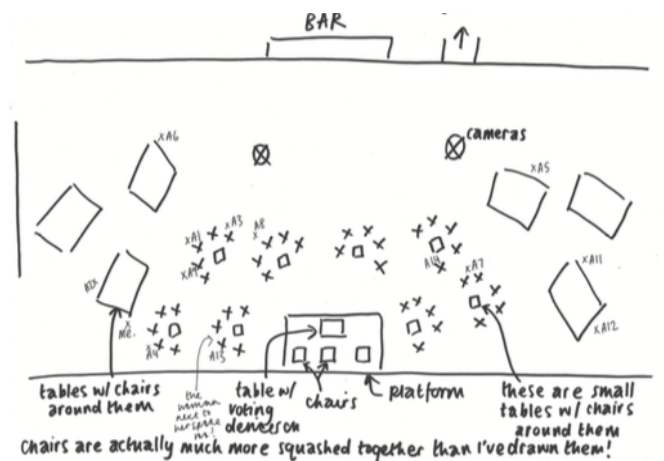


Figure 1: Drawing of a 'dialogue' event set-up in practice (adopted from Davies, 2011)

Once you decide to work on multi-stakeholder food system transformation by means of events that facilitate true dialogue, knowledge exchange and co-creation, events designs are more likely to look like the set-up in Figure 3. This document provides inspiration materials to do so.

¹ See, for instance, van der Meij, M. G., Broerse, J. E. W., & Kupper, F. (2017). Conceptualizing playfulness for reflection processes in responsible research and innovation contexts: a narrative literature review. *JOURNAL OF RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION*, 4(1), 43-63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2017.1326258>



Challenges of multi-stakeholder events

The most commonly stressed challenge of multi-stakeholder events is the variety of ‘stakes’ that stakeholders have – the reason for calling them ‘stakeholders’ – regarding a topic that is central in an event. With a transformative topic in mind like ‘changing the food system’, some stakeholders have more power to realize it; some have more interest; while others have less power or interest. Inviting and thereby including stakeholders with low(er) power and low(er) interest in the topic at stake is hard in itself; but the differences in stakes between stakeholders pose the biggest challenges: the variety can inhibit maintaining a safe space for all participants. Strong facilitation can help, and adequate event design can help as well. This document merely focuses on the latter.

Event components

When running a lab or platform, you may organize multi-stakeholder events once per day, week, month or year. Whichever event-frequency you adopt, the designing of such events entails more or less the same. Figure 1 shows several components of designing multi-stakeholder sessions, although it is not as linear as the figure suggests.

The **aims** of a multi-stakeholder event may vary from relationship building, to knowledge exchange, co-creation, or maybe even attitude or behavioral change; or a combination thereof. The event **topic** may be related to the current (transformative) actions you want to take in your platform or lab (e.g. ‘developing visions for food waste elimination’), or a more over-arching theme (e.g. ‘towards a future proof food system’). The topic choice may come along with a list of question or issues to cover during the event. To keep participants focused, we recommend covering each question or issue after one another (and not altogether at once) in a logically ordered sequence of sessions during an event.

The stakeholder list that you invite as **participants** for your events depends on the aim of the event and possible required event conditions. For example, if ‘representativeness’ is a condition to the multi-stakeholder event, the following options can be considered:

- Demographic representation
- Stakeholder representation (who’s affecting, involved or affected?)
- Cognitive representation (diversity of ideas)

With each participant that you invite, it is useful to consider (and keep track of) the reasons behind your invitation. Depending on the eventual participant list, a decision can be made for the location and medium (online or offline?).

	% of responses	K's alpha
Drew a traditional classroom/auditorium	92	1.00
Scheduled an expert presentation	87	.75
Scheduled question or discussion period	83	1.00
Drew seating for 40 or more participants**	77	.89
Scheduled between 45 and 75 minutes of questions/discussion*	46	.77
Scheduled between 0 and 44 minutes of questions/discussion*	32	.77
Scheduled between 76 and 150 minutes of questions/discussion*	22	.77
Drew seating for between 21 and 40 participants	16	.89
Drew tables for participants to face each other	14	1.00
Drew seating for 20 participants or less**	11	.89
Scheduled an opportunity to vote	9	.94
Expressed a negative sentiment in drawing or schedule	3	1.00
Scheduled an opportunity for one-on-one discussions	3	.82

*Measured as part of the same variable.

**Measured as part of the same variable.

Figure 2: Analysis of citizen-drawings about public engagement events (adopted from Beslev, 2010)



Figure 2: Event set-up suitable for dialogue, knowledge exchange and co-creation



Figure 4: Components of event design (in reality not that linear)



Crucial to events design is the **facilitation** that you apply. The idea of a ‘free dialogue’ does not mean that the dialogue should be unstructured. In the contrary! Ideally, the facilitator (or the team of facilitators) makes sure that the event design is very structured, yet with a lot of built-in flexibility. We elaborate on this simultaneous structure and flexibility in the following section on event design explicitly.

Design principles for an event set-up

Ideally, designs of multi-stakeholder events are highly structured, yet flexible, follow a well-thought sequence in exercises and apply conditions to ensure a safe environment for exchange. This section covers these aspects.

Multi-stakeholder event designs need to be strongly structured. Amongst others, this can be done by means of allocating and adhering to precise durations for the exercises, the use of (prepared) materials like canvases or cards that participants can use to converse with one another, but also by clear instructions of a facilitator. For the latter, we recommend scripting and piloting all exercises before an event. Further structuring elements to apply during events are the ‘listen-summarize-clarify’ method (“*so you said ..., is that right? And what does it mean to.....?*”), and note taking by means of keywords on (post-its on) a flipchart or on a big screen.

In creating a logical event-sequence, it can be useful to consider the distinction between diverging, converging and clustering (see Figure 5). Some events cover each of these elements, while other events focus on one of them:

- **Diverging** comprises of **idea generation**, in which ‘diversity’ and ‘quantity over quality’ are important. Exercises for diverging are mostly creative, such as free mind-mapping or other forms of brainstorming (post-its), flow diagrams, drawing, association, or even role-play (*thinking from the perspective of your superhero, what would she or he do?*).
- **Converging** is about **selecting or prioritizing ideas** and elaborating on them up to a desired detail or end-quality. Ranking is one commonly used tool for converging, in which points are allocated to each alternative idea. Alternative converging tools are timelines (*what should be first to realize the next?*) and matrices (e.g. *needed now – needed later, vs. currently represented – currently underrepresented*, see Figure 6).
- Between diverging and converging, there is a **clustering** step, in which ideas generated in the diverging stage are **sorted** for uptake in the converging step. A typical clustering exercise is post-it re-clustering and inventing themes or names for each created cluster of post-its. Mind mapping (creating hierarchy: *what is part of what?*) and timelines (*what should be done when?*) are commonly applied sorting tools.

When designing an event, it is useful to think well about which event-step is diverging and which is clustering or converging, and align the nature of the exercises along with these choices. We recommend sticking to the sequence of diverging, clustering and converging in case all these steps are being covered in one event, or within the exercises of an event. After all, it is possible that several ‘diamonds’ – exercises with diverging and converging elements in them – build upon one another (see Figure 2). In that case, the earlier exercises usually allow wider brainstorming than the later exercises; in other words, later exercises include diverging, albeit within stronger boundary conditions.

Simultaneous to the structure of multi-stakeholder events, there should be a high degree of flexibility built-in event designs as well. This involves responding to the needs of participants during each step of an event, but also by time between exercises for spontaneous happenings.

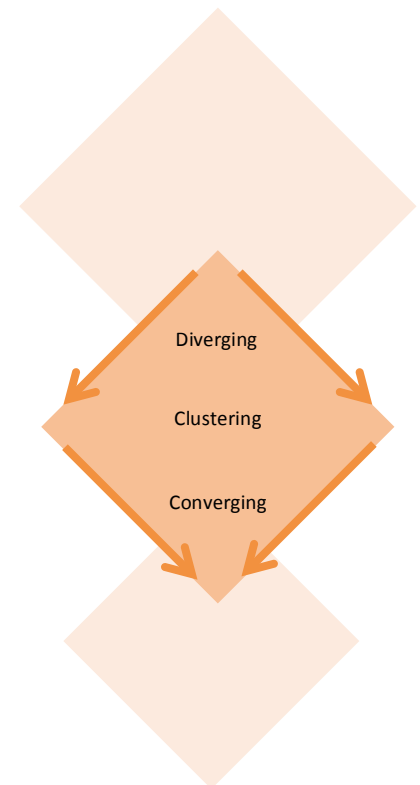


Figure 5: Visualization of diverging, clustering and converging

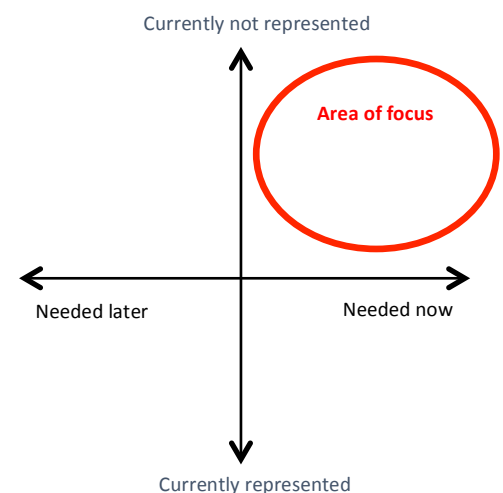


Figure 6: Example matrix for converging



Shaping event conditions

When participants are engaged in creative thinking – mostly at stake in diverging exercises – a balance should be sought between competitive and complementary interaction. In such cases, the application of event-rules can be a solution. Commonly applied event rules are:

- One conversation at a time, focus on one topic
- Try to avoid interrupting one another
- Ideas are from everybody (co-creation)
- This session is not about who you are, but about what you think
- Everything is ok and allowed, wild ideas are encouraged
- Post-pone judgments (in the moment now)
- Try to associate further upon one another ideas
- Quantity is more important now than quality.

An often overlooked aspect in multi-stakeholder event design, is to explicitly built-in elements that create a safe and trustworthy environment' in which conversations easily 'float around'. We recommend to safeguarded this by:

- Setting (see Figure 7 for an artist impression):
 - Choose for a background noise-free environment (soft, absorbing materials on walls and ceilings; use mute by default in online meetings!)
 - Open structure, enough space to talk and walk
 - (Sub-)Group sizes of 5-12 maximum
 - No hierarchy (round set-up, no table heads, no podium)
 - Maximum event duration (2-3h)
- Atmosphere:
 - Comfortable furniture
 - Uplifting music upon arrival
 - Inspiration materials
- Activities:
 - Warming up and get-to-know-each-other exercises
 - Positive, energetic tone
 - Alternate between individual, small group and plenary exchanges
 - Constructive and creative exercises.

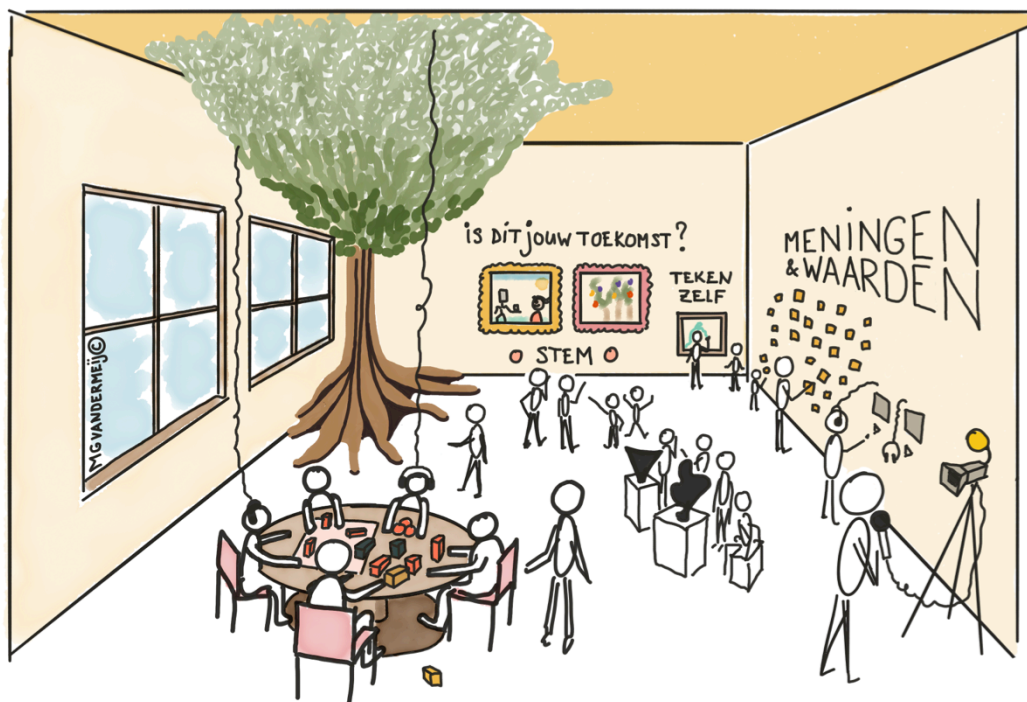


Figure 7: Artist impression of a creative and safe space for multi-stakeholder interactions (by MG van der Meij).





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