3.3.2 Methods and Methodology

Question – what's the plural of method? Answer – methods, not methodology. This is the first point that needs clarification in this section. A method is an activity which you plan, it gives a framework to a certain part of the program. It could be an energizer, a simulation game, a lecture. Methodology, on the other hand, is the educational logic of the methods chosen. The simulation exercise *Ecotonos* is a method, simulation is a methodology based on a philosophy of experiential learning. Therefore your methodology is closely related to the training strategy, it is the rubric by which the individual methods are chosen. It is the overview of the methods in the program, looking at the balance of types, how they relate to learning styles, individual\group activity, and so on. What this also suggests is that choosing a method is not a simple question of finding activities which will fill the time frame available to you. This section addresses the range of questions which should be considered before a method is decided upon.

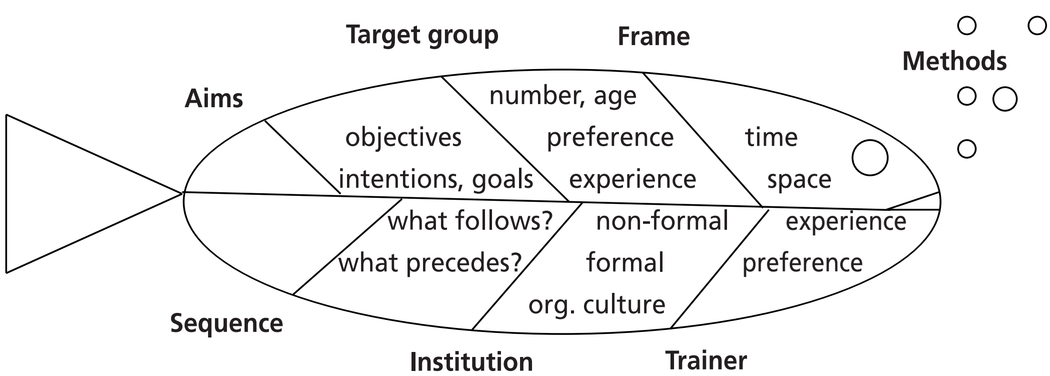
A method is the point at which all of the training planning is presented to the participants. As such, it is responsible for communicating alot about this prior process. A five hour lecture on participation and citizenship without questions or toilet breaks may seem a little odd. The method chosen and the relations between the axes of the triangle which it represents would not seem to fit with the values being espoused by the content or the training. At a fundamental level then, the method must relate to the vision and purpose of the training – in other words, the underlying values, overall aims, and specific objectives. The method chosen must fulfill a specific objective and also represent a system of values central to the whole enterprise. If we begin to collate a checklist of questions which can be referred to when choosing methods, then the initial ones would be:

- Is the chosen method in line with the values that are transmitted in the content and by the aims of the training?
- Can the method deliver the objectives specified for this stage of the training strategy? (Complete this sentence: at the end of this session I would like to say that participants…..)

These questions are also useful for teams to take stock of their shared understandings. Clearly, if team members are answering differently to these questions, a review of the process may have to be undertaken.

To begin relating the methods to an overview of factors, we can, like the ancient Romans, turn to the insides of the fish.

TE-8



The bubbles the fish breathes represent the methods, these have been generated by passing through the entire body. By looking along the ribs, we can check the factors which have influenced this. We can also relate these to the elements in the globe. Relevant questions to consider in relation to the group may be:

- How does the methodology reflect the reality of the group, in other words, are different methods used in the overall program which respond to different learning styles, needs and speeds?
- What kind of communication does the method encourage in the group?
- Does the method contribute to the process of group building, or is that an issue at this point?
- What levels of trust and familiarity does the method presume in the group?
- How does the method correspond to your understanding of the group dynamics at this point?
- How does the method address the group needs and responsibilities at this point in the training strategy?

Within these group considerations, we can add a further set of questions concerning the individual, and address that axis of the triangular relationship:

- Does the method consider any individual biographical information that may be relevant? (age, education, language, socio-cultural background, previous experience)
- Does the method allow active participation of the learner?
- Does the method engage more than verbal-intellectual skills?
- Does it give time and opportunity to the learner to get into contact with her feelings, interests and thoughts?
- Will the learner realise that she is responsible for her learning and personal development?
- Are questions raised that motivate further investigation, training, exchange or study?'
- Does the method raise reactions and emotions that can be dealt with in the context?
- Does the method presume certain physical capacities on the part of the participant?

The method has an obvious relationship to the topic, it is chosen to advance the exploration of the topic at a particular moment. Thinking back to the training strategy, the method needs to be related to the objectives of the content and the relation of the trainer and group to the content at that moment:

- What prior knowledge does the method assume? (intellectual, emotional, etc)
- How does the method relate to what has gone before and what will come after?
- How does the method value and incorporate the contributions of the group?
- What information is provided by the trainer, and what is left to the participants to supply or find themselves?
- Which elements of the topic are prioritised by the method at this point, and why?

And finally, the globe also suggests a range of factors which have to be taken into account.

- Is the method feasible?
- Is the method secure physically and safe pyschologically?
- Are the necessary materials available and budgeted for?
- How does the physical environment impact on the choice of method?
- Is there enough time, alowing for small delays, to complete the activity and fulfill the objectives?

Note: many of the questions above were suggested by or adapted from a handout "Considerations for the Design of Training Programmes and the Choice of Methods", by Antje Rothemund, for 'Training for Trainers', European Youth Center Budapest 1998, (itself adapted from Gerl, H: «Methoden der Erwachsenenbildung» in Pöggeler, *Handbuch der Erwachsenenbildung*, Stuttgart 1985).

Suggestion for Reflection

1. Having studied this list of questions, can you add any more to the different categories?
2. Are these suggested by particular experiences?

3.3.3 Methods and the Trainer

Ultimately of course, the success of the chosen method depends on the trainer delivering the trainer. Somebody once said that trainers are human, and that is probably true. Nevertheless, like so many other areas of life, some simple precautions can guard against unwanted outcomes. A method which involves a group in an experiential learning situation is not an exact science, and there is great value to be had in unexpected contributions and directions. These can only be valuable however, if the trainer is aware that they are unexpected, and can relate them to the objectives and anticipated flow of the session. Basically, a trainer needs to feel comfortable with the method, and confident in their capability to see it through. The following statements can act as a guide to assessing the suitability of the method to you as trainer. The questions are particularly suited to the process of choosing methods for intercultural learning:

When choosing methods, the trainer should……

– Feel confident and convinced about the method.
– Whenever possible, have experienced the method fully as a participant (or be part of a team where people have had that experience and can workshop it with the rest of the team)
– Be in a position to anticipate the outcomes but also deal with unexpected ones
– Be aware of the place of their own opinions and interpretations, and work with the interpretations and associations of the participants
– Make the objectives of the program unit clear, while avoiding dogmatic facilitation.
– Try not to use methods that might cause feelings in participants or the group which cannot be dealt with during the training.
– Accept that some people may not wish to participate in a particular exercise.
– Have a carefully worked out strategy for debriefing and feedback, which can also be adapted to deal with unexpected outcomes.
– Be aware that learning is change, and that this can be an uncomfortable experience. Participants may make the method (or, indeed the trainer) responsible for their discomfort. The trainer has to carefully analyse whether the discomfort was caused by the method or by the feelings and discoveries elicited by the method.

(Statements adapted from Rothemund, op.cit).

A checklist of this nature can be qualified – it obviously depends on a range of factors specific to the training context. Yet it also raises issues concerning the role of the trainer and trainer's ethics; how she sees her relation and power to the group, what it is acceptable to ask people to do, and so forth (see also 1.2.3).

3.4 Logistical considerations

Organising a training course is like preparing yourself for a journey. One of our grandmothers used to say the better you prepare your luggage, the easier the time you will have. And we think she's right. She never said much about youth work, but a training course is the same. The better you prepare it, the better prepared you are to expect the unexpected. This section takes a conventional division of three phases, and considers the practical and logistical issues you will encounter before, during and after. It is also worth bearing in mind that while the course is usually the most attractive phase, conducting an complete training means placing equal worth on every stage.

The following table is very general and contains the basic elements that need to be considered when preparing and running a training course. It presents the logical sequence of mainly administrative actions that need to be taken. We have avoided suggesting a time frame as this depends on many variables and specific features, from the nature of the training to the size, needs and traditions of the organisation. As a general rule, you could think of our granny, and don't underestimate the time that some administrative tasks may take, such as visa requests.

3.4.1 Before

SEQUENCE	ACTION	CONSIDERATIONS
1	– Needs assessment – Decision on the topic – Decision on date, hosting organisation, types of event and deadlines	Each organisation has it's own structure and its own decision making process, but this is normally the first thing you have to do: investigate and assess the needs and aspirations of your members and identify the most suitable topics for training
2	– Research available grant and necessary conditions [5] – Write the grant application	It is extremely important not to underestimate the length of this procedure, check also the precise schedule for each grant.
3	– Request placed with hosting organisation and confirmation sought	A clear and detailed list of requests and expected support should be submitted to the hosting organisation to allow it to decide if they are willing and able to host the event. Information about facilities for disabled should be sought at this stage. A preliminary date is set for the preparatory team meeting and the seminar. The exact venue is organised by the host organisation, with a confirmation about its suitability being given by the preparatory team and/or the responsible of the event when it has been seen during the preparatory team meeting. In some cases the event venue requires a deposit. Do not forget to ask about a cancellation fee
4	– Selection of the preparatory team	Organisations normally follow their own internal selection procedures, but should pay attention to questions of multiculturalism and gender in the team composition. It should be clearly stated what expectations are held regarding the experience and commitments requested from the team.

5. Different grants are available both at national or international level. At international level in the frame of Europe both the Council of Europe and the European Union provided grant for youth activities under determined conditions. For more information you could look at the following website: Council of Europe: http://www.coe.int, or European Union: http://europa.eu.int

SEQUENCE	ACTION	CONSIDERATIONS
5	– Preparatory team meeting	The preparatory meeting is ideally held at the venue. The invitation to this meeting should include an agenda for the meeting and detailed information useful for the preparation of the event such as resolutions or policies, the funding application, reports from previous events and so forth. During the meeting the objectives, program, session contents, working methods, participants profile, and team responsibilities are decided. The exact dates of the seminar are also confirmed. Immediately following the meeting the responsible of the event sends the report to the planning team.
6	– Possible interpretation staff	When the dates of the seminar have been confirmed the responsible could contact the interpretation company to check their availability, stating what facilities are available at the venue, what needs to be hired, and cost of possible cancellation.
7	– Invitations to experts and external trainers	If expert speakers have been included in the program they should be identified, contacted and briefed by the preparatory team. Do not forget to update them on amendments to the programme and to forward the materials you send to participants.
8	– Invitations to organisations and participants	Following the preparatory meeting, an invitation to the event is written. The invitation is sent to all target group organisation and potential participants. The invitation should contain aims and objectives of the event, working methods, participants' profile, application form (including dietary requirements, language abilities), travel form, visa request, instructions for disabled access and a clear application deadline. Don't forget to mention conditions for cancellation.
9	– Shortlist of applicants and send-out of acceptance letters	Based on the criteria expressed in the participants' profile the preparatory team shortlist the candidates and send them acceptance letters. These normally contain detailed information about the program and venue, how to get there and instructions for payments. Attention should be paid to disabled people who would like to attend. They should be provided with accurate information and all the necessary action to allow them to participate should be taken.

SEQUENCE	ACTION	CONSIDERATIONS
10	– Liase with host organisation on visa requests	Once the visa requests have been received they are sent to the hosting organisation, which issues the invitation to obtain the visa. Attention should be paid to the fact that a lot of countries have particular requests and formalities that need to be respected.
11	– Payment of participation fee	Some organisations require the payment of a participation fee beforehand by bank transfer, others by cash upon arrival. This means that precise bank details should be provided and the relevant currency indicated.
12	– Preparation of relevant documents and materials	Once the number of participants is clear material and relevant documents for the activities can be translated if necessary, and photocopied for the preparatory team and for the participants as appropriate. (This material could also include a certificate of attendance)

3.4.2 During

SEQUENCE	ACTION	CONSIDERATIONS
1	– Preparatory team meeting	It is advisable that the preparatory team arrives before the participants. This is to allow some time to review the program and to consider it in relation to the expectations expressed in the application forms. Last minute tasks and problems (arranging accommodation and meeting rooms as appropriate, finalising the preparation of material and a welcome pack with the necessary information about the venue and the event) can also be dealt with.
2	– A range of administrative tasks, including checking payments, correcting the list of participants, relevant claim forms. Depending on the grant received, there could be the possibility of claiming for loss of earnings, or equivalent claims.	The participants are asked to check their details, then the list can be amended and distributed. Precise instructions should be provided for completing claim forms, in the event that they are provided for in the overall grant.
3	– The daily report	Participants may be responsible for writing a daily report. These reports are later used as the basis for the event report. See *4.4.8* on report writing
4	– 'On the spot' reimbursement	If participants need a cash reimbursement, ask them to complete the appropriate expense claim. Attach all receipts or ask participants to forward them as soon as possible. In this case, take a copy!
And	– ALL THE REST!!!	The team shouldn't be overwhelmed by these administrative tasks, remember there is an educational program as well…

3.4.3 After

SEQUENCE	ACTION	CONSIDERATIONS
1	– Travel and loss of earnings reimbursements, as applicable.	The responsible of the event should pass all the claim forms to the appropriate person in the organisation to proceed with reimbursements.
2	– Thanking the team, venue and hosting organisation (letter, fax or small present as appropriate)	The responsible finds the most appropriate way to thank the venue, the host organisations, the expert speakers, the planning team
3	– The report	Depending on the practice of the organisation, and the grant stipulations, the appropriate report should be prepared and sent to the relevant people.
4	– Evaluation meeting	When feasible, the preparatory team should meet once more to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the event.
5	– Follow-up activities	Many events foresee a series of follow up activities, which could include projects prepared during the course, exchanges of results or establishing a website. See Part 6 on the follow up phase.

Clearly there are a lot of elements to bear in mind, in terms of both human and financial resource management. It is important that the various responsible parties for the event (the organisation, preparatory team and to some extent the expert speakers and participants also) have an overview of the different elements which contribute to a successful event. With this in mind, it is worth pointing out that team flexibility and preparing for the unexpected are as central to the smooth flow of administrative tasks as they are to the socio-educational elements of the event. May our granny be with you!

Suggestions for Reflection

At the beginning of this chapter we said that the tables suggest a sequence of action (mainly administrative) which could help you when preparing a training event. We deliberately choose not to indicate any timing for the different action so now…it is up to you:

– Think of the size, structure, management and traditions of your organisation. With this in mind, try to allocate on this time line the timing you think is more appropriate for the suggested action sequence (one month before, or one month after, etc).

BEFORE												
Actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Time line												
______________________________												event

You can then repeat this diagram for AFTER.