Simulation Game (Gamification)

A Simulation Game is a participatory method in which participants take on different roles within a fictional scenario and work together to make decisions. Real-world challenges are recreated in a simplified way, allowing participants to better understand complex relationships, conflicts, and decision-making processes through active experience.

Participation Depth	Participate
Project Phase	Concept Development
Goals	Developing Ideas
Format	Analogue, Digital
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30
Characteristics	Playful, Creative

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Simulation Game is to make complex relationships and decision-making processes understandable through direct experience. By taking on different roles, participants explore multiple perspectives while engaging with challenges, conflicts, and possible solutions. The method also encourages creative thinking, collaboration, and a deeper understanding of political, social, or planning processes.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the topic and objectives
Consider:

- Which topic will be explored?
- What should participants learn or understand?
- What is the central question?

Examples include:

- the future of mobility in a neighbourhood
- redesigning a public square
- managing conflicting uses of public space

- climate adaptation in urban areas

2. Develop the scenario
Create a scenario that is realistic while remaining easy to understand.

The scenario should:

- include concrete challenges
- highlight different interests and perspectives
- allow participants to make meaningful decisions

Example:

"A village is about to lose its bus service. Participants take on different roles and work together to develop future mobility solutions."

3. Prepare the roles
Define the different roles participants will assume.

Examples include:

- mayor
- local resident
- transport planner
- youth representative
- environmental initiative representative
- local business owner

Each role description should include:

- objectives
- interests
- possible conflicts
- background information

Important:

Role descriptions should be clear and easy to understand while leaving enough room for participants to interpret and develop their roles.

4. Prepare the game phases and tasks
Plan the different stages of the simulation.

Examples include:

- problem analysis
- idea generation
- discussion and negotiation
- decision-making and budgeting

Prepare:

- guiding questions
- task descriptions
- time allocations
- supporting materials

5. Organise the venue and schedule
Provide:

- enough space for group work
- a shared space for plenary discussions
- sufficient time for breaks and reflection

If the simulation is conducted online:

- test the technology beforehand
- provide clear instructions for access
- ensure technical support is available

6. Invite participants

The invitation should clearly explain:

- the purpose of the Simulation Game
- that the session is interactive and role-based
- the duration of the activity
- what participants can expect

Providing this information helps reduce uncertainty and encourages participation.

Execution

1. Welcome and introduction
At the beginning of the session, the game facilitator explains:

- the topic and objectives
- the overall process
- the rules of the simulation
- the role allocation
- the schedule

Important:

Many participants may be unfamiliar with Simulation Games. Allow enough time to explain how the activity works before it begins.

2. Getting to know the roles
Participants read their role descriptions and familiarise themselves with their responsibilities and interests.

Helpful guiding questions include:

- What are the objectives of my role?
- Which challenges does my role face?
- Which interests might conflict with those of other roles?

A short round of introductions while staying in character can help participants immerse themselves in the simulation.

3. Working through the tasks

Participants now work through the different game phases or assignments.

Depending on the structure of the simulation, they may:

- discuss challenges
- develop solutions
- negotiate with other participants
- make decisions
- prioritise measures

The facilitation team supports the groups by ensuring that:

- everyone participates
- the schedule is maintained
- conflicts are addressed constructively

4. Negotiation and decision-making
In many Simulation Games, participants eventually negotiate and make decisions together.

This allows them to recognise:

- where interests align
- where conflicts arise
- which compromises are possible

Constructive disagreement is an important and valuable part of this phase.

5. Closing and reflection
At the end of the activity, participants step out of their roles and reflect together on the experience.

Helpful reflection questions include:

- How did it feel to take on this role?
- What did you find challenging?
- Which conflicts emerged?
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Which solutions seemed realistic?

- What lessons can be transferred to real-life situations?

Reflection is one of the most important elements of the Simulation Game and should not be omitted.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Record:

- developed solutions
- key discussions and conflicts
- decisions made
- insights from the reflection session

Useful documentation methods include:

- photographs
- written notes
- maps or worksheets
- digital documentation

2. Analyse the outcomes
Consider:

- Which perspectives became visible?
- Which solutions were developed?
- Which topics require further discussion?

The results can then:

- be explored further in workshops
- inform real planning processes
- contribute to educational or participatory initiatives

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- complex topics should be communicated in an engaging and understandable way
- different perspectives need to be explored
- supporting educational or participatory processes
- participants should learn through active experience rather than theory alone
- working with young people or mixed target groups

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- there is no room for creative thinking or open-ended solutions
- the topic is highly abstract and cannot be represented through a realistic scenario
- sufficient preparation is not possible

TIPS

- Use scenarios that are closely connected to everyday life and easy to understand.
- Keep role descriptions concise and manageable.
- Ensure that the game elements support the learning objectives rather than overshadowing the actual topic.
- Allow sufficient time for reflection, as it is often the most valuable part of the method.
- The method is particularly effective when the goal is to explore different perspectives or make conflicts visible.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- formal political decision-making processes
- very large groups without sufficient facilitation
- topics where there is no meaningful scope for action
- processes with insufficient time for preparation or reflection

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/planspiel