Restaurant Day

Restaurant Day is an open participation format in which people set up temporary restaurants, cafés, or food stalls for one day in public spaces, courtyards, community centres, clubs, or other suitable locations. Within a participation context, the focus is not on the food itself but on conversation. Food serves as a low-threshold opportunity to bring people together, encourage dialogue, and create new connections. Restaurant Days can activate neighbourhoods, engage new target groups, and collect ideas and opinions about places or projects. They are also often used to temporarily transform public spaces and explore new possibilities for their future use.

Participation Depth	Inform
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 Day
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups, Organised Actors
Group Size	Medium Group up to 30, Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Creative, Playful

GOAL OF THE METHOD

Restaurant Day creates opportunities for people who would not normally meet to connect and exchange ideas.

Informal conversations help reveal experiences, ideas, and wishes while allowing public spaces to be tested,

activated, and reimagined.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the Objective and Theme
Clarify the purpose of the Restaurant Day.

Possible objectives include:

- strengthening neighbourhood connections
- collecting ideas for a public space
- activating a public area
- engaging people in a project
- connecting different groups

A thematic focus can be helpful but is not essential. The primary objective is to bring people together and encourage openness towards future participation projects.

2. Select a Suitable Location
The location should be accessible, visible, and welcoming.

Suitable locations include:

- public squares
- parks
- courtyards
- community centres
- vacant shops
- club facilities

Ensure there is sufficient space for seating and informal conversations.

3. Recruit Participants
Invite individuals or groups who would like to host a temporary café, food stall, or restaurant.

Possible participants include:

- neighbourhood initiatives
- community organisations
- schools
- youth groups
- senior groups
- local organisations
- individual volunteers

A diverse group of hosts encourages a wider range of perspectives.

4. Clarify Organisational Requirements
Before the event, address practical and legal considerations, including:

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permits

- food hygiene regulations
- electricity supply
- seating
- waste disposal
- weather contingency planning

5. Prepare Conversation Prompts
To encourage dialogue alongside eating, prepare discussion prompts.

Examples include:

- What do you like most about this place?
- What is missing in the neighbourhood?
- What changes would you like to see?
- What ideas do you have for the future?

Questions can be displayed on signs, tablecloths, or moderation cards.

Execution

1. Set Up the Temporary Restaurants
Participants prepare their food stalls or cafés.

The layout should encourage interaction and conversation.

2. Welcome and Invite Visitors
Actively invite visitors to sit down, enjoy some food, and join conversations.

Hosts who welcome newcomers and introduce people to one another are particularly helpful.

3. Facilitate Conversations
Discussions take place informally.

Prepared questions can be used to collect experiences, ideas, and suggestions.

Depending on the objectives, additional participation methods may include:

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pinboards

- idea collection boards
- feedback cards
- voting activities

4. Document Contributions
Record important comments, ideas, and observations throughout the event.

Suitable methods include:

- written notes
- photographs
- mapping activities
- audio recordings
- short interviews

5. Closing Session
At the end of the event, present a brief summary of the main findings.

Highlight recurring themes, suggestions, and ideas for improvement.

Evaluation

1. Analyse the Results
Bring together all collected contributions and organise them.

Pay particular attention to:

- recurring themes
- areas of conflict
- ideas
- suggestions for future development

2. Share the Results
Prepare the findings in an accessible format and share them with participants.

This demonstrates the value of the conversations and makes the collected insights visible.

Photos or videos taken during the event can also be shared on social media to recognise participants' engagement.

3. Plan the Next Steps
If the Restaurant Day is part of a larger participation process, use the findings to develop further activities or participation formats.

Source: Bujdosó, A. (Ed.) (2019): *Social Design Cookbook: Recipes for Social Cooperation*. Budapest: Kitchen Budapest.

WHEN USEFUL?

- new target groups should be reached.
- people should meet and talk in a relaxed atmosphere.
- neighbourhoods should be activated.
- public spaces should be revitalised.
- introducing people to participation through a low-threshold format.
- collecting ideas and experiences about a place.

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- binding decisions need to be made.
- highly specialised expertise is required.
- sensitive or highly conflictual topics need to be addressed.
- representative participation is required.
- there are insufficient resources for organisation and coordination.

TIPS

- Plan food quantities carefully to minimise waste.
- Use reusable tableware instead of disposable materials whenever possible.
- Provide takeaway containers for leftover food.
- If legally and organisationally feasible, donate surplus food to local charities or community organisations.
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Provide clearly marked waste sorting and recycling facilities.

- Schedule a collective clean-up at the end of the event.
- Leave public spaces clean, tidy, and as close as possible to their original condition to maintain good relationships with residents, local authorities, and property owners.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- sensitive or confidential topics need to be discussed.
- significant conflicts require structured conflict resolution.
- there are insufficient resources for organisation, catering, or participant support.
- legal or food hygiene requirements cannot be met.

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/restaurant-day