

Content of the tool:

Xtopian Circuit Training



Xtopian Circuit Training

→ An interactive format consisting of multiple stations that train participants (and the circuit's developers) for the future using thought experiments.



The topic

The tool provides a methodology for developing learning stations themed around the future. Each station deals with a different aspect of a chosen overarching topic. You will need to develop the stations yourself; however, you can use the Xtopia toolbox to help you do so. The toolbox is particularly geared towards topics that address relationships between people and nature, but it is useful for other themes too.


The Xtopian moment

By visiting the different stations, participants engage with topics relating to the future from different perspectives and using different methods. Each station may itself represent an Xtopia. It should use active learning methods to address radical, ambivalent aspects of the future. Alternatively, the process of completing all the stations may provide the Xtopian moment.

The target groups

As an interactive format, an Xtopian Circuit Training is typically aimed at the general public. However, it can also be targeted to specific groups, e.g. city officials, planners and developers, employees of civil society organisations, and many others.



Time required	Group size	Format	Location	Materials
<p>Set-up 60-120 mins</p> <p>Game duration > 60 mins</p> <p>Dismantling 30-60 mins</p>	<p>Large groups of around 30 or more</p>	<p>Individually or in small groups</p>	<p>Outdoors or indoors; the method is not suitable for remote participation</p>	<p>Stations, accompanying materials, stamp card (if using), evaluation materials (if using)</p> <p></p>



The educational goals

An Xtopian Circuit Training aims first and foremost to open up imaginary spaces, train the imagination and promote critical engagement with visions of the future – not only for visitors but also for those developing the training. Visions are both presented by the circuit’s developers and developed by the visitors themselves. Depending on the design of the circuit training, visitors may also be able to practice other important future skills.

Application

Developing the circuit training is relatively complex and is described in detail in the attached instructions. You will need a relatively large group for this method.

Preparation: We recommend integrating the circuit training into a larger event or registering the event with the relevant local authority with plenty of advance notice. Prepare a set-up plan. This should also take account of transport arrangements and the available time of the people involved in the project.

Set-up: Familiarise yourself in advance with the location and space for the event. Make a note of what facilities you can use and what extra items you need to arrange (e.g. tables, power supply, materials, etc.). Provided you are well prepared, the set-up itself should take no more than two hours.

Execution: A stamp card can increase motivation to visit all the stations. If the participants are supposed to visit the stations in a certain order, it is helpful to provide a clearly marked check-in station.

Conclusion: Depending on the design, visitors may leave the circuit training whenever and wherever they want, or you can offer a check-out point where they can discuss their experiences, return their completed stamp card in exchange for a reward, and give feedback on the event.

Evaluation: You may wish to evaluate the circuit training for research purposes or so that you can further refine the stations. Suitable methods include analysing the results from each station, asking the facilitators at each station to keep research diaries, interviewing the facilitators or visitors, and (if resources are available) participant observation.

Potential and challenges

An Xtopian Circuit Training can reach a large and diverse audience by offering many different ways to engage with the future. It can therefore generate a large public response and give you access to the opinions, attitudes and visions of your target group. Once developed, you can use it as a travelling exhibition. However, developing and implementing the circuit training requires considerable time and organisation, motivated developers and socially skilled, well-briefed facilitators.

Source: Jossin, J., Voigt, A., Godlewsky, T., Beecroft, R., Arnold, M., Bernstein, F., Messerschmidt, S., Rothfuss, D., Multhaup, S., Olshausen, I., Aweh, M., Lafratta, M. & Amrehn, U. (2023). *Toolbox for Xtopias: New tools for futurists*. kassel university press. doi:10.17170/kobra-202312089182

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More info: See xtopien.org/outputs for a description of how we have implemented Xtopian Circuit Trainings in various locations. At dasendederdominanz.de, you can find a description of the stations developed for a circuit training designed at the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam.

The “Urban Xtopias” project was sponsored by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.
More tools and materials: xtopien.org/toolbox

xtopien.org



Developing and setting up an Xtopian Circuit Training

What is an Xtopian Circuit Training?

The concept is inspired by sport, where circuit training consists of multiple stations, each training different muscle groups and athletic skills. In an Xtopian Circuit Training, the circuit is made up of varied stations, each representing an Xtopia (see the instructions for building an Xtopia) or Xtopia-related exercise. The stations use engaging, participatory methods to enable participants to think and feel their way into different visions of the future. Each station is usually developed by a small team, and facilitators are on hand to supervise participants. An Xtopian Circuit Training trains both the developers and visitors in various skills for the future. These include:

- Being able to imagine different futures
- Being motivated to engage with the issues of the future
- Systems thinking
- Recognising ambivalent aspects of visions of the future and dealing with these constructively

Developing an Xtopian Circuit Training step by step

Developing a circuit yourself from scratch is a fun-filled and inspiring expedition. You will learn a great deal along the way. However, it is also very time-consuming. The group that develops the circuit training will work intensively on both the overarching topic and the various action-based methods.

This should involve extended group processes such as those used in education or transformative research. You should therefore make sure that you have sufficient (wo)manpower and at least a few weeks available to prepare and develop the circuit. Also consider what financial resources you can invest. When designing the individual stations, you have the option to use tools from the Toolbox for Xtopias. This will significantly speed up the development process (see step 3).

Step 1: Read the instructions for building Xtopias

As an Xtopian Circuit Training consists of multiple small Xtopias, we recommend that you and your group first familiarise yourselves with the *instructions for building an Xtopia*.

Step 2: Choose a topic for the circuit training

An Xtopian Circuit Training is suited to dealing with broad and ambivalent topics of the future. Each station can focus on a different aspect of the topic, take a different perspective or use a different method. In the Urban Xtopias research project, for example, we worked with students to develop two circuits themed around future relationships between humans and nature (Fig. 1). Depending on the purpose and context, it is also possible to address different future-related topics in the same circuit. The *instructions for building an Xtopia* provide tips on how to develop a topic in a way that fully utilises the Xtopia's transformative potential.

Step 3: Develop an overall plan for the circuit training

Having chosen the overarching topic, you now decide the target group, the educational goals associated with the circuit training and a suitable location or occasion for the training (e.g. a street fair). You may also want to recruit potential partners for the project and possibly start thinking about how you will evaluate the results. During this stage, we recommend working with the Xtopia hexagon, as described in the *instructions for building an xtopia*. Before developing individual stations, you must decide whether participants should complete the stations in a certain order, spending the same amount of time at each station, or whether the stations will be “playable” independently of each other. The first option requires a structured game plan and lends itself to projects where you want all visitors to have similar experiences – e.g. for research purposes or as a basis for further work with the participants on the relevant topic. If you want your group to have more freedom in developing the stations, and the participants to be able to choose which stations they visit and in what order, an open-space format makes more sense. In this case, the visitors decide how they take part in the circuit training and when to take a break.



As with fitness training, this approach takes better account of the different skills and motivation levels of the visitors. However, one disadvantage is that visitors are unlikely to distribute themselves evenly across the different stations. This may result in queues and waiting times, which can be demotivating.

You also need to decide how many stations to set up and how long the activities will take. Depending on resources and the desired time for completion of the whole circuit, we recommend around three to seven stations. The more stations featured in the circuit, the more diverse the imaginary spaces opened up. Another advantage of many different stations is that different personalities are attracted to different topic areas and methods. On the other hand, a smaller number of stations allows more time to explore each topic area in depth.

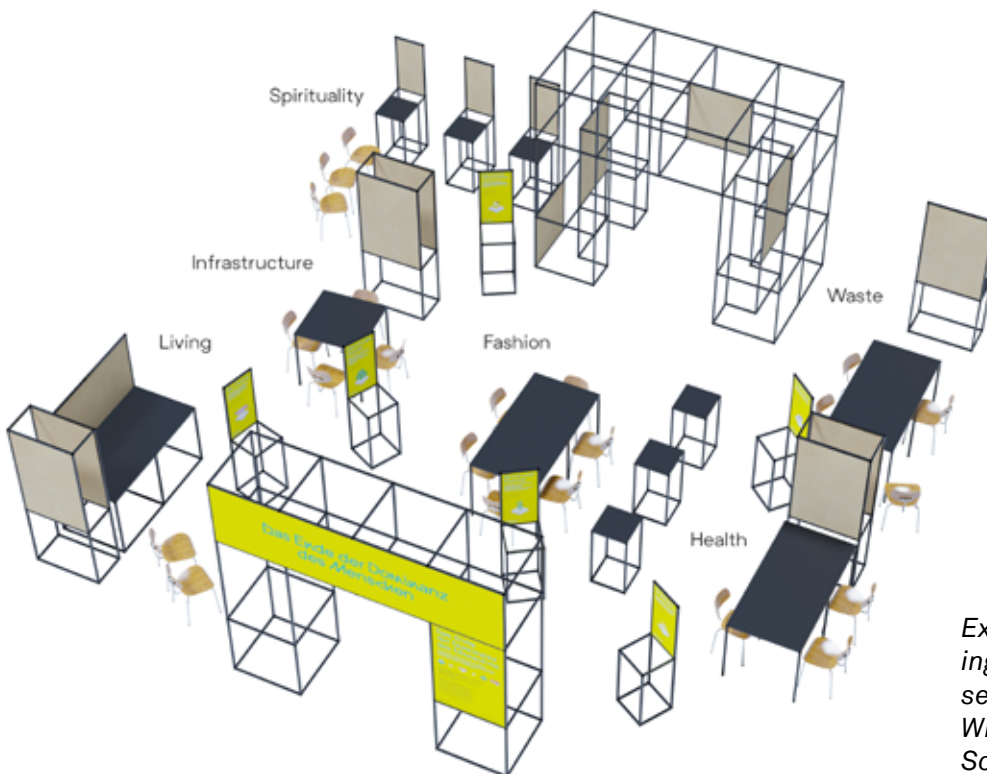
Step 4: Create small groups

Given the workload involved, you will probably want to develop the circuit training in a group. Start by putting together small groups who will each develop a station. We recommend that everyone first puts forward their ideas for a station (topic and method) so that groups can then be formed based on matching interests.

Step 5: Develop the individual stations

A wide range of methods are conceivable for the individual stations – for example, interactive theatre formats and role plays, serious games or installations that trigger debate. You can aim your stations at individuals or small groups. It is important to plan in advance how the individual stations can be supervised. We recommend having a “game master” or someone to talk to at each station. In our experience, stations that engage different senses are particularly popular. Discursive elements, i.e. opportunities to share and debate with others, are not essential at every station. However, they are often a great way to help participants reflect on the topic. Giveaways to take home can remind participants about the station or circuit and encourage continued reflection. Ideally, stations should offer different versions of the game and different levels of difficulty (e.g. for children and adults).

The *Toolbox for Xtopias* offers two tools themed around the relationships between people and nature (*Animal Perspectives and Cohabitat*), which could both be used as stations in your circuit. *Guided Visualisation Journey to the Future* can be used as a station with a longer activity time and is suitable for many future-related topics. By revising the text and rerecording the audio file, it is relatively easy to reduce the time required for the exercise or relate it to a specific topic. The same applies to *Play Space Experiment*, which we developed for visualising playful open spaces and which can be easily adapted to other



Example of an Xtopian Circuit Training as part of the Urban Xtopias research project. Rendering by Gilbert Wigankow, University of Applied Sciences Potsdam



types of spaces. The *Installation on Interconnected Thinking* and the *Mood Boards as a Door Opener* are not tied to a specific topic and can be assembled/filled with content as suitable formats for your stations.

Whatever method you use for individual stations: Build any props and accessories as simple prototypes to begin with, without spending a lot of money on materials. This means you can test and refine the stations without wasting valuable resources too early. When finalising the station, ensure that it is inviting and fits your message; use natural, eco-friendly materials.

Step 6: Test and finalise the stations

No Xtopia will be exactly right first time! Show each other your prototypes and test or “play” them to gather feedback. Refine the ideas together, coordinate the individual stations with each other and improve them further. You may want to repeat this process several times and invite guests to try the stations out; an outside perspective can be very helpful. When testing them, pay particular attention to whether the stations (both individually and collectively) a) can be understood by the target group, b) work as envisaged, c) meet your educational objectives, and d) have no unwanted effects. Most importantly, remember the following: Like all Xtopias, the individual stations may address utopian, dystopian and, above all, ambivalent aspects of the future. However, in the case of negative scenarios for the future, the participants should always have the opportunity to develop their own responses in order to counter or constructively deal with such scenarios. Where participants complete the circuit in a set order, this opportunity may come at one of the next stations. Ensure that visitors can leave the circuit training feeling motivated, inspired and, if possible, optimistic. Once the four criteria above are fulfilled, you can finalise and produce the props and accessories for your stations.

Step 7: Join the stations together

A unifying, appealing design for the stations provides orientation for visitors, improves their experience and can trigger thematically relevant associations. A designated starting point as the “entry” to the circuit training can help visitors understand the layout and introduce them to the topic. Additional posters (e.g. with thought-provoking questions such as “What would it be like if...?”) around the circuit can help them grasp the focus of each station. Make sure to use simple language – especially if you have a broad target group. A stamp card, on which participants can collect a stamp from each station they visit, is a good way to ease navigation around the

circuit and motivate people to try out every station. A check-out station can enable some concluding thoughts, gather feedback for evaluation or provide space for discussion.

Preparing the Xtopian Circuit Training

Choose the time and place for the circuit training

The circuit training format works best when it is part of larger events such as city festivals, school fêtes or cultural events. Here you have the opportunity to reach a wide public. Simply taking to the streets and persuading passers-by to take part in such a unique and intensive experience can be very difficult – particularly given all the factors that cannot be planned, such as the weather conditions.

Setting up

The stations should be set up at least a few metres apart so that they do not disturb each other. To emphasise the links between the stations or to recommend a direction, you can use markings on the floor (e.g. neon tape) or other connecting elements.

Plan and brief the facilitators at each station

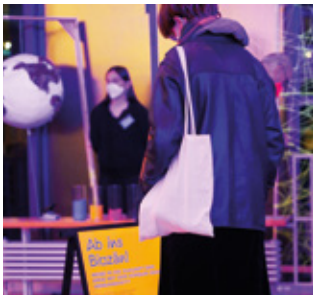
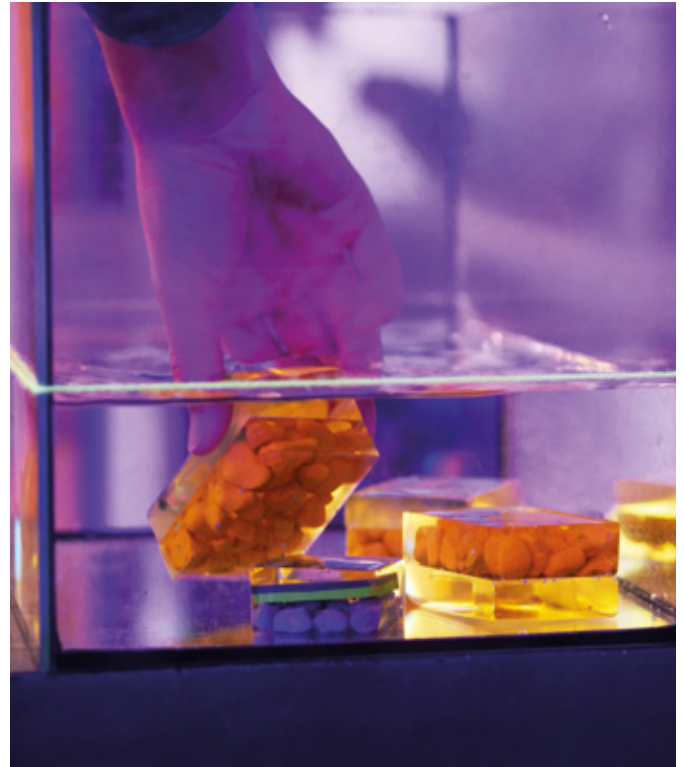
Ideally, there will be someone to greet visitors at the start. They and the facilitators at the stations should be friendly and sociable and enjoy talking to visitors. They need to be well briefed, especially if they have not developed the station themselves. It is important to prepare them to respond respectfully to criticism and be able to deal with any strong emotional reactions. Ideally, the best communicator should look after the check-out station.

We wish you fun and success in developing your Xtopian Circuit Training.



Application example: An Xtopian Circuit Training at Staatstheater Kassel

In courses at the University of Kassel and the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, we worked with students to develop two Xtopian Circuit Trainings on the „End of human dominance over other species“. They consisted of five and six stations respectively. After several presentations in the respective course group, we were guests at the Staatstheater Kassel as part of the event „Green utopias or the end of the world“, where four stations from both courses were involved. The response was very positive and the circuit training was subsequently in demand.



Pictures: Stella Hood