

**LEARNING  
FROM IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION  
OF THE EU COHESION POLICY**

**LESSONS FROM A RESEARCH-POLICY DIALOGUE**

Edited by  
Nicola Francesco Dotti

Regional Studies Association

**COHESION***POLICY*

Research Network

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Editing, cover design and publication by Nicola Francesco Dotti

Published by RSA Research Network on Cohesion Policy

ISBN 978-2-9601879-0-8 or 9782960187908

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How to cite this work

Dotti, N.F., (ed.), 2016. Learning from implementation and evaluation of the EU Cohesion Policy: Lessons from a research-policy dialogue. RSA Research Network on Cohesion Policy, Brussels.

## 12. BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EVALUATION USE: THE KNOWLEDGE BROKERS GAME

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### ABSTRACT

A clear gap exists between producing research results and using them to improve public policies. Studies point to "knowledge brokering" as an effective way of addressing this challenge.

The chapter discusses the effective use of simulation gaming to teach knowledge brokering to public professionals. Trainings with 198 practitioners from EU, US, and Canada confirm that simulation helps understanding the role of research in Cohesion Policy, mastering six activities of knowledge brokering, and recognizing limitations of broker influence in policy decision-making.

Institutions across Europe responsible for Cohesion Policy can use the Knowledge Brokers Game for training personnel and improving institutional capacity for evidence-based policy.

## PRESENTATION

<small>Regional Studies Association</small>
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<small>Research Network</small>
<h1><b>BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EVALUATION USE: THE KNOWLEDGE BROKERS GAME</b></h1>
<p>Karol OLEJNICZAK (University of Warsaw), Dominika WOJTOWICZ (Kozłmiński University)</p>
<small>LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE EU COHESION POLICY LESSONS FOR A <i>RESEARCH-POLICY</i> DIALOGUE. Brussels, 13 June 2016</small>

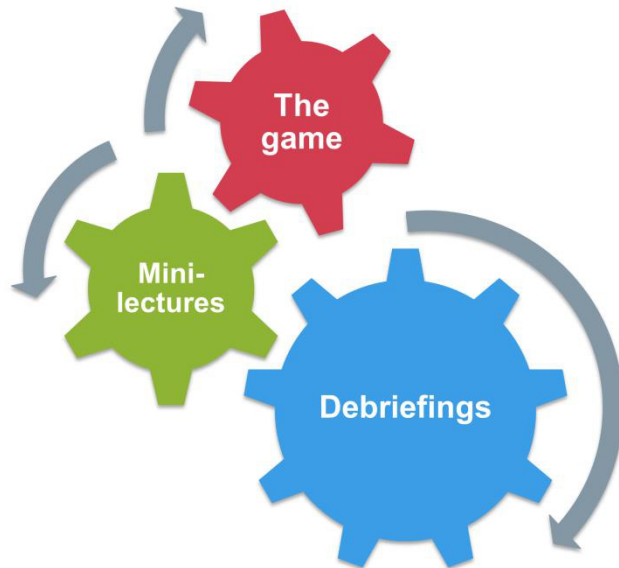
## LESSONS FOR COHESION POLICY

- **KNOWLEDGE BROKERING** MAKES RESEARCH RESULTS **USEFUL FOR PUBLIC POLICY**
- INSTITUTIONS OF COHESION POLICY NEED TO TRAIN THEIR STAFF IN KNOWLEDGE BROKERING
- WE CAN USE SERIOUS GAMES TO LEARN BROKERING SKILLS IN PRACTICE, BUT WITHOUT BEARING THE COST OF MISTAKES

## KEY SKILLS OF KNOWLEDGE BROKERS

1. IDENTIFYING KNOWLEDGE NEEDS OF USERS
2. ACQUIRING CREDIBLE KNOWLEDGE
3. FEEDING KNOWLEDGE TO USERS
4. ACCUMULATING KNOWLEDGE OVER TIME
5. BUILDING NETWORKS WITH PRODUCERS AND USERS OF KNOWLEDGE
6. MANAGING TIME AND RESOURCES

## WORKSHOP CONTENT



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## GAME SCENARIO

- PLAYERS MANAGE AN EVALUATION UNIT FOR TWELVE MONTHS
- DIFFERENT PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS ARE IMPLEMENTED IN THE REGION
- DURING INTERVENTIONS' STAGES, DECISION-MAKERS EXPRESS KNOWLEDGE NEEDS
- PLAYERS PROVIDE CREDIBLE KNOWLEDGE TO THE KEY USER ON THE RIGHT MOMENT IN AN ACCESSIBLE WAY

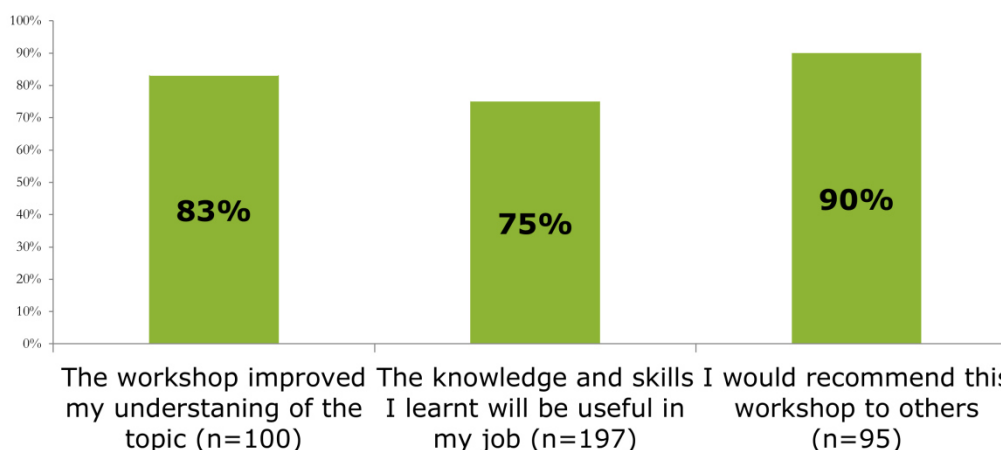


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## CONCLUSIONS

11 TRAININGS WITH 198 PROFESSIONALS FROM EU, USA, CANADA CONFIRM:

### WORKSHOP WORKS WELL AS A METHOD OF LEARNING KNOWLEDGE BROKERING SKILLS IN PRACTICE



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## BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EVALUATION USE: THE KNOWLEDGE BROKERS GAME

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A VIDEO WITH MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE USING THE FOLLOWING LINK  
[HTTP://KNOWLEDGEBROKERS.EDU.PL/](http://knowledgebrokers.edu.pl/)

## INTRODUCTION

The opportunity to improve effectiveness of Cohesion Policy (CP) with the use of research still remains largely untapped. Despite extensive production of evaluation reports, the practitioners implementing Cohesion Policy still have limited insight into "what works, for whom, and in what context" (Olejniczak, 2013; Wojtowicz and Kupiec, 2016).

Recent literature on evidence use in public policy argues that bringing credible and rigorous evidence to decision makers is not sufficient; the evidence needs to be 'brokered' (Olejniczak et al. 2016). That is because decision makers and researchers are driven by different imperatives and time frames, using different language. Studies point to "knowledge brokering" as an effective way of addressing this challenge (Meyer, 2010; Olejniczak et al. 2016).

**Knowledge brokers** are individuals or units that serve as intermediaries between the worlds of research and policy-making practice. They **help decision makers in acquiring, translating into practice, and using existing knowledge for better planning and implementation of public interventions** (Turnhout et al., 2013).

The training of Cohesion Policy practitioners in knowledge brokering could substantially improve effectiveness of public policies. Staff of CP programs would be able to acquire relevant studies and better use their results in program management. However brokering entails a set of specific skills that can be learnt most effectively by experience. That requires a practice-based training method. This gives rise to a key question: **How can public sectors professionals learn new skills of knowledge brokering in practice but without bearing the costs of mistakes that are an inevitable part of the learning process?**



The paper reports on the use of specially designed serious game as a method of teaching public policy professionals the skills of knowledge brokers. Serious games are effective adults learning method (Kapp, 2012). The game called "Knowledge Brokers" was designed over the period of two years by the team from Pracownia Gier Szkoleniowych (PGS) and Evaluation for Government Organizations (EGO).

The paper is based on extensive research of knowledge brokering in different policy areas, survey of evaluation units in Cohesion Policy and eleven game sessions with over 190 public policy practitioners from European Union, United States and Canada.

The paper is divided into four parts. It starts with an overview of the learning content - the system of knowledge use in public policy and the logic of knowledge broker actions. Then it briefly describes learning method - the game. In the third part the initial lessons from the game application are discussed. The paper concludes that the **Knowledge Broker game is a unique and useful training method for public professionals**. It helps learning in practice three things: **(1) role of research in policy and program implementation, (2) six broker's skills that increase effectiveness of public programs and (3) limitations of brokers work coming from user behaviours, organizational behaviours and policy process dynamics**.

Institutions across the EU responsible for design and implementation of Cohesion Policy can use the game for practice-based training of their professional staff. This innovation could improve their capacity for more effective evidence-based policy.

## THE LEARNING CONTENT

Knowledge Brokers, in order to be effective in helping decision-makers, require three things:

- Understanding the system of relations between research evidence and policy cycle, and the key factors that drive that system;
- Mastering sets of activities of knowledge brokering that can increase the chance of evidence use in public policy;

- Recognizing limitations of knowledge broker's influence in public policy decision-making.

Empirical studies and policy literature offer a good insight into the role of research knowledge in policy (Nutley et al., 2007; Prewitt et al., 2012; Shulha and Cousins, 1997). It can be summarized by the following narrative.

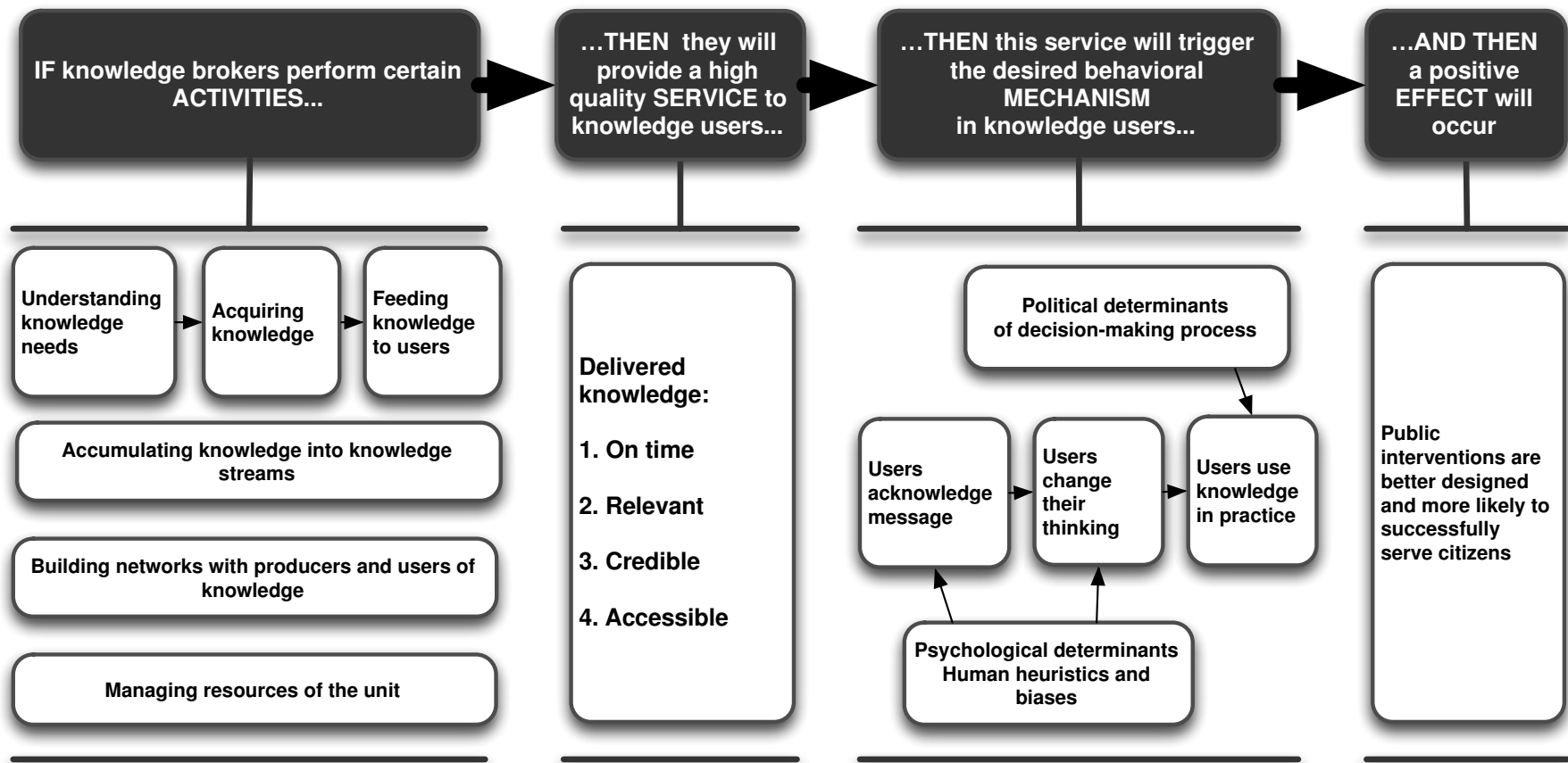
The focal points are public interventions that aim to address socio-economic issues. They proceed in stages - from agenda setting through planning and implementation to completion and assessment of outcomes (Howlett et al., 2009).

In order to run interventions successfully, different types of knowledge are required at different stages. They span from questions on diagnostic knowledge (know-about the policy issue), through know-what works and know-why things work, to technical know-how (Nutley et al., 2007).

Running the interventions is the business of policy actors. Numerous types of actors engage at certain policy stages e.g. politicians, high-level civil servants and public managers. They have different information preferences ranging from strategic issues to technical matters. They are potential knowledge users because, once involved in a particular stage of an intervention, they face certain knowledge needs.

Knowledge needs can be addressed by different sources including evidences coming from research studies. Their credibility is determined by the quality of methodological rigour - a match between research design and the research question (Stern et al., 2012).

Policy actors have certain preferences for forms and channels of communication. Some of them favour detailed form and formal contacts while others favour a concise message and face-to-face discussion. The range of these preferences can be labelled as "feeding methods". Knowing this narrative, knowledge broker can help policy practitioners to run better policies by providing credible knowledge, to the key user, on the right moment and in an accessible way. The detailed logic of knowledge brokering activities can be formulated as a theory of change (see Figure 6).



**FIGURE 6. THE LOGIC OF KNOWLEDGE BROKER ACTIVITIES (SOURCE: OLEJNICZAK ET AL., 2016)**

A few things should be pointed out in relation to this theory of change. The knowledge broker controls the first two blocks (activities and services), while the two consecutive blocks (the mechanism and effect) can only be influenced by the broker.

The key success factor of knowledge brokers is quality of their service. The four aspects of quality are: (1) delivering knowledge when users need it, (2) being relevant to their information needs, (3) keeping methodological rigour of the particular study and (4) using right feeding method (form of presentation and channel of delivery).

The mechanism of user's knowledge absorption and decision-making is complex. It is influenced both by human constraints and political dynamics. A high quality service of knowledge broker substantially increases the chances of knowledge use, but it is rarely decisive because evidence is just one of the factors in the complex decision-making (Nutley et al., 2007; Tyler, 2013).

This insight from policy practice and research has been turned into game. Whole game design, that means options available for players, their activities and scoring points, has been aligned with these findings.

## THE LEARNING METHOD

The game session has been designed as a one-day training event consisting of three integrated elements: the game, mini-lectures and debriefings.

The **game** allows participants to experience the real challenges of a knowledge broker and to test their own brokering skills in a safe and engaging environment. Knowledge Brokers game is designed as a high quality board game, with sophisticated graphics and carefully crafted playing pieces. It mirrors reality by bringing cases of projects and studies from Cohesion Policy.

**Mini lectures** provide participants with concepts on public policy and social research that are crucial for effective knowledge brokering. Delivered by experts in the field of evaluation, the lectures cover: stages of the policy cycle, research questions and research designs, policy actors and knowledge dissemination strategies. Experts often use examples from real life cases of Cohesion Policy.

**Debriefings** transfer the game experience back into the real world. Carefully animated sessions, supported by real-time feedback from game results, allow players to reflect on their strategies within the game. On that basis they transfer key-learning points into the practice of their organizations.

**The central point of the workshop is game.** Participants are divided into 6 groups (with a maximum of 5 persons in each). Each group manages an evaluation unit in a region for twelve rounds (1 round represents 1 month in real life). Their mission is to help decision-makers with expertise in implementing four different types of socio-economic projects. These are: combating single mothers' unemployment, developing a health care network, revitalizing a downtown area, and developing a public transportation system for a metropolitan area. The spectrum of projects has been based on the real, popular cases from Cohesion Policy. Each project is at a different stage of its development and faces different challenges.

With each turn knowledge needs appear for each project. They can relate to diagnostic issues (know-about), the mechanisms or effects of the implemented or planned solutions (know-what works and know-why), explanation of project problems or technical issues (know-how). Knowledge needs take the form of concrete questions. Over the course of the game players have to deal with 19 different knowledge needs.

Players have to react to knowledge needs by: contracting out studies with an appropriate research design (they have eight design to choose), targeting the key users potentially interested in study results (three types of users) and choosing methods for feeding study results to users (ten methods available).

The available resources - the number of staff in their units and the time required to complete each task, determine the choices of players. By investing additional human resources teams can act proactively: they can network (which allows them to recognize knowledge needs in advance) or search archives (to find already existing studies that will strengthen their body of evidence).

After each turn, groups of players that have completed their reports receive detailed feedback, in the form of infographics, on their timing, relevance, credibility, accessibility and information on the final effect - if a policy actor made a decision based on the delivered knowledge or on other premises (e.g. political rationale). Groups of players compete with each other. The winning

team is the team with the highest score in terms of reports used by policy actors.

## FIRST LESSONS FROM GAME APPLICATION

The game has been used in eleven training sessions with 198 public sector professionals (two games with international professionals, seven games with Polish civil servants and policy makers).

In the post-training survey the majority of the participants confirmed the usefulness of the workshop as a training tool for professionals dealing with evaluations of public policies. Knowledge Brokers game improved players understanding of the topic and provided them with knowledge and skills used in their everyday work. 90% of the post-training survey respondents would recommend participation in the workshop to the others (especially, to directors and heads of departments, colleagues, evaluation units' officers and researchers).

The participants were also asked in a survey about the most valuable thing at the workshop. Their answers can be grouped in three groups.

The first group of answers points at a unique form of learning that combines theory and examples with a hands-on experience. According to surveyed participants game increased engagement, fostered cooperation with other participants and provoked interactions. **Participants stressed that this form of workshop allows better absorption of knowledge in comparison to traditional lectures.** They were describing game as: “very developing and creative tool; an interesting way of improving knowledge about evaluation; engaging and interesting way to learn and acquire knowledge; the practical approach combined with the theory (in a very good proportion)”.

The second group of opinions on the benefits of game related to the reality of the game scenario, which - in players view - covered the knowledge and skills required at each stage of the evaluation of public projects. **Players valued gaining a holistic understanding of mechanisms that drive system of evaluation. This is a unique opportunity, especially for the staff of bureaucratic organizations that often have a fragmented view of the policy-making process.** When describing this game value, participants wrote

about: “comprehensive identification of factors, which influence the effectiveness of decisions; general view of knowledge management - a level higher than the daily routines; awareness of importance of each phase of the study (from the selection of the research design to dissemination of results between knowledge users); a comprehensive overview of the projects' evaluation”.

The third group of opinions pointed at specific knowledge gains. **The workshop allowed participants to acquire and combine particular knowledge and skills they have to use in their everyday work.** They stated that the most valuable things at the workshop were: “[gaining] knowledge on methods of transferring evidences and research designs; knowledge on report readers as well as ways of feeding evidence to the decision-makers; understanding the relationship between purpose of the study - method - users; [gaining knowledge on] knowledge users profiles and in-depth knowledge on research design”. These declarations were confirmed by the self-assessment of acquired knowledge.

It has to be noted that the current assessment of the game is limited to self-reporting of the participants. In order to establish a strong evidence of workshop effectiveness in teaching professionals, authors plan to conduct a pre-test post-test experiment comparing professionals learning with game-based workshop to group taught with traditional lecture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Recent policy practice and literature on public decision-making shows that **bringing credible and rigorous evidence to decision makers is not sufficient; the evidence needs to be ‘brokered’.** That requires skilled knowledge brokers, usually located in public administration, who can help decision makers in acquiring, translating into practice, and using existing knowledge for better planning and implementation of public interventions. Specially designed serious simulation game can help building the skills of knowledge brokers between the staff of Cohesion Policy programs.

The **Knowledge Broker game** showed to be useful for public professionals in three things. Firstly, it helps learning about role of research in policy and program implementation.

Secondly, it teaches key broker's skills:

- Understanding the knowledge needs of different policy actors;
- Acquiring credible knowledge by matching optimal research designs to the knowledge needs;
- Feeding knowledge effectively to users by choosing the dissemination methods preferred by different decision-making actors;
- Strengthening evidence by combining the results of different studies into a concise policy argument;
- Getting better insight into knowledge needs and speeding up the circulation of knowledge by using networking with producers and users;
- Managing an evaluation unit with limited time and human resources.

Lastly, game helps professionals to understand the limitations of brokers' work. At the end of the day, research findings are just one of the factors in the complex, non-linear dynamics of policy-making.

Based on the game sessions executed with public sector professionals, authors conclude that training of Cohesion Policy staff with the Knowledge Brokers game could improve their capacity for more effective evidence-based policy.

Game is useful for two groups of professionals in Cohesion Policy system. The first group is the staff of evaluation and analytical units. The workshop can be used to develop and test their strategies for effective knowledge brokering. The second group is public sector decision-makers - managers, directors of strategic or implementation units. Game helps raising their awareness on the utility of research evidences in their job, help them becoming more mindful users of knowledge.



## AUTHORS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND DISCLAIMER

Two Polish companies have founded the development and implementation of the game-based workshop: Evaluation for Government Organizations (EGO s.c.) and Pracownia Gier Szkoleniowych (PGS).

The authors would like to express their gratitude to their colleagues who designed and have been implementing the game-based workshop: Igor Widawski, Lukasz Kozak, Jakub Wisniewski, Janek Witkowski, Bartosz Ledzion, Joanna Srednicka and Jagoda Gandziarowska-Ziolecka. The authors also thank all those involved at different stages of the undertaking: Estelle Raimondo and Tomasz Kupiec who co-authored the empirical research on knowledge

brokering and a number of Polish civil servants who participated in the testing of the game and provided most valuable feedback.

For more information about the game-based workshop visit:  
[www.knowledgebrokers.edu.pl](http://www.knowledgebrokers.edu.pl)

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