

The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Culture-led Urban Revitalization

MÁRIA TAJTÁKOVÁ

School of Management/City University of Seattle programs,
Trenčín, Slovakia

MÁRIA OLEJÁROVÁ

School of Management/City University of Seattle programs,
Trenčín, Slovakia

Abstract: Knowledge brokering is a tool for facilitating the exchange of knowledge between its producers and users. It regards people and makes possible the creation of productive and dynamic relationships that enhance the movement of ideas and link different perspectives, levels of knowledge and understanding among people. The main role is attributed to knowledge brokers – individuals or organizations – that facilitate the sharing of different kinds of knowledge between knowledge sources and knowledge needs. We report findings of the primary qualitative research conducted in the field of culture-led urban revitalization in Slovakia in the view of effective knowledge brokering. Special attention is paid to the distinctions between knowledge workers and knowledge brokers from the perspective of six specific functions (Michaels, 2009, 2011; Shaxson, Gwyn et al., 2010) performed by knowledge brokers.

Keywords: Knowledge broker, knowledge worker, culture, urban revitalization.

JEL Classification: R58

1 Introduction

Knowledge brokering is a tool for facilitating the exchange of knowledge between its producers and users. It regards people and makes possible the creation of productive and dynamic relationships that enhance the movement of ideas and link different perspectives, levels of knowledge and understanding, among people. All knowledge workers possess certain knowledge which they may share and exchange with others. The concept of “knowledge workers” was introduced by Peter Drucker (1954), who described them as people who, when working, use their brain more than their muscles. According to Horibe (1999, p. xi), knowledge workers add value through their ideas, their analyses, their judgments, their syntheses and their designs.

Kelemen et al. (2010, p. 141) point out that knowledge workers represent already more than half of the employees in advanced economies. In addition, Horibe (1999, p. x, xi) claims that in the New Economy – the economy based on the flood of information coming at lightning speed – the demand at the workplace is almost exclusively for knowledge workers. However, what is the difference between knowledge workers and knowledge brokers?

The knowledge brokers are defined as individuals or organizations that facilitate the sharing of different kinds of knowledge between knowledge sources and knowledge needs (Soussa, 2008). A distinction between knowledge brokers and most other knowledge service providers (e.g. consulting companies, state agencies, business intelligence firms) lies thus in their active role in the transformation processes. The knowledge brokering is used to improve the process of knowledge transfer and sharing among different members and actors in the network.

According to Porumb and Ivanova (2014), it is the knowledge distribution among diverse actors that can be the most sensitive aspect of the knowledge management practice. Knowledge brokers act as catalysts, accelerating the combination of complementary knowledge and skills necessary to solve innovation problems, by making the right connections and links with solvers and seekers (Soussa, 2008). In this regard, Karner et al. (2014) highlighted the knowledge brokerage as a way to link different perspectives, levels of knowledge and understanding among people.

2 Six Functions of Knowledge Brokers

Sarah Michael (2009, p. 994-1011; 2011, p. 997) identified six different strategies of knowledge brokers as *informing*, *consulting*, *matchmaking*, *engaging*, *collaborating* and *building adaptive capacity*. Each strategy has a complementary function to the others and reflects a different stage in the knowledge brokering process. They are listed in the order of increasing intensity of relationship building and commitment of resources so that the strategies that involve more effort subsume those that involve less. In addition, Karner (2010, p. 14-15) points out that while informing, consulting, and matchmaking require quite a low level of involvement, engaging, collaborating and capacity building need a higher level of engagement and personal interaction in order to be effective. Shaxson and Gwyn et al. (2010, p. 4) implemented the six strategies of knowledge brokers and developed a model (Fig. 1) for knowledge translation and brokering in public policy making. The adjusted functions of knowledge brokers include *informing*, *linking*, *matchmaking*, *focused collaboration*, *strategic collaboration* and *building sustainable institutions*.

The six functions of knowledge brokering

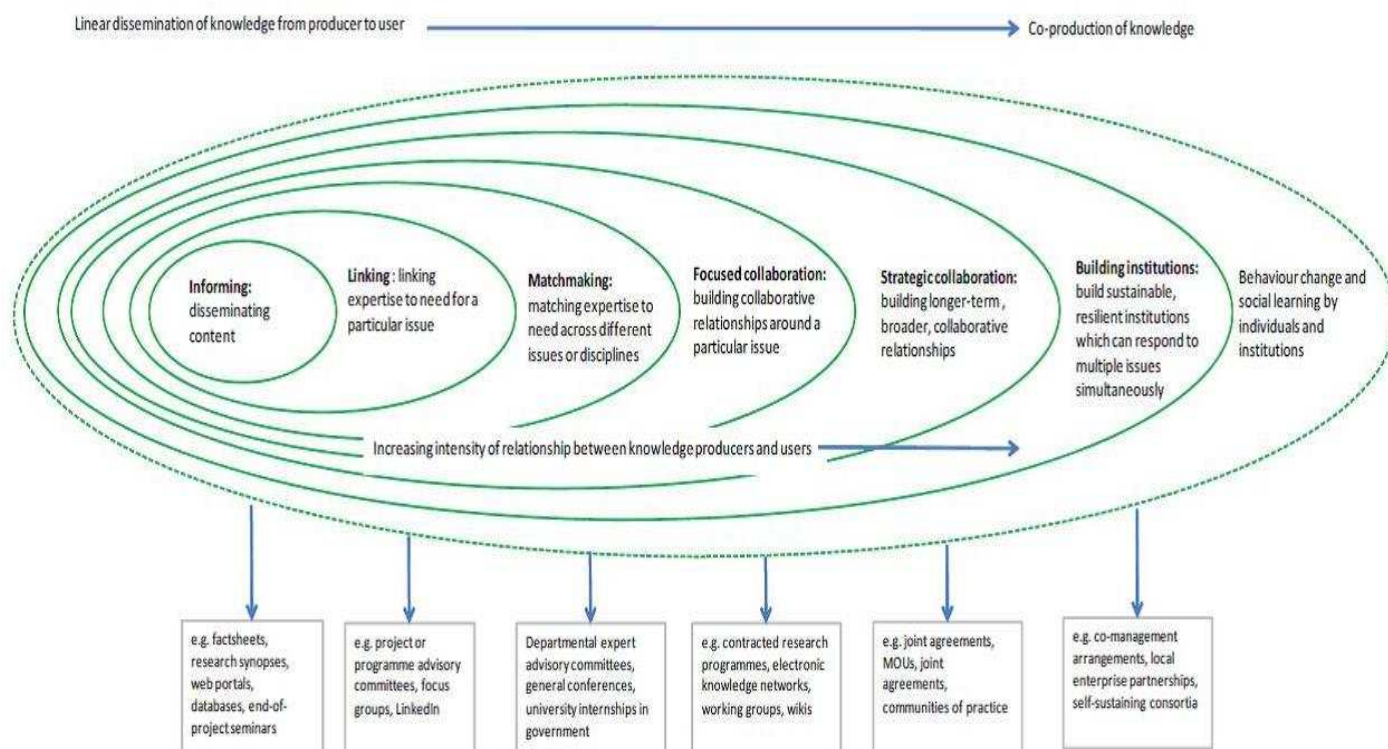


Fig. 1 The Six Functions of Knowledge Brokers

Source: Shaxson, L. and Gwyn, E. et al. 2010. *Developing a strategy for knowledge translation and brokering in public policy making*. Special Workshop on Knowledge Translation and Brokering. Montreal, Canada, 2010, p. 4. Adaptation from Michaels, S. 2009.

- **Informing**

Disseminating content, targeting decision makers with information, making information easily accessible and digestible. Examples include factsheets, research synopses, web portals, databases, end-of-project seminars.

- **Linking**

Linking expertise to need in a particular policy area, helping policymakers address a specific policy issue by seeking out the necessary experts. Examples include project or programme advisory committees, focus groups, LinkedIn.

- **Matchmaking**

Matching expertise to need across issues and disciplines, helping policymakers think more broadly about a topic, finding experts with relevant knowledge from another discipline, helping them take a strategic overview to address the fullness of the issue. Examples include departmental expert advisory committees, general conferences, university internships in the government, mapping the evidence base for an issue.

- **Focused collaboration**

Beginning to construct formal relationships to focus on a particular issue, contracting people or organisations to provide knowledge on an as-needed basis. Examples include contracted research programmes, electronic knowledge networks, working groups, wikis.

- **Strategic collaboration**

Lengthening and deepening the collaborative process, strengthening relationships and moving to a situation where all sides jointly negotiate the questions to be asked. Examples include joint agreements where the emphasis is on equality in the relationships between actors such, as joint agreements and communities of practice.

- **Building sustainable institutions**

Deepening the collaborative relationship to the extent that all parties jointly frame the issue; broadening institutional capacity of institutions to respond to several issues simultaneously. The focus is on co-production of knowledge and joint learning from doing; the arrangements are self-sustaining in terms of both funding and function, with all sides contributing resources. Examples include co-management arrangements, local enterprise partnerships, self-sustaining consortia.

3 Methodology

The study was based on a qualitative research method, with the use of personal interviews carried out with the leading personalities of selected organizations involved in urban revitalization (Olejárová, Tajtáková, 2018). In order to search for similarities and/or differences within the identification of successful knowledge practices, it was crucial to use a set of identical questions through all the studied categories. Our intention was to analyse, compare and thus to identify successful practice based on knowledge transfer and sharing. Moreover, the purpose of the used method was to obtain opinions of creative and innovative

actors, recognize their know-how and collect sufficient amount of data for creating a learning model. Our interest was also concentrated on indicating internal and external factors, opportunities and barriers. The existence of creative and innovative elements distinguishing the leaders (knowledge brokers) and their teams from the others and contributing to obvious success was a part of our research as well.

The sample consisted of six organizations listed in the table 1. The studied subjects were located in three different regions of Slovakia: Kultúrne centrum – KC Dunaj (Cultural Centre Dunaj) – Bratislava, Stará tržnica (Market City Hall) – Bratislava, Stanica (Local Train Station) Žilina-Záriečie – Žilina, Nová Synagóga (New Synagogue) – Žilina, Intercity (IC) Culture Train – Vyšné Opátske, and Tabačka (Tobacco Factory) Kulturfabrik – Košice. We identified three leading managers – founders/co-founders of civic organizations focusing on regeneration urban processes, as creative and innovative knowledge workers representing the knowledge brokers.

Tab. 1 *The Studied Sample*

	Subject	City	Original vs. Present Purpose	Reconstruction date
1.	KC Dunaj	Bratislava	Department Store Independent Cultural Centre	summer 2010
2.	Stará tržnica	Bratislava	Market Hall Cultural Centre, Market Hall	fall 2013-2015, ongoing
3.	Stanica Záriečie	Žilina	Local Train Station Independent Cultural Centre	spring 2003, ongoing
4.	Nová Synagóga	Žilina	Jewish Synagogue Cultural & Community Centre	spring 2011, ongoing
5.	IC Culture Train	Košice	Suburb Community Centre Independent Cultural Centre	2005-2008
6.	Tabačka Kulturfabrik	Košice	Tobacco Factory Independent Cultural Centre & Creative Incubator	2009, ongoing

Source: Own processing.

Findings of the qualitative research were analysed by using description and comparison of existing approaches and preferences of the research phenomena, including the internal and external environment of the selected cultural organizations. Moreover, the SWOT analysis of innovative and creative approaches focusing on urban revitalization processes enabled us to highlight effective tools and methods in order to formulate criteria and conclusions.

4 Results

Projects included in the sample reflected creative and innovative approaches aimed at achieving sustainability of the accomplished culture-led urban revitalization projects. Our findings confirmed a significant role of project leaders who were acting as change agents – knowledge brokers. In total, three knowledge brokers were identified. They were involved in more than one project team (usually two projects) and transferred their knowledge gained in one project to another project. After monitoring, comparing, analysing, and evaluating the activities and transformation processes of knowledge brokers, we applied the perspective of knowledge management through different knowledge brokers' strategies as defined by Michael (2009, 2011) and further adapted by Shaxson and Gwyn et al. (2010). In the

following text we present the six knowledge brokers functions as identified within the analysis of the knowledge brokers in our sample.

- **Informing**

In order to share gained knowledge, the knowledge brokers regularly took part in workshops, conferences and seminars.

- **Linking**

Besides knowledge distribution, the examined knowledge brokers were particularly successful in attracting and involving other individuals, activists, and experts, who became team members, regular or occasional participants, or advisors of the projects.

- **Matchmaking**

Opportunities for exchanging knowledge bring together experts, managers, community workers, students and others to get inspiration and, at the same time, to inspire the others through activities such as residential stays, pilot projects and volunteering.

- **Focused collaboration**

The know-how gained within a culture-based urban regeneration project became a valuable and stimulating base of knowledge not only for the studied organizations but also for other peer individuals and institutions. Moreover, it appeared very useful to participate in diverse platforms providing opportunities for presenting experience and skills and thus help and encourage other organizations. The intention was also to support and connect communities, local and neighbouring creative industries, students, small producers and farmers.

- **Strategic collaboration**

The role of the knowledge brokers brings expectations and demands for continuing improvements. Therefore, the identified change agents not only presented their experience and skills but also participated as active members in local, national and international networks and institutions. Such platforms do not only mean a significant opportunity to learn about other successful projects but also enable establishing cooperation, bringing experts together, and providing the spill-over effect.

- **Building sustainable institutions**

Visible enthusiasm and a creative and innovative approach were significant for all knowledge brokers and their teams and resulted in building and strengthening long-term and supportive relationships with different stakeholders including communities, city and regional structures, donors, enterprises, institutions and volunteers.

5 Conclusions

We conclude that the main role of knowledge brokers resides in the effective knowledge transfer and management between knowledge banks and knowledge needs. The identified knowledge brokers demonstrated the ability to learn and share valuable knowledge and experience not only from their previous projects but also from the interaction with other national or international peers. They also demonstrated effective knowledge transfer and management between knowledge banks and places of knowledge needs. The six functions of knowledge brokers were performed by the leaders of culture-led urban revitalization projects,

who shared and distributed their knowledge towards new or parallel culture-based urban regeneration projects.

In spite of the fact that the revitalized venues were located in different cities and regions of Slovakia (considering possible demographic and economic deviations), the summarized outcomes indicate prevailing compliance visible in all the studied subjects. It is also necessary to mention that the studied organizations were active members of several national and international platforms for sharing knowledge and experience related to similar urban regeneration projects, e.g. ANTENA, T.E.H., etc. This was particularly important in the view of knowledge brokering and knowledge transfer among different revitalization cases and teams.

In addition, the knowledge brokers received several prestigious awards and invitations to cooperation on future urban regeneration projects, which can be seen as evidence of the correct approach and appropriate knowledge management.

Acknowledgments

This paper was elaborated in the framework of the research project VEGA No. 1/0562/18 “The links between Human Capital and Information and Communication Technology”.

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Contact data:

Mária Tajtáková, Assoc. Prof., Ing. PhD.

School of Management/City University of Seattle programs in Trenčín,
Panónska cesta 17, 851 04 Bratislava, Slovakia
mtajtakova@vsm.sk

Mária Olejárová, PhDr., PhD., MBA

School of Management/City University of Seattle programs in Trenčín,
Panónska cesta 17, 851 04 Bratislava, Slovakia
molejarova@vsm.sk