

TURN LEARNING INTO A GAME

Experiential Learning
Through Immersive
Simulations



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CHALLENGE



GRASPING MEDIATIZATION OF SOCIETY

- Theoretical concept that describes the (increasing) influence of the media on all parts of society over time:
 - In private contexts
 - In professional contexts
 - As well-informed citizens
- Not only relevant for media and communication researchers:
 - Media can get instrumentalized by strategic actors of all kinds
 - Media shape the actions of strategic actors
 - We react to the potential of media presence and coverage

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/2010/06/18/US/POLITICS/18SPILL.HTML](https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/18/US/POLITICS/18SPILL.HTML)



Easy to understand as a **general concept**, but...

...hard to grasp the **depth of its implications**

SETTING: EXPERTS IN TEAMWORK (EiT)

- Intensive «village» context (three weeks with daily teaching)
- Massively interdisciplinary
- Focus on teamwork / collaborative skills
- Practice- and experience-oriented
- Theoretically based on **experiential learning**, a pedagogical approach according to which learning is the process of creating knowledge through “grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41)

Eksperter i team (EiT)





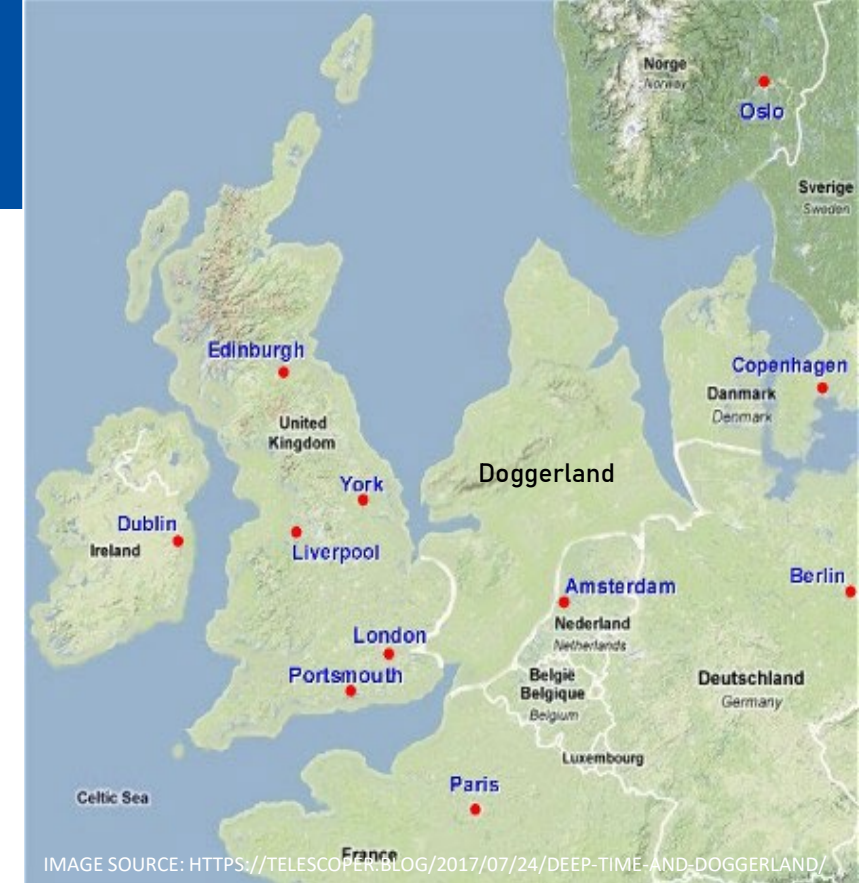
APPROACH

SIMULATIONS AS A TOOL FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING




- Experiential learning can be realized by means of **simulations as a pedagogical tool**
- Central elements of simulations:
 - **Realism:** team-based activities that mimic real-world situations; students plan, make decisions, and face consequences
 - **Competition (as well as interaction and cooperation):** motivates students to gather and analyze complex information and strive to win
 - **Involvement and motivation:** students experience simulations as valuable and enjoyable, as they apply knowledge and skills, stimulating higher-order thinking, reflection, and critical analysis → enhancing learning
 - **Feedback and facilitation:** Teachers as facilitators; teacher–student interaction boosts student satisfaction
 - **Reflection on learning:** Reflections on and self-evaluations of own learning → metacognition

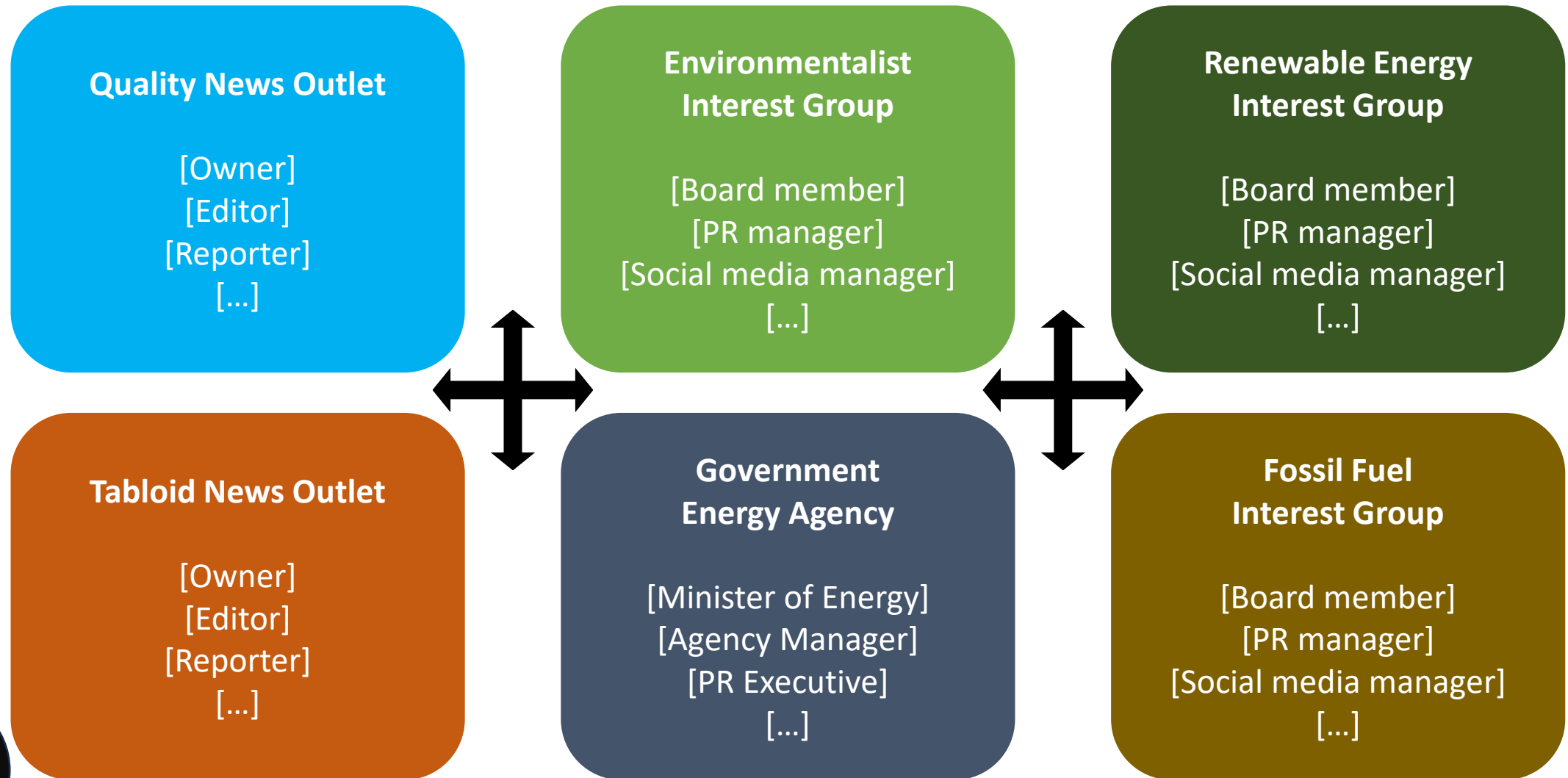
SETTING

- **Doggerland**, a fictional country in the North Sea
- Shaping **energy policy** in Doggerland
- Country information (population, cities, energy system, political system...)
- **Sandbox** role playing game/simulation
- **Each student joins one Doggerland organization** with a specific identity and task (profile) and creates a character to play



TEAMS & TASKS

-  → Create a newspaper every day, sell, outperform
-  → Balance interests, public approval, media attention
-  → Media attention, public approval, shape policy



Game Master (GM)

GUIDANCE & INTERVENTION

- 45-90min lectures everyday (news, journalism, mediatization, scandalization, ...)
- Continuous «Wire News» for newspapers
- Daily briefing for each group
 - Feedback and „real-world“ consequences
- Resource cards (example actions, GM decisions)
- Interactions between groups on Twitter
- Daily ‘reveal’ of the newspapers



SCHEDULE

Buildup		Routine					Debate				Scandal					Final Reflection					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
9	L	L	L	L	L			L	L	G	L	G			G	G	G	L	G		
10	L	L	L	L	L			L	L	G	L	G			G	G	G	L	G		
11	G	G	G	G	G			G	G	G	G	G			G	G	G	G	G		
12	T	G	G	G	T			T	G	G	G	T			T	G	G	T	G		
13	G	G	G	G	G			G	G	G	G	G			G	G	G	G	G		
14	G	G	T	G	G			G	G	T	G	G			G	G	T	G	G		
15	G	G	G	G	G			G	G	G	G	G			G	G	G	T	G		
16	C	C	C	C	C			C	C	C	C	C			C	C	C	C	C		

Stress

Instruction

Supervision & Teambuilding

QUESTIONS

- Does this create a sense of **realism**?
- Does the game stimulate **motivation and involvement**?
- Do groups engage in **interaction, competition, cooperation**?
- How did **feedback and facilitation** affect the game?
- Did students achieve the **learning goals** and engage in **reflection** based on experiences?

Data sources: (a) Final reflections session, (b) reference group, (c) evaluation survey, (d) grade distribution

RESULTS



Deep immersion reported

« *“Everybody bought into it, you know, and they, they played their part.”*

Simulated stress and anticipation

« *I was on my mobile phone and the messages were just coming one after the next, bing, bing, bing. [...] It was fun. Like a little bit stressful, but fun in a way. We were always like “what is it now”?*

Daily rhythm helped diving into the game

« *When you go every day, you can like think about what happened yesterday and react, plan, and get a like very close connection to your team.*

Possibility to step out of the game helps reflecting playfully

« *“[W]e couldn’t help ourselves being funny once both newspapers were, I think, funnier than real newspapers would be.*

MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT



High levels of enjoyment

« *My flatmates are so jealous of me. [...] [T]hey hate the fact that I'm enjoying EiT so much.* »

Stakes were high, failures in the game were experienced as painful

« *I was so disappointed and, and I tried to leverage the personal relationship we had with the Minister of Energy [...] but it turned out it was not very successful. We were so upset because we did not get any reactions at all for a while.* »

Feeling media power and logic

« *You were vicious with that mute button. It wasn't like, letting the sentence finish. It was on the second, like, bam, cut off. That was pretty funny.* »

INTERACTION, COMPETITION, COOPERATION



Sense of pride from success

- « *Sometimes the actions you did were very beneficial to us. For instance, you ordered the inspection of all nuclear plants [...]. We use[d] that [...] to defend ourselves. [...] So we sort of [...] rode your coattails to greatness.*

Groups build strategies, cooperate, compete

- « *It's been amazing actually today and listening to the team, other teams present because it, it feels to me like the fog of war is lifting. And I can actually see how the other groups strategized. And it's so amazing to find out what was going on in your heads at the same time as we were thinking about during the game.*

Complexity and layeredness of interactions and consciousness

- « *NEED: "What's On", did you realize that we were absolutely trying to instrumentalize you [...]?*
- « *WhatsOn: Yes, we were aware, but we thought it was kind of fun because when you're aware that you are sort of being played, you can try and not play into it or you can lean more into it.*



Game produces feedback automatically

- « *“[A] highlight of the day was like when newspapers got rolled out, sitting and reading the news was very fun and we sort of sat, grouped together and enjoyed reading together.”*
- « *“[...] this one day where we got this bad review that we were like basically doing nothing and that we were like so old school. And then we were like, OK, [...] we need to react to this now.”*

GM was essential as a facilitator (lecture and game materials, resources, available for questions, daily briefings). The simulation demanded **high involvement from the teacher (=facilitator)**.

Dramaturgy from routine phase to debate event to scandal was experienced as satisfying

LEARNING AND REFLECTION



Students use **conceptual terminology**, e.g. **anticipating** potential media criticism by taking **preventive** measures:

« *We deliberately buried information in long and technical press releases. [...] This prevented a degree of mediatization where you couldn't say we weren't communicating or we weren't being transparent. The media had no options to misconstrue or to frame the conversation because we had already put it out there.*

High **satisfaction with own learning** (3.98 on a 1–5 scale)

All **group reports graded** at A, B, or C



CONCLUSION

IMPLICATIONS

- Simulation effectively **linked theoretical, applied, and critical knowledge** about mediatization and created **strong realism and immersion**:
- By experiencing decision-making in a mediatized society “firsthand”, students **understood strategies, considerations, trade-offs, contingencies, and ethical dilemmas**.
- **Key ingredients** in game design:
 1. **Extensive background information for use in-game**
 2. **Stimulating events that changed routines and relationships**
 3. **In-game arenas generating continuous feedback**
 4. **Continuous teacher facilitation (out-game)**

➔ Enabling **key components of experiential learning**: realism, competition, involvement, motivation, feedback, and reflection

**GAME
OVER**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



Kunnskap for en bedre verden

ANY COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS?

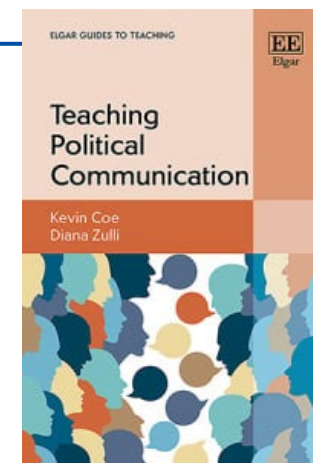
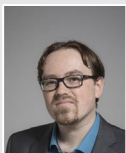


IMAGE SOURCE: ELGAR.COM

Geiß, S. & Magin, M. (2026). The Mediatization Experience. An experiential learning simulation on mediatization of politics. In K. Coe & D. Zulli (Eds.), *Teaching Political Communication*. Elgar Guides to Teaching. Edward Elgar.



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