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The Urban Lab of Europe !

The BRIDGE project Journal N° 5

Project led by the City of Rotterdam



**JOBS & SKILLS
IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY**



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THE BRIDGE PROJECT

BRIDGE addresses the urgent urban challenge of better aligning young people's educational choices with future labour market needs. Rapid transformation of many sectors of the Rotterdam economy has already started to change the skills that are required from the workforce. The associated unprecedented new economic opportunities and challenges will drastically change labour market needs. Consequently, qualification and skill gaps are expected to grow significantly. The target area of South Rotterdam (200.000 inhabitants) has major disadvantages across key socio-economic indicators compared to the rest of Rotterdam and the country. Unemployment is at 21%, 32% of the children grow up in poverty and 39% have parents with no/low formal education. First and second-generation migrants make up 74% of the population in the focus areas of South Rotterdam. In this context, young people often make career choices that lack a realistic labour market perspective. The result is a persistent situation in which although the work is there, many of the 2.000 young people from South Rotterdam annually entering the labour market cannot realistically compete, either in the current, or in the EU vision of a green digital economy.

The proposed innovative urban action ensures that by 2020, 50% of secondary vocational training students in South Rotterdam, will have chosen a career in one of the major growth sectors. This ambitious goal will be achieved through close cooperation between employers, schools, national and local government. Pupils will follow a programme centred on the opportunities relating to the Green Digital Economy major growth sectors. Bringing together all 68 primary schools, 20 secondary schools and 3 vocational schools in South Rotterdam, all pupils and their parents will take part in the programme. This career and talent orientation programme will start in primary school (age 9) and end when students enter the labour market.

Partnership:

- Gemeente Rotterdam
- Metropoolregio Rotterdam Den Haag
- SEOR B.V.
- Hogeschool Rotterdam - Rotterdam University of Applied Science
- RebelGroup Executives BV

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the UIA BRIDGE project, Rotterdam tackles two major challenges: the transformation of a deprived area and the mismatch between the education system and the labour market.

As the UIA-funded period ends, the city has secured funds to continue the project's core activities. BRIDGE's effective partnership model and its development of relevant tools have encouraged this vote of confidence. Its absorption into the city's mainstream services, evidenced through its influence in Rotterdam's new Work and Learning Agreements, has been the reward. This is the legacy of its initial success.

Yet the continuation of BRIDGE is in spite of the current evaluation evidence. This does confirm the project's intervention logic in relation to the careers choices of young people in Rotterdam South. Those with appropriate qualifications opting for careers in the target sectors are more likely to find and stay in employment.

However, the available data cannot evidence that this is happening: yet. More time is required. In the meantime, the research indicates that there are significant social benefits from the target group choosing these career paths: a lifetime benefit of €91,568 in the case of technology and €81,627 in the case of healthcare.

The technical challenges of identifying a single unit cost relating to impact has hindered the project's financial innovation work. For example, it has blocked the development of a Social Impact Bond (SIB) as a future funding source. Instead the team has devised an innovative social coin mechanism (RIKX) based on carbon trading

principles. This evolved from BRIDGE as a way to improve the city's SROI ecosystem, and the pilot phase takes place in autumn/winter 2019.

As BRIDGE 1.0 closes, schools have become increasingly engaged, with almost all of those in South Rotterdam involved. Research into the 60 primary schools in the area showed an average participation in between two and three BRIDGE interventions per school. Despite this, four schools were not involved at all, and key lessons have been learned about effective school engagement during this phase. These lessons will be applied going forward.

At the same time, engaging individual employers remains a challenge. Although BRIDGE exceeded its target of Career Start Guarantees (702 against a target of 600), these were negotiated with industry sector bodies. But in a survey only 5% of companies in the target sectors recognised the project brand. This also remains work in progress, to be picked up in the Work and Learning Agreements.

Getting the message across the young people has also been a BRIDGE priority. To this end, the project has designed and implemented a battery of digital products, shaped by an understanding of this niche target audience. On the conclusion of stage 1, some important lessons have emerged from this strand of activity. The most salient of these is the continuing primacy of face-to-face communication. The most effective intervention was the large experiential AHOY event in January 2019, and the team acknowledges that direct work in schools has also paid off highly. Again, these are important learning points for the future.

As we have already noted, BRIDGE is more than the sum of its parts. We have also pointed out that its transformative work within City Hall has been one of the keys to its success. The project has successfully established a cross-departmental innovation space which provides a much greater chance of these cross-cutting lessons being applied in future. In doing so, it has had a significant impact on the working culture within the city government. As a senior city official observed:

“What I really like about this is the feedback loop we’ve created but which is not always used in policy making. BRIDGE gives the three of us, from different departments, the chance to think and work together, to develop solutions to shared challenges.”

BRIDGE has generated many lessons for Rotterdam itself. But there are also important ones for cities across Europe and beyond. From this penultimate expert visit, we would specifically underline the following:

1. Do not assume that digital platforms are the best way to reach young people

Although digital tools are attractive, the BRIDGE experience clearly shows they cannot replace – or match – real human interaction. A hybrid approach works best.

2. Draw inspiration from other sectors

The design of the innovative RIKX social-coin concept draws upon the work of innovators in other sectors, including the notion of a local

digital currency (such as the Bristol Pound) and that of a virtual commodity exchange, like the carbon trading platform.

3. There is no such thing as a free lunch

The BRIDGE evaluation indicates varying levels of school buy in. This seems partly due to the fact that their project role remains rather passive. Interventions are offered free, with schools opting in or out. A stronger sense of ownership amongst schools is needed. Providing them with their own budget to spend on intervention – and other related activities- could help address this.

4. Get beyond the sectors to work with employers

There is an obvious rationale for working with employer bodies. In most cities, the majority of the employer base is SMEs, so there are clear economies of scale operating through industry bodies. However, the BRIDGE experience shows that this is not enough. Meaningful engagement must go beyond this to find ways to directly connect with employers.

5. Invest in effective data systems relating to diversity

Some of the evaluation outputs from BRIDGE make for uncomfortable reading. This is particularly the case in relation to the evidence relating to people from migrant backgrounds, showing the labour market disadvantages they face. Reliable transparent data enables us to understand this – and, with political will, to address it in our policymaking.

2. OPENING AND CLOSING

2.1 Introduction

The UIA-funded phase of the Rotterdam BRIDGE project came to an end on 31st October 2019. The date marked the termination of three busy years delivering an innovative approach to influencing the career choices of young people in Rotterdam South. In the most deprived neighbourhood in the Netherlands, BRIDGE seeks to break the cycle of poverty by nudging young people towards careers in the city's growth sectors. Through making better career choices, they can improve

their life prospects and those of their families and communities.

In this fifth and final journal¹ covering the operational period, we report on the extent to which the project's goals have been achieved. We also explore the innovation lessons generated by this ambitious undertaking, as well as examining the prospects for BRIDGE after the conclusion of the UIA funding.

2.2 Mainstreaming public sector innovation

The role of these journals is not to evaluate each UIA initiative. Rather, it is to shine a light on the overall project, as well as to highlight aspects of particular interest. This has been the approach throughout the series, with each journal paying particular attention to specific strands of activity.

This fifth journal is similar, but also different. Although it considers BRIDGE as a whole, it gives special focus on two of the most challenging components; the monitoring and evaluation activity and the financial innovation work. Throughout the project these have been 'red flagged' as the most complex of the nine innovation challenges set out by the UIA.

Previously, we have noted that BRIDGE is more than the sum of its parts. It represents a systemic approach which is complex – at times messy – and which does not fail to duck major challenges. One of these is the key urban policy question around reviving deprived neighbourhoods;

another relates to the ongoing – and growing – mismatch between the education system and the labour market. Cities across Europe and beyond will recognise and understand these issues.

Addressing one of these systemic challenges would be enough for most cities. But Rotterdam has approached them both, and in a way that has required City Hall staff to break out of their established silos. As we noted in Journal 4, this is risky business, which can often make enemies amongst those more at home in their own policy spheres. As a pilot project with short-term funding, the starting odds were perhaps stacked against BRIDGE continuing beyond its initial three year period.

Yet it will continue. Funds – from a wide variety of sources – have been made available to support the continuation of the work. And this, despite the absence of watertight evidence on impact, for reasons that are later discussed. Several

¹ There will be a final, sixth journal, in spring 2020, six months after the project's completion.

important factors – including high level and sustained political support – underpin this continued commitment.

BRIDGE’s effective partnership model and its development of tools that have been absorbed into the city’s flagship Work and Learning Agreements has helped build this trust in its future. These results also reflect the important steps BRIDGE has achieved in establishing a collaborative partnership for continued innovation and learning across departmental

boundaries in City Hall. This has been a key element in the successful mainstreaming of the BRIDGE project.

Reflecting on this, a senior city official noted:

“What I really like about this is the feedback loop we’ve created but which is not always used in policy making. BRIDGE gives the three of us, from different departments, the chance to think and work together, to develop solutions to shared challenges.”



“BRIDGE Steering Group workshop”

3. SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

3.1 BRIDGE INTERVENTIONS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In earlier journals we have considered the package of BRIDGE interventions. We have discussed the wide diversity between the 20 interventions on offer, and the fact that some were already in place prior to the UIA start, whilst others have only recently come on stream. We have also examined their relative popularity with schools and other stakeholders.

3.1.1 Interventions and schools

The level of engagement in Bridge interventions amongst South schools has risen over the project's UIA lifetime². For example of the 60 primary schools in the area, 16 schools participated in four or more in 2018/19, compared to 10 in the previous year. In most cases (53%) these schools engage in two or three interventions. At the same time, four schools continue to not engage at all.

These patterns reflect the complexity of working with schools. The factors behind differing levels of engagement have been discussed in earlier journals and they include:

- The absence of a systems-thinking innovation culture in schools
- The autonomy of schools and the key role of head teachers in setting the culture
- Shortages of staff and resources

Overall, what has the experience in this UIA period taught us about schools' involvement in

Although the interventions continue, it is useful in this journal to take a step back to reflect on what has been learnt. Specifically, this will involve commenting on the relative take up levels and apparent appeal of the interventions. We will then build on this to consider our related conclusions for each of the key stakeholder groups: schools, employers and parents.

such programmes? How can we achieve higher levels of commitment going forward?

The city's Education Director had important observations on this question:

"We learned from this project that it takes time for schools to see the importance of these partnerships. It's too optimistic to expect these to change in three years. Schools are conservative, and struggling with daily life. But the work BRIDGE is doing is an important extra motor to drive change in how schools prepare children for the choices they have to make."

She also had clear thoughts on the question of school buy-in.

"I would like to make it (participation in BRIDGE) mandatory. One of the good things about Bridge is that we didn't have to worry about chasing the money. This creates uncertainty amongst schools. Instead, we were able to focus on developing the product. "

² These data come from the analysis of a selection of interventions for which participation data was available.

For those stakeholders working outside the Education sector, Bridge has provided important insights into the psychology and culture of schools. For example, there is a tension between their very long fixed planning schedules and the reactive day to day culture in schools, where resources are tight.

Consequently, daily firefighting means that schools may withdraw from an intervention at the last minute without any penalty; particularly as this is other people's money. A Bridge stakeholder working closely with schools suggested a solution:

"We need to invest in schools' ability for reflection. We should pay them to reflect and share with one another. And we should give them budget to buy services if we want to get deeper engagement. Get them to own and pay for their own plans."

These are significant conclusions from this work, which has unearthed many potential

3.1.2 Interventions and Employers

Bridge's work with educational agencies and with employer bodies has been instrumental in shaping the city's new Work Learning Agreements, outlined in Journal 4. Indeed, the past three years have generated useful intelligence in relation to Rotterdam's key sector employers, their plans for addressing the challenge of the Next Economy and their attitude towards future skills supply.

We examined this in some detail in Journal 3. There, we flagged the Career Start Guarantee (CSG) as the most visible intervention linked to employers – and indeed perhaps the flagship intervention for Bridge overall.

Since then, and on completion of the UIA phase, Bridge has exceeded its CSG targets and to date there are 702 of these guarantees now in place.

improvements. But it's also important not to lose sight of what has been achieved. In Section 3.4 we discuss the evaluation, and in June 2019 Bridge assembled project partners to share their experiences with a large delegation of international visitors. Teachers played an active role in this session, and two transcript comments give an insight into their perceptions:

"And when the teachers talk with the parents about the career of their kids, it's no longer about grades, it's also about your path to go to a career, what are talents of your child? Do you see the talents of your child? And make a choice that fits the child." (Teacher)

"The teacher is coaching the conversation. In my opinion the teachers in Rotterdam South in the next years, have to learn not to teach, but to ask questions at the right moment and in the right place and the right pupil." (Vocational Education professional)

This is across 10 industry sectors, with Childcare and the Police the latest to come on board. These impressive metrics suggest that Bridge is tapping into something important.

However, the numbers rarely tell the full story. As Bridge 1.0 comes to a close, there is a clear sense that, as with schools, these good things can be improved upon in the next phase. One of them is the visibility of Bridge – and specifically the CSG – amongst individual employers. A recent survey for the project showed that only 5% of companies in the city's target sectors recognised the brand. This is surprising, but likely due to the fact that these are negotiated with sectoral bodies, rather than companies. Addressing this needs some thought going forward, perhaps as part of the Work Learning Agreements process.

What also needs thought is the nature of the guarantee. As we have noted in an earlier journal, this varies dramatically from sector to sector, which is likely to be unhelpful in attracting young people – and influencers like their parents. Rotterdam’s labour market is currently buoyant, and demographic changes mean that there will be many replacement opportunities in the near future economy. In these cases, job seekers have more options. Logically, employers will have to work harder to compete in this limited talent pool, and refining the guarantee offer may be an effective way to do this.

It is important not to underestimate the effort Bridge has invested in cultivating employer relationships and commitment. As we noted in Journal 3, employers still appear to assume quite a passive role in this process, expecting others to

3.1.3 Working with Parents

Parents remain perhaps the most difficult stakeholder group for Bridge to engage with. As we heard from our teacher focus group in Journal 4, many schools struggle with this, particularly in South where there are multiple barriers.

Yet, the teachers session provided a good example of one school struggling to connect with parents, and another which has transformed its parental engagement through using the tools developed through Bridge. These resources, which continue to be rolled out to schools, are a major project legacy, with the quiet potential to address a chronic challenge within the education system.

These career guidance products are helping schools with career orientation in general, but specifically giving structured tools to actively engage parents. In doing so, they are enhancing

solve their future skills pipeline problems – as they have in the past. So, building and maintaining these relationships remains work in progress.

With this in mind, it was very positive to have employers actively involved in the International Workshop held in June 2019. As part of the dialogue process, they articulated the way in which Bridge was reshaping their relationships with schools, teachers and young people.

“Well what hasn’t been done before is the connection with the young people, we open doors in our company but it’s also good that you have a platform to open up.” (Employer)

“A lot of the kids who live around here don’t even know what basic job an engineer does, what a nurse does. So we had to recalibrate a little bit how to close that gap.” (Employer)

the dialogue between children and their parents, as well as between teachers and parents.

It is encouraging to hear that this work will continue – funded through other sources – and there is, of course, potential for roll out beyond Rotterdam South.

From the International Workshop session, there was helpful comment about the way in which this work has helped clarify teachers’ role towards parents, and also equipped them with the language to engage them effectively:

“Tell parents, what is it that you are proud of your child? What are you proud of?” and also the question to the pupil, “What are you proud about your parents?” So the atmosphere in the conversation is totally different from a few years ago. (Vocational Education professional)

3.2 FINANCIAL INNOVATION

A commitment to financial innovation has been an important element of the BRIDGE project. Throughout the journey we have tracked this element of the project's work, specifically in Journals 2 and 4.

This work is closely tied to the monitoring and evaluation of the project, as well as to the search for a sustainable funding model beyond the UIA funds. Specifically, the three tasks for this element of work comprised:

- Building a business case for BRIDGE, based on an understanding of its effects and unit costs
- Exploring the potential for a Social Impact Bond (SIB) linked to BRIDGE
- Examining the city's SROI³ model and how this relates to BRIDGE

The indicator applied to this activity was to generate €3m of funding to sustain the project beyond autumn 2019.

Happily, that indicator has been achieved, albeit through more conventional funding mechanisms as we discussed in section 2.2. Although they are pleased with this result, there is some disappointment within the financial innovation team that the project continues to rely on conventional funding sources:

“I was very excited at the start. When I look now I'm sad that we are continuing with a rather traditional funding model. We explored every avenue but always bumped up against barriers.”

Those barriers have already been identified in earlier journals. They have included the inability to identify a base unit cost for BRIDGE interventions, due to a number of reasons,

including the diversity of those interventions and the project's relatively short timescale.

The absence of an established unit cost for the social impact of BRIDGE also prevented any progress in relation to Social Income Bonds (SIBs), a field in which Rotterdam is already an established player.

Given these frustrations, it is good to report that this strand of BRIDGE's work has yielded important results. The first of these relates to the way in which the project has catalysed a transformation in the operation of the city's SROI fund. The starting point for this was a review of the current model, where employers on city government business commit to generating agreed levels of social impact. This revealed that many companies struggle to meet these commitments and that, when they do, they rarely see their benefit. Consequently, companies see this as an additional levy placed upon them.

Influenced by BRIDGE's work in this area, the city of Rotterdam has acknowledged this challenge and taken steps to address it. Changes to the city regulations from October 2019 allow greater flexibility around how businesses meet these commitments. This increased latitude will enable the piloting of BRIDGE's most innovative development in this area of work; the concept of the social coin, branded in Rotterdam as [RIKX](#).

As we described in Journal 4, the basic concept of this is to create a market whereby businesses with an outstanding SROI liability can meet these by supporting social entrepreneurs in the city. Loosely based on the concept of carbon trading, the mechanism for this will be the new social coin.

³ Social Return on Investment

How does this work? For the pilot phase, which started in October, the BRIDGE team has recruited 13 city-based social entrepreneurs largely active in the sectors targeted by the project. Assessment has enabled the team to calibrate and place a value upon the social impact created by these organisations. In mid November, the plan is to link them to businesses with outstanding SROI obligations who will ‘purchase’ some of these impacts using RIKX. In doing so, they will meet their SROI requirements, a transaction enabled by the city’s acceptance of the social coin as part of its decision of 9th October.

The BRIDGE team is excited about these pioneering developments, which represent

3.3 COMMUNICATIONS

Throughout the series of journals, we have tracked the progress of Bridge’s communications activity. This has been a highly visible component of the project, with many examples of experimentation, as we have previously discussed.

This multi-pronged campaign has combined digital and more traditional tools. This hybrid approach has generated valuable intelligence around how to engage with BRIDGE’s different audiences. It is perhaps the lessons about reaching young people that are the most useful.

a global first. Assuming the model works, future plans would include identifying the social impact of various BRIDGE interventions and embedding them in the RIKX platform in order to generate a future income source from the city’s businesses.

From the start of the project, we have identified this element of work as being one of the two largest challenges. Although a workable solution has yet to appear, there is a consensus that the issues raised by BRIDGE have been instrumental in the city’s refinement of its SROI approach. It is also evident that the RIKX concept provides a potential breakthrough in ways to fund social impact beyond the traditional public funding sources.

Overall, there is a consensus that the balance favoured digital too much against the established approaches. The major *Gaan voor een Baan*⁴ event, held at the Ahoy Exhibition Centre in January 2019, is widely regarded as the most effective single action. This attracted 1,500 young participants over two days. The NPRZ team leading this work sees the experiential aspect of the event as being a key part of its success. They also underline the value of engaging directly in schools.



“Gaan voor een baan”event

⁴ Go For a Job

Their experience of mobilising a repertoire of digital tools has identified pros and cons amongst them. For example, the use of websites has not been as affective as hoped. The project’s website attracts lots of traffic, but usage is fleeting and superficial. There is a lack of what digital developers call ‘stickiness’.

Relying on schools’ websites has been frustrating. These are largely static, digital information boards, which have not been able to assist in connecting young people to Bridges’ work.

As a team member observed:

“We realize that you have to treat social media and websites as ancillary tools – not as the main platform. You have to put more effort into exploring how they (young people) live their lives and where they meet – then try to get into those spaces to connect with them. And you have to be in class. In their faces. More than one time. Social media is the back up – not the other way around.”

This is perhaps a surprising finding. It would be easy to assume that this generation of digital natives would be most comfortable engaging on

line. But the real picture is more complex, which is endorsed by other initiatives operating in this space. For example, in Finland, young people were actively involved in the co-design of a new network of drop-in career guidance centres called [Ohjaamo](#). The final shape of these facilities reflects some of the young people’s priorities – one of which was a recommendation to prioritise face-to-face guidance and support over the digital equivalent. Of course the two operate in tandem, but the human element came through clearly in their advice. It seems that a similar message is coming from BRIDGE.

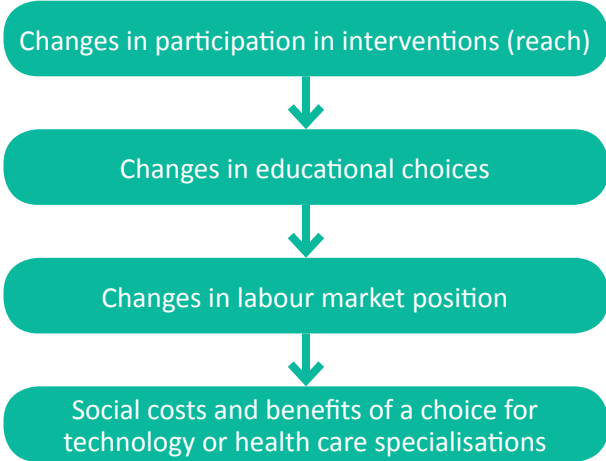
Looking ahead, one of the big developments is to co-design events with key sectoral organisations based on the success of the Ahoy event. In February 2020, there will be a major event with a large Housing Association and another related to energy transition linked to the city’s shift from gas to renewables. In November 2020 the Ahoy event will be repeated.

In the meantime, the communication campaign will be revised and refreshed, incorporating the key findings from this initial phase of activity.

3.4 EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BRIDGE

This final period of UIA funding has contained a significant block of monitoring and evaluation activity. This has comprised a schools survey, an employer survey and a second set of data analysis, led by the Erasmus University team.

As we have already noted, the monitoring and evaluation activity has been inhibited by some key technical challenges relating to the data and to the project timescales. In this section, we share the headline messages based on four dimensions:



3.4.1 The reach of BRIDGE interventions

In Section 3.1 we discussed the state of play in relation to the BRIDGE interventions. We noted the diversity of the offer and the fact that some interventions have only been available for a relatively short period.

In that section we cited figures relating to school engagement levels. These came from the evaluation team, which has noted that over time, BRIDGE continues to reach more schools in Rotterdam South, as the table below shows.

Table 1: Distribution of primary schools based on the number of interventions they engage with⁵

Number of interventions	Primary schools in 2017/18	Primary schools in 2018/19
0	4	4
1	13	8
2	10	18
3	23	14
4	8	8
5	1	6
6	1	2

Source: SEOR, BRIDGE Evaluation team

The table shows that most primary schools manage to engage in between 3 and 4 interventions. Positively, we see a strong increase in schools engaging with 6 or more. However, at the same time for both of these years, 4 primary schools in South did not participate at all.

The evaluation concludes that there is scope to further grow the intervention numbers. As we have noted in 3.1.2, it also notes the potential to involve more employers in the programme.

From the school side, a number of factors limiting participation have been identified. Each school has its own vision of career orientation, largely set by the senior management team. Where this conflicts with BRIDGE, it’s hard to secure active buy in. Another issue is schools’ limited capacity – in terms of personnel and other resources. Alongside this, school planning cycles are long and quite inflexible, and addressing this has required considerable input from the BRIDGE team.

3.4.2 Changes in educational choices

A number of analyses have been carried out, each of them contributing to the question to what extent interventions of BRIDGE have contributed to other educational choices. The analysis yields few positive indications. However,

this part of the evaluation perhaps faces the biggest technical issues. Due to the limitations of the data, at this stage it is not possible to reach final conclusions on the effectiveness of interventions.

⁵ These data come from the analysis of a selection of interventions for which participation data was available.

In South Rotterdam, take up patterns of the target vocational courses largely reflect wider trends. However, the evaluation evidence has highlighted some positive shifts, such as the relatively strong growth in higher-level vocational health courses taking place in South. The differences in growth for these higher level health courses are mainly in comparison with regions outside Rotterdam. The differences between Rotterdam South and the rest of Rotterdam are limited.

It has also illuminated some of the basic barriers which include the fact that 40% of pupils in Rotterdam South are in schools with no technology offer. A number of factors contribute to this – including the large number of small schools – but the net effect is a significant barrier to progression in one of the sectoral target areas. This is an important emerging finding which the city’s Education Director has identified as a strategic priority to address.

Another important finding relates to participation rates in the VBL stream. This is a dual-system type offer, where pupils spend a high proportion of their time in a workplace. This apprenticeship

programme leads to high levels of employment outcomes. Yet, the evaluation data shows a clear gap in take up between pupils with a migration background and the general population. In 2018, only 9% of pupils with a migrant took this route, compared to 22% of the Rotterdam South population without a migrant background.

Discussions have suggested two factors at play here. The first is that migrant households may either not understand the details of this model, or may even see it as a lower quality education opportunity. The second is that employers discriminate against young people of migrant background. Both factors can, of course, be in operation at once. The clear message for Bridge is a need to address any such behaviours on either side, so that all young people can make the best choices for themselves.

A final observation relates to the role of career guidance in schools. All that can be said, based on the available data so far, is that these interventions do facilitate the career guidance process. However, they may not contribute to young people making better decisions relating to better future employment prospects.



View of Rotterdam South

3.4.3 Changes in labour market position

The percentage of young people in Rotterdam South with a job remains slightly lower than that for the rest of the city and for the other three large Dutch cities. It remains much lower than the national average. The available evidence shows that young people in Rotterdam South choosing careers in BRIDGE target sectors have better career prospects⁶. It also shows that the higher the qualification level they achieve, the better those prospects are. This underlines the need to address qualification levels, as well as sectors.

These points are clearly shown in Table 2 below. This shows the average share of time vocational secondary graduates are in employment. So, in the case of Logistics, for a young person in South, their time in employment increases in line with higher levels of qualification – from 66% to 84%. However, it shows that regardless of qualification level, they will always spend less time in employment than the ‘Netherlands Other’⁷ rate for their equally qualified peers.

Table 2: Fraction job by field and level of education – senior secondary vocational graduates

	Rotterdam South	Rotterdam other	G3 (= 3 other large cities)	Netherlands other
other				
mbo 2	59%	61%	64%	75%
mbo 3	67%	71%	71%	80%
mbo 4	71%	72%	77%	81%
technology				
mbo 2	70%	73%	70%	82%
mbo 3	83%	85%	79%	89%
mbo 4	80%	83%	74%	86%
healthcare				
mbo 2	52%	54%	58%	69%
mbo 3	83%	86%	86%	94%
mbo 4	85%	86%	85%	94%
logistics				
mbo 2	66%	60%	78%	87%
mbo 3	80%	80%	81%	85%
mbo 4	84%	76%	83%	89%

Source: SEOR, BRIDGE Evaluation team

⁶ As we have noted in previous journals, the exception is Care MBO Level 2, which does not bestow better career prospects.

⁷ ‘Netherlands Other’ refers to the Netherlands excluding the 4 largest cities.

This begs the important question of why. Further analysis by the Erasmus University team provides an insight. Using statistical regression analysis⁸ they have further explored the factors within the population which shape the fractional job data. This shows that if the population of South mirrored the national population distribution, the overall time spent in employment would be 11.2% higher.

3.4.4 Social costs and benefits

Supporting people into sustained employment creates multiple benefits both for the individuals and society. This is particularly the case in Rotterdam South and similar neighbourhoods, where higher unemployment rates have widespread negative effects.

For BRIDGE, where the main beneficiaries are not yet in the labour market, timescales are too short to measure this impact. However, by using existing data, the evaluation team has explored the lifetime benefits of someone selecting either technology or healthcare over other options. Taking account of the income and costs – both to individuals and the state – the benefit of making

It also shows that if South had the same proportion of people with a migrant background as the Dutch average, the time spent in employment would rise by 5.6% - the biggest factor amongst the different characteristics. As we have noted in earlier journals, migration background continues to influence the employment prospects of Rotterdam South residents.

these choices is quite significant. The life-time per person surplus would be:

- €91,568 in the case of the technology option; and
- €81,627 for the healthcare option

This shows that the overall net social benefits – at both individual and state level – are high for both of these sectoral pathways. In fact, the surpluses are so high that if BRIDGE persuades a few dozen students annually to opt for these sectors over others, the programme costs are covered. So only a small effect of BRIDGE would be sufficient to compensate the costs.

3.4.5 Some final remarks on Monitoring and Evaluation

As a 'critical friend' the UIA Expert should seek to be impartial and objective. However, the results at the end of this three-year period feel disappointing. Although the social cost analysis is promising, one looks for stronger evidence of the effects than are currently available.

As we know, this is partly due to the relatively short timescales. Three years is an insufficient span to meaningfully measure the impact of this work, given its target group and timescales. There are also technical limitations. Most of these are

beyond the control of the project. But others are not. For example, better data from schools would help. So too would a model that utilised a control group to compare effects against.

This approach was considered at the outset, but rejected on the basis that it would be unfair and perhaps unethical. From a technical perspective, it is interesting to note that an approach widely considered ethically acceptable within the health sector, was deemed not so in this innovation case.

⁸ This creates a model of the Rotterdam South population which has a comparable distribution (age, gender, ethnicity, educational qualifications etc) to the national pattern.



Promoting Career Start Guarantees

4. LESSONS FOR EUROPE'S CITIES

4.1 Introduction

Each of these journals has contained a short video capturing relevant comments from the people involved in the expert meetings. This journal is no different. [Here](#), we include the perspectives of the some key BRIDGE stakeholders reflecting on their overall impressions of the journey.

This final section does not, however, draw all of the strings together. Rather, we will do this in the

final journal, once the dust has settled and we can assess the project's legacy more clearly. In the meantime, we revisit the UIA table of barriers and our traffic-light assessment of how they apply to BRIDGE. Following that we share some tips for other cities based on this final stage of BRIDGE activity.

4.2 BRIDGE and the UIA Innovation Barriers

This table has remained largely consistent throughout the project. Yet in this final operational stage we can see changes. The two most interesting relate to the challenges which have stubbornly remained in the red danger zone – Monitoring and Evaluation and Financial Sustainability.

The first shifts into the amber zone because the evaluation work will continue, although in a slightly different format, allowing the possibility of generating the longitudinal data this project requires. On the second, BRIDGE is financially

stable, although not perhaps in ways that were expected. The ongoing RIKX pilot offer the prospect of a more dynamic breakthrough in relation to this challenge.

Challenge 3, cross-departmental working, also moves up a level. As we have noted, this is one of the residual successes of the project. Against this, Communication with Target Beneficiaries, drops a grade, due to the realisation that over-emphasis on digital has not had the desired effect of reaching the youth target group.

TABLE 1: MAPPING BRIDGE AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

Challenge	Level	Observations
1. Leadership for implementation	Low	Bridge continues to enjoy strong political support and backing across the city administration.
2. Public procurement	Medium	Minor procurement issues at the commissioning stage of interventions – although the resulting limitations have had an effect on the project.
3. Integrated cross-departmental working	Low/ Medium	This remains work in progress. However, BRIDGE has been an important catalysts for new ways of working across silos.
4. Adopting a participative approach	Low/ Medium	High levels of participation evident across stakeholder groups – Agile Agreement suggests rising levels of employer and vocational school buy in. However, securing individual employer involvement remains a challenge.
5. Monitoring and evaluation	High/ Medium	The continuation of the M&E work, albeit under a different package, provides grounds for optimism.
6. Financial Sustainability	Low/ Medium	BRIDGE’s financial stability is assured, although not quite in the way partners expected. Financial innovation pilot continues, with good prospects.
7. Communicating with target beneficiaries	Medium	Despite a creative repertoire of digital tools, BRIDGE needs to rebalance its approach to young people.
8. Upscaling	Medium	There is an argument for claiming that BRIDGE has been successfully upscaled at city level. It also has major potential for other cities.

4.3 Five key lessons for other cities from this final operational stage

The findings of this fifth Expert visit have generated the following key tips for other cities.

1. Do not assume that digital platforms are the best way to reach young people

Digital tools are attractive. They are easy and cheap to use, and it is tempting to see them as the best way to reach young people. However, the BRIDGE experience clearly shows that although these tools have their place, they cannot replace – or match – real human interaction. The optimum approach combines a balance of the two, appropriately calibrated.

2. Draw inspiration from other sectors

Pattern-breaking is an important component of innovation thinking. So too is looking beyond one’s own sphere for ideas. As BRIDGE concludes its initial stage, it continues to generate new potential solutions, one of which is the social coin, RIKX. This represents a hybrid of other existing innovations, including the notion of a local digital currency (such as the Bristol Pound) and that of a virtual commodity exchange, like the carbon trading platform.

3. There is no such thing as a free lunch

BRIDGE has worked hard to engage active school participation in its interventions. Although this has been largely successful, a small number of schools have resisted, whilst others have engaged sporadically.

A main explanation for this is that schools have had no financial investment in the programme. Without this, they have a reduced sense of ownership and the temptation to back out – often at short notice – if other priorities emerge.

In terms of psychology, going forward providing schools with a budget and allowing them to make their own investments – and decisions – might help address this situation.

4. Get beyond the sectors to work with employers

There is an obvious rationale for working with employer bodies. In most cities, the majority of the employer base is SMEs, so there are clear economies of scale operating through industry

bodies. However, the BRIDGE experience shows that this is not enough. Meaningful engagement must go beyond this to find ways to directly connect with employers.

5. Invest in effective data systems relating to diversity

Some of the evaluation outputs from BRIDGE make for uncomfortable reading. This is particularly the case in relation to the evidence relating to people from migrant backgrounds. Our section examining changes in labour market position is a clear example.

The messages we take from this make the challenge ahead quite clear. However, without this data that task would be much more difficult. The Netherlands is a country which gathers quality data relating to ethnic origin (as well as gender), but this is not universal. However, without this, it is not possible to fully understand what is happening and, based on this, the steps required to address it.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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