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The Urban Lab of Europe !

The Final Bridge: Journal N° 6

Reflections on the Rotterdam BRIDGE UIA Journey



**JOBS & SKILLS
IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY**



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

This final journal provides an overview of the BRIDGE experience through the lens of the eight UIA innovation challenges. These were used to frame the final set of stakeholder exchanges, in June 2020.

Leadership: Partners were unanimous that this challenge had been handled well. BRIDGE has benefited from strong leadership and support. It has also had strong strategic and operational leadership on the ground. Innovation projects like BRIDGE, which can upset vested interests, are greatly assisted by such leadership and support.

Public Procurement: The BRIDGE experience of the public procurement was limited, but even so, the subject of some frustration. This mainly related to the prescriptive and inflexible nature of the service commissioning procedures. Where a service codesign process was in place. The experience was more positive.

Integrated cross-departmental working: BRIDGE offers a playbook for inter-departmental collaboration. At the core is a small, agile team of talented people sitting between departments. They bring experience across policy areas and an empathy with colleagues across departments. Externally funded, they are tasked with tackling deep-seated challenges that cannot be solved in isolation.

The participative approach: In a city with an ingrained participative culture, this challenge has been addressed well. In particular, BRIDGE provides excellent insights into how to engage with young people. However, its work with groups which have been more challenging –

notably teachers and parents – perhaps provides the most valuable lessons.

Monitoring and Evaluation: This was a steep challenge for BRIDGE, largely due to technical and timescale issues. However, Rotterdam placed this dimension at the heart of its work to great effect. Although the results are as yet inconclusive, there are positive signs. This work has also identified important structural issues that have significant policy implications.

Financial Sustainability: Although there is some disappointment that BRIDGE did not identify a sustainable source of non-public funding, this work package has also delivered valuable results for the city. These relate to the city's SROI framework and the way in which businesses can meet these obligations to City Hall. The RIKX social coin may, in time, provide a useful mechanism here.

Upscaling: The BRIDGE model will be sustained and upscaled in two ways: first, aspects of the model will be developed in schools city-wide; second, through the flagship Work Learning Agreements key aspects will be extended to adults. As BRIDGE addresses an issue all cities face – the interface between the education system and the labour market – there is scope for the model to be adopted in other cities.

2. FINAL WORDS

This is the last journal from the Rotterdam UIA BRIDGE project. It represents the culmination of three years pioneering activity from one of the first wave of UIA projects. Over this period BRIDGE has enjoyed a high profile both within its home city, but also across Europe, largely because it tackles universal issues: ensuring that the structural changes taking place in the economy do not widen existing social inequalities.

BRIDGE has tested some core assumptions. At the heart of these is the link between the career

choices school pupils make and their future engagement in the labour market. In Rotterdam South, with the country's highest deprivation levels, the significance of these choices has added weight. BRIDGE has collaborated with the main stakeholders – young people, teachers, parents and employers – to encourage young people in Rotterdam South to make career choices that will improve their social and economic prospects.

3. JOURNAL OBJECTIVE AND FORMAT

Each of the previous BRIDGE journals has provided an update on project progress. There has also been a focus on a particular element of the innovation approach, in each edition. These themes have included the approach to monitoring and evaluation, the mentoring model and the employer perspective.

The format of this final journal is rather different. Instead, we provide a big picture view of the BRIDGE experience, covering the entire three-year project. In order to be concise, this is presented through the prism of the eight UIA

innovation challenges. These are consistent for all UIA projects, and further details are set out at the start of the next chapter.

Finally, in terms of process, the material for this journal was generated through a final set of exchanges held with project stakeholders in mid-June 2020. Due to the COVID-9 pandemic, these expert exchanges were conducted online using a combination of digital platforms as well as the MIRO whiteboarding tool for a partner workshop session.

4. REFLECTIONS ON THE BRIDGE EXPERIENCE AGAINST THE UIA CHALLENGES

4.1 Introduction

Urban Innovative Actions has designed a series of eight challenges widely linked to the design and implementation of innovative urban solutions. These are:

- Leadership
- Public Procurement
- Integrated Cross- Departmental Working
- The participative approach
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Financial Sustainability
- Communication with target beneficiaries
- Upscaling

Throughout the project, the expert journals have assessed the performance of BRIDGE in relation to these challenges, using a traffic-light system. In this colour coding, green means the city is managing the challenge well, amber somewhere in the middle and red means the challenge is presenting difficulties.

During the final stakeholder workshop, participants were asked to give an overall traffic light assessment for each of these challenges. The result of the exercise is illustrated below:

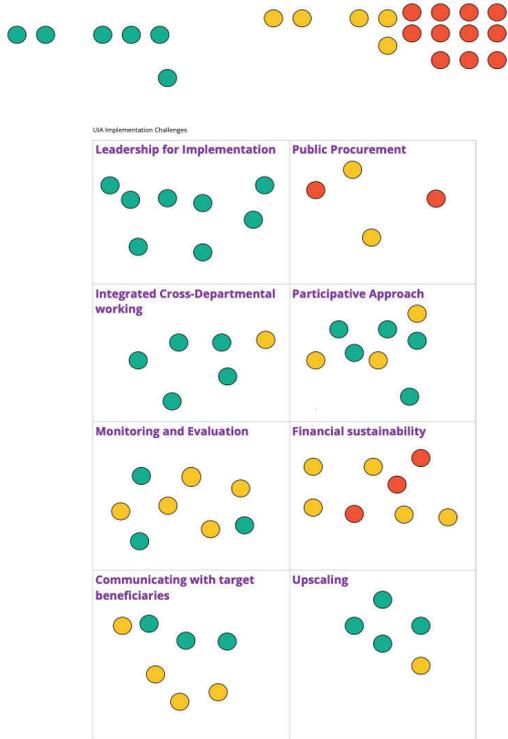


Figure 1: MIRO Whiteboard summary of UIA Challenge performance

In the following sections we reflect on each challenge individually. The quotations in these sections come from the BRIDGE partner consultations.

4.2 Leadership

Of the eight UIA challenges, this was the only one with a complete set of green lights. Furthermore, every journal has assessed the Leadership challenge with the same positive assessment. This confirms the unwavering support that BRIDGE has enjoyed throughout the UIA funding period.

At the highest-level BRIDGE has benefited from the support of the City Mayor, as well as the three aldermen whose policy areas the project traverses. At the strategic level, project activity has been overseen by the Project Steering Group, whose membership represents the key players across the regeneration and education sectors in the city.

This level of support offers comfort and protection for short-term innovation projects given a licence to disrupt. As there will be winners and losers from successful pilots, it is difficult for such projects to avoid making enemies. As we discuss below, BRIDGE has been adept at building allegiances, and these factors have contributed to its sustainability.

Explaining BRIDGE's leadership backing is not difficult. The project's spatial target, Rotterdam South, is the country's most deprived area with a highly diverse community. It is the subject of a

twenty-year regeneration project (NPRZ) co-run at the city and national level. BRIDGE added resources and fresh thinking to two of NPRZ's policy pillars, education and employment.

In addition to this, BRIDGE's development was informed by Rotterdam's investigations into the digital decarbonised economy, and specifically its Next Economy Roadmap (RNE). As well as foresighting the future economy for Europe's largest port, the RNE highlighted the risks to widening levels of inequality, during this economic transition. BRIDGE was conceived as one of the most effective ways to anticipate this shift, through interventions designed to alter the careers options of young people in South.

Expert Conclusion:

Fledgling innovation projects need nurture and protection. Without this they are vulnerable and at risk of marginalization. In this case, the project was closely aligned to the city and national strategic priorities. In addition, BRIDGE was assisted by a period of political continuity where the city's leadership remained consistent. Without this, the project may have been more exposed, particularly due to the difficulties faced demonstrating impact during its initial lifespan.

4.3 Public Procurement

Compared to many UIA projects, BRIDGE has low levels of capital expenditure. It involved no construction or refurbishment of physical spaces, and no physical planning requirements. Consequently, public procurement has been a less central challenge than to other projects.

The experience of the public procurement system has mostly been confined to design and commissioning of services related to BRIDGE's twenty interventions. Although not large scale, this experience has been the subject of some frustration and dissatisfaction within the core team. Consequently, in the final workshop, of those with a view, the results were an even split between amber and red.

This frustration seems to relate to the difficulties faced in precisely knowing what you need from a service that is new. In some cases, the project team commissioned services as part of the menu of interventions. It was only after the service was in place that it proved to be not quite right. At this point, as the specification was set out in the tender, there was little scope to manoeuvre.

On reflection, two things may have made a difference. The first would have been to have written a looser specification, which perhaps majored more on the desired results than the way of achieving them. Related to this, a second step would then been to have co-designed the final shape of the service, based on the interpretation of the brief submitted by the winning proposal.

This more open approach to commissioning is increasingly associated with the innovation process, particularly where it provides scope for co-design between commissioner, service provider and, ideally, end users. In fact, the BRIDGE Communications Work Package provides some nice examples of this approach, referred to below.

“Don't overdesign the product at the commissioning stage. Friends for Brands, for example, were experts in youth communication. This was a good case where we learned with the suppliers together.”

Expert Conclusion:

Procurement is never risk free. Fear of failure - and the subsequent waste of public money - is deep rooted in our administrative culture. Whilst this is legitimate and laudable, it can inhibit risk-taking and scope for experimentation. Low tolerance for risk amongst public procurement teams can mean that the bigger risk is a failure to innovate and evolve services, leaving us with interventions that are less efficient and effective.

An important message here is the value of letting go and the importance of creating services which are flexible whilst focusing on the desired results. Another is creating collaborative service design space between public service commissioners and providers. These have been important lessons for Rotterdam and other cities looking to optimise the scope for creative service design.

4.4 Integrated cross departmental working

In the final workshop, there was almost unanimity that this UIA challenge had been addressed effectively. A single amber dot sits amongst a sea of green, despite the fact that the challenge of overcoming silo-culture is deep-seated and universal.

Why do city stakeholders feel so positive about this – and how have they managed to achieve this progress?

Even in a modern progressive city like Rotterdam, the culture of departmentalism inhibits collaboration across established policy areas. BRIDGE straddles three of these: Education, Welfare and Economy. Although they share touch points, each has its own priorities, targets and budgets. They also have their own way of working within the respective departments. BRIDGE started small, drawing talent from across the different departments and was positioned in a way that made it attractive to each of them. It did so by addressing a chronic challenge that each department recognises – but which it cannot solve alone.

“It’s important to define a collective problem and a shared direction towards a solution. You need a coalition of the willing. Start small, with an agile core team, if you aim to shift the culture. But it takes time, and three years is too short.”

This modest project, externally funded, was not perceived as a threat. On the contrary, it used external budget to potentially tackle each department’s deep-seated challenges. Nimble, agile and staffed by talented people, it moved between these policy spheres, cross-fertilising and building connections.

“Language matters. We use the same words but they have very different meaning in our different worlds. That’s why we need bridges. One to connect education to employers, another to connect schools to parents and yet another linking civil servants to employers.”

BRIDGE has champions and is perceived as having friends in the highest places. Initially, the ambition was to secure equal levels of senior-level buy in across the three departments. But this proves to be unworkable; instead, a different approach to the optimum ownership model was established.

“To be effective across silos perhaps you don’t need balanced co-ownership. It’s probably better to have one of three departments see it as theirs, with the others close to that. In reality if it’s co-owned, no-one really owns it.”

But it is never plain sailing. Despite its cross-sectoral attractiveness, there are those who would prefer the project to fail. Systemic change always creates institutional anxiety, and experienced people within the machine become adept at stalling and sabotaging innovation without sticking their heads above the parapet.

BRIDGE has useful lessons for other cities facing these same challenges. In Journal 4 we spoke with a teacher who was committed to achieving disruption and innovating within the system without raising alarm bells amongst colleagues. The importance of such change agents cannot be understated.

Within City Hall itself, BRIDGE had a champion working across departments, with first hand experience in each. As such, she was able to put herself in others’ shoes. She was also well-placed to identify, and handle, resistance when it materialized.

“There will always be resistance. I like to be transparent: if someone doesn’t deliver then I don’t hide it. Usually it’s in the middle management tier where we find the problems and challenges. Sometimes you have to escalate problems to director level, identify their options and ask them to guide your decisions.”

These are insights into how Rotterdam has addressed this challenge. The evidence of what has been done is there to see in the work across schools, communities and workplaces. That this work continues under BRIDGE 2.0 is testament to its effectiveness. Beyond that, the city’s new Work Learning Agreements draw a great deal upon BRIDGE’s modus operandum, with three pathways designed to improve labour market supply and demand.

4.5 The Participative approach

Stakeholders assessed Rotterdam’s response to this challenge with a cluster of green and amber votes. In short, broadly successful. The true picture however, is a little more mixed.

In a city with a strong participation culture, BRIDGE faced three significant challenges. The first was tackling a variety of target groups: young people, parents, teachers and employers most notably. The second was the fact that these groups include some of the most difficult to engage in the participative process. Third, the BRIDGE agenda was about working with these groups together, as well as engaging with them separately. As a package, this was a tall order.

The positive partner feedback indicates that much of this has been done well. In terms of work with specific beneficiary groups, the engagement with young people, for example, has been highly effective and has generated game-changing lessons, as we discuss in 2.8. The mobilisation of student mentors, cannot be overlooked here, as

The Career Start Guarantee – a concept fully developed through BRIDGE – is a cornerstone of these agreements, which is testament to its cross-cutting impact, as we discuss elsewhere in this journal.

Expert Conclusion:

BRIDGE offers a playbook for inter-departmental collaboration. At the core is a small, agile team of talented people sitting at the nodal point between departments. They bring direct experience across policy areas and an ability to empathise with colleagues in these key departments. Externally funded, they are tasked with tackling deep-seated crosscutting challenges that cannot be solved in isolation.

these young people have provided great role models as well as advocates for the BRIDGE model. The work too with employment sector groups has also been good, although as we reported in Journal 5, much work remains to be done with individual employers.

Collectively, the stand out successes have included the Gaan voor een Baan event in January 2019, widely regarded as a major breakthrough in bringing young people and employers together. It also includes the most popular interventions like the port visits, whilst the feedback loops and evidence gathering mechanisms have ensured a process on continuous improvement and refinement of interventions.

Despite this success, BRIDGE has shown that three years is too short a period to make serious inroads around some of these deep-seated social and professional challenges. Although the project has made impressive progress engaging with teachers, the participation pattern is mixed both

between and within schools, This remains far from systemic.

Equally challenging has been the work to secure the active involvement of parents. BRIDGE has taken big steps to support schools looking to work more effectively with parents. But again, some schools are more bought into this than others. In this ongoing work component, there is a growing awareness of the importance of mothers, specifically of pre-teen children. Building close relationships with them at this pivotal stage of their child's life is a focal point for BRIDGE II's continued work in this area.

“All mothers want a good future for their kids. They want them to be secure. There's a golden window at the pre-teen stage. But you need to know where you will reach the target group to get your message across, You have to go where the parents are – and that's in schools. “

4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

Throughout this project the monitoring and evaluation challenge has largely remained in the red zone. Given this, we should conclude that our workshop snapshot, generating a mix of yellow and even green scores, represents something of a triumph.

Why has this challenge been so difficult and how do we explain this optimistic shift as the UIA phase of BRIDGE concludes?

The difficulties have related primarily to technical issues as well as to timescales. Gauging the impact of such a complex project, requires being able to attribute labour market outcomes with careers decisions taken as a result of school-based interventions. Data limitations prevent us being able to track individual experiences, and although participation data is available for

Expert Conclusion:

In a city with a highly developed participative culture within its public policy, it's perhaps not surprising that BRIDGE has successfully addressed this challenge. But it is where this engagement and participation has been tough that we can find the most interesting lessons.

Without doubt, BRIDGE's approach to promoting youth participation has been exemplary and of an exceptional standard. But the fact that in spite of its levels of commitment – and excellent resources – progress with teachers and parents has been so difficult provides much food for thought. As Rotterdam continues its work with these target groups, it should be encouraged to continue sharing its important experiences with other cities across Europe.

schools, a causal link between this and career choice shifts cannot be made.

In terms of timescales, as BRIDGE is targeting young people aged 9 and 10 upwards, it takes time to track their progress through the educational system – and ultimately into the labour market.

Some factors have helped address these issues. One is that some interventions pre-dated BRIDGE, allowing the team more data to draw upon. Another was that a recent change in legislation allows better access to school data, although this occurred just as the UIA phase was completing.

In terms of its assessment, the BRIDGE monitoring and evaluation work focused on testing the assumptions that:

- More schools participating in BRIDGE interventions exposed more children to messages and experiences linked with the target industry sectors
- This exposure and experience would influence those young people's career choices, channeling them into particular areas of study
- Acquiring qualifications in these key sectors would improve their labour market prospects; and
- These labour market changes would provide social and economic benefits

In Journal 5 we explored the final situation relating to these in some detail. Although there is not yet definitive evidence supporting each of them, there are positive signs, such as:

- Young people in Rotterdam South choosing careers in BRIDGE target sectors¹ have better career prospects than their peers
- There are lifetime economic benefits related to these target sectors, reflected as a life-time per person surplus of:
 - o €91,568 in the case of the technology sector; and
 - o €81,627 for the healthcare sector

Beyond this central focus, the monitoring and evaluation work has generated unanticipated evidence which has had profound and immediate implications for city policy.

One relates to access to facilities. BRIDGE analysis highlighted that 40% of pupils in Rotterdam South are in schools with no technology offer. This finding has fed into ongoing discussions around education resource planning in the city – particularly Rotterdam South.

Another relates to ethnic discrimination, which is reflected in the data in different ways. For example, the VBL stream is a dual-system type of offer where a young person splits their time between school and a workplace. This provides a good chance for both parties to get to know one another, and is an excellent route into employment. Yet the evaluation data shows that only 9% of pupils with a migrant background took this route, against 23% of those from other backgrounds. Alongside this, another strand of research showed that if South had the same population profile as the national average, 5.6% more time would be spent in employment. Having a migrant background was the largest factor in this difference.

Perhaps it is the importance and value of these findings which encouraged our participants to opt for the green and yellow votes. The fact that this monitoring and evaluation work will continue, enabling longitudinal data over time, was another factor in this positive response.

Expert Conclusion:

What can other cities learn from Rotterdam's approach to this complex challenge? A clear lesson is the importance of placing monitoring and evaluation at the heart of the work from the very beginning. Equally important was the appointment of an experienced and robustly independent monitoring and evaluation team, which lent authority to their work throughout the process. The value of the City of Rotterdam's respect for robust scientific evidence, impartially produced, cannot be overstated.

¹ With the exception of Care MBO Level 2

4.7 Financial Sustainability

This was the other challenge consistently in the danger zone throughout the lifetime of BRIDGE, illustrated in the final mix of stakeholder scores, which split between amber and red. Why has this challenge been so difficult and does the final scorecard tell the whole story?

Securing the financial sustainability of short life innovation projects is often difficult. There is no standard definition of success, but as we reported in the last journal, Rotterdam City has made resources available to continue with much of the BRIDGE structure – including the suite of interventions targeting schools, parents and employers. Furthermore, as we discuss below, the Career Start Guarantee, widely regarded as the jewel in the interventions crown, has been embedded within the new Work Learning Agreements, where they have been extended to cover others parts of the Rotterdam City region. For many, this would be regarded as proof of financial sustainability¹.

So why no green votes? To understand this we must return to the three tasks identified for the ‘financial innovation’ strand of BRIDGE. These were to:

- Build a business case for BRIDGE, based on an understanding of its effects and unit costs
- Explore the potential for a social impact bond (SIB) linked to BRIDGE
- Examine the city’s Social Return on Investment (SROI) model and how this relates to BRIDGE

In short, the exploration of the business case for BRIDGE showed that it would not be possible to

identify a single unit cost per beneficiary outcome². Without this, the potential for an SIB was a non-starter. Despite this however, this BRIDGE activity of work has influenced the city’s approach to SROI and has led to the design and piloting of the innovative RIKX social coin concept³.

The RIKX pilot continues – with an extension period due to the Coronavirus pandemic – and the concept has attracted widespread interest. More importantly, it has engaged businesses that have previously struggled to meet their SROI obligation to the city. In this respect, it may yet prove to be a win-win mechanism.

The team involved in this project is disappointed that this work has not generated a new financial model to support BRIDGE in the long run. Although continued public-funding is welcome, this remains short term and subject to ongoing agreement. Consequently, the project remains vulnerable to a change in political administration.

“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 against barriers. “

Expert Conclusion:

In an ambitious project, this was perhaps the most far-sighted element of BRIDGE. The city’s vision and aspiration here should be applauded. So too should the lessons learned which have been valuable at project and city level.

Rotterdam has one of Europe’s most sophisticated SROI structures. The fact that BRIDGE pinpointed weaknesses in this and proposed innovative solutions may yet yield benefits for the city.

¹ Although not permanent, the Work Learning Agreements are funded for a six-years period, which is relatively long term in public finance terms

² A detailed explanation of this is provided in Journal 3

³ Discussed in Journal 4

Although this will not provide a sustainable income stream for BRIDGE in its original format, these policy benefits will outlast the UIA funding period.

4.8 Communication with target beneficiaries

Our stakeholder scorecard rated activity against this challenge highly. The image shows a mix of green and amber responses, suggesting a good level of satisfaction with the overall performance.

This is positive because here too BRIDGE provided space for experimentation and development of new approaches. From the start, there was a strong anthropological dimension to the approach, with extensive participation of young people through focus groups and other methods designed to hear authentic perspectives.

These important exchanges enabled some significant psychological insights. A good example was the widespread perception that jobs in some of the target sectors were badly paid. In a society where it is considered impolite to discuss earning levels, BRIDGE launched a campaign involving young people talking openly about the amounts of money they earned working in target sectors like the port. This willingness to break taboos was accompanied by extensive use of humour and street-talk, with role models like Edson da Graça fronting media campaigns.

Perhaps the most interesting finding here comes from the search for the optimum balance between social media and face-to-face communication. Here we have seen a shift in perspectives within the communications team, towards the value of face-to-face contact. The huge success of the 2019 Gaan voor een Baan event, attracting 1500 youngsters and a huge social media cascade underlined the need for a dual approach. The BRIDGE Communications

team has been surprised to conclude that the physical aspect is more influential – even amongst children who are digital natives.

Building on this key realisation, future activity will involve more direct work building relationships in schools. This means with students – but also with parents, who we considered in 2.5.

“We realise 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 and connect with them. And you have to be in class – in their faces – more than one time.”

Expert Conclusion:

BRIDGE has many lessons for other cities. In terms of this challenge, perhaps the most important message is that communication with stakeholders is not a bolt-on afterthought. This strand of activity has been central to the overall project work, contributing valuable intelligence and absorbing lessons from others parts of the process.

4.9 Upscaling

In the final partner workshop the assessment relating to the Upscaling challenge was almost unanimously green. However, looking back, that positive outcome was not always without doubt. At various points, the dial switched to amber, so this is an area where a strong finish has influenced partner perspectives.

Where is the evidence for this and what are the reasons behind it?

The response partly lies in our interpretation of the term upscaling. We can link this to sustainability and, at least in local terms, to notions of spatial and target group scale. We have already noted that BRIDGE will be continued, although the brand may be diluted. In terms of scale, we can cite two examples which show the enlargement of the BRIDGE model. The first relates to interventions aimed at young people, the second to adults.

Schools in Rotterdam South will continue to access BRIDGE interventions after the end of UIA funding. In addition, the principles of BRIDGE and some of its operational elements will be extended to schools throughout Rotterdam. Although South has higher deprivation levels than the rest of the city, the challenge to align schools and employers is a shared one across the entire city. BRIDGE has underlined the value of this alignment, but has also shown that it is a long-term game. As the City's Director of Education noted:

"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."

Of course, at the metropolitan level, there are limits to what City Hall can do in schools. For example, the curriculum, which is so important in this labour market discussion, remains a national level competence. Nevertheless, BRIDGE's success at creating this level of trust and traction with schools, in a relatively short time, must be identified as a major project success. We remain in the foothills of a mountain-sized challenge, but this work is truly under progress now as a result of the catalyst BRIDGE has provided.

"We try to address this (lack of innovation) by investing and giving them space. Here, it's important that schools work with one another as well as with outsiders. They are often too introspective, and BRIDGE has been very good at providing that external perspective."

The continuation of BRIDGE's school-based interventions, including the Career Start Guarantee (CSG) will be funded within Rotterdam's new Work Learning Agreement framework, extending the concept beyond Rotterdam South.

These new agreements mark a breakthrough for the city in a number of ways. They are funded by the three policy departments that collaborated to deliver BRIDGE, a further indication of the growing maturity of this cross-silo relationship. The agreements also bring to the table, as active partners, the city's most important learning providers and sectoral employment bodies. The importance of having all of these key players fully engaged from the very start was a key lesson from the BRIDGE experience.

Expert Conclusion:

There is clear evidence that the core principles and components of BRIDGE will now apply at a larger scale within Rotterdam.

The upscaling question beyond the city remains open. Certainly, other Dutch cities have examined the BRIDGE model with interest, as have overseas cities including those who participated in

BRIDGE's 2019 international workshop. It remains too early to see any direct results from this.

For sure, the core challenge BRIDGE addresses is universal. However specific issues within the Dutch system – most notable children having to make such big career choices so early – is not a universal challenge.

5. SOME CLOSING POINTS

Ultimately, the success of the BRIDGE project will be measured by its results. As the UIA funding period completes, we can identify metrics which position the project in a positive light. A good example is the project exceeding its target to establish 600 Career Start Guarantees.

At this stage, we measure what we can because the deeper impact of BRIDGE cannot be assessed until some future point. In this respect it is encouraging to know that Rotterdam is committed to the longitudinal approach required to do this. In the meantime, as we have stated in this journal, there are positive signs that BRIDGE has moved the dial in the right direction.

Numbers matter, of course. But from an expert perspective the most significant results from BRIDGE relate to deep questions of governance and public administration systems. Here, I would identify three important achievements from this UIA-funded phase.

The first is that BRIDGE has helped shift a collaborative way of working from the margins to the mainstream.

The second is that this mainstreaming represents a transition from the ad hoc to the systemic. There is now a growing structural framework – including the Work Learning Agreements – to support this.

Related to this is the move from temporary to permanent. The culture of BRIDGE is now the wider culture within the City Hall, at least within the project's participating departments.

Nothing, of course, is ever permanent. As the pilot period concludes, the aftermath of the COVID 19 pandemic presents new challenges, especially amongst the most vulnerable. However, Rotterdam's established resilience, and its ability to respond to such challenges has been deeply enhanced by the legacy of the BRIDGE project.

“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.”

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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