The BRIDGE Project
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Project led by the City of Rotterdam

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.

The crucial element in the programme is the Career Start Guarantee. Employers will offer 600 pupils per year a Career Start guarantee (420 for technology sectors and 180 for healthcare) at the moment they enter secondary vocational education and need to make the most crucial subject and career choices. Provided that the pupil chooses the training that the labour market needs, an employer will commit in advance to that individual with a guaranteed career start after graduation. Impact investment instruments (public subsidy based impact investing, social return on investment and social impact bonds) are an integral part of the project, supporting scaling and mainstreaming of the programme.

Partnership:
- Gemeente Rotterdam
- Metropoolregio Rotterdam Den Haag - Organised agglomeration
- SEOR B.V. - Research center
- Hogeschool Rotterdam - Rotterdam University of Applied Science
- RebelGroup Executives BV - Private Company

There is a short video with partners’ views on aspects of BRIDGE.
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1 Executive Summary

The EU has a high-level 2020 goal to support 75% of people aged 20-64 into employment. However, across Europe employment rates remain highly uneven.

This imbalance applies between and within Member States as well as within cities, where some neighbourhoods continue to miss out on the benefits of growth. Although the upturn in the global economy provides a basis for cautious optimism, Europe continues to face deep structural challenges in relation to its labour markets.

In anticipation of the challenges of what has been labelled the Third Industrial Revolution, the Metropolitan Region of Rotterdam-The Hague (MRDH) has developed its Roadmap Next Economy (RNE). This seeks to build on existing assets to optimise the potential benefits of the decarbonized digital economy.

The Rotterdam UIA Project, BRIDGE, forms an important part of this overall RNE approach. Linked to the 20-year multilevel governance renewal programme, NPRZ, it focuses on Rotterdam South, the most deprived part of the MRDH region. In these neighbourhoods 21% are unemployed, 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.

BRIDGE supports young people in the target area to make more informed career choices leading to sustainable jobs. Currently, many choose vocational routes such as financial, media and lifestyle subjects, that have limited job opportunities. BRIDGE tackles the factors that lead to these poor choices.

The target is to support greater numbers to achieve higher-level vocational qualifications in key growth sectors (technology and healthcare). BRIDGE includes 20 interventions to support these goals. Career Start Guarantees (CSGs) is one of them. Through these, employers in the target industry sectors will guarantee a starting position to young people in Rotterdam South who complete the relevant higher-level qualification. At the time of the first expert visit (September 2017) there were 470 CSGs in place from six industry associations in the city.
This offer will provide entry-level opportunities as well as promoting future labour market resilience. CSGs are only 1 of 20 interventions aimed at supporting key stakeholders, who include:

- **Young people**
  Young people grow up in South Rotterdam facing competing pressures. This includes poverty, cultural expectations from home and the pressure of street culture and the informal economy. Mentors are amongst the key BRIDGE interventions to help them deal with this. The inputs start with children aged 9.

- **Schools and teachers**
  All of South Rotterdam’s institutions – 55 primary, 20 secondary and 4 vocational training colleges – participate in BRIDGE. Teachers are given support to better understand the changing labour market and employers’ needs. Schools are supported to work more effectively with parents.

- **Parents**
  Many South Rotterdam parents are unfamiliar with, or have negative experiences of, the Dutch education system. They also struggle to understand the fast changing economy, and the implications for their children. BRIDGE is supporting parents to gain this knowledge and to improve their school links.

- **Employers**
  Employers are key to the project’s success and BRIDGE interventions aim to improve their collaboration with schools.

BRIDGE also supports specialist skills and employment foresight activity to ensure that its labour market assumptions are as accurate as possible. This work package will conduct an in depth analysis of five growth clusters:

- Smart manufacturing
- Smart health
- Feeding the world
- Energy and climate
- Cyber security (transversal theme)

The project is also building on Rotterdam’s experience in new financial instruments to examine options for sustainable funding.
The UIA has identified eight challenges relating to the implementation of innovation projects. These include public procurement, leadership and upscaling. BRIDGE scores well against many of these challenges, but it is likely that two – Monitoring and Evaluation and Financial Sustainability – will be the most difficult to address.

BRIDGE can point to a number of achievements at this early stage. The most important are:

- Building the framework for collaboration
- Securing the buy-in of schools
- Design and development of the interventions
- Establishment of the monitoring and evaluation framework
- Mobilising the ‘Gann voor Baan’ (Go for a Job) campaign

The project is generating important findings in relation to the mismatch between education systems and urban labour markets.

Early key lessons include:

- The importance of starting young in schools
- The value of providing a universal – not targeted – offer
- Focusing on talent avoiding a ‘deficit model’ with young people
- Mobilising the power of mentors and role-models
- Employing visual tools to convey complex issues
2 The Context for BRIDGE

2.1 The Big Picture

Despite years of effort and billions in investment, Europe’s cities remain scarred by poor deprived neighbourhoods. Access to sustained quality employment is part of the solution to this. Amongst the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the abolition of poverty is the top priority. A number of other SDGs contribute towards this primary goal. One of these is quality education whilst another is decent work and economic growth.

As we approach 2020, the EU’s high-level goals remain in place and under review. They include the commitment to support 75% of people aged 20-64 to be in employment. However, as Member States continue their recovery from the decade-old Global Financial Crisis, employment rates remain highly uneven. This imbalance can be seen not only across the EU, but also within Member States where rates of economic growth and resilience vary. They can also be identified within cities, where some neighbourhoods continue to miss out on the benefits of growth.

Although the upturn in the global economy provides a basis for cautious optimism, Europe continues to face deep structural challenges in relation to its labour markets. On the one hand, the economy is being transformed by the ongoing impact of the digital revolution, combined with the growing focus on low carbon. These trends are creating new opportunities at such a rate that it is estimated that 65% of the future jobs done by current primary school pupils have yet to be invented.

At the same time, demographic changes also generate challenges as well as opportunities as our society ages. The EU forecasts the creation of
over 104 million job openings in the Health and Care sector between 2013 and 2025. Many of these are in the growing homecare sector, supporting older people to live independently in later life.

On the other hand, is the reality of a Europe where significant proportions of citizens have such low skills that their future prospects are curtailed. According to the EU’s latest data, 1 in 5 adults has low literacy levels, almost 1 in 4 low numeracy levels and 2 in 5 (41%) no basic digital skills. At the same time, this data indicates that 2 out of every 5 employers have difficulties finding staff with the right skills.

There has been a significant policy response to these challenges at the EU level, most notably in the launch of the New Skills Agenda which confronts the vocational skills challenge specifically. However, unless these fundamental mismatches are addressed, there is a significant risk of wider and growing inequalities throughout Europe.

As more than 70% of Europeans live in urban areas, these problems must be tackled in our cities. Consequently, the EU has continued to promote the importance of the urban agenda that has characterised the current funding period. Features of this have included ring-fencing European Structural and Investment Funds for use in urban areas, as well as the establishment of initiatives such as Urban Innovative Actions (UIA).

Under the Dutch Presidency in 2016 the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) was launched. One of the emerging partnerships, Jobs and Skills, is co-chaired by Rotterdam and includes a focus on Next Economy skills. The emphasis is on the improved use of EU funds in this key policy area.

2.2 The View from Rotterdam South

The Metropolitan Region of Rotterdam-The Hague (MRDH) was formed in January 2015 when the two cities combined with 21 smaller municipalities. MRDH generates around 16% of the national GDP, with Rotterdam’s economy driven by the port and logistics sector whilst The Hague has high levels of public administration.

The metropolitan region has many assets. As well as these established economic clusters, it has a strong Research and Development base and a young population. However, it does not fully translate these advantages into added economic value.

The 2016 OECD Territorial Review of MRDH noted that its productivity levels lagged behind the national average. It also concluded that educational attainment rates are low by Dutch standards and that unemployment rates were particularly high for those from migrant backgrounds.

Aware of these challenges, and in anticipation of what has been labelled the Third Industrial Revolution, in 2017 MRDH launched its Roadmap Next Economy (RNE). This sets out a long-term plan that builds on existing assets to optimise the potential benefits of the decarbonized digital economy. This ambitious programme encompasses five transition paths:

- Smart Digital Delta (Better digital connections, networks, platforms and big data)
- Smart Energy Delta (Smart networks, new clean energy sources, CO2 storage, conversion and storage technology)
- Circular Economy (Reusing and recycling all resources and residual materials)
- Entrepreneurial Region (New business models, products, services, new cooperative forms, development and support of start-ups)
- Next Society (Shaping the inclusive society – labour market and education; cooperatives; social entrepreneurship)

The Rotterdam UIA Project, BRIDGE, forms an important part of this overall RNE approach. It does so by focusing on Rotterdam South, the most deprived part of the MRDH region. Its seven focus areas in this locality are also the target of a 20-year multilevel governance renewal programme, NPRZ. This integrated approach combines housing, education and employment interventions, alongside a physical regeneration programme.

Data set out in the introduction highlight the disadvantages young people face in Rotterdam South, including the fact that almost one in three grows up in poverty.

Within this major regeneration drive, the contribution of BRIDGE is to ensure that young people in Rotterdam South are well-placed to access the anticipated economic benefits resulting from the city’s transition to the Next Economy.

### Table 1: Comparative indicators for NPRZ focus areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Rotterdam</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>7 focus areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>16.829.289</td>
<td>618.109</td>
<td>195.157</td>
<td>76.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% youth (&lt; 23)</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% poorly educated parents</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average disposable income (€)</td>
<td>23.900</td>
<td>21.700</td>
<td>21.700</td>
<td>17.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Unemployment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Fragile housing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of average property</td>
<td>211.000</td>
<td>149.000</td>
<td>113.772</td>
<td>92.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: NPRZ uitvoeringsplan 2014-2018*
3 The BRIDGE Concept

3.1 What is BRIDGE aiming to do?

BRIDGE aims to improve the life prospects of people living in Rotterdam South. In doing so, the project will contribute to the wider strategic goal of reducing unemployment rates and levels of welfare dependency. BRIDGE targets young people in the area, supporting them to make more informed career choices leading to sustainable jobs. Currently, many choose vocational routes such as financial, media and lifestyle subjects, that have limited job opportunities. Young people follow these pathways due to several factors, including cultural misconceptions (for example around the care sector); lack of knowledge about the prospects (i.e. in the port sector); unwillingness to travel to where there are regional opportunities (greenhouse sectors for example) and perceptions about the status of particular roles, such as in administration.

Through this initiative, the aim is to encourage greater numbers to opt for pathways leading to healthcare, advanced engineering or the port and related industry sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: BRIDGE GOALS</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>TARGET 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% pupils choosing vocational study in healthcare</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% pupils choosing vocational study in technical branches</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alongside this sectoral shift, the project also aims to raise the numbers of young people gaining higher-level vocational qualifications related to these industry sectors. Currently, too many students gain a lower level vocational qualification (VMBO) which is not sufficient for a sustained position in industry.

The target is to support greater numbers to achieve the higher MBO qualification which will not only give them entry level opportunities but also greater labour market resilience in future. The aim of all these activities is that, by 2020, half of all young people in South Rotterdam who pursue a vocational education will choose a course in engineering (35%) or healthcare (15%). Given the size of the population in the South area, this equates to 600 participants a year. The aim of the activities in BRIDGE is that a career start guarantee provided by employers is available to all these students.
3.2 What are the key components of BRIDGE?

Career Start Guarantees
Although only one of the twenty interventions, it is worth discussing the Career Start Guarantees (CSGs) as the centerpiece of the BRIDGE offer. Through this intervention, employers in the target industry sectors will guarantee a starting position to young people in Rotterdam South who complete the relevant higher-level vocational training. This offer can be seen as a major incentive to young people and a potential platform to sustained labour market engagement.

At the time of the first expert visit (September 2017) there were 470 CSGs in place from six industry associations in the city. By working with these industry sector bodies, rather than with individual employers, Rotterdam can engage with businesses of all sizes. The CSG is offered to young people signing up for an MBO (higher-level vocational) course co-designed with industry.

The guarantee is that on graduation, young people from Rotterdam South will start their careers with a participating employer. The employer may set conditions and the precise nature of the offer is open for negotiation. However, in a tight labour market, businesses sign up to make these offers in the knowledge that it provides access to a reliable talent pipeline.

As we discuss below, BRIDGE has developed a sophisticated promotional package around the pipeline concept, and in particular with the CSG offer itself. Branded under the slogan Gaan voor een baan! (Go for a job!) there is a graphic version of the pathways to promote understanding of the journey involved. In addition, the CSG offer itself is packaged as a golden ticket – à la Willie Wonka – to enhance the sense of gaining something of rare value.

In addition to the CSG and other interventions, BRIDGE is supporting other activities to support its core aims. These include:

Further analysis of regional skills trends
BRIDGE is supporting specialist skills and employment foresight activity to ensure that its labour market assumptions are as accurate as possible. This work complements research undertaken as part of the Roadmap Next Economy activity. Specifically, this BRIDGE work package will conduct an in depth analysis of five growth clusters:
- Smart manufacturing
- Smart health
- Feeding the world
- Energy and climate
- Cyber security (transversal theme)

![Source: SER/MRDH](image-url)
One of the emerging observations is the importance of approaching these themes in societal terms, rather than as industry sector silos. Their interconnected nature reflects the trend towards a decarbonized economy shaped by digital connectedness described in Rifkin’s work\(^1\). Building on this, the team is particularly interested in exploring the potential of fieldlabs. These operate like large scale open living labs, facilitating the collaboration of actors from different sectors to address shared challenges and interests. South Holland has a strong and growing fieldlab capacity.

Other early observations include confirmation of economic growth accompanied by a growing skills mismatch. Digital developments are driving both of these developments, which will benefit some more than others. The overall message is one of major and continuous readjustment, which underlines the importance of equipping people to manage transitions and continually reskill.

Linked to this, the team will investigate the way in which technology can enable people with less education to conduct highly skilled tasks. Early examples of this are being piloted in the telemedicine field.

**Investigation of new financial support models**

As part of BRIDGE, partners are investigating ways to secure sustained financial support for this approach. The city has an established reputation as a trailblazer in new financial instruments. The potential to apply these in the context of careers pathways in Rotterdam South is being explored. Further details are set out in Section 3.

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\(^1\) Rifkin J, The Third Industrial Revolution, 2011.
3.3 Who are the key BRIDGE stakeholders?

The success of BRIDGE relies on the following key stakeholders.

**Young people**

BRIDGE is predicated on young people in South Rotterdam making different career choices. This is a big ambition set within a complex landscape. Achieving the set goal will require raising the aspirations of these young people, enhancing their awareness of the opportunities and supporting them to resist pressures that might inhibit their future progress.

Rotterdam South is a diverse neighbourhood with high levels of deprivation. Young people grow up there with pressure all around. At home this comes from parents, often brought up in a different cultural context. Although they may be ambitious for their children, these parents may not always have a good grasp of the opportunities available to them. Cultural attitudes may also stereotype and limit the scope of their children’s own ambitions.

Outside the home there is the pressure of the street. Young people in education are surrounded by peers with disposable income to spend on consumer goods which the media portrays as self-defining. Street-culture messages are about how it’s uncool to try hard, with an emphasis on short-term material goals. Combined with this, there are pressures about sub-cultural belonging which test loyalty to family, community and self.

The value of positive role models should not be underestimated in this context. There is ample evidence that seeing people, with whom they can identify, in key positions, makes a difference. In this case they may be mentors, teachers or employers, and BRIDGE takes account of this in its interventions, for example through its strong student mentor programme. Having this mentor support open to all students is also important.

This universal invitation avoids any notion of targeting and stigma.

As one interviewee put it:

“Mentoring is a universal offer. It is about serving not saving. It is open to all and not based on some deficit model.”

Messages which support self-efficacy and which address the challenge of street-culture to school-culture can also help. In Rotterdam, influential work is being led in this area by Iliass el Hadioui at Erasmus University, who is supporting NPRZ activity and working with BRIDGE to help teachers understand these tensions and how to address them.

Ultimately, young people cannot be forced to make different choices. BRIDGE can work to create the best conditions, but ultimately, it is the young people themselves who will decide whether the programme succeeds or not.
**Schools and teachers**

All the schools in South Rotterdam, that is, 55 primary schools, 20 secondary schools and the four vocational training colleges, participate in BRIDGE. Students in South Rotterdam are offered a wide range of activities. These start as early as primary school Group 6 (aged 9) and continue on to the final year of their vocational training. Building the relationship across these institutions has been an intensive and time-consuming component of the project’s first year. Without buy-in from schools, BRIDGE cannot succeed. As part of the problem, they must also be an active part of the solution. Their role in the problem includes continuing to offer low-level vocational courses in subjects for which there are limited job opportunities.

As one of our interviewees noted:

> “Students keep making the wrong choices because school keep offering them.”

The pain felt by unemployed media studies and animal-welfare graduates is greater than that felt by institutions which continue to be funded regardless of labour market outcomes.

An important part of the required shift is a better understanding within the education system of where the city’s future employment opportunities will be. That requires having clear reliable evidence to share about the Next Economy, presented in accessible ways. It also means building stronger links between teachers and employers, through school visits and by taking teachers out into industry. Part of this dialogue is also about reshaping the curriculum so that it better reflects employers’ needs. As well as a better understanding of the changing labour market, teachers need insights into the lives of their students. This includes an awareness of the street pressures they face, which BRIDGE interventions can offer. Alongside this, it requires a renegotiated relationship with parents. Teachers can support parents to help their children make the right choices, but often lack the tools to do this. In the words of a Rotterdam interviewee:  

> “Schools want to work with parents but they often don’t know how.”

BRIDGE provides interventions that support schools to work more effectively with parents. We visited a Rotterdam South school which has transformed this set of relationships, so that it now has 100% parental involvement. A key to this has been structured three-way (“Mole”) meetings (student, teacher, parents) running throughout the year. These start during ‘peace-time’, early in the academic year, where the focus is on the student, their talents and aspirations for the year ahead. Structured in this way, the young person is at the centre, with an emphasis on what they can do and what they hope to achieve.

Through this format, teachers see the importance of collaborating with others to support their student’s progression. This collaboration goes beyond parents. It also involves working closely with the student mentors. Here, schools are expected to assume an active role, rather than seeing the mentor input as an opportunity to switch off and do other things. In tandem with the buddies, each class has a teacher mentor, who provides a consistent pastoral point of contact and support. Again, BRIDGE interventions are in place to support schools in this work.

During our visit however, we heard that supporting this professional transition within the workforce remains a significant challenge. Teachers, themselves under pressure and in challenging jobs, must believe in the transformation potential of these students, if
BRIDGE is to achieve its goals. Ongoing professional development support and attracting new talent to the sector – especially from diverse backgrounds – remain keys to this dimension of the task.

There are also challenges within the education system. One of these is competition amongst schools. The more successful can attract talented students from elsewhere. North Rotterdam schools, which are magnets for outsiders, have been allowed public funds to continually grow. At the same time, denominational schools also pose a threat by removing young people from the mainstream system. These combined pressures operate against the work being done in Rotterdam South schools supported through the BRIDGE.

But successful examples are already visible on the ground. The Principal of the school mentioned earlier, which now has 100% parental engagement, faces these pressures. However, in a school with over 50 nationalities she has seen its reputation and results rise, through changes that BRIDGE supports. Asked about the key success factors, she highlighted those set out in the green box below.

### Parents

In addition to what has already been said about parents, there are a few other key points. One is about creating a positive perception of school. For first generation migrant parents, the Dutch education system is often a closed book. For many others who grew up in the Netherlands, memories of school are negative. As parents, their experience of being in school was when their child was in trouble or during a feedback session focused on what needed to improve. BRIDGE is working directly with parents (for example through neighbourhood teams working with families at home), as well as helping schools to do this more effectively. An important part of this is engaging parents as active partners, with a valuable contribution to make. Another is adopting a positive starting point, focused on the young person.

### Success Factors

- Creation of safe school environment
- Clear structures
- Culture of active participation
- Organised attention
- The Buddy Programme
- Parental involvement

### Employers

Like many other urban labour markets, Rotterdam has relatively high levels of youth unemployment in deprived areas, whilst employers struggle with unfilled vacancies. At the same time, employers complain that young people leave school unprepared for working life. BRIDGE provides an opportunity for employers to assume a more active role in shaping the city’s talent pipeline. The project’s interventions create multiple spaces for employers to collaborate with young people, teachers and parents. In addition, it gives scope for them to influence curricular content to help ensure a better fit between labour market supply and demand.

At the heart of BRIDGE is the Career Start Guarantee, perhaps the most significant of all twenty interventions. Without strong and committed employer support, these guarantees are hollow promises, so the ongoing involvement of the city’s businesses will remain a priority.
4 Innovation, Challenges and Risks

4.1 Overview of the Challenges

Urban Innovative Actions is all about city innovation. Genuine innovation cannot happen without risk, which is often an uncomfortable discussion where public funds are concerned. At the same time, UIA supports the implementation of innovative approaches which, by definition, face challenges. As well as supporting cities directly through the initiative, UIA also aims to identify and share the key lessons learned through these projects. Many of the implementation challenges are shared with other cities, and in this section we consider Rotterdam’s through a framework established by the UIA.

In each journal we will revisit the UIA challenge grid and assess progress made and lessons learned. Table 3 below provides an overview of the identified UIA Challenges. The table shows that two of the eight UIA challenges pose particular challenges for BRIDGE. Both of these are considered in more detail here.

4.2 Measurement and Impact

BRIDGE has assembled a strong and highly experienced team to conduct its measurement and impact activity. During this initial period, it has developed and signed off its monitoring and evaluation framework. This will draw upon existing data as well as gathering its own, and it will employ quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the effectiveness of the project. However, there are a number of technical challenges relating to measurement of the project’s impact. Amongst these are the following:

- Data on BRIDGE interventions can only be gathered at the school, not individual level. This means that it will not be possible to measure job outcomes as a result of the interventions. However, the team will try to make estimates of job outcomes in an indirect way.
- There is no randomized control dimension to the evaluation although there are possible control group options using Rotterdam South schools not using some of the interventions. Furthermore, surveys among pupils and other actors involved may give indications of the effects on school outcomes.
- The limited duration of BRIDGE only allows a maximum three year period to track pupils’ progress.

Assuming that the monitoring and evaluation work goes to plan, and that the schools remain actively involved in data capture and sharing, we can expect at least three important findings. The first is to assess with confidence the effect of BRIDGE interventions on school outcomes, the second will relate to the impact of Career Start Guarantees on sustained labour market integration in Rotterdam and the third will provide indications of the labour market impacts of some of the other interventions.
4.3 Financial Sustainability

The UIA funding of BRIDGE runs until the end of 2019. During this period, the Rotterdam project partners are investigating sustainable finance options. In particular, there is an interest in the potential of new financial instruments, particularly those which might attract third-party investors and create a revolving fund. Rotterdam can build on significant experience in the field of social investment and impact. The city also has access to a number of Family Office Wealth management organisations looking for investment opportunities with social impact. The financial sustainability work package is closely aligned to the monitoring and evaluation activity. The latter’s work will generate key baseline intelligence required to consider the various investment vehicle options. At the most fundamental, the M & E work must identify the benefits arising from BRIDGE and consider whether these can lead to savings in the public purse. This can then provide the basis for discussion with potential investors, to inform the design of an appropriate mechanism.

At this early stage, the work-package team is considering the range of technical options. The aim is to have a model identified and in place to commence in 2019. However, the technical challenges identified for the monitoring and evaluation work also apply here, and this element of BRIDGE’s activity is leading edge and not without risk.

4.4 The Challenges and Risks Ahead

BRIDGE is an ambitious and complex project. It seeks to address two deep-seated issues that few cities have successfully tackled. The first relates to neighbourhood renewal, and the challenge of breaking long-standing and inter-generational cycles of deprivation. The second, connected challenge is to resolve the mismatch between labour-market supply and demand. There is no guarantee that BRIDGE will succeed, although Rotterdam has assembled a compelling suite of interventions to tackle these challenges. It has also mobilised all of the relevant stakeholders. By involving all levels of government it has also constructed an approach that can truly be described as integrated.

In this section we have assessed which of the UIA’s schedule of challenges are most relevant. We have identified two of these which are higher level. However, beyond these, BRIDGE faces other risks which we will monitor over the duration of this work. These include:

- **The need for high level commitment and quality job offers from employers**: At this early stage, no one has yet entered the labour market through a Career Start Guarantee. The credibility of BRIDGE is closely aligned with this particular intervention, so it will be important that the expectations of young people and their advisors are met.

- **The pressures on young people in Rotterdam South to opt out of education**: These are many and varied. They include the lure of easy money in the informal economy, the power of street culture and simple financial pressures on families.

- **Competition within the school system**: Schools in Rotterdam South face competition – particularly for the most able students – from other schools outside the area. Within the area itself, the growth of denominational schools may further complicate this issue.
Ultimately, BRIDGE is focused on changing mindsets and on rewriting the narrative of a neighbourhood. Success here does not depend on the construction of physical infrastructure but on the enhancement of human resources – and resilience – in the area. As such it is a social experiment reliant on changed behaviours within the local population.
### TABLE 3: MAPPING BRIDGE AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leadership for implementation</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BRIDGE enjoys political support at the highest level and as part of the wider NPRZ at different multi-governance levels. Although this cannot be taken for granted, following recent national and regional elections this seems set to continue. Within the city administration, BRIDGE champions occupy key positions to support its implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Public procurement</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>BRIDGE is an unusual UIA project in that it does not involve large-scale capital expenditure. Although this limits the procurement challenge it does not entirely remove it. For example, each of the BRIDGE interventions requires a lengthy procurement process which absorbs significant staff time and which may deter some contractors from applying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Integrated cross-departmental working</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Rotterdam has established key strengths in this area. However, as with all relationship management it requires ongoing attention and activity. Already, the BRIDGE Interventions coordinator has invested significant time building school relationships which will be ongoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adopting a participative approach</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>This is another area where Rotterdam has established strengths. The project’s success will largely rely on the city’s ability to create platforms that encourage and support key stakeholder participation. Student Councils, Cross-school platforms and Employer Alliances will all form part of this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Accurately measuring the impact of BRIDGE presents a number of technical challenges. Although the project has clear targets, these relate to people accessing particular pathways, ideally into employment. However, there are many factors in play that will influence each individual’s journey. Consequently, attributing impact for the outcomes is complex and not free of risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Financial Sustainability</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>There is a close relationship between this challenge and that of monitoring and evaluation. Although Rotterdam has an established reputation in relation to new financial instruments, BRIDGE faces some fundamental challenges in this domain. Again the relatively short project timescales are an issue here, and this challenge is described in greater detail in the main narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Communicating with target beneficiaries</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BRIDGE can build upon established communication platforms for the NPRZ. There is also a considerable expertise in the city around communication, evidenced for example in the videos on the UIA website. As the project develops, the use of successful participants as ambassadors – as well as satisfied employers - will be increasingly important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Upscaling</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>The challenge of Upscaling BRIDGE is, itself, a challenge. There is no other deprived neighbourhood of this scale in the Netherlands. Beyond these boundaries, there may be limits within national education systems, but the principles at the heart of BRIDGE are largely transferable. The questions of political and financial commitment are more important factors relating to scalability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Early learning points and next steps

5.1 Where is the innovation in BRIDGE?

Taken separately, nothing in BRIDGE is innovative *per se*. The innovation comes from the sophisticated packaging of different elements and their mobilisation as part of an area-based approach.

Cross-sectoral collaboration in itself presents significant challenges. Behind the highly visible elements of BRIDGE – the CSGs, the interventions etc – is a major investment in relationship building and partnership management.

Although less evident, without this fundamental activity BRIDGE would lack the necessary foundations for its success. As an example of this, we would point to the intense relationship building campaign undertaken with Rotterdam South schools led by the Interventions Manager during the initial project period. This ongoing work is a prerequisite for BRIDGE to achieve its goals.

The cross-sectoral dimension of the approach is reflected in the 20 interventions. These target and involve each of the four key stakeholder groups:
- Students
- Teachers
- Parents
- Employers

The fact that these stakeholders may be defined as ‘the usual suspects’ should not mislead us into thinking that this is business as usual. It is not. And although we may see other examples where employers are shaping the curriculum – most notably through variations of the Dual System – BRIDGE is something different. That difference is embodied in the specific CSG offer, which gives Rotterdam South students tangible Next Economy career opportunities. In the context of the city economy talent pipeline, this represents a high level of innovation.

That this collaborative work with young people begins so early – at the age of 9 – reflects impressive planning. It could also be described as innovative when so much activity under the banner of career guidance is typically delivered when students are fast approaching the labour market.

There is no guarantee that young people in Rotterdam South will make the ‘right’ choices, but they are far more likely to make informed ones based on BRIDGE’s activity.

Other components of BRIDGE’s work – for example the potential financial instruments – may attract wider attention as novel groundbreaking ways of addressing shared challenges. However, we should not overlook the process innovation being undertaken behind the scenes that is creating the framework for this to take place.
**5.2 What progress has been made in this initial period?**

In an intense initial period, BRIDGE has already achieved a great deal. Based on our observations and understanding of the project, we would identify the following five as being particularly important.

1. **Building the framework for collaboration**
   As noted above, there has been a significant investment in building the right collaborative framework for BRIDGE in this early period. The importance of trusted relationships cannot be underestimated in the context of BRIDGE’s work. This activity has included the establishment of a high level group which mobilises political support as well as a steering group to oversee operational issues. Meshing this work within the wider ambit of the NPRZ has been a complex and detailed task.
   Alongside this, there has been extensive activity to map (utilising the Kumu tool) and engage with a myriad of delivery organisations in Rotterdam South and beyond.

2. **Securing the buy in of schools**
   In organisational terms, schools are the key to BRIDGE’s success. This is where the engagement with young people takes place, and where the battle for mindsets will be won or lost.
   A significant proportion of BRIDGE’s initial activity has focused on cultivating the relationship with Rotterdam South schools and colleges. Practically, this has involved detailed work with education managers to secure their commitment to the BRIDGE offer.
   School principals and their management colleagues have a pivotal role to play in mobilising teachers around the concept. Unless teachers believe in the potential transformative power of BRIDGE, then success will be hard to achieve.

3. **Design and Development of the Interventions**
   The BRIDGE interventions are the tools that will be employed to encourage young people in Rotterdam South to make different career decisions. They target all of the influencers in young people’s lives, and include the Career Start Guarantees, as part of a wide repertoire of options. The design, development and commissioning of these interventions has been a key achievement in this start up part of the project.

4. **Establishing the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**
   All of the UIA projects are required to evidence their impact. This can be easier where capital investment is involved and where there are physical results from the investment. That is not the case with BRIDGE, which operates in a complex environment where the results relate to human choices. The recently agreed monitoring and evaluation framework is a sophisticated approach characterised by refreshing realism. It clearly sets out what can and cannot be measured in the project’s lifespan. Although the limitations may disappoint some, the proposed approach will provide valuable evidence on the effects of these interventions – particularly the Career Start Guarantee itself.

5. **Mobilising the ‘Gaan voor Baan’ campaign**
   BRIDGE must communicate effectively with a wide range of audiences. It must be credible with young people, parents, teachers and employers. It must also convey complex concepts in a clear and accessible way. The development of the ‘Gaan voor Bann’ campaign tools – lively, highly visual and utilising humour – will be a great asset here. The fact that they have been produced right at the start is also important. Too often this aspect of a major project is an afterthought.
5.3 What can others learn from BRIDGE so far?

BRIDGE tackles issues that are relevant to many other cities. The most important of these is the mismatch between labour market supply and demand. On the ground, this means high unemployment levels in Rotterdam South alongside unfilled vacancies in other parts of the city.

Many factors contribute to this familiar scenario. Lack of clarity about future employment opportunities, particularly due to fast-changing economic drivers can be one. Linked to this, is employer uncertainty relating to their future recruitment needs. These uncertainties make it difficult, in turn, for young people and those who advise them to make informed career choices. In deprived areas like Rotterdam South, insularity and reluctance to travel are well-reported additional factors. Low confidence contributes to this, as can practical barriers like poor transport links. Systemic issues exacerbate these problems. In many countries, vocational education does not enjoy parity of esteem with its more academic parallel, which can deter young people and parents. This is in spite of the fact that these pathways can lead to sustained employment in high growth and well-paid industrial sectors. These challenges are familiar to cities world-wide. BRIDGE provides an innovative sophisticated approach that has high levels of relevance as well as replicability for others.

This is a model that others can apply to improve their city’s labour market functioning in future. Although not all cities have the scale and range of job opportunities available in Rotterdam, the issue of mismatch is widely reported. As its name implies, BRIDGE is all about connections, and this is another important potential learning point.

This approach relies on the effective collaboration of all key stakeholders: young people, teachers, parents and employers. No single group can solve this complex issue alone. And without the active collaboration of all four stakeholder groups, BRIDGE will fail. Working this way is not easy – if it was, every city would be doing it – and the incubation of this collaborative culture is perhaps Rotterdam’s most important lesson for others. At this early stage, there are also some clear practical tips that others can learn from BRIDGE’s journey so far:

### 5.4 Next Steps

This initial journal has set out a baseline for readers unfamiliar with BRIDGE. It has explained the challenges the project sets out to address, and has provided extensive detail on how partners will do that. In doing so we have highlighted the associated risks and considered the challenges – many of which are relevant across the UIA projects. We will produce Journal 2 in spring 2018. In that edition we will explore views of key stakeholders in greater detail. We will also review the full range of BRIDGE interventions, paying particular attention to the format and operation of the Career Start Guarantee.

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**Early lessons from BRIDGE**

- Start young – key decisions are set before age 10
- Provide a universal not targeted offer
- Focus on talent: underline what people can do
- Mobilise the power of mentors and role-models
- Employ visual tools to convey your story
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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