

The BRiDGE Project

Sustainability Strategy

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Executive Summary

The BRIDGE Project, launched in 2023 as an Erasmus+ Higher Education Cooperation project, addresses critical gaps between the knowledge and expertise of researchers, policy makers and civil society organisations that often prevent effective connection of evidence with policy and practice.

Our approach is grounded in open science principles, emphasising knowledge co-production, inclusivity, and meaningful engagement across sectors. The project has successfully piloted three main components: training workshops for early career researchers, a cross-sector learning community, and open access publications. These components work together to support evidence-informed policy and practice while promoting democratic engagement.

- The case-based training workshops have developed early career researchers' competences in policy-relevant research
- The learning community has created a space for dialogue and mutual learning across sectors.
- Open Access publications, including several working papers developed in the context of the learning community, a meta-analysis of open science and open access in the current European context, and two thematic journal issues have been launched as an alternative to commercial publishing models that have erected paywalls, limiting access, and create disincentives for open science collaboration.

Looking ahead to 2025 – 2028, the BRIDGE Project will focus on establishing a more formal network structure, including through expanded training that includes mid-career researchers, civil society actors and knowledge brokers, and strengthening engagement with policy makers. We recognise the challenges inherent in this work, particularly in establishing sustainable funding mechanisms. However, our experience demonstrates that meaningful intersectoral collaboration is both possible and essential for more effective, evidence-informed policy and practice.

This sustainability strategy outlines concrete steps for maintaining and expanding the BRIDGE Project's work. We are guided by our shared mission to improve the relevance and visibility of evidence-informed education policy and practice. Our approach emphasises gradual, sustainable growth while maintaining our commitment to open science principles and democratic engagement.

1.0 Introduction to the BRiDGE Project

The BRiDGE Project was launched in Autumn 2023 as an Erasmus+ Higher Education Cooperation project.

Grounded in the principles of open science (OS), the overarching aim of the project has been to address gaps between the knowledge and expertise of Higher Education institution-based researchers, practitioners in civil society organisations¹, and policy makers that prevent the effective connection of evidence with policy and practice. As part of this the BRiDGE Project also promotes open access publications targeted to all three parts of the research-civic-policy knowledge triangle.

The long-term vision of the BRiDGE Project is to establish a thriving international network to support open science for policy to promote civic engagement in and future capacity for innovative, high-quality education policy research.

The specific objectives of the BRiDGE Project, which has piloted main elements of the network, have been to:

- develop early career education policy researchers' competences (graduate student and post-doctorate) to produce relevant international research outputs, and to benefit from European civil society organisation insights and collaboration;
- bring together researchers, policy makers and members of European civil society organisations, as part of a learning community, to cooperate in and use research and to be a critically reflective and collaborative pivot in the education research-policy-civil society knowledge triangle;
- develop open access publications that address both education policy and practice. Publications developed in this work package are targeted at different stakeholder audiences – including through academic publications in the European Journal of Education Policy & Practice, and working papers -- authored by academics as well as practitioners.
- develop a plan for sustainability of the BRiDGE Project.

Box 1: Strengthening evidence-informed education policy and practice: The BRiDGE Project's added value

Building bridges between research, policy and practice is essential for creating more effective and democratic education systems, and on evidence-informed policy and practices.

- For researchers: stronger competences in policy-relevant research, collaborative opportunities, and enhanced impact of research on policy and practice.
- For policy makers: access to evidence-informed insights and more sustainable policies.
- For civil society: active participation in knowledge creation, opportunities to meaningfully engage in discussions with policy makers and researchers.

¹ In this document, the term *civil society* includes both formal civil society organisations (e.g., NGOs, advocacy groups, professional associations, trade unions) and the practitioners and other stakeholders they represent in the education sector.

1.1 Conceptual foundations of the BRiDGE Project

The BRiDGE Project uses the Joint Research Centre's (JRC) Science for Knowledge4Policy Framework as a foundation for its work with an international and comparative approach to education policy research and development.

As defined by the European Commission, "open science" is:

... an approach to research based on open cooperative work that emphasises the sharing of knowledge, results and tools as early and widely as possible. It ...operates on the principle of being 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary.'²

Open science practices include:

- early and open sharing of research and open collaboration within science and other knowledge producers;
- immediate and unrestricted open access to scientific publication and research outputs;
- ensuring verifiability and reproducibility of research outputs;
- responsible research output management in line with the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) principles of public engagement in research and innovation, actively involving citizens in various stages of the scientific research process and enhancing public trust in science.^{3 4}

The European Commission supports open science through its "Knowledge for Policy Competence Framework for researchers"⁵ (Figure 1) to make research more collaborative, transparent and accessible, and to support the development of evidence-informed policy. This model has underpinned the design of the BRiDGE Project.

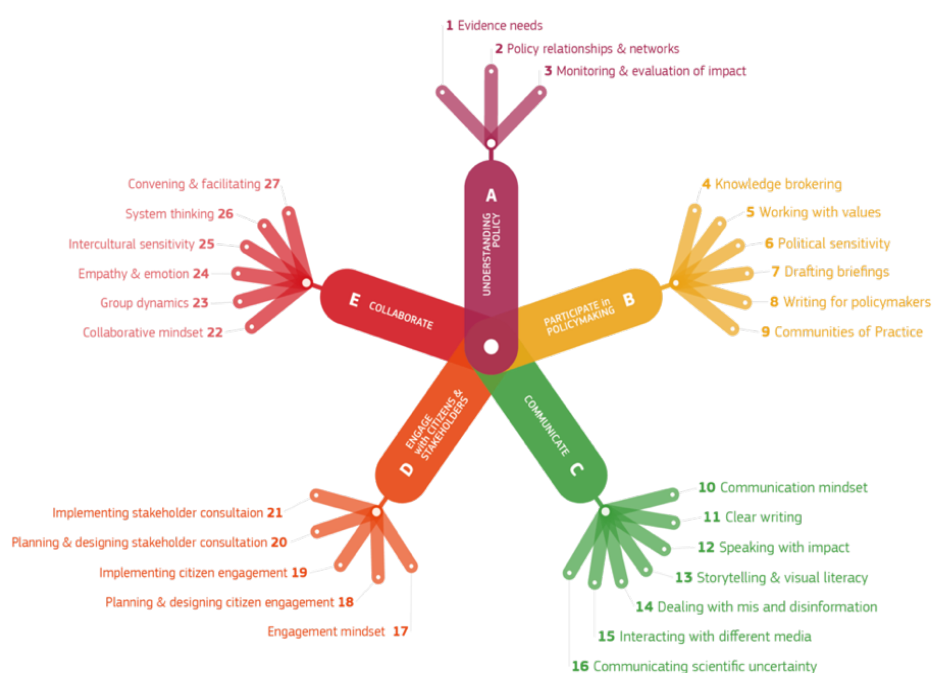
² https://rea.ec.europa.eu/open-science_en

³ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/open-science_en

⁴ <https://data.europa.eu/en/news-events/news/empowering-citizens-through-science-role-citizen-science-europe>

⁵ https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/visualisation/competence-framework-'science-policy'-researchers_en

Figure 1: Knowledge4Policy



Source: Joint Research Centre, European Commission
https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/visualisation/competence-framework-'science-policy'-researchers_en

1.2 The BRiDGE Project partnership

The project has brought together a collaborative pan-European professional learning community to support development of competences for policy learning. This includes development of “intra-“and “inter-“professional learning communities, to promote interconnected HE systems, as well as offer opportunities for participation in democratic, social and civic engagement through formal and non-formal learning.

The BRiDGE Partners are:

- Vytautas Magnus University (LT)
- The European Institute of Education and Social Policy (Institut Européen d'Éducation et de Politique Sociale) (FR)
- The Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL-P) (BE)
- The University of Education Freiburg (Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg/PHFR) (DE)
- The Institute of Education, University of Lisbon (Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa) (PT)
- Free University of Brussels, Doctoral School of Human Sciences (VUB/ Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) (BE)
- Eötvös Loránd University, PPK (The Faculty of Education and Psychology) (HU)

1.3 About this paper

This paper addresses a final aim of the project – to develop robust scenarios for long-term sustainability of the BRiDGE Project work. By “sustainability” we mean the ability of the BRiDGE partnership to:

- foster a committed, diverse, and collaborative network of stakeholders that supports open science values and actively contribute to the network’s governance and development;
- maintain and evolve training workshops to support development of competences for education policy research;
- support collaboration across education research, civil society and policy sectors as part of a learning community recognising diverse research cultures, knowledge systems and practices;
- communicate research through open access outputs relevant for diverse communities (including academic research, policy briefs and working papers, and other formats).

Sustainability also refers to long-term financial viability, based on a diversified funding model that can support core organisational work, training workshops, learning community activities, as well as smaller seminars and related publications.

To support strategic decision-making around the future of the BRiDGE Project, this paper is structured as follows:

- Section 2 identifies the context and key tensions that have shaped the Open Science movement over time, and implications for the sustainability of the BRiDGE Project.
- Section 3 shares the mission, vision and values (MVV) that underpin the BRiDGE Project going forward.
- In section 4, the lessons learned over the past two years of the Eramsus+ project – successes as well as areas for improvement – are shared. This section also shares an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to be considered in developing the sustainability strategy.
- Alternative actions for sustaining, deepening and broadening the work of BRiDGE Project over time are set out in section 5.
- Section 6 identifies potential risks for the different project dimensions, and identifies indicators for monitoring progress on a regular basis.
- Section 7 concludes with a reflection on how context, experience and values have informed our view of sustainability – and of future intersectoral work.

2.0 The context of open science and its implications for the BRiDGE Project

Rooted in Enlightenment ideals of reason, transparency, and the free exchange of ideas, open science continues a centuries-long effort to make knowledge a public good. The BRiDGE Project is inspired by this rich heritage. Yet the evolution of open science has been a contested process, with its principles often difficult to realise in practice (Chan, 2011)⁶. Central to these tensions are questions of:

- whose knowledge is recognised as legitimate
- who controls access to and benefits from knowledge (Chan, 2011), and
- how contributions are measured (Ruano-Borbalan, 2025).⁷

These issues remain critical for BRiDGE's strategic positioning and sustainability, and are outlined in some detail below. (NB: A more extensive analysis of the evolution of open science developed for the BRiDGE Project is available at <https://thebridgeproject.vdu.lt>].

2.1 Whose knowledge is recognised as legitimate

Drawing on the JRC Knowledge4Policy model (Figure 1), the BRiDGE Project emphasises the critical importance of integrating perspectives from research, policy, and civil society domains. This intersection presents inherent tensions, as each sector operates within distinct epistemic traditions and professional norms. These tensions are particularly evident in education research, where debates about evidence hierarchies and knowledge legitimacy often privilege certain methodologies over practitioner expertise and contextual understanding (Tuomi, 2025).⁸ Traditional policy development processes frequently fail to effectively incorporate either research evidence or practitioner insights, highlighting the need for more systematic approaches to knowledge integration (Jahn, Bergmann & Keil, 2012).⁹

2.2 Who controls access to and benefits from knowledge

The question of who controls access to knowledge centres on whether knowledge is a public good or a private asset (with rights based on individual or institutional patents and copyrights). This tension is particularly evident in academic publishing, where commercial publishers maintain significant control through traditional subscription models and article processing charges (APCs), despite major initiatives like Plan S¹⁰ advocating for unrestricted access to scholarly literature

⁶ Chan, L. (2011). *Contextualizing Openness: Situating Open Science*. In: L. Chan & S. Okune (Eds.), *Contextualizing Openness: Situating Open Science*, IRDC.

⁷ Ruano-Borbalan, J.C. (2025). Towards a more inclusive science: Open Science and the transformation of knowledge governance. The BRiDGE Project.

⁸ Tuomi, I. (2025). What counts as evidence in AI & ED: Towards Science-for-Policy 3.0. *European Journal of Education Policy & Practice*, 1(1) 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.5117/EJEP2025.1.001.TUOM>

⁹ Jahn, T., Bergmann, M., & Keil, F. (2012). Transdisciplinarity: Between mainstreaming and marginalization. *Ecological Economics*, 79, 1–10 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2012.04.017>

¹⁰ <https://www.coalition-s.org>

This situation creates a interconnected challenges for researcher and institutions as well as :

- Early career researchers need publications in high impact journals for career advancement.
- Commercial publishers' high APCs create barriers to publication, particularly for researchers from less-resourced institutions.
- While movements promoting Open Access (e.g. Plan S, which mandates that all publicly funded research be made openly available <https://www.coalition-s.org>), commercial publishers continue to maintain market control.
- Professionals outside of academia (i.e. working in CSOs) do not have (easy or free) access to timely research, creating barrier between research and practice.

For BRiDGE, The importance of ensuring visibility and quality of open access publication, and for developing a sustainable funding model (without author fees), is central. We will both work to develop a sustainable funding model for open access publicatin, and actively advocate for systemic change in publishing through the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

2.3 How knowledge is evaluated and valued

International university rankings also create barriers to open science. University rankings shape perceptions of institutional quality, driving funding, enrolment, and individual researchers' career opportunities. Yet rankings are criticised for privileging research intensity, reinforcing global hierarchies, while neglecting community engagement or locally relevant work (Hazelkorn, 2015).¹¹ Lower-ranked institutions risk decline, while highly ranked ones consolidate advantage. international university rankings contribute to homogenisation of priorities and goals for higher education on a global scale (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015).¹²

While efforts to reform evaluation of higher education institutions are underway (e.g. UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda, The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings consideration of contributions to UN Sustainable Development Goals and alternative metrics for academic publicaitons), many institutions remain entrenched in traditional rankings and impact factors, perpetuating systems that undervalue open science and context-sensitive research (Hicks, Wouters, Waltman, de Rijcke & Rafols 2015).¹³

These different tensions all have implications for the BRiDGE Project strategy (Box 2).

¹¹ Hazelkorn, E. (2015). *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230306394>

¹² Ordorika, I. & Lloyd, M. (2015). "International rankings and the contest for university hegemony." In S. Ball (Ed.), *Governing by Numbers: Education, Governance, and the Tyranny of Metrics* (pp, 197-214). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315203898>

¹³ Hicks, D. Wouters, P., Waltman, L., de Rijcke, S., & Rafols, I. (2015). Bibliometrics: The Leiden Manifesto for research metrics. *Nature*, 520(7548), 429-431. <https://doi.org/10.1038/520429a>

Box 2: Implications for the BRiDGE Project

While efforts to promote open science approaches and open access publications have intensified since the 1990s – and there has been some significant progress – it will be important for the BRiDGE Project to navigate deep-seated tensions.

1.) The BRiDGE Project brings together research, policy and civil society. Yet epistemological orientations and professional cultures diverge significantly across the domains of research, policy, and practice. Navigating tensions across different epistemic and professional cultures does not require their resolution, but rather a commitment to constructive engagement. This means creating opportunities and methods that will support open, honest exchange, and where researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can make their perspectives clear and learn from one another. It's about building spaces where different kinds of knowledge—academic, political, and practical— are made explicit, and all participants have an opportunity to be heard. Opportunities for mutual and meaningful learning may support cross-sector collaboration without subsuming one form of knowledge to another.

2.) Competences for intersectoral working and development are needed. In addition to a commitment to constructive engagement, all participants need to build competences in the area of the JRC's Knowledge4Policy framework (Figure 1). These include: understanding policy; participation in policy making; communication; engaging with citizens and stakeholders; and collaboration. (See section 5 areas to develop training, peer learning and mentorship in the learning community, the training workshops and open access publications.)

In addition to the specific areas identified in the Knowledge4Policy framework, a shared understanding of ethical principles and practices, and willingness to ask who benefits from open science, how to recognise different contributions may also set the foundation for collaboration.

3.) Alternative approaches to publication are needed. Open access publishing is central to transparency, reproducibility, collaboration, and public engagement. In spite of the current challenges for open access publishing (*i.e.*, dominance of large commercial publishers, career pressures to publish in well-known journals with strong impact factors, etc.), alternatives are needed to this model. The challenge for BRiDGE publications will be to ensure visibility and wide dissemination of publications for different stakeholders. In addition, BRiDGE can also actively engage in advocacy efforts to strengthen open access publication, including alternative approaches to valuing and evaluating research publications.

3.0 Looking ahead: Mission, vision and values of the BRiDGE Project

The BRiDGE Project was initially conceived as a way to support intersectoral cooperation through “Knoweldge4Policy”, to launch a learning community, to support the next generation of policy researchers, and to find a way to support high-quality open access publications.

Following two years of cooperation, the partners of the BRiDGE Project, the project partners formulated the Mission, Vision and Values that will shape the strategy moving forward. The partners are committed to continue working together and to widening, deepening these activities. We are animated by shared values and aims related to open science, also captured in our mission, vision and values (MVV) statement (Box 3).

Box 3: Mission, Vision and Values of the BRiDGE Partnership

Our mission is to improve the relevance and visibility of evidence-informed education policy and practice. We aim to bridge gaps, working across boundaries between research, practice and policy contexts in order to support critical analysis and effective policy and practice. This intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach lays the groundwork for more democratic, effective and sustainable policy design implementation and evaluation.

Our long-term vision is to establish a thriving international network to support open science for policy to promote civic engagement in and future capacity for innovative, high-quality education policy research. The active engagement of researchers, civil society organisations, policy makers, and other key players is essential. The network contributes to mutual learning and collaboration across boundaries to support evidence-informed policy and practice, training workshops to build competences for education policy research and policy design, and broadly disseminated publications. We aim to generate new knowledge about how to successfully boundary spanning that engages all education stakeholder groups.

Our work is grounded in the following principles:

- **Democratic citizenship and civic engagement**
- The **value of generating and working with evidence** in developing education policy and practice
- The importance of **interprofessional communication and mutual learning** across professional and geographical boundaries as a foundation for more effective and sustainable policy
- The need to **build capacity for innovative, high-quality education and policy research** to meet current and future challenges at all system levels, and **which places learning at its centre**

The shared mission, vision and values of the BRiDGE partners will guide our decisions going forward, and will help to maintain strong core principles while working in a complex and challenging environment.

3.1 The unique contribution of the BRiDGE Project: adding value and creating synergies

In alignment with European priorities for democratic citizenship and the use of evidence-informed policy and practice the BRiDGE Project seeks to cultivate meaningful synergies among education researchers, policy makers and civil society actors. By engaging constructively with differences across these three sectors, we aim to cultivate deeper understanding across different professional cultures and epistemologies.

The BRiDGE Project will complement established networks in Europe. Several education networks in facilitate cross-sector dialogue, each with its unique emphasis and focus.

- The European Commission's European Education Area (EEA) Working Groups facilitate voluntary cooperation and exchange of experiences. The Working Groups offer a forum to exchange experiences and practices on addressing common challenges and facilitate implementation of EEA actions.
- The European Commission Learning Labs on Investing in Quality Education and Training, which promotes education policy evaluation practices in the EU to improve evidence and identify ways to invest in education policies,
- The Expert Network on Economics and Sociology of Education and Training (ENESET), is an international advisory network of experts, funded by the European Commission.

Other European-wide networks bring together research, policy and practice to address specific issues. Among these are:

- The Pascal International Observatory which helps shape strategies for regional and urban development that integrate economic efficiency, social equity, and environmental sustainability (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/research/researchcentreshubsnetworks/pascal/>).
- European SchoolNet (EUN), is a network of ministries from across Europe, dedicated to driving educational innovation and supporting digital transformation for school and teaching practices. Its mission is to support policy makers. EUN collects and shares evidence to inform policy; supports schools and teachers with professional development and best practices; and sustains a network of schools engaged in innovation (<http://www.eun.org/about?sessionId=2B35846961BAC0645751C9D19CE1C087>).
- European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) is a non-profit organisation with institutional and individual membership. It fosters cooperation among researchers, supports the development and dissemination of both theoretical and empirical research, and provides platforms for critical discussion and publication. It supports thematic research networks, organises major conferences and events, supports early career researchers with training and mentorship, and publishes the European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) (<https://esrea.org/about-us/history-mission/>).

- The Lifelong Learning Platform (a BRIDGE partner), the largest European network of organisations active in education and training in Europe. LLLP supports exchange of innovative practices in Europe and beyond (<https://www.lllplatform.eu>).

An additional example of a network which, like the BRIDGE Project, is focused on knowledge brokerage, is the **Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE)**. SPRE “works with research, knowledge mobilisation and policy communities to improve how evidence and expertise shapes policy” (<https://spre.scot/>). ‘The Brokerage’ is the name given to their network of researchers, knowledge mobilisers, and policy professionals and is a space for formal and informal opportunities for sharing. SPRE was created in 2019 from discussions between academics and policy makers in Scotland and has recently been re-launched as an independent charity (SCIO) with Board of Trustees (volunteers) and Co-Director model of leadership. SPRE organise and host or co-host events (webinars, training sessions). They also offer support to early-career researchers & PhD Candidates.

The BRIDGE Project partners will complement the work of existing networks, but also contribute its own unique approach to supporting interprofessional learning and exchange with its lifelong learning focus, and reach across Europe and with relevant international partners from other regions.

The BRIDGE Projects will further develop:

- **Capacity building** through training workshops to build competences on open science methods. In the area of research training, interdisciplinary collaboration, a key aspect of open science, remains underdeveloped in many doctoral training programmes. While many institutions offer introductory workshops on open data and reproducibility, they rarely provide structured, in-depth curricula that integrate open science with disciplinary research methods (European Commission, 2021)¹⁴. A strong focus on the values, motivations, principles and methods of open science need also to be addressed in training for early- and mid-career participants.
- **An online community platform** to reach a broader set of education stakeholders for meaningful engagement and learning. The platform will support active participation and peer learning in online seminars and peer learning activities. A monthly newsletter can provide information on relevant current and upcoming project activities.
- **Annual seminars** on selected topics may bring together representatives of education research, policy and practice and support mutual learning. The seminars may be linked to the production of open access publications (journal and working papers) and tie into online seminars and bi-annual conferences.
- **Open access publications** addressing policy and practice: Our open access publications (journal, policy briefs and working papers) provide an alternative model for knowledge production and dissemination by valuing and integrating contributions of researchers, policy makers and

¹⁴ European Commission (2020). *Strategic plan 2020-2024 - Research and Innovation*. https://commission.europa.eu/publications/strategic-plan-2020-2024-research-and-innovation_en

practitioners as part of a collaborative community of practice. This approach moves beyond the traditional academic publishing models and supports open science principles.

- **Conferences** to engage a broader community of education stakeholders from policy, research and practice. Bi- or tri-annual conferences can help to raise the visibility of the BRiDGE Project and its outputs, provide opportunities for others to share their work, and grow the network reach.

The next sections explore the operational aspects of long-term sustainability for the BRiDGE Project and a broader community of stakeholders. Lessons learned over the first two years are shared, along with partners' analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) facing the project. Our strategy for further development and financial viability over time is shared.

4.0 Lessons learned from the first two years of the BRiDGE project

This section presents insights gained during the initial phase of the BRiDGE project, drawing on participant feedback, partner reflections, and input from critical friends across our three main components: early career researcher training, the learning community, and open access publications. These lessons will inform how we can build on and improve the current project design in order to reach a broader set of stakeholders and deepen our impact.

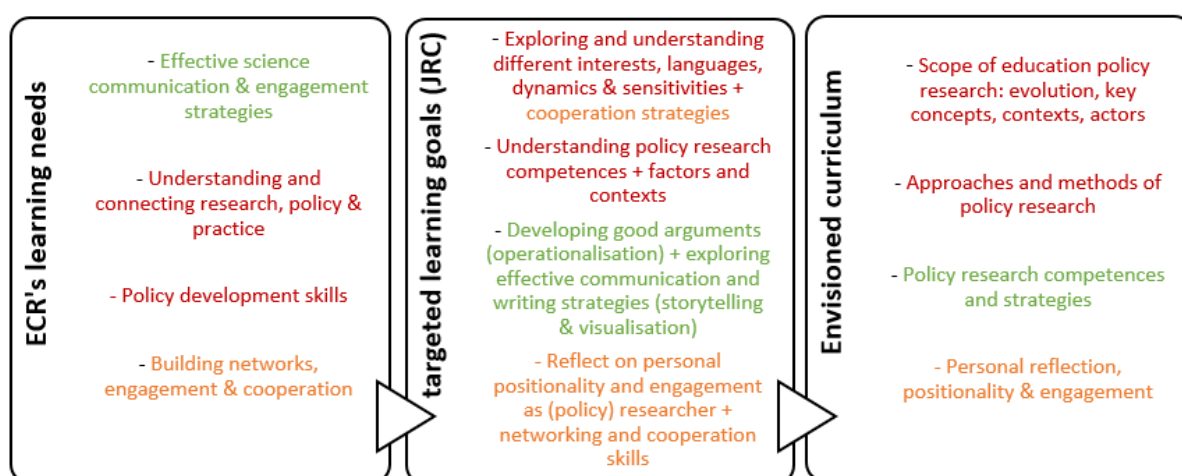
The section concludes with SWOT analysis, laying out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the BRiDGE Project as we move forward, setting the basis for further strategic planning.

4.1 Workshops for early career researchers (ECRs)

The specific objectives of the ECR workshop series (WP2) have been to: 1) improve the capacity of universities to support early career researchers (ECRs - including post-doctoral researchers, doctoral candidates and other graduate students) in international and comparative education policy research, and to benefit from European civil society insights and collaboration; and 2) improve the competences of early career researchers, focusing on specific sub-areas within the JRC Science4Policy competence framework.

To identify competence needs related to education policy research (based on competences identified in the JRC framework), faculty and graduate students in the partner higher education institutions were surveyed. Competence needs identified included effective science communication and engagement strategies; understanding and connecting research, policy and practice; policy development skills; and, building networks, engagement and cooperation. Figure 2 highlights identified learning needs, general course aims.

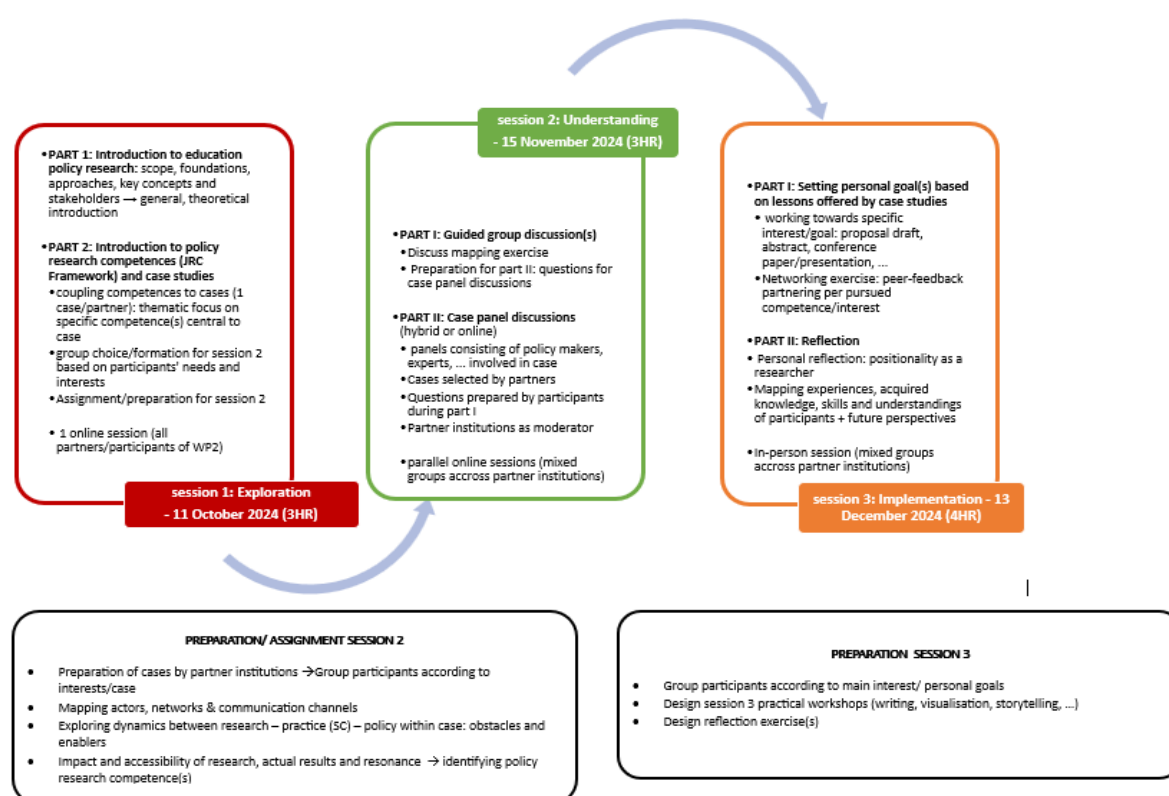
Figure 2: Early career researchers' identified learning needs, course aims and curriculum



Source: BRiDGE Project partners

Relevant readings were identified and partners developed case studies for the course. The curriculum (Figure 3) was structured for online delivery (with the final session in the first round of workshops scheduled as a hybrid workshop). This enabled international partners to cooperate in the course delivery, and to highlight the comparative dimensions of case studies from different countries.

Figure 3: Course curriculum



Source: BRIDGE Project Partners

While the initial project design foresaw that workshops would be held in-presence at each of the partner universities, the decision was made to hold sessions online. This approach allowed partners to emphasise the comparative and international dimension education policy (a comparative advantage of our international partnership). Learners were exposed to a range of issues and cases from the different partner countries.

The workshops were conducted in two rounds, with the second round allowing for further development of the curriculum and adaptations based on early participant feedback.

4.1.1 What worked well

Participant evaluation results collected indicated that aspects that have worked well in the organisation of the ECR workshops are:

- The enhanced credibility and diversity fostered through a multinational partnership
- The use of real examples for the case-based curriculum design
- The alignment with the with the Science4Policy competence framework
- Relevance of topics covered
- The possibility to reuse course materials
- ECTS credits were awarded

4.1.2 Areas for improvement

While attendance in the first round of workshops was good, recruitment for the second round was more challenging. Participants and partners identified the following areas for improvement

- Strengthen recruitment, assessment, and follow up processes (e.g. participants' motivation; assessment limited to self-reflection; not enough follow up after workshops)
- Reflect over the staffing structure (reliance on individual staff for delivery)
- Revise the curriculum design so that participants can access fully asynchronously

Bridge Partners from the learning community also highlighted their desire to have training opportunities for and engagement with participants from civil society organisations. This may include a focus on the JRC Knowledge4Policy competences as this framework was designed to address competences needed for all three sectors. However, the specific training needs and approach for different learners would need to be rethought.

4.2 The learning community

While the ECR training workshops focused on individual capacity building, the learning community aimed to create sustained cross-sector dialogue, and embedded intersectoral learning.

The specific objectives of this learning community (WP3) have been to: 1) establish a learning community comprised of civil society organisation stakeholders and education researchers to allow for mutual learning on effective approaches to policy research; 2) identify education policy research priorities and research needs of the civil society organisations (CSO's) (lifelong learning focus); and 3) improve the capacity of European civil society organisations and their members to cooperate in and use research for education policy development, implementation, and evaluation, and to be a critically reflective and collaborative pivot in the research-policy-civil society knowledge triangle.

Based on a survey of Lifelong Learning Platform member organisations. two high priority topics for learning community engagement were identified: (global) citizenship education and internationalisation of education.

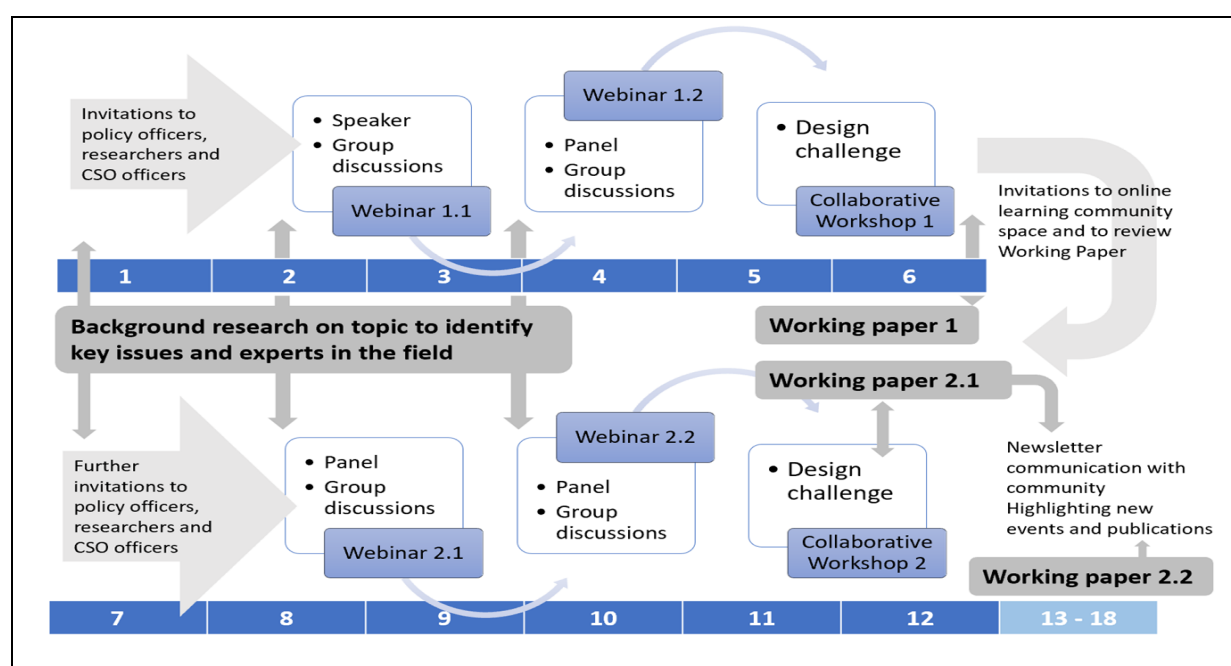
The activities organised included two online seminar series, which allowed for mutual exchange and critical reflection on the conceptual frameworks that inform approaches in a selected policy area, including interpretation and use of evidence, and communication and collaboration strategies.

Each series included two seminars, and a peer learning activity with a design challenge. The series engaged CSO representatives, academic researchers, and policy makers from selected Member States and the EU in the discussion of shared policy concerns. The seminars and peer learning activities were underpinned by background research with the collaboration of HEI researchers (established and early career) and civil society stakeholders, and Working Paper outputs (available on <https://thebridgeproject.vdu.it>).

Drawing on our experiences of facilitating the two thematic series, we developed a new publication, *["Interprofessional working: a guide to the challenges and opportunities in collaborating on evidence-informed education policy."](#)* Within this Guide we propose a set of “interprofessional competence domains”, closely based on, and complementing, the two JRC frameworks. This is a contribution to the broad community of education stakeholders as well as to the EU institutions. One possibility for a future iteration of the project/network is to run a new webinar series on each of these competence domains in order to further contribute to the self-efficacy of professionals working in or for education policy development. Taking a competence-based approach also invites the education community to work cross-sectorally and share expertise without limitations of education level or thematic issue.

Figure 4 illustrates the full process of designing and implementing the learning community webinars and developing the working papers.

Figure 4: The full 12- to 18-month process of creating the learning community, facilitating events, and creating working papers



Source: "Interprofessional working: a guide to the challenges and opportunities in collaborating on evidence-informed education policy." (Bridge Project 2025)

4.2.1 What worked well

The evaluation results for the different learning community activities indicate that the organisation and delivery of the seminar series were generally effective. The design approach—to engage participants in the co-creation of boundary objects (i.e., the working papers that were developed for each of the two cycles of the learning community) as a form of active learning—was successful. By combining expert panels, group discussions, and an interactive design challenge, we facilitated a practice-oriented experience that helped participants develop competences applicable to real-world contexts.

Participation in the series remained stable at just over 30 attendees. While engagement from policy makers remained low (see below), participants cited a variety of motivations for attending: learning and sharing new ideas, networking, and professional development. The presence of participants from countries outside the EU confirmed that the topic of global citizenship education resonated beyond national contexts and reflected real stakeholder needs.

The learning community was widely seen as offering valuable opportunities for networking. From the BRIDGE partners' perspective, this is not only a professional benefit for individuals but a key mechanism for fostering collaboration across sectors. Beyond the relevance of the selected topics, participants highlighted the opportunity to learn how other communities approached shared issues and the value of exchanging diverse perspectives. Given that the BRiDGE project's goal is to build bridges between policy, academia, and civil society, this is an encouraging outcome. Participants confirmed this impression—overall feedback rated the series as “very good” or “good” without exception.

We are satisfied with the blended format of combining panel discussions, group work, and an interactive design challenge. All participants had opportunities to contribute and to develop competences through reflection and collaboration, even without formal instruction. Facilitators were able to draw on additional expertise beyond the consortium to enrich the panel sessions.

With regard to knowledge transfer, **the majority of participants reported that they had gained new understanding and felt better informed after attending.** Three-quarters said they would apply what they had learned in their professional contexts and planned to share the knowledge with colleagues. When asked about the idea of a pan-European learning community focused on developing competences for policy research, responses were uniformly positive in terms of both relevance and importance. Participants identified potential themes for future learning community activities as continued focus on global citizenship education, and the challenges associated with AI.

Using boundary objects to ground discussions in shared themes allowed us to engage professionals from different sectors in meaningful dialogue. The Working Papers developed as an output of the learning community functioned well as boundary objects—not only by capturing key insights and offering additional context, but also by encouraging further reflection on interprofessional working. One challenge, however, was developing a writing style that was neither strictly academic, nor purely advocacy-oriented, nor entirely a recommendation report—yet that was still accessible and relevant to a diverse readership expecting all three.

Overall, these results suggest that the approach of the learning community was well received. Based on this experience, we believe the project has laid a solid foundation for continued cross-sectoral exchange. It also addressed a real need for networking and for thinking through complex topics in interdisciplinary groups.

In terms of sustainability, the stable network of contacts established provides a strong basis for further initiatives led by LLLP and other BRIDGE Project partners. BRIDGE will support ongoing activities and dialogue between researchers, policy makers, and civil society actors.

4.2.2 Areas for improvement

In terms of participation, the second seminar series managed to attract the envisaged number of attendees (30 to 40), though at the lower end (32). In both series, however, we observed a comparatively high drop-out rate shortly before each event (5–10 participants per event). Furthermore, the number of policy representatives was lower than expected (only 4). Combined with the even lower numbers in the first series, this highlights the need to expand and strengthen our networks to attract a broader range of participants. The increase in attendance nevertheless shows that this is feasible and that our networks did grow during the project. Ideally, we would have achieved a more balanced mix of stakeholder types, particularly by increasing participation from policy officers. We also hoped to build a larger learning community overall.

One key insight is that managing the mailing list was a time-consuming task that proved difficult to sustain alongside other responsibilities. Additionally, we found that “word of mouth” or “snowballing” strategies were not particularly effective. We tried to activate more policy makers through our own and our partners’ networks, reaching out at various levels (local, regional, national, EU), but with limited success. One option that showed promise in a similar event by a project partner was to have policy makers serve as hosts, which helped draw a larger audience from this target group. Moreover, we need to further refine our understanding of who qualifies as a policy maker—especially regarding the differences between local, regional, national, EU, and international contexts—to better tailor our outreach.

Project partners decided to distribute a newsletter about relevant current and upcoming project activities, which participants evaluated as helpful and informative. This newsletter is expected to continue, managed by the Lifelong Learning Platform depending on the availability of resources. However, the ambition to build a fully interactive community cannot be achieved through such a one-way channel.

It proved difficult to engage the community in the sustained creation of boundary objects (e.g. working papers) and dissemination. For long-term success, members will need to be more systematically involved in these processes—sharing experiences and specific knowledge, creating best-practice examples, articulating needs, and so on. We observed that without external stimuli like this project actively creating spaces for exchange, the networks established during the project are not yet strong enough to initiate such activities independently. Nevertheless, our Belgian partners plan to embed some of these efforts into their ongoing work. The project has created a solid foundation to build on.

To increase sustainability of the online learning community, closer integration of content and dissemination efforts will be essential—especially for reaching new audiences.

4.3 Open access publications

Publications provided a third pillar of knowledge-sharing, with the aim of ensuring outputs were accessible beyond immediate participants. Publications included two issues of the new open access European Journal of Education Policy & Practice (EJP&P); partner-led working papers linked to the Learning Community seminar and PLA series; a “How To” guide on learning community engagement; and, a meta-analysis on open science and open access publishing, which identified systemic challenges and opportunities for policy reform (and underpinning the analysis in section 2.0).

4.3.1 What worked well

For both thematic issues, we chose topics that provide simultaneously an opportunity to reflect on the theoretical questions of global educational phenomena, to present relevant research findings, and to articulate practice-based experiences. This approach not only made it possible for the studies to convey, at least implicitly, the triad of research, policy, and social practice (e.g. the activity of NGOs), but also to address explicitly the interplay of these three domains within the given thematic area. In doing so, it forged a close connection between the two thematic journal issues and the BRIDGE project, while also opening pathways for the project’s long-term sustainability and open science approach.

Amid the profound social, political, ideological, and practical transformations of recent years, both citizenship education and the internationalisation of (higher) education are now confronted with fundamental challenges. Accordingly, for each of the two thematic issues we invited authors to prepare three distinct types of contributions:

- **Comprehensive theoretical studies** that situate the questions of citizenship education and the internationalisation of (higher) education within the historical, socio-historical, and research-historical contexts of the past decades, while also attempting to outline future possibilities in these fields;
- **Research based articles** that focus on more narrowly defined, specific phenomena within the respective topics, presenting original research findings;
- **Thought pieces**, in which authors, drawing on several decades of distinguished professional activity, offered essay-style reflections of high scholarly sophistication on the fundamental issues of the respective educational domains.

Leading global experts in the two fields were invited to prepare the comprehensive theoretical analyses, empirical studies, and thought pieces. We proposed innovative topics that enabled all contributors to re-engage with their prior professional achievements from a fresh perspective, thereby opening new avenues within their respective disciplines. In this way— as the authors themselves noted in their communications with us—we were able to take a significant step toward enhancing the long-term exploration of the topics addressed.

Assembling an appropriate pool of reviewers for these manuscripts proved far from straightforward. For each submission, we sought the evaluations of two senior scholars with highly specific expertise and, in addition, invited one junior reviewer, for whom the assignment served as a form of practical, learning-oriented review experience. In this aspect of editing the thematic issues, we thus created a context in which senior experts and early-career researchers could collaborate, even though everyone ultimately conducted their evaluations independently. All in all, more than thirty senior and junior scholars from across the globe participated in the review process for the two thematic issues.

Given that the topics we proposed for the articles contained numerous professionally innovative elements, they proved inspiring both to the authors and to the reviewers. Several leading experts even offered to continue collaborating with our working group in the next phase of the BRiDGE project, expressing willingness to assume an even more active role than at present. We regard this as another significant opportunity—and an important step forward—from the perspective of the project’s sustainability.

4.3.2 Areas for improvement

We identified areas for future improvement. First, we had some difficulty in attracting early career researchers for a journal that does not yet have an impact factor ranking. The ranking is important for career development. The journal editors (EIESP) will apply for ISI ranking after the first 2 years, typical time needed before this is possible. We will also need to ensure the new journal is visible to a broad audience.

Over the longer term, the BRiDGE Project can bring additional opportunities for stakeholders in Europe (and eventually beyond Europe) to engage in mutual learning and collaboration, disseminating collaborative research results more widely through the European Journal of Education Policy & Practice, working papers, and other communication channels.

4.4 SWOT analysis and strategic takeaways

Henry Mintzberg (1994), among the most influential management and strategy thinkers, has argued that traditional strategic planning, including SWOT analyses, are too formal, static, and detached from the reality of everyday work in organisations. Rather, Mintzberg argues, plans should emerge in daily activities and through organisational learning. In this spirit, the SWOT analysis developed by the BRiDGE partners should be seen as a framework and tool for monitoring of both internal and external factors over time (Box 3). It provides a snapshot of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at this point in time, and will need to be updated as internal and external factors evolve. The elements outlined in the SWOT should be linked directly to clear actions, and a monitoring framework to allow for adaptation as we learn more about what works and what needs to be adjusted.

Box 4: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the BRiDGE Project, 2025

Opportunities	Threats
- Open science and open access are now firmly established, as is the importance of evidence-informed policy and practice in education (incl. evidence from research studies and practitioner experience) - There is growing attention to the need to strengthen democracy and citizenship education (with open science/stakeholder engagement being important elements). Research focused on local needs and societal impact are increasingly prioritised. - The BRiDGE partners can facilitate intersectoral engagement and mutual learning involving a broad range of stakeholders at various stages of policy and research processes. . - There is a need to build competences of researchers, civil society and policy makers in using “Knowledge for Policy”. Attention to research that is indirectly relevant for policy is also important (e.g. critical analysis). - The BRIDGE model for training of early career researchers may be expanded to include mid-career researchers, knowledge brokers, civil society organisations who provide bridges between researchers, policy makers and practitioners. - There is potential to establish BRiDGE as a European network with core funding (members from 9 EU countries), thus formalising our work.	- Political and economic disruptions at global level - Shrinking space for civil society organisations - Ongoing challenges in working across sectors based on different professional cultures and priorities - Ongoing competition for increasingly limited funding to support policy studies and stakeholder engagement - While initiatives like the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics advocate for reforming research evaluation, many institutions continue to rely on the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) as a primary benchmark for academic success - Current approaches to institutional and individual researcher evaluation metrics also undermine the value of local research needs and society and non-profit journals that do not have resources or scale and operational efficiencies of the large commercial publishers.

- There are several initiatives to improve how universities, individual academics and journal publications are evaluated. The BRIDGE Project can build on and support these efforts.	
Strengths	Weaknesses
- Partners themselves have strong competences in Science for Policy - Partners agree on need to support more effective intersectoral work - Good working relationships among partners - Good international representation among partners - Activities have been piloted through the Erasmus+ BRIDGE project and the partners can build on strengths and areas for improvement they have identified - Publication opportunities in the European Journal of Education Policy & Practice, BRIDGE website, and other platforms.	- Need to develop synergies across the different project activities/ break out of “intra-professional” communities - While partners see a demand for training workshops for CSO professionals as well as for early- and mid-career researchers, more reflection on the epistemology and approach for different target groups is needed - Difficulty of engaging policy makers in different activities, particularly on an ongoing basis

As indicated in the SWOT analysis, the BRIDGE Project is well-positioned to scale as a more formalised network with a broader set of offerings. Its long-term vision is aligned with EU priorities in education and democratic engagement. Its intersectoral model is both a strength and a challenge—it enables collaboration but will need to overcome entrenched silos and differing institutional cultures and norms.

The BRIDGE Project also faces a number of challenges. The main challenge is not linked to the project model or to the external demand, but rather to the mismatch between the model and the competition-driven norms and cultures of academia, policy and funding models. Institutional inertia, funding pressures, and shifts in the current political landscape will need to be navigated.

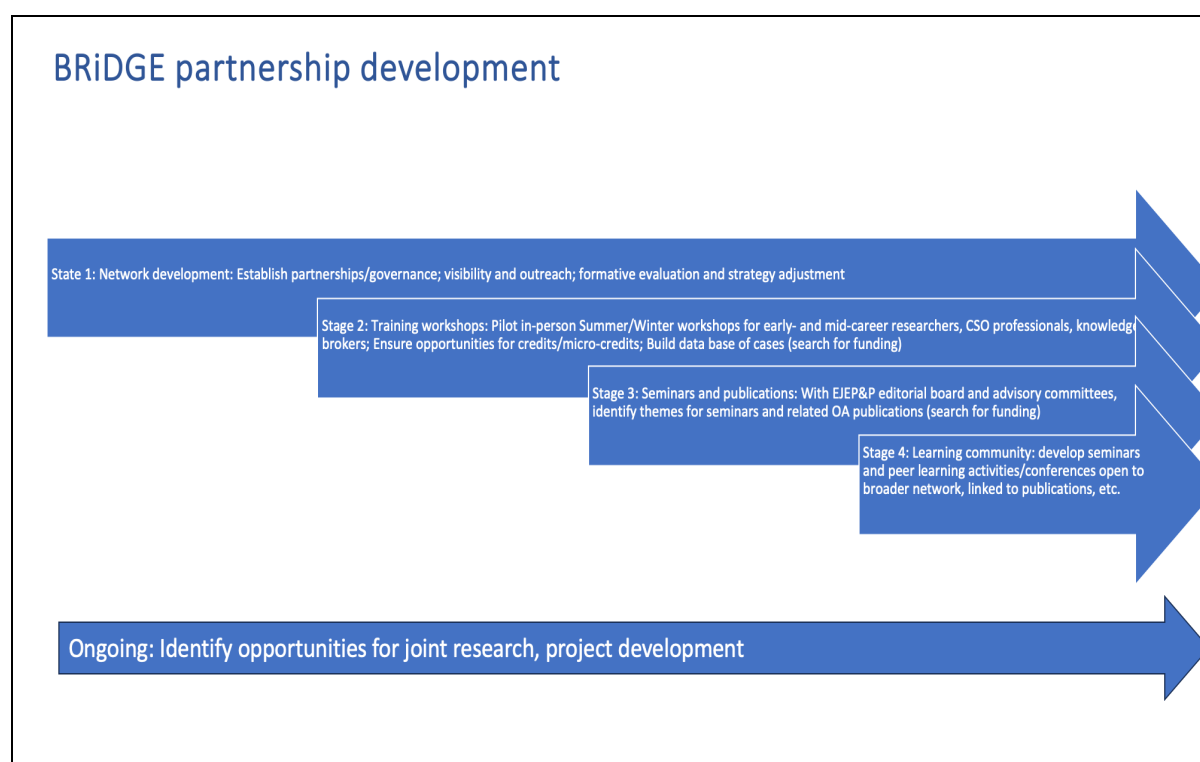
The BRIDGE project can address the challenges outlined in this analysis, in part, by actively promoting open science principles and partnering with institutions that are leading the reform of research evaluation. We will also need to invest in “bridging” expertise – not only by bringing different sectors together, but by actively facilitating mutual understanding and a shared language to address professional cultural barriers – and to turn this weakness into a strength. Wide dissemination of our model as an alternative to current dominant models of research evaluation will also be important.

5.0 Near- and mid-term options for development of the BRiDGE Project

In this section we outline an iterative strategy for the project's future, with near- and mid-term options for each project component. The approach is designed to maintain flexibility and allow for strategic adjustments as needed. This draws on the principles of learning organisations (Senge, 1990)¹⁵ and Mintzberg's (1994) ideas regarding "emergent strategies".

Figure 4 presents a structured roadmap for the BRiDGE Project. This roadmap provides a sequential framework for building resources, expertise, and partnerships. Importantly, we have built formative evaluation into the process from the very beginning. This continuous feedback loop accounts for the learning, adaptation, and unexpected opportunities that will inevitably arise, allowing us to turn our plan into a responsive and resilient strategy.

Figure 5: General sequencing strategy for the BRiDGE Project



Source: BRiDGE Partners

Next steps for development begin with decisions regarding the network governance structure among partners. This will set the foundation for decision making, expansion of the BRiDGE network membership, outreach, and priority setting. Frameworks for regular, formative evaluation should also be established early.

The next level is related to further development of the training workshops. Building capacity for effective intersectoral working will enable greater impact of our own network, and encourage workshop participants to

¹⁵ Senge, Peter M. (1990). *The fifth discipline : the art and practice of the learning organization*. Doubleday/Currency

develop open science methods in their own work. Developing curriculum for 3-4 day summer/winter fee-paying workshops can also support financial sustainability of the network activities over time.

Near- to mid-term plans for seminars and open access publications will build on the learning community and publications component of the first two years of the BRiDGE Project. Ways to strengthen links between these two components – including seminars bringing researchers, policy makers and civil society stakeholders together, and contributing directly and indirectly to publications (e.g. in the European Journal of Education Policy & Practice), working papers and policy briefs will be explored.

At the fourth stage, we have foreseen further development of the learning community activities. Seminars open to a broader (online and face-to-face) network may be linked to themes explored in the “working group” style seminars in stage 3. Further work will need to be done to build and maintain the broader learning community, to disseminate its work, and to ensure sustainable funding,

As indicated at the bottom of Figure 5, we will identify opportunities for joint research and project development among BRiDGE Partners on an ongoing basis. This involves scanning for project opportunities at the European level and beyond (e.g. Horizon, Erasmus+ and other funding opportunities), and developing projects that allow us to put our Mission, Vision and Values into action.

Below, we develop options for each project component over the near-to-mid-term (late 2025-28). Monitoring and risk management indicators are included at the end of the section.

5.1 Partnership/network development

The Erasmus+ BRiDGE Project has allowed partners to pilot different project components, which are to be further developed over time. However, Erasmus+ funding is intended for discrete projects. If BRiDGE partners are to continue to collaborate, we will need to develop a governance structure and partnership agreements. One option may be to establish ourselves as a formal network with Memoranda of Agreement setting out roles, responsibilities and working . A second option would be to move ahead as a looser coalition, working together in ad hoc but regular activities (training workshops, projects). We would also plan to expand our partnership.

For university partners, we will aim not only to ensure broad geographic representation, but also identify institutions that actively value research with local and societal impact, and evaluate researchers’ contributions accordingly. Alignment of new partners with the BRiDGE mission, values and vision is essential.

Civil society partners are well represented in our partnership by the Lifelong Learning Platform, which is itself a network with more than 40 European-wide networks and covering formal, nonformal and informal learning. Strategies to engage representatives from other civil society organisations and networks in learning community activities may help to widen representation of this sector.

The inclusion of “formative evaluation and strategy adjustment” in the initial phase of our near-to-mid-term strategy will support our emergent and adaptive approach to strategy development. This will allow us to make course corrections as needed.

An example of another European network (the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults/ESREA) is shared in Box 4. Lessons from the Adult Specific steps to develop this component of the BRIDGE Project are outlined in Box 5.

Box 6, which follows these examples, lists specific steps to develop the BRIDGE governance structure, visibility and formative evaluation.

Box 5: The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)

About: The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) network was launched in 1991 to support high-quality research on adult learning in Europe.

Activities: ESREA serves as an umbrella for several sub-networks (currently 13). These networks, which are approved by the ESREA steering committee based on their long-term perspectives, focus on specific research topics. The sub-network meetings, are held on an annual or bi-annual basis (with support from members and their universities). The Society also cooperates with other European networks and national organisations addressing similar issues.

While ESREA is primarily a research network, it also works with policy organisations to interpret research findings and advocate for evidence-informed policies.

Other ESREA activities and outputs include:

- **Seasonal schools:** ESREA provides bursaries for PhD students attending seasonal schools approved for sponsorship. The schools must include a focus on adult education and learning research; support substantial doctoral education activities; and align with ESREA's academic and social traditions.
- **Publications:** ESREA edits the [European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults \(RELA\)](#) and also publishes a [book series](#).

Funding: ESREA finances its activities through institutional and individual membership fees. The network also relies on in-kind contributions of members. For example, costs of the sub-networks and for related seminars and conferences are borne by universities in the host institutions.

Membership and conference fees (annual conferences and seminars and a major tri-annual conference) support the core secretariat, publications, and other activities.

Box 6: The Pascal International Observatory

About: [The Pascal International Observatory](#) established in 2001, brings together researchers, policy analysts and practitioners from higher education, civil society, government and private sector institutions to bridge policy and practice. Its aim is to support policy makers to design regional development strategies that integrate economic efficiency, social equality and environmental sustainability.

There are five regional hubs: Europe (University of Glasgow); Australasia (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology); Africa – University of Johannesburg; Southeast Asia & the Philippines – University of the Philippines; North America – Rutgers University.

The directors of the five hubs coordinate their work via the Executive Steering Committee. They are supported by an international advisory committee.

The regional hubs follow the same objectives and coordinate their work, but act independently. The Observatory cooperates with the UNESCO Learning Cities initiative (est. 2013).

Activities: The five hubs support thematic networks in the areas of: lifelong learning; learning societies; place management and place-making; social capital; and, learning cities and regions.

The Observatory works collaboratively with its members in order to develop approaches that are appropriate for context.

The Observatory consolidates, interprets and shares knowledge and mutual learning (e.g. through briefs).

Funding: Each hub has its own legal status (independent of the universities in where they are hosted) and generates income to cover its costs. Future plans are to establish an independent European Economic Interest grouping in Brussels.

Box 7: Steps to develop BRiDGE governance structure, visibility and formative evaluation

- Develop memoranda of Agreement (MoA) for institutional partners. The MoA should address roles, responsibilities and how different members will contribute based on their strengths (e.g., as CSOs, universities, or knowledge brokers). Ensure that roles are evenly disseminated so that the partnership/network is not dominated by one sector. Identify a coordination hub/secretariat. Consider working as a looser coalition if there are barriers to formalisation of the network (e.g. institution level, etc.).
- Identify and invite additional institutional partners. Their alignment with the mission, vision and values of the project and geographic representativeness is essential.
- Establish a steering committee for the overall network. Decide on decision-making (e.g., by majority vote, consensus, or advisory). Develop working groups to advance different components.
- Develop links with the editorial board of the European Journal of Education Policy & Practice (e.g. as editorial correspondents).
- Implement the project monitoring framework, and plans for formative evaluation and improvement (see section 7).
- Establish a platform for knowledge sharing, and decide on frequency and methods for internal communication, and following regulations related to data protection and ethics. Ensure regular updates and transparent communications.

- Establish external communications, building on the BRiDGE Project website, newsletter, and social media strategy to ensure the network is visible.
- Develop strategic links with stakeholders in the European Commission, and other international networks. Identify and work actively with advocacy groups for open science and open access publications (e.g. the coalition for advancing research assessment (CoARA)).
- Seek funding for bi- or tri-annual conferences (beginning in 2027 or 2028).

The initial proposal for the BRiDGE Project was to develop curriculum for early career researcher training in education policy research. The (mostly) online case-based workshops have established a strong basis for future development. As noted above, partners have expressed interest in extending the training to cover not only early- but also mid-career researchers and knowledge brokers, as well as civil society actors. Indeed, the earlier analysis on open science context and current challenges (section 2) highlighted the need for individuals in research, policy and practice to develop capacities for intersectoral working, and hands-on experience in workshops can support this approach.

While no single curricula will be able to address needs of different professional learning communities, there are significant areas of overlap where learning might be enriched through combined sessions. Case studies and simulations, for example, could involve participants from different sectors. Peer learning opportunities may also enrich intersectoral working. However, some sessions on research methods may need to be tailored to specific Knowledge4Policy competence needs of different sectors.

Content for 3- to 4-day workshops may include a combination of lectures, discussions with experts and hands-on experience via case study methods and simulations. Box 7 outlines specific steps to develop 3- to 4-day summer/winter training workshops, and includes options for development of curricula to meet needs of a broader set of learners.

Box 8: Steps to develop 3-4 day seasonal training workshops

- Establish fee levels (based on our recent online research, the typical fee for 4-day summer/winter workshop is approximately 500 Euros per participant, with housing included. The workshops may be pitched not to early- and mid-career researchers/knowledge brokers, and civil society actors.
- Formalise training workshops for researchers to ensure eligibility for credits/ micro-credits (including university credits, as appropriate).
- Develop workshop curriculum for the more intensive workshops, potentially including:
 - Open science history and principles, challenges of intersectoral work
 - Becoming a researcher (e.g. project management, understanding policy research and communication; processes for publication of articles and books, working in a participatory action research mode)
 - Research literacy, including debates regarding “what counts and evidence” (Tuomi, 2025),

- Policy decision-making in conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty, using evidence in policy learning and design processes
- Simulations involving intersectoral engagement in open science research and policy design processes
- Research methods for comparative education policy; policy learning to support mutual learning with stakeholders
- Research methods, including working with open data and AI, participatory research, policy evaluation
- Policy design, including issue framing and theory of change, methods for meaningful engagement with stakeholders in structured processes
- Policy communication for different target audiences, including use of plain language
- Grant-writing for multi-sectoral partnerships
- Develop additional case studies of education policy design, and roles played by researchers/knowledge brokers, policy makers and civil society.
- Explore demand for online training beyond Europe.
- Build on lessons learned from pilots of online case-based workshops.

5.2 The learning community

In the first two-years of the project, partners have designed and facilitated several thematic workshops and peer learning activities to support intersectoral engagement and learning. As indicated in this title, the learning community is a forum for promoting mutual learning and understanding on specific education policy issues across sectors and countries. As a space for mutual learning across sectors, the learning community has adopted a constructivist approach, where different expertises of participants contribute to deepening understanding.

A major difficulty for the learning community has been in engaging policy makers, except as invited experts, in the different activities. This is in part due to their differing priorities and time constraints. At the same time, the learning community can provide an important opportunity for policy makers to engage with stakeholders in more meaningful ways than is possible with the more typical surveys and online opportunities for comment. Further discussions with individuals in the policy making community may help identify ways that the learning community can meet their own needs for learning and engagement with other stakeholders.

The next steps for this project component will be to identify ways to build and sustain the community and to promote mutual learning. It will be important to foster trust through regular communication and transparent processes. This will involve establishing guidelines for ethical collaboration, ensuring transparency and respect for diverse perspectives.

Building on the first two years' work, partners will fortify BRIDGE as a platform for mutual learning and knowledge co-creation.

Box 9: Steps to develop the learning community

Some potential ways to achieve develop the learning community are to:

- Identify community hosts potentially identifying from different sectors, as co-designers and to facilitate discussions,
- Identify individuals/organisations to curate themes and outputs
- Use structured facilitation techniques (e.g., design thinking workshops) to align diverse priorities and mitigate professional culture clashes.
- Identify ways to include organisations on the periphery to ensure more equitable representation of different viewpoints.
- Encourage joint research-policy initiatives, such as co-authored policy briefs or case studies.
- Introduce peer mentoring across sectors (e.g. CSO staff paired with researchers).
- Design a webinar series structured by interprofessional competence domains (as proposed within the Guide, see above)
- Host co-authoring workshops to facilitate and encourage multi-sectoral collaboration on written outputs
- Introduce short video interviews or podcasts to spotlight issues, and personalise the network. This could be framed as “voices from the field”
- Embed activities in existing partner initiatives (e.g., LLP activities, seminars linked with European Journal of Education Policy & Practice themes, etc., activities linked to training)
- Plan bi- or tri-annual conferences for a broader range of stakeholders
- Develop case-based learning discussions -- with cases exploring roles of stakeholders from three sectors -- invited speakers from all sectors. These may either be linked to the training workshops or as part of the learning community meetings.
- Invite early- and mid-career researchers from training workshops to participate in learning community activities and development of policy briefs and working papers.
- Develop sub-networks to explore specific issues of the longer term
- Support and enhance existing education networks

5.3 Open access publications

Challenges related to academic journal publications were noted in section 2 and in the meta-analysis on open science developed for this project – including the dominance of commercial publishers. A new open access journal will need to ensure visibility and establish its reputation and relevance for target audiences, as well as develop a sustainable funding model to support open access fees (and avoid charging individual journal authors

with article processing charges). In line with open science principles, it will also be important to reach diverse stakeholders with a range of publications (including policy briefs and working papers).

The European Journal of Education Policy & Practice, edited by the EIESP and published by Amsterdam University Press, has been developed as an alternative model to commercial publishing. This peer reviewed, thematic open access journal focuses on comparative and international education policy. In line with the principles of open science, it brings together contributors with a high level of expertise in research, policy, and practice. Issue themes are identified by the journal editorial board and editorial correspondents. This ensures that themes identified are relevant to journal stakeholders, and builds on a broader network of contributors. Guest editors of the thematic issues will be invited to create communities of practice (e.g. through the seminars devoted to the issue theme and peer review processes) with researchers, policy makers and civil society actors. Journal contributions and other related publications will include the voices of these different sectors / epistemic communities.

To ensure visibility for the journal and attract high-quality articles, the journal will need to apply for a journal impact factor ranking (e.g. the SCOPUS and DOAJ indices) after the first two years of publication. While the impact factor rankings are in and of themselves problematic, we recognise their importance for authors' careers (particularly early career researchers), and for the journal profile and visibility. At the same time, we will track alternative metrics on journal quality (Altmetrics) and will advocate for the inclusion of local engagement and social relevance and impact in institutional measures (e.g. with coARA). Box 7 sets out concrete steps to develop publications.

Box 10: Steps to develop open access publications

- The EIESP hosts a launch event for its new open access journal, the European Journal of Education Policy & Practice
- Hold annual or bi-annual seminars including individuals from research, civil society and policy to explore specific concerns. The seminars may feed into development of one to two thematic issues of the journal, and working papers/policy briefs. Themes for seminars and related publications to be developed with input of policy advisory committee, the journal's editorial board and editorial correspondents and guest editor.
- Invite well-known scholars or thought leaders in different sectors to participate in seminars/author or co-author articles or thought pieces.
- Offer mentoring, feedback sessions, or writing workshops for early-career authors. Invite early-career and established scholars to participate in seminars linked to guest-edited issues, with discussion and peer review developed as part of a community of practice

- Extend journal advisory roles to BRIDGE partners (university-based and CSOs) as editorial correspondents Consider journal advisory roles for representatives from policy organisations such as the European Commission, OECD and UNESCO.
- Develop an outreach strategy to ensure wide readership of the journal and working papers/briefs -- libraries, policy think tanks, university departments, social media.
- Invite editorial board and correspondents as ambassadors to promote the journal.
- Leverage social media (e.g. LinkedIn account for the journal, policy briefs and working papers). Ask authors to promote their work and the journal.
- Develop 'video abstracts' for the journal and for working papers. Ask authors to promote their work and the journal.
- Highlight contributions from new scholars.
- Partner with academic networks, societies, or research centres to guest edit special issues; host joint webinars or events; and promote the journal to their members.
- Track & Promote Altmetrics (e.g. article views/downloads, mentions in social media).
- Apply for listing in journal indices in DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and Scopus (once criteria are met).

6.0 Develop synergies across BRiDGE Project components

The mission, vision and values of the BRiDGE Project highlight shared values and aims – and articulate themes that unify work across all components of the BRiDGE Project. As the BRiDGE Project partners further develop the different components, it will be important to find synergies among them.

Effective collaboration requires both structural support and cultural change. The structural elements include formal mechanisms for coordination and knowledge sharing, while cultural elements involve fostering an environment where cross-component collaboration is valued and rewarded. Regular reflection and adjustment of these approaches will be essential as the project evolves.

BRiDGE partners may draw also on the rich work of different theorists. Wenger’s “Communities of Practice”¹⁶ emphasises learning through shared practice and meaning-making across different professional groups; “Boundary Object Theory (e.g. Star & Griesemer’s¹⁷ analysis of how artifacts that are meaningful across different professional communities can support collaboration while respecting different professional perspectives). Graham’s¹⁸ “knowledge to action framework” emphasises the importance of adapting knowledge for different audiences and contexts – to ensure that research is accessible across sectors.

Box 11 outlines concrete approaches for collaborative work across the different project components. Figure 6 illustrates a dynamic model of how the BRiDGE Project can continue to address gaps across research, policy and practice. Project partners will benefit from regular formative evaluation and reflection on what is working well and where adjustments may be needed.

Box 11: Potential synergies across the different BRiDGE Project components

BRiDGE Project component	Potential synergies
Training Workshops	- Encourage participation of learners participating in the training to also participate in learning community activities - Invite peer review of journal articles
Learning community	- Identify priority policy concerns and participant needs - Develop case studies of intersectoral cooperation to build knowledge on effective approaches

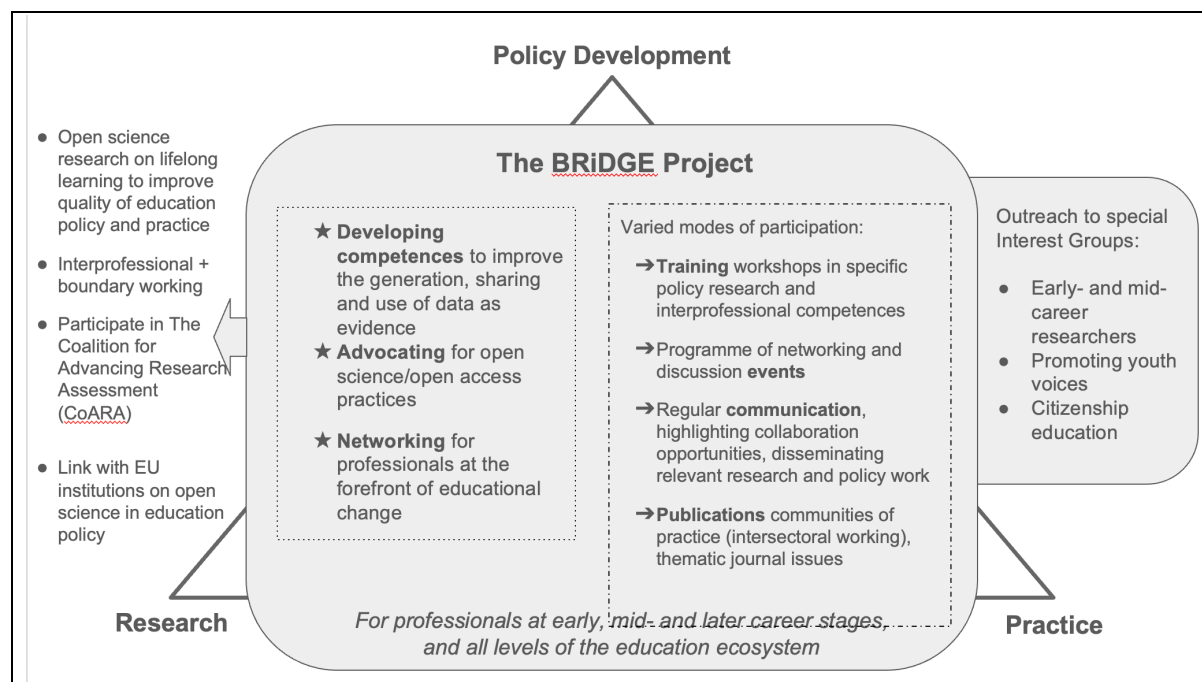
¹⁶ Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷ Star, S.L., & Griesemer, J.R. (1989). "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39. *Social Studies of Science*, 19(3), 387–420.

¹⁸ Graham, I.D., Logan, J., Harrison, M.B., Straus, S.E., Tetroe, J., Caswell, W., & Robinson, N. (2006). “Lost in knowledge translation: Time for a map?”. *The Journal of Continuing Education the Health Professions*, 26(1), 13–24.

	- Create peer groups for collaborative authorship of policy briefs and working papers - Build capacity to use and communicate research - Where relevant, authors of journal articles are invited to share their research findings and discuss
Publications	- Develop thematic issues linked to priorities identified by the learning community (and vice versa) - Invite civil society actors and policy makers to participate in seminars and contribute to the journal as authors, co-authors or through thought pieces
Cross-component roles and participation	- Cross-component steering committee and working groups to address specific issues in education policy and practice - Invite contributors to play multiple roles (e.g. CSO representative joins the learning community, co-authors a working paper, and speaks at a training workshop; a training workshop participant also participates in learning community activities and/or seminars and communities of practice linked with journal issues). - Joint definition of priority areas education policy and practice to address through the different project components - When possible, develop shared themes across the different components - Regular meetings across the different working teams - Central repository for shared resources (e.g. case studies, written outputs, programme planning) - Regular reflection on what is working well across the project and how synergies may be improved - Shared social media strategy.

Figure 6: A dynamic model for working across the research, policy, practice knowledge triangle



7.0 Conclusion

The BRiDGE Project is an important effort for strengthening Open Science knowledge creation across research, policy and practice. Through our first two years of implementation under the Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation project, we have tested the potential and challenges of creating genuine cross-sector and cross-national dialogue and collaboration.

Our key achievements have included:

- Development of multi-national, case-based training workshops
- Development of meaningful cross-sector dialogue within the learning community
- Launch of alternative publication pathways
- Establishment of a strong foundation for sustainable development of the network.

We have also taken steps toward creating a culture where professionals from different sectors can work together productively. Perhaps most importantly, we have arrived at a shared statement of our Mission, Vision and Values, underlining our shared belief that Open Science promotes democratic engagement and the advancement of evidence-informed policy and practice.

Future directions for our work will involve expanding training to include more diverse types of learners, finding ways to strengthen policy maker engagement, and developing sustainable funding models. BRiDGE may also actively engage in advocacy efforts for reform of evaluation metrics that work against open science and open access.

ANNEX 1: Risk analysis, mitigation measures, and monitoring

Proactively addressing risks is essential to achieving the long-term objectives of this sustainability strategy. The following table summarises the main risks, the mitigation approaches in place, and the monitoring and evaluation indicators that will ensure our efforts remain adaptive.

Lack of funding for network activities (learning community, training workshops, journal, organisational)					
	Low-risk	Medium-risk	High-risk	Mitigation measures	Monitoring indicators
Lack of funding for network activities		XX		Develop activities step-by-step; ensure scale of individual activities is sustainable Regularly scan for funding opportunities aligned with the BRiDGE MVV and strategy (Erasmus+, Horizon, CERV, etc.) Develop fee-paying training workshops Fund conferences through fees and grants (with incentives e.g. poster presentations, etc.)	Regular monitoring of budget for network activities

Lack of funding to cover seminars, open access fees for journal		XX		Limit to publication of two issues per year. See small scale grants for seminars to address thematic areas, and for other research projects (e.g. publicly funded projects encourage OA funding)	
Low visibility of the BRiDGE Project					
	Low-risk	Medium-risk	High-risk	Mitigation measures	Monitoring indicators
Low visibility of the BRiDGE Project			XX	BRiDGE website to be updated and maintained by EIESP Newsletter developed by LLLP/EIESP with input from all other partners; social media outreach by all partners. Outreach to potential training workshop participants [work with librarian advisor on how to increase visibility]	Track website visitors Publications: track full article downloads, citations and Altmetrics for journal and working papers Numbers of participants in different activities

				[link to seminars and other BRIDGE activities] ADD SOME OF THE IDEAS FROM LC]	
Low interest in training workshops		XX		Survey faculty and students, CSO representatives and others to identify learning needs and preferred formats. Develop fee-paying, in-presence workshops Provide micro-credits Outreach to partners [CHECK IDEAS ABOVE] Establish reputation for high-quality training (i.e. with participant testimonials, strong relationships with institutions sending learners)	Regular training workshop participant surveys. Track attendance and drop-outs

Low representation of policy makers in seminars, learning community		XX		Include individuals with both academic/policy backgrounds [ADD IDEAS FROM ABOVE]	
Low interest of early career researchers in publishing in new journal		XX		Apply for ranking in SCOPUS and DOAJ indices by 2028 Work with librarian advisors to improve visibility of the journal Work with [friends of journal – etc. – see these ideas	Track fulfilment of criteria to qualify for SCOPUS and DOAJ ranking Track Altmetrics
Other					
Attrition of network members	XX			Develop network as a partnership, with membership based on shared values and aims to ensure strong ownership	