

Bridge and elderly: a successful project in The Netherlands



Eric Laurant
Torun, Poland April 20, 2017

Who heard about bridge?



We are unknown as a sport although:

- ♠ WBF counts 116 NBO's, 1M members
- ♠ EBL counts 46 NBO's, 400k members
- ♠ NBB counts > 1150 clubs, > 80k members
- ♠ In NBB > 2M games / week, 21-24 per session
- ♠ In NL > 5M games / week in clubs and at home
- ♠ In NL 3rd team sport after soccer, hockey
- ♠ Bridge is much bigger than chess, draughts, Go



Bridge is such a sensational game that I wouldn't mind being in jail if I had three cellmates who were decent players and who were willing to keep the game going 24 hours a day!

Warren Buffett

Investor and active tournament player





The best thing about this is that we had a black, a Jew, an Indian and a Pakistani playing together. It's good to show how bridge can bring together people from such different backgrounds, it shows a special magic about the game of bridge.

Zia Mahmood after winning with Larry Cohen, Ron Smith and Jaggy Shivdasani.





When I retired, I started to play Bridge again. It's the best decision I've ever taken! I wake up every morning and I am the happiest man on Earth.

*Dr. Magnus Olafsson,
Nobel laureate
(Nobel Peace Prize 2005)*





No matter where I go, I always make friends at the bridge table.

*Martina Navratilova,
greatest female tennis
player for the years
1965-2005*





Bridge personalities



I love Bridge. Everybody who is good at Bridge is going to be good at lots of things!

***Bill Gates,
Microsoft Founder***





Small country:

- ♠ 41.526 km²
(Germany 8x, France 16x)
- ♠ 16.8 M people
(Germany 5x, France 4x)
- ♠ 30 cities > 100k,
400 municipalities





Bridge in NL



Small country but NBB is quite a large federation:

- ♠ > 80.000 member players
- ♠ > 20.000 playing on internet
- ♠ > 1.150 member clubs
- ♠ > 20 full time employees
- ♠ > 650 active teachers
- ♠ > 350 certified teachers

[Teachers in NL](#)



The secrets of bridge

(fact group 1)



Scientific research related to bridge proves:

♠ Bridge provides a social network

♠ Bridge effectively counters loneliness

♠ Bridge raises happiness

Source:

NIVEL, Leemrijse C.J.; Ooms, L; Veenhof C. (2011) Evaluatie van kansrijke beweegprogramma's ...

NIVEL, Leemrijse C.J.; Veenhof C. (2012) Denken en Doen: bruggend de eenzaamheid te lijf

Mulier Institute, Smits F., van Rens F.; Elling, A. (2012) Om mijn hersenen te trainen en voor de gezelligheid



General scientific research also proves that happiness and a social network reduces mortality risks comparable to:

- ♠ **Stop smoking**
- ♠ **Stop drinking**
- ♠ **Lose weight**
- ♠ **Exercise more**

Source: *PLoS Med* 7 (7): e1000316, doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316



The secrets of bridge



We discover the importance of social relationships for health and see an increased need for them





Conclusion: Bridge is more than fun



fact group 1 + fact group 2:

**Bridge and its social network
improves health and reduces
mortality risks**

(especially among elderly)

a scientific proven statement



More scientific research



The results of a research by *Louise Clarkson Smith* and *Alan A. Hartley* (Journal of Gerontology – Vol 45, Issue 6, pp 233-238) on Bridge players and nonplayers aged 55-91 indicated that players outperformed nonplayers in measures of **working memory** and **reasoning**.



More scientific research



A study published in 2003 by Vergheze in the New England Journal of Medicine proved that senior citizens who play a board game have 74% **lower risk of dementia.**



More scientific research



In 2000, Marian Cleeves Diamond found out that playing Bridge stimulates the thymus gland, which produces white blood cells (T lymphocytes), thus enhancing the **immune system**.



More scientific research



A 2014 research performed by Tor Vergata (Rome) scientists (Becchetti, Fiaschetti, Marini) proved that Bridge players, due to their superior team play habits, are more likely to adopt **cooperative behavior**.

Listening, etiquette, concentration, dealing with winning and losing and many other social skills can be enhanced by playing Bridge.



Why all this research?



To convince EU, national ministry of health and/or local government organizations it is wise to invest in bridge projects:

- ♠ scientifically proven advantages
- ♠ infrastructure of WBF, EBL and NBO's
- ♠ successful projects and best practices



Marketing senior bridge



- ♠ Average age of bridge players is about 70 (...)
- ♠ Emphasize that bridge is fun
- ♠ Claim bridge improves health, scientific data
- ♠ Use dedicated learning method (tempo)
- ♠ Use internet for practicing



Clear message to municipalities / ministry:

- ♠ social networks are important for elderly
- ♠ improve health by offering a perspective
- ♠ it is human to fight against loneliness
- ♠ prevention much cheaper than care
- ♠ municipality administration sends letter
- ♠ hereafter NBB takes care of total project
- ♠ NBB make use of local community centers



- ♠ Two dedicated sales persons
- ♠ Bridge players, retired from commercial job
- ♠ Two years project (2012-2013, 2017-2018)
- ♠ Each salesperson got 200 municipalities
- ♠ Sent out letter to local govt administrations
- ♠ Followed up by phone call and meeting
- ♠ In NL we asked for local budget of € 2k - € 5k
- ♠ And this was doubled by ministry of health



Result:

Local government organizations invest in bridge learning projects



**“Difficult, but
so much fun!”**

**Participant local
government project
(76)**



‘Without this letter of the local government I would never have started playing bridge. And now it’s my most important hobby’

Participant [59]

‘Facilitating this great initiative is the best our municipality administration has done for many years’

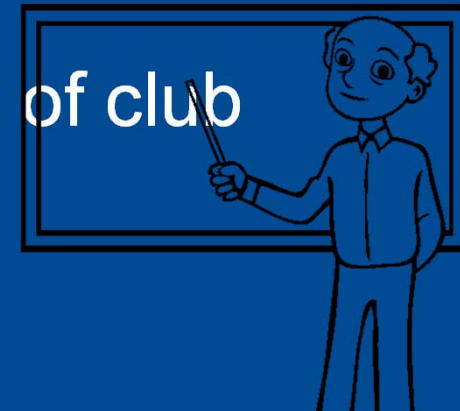
Participant [71]

‘I really look forward to Monday and Thursday afternoons’

Participant [66]



- ♠ Club teachers with classes of 8-20 students
- ♠ Two phases/years, once a week, evening
- ♠ Focus on bridge technical aspects
- ♠ After finishing course membership of club
- ♠ Relatively large early drop out



Modern senior approach



- ♠ Startersbridge: playing important, simple bidding
- ♠ Internet: practice from day 1
- ♠ Fun: more important than level
- ♠ Social: bridge but also meet, walk, gym
- ♠ Frequency: two-three times per week, day times



First project in 2012-2013 successful:

- ♠ 2 sales persons visited all municipalities
- ♠ 180 municipalities joined and payed
- ♠ > 5.000 elderly joined, drop out very low
- ♠ > 10 new bridge clubs joined NBB
- ♠ > 3.000 new members joined NBB
- ♠ many new meetings in community center
- ♠ result good enough to repeat in 2017!



Dutch approach



Thank you,
don't hesitate to ask
questions or to
contact me!

eric@laurant.nl