Bridge and elderly: a successful project in The Netherlands

Eric Laurant
We are unknown as a sport although:

- WBF counts 116 NBO’s, 1M members
- EBL counts 46 NBO’s, 350k 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
I love Bridge. Everybody who is good at Bridge is going to be good at lots of things!

Bill Gates,
Microsoft Founder
The Netherlands

Small country:

♣ 41.526 km\(^2\)  
(Germany 8x, France 16x)

♣ 17 M people  
(Germany 5x, France 4x)

♣ 30 cities > 100k, 400 municipalities
Small country but NBB is quite a large federation:

- > 80,000 member players
- > 30,000 playing on internet
- > 1,150 member clubs
- > 20 full time employees
- > 650 active teachers
- > 350 certified teachers
Teachers in NL
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 …
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

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

‘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 and 2022
Thank you, don't hesitate to ask questions or to contact me!

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