



Coordination during Pandemical Times

We're living in extraordinary times, all the time. The issues that assail us are perennial. (attrib: Anthony McCarten)

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An Introduction to the Introduction

This document is lengthy. It might, in its detail, appear excessively complex & as the issues are outlined & the costs counted, be inclined towards the melancholic. This is not its intention. It is attempt to set down actions, reflections & details of the project development during a very strange period of time.

A most important statement:

"A Pil to Purge Melancholie"¹

The Green Bridges partnership

is alive & well,

making excellent progress.

There are

- plans and activities being implemented,
- regular meetings
- lively, creative & valuable contributions from all partners
- positive energetic spirits spread across the partnership

¹ pamphlet published 1599, the title being used during C17 & 18th relating to bawdy songs and dance music





Introduction

“Whoso beset them 'round
With dismal stories
Do but themselves confound
Their strength the more is”²

As has been noted in statements previously published, the situation the Green Bridges project faces is difficult and complex. There are no easy solutions to any of the issues the partnership needs to confront. The coordinators are grateful for existing support & for the efforts made to ensure the partnership continues positively despite existing in a very complex situation.



The recent attempts to control the spread of the virus Covid 19 have required societies to enter a state of physical distancing with most normal social activities severely restricted. The term ‘lock-down’ has been used to describe the situation. ‘Lock Down’ is a term from C19th used primarily (until recently) for the literal locking into cells of inmates in a prison. Isolation within incarceration imposed forcefully on individuals by a controlling authority. The adoption of the term during

² John Bunyan, 1684 Political and religious radical, an extract from the song in part 2 of Pilgrim’s Progress, an allegory





the epidemic has led to its use in much less physically, socially and emotionally less severe circumstances.

However, it is, for English speakers it a very simple & easy to understand term and carries with it a message of confinement imposed by harsh external, control.

It does not, in reality, describe the nature of the physical and social isolation that most people suffered in recent times.

What did occur - and is reflected in the 'diaries' on the Green Bridges web site - is a sense of isolation and emotional stress that many felt.

The gradual partial re-opening of societies has been very varied, legally controlled, limited & capable of near instant removal. 'Freedom' itself is word that is being re-formulated & for some the loss of social opportunity a necessary part of emotional & psychological balance, has had major impact.

As societies begin the process of analysis of this period (reflecting & analysing even as the pandemic continues to impose itself) many important issues relating to individual and social health are emerging.

What follows below is part information, part reflection & part assessment of the present situation facing Green Bridges.





It is to be hoped that the social damage being caused by the pandemic can be alleviated & overcome - but as a partnership all partners need to be aware of & sensitive to the continuing & variable implications of the pandemic & the need for considerable alterations to the original project action plans.

The Coordinators' Tale

(composed: 25th July - 10th August)

The prime function of the coordinating agency is to:

“monitor and ensure the project is implemented in accordance with the grant agreement”³

This is a very wide brief, which also includes all forms of reporting both to National Agency & partners.

Pathways has been involved in EU education partnerships since the late 1990s, first as an internal project assessor & since 2003, usually as a project coordinator (in one case for of a group of 15 partners whose project initially lacked a coordinator).

Pathways has always had available its own informal network of considerable educational & management expertise & coordination was, within the organisation, always a shared function

In the past project coordination occurred in a generally stable international environment and was (apart from a few ‘curious’ incidents & vicissitudes associated with individual partners) fairly straightforward. In the experience of Pathways the only incident that has caused major disruption to project mobility was that of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland in 2010. The disruption to air traffic lasted 6 days & involved the rearrangement of one meeting.

The ‘intrusion’ by Covid 19 has created a disruption and the end of its impact cannot be predicted. Even if a vaccine is created there will be a long period during which

³ 2019 Key Action 2 Handbook UK NA





the effective value of the vaccine will be tested (in society & in understanding if it is a permanent or temporary solution).

Though there is no official instruction regarding international travel (at least in the UK where the government usually offers official 'advice'), there are some practical issues that may make planning and holding partnership meetings very difficult to achieve.

- the means of travelling may be difficult
 - lack of public transport
 - raised costs for international journeys
 - restricted accommodation
- travel & health insurance may be difficult to obtain and/or very expensive
- quarantine may be frequently required & imposed suddenly (as is occurring during July & August 2020)
- individual and social desire to travel may be considerably diminished

Coffee Culture

There is a popular American phrase that is presently used frequently in the UK : 'Wake up & smell the coffee'⁴; ie become aware of the realities that are occurring.

For Green Bridges, this requires coordinator and partners to become increasingly aware of the possible complexities for the project created by the impact of Covid 19. These 'complexities' have evolved since the pandemic had its first impact in March.

One key element of increasing awareness is that it is not possible to be completely aware!

⁴ Probably an American phrase meaning that we should become aware of the realities of the present situation. For origin see <https://wordhistories.net/2019/02/04/wake-smell-coffee/>





We seem to be constantly receiving from government & media ‘wake-up’ calls⁵



It is not possible, at the time of writing, to know what long term impact of Covid 19 will be on the project. There are multiple possibilities. Coordinators & partners therefore need to be capable of managing an evolving and changing process.

At present societies seem to be at a stage, in the development of the pandemic, where it is considered a sufficient adjustment has occurred - but then discovering that there are new developments in the pandemic. Thus recently there has been an increase in freedom - which is then suddenly being reduced. The media now warns of a very difficult winter period for 2020/21.... but they could be wrong!

Another day, another ‘awakening’ but unfortunately the coffee smells different because the blend has changed.

What has been called a Covidian Intrusion (implying that, however long, it is all but a temporary situation), may actually become something more permanent.

A comment made in an early partnership Skype meeting suggested that members of the partnership might have returned to normal work by May. The chart shared with partners containing varied meeting options included an October option. That suggestion now seems quite ridiculous!

⁵ In UK the governments (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) have placed pop-up warnings on many web sites. In Wales they are in Welsh as well as English.





At the present time the only established fact of this pandemic is that for partnerships such as Green Bridges, with their requirement of international mobility, there is only a continuing 'uncertainty'.⁶



What now for the coordinating agency?

“when I leave and go somewhere else
I find the same thing
my lost leg
has taken over the entire earth

That horrible incomprehensible thing in my leg
carries pain to faraway lands
as though it were world war
And my eyes cannot see where the leg ends”⁷

⁶ The term 'new normal' (originally applied to the economic changes that occurred after the financial crisis of 2008) has been used to describe human behavioural changes which include maintaining removal of physical actions such as handshaking & introduction of increased physical distancing between individuals: 'social distancing'. The World Economic Forum criticises such terms as “It first impedes personal psychological wellbeing, then ignores the fact that 'normal' is not working for a majority of society.”

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/theres-nothing-new-about-this-new-normal-heres-why/>

⁷ https://issuu.com/arcpublications/docs/the_ballad_of_kukutis_12_june_2019





The new and varied roles of coordination

In official documentation from UK NA the role of the coordinating agency is described as

“Coordinators are responsible for managing the project budget in order to ensure the successful implementation of the project. They can choose to make pre-financing payments to partners according to the project’s requirements and key milestones. However, it is important to consider the risks associated with the level of pre-financing payments. Coordinators may consider paying partners smaller instalments of pre-financing and linking payments to milestones, results or outcomes. It is recommended that coordinators clearly outline the timing and conditions for payments to partners in any partnership agreement. Payments to partners must be made without undue delay and should not be delayed without a justifiable reason which relates to the programme rules and/or provisions of the grant agreement. In any such case, the Coordinator should ensure that they have evidence to justify the delay, as this may be looked at during checks or audits.”⁸

The balancing of risk, mentioned above, is a core element of company best practise. Directors are not to endanger the life of their company (which has the status of a living being) by taking undue risks

All partners are ‘beneficiaries’ with the coordinator positioned to act on their behalf

1.1.2 By signing the Agreement, the beneficiaries accept the grant and agree to implement the Project, acting on their own responsibility⁹

⁸ 2019 Key Action 2 Handbook UK NA. The EU publishes guidance for each year & NAs then develop their own versions. The quote is an extract. The present delay in transferring the full instalment of the 2nd tranche is an example of the type of decision that has never been necessary previously. Once an opinion has been received from UK NA the partnership will better understand what action is required.

⁹ Grant Agreement: partners ‘acting on their own responsibility’ means they are to be efficiently self-organising to ensure that they are capable of implementing the terms of the agreement (which is based on the application form)





The coordinating agency has overriding responsibility to ensure the project 'is implemented in accordance with the grant agreement' and thus on occasions has to make difficult decisions.

The process of management was comparatively straightforward until the pandemic. That has now changed.

The pandemic, with virtual rather than physical meetings has sharpened up the management & procedural processes and introduced some new elements.

- A revised Work Programme, allowing for the differing impacts of the pandemic across the partnership
 - The coordinators have already (August 2020) begun considering how the project may ensure its development of the project beyond November 2020
- responding to partner thoughts and ideas
 - the coordinators respectfully request as an 'act of courtesy' that specific ideas are first shared with them before wider publication. Frequently such suggestions will stimulate or usefully alter the existing thoughts and plans being developed by coordinators & avoid duplication.
- introducing new and more stringent reporting and assessment processes
- adjusting financial payments to partners
- engaging in estimating the future impact of Covid 19 in order to factor in the impact on the future of the partnership

There is also another factor that may lie well beyond the capabilities of any coordinating agency - but which in UK, in trying to being an effective coordinating agency, we have attempted to assess

- the impact of this uncertainty on the way partners and volunteers think, feel and behave in these 'uncertain times'





To maintain any form of effective coordination will require an ability to adjust to the unexpected, not just the development of the pandemic but to personal and social reactions to it.

The Green Bridges project is comparatively simple, with clearly stated goals (contained in one document - the application form). However there are differing interpretations of the processes and for coordinators there may be occasions when there is a failure to achieve a standard of which all partners would approve.

My hands cannot reach my head
and my words move out of earshot
Words become lost from language

Everything changes
so my thinking grows small
so that there is nowhere that I can go
in this world to get away from my lost leg¹⁰

There may be, for those of interested in long walked journeys, in processional development & interactive processes, a real excitement in working in, with and through the processes that this 'pandemical' challenge presents to Green Bridges.

Such people are ready for each day's coffee to smell differently, for looking ahead & musing (collectively) about the forthcoming complexities & receiving the feedback and questions that others raise regarding attempts to 'coordinate'.

At present this is not an easy state to achieve!

¹⁰ https://issuu.com/arcpublications/docs/the_ballad_of_kukutis_12_june_2019



The existing 'pandemical process'.

It has been reactive & evolutionary and on reflection after only 4 months, it is, as a process, difficult to describe. It is also very difficult (maybe impossible) to know if the coordinating actions taken have been correct.

We are engaged in a game in which we do not fully understand the rules.

In one form the 'game' seems to parallel an ancient but unknown in detail, Welsh/Irish game known as Gwyddbwyll. The word itself beautifully symbolises the realities of Covid 19. For those

who not know how to pronounce Welsh it is impossible to say & for those who do know, will also know that it is almost impossible to know anything about the game. What does seem to be known is that the game was played on a board with real people & related to warfare.¹¹



¹¹ There is an excellent brief article that completely ignores the usual 'celtic' nonsense & presents a view of what it may have been - with a reflection of the way Britain is inclined to continue the underlying purposes of the game

<https://lornasmithers.wordpress.com/2017/06/16/gwyddbwyll-why-the-war-games/>

The reference to the game being played by Arthur & Owain Rheged in Rhonabwy's Dream, occurs to an event local to the Green Bridges project (near Montgomery)



The pandemic is not a conflict but Covid 19 has created uncertainty and confusion.

The coordinators have therefore been trying to evolve appropriate activities & manage uncertainties & been in a process of 'discovery'.

In another form of 'game' (different from Gwyddbwyll) it is as if all are engaged in a situation a group, had been suddenly dropped into an unknown landscape and required perform certain tasks. The coordinator is required to be both 'expert guide' & 'leader' receiving (but without any knowledge as to when) messages & support from a distance, whilst at the same time having to remaining open to suggestion from members of the group, being reflective & always flexible.

There are no maps, the route through the complexities of the landscape is uncertain, some sections seem to resemble a thick forest or jungle, other parts seem reasonably level and straightforward until there is sudden encounter with a deep chasm which has to be negotiated carefully. Inevitably there are wrong turnings and stumbles.

There is not even any real understanding of where the destination is - it may be reached within 2 years (but only by ignoring the required tasks), may require considerably more time to complete - and may never be reached.



The Journey thus far

The initial focus of coordination work in the pandemic was to ensure that all partners had demonstrated, using the web site, that they were making progress with the project.

This allowed for a very positive Interim Report which was well received by UK NA.





The Epic Journey & The 4 Issues of Partnership Concern

The manner in which the pandemic is impacting on the project creates its own story.

The Green Bridges project was created with the intention its activities becoming a story. The web site has been presented within the partnership as a means of dissemination - the place where the story of the project is told.

The purposes behind viewing the project as a story (and / or a series of inter-connected stories) are multiple but one core aim is to turn the recording of project actions into an account designed to entertain.¹²

At any time during the project it would have been possible for the varying efforts the partners are making to be presented as separate elements in an Epic Tale.¹³

As with the sense of the project being on a strange journey (as above), so the telling of the story of that journey has a somewhat ancient 'Epic' quality in which the participants in the story are faced with unexpected tasks & difficulties - but all to be told to those who are 'yet to be'

"Come and sing with me the stories,
Come and chant with me the legends,
Legends of the times forgotten,
Since we now are here together,
Come together from our roamings.
Seldom do we come for singing,
Seldom to the one, the other,
O'er this cold and cruel country,
O'er the poor soil of the Northland.
Let us clasp our hands together

¹² Stories are central to human cognition and communication. We engage with others through stories. They help us understand our place, to learn how to act wisely, to share our view or perspective & to understand that of others & to pass on heritage & engage with ethics & morality.

¹³ In English the word has had 'heroic' implications since the C18th. The meaning is from the Greek: epikos: epos "a word; a tale, story; promise, prophecy, proverb; poetry in heroic verse," with more ancient origins meaning "to speak."





That we thus may best remember.
Join we now in merry singing,
Chant we now the oldest folk-lore,
That the dear ones all may hear them,
That the well-inclined may hear them,
Of this rising generation.”¹⁴

Following the approval of the Report the focus for the coordinators, during Spring and Summer of 2020, there have been

The 4 Issues of Partnership Concern

1. Considering how the mobility aspects of the project might be revised
 - a core element of all Erasmus+ & predecessor programmes
2. Ensuring that all partners have some form of common Work Programme based on the requirements described in the application form (which forms the contractual agreement with the funding agency)
3. Proposing a regular pattern of monitoring and assessment which
 - responds to the comment made in the UK NA feedback on our Interim Report
 - provides information capable of being placed on the web site & as an element in the next Interim Report
4. Managing aspects of the pre-financing processes in relation to
 - the revised funding resulting from the Polish hiatus
 - the invoking of a force majeure
 - the possibility of having to continue with a project that had no physical meetings

¹⁴ Excerpt From: “Kalevala : the Epic Poem of Finland





The order in which these were considered related to external circumstance.

It became apparent that the UK NA was not able to offer advice (messages took considerable time to be answered & the responses were not very particular) and on 24th July a brief message indicated that Green Bridges would not (yet) receive detailed assistance. There was no indication when such assistance and advice would be available (but it is reasonable to assume that it will not occur until 2021).

That message revealed the depth of the difficulties that the EU was facing in regard to Erasmus+ (in that, presumably, most projects across all sectors, with thousands of placements, visits, activities, meetings etc were disrupted).

The difficulties Green Bridges faced are comparatively minor compared with those faced by many other agencies and institutions.

The 1st Project Issue (point 1 above), regarding meetings, was caused by the need to consider what the partnership should attempt in regard to the meeting in Finland in September. By accepting that patterns needed to change with possibly project extension time and money were saved

- It is doubtful that there would have been the option of being refunded for a meeting that was likely to be abandoned
- as events have shown, some partners would probably not have permission to enter Finland
- this situation is like to continue, maybe well into next year and possibly beyond

The 2nd Project Issue to be developed was necessary because only 2 partners can presently work in a way similar to that intended when the project began. There is a need for all partners to be demonstrating reasonable action (that is what the money has been provided for - and now needs to be demonstrated (by November) further pre-financing is to be provided.

The briefing papers outlined the situation and made proposals. They were the result of discussions amongst the Pathways coordinating group (sharing thought ideas





and proposals). The 'Common Task' document provided a common core activity that all partners can develop - regardless of their local restrictions.

Other required elements of the work programme are being developed by members of the coordinating group.

The 3rd Project Issue is in part response to a comment by the UK NA but also fits in with the work of the 'in-house' project international monitoring group (based in Oxford). This group have received two reports thus far (with opportunities through a Zoom meeting to raise questions about the project work). The monitoring group will probably take an active role in the autumn reporting session with a published contribution to the November Interim Report.

The 4th Project Issue has been spread across the length of the project. Once the Polish partner withdrew they created a financial difficulty as the Grant Agreement which has been formally signed and implemented still included them.

This issue still continues as the contract between UK NA and the coordinating agency (Pathways) has not, in respect of the funding payments to the partnership, been amended.

The financial aspects are outlined in more detail elsewhere in the document.

Other issues related to finance have occurred as time has passed. As there seems to be no possibility of knowing when physical meetings ('mobilities') will be possible the coordinating agency is holding the relevant finance in pursuance of its requirement to manage "the project budget in order to ensure the successful implementation of the project". This will continue until the situation relating to meetings changes and /or discussion with the UK NA is possible.

The 4 Project Issues have become the foci around which the project will be developed during the autumn of 2020.

The manner in which they are developed and managed will form part of the next Interim Report. The partnership will need to ensure that, whatever differences are encountered, there is a reasonable response to them all.



The journey together is marked by difference

The Pandemic has divided the group. For some, work will continue in a relatively comfortable fashion, for others there will be greater difficulties and a need to develop work in a different style than that expected.

Great Epics usually describe struggle, disappointment, even disaster but also the overcoming of such moments with a coming together, a return of wholeness to the group, and through effort, a reconstitution:

"Where a membrane's missing, set a membrane a-growing,
Where a vein's collapsèd, set a vein a-knitting,
Whence the blood has run off, set more blood a-flowing,
Whence the bone has rotted, slip more bone in its stead,
Whence the flesh removèd, set new flesh befitting,
Each thing to its blessèd place, set in its rightful place:
Bone to bone, flesh to flesh, joints to their joints!"¹⁵



¹⁵ Lemminkäinen's restoration Rune XV: Kalevala



Other factors:

The Green Bridges project is based around the sharing of a series of local activities & experiences. It does not have a series of 'Intellectual Outputs':

'An activity that results in tangible and meaningful outcomes such as publications and course materials', but the Green Bridges project has something similar:

7 tangible results

7 tangible results:

1st group: The Green Way

O1. a publicly accessible 'Green Way': a metaphorical bridge between people, places & natural environments. A route encouraging creative educational activities & reflection. Route & processes recorded, published, 'blogged'.

The 'Green Way' creation, interpreted contextually - & relevant to linked creative education.

O2. A publicly usable map of the route

O3. Images & information

Of communities, facilities, social, cultural, natural interest related to the route of the Green Way. All to be published.

2nd Group: Activities & standards

O4. Best Practice Guide: over-arching term/'working title' for high quality project standards covering education process, management practise, health & safety, safeguarding & data protection. Published & capable of use by other agencies.

O5. Creative environmentally related educational Activities on/ associated with the Green Way

Aim: for all core team members/managers/educators & other volunteers to develop leadership skills & technical expertise

participants to learn techniques related to above processes

3rd Group: The Personal

O6. New publicly demonstrable practical skills (thus tangible)

O7. Stories in multi-media collected during the project about or directly related to the 'bridges' theme.

These 'results' would have been outlined, discussed, detailed & formalised during the 2 LTTA meetings in 2020.

Since the loss of physical meetings, especially the formative LTTAs (and uncertainty as to when they can be arranged), The 7 tangible results as described in the application form have gained in significance.

Most can be developed in isolation.





The extra task of the coordinating agency is, in effect to restructure the project action plan, ensuring that partners

- fully understand each element
- are capable of implementing appropriate action within / and or relevant to their locality
- have a clearly stated process & if possible, schedule for delivery

It may be that some of this work is contained in a 'blended' format as suggested by the EU:

'to start with a period of virtual mobility, then moving on to physical mobility abroad.' (see below)

At present (August) the coordinators are engaged in discussions about 'delivery processes' & their relationship with a revised project timetable (which still includes the option of extension).

Individual contributions and thoughts to this process will be considered by the coordinating & monitoring group within Pathways, prior to publication for further partnership discussion.



Finance: Recalibrating the budget



(The Misers by the Followers of Marinus van Raymerswaele (1548-51))

Present situation & future issues

- Key point: all finance from the EU is technically 'pre-financing'. Projects do not become 'financed' until after the acceptance of the final report.



- "The aim of the pre-financing is to provide the beneficiaries with a float. The pre-financing remains the property of the NA until the payment of the balance." (Grant Agreement page 4)
- the coordinating agency carries the financial responsibility on behalf of all the partners. It was subject to a detailed financial audit before the offer of funding was made by UK NA & was required to have sufficient funds to guarantee the viability of the project.
 - as a consequence (as noted above) coordinating agencies are required to follow company 'best practise' & exercise oversight & management that ensures the pre-financing 'float' is used appropriately
- money is provided to allow action - therefore 'outputs' resulting from this form of loan - the 'float' (ie pre-financing) are the most important elements for the Funding Agency (the EU)
- Unexpectedly the patterns of 'delivery' of partnership projects used since the introduction of the Socrates programme (1994) have been severely disrupted by the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Mobility across Europe, a key element of all programmes, has become almost impossible in recent months - and planning for future mobilities in 2020 & 2021 is uncertain

.....

The figures presented as notes below are an attempt to provide some detailed information about the manner in which the project funding has evolved. There are points where 'interpretation' has occurred. For example, having a budget provided by a series of percentages, rather than for specific actions or items, leaves the analysis of that percentage open to varying interpretations.

The presentation of this 'percentage' money could be different to that being made in this document. Two or more separate interpretations may not negate the validity of the original interpretation.





Present Situation

The Budget (applicable from November 2019 to October 2021) was revised following withdrawal of original Polish partner and introduction of a new Polish partner in March 2020 (month 5)

There are three headings showing revised budget first & original in parentheses

Project Management & Implementation: €41000 (€42000)

Transnational Project meetings: €22960 (€24110)

Learning Teaching, Training Activities: €17670 (€17670)

Total: €81630 (€83780)

Difference between original & revised a reduction of **€2150**

.....

There is a formal contract amendment & budget dated 5th March 2020

Due to withdrawal of the first Polish partner there was no Polish partner at the first meeting. The new Polish partner joined formally in March (month 5)

- The revised budget (applicable after 5th March 2020) has
 - subtracted 4 months from Project Management payments (€250 per month)
 - removed the allowance for attendance of a Polish partner at the first TPM (€1150)

.....

Payments are made by UK NA to Pathways (as coordinator) in tranches

There are 4

2 at 20%,

3rd at 40%

(all during the project & called 'pre-financing')





4th of 20% after the acceptance of the final report

.....

As of date of this document 2 'tranches' at 20% have been made

The first occurred before the Polish partner had withdrawn & the budget was revised. The second after the revision - but using the original formula

- 20% : €16756 (of 83780.00) November 2019 (month 1 of the project)
- 20% : €16756 (of 83780.00) July 2020

the revised budget 20% would have been €16326 of (€81630)

.....

If that pattern is repeated for the 2nd tranche the partnership will receive (after acceptance of a 2nd Interim Report in November)

EUR 33,512.00

(rather than a revised EUR 32652)

If the payments remain as originally stated in the Grant Agreement (but this point has yet to be confirmed) the final payment, after completion of the project, will be less than 20% at

- €14606 (originally €16756)

.....

Why are payments from UK NA remaining unchanged?

- in regard to reporting and tranche payments the original contract has not been amended (Interim Reports are in May 2020 & November 2020 with payments following acceptance by UK NA)
- the only formal amendments to the contract relate to
 - change of partner
 - financial totals paid to partners.





What is the amount of money left at the end?

- if UK NA applies the original pattern as in the Grant Agreement and continues paying tranches not adjusted to the new situation of lost Polish partner
- by end of November the partnership will have received a pre-financing payment total of €67024

from a revised budget total of €81630

ie the partnership will have received more than 80% of the adjusted total

if this is the case then the final payment, after completion of the project, will be less than 20% & will be

- €14606

.....





‘Money Makes the Mirth’

“When all birds else do of their music fail,
Money's the still-sweet-singing nightingale!”¹⁶

Payments made to Partners

November 2019 Received from UK NA: €16756

Payments are a percentage of the total project. This is 20% and was divided amongst partners as 20% of their money.

The chart below indicates EU ‘float money’ provided and amounts used (if the money has been allocated as described in the funding documentation).

The money from the UK NA to the coordinator (Pathways) is provided as a percentage.

The distribution by Pathways followed that approach

The first tranche of money provided for Green Bridges was required to cover 6 months of Project Management, 1 TPM & 1 LTТА.

Partners are able to use as required by their local context provided that when presenting accounts they can demonstrate they have apportioned their money correctly by headings. It is permitted to move some money between headings (up to 20%).

Example: This may have occurred to allow an extra member from LT to attend the Iasi meeting & could create an extra complexity to be managed if (sic) we are not able to have any future meetings (‘noted’ but improbable)

¹⁶ Robert Herrick, C17th English poet





The LTTA was cancelled - but with hope of reinstatement after the pandemic (if that occurs)

The following chart shows present balances based on the November payment.

Only two partners are 'in balance', others are carrying losses.

	Received	Proj Mngmnt (if used)	TPM 1 Support funding)	Balance (if Proj Mngmnt used)	Notes
FI	2558.40	1500	1150	-91.6	
IT	2644.40	1500	1150	-5.6	
LT	2576.40	1500	1150	-73.6	
PL	1900	750	1150	0	Joined in March '20 did not attend 1st meeting
RO	2610.40	1500		1110.4	
UK	3790	3000	1520	-730	

The failure to hold the UK LTTA has further exacerbated the situation (and losses).

They may be covered by Force Majeure

Force Majeure

The cancellation created a 'force majeure'. This is a specific clause in the Green Bridges contract.

The law system applicable to partnerships is that of the coordinating country (this will become relevant later in the project in relation to other issues)





Background:

“clauses may have a variety of consequences, including: excusing the affected party from performing the contract in whole or in part;...
In English and Scots law, force majeure is a creature of contract and not of the general common law....
It is for the party seeking to rely on a force majeure clause in order to excuse its non-performance or late performance to satisfy a court or other tribunal that this is the effect of the clause.

<https://www.pinsentmasons.com/out-law/guides/covid-19-force-majeure-clause>

The EU Commission allowed National Agencies to invoke force majeure clauses - which the UK NA (the funding body for Green Bridges) did.

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/coronavirus-consequences-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-mobility-activities_en

Expenses made for the UK LTTA & claimed by individual partners

Country	Claim	Note
FI	1075.34	
IT	78.65	
LT	294.88	
PL	GBP 310	UK NA accepts claims in GBP
RO	261.23	
UK	GBP 200+	Unclaimed partnership rail tickets for journey to Oxford

The claim for restitution of expenses is with UK NA. Though there has been no indication if/ when the money will be repaid a note from UK NA indicated that they had been considering the claims.

- As of August 2020 there is no clear indication from UK NA how the repayments will be resolved.





- The money may be included as an addition to a tranche (this was expected in July but did not occur).
- money may be returned separately - but presumably (a guess) to Pathways for onwards distribution
- It is possible that payment may be made at the end of the project ('best guess' at the moment... but a 'guess' & given the losses incurred by all but one partner it is to be hoped that the expenses are returned soon)
- at the moment we do not know!
- As is obvious (!) the sums involved have considerable implications to individual partners

Future Issues

The uncertainty afflicting the partnership may require adjustments to future payments both to the partnership as a whole (from UK NA) and to partners.

Hopefully this will not be the case but the following points have to be accepted:

- Quite apart from the mobility issues the advice from UK NA (quoted above) indicates that coordinators may on occasions withhold any form of payment.
- This creates an extra dilemma.

All has changed

- the lack of meetings in the 'predictable' future (ie until Spring 2021, maybe later) will place extra emphasis on the work of which partners may be capable.
- The likely continuing 'virtual' nature of the partnership will require attentive engagement by partners & astute management & coordination.
- It will be necessary to ensure that the work programmes being evolved (that allow the project to develop) are delivered to a satisfactory standard.





Summary of financial situation

- expected payments were incorrect at the time of acceptance by partners due to loss of Polish partner
 - yet apparently uncorrected by UK NA in tranche 2
- further complicated by a Force Majeure
- require ongoing reconsideration due to the disruption caused by Covid 19 & inability to plan meetings
- uncertainty as to the manner in which the National Agency will resolve issues arising during the remaining period of the project

Payments to partners presently only cover Management costs because

- it is possible that there will be no further partner meetings
- that any meetings will be arranged to those planned,

When project meetings become possible funding restored as required.

UK NA advice on this (unique) situation is being sought but is not presently possible (presumably due to the NA work load)

The next Interim Report in November, if successful, will produce a further tranche paid to the project.

The present proposal (to be formalised) is that there would then be 2 further payments of : €1500 plus an equal proportion of the residual amount which is expected to total €14606.

The payments would be related to a more detailed monitoring process than has been previously applied (partly to ensure the work that cannot follow the original plan will produce a standard that guarantees a quality Interim Report).

A document related to the monitoring processes was issued in late July





The UK NA response to the Interim Report indicated that ‘monitoring’ was important.

“Please provide information detailing what mechanisms/tools you have put in place to monitor financial expenditure of the grant within project consortium?”

As of August 2020 Pathways, as coordinating agency, has responded to UK NA without receiving any further comment. It is assumed that the NA was satisfied with the response.

It may be that more information (than was normal in previous projects) will be required during monitoring processes. It is also possible that, given the volume of work all National Agencies all have will result in a monitoring process that relates more closely to that of the previous Life Long Learning programme.





Future Issues for the project

‘Nothing can ever happen twice.
In consequence, the sorry fact is
that we arrive here improvised
and leave without the chance to practice.’¹⁷

Together Though Apart

The general and specific issues presented below could seem to be simply a ‘catalogue of complaint’ - a list of issues that cannot be addressed.

This is not the intention. It is presentation of some issues that are obvious and others that occur through reflection on what has happened in the past 4 months.

Green Bridges is a strong partnership .

By recognising the complexities it can begin the process of ensuring that the difficulties they create do not damage the local work or that of the shared partnership.

In working to overcome the difficulties we become our own ‘beacon of hope’, demonstrating what can be achieved ‘together though apart’

The Project Action

The limited contacts we have with UK NA indicate the degree to which they and all other countries are overwhelmed with work.

The key element of all Socrates, Life Long Learning & Erasmus+ programmes (since 1994) has been ‘mobility’.

This element is temporarily in hiatus & may have been permanently damaged.

As with many aspects of modern work and life-style (shopping for example) the pandemic has accelerated change. Taking the UK as an example ‘online-shopping’

¹⁷ Wislawa Szymborska: from ‘Nothing twice’. Nobel prize winning poet (born near Poznań)





with next delivery, which for many of us has been normal for several years, is becoming commonplace - including food supplies, clothing, domestic & electrical equipment etc etc). Google, through whom much shopping 'searches' are performed has decided that its employees will be home based until summer 2021¹⁸

The Green Bridges project is just a very small element - and the removal of meetings from our work plus the uncertainty regarding their restitution has created additional requirements for coordination.

As with the NA so it is with Pathways.

The original internal agreements signed in November had, due to the departure of the original Polish partner, been corrupted before they were signed. The financial aspects were the most obvious to (literally) see (being just a set of numbers rather than descriptions). The continuation of the original contractual payments added a further element &

force majeure issues yet another.

Alongside these easily identified 'numerical' elements was also the other and more complex adjustments to work programmes.

These would

have been encountered in the UK LTTA - but the pandemic intruded before the issues were raised.



¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/27/google-employees-work-from-home-coronavirus-pandemic>





There are elements of the project requirement that have only become obvious as the partnership has gradually evolved during the pandemic. These elements have previously been 'in the background'

Now the partnership is engaged in a process of re-shaping the whole of the project whilst actively being attempting its delivery!

Returning to youthful simplicities

Reflecting on the experience of previous partnerships indicates that the above 're-shaping' was always present (sometimes very dramatically). The difference with Green Bridges is that there are no physical meetings at which all aspects of change can be managed through debate & discussion. Without physical meetings the project dynamic becomes different & considerably more formal.

The 'dynamic' that exists now (July 2020) lacks the energy that occurs when people meet together physically. Even in the most formally structured meetings (of any type or cause), where there is a 'residential element' there are opportunities for informal discussion. Frequently residential meetings allow for complex discussion (and disagreement) to be overcome simply through having everyone sleeping - and almost magically (at times it has seemed such), waking with an understanding of a differing view... which can lead to consensus and resolution.

There is also, in the present project context a lack of opportunity for participants to have 'fun' together.¹⁹

The lack of direct personal contact also results in the coordinating agency finding it very difficult to assess exactly how partners are feeling. A once a month conversation is sometimes fractured (by a range of factors technical and personal). It is also difficult for partners to make responses to any message or discussion. In a physical meeting there can be a range of factors that stimulate participants.

¹⁹ 'fun', the great underrated core element in social and creative development: 'unstructured play'. A useful article is at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/animal-emotions/201405/the-importance-play-having-fun-must-be-taken-seriously>





This is a common finding across organisations everywhere.

Some specialists have suggested there are 4 problems in virtual communications

“Lack of feedback. In the physical world implicit and explicit feedback mix in a way that feels effortless thanks to largely unconscious sensory information that goes with our words. ...

Lack of empathy. The online workplace is emotionally stunted. ...

Lack of emotion. ...

Lack of commitment.”²⁰

The advice available for such difficult situations often encourages using techniques that are simple and which are commonly used when working with very young people (called ‘children’).

A return to picture images and clarity of speech & intention.

We need to return to youthful simplicities

Maintaining Flow



Another new challenge for coordination.

In isolation creative thoughts sometimes fade away before an opportunity to discuss them occurs, whilst others crystallise into erroneous views or judgements that become difficult to correct.

²⁰ There is useful advice available & the Green Bridges project coordinators are sharing their own experiences & some found on-line. For example: <https://www.thepeoplespace.com/ideas/articles/four-problems-virtual-communications-and-how-fix-them>





The dynamic of a physical meeting allows for both creative and negative thoughts to be adopted or dismissed almost before they have been fully transmitted. The whole partnership process, with its subtle developments, movement and changes, thus advance at a speed incapable of being achieved by groups that exist in isolation.

Further, the partners that have well established local groups of reasonable size have more opportunities (even when prevented to engage in physical work) than do those whose work involves the initial creating and sustaining of such groups.

A comparison with what we are 'incapable of achieving' can be quickly observed by viewing the web site details of activities & liveliness of the first meeting in November 2019.

<https://greenbridgesproject.org/first-partnership-meeting/>

There is, at present simply 'no comparison' between what happened then and what we are a capable of creating now. All partners are separated and have little or no sense of what other partners are managing to achieve.

In November (as the images show) a 'flow' was created. The partners worked (and most importantly) socialised together and all were ready to engage in making the (more complex than usual) preparations for the UK LTTA.

'Flow' is an important aspect of any successful event or project.... the gradual embracing of the purposes and action that then create their own momentum. For individuals this can be assisted by personal focus & specific personal actions (as an athlete in training).

For groups this takes time to develop - but in Iasi there were several positive indicators that this was occurring.





The extra aspects of coordination are only capable of being managed thanks to a small dedicated group of people (approximately 10) who, despite their own extra work commitments, have been giving time to considering all aspects of the project work.

It is inevitable that at times, in order to maintain a sense of order and purpose, there will need to be project decisions which would never have been required under normal circumstances.

The actions being taken at present are designed to assist partners continue their work on the project.

Specifics:



Those mentioned below may in time be joined by other aspects of the project.

The coordination process has become a 'living issue' & no doubt there will be, during the progress, encounters with issues that seem to be in the shape of 'hobgoblins and foul fiends' but which, when confronted, will be as nothing more than formless shapes in evaporating mist.

'Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt their spirit' as John Bunyan suggested.





TPMs & LTTAs

- TPMs: We may have to continue with virtual meetings (possibly for the whole project)
 - at present virtual TPMs do not qualify for funding
 - Potential loss from existing budget: €22960

- LTTAs:

- A document has been circulated by the EU which states the following

“Learning, Teaching and Training Activities

Beneficiaries may organise activities virtually. We encourage a blended approach if possible, i.e. to start with a period of virtual mobility, then moving on to physical mobility abroad.

The combination of the virtual and physical periods must comply with the eligible duration of a Learning, Teaching and Training activity as referenced in the Programme Guide. No grant support for travel will be awarded for virtual periods.

For virtual periods, the grant paid per participant is 15% of the corresponding unit cost for Individual Support as specified in Annex IV of the grant agreement

Beneficiaries should identify participants to online events by providing supporting evidence, as they would for physical events. “

- There has been no time to consider the implications of this document for Green Bridges (it still requires physical mobility) & at present the hope is that we will be able to arrange meetings.

Loss of finances from LTTA budget (no calculation made regarding the above ‘blended’ processes (and remember ‘blended whisky is inferior to malt. I guess all partners would prefer ‘malt’ meetings)

- €17670.00

Monitoring

During the autumn of 2020 the coordination will be engaged in trying to ascertain what level of monitoring will be sufficient for the new realities of the project.





It is expected to remain much as before, with the web site being the public demonstration of partner activity. The Briefing papers and proposed assessment processes (with their use of visual reporting) are designed to assist.

The 'Oxford' group (TEFG) are considering engaging more formally and in producing a report on project progress & relationships for inclusion in the next Interim Report.

Use of Mobility funding

The finances provided are a form of loan. They remain the property of the EU who therefore would require no special action in order to reclaim them.

Most requirements of project coordination & management (and language style of applications & documentation) are related to institutional processes. It is at this level that most of the finance is committed (with very large sums involved) and therefore it is likely that this would be the thrust of any decision relating to the issue of repayment.

At this moment it is impossible to assess what is happening to other projects and if there is large scale defaulting, what action the EU might consider.

It is possible to imagine that there would be a split between small scale projects (such as Green Bridges) and those of larger institutions .

For example: where a small project is making good progress, might it be possible for innovative ways of using the finance to be introduced?

(but this is idle speculation countered by the cost of requiring new contracts in order to enact major procedural changes)

Undoubtedly the EU would prefer to see the money used for its original purpose & there may be some creative ways in which we are able to make use of the money that has been provided.

Once it is possible to engage directly & in detail with UK NA, ideas being created presently will be discussed with them.





If any partner has any thoughts and ideas relating to this or any other issue, please let us know (directly).

Sharing ideas amongst partners is very valuable but as noted above, it is advisable to consult coordinators as what is being suggested may already be part of a discussion process within the coordinating agency.

Afterword

The Green Bridges project is a response to awareness of a rapidly changing global environment. Embedded in the formal texts is a desire that humanity should change its relationship with all other elements that compose 'creation'.

The project is primarily a social activity that intends in its work to produce both physical & intellectual products.

There are many types of human social activity. In being able to organise socially humanity was, like many other predatory animals, able to survive. Its predatory capacity allied to its social and communicative capabilities has allowed humanity to exploit the environment: 'creation'.

The Green Bridges project is one of a particular type of social action.

It is distinguished by being a social, rather than just personal or family structured activity. One in which cooperation with others is essential for its success. This social & cooperative context places us all into a specialised group of action (of being related to creating 'community' rather than 'personal' gain). It is further distinguished by being international. This 'cooperative', 'international & 'community' focus places Green Bridges into a rather specialised category. The participants & managers give time, effort and energy to activities that for most people who are encountered in daily lives and localities, never share.... and in many cases never understand.





The group is not unique & the project is, compared with some other 'cooperative, international, community focused' action (eg UN Agencies) extremely small - but participants are, in corners of Europe, members of a type of human interaction and cooperation based on free association, free movement & free speech²¹ that provides the essential sub-structure to all free societies.

The prevention of free-association (an essential component of the work) was and is a core element in authoritarian regimes (such as existed under communism in Central and Eastern Europe).

The loss of 'free movement' in an 'open society' can only be temporary for the society to remain 'free' and 'open'. But how long is 'temporary'!

All participants in this project are also and very importantly 'volunteers'.

Even for the two institutional members, the work involves both an element of 'free giving' of time and energy for community not personal, benefit. This is particularly so when using professional skills, situations & position to encouraging others to engage and 'give' of themselves.

For projects such as Green Bridges it is in the struggle, giving of energy and time to a worthy purpose beyond the personal, that the deeper satisfaction is achieved.

As partners, there is presently greater distance than is desired but hopefully there can be a maintaining of local actions with a common shared purpose & a resulting benefit to the local societies in which the project occurs.

*'we carry without tears
a sickness in the chords
and go on without end
awards the setting of the sun
..... We spawn infinity
with a song, with a mystery'²²*

²¹ Such liberties still have to be managed. We are not 'free' to do or say anything we personally wish to say or do

²² Lucian Blaga



