

TEFG Reports

Monitoring Report October 2020

Post-Project Summative Report December 2021

Monitoring and evaluation

TEFG1 has a monitoring and evaluation rôle for the Green Bridges project. The group has been asked to pose questions, offer reflection, informed input and suggestions and to produce a published report after the project's conclusion. Two members of the group are participant/observers in the online consultative group and regular (online) partnership meetings.

The project coordinator also took part in an interactive session with group members which explored some of the concepts and cultural parameters of the project. This conversation highlighted the essential *experiential learning* aspect of the Project where a common activity (e.g. a planned walk, journey or pilgrimage) provides an opportunity for people to engage with an environment, and (some aspects of) its history, geography, ecology, industry and agriculture *beyond* their usual context. This *engagement*, in collaboration with others, stimulates conversations and reflection resulting in new thinking and knowledge.

Due to the Covid pandemic many of the planned tasks and activities are proceeding *online*, rather than physically. In this situation the website, to which all partners contribute, is the main forum for the shared narrative and forms the Project's substantive, public record of progress and achievements to date. In tandem, all meetings between partners have continued to be *virtual* (by Skype or Zoom). This is a particular challenge because the constraints on meeting and travel have denied partners the opportunity to visit each others' places to experience, explore and to see their respective work at first hand. Furthermore a number of people involved have only been able to meet one another virtually and not in person: it is noticeably more difficult to develop and sustain trusting relationships in this way rather than side by side, in person.

The challenge to coordination is further complicated because the participating countries face very different restrictions and these change at different times in different places too. Some partners have been able to meet physically and undertake tasks and activities much as planned while others have found it harder to make progress. In response the structures and processes have been changed to support good communication and to enable progress to be made on the tangible results areas. It is clear, however, that the exchange of ideas and practice and developing relationships and shared learning are not at the level which would be expected if the physical Partnership meetings had been possible.

The approach to evaluation is planned to follow the ethos of the project. Therefore a process of *self-evaluation* is envisaged which supports the partners in enhancing professional and organisational capacity for reflection on the basis that it is for the *partners* to decide whether, and to what extent, the Project has achieved its purposes. To be credible, however, any evaluation has to be based on appropriate and valid evidence and correspond with the common parameters of the Project overall. This process would have been launched at the LTTA meeting planned for Oxford last March which had to be abandoned. So far as common processes are concerned the 'best practice guide' currently has priority for the Project's attention so evaluation will be introduced early in 2021. The *perspective* from which evaluation is carried out is critical for its effectiveness so TEF1 will not offer a hierarchical assessment but *facilitate* the partners' reflections and help draw out the threads of shared learning for the partnership.

Andrew Bevan and John Reader
October 2020

Please read this report in conjunction with our interim report of October 2020. It is necessarily more brief and superficial than we originally envisaged for the following reasons:

- the Covid pandemic meant that physical engagement of partners was mostly impossible (all LTTAs were cancelled and only the initial and final TPMs were held in person) so TEFG¹ was never able to establish an adequate relational base with most partners (which would have been achieved if the first, planned LTTA, in Oxford, had taken place);
- as a matter of principle our rôle in evaluation was to have been to *facilitate* self-evaluation by the partnership and feed back and disseminate the results;
- instead, as the interactions and management of the project went almost entirely on-line, we offered support and reflective space to the Coordinator and UK management group and participated on occasion with the wider, partnership meetings, on Zoom, as observers only;
- therefore this report offers a more limited evaluation than would have been possible if there had been no pandemic, based largely on conversations with the Project Coordinator.

TEFG has the twin foci of the ecological consequences of unprecedented changes to the natural environment (including loss of bio-diversity and competition and conflict between species including humans) and the explosive growth and use of digital technologies. Green Bridges intersected with the first interest under the explicit project rubric: “*there is no well-being without nature’s well being*”.² This chimes pretty closely with a statement of principle on the TEFG page on the William Temple Foundation website:

*“As a general principle upon which alone the solid foundations of peace can be built, we should recognise that the resources of the earth should be used as God’s gift to the whole human race, and used with due consideration for the needs of the present and future generations.”*³

As an explicit purpose of the project, therefore, it is legitimate to ask, despite the disruptions caused by Covid, the extent to which the Project achieved this primary aim. Based on the evidence of the website⁴ the Project succeeded in this regard: specifically the *tangible outputs* pages⁵ show the work of all the partners under the planned categories.

The Project was also intended to foster multi-national collegiality and shared experiential learning. These aspects were significantly affected by the Covid pandemic. This resulted in a creative outpouring and mutual support as people faced restrictions and dislocation in their different contexts; disruption of the Project was part of this experience but addressing that and finding shared solutions to compensate came *after* working through the initial shock.⁶

Whilst travel restrictions and varying degrees of local lock-down changed the management, processes and dynamics of the Project the wide availability of digital communications meant it was feasible to continue the project in a way which simply would not have been possible in an earlier era. It is this *unexpected* circumstance which connects with the second area of concern of TEFG: the relationships developed and sustained using digital means are of a *different quality* to those conducted in physical proximity but without that technology the project might not have continued at

1 Ethical Futures: Digital and Ecological is a multi-disciplinary network of theologians, philosophers, natural and social scientists, artists, practitioners, academics and activists with shared interests in developing theological responses to ecological challenges and new digital technologies. (William Temple Foundation website).

2 Project Summary, final project report.

3 <https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/our-work/ethical-futures-digital-and-ecological/>

4 <https://greenbridgesproject.org/>

5 <https://greenbridgesproject.org/the-tangible-results/>

6 <https://greenbridgesproject.org/pandemic-times/>

all. At one extreme a partner institution ‘lost’ their students who were intended to be key players in their work. Similarly the differing travel restrictions meant that one partner *never* met all the others *physically*.

In retrospect the Coordinator observed that the partners never expected the Project to be abandoned. Rather the re-structuring emerged ‘seamlessly’ from their various responses to the Covid pandemic⁷ which allowed the others to respond according to their own contexts with varying degrees of creativity. In this circumstance the coordinating function consisted of creating space for partners to express themselves by creating their own improvisations which allowed them to be flexible within the framework of the Project. This suggests a high level of adaptation and collaborative learning was achieved in the changed circumstances.

Fostering experiential learning was an aim of the Project but in the event this was enabled by digital technology and the virtual environment. An example of ‘the power of online collaboration and the adaptability of these for more formal models of learning’⁸ is offered by a *different* project where a collaborative poem was produced in early 2021. A presentation of this process *the Serendipitous Emergence of Collaborative Learning*⁹ includes the themes of digital well-being and authentic connection and offers some theoretical underpinning of this pedagogy.

The Pandemic was uncontrollable (certainly in its effect on the Project) but not completely unforeseen. Possibly it resulted from zoonotic spillover, perhaps in a wet market or directly from a bat, or perhaps it was engineered and escaped from a laboratory. In either case it is an unintended consequence of failing to adhere sufficiently to the environmental principles underlying the project and of concern to TEFEG. In conclusion, therefore, it is apposite to note that digital technology allowed some mitigation of its consequences to the Project and, possibly, that the Pandemic resulted in some unexpected beneficial outcomes for participants.

Andrew Bevan
December 2021

7 <https://greenbridgesproject.org/pandemic-times/>

8 <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/251943/>

9 <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/251943/1/251943.pdf>