

Keep Bridge Alive Initiative

In February 2019 the University of Stirling, led by Professor Samantha Punch, launched the global Keep Bridge Alive Campaign to publicise the benefits of bridge beyond the bridge world. Today, fewer people are playing bridge and the bridge community needs to come together and develop new approaches to recruit a fresh generation of players.

The Sociology of Bridge is a research project and an emerging academic field exploring interactions within the mind sport, well-being, transferable life skills, mental health and social connection. Playing bridge encourages clear thinking, boosts self-esteem, facilitates partnerships, trust and cooperation and contributes to intergenerational community building.

One of the aims of Keep Bridge Alive (KBA) is to encourage people to build new friendships and engage in social interaction and face-to-face communication at the bridge table. The Keep Bridge Alive project is keen to develop an intergenerational approach, as well as to produce resources aimed at getting more bridge into schools, universities, work-places, public libraries and community centres.

Thus the global Keep Bridge Alive Campaign aims to:

- Transform the image of bridge
- Increase participation
- Enhance the sustainability of the mind sport.

All profits from KBA fundraising go directly to pay the researchers who work with Professor Punch as UK universities no longer fund research, relying instead on increasingly limited external funding. The University of Stirling supports the KBA work by not charging overheads, administration costs nor for Samantha's time and has already invested £30K by match-funding a PhD in bridge with EBED and the UK and Irish Bridge Unions.

Research so far

Project 1 - Dynamics and Interactions at the Bridge Table: Samantha has conducted 52 in-depth interviews (on average two hours each) with top male and female bridge players in the UK, Europe and USA, aged 18 to 79. This wealth of qualitative interview data will offer a sociological understanding of bridge as a mind sport, including the characteristics of the card game, benefits, challenges, motivations, barriers to participation, opportunities for skill development and engagement across the lifecourse. Thanks to funding from the WBF (World Bridge Federation), EBL (European Bridge League) and KBA, analysis has begun with four academic papers currently under development.

Project 2 - Bridge and Well-being: Keep Bridge Alive work builds on previous research by the partnership of EBED (English Bridge Education and Development) and the University of Stirling, which includes a survey of 7,000 bridge players which was compared with 10,000 non-bridge players. The key finding was that bridge players have subjectively higher levels of well-being

than those who do not play. This work needs to be published in academic peer-reviewed journal articles in order to provide a reputable evidence base of the benefits of bridge. Until now, there have been virtually no sociological studies on bridge and there is a lack of published work based on robust research.

Project 3 - Gender and Bridge: Using data from the 52 elite interviews we are exploring views of women's bridge, gender differences in the mind sport and why, at the top of the game, men are more successful in terms of winning more prestigious events. This has been followed up by a qualitative email survey on a wider range of bridge players' views and experiences, including club, tournament, international and professional players. We received 150 responses from 84 male and 67 female bridge players from across the world, aged approx. 18-75 years. Work still ongoing and will feed into possible training for Tournament Directors (gender workshop with EBU TDs was well received in England). Scope to develop a practical resource raising gender awareness in relation to the findings. Also includes a literature review paper in progress titled: 'Sex differences in the human brain and the game of bridge' (McPherson, Punch and Graham).

Project 4 – Bridge and Schools: This research will explore what helps and hinders learning for children in primary and secondary schools. This case study will focus on research the benefits and challenges of teaching bridge in schools, using the example of Northern Ireland. Bridge has recently been introduced into the curriculum with follow-through from teaching children in primary and then on to secondary school. Focus group and individual interviews will be conducted with teachers, pupils and parents to explore different perspectives in relation to the skills gained through bridge. Ethics application being developed, fieldwork to take place in Spring 2020. Funded by the Davenport Foundation.

Project 5 – New academic module on Sociology of Sports and Leisure: The sociology of mind sports needs to speak to existing academic fields of sport and leisure. We are using the broader focus on the sociology of mind sports (with sociology of bridge as part of that) in order to generate more attention to it, and see where it fits academically between sport and leisure studies. Literature reviews are being undertaken on bridge, chess and mah-jong. Useful lessons to be learnt from the academic studies of chess in particular, as chess has received more investment from schools in the UK. The ambition is to develop the sociology of mind sports as a new area of teaching (as well as research) and share materials with other universities so mind sports become more widely recognised.

Current KBA Research Team: Prof Sam Punch (2 days a week), Dr Miriam Snellgrove (3 days a week), with Zoe Russell, Jess Cleary and Cate Pemble who are full-time PhD students (on non-bridge PhD topics) who work approx. 4-6 hours a week on KBA supervised by Sam.

Hence from projects 1-3 there is much existing data where the analysis and write up needs to be completed in order to gain academic credibility for bridge research and subsequent KBA work. We are also in the initial planning stages of projects 4 and 5. Projects 1-5 form the basis for phase 1 of a longer-term Programme of Work for KBA (see below).

Meanwhile, we are also starting phase 2 so that we have early input from the bridge community and begin to develop our global KBA partnerships to inform phases 3-5.

Programme of KBA Work

- Phase 1 – publish academic papers and establish the sociology of mind sports as a new area of teaching and research
- Phase 2 – develop a global Keep Bridge Alive network to share best practice
- Phase 3 – create accessible resources from the research findings for different groups such as teachers, parents, employers, policy-makers and children
- Phase 4 – conduct new Keep Bridge Alive research within the bridge community to co-develop solutions to sustaining bridge
- Phase 5 – secure further funding from research bodies and health organisations to roll out Keep Bridge Alive solutions and practical projects

Existing Papers:

From the Doctorate in the Sociology of Bridge: (funded by EBED, UK and Irish Bridge Unions)

Judge, K. and Punch, S. (2019) 'Lessons Learned from Bridge: A Sociological Exploration of the New University of Stirling Bridge Club', *Stirling International Journal of Postgraduate Research SPARK*, Issue 5. Available at: <https://spark.stir.ac.uk/issues/issue5/>

Online Papers: (funded by EBED)

McDonnell, D., Punch, S. and Small, C. (2017) *Individual Wellbeing and Bridge: An Empirical Analysis*, Aylesbury: English Bridge Education & Development (EBED), <http://www.ebedcio.org.uk/health-wellbeing-research>

Ashworth, R., Punch, S. and Small, C. (2016) *A Review of Possible Interventions into Healthy Ageing and Cognitive Stimulation: Exploring the Links between Bridge and Dementia*, Aylesbury: English Bridge Education & Development (EBED), <http://www.ebedcio.org.uk/health-wellbeing-research>

KBA Papers in Preparation: (funded by KBA, WBF, EBL)

Punch, S. and Russell, Z. 'Temperament is Everything': Partnerships and Emotions in the Mind Sport of Bridge', Target Journal: *Sociology*.

Punch, S. and Russell, Z. 'The Preparation and Performance of Idealised Selves: Partnerships and Player Identities in the Mind Sport Bridge', Target Journal: *Qualitative Sociology*.

Punch, S. and Snellgrove, M. 'Playing your Life: Impression Management and Strategic Interaction in the Game of Bridge', Target Journal: *Symbolic Interaction*.

Punch, S. and Snellgrove, M. 'Fun, Fights and Failures: Intimate Couple Relationships and Playing Bridge', Target Journal: *Families, Relationships and Societies*.

Contact emails: s.v.punch@stir.ac.uk or miriam.snellgrove2@stir.ac.uk

Sociologyofbridge.wordpress.com



@soc_of_bridge



Keep Bridge Alive Pro-Am Pairs