



Bridge: A MindSport For All

Connects People, Challenges Minds

Promoting Mindsports

McCutcheon A. and Punch S. (2026) [Promoting Traditional Leisure: Barriers and Enablers for the Mindsport Bridge](#), *Leisure Studies*, 1-22.

Summary

Mindsports are intellectual, competitive games like chess and bridge. Bridge has been declining in popularity over the last few decades.

This paper explores the enablers and barriers regarding participation and the promotion of bridge. It is based on interviews with 30 bridge teachers, players and National Bridge Organisation (NBO) employees/volunteers from several countries. The study addresses:

- To what extent does bridge need to promote itself and attract and retain players?
- What are the challenges of promoting bridge, recruiting and retaining players?
- What are some approaches and opportunities that could enable bridge to promote itself, attract and retain players?

The paper contains many quotes from the interviews.

Findings

Some themes relating to the above questions are:

- the future, stereotypes, and bridge as a sport.
- structural problems, behaviour/attitudes, learning and teaching, and marketing troubles.
- transition management, social bridge, and volunteers.

The paper identifies several barriers and enablers for promoting bridge and getting people involved:

Barriers to Bridge Promotion

- At an individual level, people have a variety of motivations for playing bridge. For duplicate players, the ability to find consistent partners at compatible times and skill levels is a challenge. For social players, the time required to play a session is a barrier. Several participants took breaks from playing and did not return to the game until later life because work and life commitments impacted their ability and desire to play bridge.
- At an institutional level, membership in some clubs have prerequisites, e.g. expensive to join or need to be nominated for membership. Many clubs and NBOs make only limited efforts to engage minority demographics.

- For newcomers, the first few club experiences are crucial and they must be positive, but the (often unintentionally rude) actions of experienced players can hinder this. There is a need for a welcoming culture, with a "zero tolerance" approach to poor behaviour.
- Bridge marketing is an issue. Social media marketing to attract younger people is not widely used. Effective recruitment campaigns are difficult to identify.
- Teaching methods are often traditional and formal in nature. Bridge's complexity is part of its appeal, but this could be off-putting for certain types of players.
- At a cultural level, bridge is frequently associated with older age, and this perception can discourage younger players. There is also a perception of elitism, with an assumption that bridge players must be highly intelligent, well-educated and from relatively affluent backgrounds.

Enablers for Promoting Bridge

- At an individual level, not all players aspire to master the game or compete in tournaments; many are drawn to bridge for its social aspects or leisure qualities. This needs to be borne in mind when recruiting players.
- At an institutional level, it is important to engage both social and competitive players across age groups, including through youth initiatives that encourage cross-generational participation. There is also value in connecting clubs with more informal, community-based spaces, e.g. café bridge or coffee mornings in local venues.
- At a cultural level, social and digital media marketing has the potential to enhance visibility and reach more diverse audiences.

Coordinated strategies are important. Initiatives aimed solely at increasing individual motivation or advertising the cognitive benefits of bridge are unlikely to succeed if institutional structures and club cultures remain unchanged. Practical suggestions include:

- Developing flexible teaching pathways and expanding mentorship schemes.
- Increasing the visibility of diverse and younger role models and using a youth-centred participatory approach when designing interactive teaching materials.
- Training and supporting volunteers to help modernise the game.
- Encouraging collaborative partnerships between clubs or organisations.

Conclusions

A multi-layered approach to revitalising bridge must consider not only individual motivations and constraints but also broader cultural and institutional structures. It is vital to address barriers at all levels to ensure that bridge is welcoming to a wider spectrum of players, particularly those who seek enjoyment and competition in a relaxed atmosphere. In this way, bridge can maintain its rich heritage while expanding participation and cultivating a more diverse and engaged community.

It is crucial that efforts at one level align with changes at others - recruitment campaigns, educational practices and club environments must consistently convey messages of accessibility, welcome and inclusion.

BAMSA Project Lead: Professor Samantha Punch
Email: bamsa@stir.ac.uk



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