

15th Ordinary Session of the Intergovernmental Council (IGC) of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, 30-31 March 2021.

Item 5 of the Agenda

PROPOSALS FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF BRIDGES AS A MOST SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE COALITION

This document is prepared in response to paragraphs 7 and 8 of the decision taken by the IGC Bureau at its meeting on 27-28 February 2020 (MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/14). It includes proposals for the governance of BRIDGES developed in discussion with all stakeholders at a meeting on 6-7 July 2020 and further refined at a meeting on 15 September 2020 of the designated BRIDGES drafting group.

Draft decision: paragraph 17.

I) CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1. As summarized for the IGC Bureau in document MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/5, the BRIDGES initiative stems from the UNESCO-organized project “Broadening the Application of the Sustainability Science Approach”, which was initiated in October 2015 with support of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan/MEXT) to develop policy guidelines to help Member States harness the potential of sustainability science in their sustainable development strategies. This project aimed to help UNESCO Member States and other stakeholders introduce and reinforce a sustainability science approach to transdisciplinary research and education to enable these sectors to respond more effectively to global challenges. The project was carried out over three symposia organized during a two-year period (2015-2017) to foster dialogue and collaboration among sustainability experts and policy-makers. The major output of the project was UNESCO’s policy document Guidelines for Sustainability Science in Research and Education (hereafter SuS Guidelines). As framed in this key document, sustainability science (SuS) should be understood as science both about sustainability and for sustainability. In other words, SuS involves a two-way process encompassing the study and understanding of complex socio-ecological systems, on the one hand, and the strategic application of knowledge thereby produced towards the design of actions in favor of sustainability on the other hand.
2. The BRIDGES initiative has been established by three founding partners – the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH), Humanities for the Environment (HfE) and UNESCO – which have coordinated the establishment process, involving consultations with all the partners in general assembly in 2019-20 as well as three workshops in 2019, each sponsored by one of the founding partners, and an online workshop in July 2020 co-organized by all of them.
3. The purpose of BRIDGES is to operationalize the UNESCO SuS Guidelines in a variety of contexts, by connecting diverse communities of knowledge and action throughout societies in project-based activities. BRIDGES aims to harness the capabilities of higher education and research institutions to serve as vital touchstones in transdisciplinary efforts together with international councils of science, intergovernmental science programmes, research and educational networks, as well as key local and national partners from public and private sectors, and from civil society.
4. BRIDGES builds on the refined sustainability science paradigm inaugurated in UNESCO’s SuS Guidelines, including the core principles set out in that key document. The six principles in the UNESCO SuS Guidelines are set out in the following terms:
 1. *Sustainability Science responds specifically to the **interdependent, complex and mutually reinforcing character** of natural, social and cultural sustainability challenges that are ongoing globally and locally. Sustainable development, as expressed in the United Nations Agenda 2030, is exactly about the interplay of such challenges.*
 2. *Sustainability Science aims at mobilizing, generating, disseminating and implementing **knowledge necessary to define and achieve sustainability** as a response to such challenges in the concrete contexts of different geographical and temporal scales. Such knowledge includes new technologies and innovative processes.*
 3. *In addition to generating knowledge, Sustainability Science focuses on **solving problems, understanding dilemmas and conflicts of goals and interests**, with a view to move towards more integrated and coherent policy agendas, policy options and foresight scenarios that take into account both short-term and long-term needs.*

4. *Sustainability Science is crosscutting science by nature, having as a major goal to seek complementary **cooperation** between natural and social sciences, the humanities, the arts and, in particular, to ensure the participation of diverse non-academic stakeholders, through a collaborative process of co-design, co-production and co-management.*
5. *Sustainability Science is based on both **academic freedom and academic responsibility** towards societal needs.*
6. *Sustainability Science **requires important new capacities of individual scientists** for integrated critical analysis and foresight; the ability to cope with systems thinking, changing environments, risks and insecurity; and the capacity to recognize and address diverse values as well as conflicts of goals and interests, to empathize and work responsibly and collectively in diverse partnerships. Such capacities need to be strengthened through all forms of education.*

(UNESCO SuS Guidelines, 2-3)

5. Participants in BRIDGES have adopted five additional key principles that help to define the distinctive value and approaches BRIDGES will bring to sustainability science that are not otherwise programmatically addressed within the field.
 1. *The BRIDGES Coalition is humanities-centered but not limited to the humanities. We value contextualized and diverse approaches to sustainability and we acknowledge that persistent challenges are often complex, yielding sometimes contradictory responses. We encourage robust debate in efforts to meet these challenges.*
 2. *The BRIDGES partners understand the Earth not solely as a planetary system, nor as a reservoir of resources, but as a web of meanings and interactions that is inherently multilayered and pluralistic.*
 3. *The BRIDGES Coalition is committed to a critical understanding of sustainability that emphasizes the diversity of its subjects, objects and timelines.*
 4. *BRIDGES will work to establish a world of new relationships, based on convergent understandings and co-design among the co-inhabitants of the Earth.*
 5. *The BRIDGES partners are committed to an ethical approach to resource mobilization and use.*
6. BRIDGES will promote a general conceptual and methodological framework for transformation to sustainability rooted in transdisciplinary approaches to research and education. The challenge is to support sustainable and inclusive ecological/cultural spaces towards territorial development capable of realizing profound transformations that cannot be achieved solely through the application of technical solutions such as renewable energy, better water management, innovative building, etc. Rather, such solutions must be part of a comprehensive approach rooted in *processes* of social, economic, institutional and cultural transformation that can enable territorial stakeholders to question, critically examine, and possibly rethink not only longstanding or prevailing ideas about territorial integrity, but also their own attitudes, practices and behaviour as these may impact the territory. Such a meta-perspective requires continuous analysis and evaluation of prevailing modes of stakeholder participation in knowledge co-production as well as ongoing assessment of the fora and mechanisms that serve to bring distinct domains, traditions and communities of knowledge together (sometimes in hybrid forms). This includes technical knowledge about various systems, institutionally embedded knowledge concerning policy and governance, and scientific knowledge about how particular ecosystems, habitats and social environments function, as well as informal knowledge, knowledge embedded in communities of purpose and practice, and indigenous knowledge where any of these may be applicable.

7. Pending formal institutionalization of BRIDGES, active steps have been taken to define areas of engagement, solicit pilot projects for BRIDGES endorsement and prepare the basis for future development. A number of activities are under way that, in addition to their direct programme delivery, will also offer a proof of concept for the added value of BRIDGES as an initiative. Further project proposals are under development. The basis for project assessment and recognition was presented in detail in document MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/5.
8. Governance of BRIDGES has hitherto been conducted on an ad hoc basis, shared among the founding partners. It has thus involved the active participation of the MOST Secretariat. It is recognized, and was reaffirmed at a meeting of all stakeholders on 6-7 July 2020, that formalization is required and that the most appropriate mechanism for this would be through a connection with the MOST programme.
9. The BRIDGES proposal, including background history and process summary, was submitted to the IGC Bureau at its meeting in February 2020 (document MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/5), with a view to enabling discussion of its formalization within the MOST Programme. The Bureau also took note of the views of the Scientific Advisory Committee, which had previously discussed BRIDGES during its meeting on 25-26 February 2020.
10. In its decision (MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/14), the Bureau affirmed “the importance of sustainability science and the value of the social and human sciences in supporting its development and implementation, and takes note of the BRIDGES initiative, which could in principle be an important addition to the UNESCO MOST programme portfolio” (paragraph 6).
11. The Bureau further requested the Secretariat “In order to enable a decision on endorsement of BRIDGES as a MOST initiative to be made by the Extraordinary Session of the IGC scheduled in September 2020, ... to consult prospective BRIDGES partners and prepare detailed proposals for the organization, governance and financing of BRIDGES, which will be considered by the Bureau at its meeting immediately prior to the aforementioned Extraordinary Session” (paragraph 7). In addition, “In developing these proposals, the Bureau further requests the Secretariat to ensure that BRIDGES is defined as funded from extrabudgetary sources and that clear oversight principles are established, based on a recognized role for the SAC and regular reporting to the IGC (paragraph 8).
12. In light of the exceptional conditions imposed by the global pandemic, the Extraordinary Session of MOST IGC scheduled in September 2020 was cancelled. The Bureau’s decision is therefore to be applied *mutatis mutandis* by submission of the requested proposals to the IGC for consideration at the present Ordinary Session.

II) BRIDGES GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS

13. Following consultation of all BRIDGES stakeholders, taking full account of the decisions of the IGC Bureau, and a specific meeting of the BRIDGES drafting group on 15 September 2020, it is proposed that BRIDGES be governed according to the following basic principles:
 - a. BRIDGES should be a flexible, open-ended network, involving a range of projects with different scopes and scales, the coherence of which derives from the shared principles specified in paragraphs 4 and 5 above.
 - b. BRIDGES should adopt a minimalist approach to governance, creating explicit formal mechanisms only when agreed objectives cannot be achieved otherwise. Nonetheless, a

number of important functions require formalization.

- c. BRIDGES should be self-governing within the limits entailed by the statutory role of the MOST IGC, as defined in Article VII of the MOST Statutes, and Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), as defined in Article XII, paragraphs 4 and 5, of the MOST Statutes.¹
- d. BRIDGES should operate on an inclusive basis, actively seeking to engage new knowledge domains and stakeholders, in particular to ensure geographical and gender balance, and critically reviewing its procedures and methods as the composition of the network evolves.

14. The functions that are judged to require formalization are the following:

- a. *Recognition.* Recognizing a specific project as a BRIDGES project requires formal assessment according to explicit criteria, with the involvement of the SAC through participation in assessment of its designated focal point. Each activity report by the Secretariat will give the IGC an opportunity to review which projects have been recognized and to make suggestions as to possible future projects. Furthermore, the IGC Bureau will be apprised of the project portfolio at each of its meetings, as part of the rolling process to update the MOST Action Plan.
- b. *External communication/advocacy.* Consistent with the constitution of the BRIDGES portfolio of recognized and labelled projects, communication requires coordination (with respect to the actions of individual institutions) and a degree of central action (to ensure visibility and impact). For these purposes, communication includes the various aspects of publication. Advocacy will support the vision and principles of BRIDGES in order to establish new partnerships, facilitate resource mobilization for BRIDGES as a whole, and promote enactment and funding of specific projects.
- c. *Resource mobilization.* Projects will typically be funded by resources mobilized by their host institutions. Nonetheless, a key point of the design of BRIDGES as a consortium is to unlock the potential for joint resource mobilization, drawing on synergies between projects. It is emphasized that, with the exception of the direct cost of involvement of UNESCO staff in BRIDGES coordination activities, UNESCO shall make no financial contribution to BRIDGES from its regular budget.
- d. *Monitoring, learning, reporting and quality control.* Maintaining the recognition of projects over time requires agreed processes and capacity to consider performance and impact and to take decisions, as required, on discontinuation of projects which have been completed or, for whatever reason, no longer fit within BRIDGES. Criteria in this regard should take account of consultation with the SAC and should be reported periodically to the IGC.
- e. *Strategy and planning.* Given the evolving and dynamic nature of the BRIDGES network, strategy and planning require rolling review. Proposals for strategic development should be set within the applicable MOST Strategy, take account of consultation with the SAC and be reported periodically to the IGC.

15. In order to formalize the above functions, the following organs specific to BRIDGES are proposed:

- a. A *Secretariat*, located in and supported by a relevant partner institution tasked with all coordination functions as defined above, and liaising on a regular basis with the MOST

¹ The MOST IGC Statutes are available here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261418>.

Secretariat. Efforts to identify an institutional host for the BRIDGES secretariat are under way, with the aim of concluding negotiations regarding local measures necessary to support and operate the secretariat for an initial four-year period in the first half of 2021.

- b. An *Executive Committee* (or equivalent term) tasked with supervision of the formal functions as defined above, composed of a number of representatives of institutions committed to BRIDGES, which shall be balanced by geography and gender.
 - c. A *General Assembly*, tasked with oversight of the secretariat and executive committee, and composed of representatives of all institutions committed to BRIDGES.
 - d. The possible creation of a *Stakeholder Advisory Committee* will be considered at a later stage.
 - e. Furthermore, ad hoc working groups may be created in the course of BRIDGES operations and evolution to address strategic development of new BRIDGES activities, advocacy engagements, position statements and/or collaborations with other partners (such as international councils etc.) in initiatives of common interest/focus (e.g. related to sustainability science).
16. In order to ensure the appropriate connections between BRIDGES and the organs of the MOST programme, the following roles and processes are proposed:
- a. The MOST SAC will be directly involved, through a designated focal point, in BRIDGES project assessment. Furthermore, the SAC will be provided, annually, with a report on scientific issues arising from the implementation of BRIDGES and given the opportunity to bring its observations thereon to the attention of the BRIDGES General Assembly. The SAC may, at any time, bring to the attention of the Bureau any specific issues of concern.
 - b. The IGC Bureau will be invited to designate an observer to attend meetings of the BRIDGES General Assembly.
 - c. The IGC will receive, at each of its sessions, a specific report on BRIDGES implementation and proposals for future development, taking account of the observations of the SAC mentioned in paragraph a above, in order to assess consistency with the applicable MOST strategy.
 - d. Furthermore, information on BRIDGES will be included in activity reports by the MOST secretariat to the IGC and to its Bureau as well as in periodic updates of the MOST Action Plan.

III) DRAFT DECISION

17. The Intergovernmental Council of the MOST Programme

Referring to document MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/5,

Mindful of its decisions thereon in document MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/14, paragraphs 6-8,

Having considered document MOST/IGC/2021/3,

Endorses the proposals for the governance of BRIDGES as a MOST sustainability science coalition contained in paragraphs 13-16 of document MOST/IGC/2021/3.