

Project title: Sport for Peace and Friendship: Preparing Youths at Risk for Peace through Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

Country where project took place: Brazil.

Sponsoring College: The Graduate Institute Geneva.

Designated project leader name: Raphael Schapira.

Associated project blogs: <https://www.facebook.com/EPVEA/>

<https://www.instagram.com/projetoesportepela/>

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## **Section I: Narrative**

### **A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project**

By participating in the project "Sport for Peace and Friendship: Preparing Youths at Risk for Peace through Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu," 70 socially disadvantaged children and teenagers of Rio de Janeiro's northern periphery were introduced to the corporeal and ethical aspects of Brazilian jiu-jitsu centered on nonviolent conflict solution and developed self-esteem and friendship. The symbolic status and friendships thus incorporated prevented participants from seeking employment in the drug business and from seeing each other as potential enemies because of living in territories controlled by different drug factions.

### **Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

No other funds contributed to the project.

### **How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

Doing research for my Ph.D. in anthropology on the social significance of the martial art Brazilian jiu-jitsu in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, I observed firsthand the important work of a network of Brazilian jiu-jitsu teachers implementing sport for peace projects in Rio de Janeiro's periphery and shantytowns. These coaches have proven through their work that teaching martial arts to youths at risk is an effective way to show them the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully and developing a perspective for the future. By experiencing themselves as successful in Brazilian jiu-jitsu children and teenagers become motivated to thrive in life, school, and other aspects of their lives, too. Out of my personal encounter with this local Brazilian jiu-jitsu culture, grew my strong motivation to develop a grassroots North-South sport for peace and development project striving for a positive social impact on deprived communities by giving new opportunities to their youths.

### **Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world. Many children and teenagers growing up in Rio de Janeiro's northern periphery are extremely vulnerable to become recruited as child soldiers and drug traffickers because of lacking prospects. Besides the economic and social hardship many of these youths experience, it is the symbolic exclusion they experience as marginalized inhabitants of the periphery and of shantytowns which makes the acquisition of social status through illicit activities attractive to them.

### **Why did you choose your host site to work in?**

The project was implemented at the community center "Lona Cultural Terra Guadalupe." This strategically situated community center was chosen because it allowed participants from the area and the surrounding shanty towns to meet, get to know each other, and make new friends. The community center is considered "neutral grounds" so that inhabitants of shanty towns controlled by enemy drug fractions can meet there, who are, otherwise, impeded to enter the "enemy" (according to the drug cartel's logic) neighborhood. Additionally, the community center provided the necessary infrastructure where the project took place, such as toilets and facilities to store the mats.

### **What was it like to work in your host site?**

Working in the host site was very positive. The head of the community center was very welcoming and helpful in hosting the project. Another positive aspect of the host site was that pedestrians could see from the outside when training took place. This attracted several children to participate in the project. On a personal level, it took me some time to really understand the local circumstances. As a foreigner, I needed to get accustomed to the idea that the shanty towns surrounding the host site were off-limits for me and that I could only pass them in a car with a local driving it.

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### **Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

Due to my professional local partners partaking in the implementation of the project I never had the feeling that this project was not going to work. I chose local partners already experienced in giving Brazilian jiu-jitsu classes to socially disadvantaged children and teenagers and knowledgeable of the area where the project was implemented. Their professionalism and acquaintance with the local circumstances were important factors contributing to the project's success.

### **What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

The communication in itself was not problematic due to my knowledge of Portuguese. What I found challenging, nevertheless, was my insufficient incorporated knowledge of the local circumstances. Although I knew theoretically about the complicated local power structures that divide urban space in that area of Rio de Janeiro, I fell time and again into the trap of thinking that things are easier than they really are. Therefore, it was necessary for my local partners and me to have patience to clarify in conversations irritations that presented itself during the implementation of the project.

### **How do you define peace?**

In my opinion, peace is a state in which people can develop their personal potentialities to live a fulfilling and creative-productive life as part of a world made out of relationships between humans and their surroundings. Although peace is realized through individual well-being, it can only be thought of as a relational in regard to the well-being of others, human as well as non-human. Peace is inclusive and not achieved at the expenses of others.

### **How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

On a short-term level, my project contributed to peace by allowing children and teenagers to become part of a Brazilian jiu-jitsu community through which they developed an alternative vision of the world. The participants learned that it is possible to acquire status and self-esteem through Brazilian jiu-jitsu as an alternative to the drug trade. By experiencing themselves as successful in Brazilian jiu-jitsu children and teenagers became motivated to thrive in life, school, and other aspects of their lives, too. Their example serves as a motivation for other members of their communities, this way contributing to conflict prevention and promoting peace through sports as an alternative to drugs and violence. On a long-term level, the financial and institutional support provided will allow establishing a new training center which will continue working after the project ends. To give sustainability to the project, upon its completion, the acquired equipment will continue being used for Brazilian jiu-jitsu classes at the same location. The participants will have the opportunity to continue the classes with the junior Brazilian jiu-jitsu teacher with the prospect of becoming Brazilian jiu-jitsu coaches themselves. Also, new children and teenagers will be encouraged to participate and to become multipliers.

### **Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

The project taught me how important local knowledge is in implementing Sports for Peace and Development (SDP) projects in an urban setting of the Global South. With local knowledge, I am referring to knowledge on neighborhood-level. In densely populated and highly fractured urban spaces as those of Rio de Janeiro's periphery, state and non-state powers are constantly struggling over territorial control. In these spaces at the margins of the state, it is paramount to work with local partners knowledgeable regarding the intricacies of local ways of managing these dangerous urban environments. They know how to respond to the needs of the local populations and how to realize positive change. The project has convinced me of the importance of starting working with local partners as early as possible in the development of new SDP projects.

### **Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result.**

The project "Sport for Peace and Friendship: Preparing Youths at Risk for Peace through Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu" financed by the Kathryn W. Davis Projects for Peace initiative has allowed socially disadvantaged children and teenagers from Rio de Janeiro's periphery to experience themselves as important and valuable members of society by becoming part of a community of Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioners. Through this project, I learned that dedicated persons exist everywhere who put positive community development as their priority and that it is our task as academics to support these people in working towards a more just and peaceful world.

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## Section II: Photographs

