

Title of Project: *Adopt a Park*

Country of project implementation: Brazil

Sponsoring College: International House NY

Designated Project Leader: Isadora M Amaral (Brazil) and Álvaro Carreño (Chile)

## Section I: Narrative

***Adopt a Park* is a community-led, collective behavior change urban intervention, which aims to increase participation of women in urban spaces, reducing gender-based perception of violence.**

Violence is a pervasive problem in metropolitan areas of Brazil. In Brasília, data shows that about 8,000 people per year experience acts of violence against them (robbery, intimidation, harassment). In addition, about 350 women and children are raped every year in the city. Women are specifically targeted and disproportionately suffer the most from the effects of the violence in the streets.

**This project's idea was born out of the renewed attention on gender-based violence due to the pandemic.** In Brasília, in particular, the agencies that handle this issue were overwhelmed as the crisis aggravated.

There are several root-causes for this complex problem, such as the permissive culture of violence against women, and the negligence of authorities in providing better community policing in low-income areas. The angles that this team felt competent to address were the behavioral and the urban planning ones.

Thus, the implementation team was defined. **Coletivo M.O.B. (Collective Movement Occupy your Neighborhood)** is in charge of the articulation with the community and local actors, as well as designing the user-centered park, applying their participatory urbanization expertise, and hiring a local contractor to build it. **EBBI (Evidence-based Behavioral Innovations)** provides behavioral insights to increase people's engagement in activities that reduce crime and violence, contributing to the reduction of gender-based violence through on-site interventions.

At the time of the applications, the two student members of the team were starting an initiative to produce evidence using behavioral science techniques, EBBI. The student leader, in turn, was familiar with the impressive participatory approach of the partner organization MOB in engaging communities with public spaces. The synergy between the two angles became clear.

In this context, *Adopt a Park* emerges as an initiative seeking to build safer community environments and reduce urban gender violence in Brasília, with the strategy of implementing an urban intervention in a quick and compact format. We believe that once a given community space becomes widely used by its members, they will engage in a process of self-surveillance of violent acts.

**In our perspective, peace means to be able to exist as a social being without watching over our shoulders.** Either in public or in private, we envision a long-term peaceful environment where people - especially women and girls - can live their lives without always having safety concerns on the back of their heads, or casually calculating where to walk, or how to make themselves smaller to minimize their chances of being aggressed and having their dignity impacted. We believe peace comes with being able to trust others fully and living without the weight of fearing violence all the time. Thus, we hope to contribute to this vision in the short-term, by eliminating this weight on at least one part of the community environment.

At the initial coordination stage between the two organizations, one of the main challenges emerged. In the beginning of the summer, the pandemic was still at its second wave in Brazil. Therefore, without visibility around in-person meetings, community engagement and construction work, it was hard to envision which kind of deliverables would be possible and when. We assumed the risk, however, and

followed through with the next steps with mitigation strategies in mind.

**The implementation team then selected a list of potential places to implement the project** based on a set of criteria that made the project feasible and acceptable to the communities living in those areas. The initial criteria were places in Brasília with a high population density, but with public spaces poorly used. We approached the communities at the shortlisted places, looking to find a match between the needs of those communities and the proposal we had at hand. The next step was approaching the local governments (Regional Administrations - RAs) and assessing their interest and capacity for support.

That is how we got to **Feira Permanente do Cruzeiro**, a well-known permanent market in Cruzeiro, a prominent district in Brasília. The market has a constant inflow of customers seeking to buy everyday goods. The market also has a cohesive group of vendors, which facilitated the process of making an agreement.

In the process of negotiating with the local administration, **the project - which started uniquely funded by the Davis grant - was able to secure support from the local government branch** as well. It became a collective effort to rethink the collective space in the best way for the community. The government is contributing through two main ways: (i) facilitating the communication with the community and (ii) providing the construction workers that are building the park infrastructure.

We conducted a series of activities to engage the community into the creation of a new, safer space for the market. Through processes of participatory engagement, we involved business and the local community in defining the intervention and its maintenance. Every activity took into account current public health standards.

**There have been two community workshops so far.** The first had the purpose of introducing the project, gathering initial support, and establishing a network of contacts. In the second, we intended to systematically collect inputs on the current use of the space, and the ideal use of the space. It was followed by a survey on the community's perceptions on gender-based violence.

These processes brought about important initial lessons. Despite being next to a busy street, the market had a central square which was not being used by people and represented a potential source of risk for women. **In fact, when we asked the community about potential sources of violence, most of the women agreed that the place was not safe at night, and that it was likely for them to suffer- in the least- some verbal violence when using the park.**

Overall, the main challenge regarding community coordination was ensuring inclusivity. The audience of the workshops and the future users of the public space we are about to create are mostly lower-income people. So we had to be careful to tailor our language, to make all materials accessible and conduct in-person dynamics in ways that allowed everyone to contribute.

Another facet of the inclusivity challenge was a new element that came up during the workshops. Part of the space to receive the intervention is currently used by homeless people. That fact sparks a different set of reactions in the community. So we felt the need to ensure that the project will not harm these people already in a situation of vulnerability, while also acknowledging that our skills do not reach the complexity needed to address this issue. Therefore, in addition to being intentional about an accommodating architecture, we will be in touch with the local head of social workers.

Throughout the project we have been in touch with suppliers, which brought to light a different set of challenges. COVID-19 has deeply impacted infrastructure supply chains. Resources were both more expensive and harder to achieve. This impacted the project's scope - which we had to adapt to a budget that affords less than our initial estimates in January/2021 - and the schedule - since the construction has been affected by material delays. **Our current estimate is that the construction will be finalized in December 2021, but even with a longer timetable, we have set in motion a project that contributes to a more peaceful environment in Brasília.**

Section II: Photographs

