

Project Title: Sports Education for Social Transformation: Proyecto Deportivo FTM Ecuador
Project's Location: Quito, Ecuador
Sponsoring College: Lewis and Clark College
Project Leader: María Laura Andrade Laso, Ecuador, Lewis and Clark College, UWC Costa Rica

Goal Summary: The main goal of this project was to foster spaces and practices through which FTMs had the opportunity to *develop* a deeper understanding of their gender constructions, *engage in* sports as a key part of their affirmative transitions and *share* reflections towards peace-building and social justice.

External Fundraising: Besides the Projects for Peace grant, Lewis & Clark College donated \$2,500 to this project. This funding allowed us to partner with *Asociación de Trabajadoras Sexuales Trans-Quito* and put together a workshop in which trans sex workers reflected on their right to the city and learned strategies to advocate for peaceful coexistence in the face of police brutality, violence and discrimination. A trans youth was invited to participate in this workshop as part of the mentorship component of this project.

How the Project Worked: In 2017, I did an internship with PROYECTO TRVNSGEN3RO and contributed to the initial implementation of "El Programa Deportivo FTM". I witnessed how sports were reclaimed as a tool to foster individual and collective healing as well as an strategy to advocate for trans rights and policy changes. Inspired by this initial experience, I decided to further contribute to the sustainability and innovation of this initiative. The youth involved in this project had expressed that doing sports together became one of their most powerful, dynamic, and meaningful ways to resist discrimination, cultivate healthier bodies and foster a unified community. Therefore, I not only wanted to continue the sports community program, but I also wanted to document their experiences and reflections through an audiovisual product that tells the stories and reflections of the participants.

In my experience working with trans communities, I have learned that trans people are often marginalized and simultaneously pushed to violently conform to the existing gender norms. In this dilemma between exclusion and assimilation, trans people struggle to find spaces where they can thrive, build a sense of community, develop healthy gender identities and reclaim their autonomy. This isolation is exacerbated by the lack of policies to mitigate discriminatory practices. This limits trans people's access to healthcare, education and recreational activities. In response to this issue, our project aimed to promote non-toxic masculinities, empower trans youth, celebrate the beauty of diverse bodies and foster solidarity among peers.

I have a personal connection with feminism, gender justice and trans rights in Ecuador, my home country. To be honest it is hard for me to imagine doing this project elsewhere. I felt I needed to have a connection with a local organization to better understand and identify the needs of the participants. I also wanted to contribute back to my communities. I have developed a strong relationship with PROYECTO TRVNSGEN3RO, and I have experience managing projects along their side. This made the communication with people more effective. I didn't feel I was bringing a project to them, but instead we made sure we were developing the project together and working with flexibility, and cultural sensitivity. This collaborative model allowed me to listen to their priorities and contribute to their mission in ways that felt meaningful even when we had to accommodate and modify the project's initial goals.

One of the biggest challenges was coordinating the project around people's availability, especially when many of the participants were students with full time jobs and economic struggles. For instance, at first the youth were very involved and invested in developing a Hip Hop choreography. However, by the fifth week they started to miss rehearsals and the coach, even though he proved to be extremely supportive, was also struggling to keep them engaged. At the end we were not able to present the choreography at an event as planned, instead we did a photoshoot where the participants explored what they had learned in an artistic way. I think this alternative created a possibility for the future and invited the youth to continue this project. Something important that I learned through this experience is that it is not always possible to synchronize the participants' times with the project's expected timelines. It is necessary to learn to embrace the unexpected and chaotic aspects of project managing. For instance, we had a workshop planned about "childhood and trans rights" but one of the participants had an accident, which required everyone's support in different capacities and we had to reschedule the workshop.

Definition of Peace: For me peace is the ongoing search for justice, human dignity, and freedom. This project has taught me that peace begins in our bodies, skins and sense-of-self. The way we inhabit our bodies and carry ourselves in the world is often conditioned by the violence and exclusion we endure. Peace-building simultaneously gives the opportunity to engage in individual healing and the space to build community, organize and advocate for justice. It was key to think of this project in relation to PROYECTO TRVNSGEN3RO's work and historical contributions to trans rights in Ecuador. Peace is not an isolated event but a continuous effort to contribute to our collective history of resilience. I am confident that this project gave trans youth the opportunity to rethink their relationship with their bodies, skins and identities.

Through sports, dance and community building, the youth were invited to reflect about the multiplicity of ways one can embody and express gender. They also reflected about their role and contribution to trans history in Ecuador. I would like to emphasize that this pedagogical process did not come from gender theory workshops, but from their very lived experience. For example, we organized an intergenerational and intercultural "mañana deportiva" (sports event), which resulted in a powerful encounter between trans youth from Quito and "older" trans masculine folks from Manta, a town located in the Ecuadorian coast. This intercultural exchange engendered a sense of solidarity among participants who saw in each other different expression of masculinity and multiple ways of being trans. This weekend long event ended in a soccer game between the FTM team and the local team composed by trans femmes and gay men.

I think this project gave the youth an artistic venue to tell the story of how they are constantly finding peace through community programs that involve sports, arts, dance and activism. In the long term, I think this experience was not only empowering and pedagogic for the youth but also resulted in an important living document, a video and a publication, that will serve as evidence to continue the struggle for social, legal and political transformation.

At a personal and political level, I believe this project allowed me to experience first hand the challenges and rewards of community based work and project management. The opportunity to engage with vulnerable populations, complex realities and alternative practices has given me a more nuanced perspective of the world. When we talk about ideals, transformation and peace in abstract it is easy to disconnect the discourse from the practical realities. This experience grounded me and allowed me to see that the impact of a project is measured by the collaborative process that shaped it and the communities you connect with. Change does not happen overnight and this project was a invitation for the youth and myself to learn from the history, struggles, and stories of older generations. My project wouldn't have been possible without the work that PROYECTO TRVNSGEN3RO has done in the past two decades. I am grateful I had the opportunity to collaborate with them, and I want to honor and recognize their work and history.

Personal Statement:

"I learn peace-building is more powerful when those affected by violence, injustice and discrimination reclaim their right to engage in political work and social transformation. Yet, I also witnessed how peace and healing happen in the ordinary, in a dance movement, a soccer game, in a gesture of solidarity with our peers."

