



INTERVIEW WITH EDUARDO ROBERTO UHLE, PROGRAMME MANAGER AT SESC, ABOUT GRASSROOTS SPORT DIPLOMACY

IRIS - What is the SESC and why did you decide to get involved in Grassroots sport diplomacy?

EDUARDO UHLE (PROGRAMME MANAGER, SESC): Social Service of Commerce (SESC), is a private organization supported by entrepreneurs in businesses, tourism and services. Inspired by concepts from the Carta da Paz Social (Letter for Social Peace), it aims to provide well-being and quality of life to professionals working in these industries and their family members. SESC's initiatives stem from a solid cultural and educational project that has borne the mark of innovation and social transformation since it was established by the business and services community in 1946.

Throughout its more than 70 years, SESC has been innovating by introducing new models of cultural action and, in the '80s, underscored education as a basic tenet for social transformation. It has been fulfilling its purpose through concentrated efforts in the field of culture and its many forms of expression, reaching audiences that span all age groups and social strata. That means not only offering a wide variety of activities, but also making an effective contribution to more long-lasting and meaningful experiences.

As a grassroots sports organization, we believe the grassroots sports sector grow stronger when their agents (institutions and organizations) are connected and we believe that Grassroots sports diplomacy (GSD) can help us in that matter. We are members of several national and international networks and umbrella organizations, like ISCA. Our initiatives in the international field comprises the coordination of two international campaigns "Challenge Day" and "Semana Move/SemanaMuevela", aiming to stimulate people to add sport and physical activities in their daily life.

Can you describe your pilot action? How did you decide to work on this specific matter and why with Argentina and Uruguay specifically?

The thematic surrounding women participation/practice in sports is getting higher in the agenda. All researches we have access to, shows that women participation in sports is smaller and that girls leave sports practices earlier than men. Since one of Sesc's objectives is to provide sport for all, this issue is something we try to face with our campaigns and programs.



When we thought about this pilot action, the possibility to tackle inequities in sport arose quite fast within the group and many other factors led us to women football.

- First, we recently held a Symposium in São Paulo of the Rede de Pesquisa sobre „futebol e mulher na América Latina” (Research Network on football and women in Latin America) together with Museu do Futebol (Football Museum) that debated women participation in football and how society mobilizes itself to confront some barriers.
- Second, the strong role football plays in South America’s sports culture, and how it is considered men’s territory only. It is a symbol and to change its culture might inspire other changes.
- Third, we considered that 2019 was Women’s World Cup Year, and that this subject could have more visibility and resources throughout the year.

With that in mind, our pilot action was an effort to set up an international network focused on women football. The idea was to try to understand the scenario we have in Brazil, that women have limited access to its practice, and to see if we had the same in our neighboring countries in order to share good practices around women inclusion in football.

Since it was a pilot action with limited resources, our first option was to reach neighboring countries, Argentina and Uruguay.

Our main objectives were:

- To create a network of South American institutions that work with women football;
- To enable the exchange of information among partners and best practices, considering their reality and culture and better understand what challenges they face and what solutions they already have;
- Deepen partners’ understanding on grassroots sport diplomacy;
- Lead partners to discover their potential on doing GSD, to become a GS Diplomate and increase their actions on this matter.

After several attempts over a two-month period, we succeeded in establishing a group of organizations from Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. Our international network started online with 4 institutions: 2 from Uruguay and 1 from Brazil and Argentina. At the same time, we mobilized a group of organizations from the São Paulo region with the same purpose. After 9 months of activities, we did:

- 4 Regional meetings – one every second month
- 3 International Online Meetings – one every second month



- 3 Field trips: to Brazil, to Argentina and to Uruguay
- Closing event – 1 Women Football Fórum in Jundiaí - Brazil

What are the main results?

I think the first thing we could notice is that football in Latin America is strong and dominated by men. There are several barriers to women participation in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Another important aspect is that we have many groups trying to change this situation, fighting for women's right to play in those countries. However, it was curious to notice that none of the international partners knew each other prior to the Grassroots sport diplomacy approach, even those from Uruguay and Argentina, countries that share the same culture and speak the same language.

A strong factor about the network was its diversity, several different organizations, from private clubs, with a pay for play strategy focused on the upper classes to local feminist collectives from underserved areas, blogs websites and a museum, could seat together to debate their issues and share experiences.

While some groups are business oriented and formalized, other groups were struggling to fundraise and keep its activities working on a daily basis. This leads to sharing into different levels, from administration and fundraising to communication and opportunities.

We could also notice similar contexts, even from different countries, created strong connections. Two associations, *La Nuestra* from Buenos Aires and *Perifeminas* from the outskirts of São Paulo, are one example; both projects take place in underserved parts of each city and they could understand each other's difficulties and perspectives better.

Finally, from the Grassroots sport diplomacy perspective, we highlight that field trips and face-to-face meetings with the international partners were important to strengthen our bond and to get to know each other better. One of the partners reported a fear to collaborate with big and strong institutions such as Sesc. She mentioned a fear that one institution could try to impose ideas or solutions over the others, however once we start to work together in a collaborative and horizontal way, she felt confident about the work and the role she had to play in it.

During this 9 months, it is important to highlight what network was able to provide:

- Sports equipment donations between partners;
- Exchange of good practices in communications strategies, share of training methodologies for women;



- Job opportunities for network members;
- New partners for new projects → Love.Fútbol project with Perifeminas; (Love.Fútbol is a NGO that helps communities to build their own field/sports court and it is trying to fundraise to help Perifeminas)
- Creation of a calendar of local women's football activities to articulate and integrate more people inside and outside the network (work in progress); and
- Collaborative work to set up the Forum.

What will be the next steps?

Although the network has only work for 9 months, once we were together at the closing event all partners stated the will to continue it. The sharing and visiting created a sense of belonging and a desire to keep the network and expand it to other states and countries even without GSD funding.

During the meeting, we realized the importance of having a common project, a deliverable, to work together and keep partners involved. This could help us to keep in touch during the year, and to have a schedule of meetings.

If setting up a network does not demand a whole lot of money, with the possibility to use technology in our behalf to meet (skype, googlemeet, gotomeeting and so on), finding resources to help with face-to-face meetings is another thing. We believe these offline moments are needed and strong; therefore, we should either invest or fund raise to have them at least once a month.

So far, we thought about inviting new partners from other countries, such as Chile, to widen our reach and to gather new perspectives.

How can this project inspire other ideas, project, stakeholders?

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We believe that this project goes on that direction, that it could inspire institutions with the same goals to look for partners - close to them and around the world - to share



GRASSROOTS SPORT DIPLOMACY

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experiences, to help and inspire each other. There are many people looking for solutions to tackle inactivity and to empower the grassroots sport sector, let us go out and find them!

