

Cultural Exchange Program for Youth Sport Development: A Case Example of the Japan's Sport Festival "Undokai" in Ecuador

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Abstract

One of Ecuador's problems is the lack of practice of physical activity, sport and recreation. This is producing a sedentary society prone to deterioration of health and quality of life. According to the INEC (National Institute of Statistics and Census, 2017) 68,4% of population does not practice sport. Sport for international development has proved it can contribute for social changes. For this reason, the first author took this problem to apply the knowledge and experience about Japanese culture as part of her domestic internship - 'On the Job Practice (OJP) of the Master Program in Development and Peace through Sports'. The Japanese Sport Festival "Undokai" was carried out in the first author's homeland and with the purpose of contributing to the field of Physical Education (PE) and health's promotion in Ecuador. Additionally, in 2018 Ecuador and Japan celebrated the Centenary of Diplomatic Relations. Thus, it was an opportunity to start this project and connect collaborative organizations of both countries for future events. This report describes how Undokai was adapted to the Ecuadorian culture as a sport cultural exchange event. As a result, the program (Undokai) provided with a new PE method for PE teachers and motivated children to participate in sport activities.

Key words: Sport for development, Cultural exchange, Volunteers training, Youth development, Physical education

1. BACKGROUND

Introduction to Ecuador

The Republic of Ecuador is located in South America. In the north is bordered by Colombia, in the south east Peru and in the west by the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador covers an area of 283,561 km² with a population is of 16.7 million people (2017). A province of Ecuador is the Galapagos Islands. The capital city is Quito and the two official languages are Spanish and Quechua. Before the Inca empire conquered Ecuador's area in the 15th century, there were different indigenous cultures, and in 1534, Spain defeated the Inca armies. The "Republic of the Ecuador" was one of the three countries that emerged after the Gran Colombia in 1830. The other countries were Colombia and Venezuela. During the years 1904 and 1942 Ecuador lost territories in conflicts with its neighbors (Nations Online Project, 2021).

The Problem of Sedentary Lifestyle

A problem in Ecuador is the sedentary life-style due to the habits in the practice of sport and physical activity. Ecuador's sedentary lifestyle is related to the lack of interest in the practice of physical activity, sport and recreation, as a social behaviour or a positive habit. This has resulted in a society with deterioration in the health and quality of life of its citizens.

According to the INEC (National Institute of Statistics and Census, 2017) and a research about the habits and sport practice in Ecuadorian population over 12-years old – only 31.6% of population was found to practice sport. However, 68.4% do not practice any sport. This percentage also includes male and female participation, 47.7% of men practice sport and 52.3% do not. On the other hand, 16.2% of women practice sport while 83.8% do not (Figure 1).

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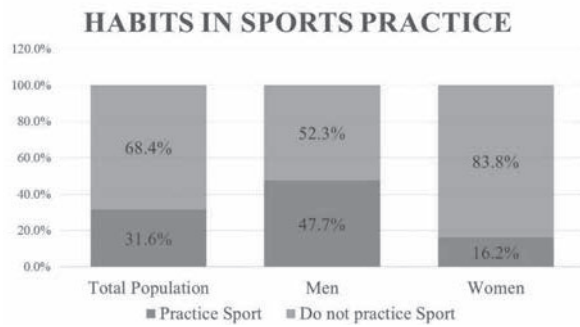


Photo 1. Habits in Sports Practice (by author from: National Institute of Statistics and Census, 2017)

In the Ecuadorian National Plan of Wellbeing (2017) development is connected to the promotion of habits to prevent a sedentary lifestyle including the increase of physical activity. The Goal #1: “To ensure a life of dignity with equal opportunities for all people” and to increase from 12.2% to 14.4%, the percentage of people who practice physical activity.

Japanese Festival “Undokai”

The “Undokai”, Sports Festival, appeared in Japan in the beginning of Meiji Era (1868-1912) (Hirokawa, 1995) The government promoted the practice of Undokai in all the schools public and private to promote physical and mental health. It was an opportunity for students to have fun while joining in series of sports contests. At the same time, it was an opportunity to gather and demonstrate what they have practiced.

During the years 1880, the Undokai followed a model that included:

- Opening ceremony with words of the organizer and especial guests
- Demonstration of gymnastics and sports contests
- Closing ceremony with the evaluation and giving prizes

Undokai was spread as an educative event of schools. Schools that did not have the facilities or ground occupied a space in a shrine or a park. Undokai had an impact in the communities as an event that foster friendship and it was an influence for organizing it in workplaces too. It has been held continuously until now around Japan as an opportunity to participate an integrate citizens even if they are not sports fans (Hirokawa, 1995).

The Undokai is generally held according to: the educative organization (kinder, elementary school, junior

high school, high school, university, etc), the community, workplace, or other group organizations. It is held once a year and in one day. The order varies from the activities on the program. It generally follows this order:

- Opening Ceremony
- Warming Up Exercise (Usually with radio exercise, it is called “Radio Taiso”)
- Sport Contests
- Closure Ceremony

Teams compete in each contest to get points for the group. Each group has a different colour. If there are few participants, the colours are red and white. If the participants increase, different colours are used. There are traditional contests such as the “Tsunahiki” which is the Tug of War and the “Tamaire” a contest to throw balls in a basket on a high pole for a determined time.

The festival “Undokai” is an event for friendship and to train leaders. In schools, it has educative purposes since children participate from the preparation process. It’s an opportunity to show what they have learned. To hold an Undokai, it is not necessary a big budget because the materials used are from the public organizations and some of the materials children make themselves. It does not represent an economic problem for the participants (Hirokawa, 1995).

Japan Vision 2020 (MEXT, 2020) states that successful Olympic Games can be realized under the premise of upgrading Japanese society and its citizens. It mentions “Feel Olympic inspiration, Individual change, social change” (MEXT, 2020) it includes the performance of Japanese Undokai as exhibition and also create an information system to introduce Japanese culture.

Sport for Tomorrow (SFT) have been supporting in the fields of education, human development, overcoming social problems through sports. Holding the Undokai in different countries has been a tool to improve physical capabilities and cultivate cooperation and unity through team sports (SFT, 2016).

As an example, Undokai in Malawi was supported by Japan Sport Council and the Japan Overseas Cooperative Association (JOCA). It provided opportunities to do exercise for children and adults and promoted the Olympic and Paralympic Movement. 1200 children participated and JOCA started a programme for trainers to support Malawi people to hold ongoing Undokai themselves. Undokai by SFT programme was held in 27 countries with about 40,000 people (SFT,2016)

Sport for Development

Sport expansion has demonstrated to have diverse impacts for social development. Laattoe and Keim (2015) state that sport is not only a physical activity but an area where people interact socially, and popular culture attaches positive values to sport like health, fitness, education, creates opportunities, teamwork, contributes to cross cultural dialogue, understanding, etc (Laattoe and Keim,2015)

The use of sport as a tool for international development was formally recognized by the United Nations (2013) to promote health, education, development and peace (United Nations Inter Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2013). It has been applied to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (UNOSDP, 2015). Sport for international development programmes are intended to contribute social issues including social equality, education, health, conflicts prevention, peace building, etc. Therefore, sport is a vehicle to improve social cohesion, provide with life opportunities, and enhance health condition and education.

On the contrary, Darnell (2007) clarified that Sport for Development programmes might be problematic when the aid is provided from the first world to the third world. For this reason, during this programme, we also focused on training local leaders. We gave them important roles to make them oversee the programme activities and lead independently after learning about the programme. We trained P.E. university students and the teachers of the school. Pink and Cameron (2013) mentioned the importance of motivating coaches to attend the programmes since in sport for development, it is important the role that local coaches play in sustaining a SFD programme and providing mentorship to younger participants.

Furthermore, Sport plays an important role in the adaptation to understand a new culture. The benefits of participating in recreation are to promote social inclusion (Donnelly and Coakley, 2002). Laattoe and Keim (2015) mentioned the importance of the direct interaction between participants and communities to understand cultural exchange programmes. Exchange programmes are connected to understand cultural differences and integration. Consequently, a sport cultural event can be used as a tool for fostering social change and youth sport programmes in the educational process.

2. PURPOSE OF THE INTERNSHIP

Due to Ecuador's problem of sedentary lifestyle, the aims of this internship were to provide with an international programme that:

- Connects Ecuador and Japan through Sports.
- Make children work as a team, enjoy and motivate them to do sport.
- Train Ecuadorian Physical Education volunteers and teachers to lead a Sport Event.

To achieve this purpose, Japanese sport event "Undokai" was held after preparation and research by the author in the National Institute of Fitness and Sports in Kanoya, Japan during the first year of the Master's studies. During the spring break, the first author took one month of preparation and training on the field, in Quito, Ecuador. Data from PE volunteer students' reports were collected, and a survey was conducted to children before and after the event.

3. INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE THROUGH "UNDOKAI"

Project Summary

To hold the Undokai, first, it was proposed as organizer's (first author) domestic internship, On the Job Practice (OJP) of the master course of International Development and Peace through Sport from the National Institute of Fitness and Sports (NIFS) in Kanoya and University of Tsukuba. To introduce Japanese culture in a different country, the organizer suggested collaborating with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Ecuador. For this reason, NIFS in Kanoya through Professor Masashi Kawanishi, as supervisor of the internship, contacted the JICA in the Kyushu region. JICA supported the project considering it as part of an internship and contacted JICA in Ecuador. In Ecuador, the COMIL Eloy Alfaro School and the Department of Physical Education at ESPE University were contacted to permit the launch of the Undokai with their students. The COMIL Eloy Alfaro School was the former junior and high school of the authors. The school is connected with ESPE University and additionally, we contacted the Department of Physical Education to collaborate with students Major in PE. Former Professor Ramon Gomez collaborated to contact the Department of Physical Education and the authorities of the COMIL Eloy Alfaro proposing to collaborate as part of OJP.

After receiving the acceptance of the main

organizations, we contact some other organizations like the Embassy of Japan, the Centenary Committee between Ecuador and Japan, etc. Holding the event this year was a good opportunity because in 2018, Ecuador and Japan celebrate the Centenary of the establishment of Diplomatic Relations (Embassy of Japan in Ecuador, 2015). During the year, many events related to Japanese culture were being held in Ecuador to commemorate the Centenary.

After deciding the date of Undokai, there was one month for the preparation. We started training university students (PE) theoretically and practically to learn how to lead the event. In the theoretical lecture, students learned about Sport for Tomorrow (SFT) and Japan's initiative to promote sports and create legacy for the Olympics 2020 (SFT, 2020). Students watched videos of Undokai launched in different countries as part of the SFT program.

The program for this Undokai was in this order: warming up from Radio Taiso, running contest, tug of war, long rope (jump in groups), Tama Ire (throw balls in a basket), Relay finally gymnastics and stretching with an Ecuadorian traditional song.

During the practical lecture, students learned the program of the activities. The warming up "Radio Taiso" was a new activity for them that need personal rehearsal to memorize. For the running contest and relay, students already had experience; therefore, we emphasized the positions to lead children. For the tug of war and long rope, students understood the need to cooperate as a team, to coordinate the strength of the group by counting or using rhythm.

Students enjoyed the training session, and they were ready to join the practice with children in the school. The preparation for the Undokai was considered internship for university students. They follow the calendar of practices and joined to lead children in cooperation with the PE teacher of the school before the event.



Photo 2. Explanation of Undokai to children of COMIL

Additionally, school teachers of 5th grade and all physical education teachers of the COMIL Eloy Alfaro received the same training: theoretical and practical. Undokai is an event from Japanese culture that we hold in Ecuador that was the reason why we decided to demonstrate the leaders by letting them practice it by themselves.



Photo 3. Training for school teachers

We practiced Undokai activities with about 220 children for 3 weeks in each PE lesson of 5th grade students. Material was prepared by university volunteers and children. We held the event after the last day of the 3rd week.



Photo 4. Class of P.E. leading by ESPE volunteers



Photo 5. P.E. Class: Explanation of Tama Ire by ESPE volunteers



Photo 6. P.E. Class: Coordination to jump as a team



Photo 7. P.E. Class: Tug of War lead by volunteers

Children learned and practiced 6 activities and participated in teams with their classmates. We started with the established Japanese-style "Radio Taiso" warming up. Then, there was the running competition, the tug of war, and long rope (jump in groups). The next activity was Tama Ire, an activity to throw the highest number of balls in a high basket. The children and volunteers of ESPE made all the material of this test. Then, we had the relay race. In addition to the children, the volunteers, the teachers, the audience also got the energy, joy and passion of children to give their best effort and compete for the team, which made it a very exciting and fun event. The event finished with a choreography of the dance "A mi lindo Ecuador" created by the ESPE volunteers emphasizing physical stretching movements and using traditional music. Children enjoyed the dance.

4. RESULTS

Beneficiaries

In a period of one month, 220 elementary school children from 5th grade, 15 university students (PE), and about 12 school teachers participated in the programme being trained and learning Undokai event. Volunteer students from the Undergraduate Programme of Physical

Education, Recreation and Sports programme of ESPE University, and teachers of the school were trained to teach children and collaborate during the event's organization.



Photo 8. JICA volunteers in Ecuador and ESPE volunteers

Collaboration with Organizations

We asked for support to the Embassy of Japan in Ecuador for the diffusion of a Japanese cultural event. JICA office collaborated with Japanese volunteers who were residents in Ecuador and validate the project as part of Sport for Tomorrow (To accredit as Sport for Tomorrow programme, the UNDOKAI shall be organized by a member of Sport for Tomorrow Consortium such as Embassy of Japan, NIFS, JICA, JOCV etc.). The organization of the Project oversaw a student of the joint master course in International Development and Peace through Sports from NIFS in Kanoya and Tsukuba University. Additionally, the Japanese School of Quito, and the Centenary Committee supported us lending us material for Undokai and promoting the event.

Data Results

ESPE Volunteers: Physical Education Students' Feedback

During the training 16 students participated and 14 took part in the project. We received 12 reports about the experience from the training, practice and the event of the day. They wrote about their experience, what they learned and how to improve it.

In general, volunteers liked learning from another culture and realized that during international exchanges, there are no limits to have fun, some activities or games from Undokai can be applied with many children at the same time regardless children's physical abilities. Also, they enjoyed teaching experience and learning from mistakes. In particular, we focused on teaching to work

as a team and not to fight with group members. They enjoyed the happiness and passion of children during the Undokai and felt their job was efficient.



Photo 9. ESPE Volunteer leading children

Furthermore, they mentioned they learned the importance of previous preparation for events and the work in team as organizers. They shared suggestions between them and the group of leaders improved, and they felt support between each other. For some of them, this experience and working as a team was a reminder that this is the job they have always wanted.

The experience was not only with students and teachers, while learning about another culture; they acquired new knowledge in their field and strength friendship between their colleagues. They also learned strategies to make events and felt inspired. Plus, they mentioned learning from Japanese culture about organization and training was the key to make an excellent event and avoid unexpected incidents. Students suggest ways to improving the event expanding it with more students, having longer period of preparation and adding more activities and games.

They felt there are some activities that they can apply in their future career and promote sports improving the quality of physical education. Students were interested in continuing Undokai and emphasizing the importance of team work not only for children participants, but also for the organizing team.

Elementary School Students Research Results

Additionally, 216 elementary school students responded a survey about their interest and motivation in practicing physical activity. We collected data pre- and post-event. Both surveys were similar to each other to analyse the impact of Undokai in Ecuadorian children.

In the first question, we asked if children like or not to

do exercise. The number of children that like to practice sports increased from 121 to 172.

Do you like to practice sports?	Before		After	
	n=216	%	n=216	%
Totally Agree	121	56,02	171	79,17
Agree	26	12,04	13	6,02
Neither Agree or Disagree	25	11,57	5	2,31
Disagree	9	4,17	2	0,93
Totally Disagree	17	7,87	14	6,48
No answer	18	8,33	11	5,09

Photo 10. Sport's Attraction

Table2. Sport's Attraction

After Undokai, we wanted to know if children were familiar with the activities or if they were new for them. The majority (54,63%) knew some of Undokai activities.

Did you know Undokai activities?		
activities?	n=216	%
Yes	82	37,96
No	16	7,41
Some of them	118	54,63

Photo 11. Knowledge of Undokai

Table 3. Knowledge of Undokai

Moreover, after the Undokai, children answered that they would like to do more physical activity. We also asked children if they would like to learn new sports or activities. Before the Undokai, 131 children said they

Do you want to learn more activities?	Before		After	
	n=216	%	n=216	%
Totally Agree	131	60,65	166	76,85
Agree	21	9,72	11	5,09
Neither Agree or Disagree	13	6,02	6	2,78
Disagree	8	3,70	3	1,39
Totally Disagree	23	10,65	17	7,87
No answer	20	9,26	13	6,02

Photo 12. Undokai Interest



Photo 13. Collaborators

want to learn and after the event, the number increased to 166. Finally, for most children, the most important fact while doing sport was: have fun, share time with friends, and feel fulfil with themselves.

Project Short Report:

UNDOKAI PROJECT IN ECUADOR

National Institute of Fitness and Sports in Kanoya
 Faculty of Physical Education Research
 International Development and Peace through Sports
 Master Course 1st Year



Photo 14. The first author and the Ambassador of Japan in Ecuador

Tanya Gómez A. (Ecuador)
 Intern JICA [On the Job Practice-Domestic]

As part of my internship in the master program of International Development and Peace through Sports, I launched the Undokai Project in Ecuador. Undokai in Ecuador was done for first time with the purpose of motivating children to be involved in physical activity, have fun and work as a team.

Many organizations supported this project. We trained P.E. university students and school teachers to be able to guide about 220 children for Undokai. We practiced hard during 3 weeks, prepared material and hold Undokai. The goal of this project is to contribute to social development



Photo 15. Undokai: Tama Ire



Photo 16. Undokai: Jumping the rope in teams

improving health condition and the quality of P.E. in schools.

The volunteers, teachers, and the audience also got the energy and passion of children. They were doing their best effort for the team. It was a very exciting and fun event. Ecuadorian P.E. university students learned about Japanese culture and elementary school students were motivated to do Undokai again.



Photo 17. Together Enjoy an Active Life (TEAL)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

During this case, we applied Undokai as a means for social development. The event was a contribution for the quality of Physical Education. University students learned to prepare and hold a sport event as a method that can be applied in their teaching style at Physical Education class.

During this event, we confirmed that the social interaction demonstrates positive values and reactions from the participants. After Undokai, children were motivated to practice physical activities and sports. For Undokai practice, while enjoying the PE class, we promote health habits. Also, by training teachers, we reinforced leadership and provided them with new methods of teaching. It is a step to contribute the quality of PE. Some positive changes were: behaviour, skills, confidence, and teamwork from both participants and organizers.

However, there were some cultural barriers, during the training and preparation of the programme due to the differences in terms of: organization, planning and establishing a schedule. Besides, some teachers were unmotivated to collaborate. Some training activities for them were done after school hours not to interfere with children's schedule. Other teachers did not show interest until the day of the event. For this reason, it was important the way to make participants get involved with different roles in preparation of materials, organization of the event, inviting authorities of the school or the Japanese organizations, etc.

Therefore, the collaboration of Japanese organizations in Ecuador had an important role to make local

organizations collaborate with us. Undokai was an exchange experience to learn a sport method for another culture and applied adapting it to the Ecuadorian culture and it was organized by locals with the support of the Japanese. It was confirmed that cultural tolerance and cultural diversity, contributes to understanding. During this event, we realized the importance of adapting activities, by modifying we recreate Undokai that is adapted to the Ecuadorian culture. Learning habits and customs of other cultures through globalization can be productive for the new generations. It also can give them hope of forging a better future through physical activity, sport and recreation.

Plus, this project is related to Ecuadorian Constitution, in which the enhancement of the quality of life and life expectancy increases the capabilities and potentialities as part of Ecuadorians rights.

Training volunteers that were related to the education field was a way to create community leaders. This step is very important to continue the project with local staff and make it sustainable. Before Undokai, locals did not know about the event but after making it, we can promote next events to find resources demonstrating that as a Physical Education method this event can contribute to the community.

This socio-cultural event it is a tool for social change for the youth. Expanding Undokai as a method for sport for development, the final goal is to make a healthy and active community and visualize the impact of the value of Sports for Development programmes.



Photo 18. First Undokai in Ecuador

Recommendations

It is important to follow a concrete plan with the activity, staff roles and materials to know how to react to unexpected actions to solve previous the day of the event. Also, to inform all the staff involve the roles in the case that someone is absent, if other staff is familiar with the role, they are able to cover the position and responsibility.

To motivate other teachers and interns to participate, it is important to give a role and also invite different organizations to see the program. In this way, the teachers and the interns felt motivated to show what they have learned during the preparation period.

When sharing a culture from a country to another, it is important to adapt the activities according to the environment and the culture.

It's important to continue training local volunteers or interns to lead educational events, it is also a way to create community leaders. Local leaders can learn from overseas sports projects and by being able to do by themselves. A sustainable project might be created through bilateral relations between Ecuador and Japan.

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Author Contribution

T.S. planned the Undokai initiative and in collaboration with V.G designed the study structure. T.G wrote the manuscript and R.R edited the manuscript.

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