



Let's Play Ball. It Beats Being at War: Narratives from Football Teams in Palestine and Israel

Dr. Gal Harmat

- As part of using contact theory for dialogue between conflicting parties, sport is a setting that due to its conflictual nature, can actually serve as a venue for collaboration and cooperation. In the international conflicted arena, sport was used for nationalistic and sometimes chauvinistic purposes by the modern state. It was a way to test power and gain prestige. However, sport also played an important role as a “soft power” to bring together conflicting parties.
- Most of the programs that highlight the use of Sport as a mediator and a connector between the two conflicting societies, takes pride in choosing youth as the key target audience. Youth are thought to be less sophisticated sub-group that is very vulnerable in conflict and hence will benefit greatly from taking part in cross-border sport activities. It also takes advantage of the popularity of sport and its ability to use it to humanize the “other side” through creating a new temporary in-group (the Psychological-process-oriented model). The subset of rules which serve as an equalizer between uneven societies and working together for a common goal makes it almost as an un-facilitated dialogue. Football is the drawcard bringing opposing sides together, creating cross-border friendships and facilitating dialogue encounters that are providing positive exemplars for traversing challenging topics.





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Dr. Gal Harmat. *Professor, Gender and Peace Building Programme,
Department head of Peace and Conflict Studies*

Dr. Gal Harmat holds a PhD in Gender Analysis of Peace Education and Dialogue Encounters from Nitra University (Slovakia) and M.A. in Gender and Peacebuilding from the UN-Mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica. She was a professor in conflict transformation, peace education and gender and Co-Director of the Social Justice and Peace Education Teachers Training Program, Kibbutzim Teachers College in Tel Aviv, Israel. She has also been teaching in the World Peace Academy (University of Basel), the European Peace University (Austria), and the Arts and Social Change College in Israel.

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P.O. BOX 138-6100, San José, Costa Rica
TEL (506) 2205 9000
FAX (506) 2249 1929
WEB www.upeace.org

- The hurdles are not insignificant particularly when you take into account the sizeable, political, cultural, economic and social obstacles as well as safety issues the project runs up against. The backdrop is a climate of fear where average Israelis and Palestinians are full of hatred and street discourse centers on killing and eliminating the 'other'. Military siege and curfews regularly occur in the West Bank where Palestinian children are actively prevented from going to school. Israeli parents and children have to take refuge in bomb shelters in areas under attack. Travel across Israel and the West Bank is very difficult due to the Israeli defence force checkpoints, the separation walls and the necessity of obtaining complicated and bureaucratic military permits. The segregated nature and unequal relationships between Jewish and Palestinian communities in Israel result in few opportunities for Jewish and Palestinian youth and children to encounter each other's opinions or have the possibility for personal and social interaction that do not reinforce existing negative stereotypes. A situation exacerbated by the Israeli Ministry of Education which decided ten years ago to stop all projects that invited and promoted dialogue between the two sides (although a few small independent projects survived). Most peace organizations have stopped their activities too. Add to this the fact that parents do not consider football a sport you invest in for girls because of gender-based prejudices and you begin to wonder how the project exists at all.
- Nonetheless and despite the myriad of complicating factors the sport and peace education program currently involves 2000 Israeli and Palestinian children, 1/3 of whom are female, who regularly come together to play sport, learn and spend time together. Football is the tool that is building bridges between children from enemy sides and the remainder of this paper will speak to the research conducted by this author between 2008-2016 that highlights the project itself, research outcomes and the success factors enabling this tool to be developed into a more sustained program of gender empowerment and peacebuilding.

Dialogue Encounters

Over the last 35 years' dialogue encounters between Palestinians and Israelis have sought to foster understanding and promote coexistence, peace and sometimes justice in Palestinian and Jewish societies. By creating a space for dialogue, different peace organizations deemed it would be possible to offer an alternative to 'the outside reality'. Dialogue encounters draw from many different theories and models and can include narrative, contact, critical and task-oriented practices or indeed a mixture of all in their varied approaches to peace education.

Dialogue encounter groups between Jews and Palestinians in Israel is a broadly inclusive description for a wide variety of activities that are jointly attended by members of two communities. They can be different types of encounters ranging from 90 minutes with pre-schoolers from Palestinian and Jewish kindergartens playing together to a two-year programme of periodical meetings for youth that includes an intensive 3-day joint seminar away from home.

In the research I conducted with the Peres Peace Centre between 2008 and 2016 I examined a task-oriented model for dialogue encounters and the effect joint sports activities - notably football - have in breaking down ethnic stereotypes. The task-oriented model is grounded in the assumption that enemy groups who are co-operating to jointly solve tasks, develop cooperation mechanisms and reach an understanding between participants of both groups. This model of peace education promotes dialogue encounters that create commonalities as they are based on common goals and objectives that lead to the creation of common ideas, shared conclusions and joint solutions by the participants. The assertion is that these commonalities created by solving tasks can be duplicated and applied to other tasks such as peacebuilding. The joint task and feelings of shared accomplishment as people and not as enemies, it is argued, ignite the process of crumbling stereotypes.

The main objective of the task-oriented model is to base dialogue on an actual need by looking for a peaceful solution and solving a problem. In the research I conducted on the dialogue encounters in Israel and Palestine over the last ten years at the Peres Peace Center, football is an outlet through which youth, children and parents meet a need. This need is for fun and leisure in a war-torn landscape that offers few other options. Finding a source of happiness for the children and youth in addition to recognising that accomplishing a task together as human beings and not as enemies,

is likely to result in understanding and tolerance, are two intertwined outcomes of the sports and peace project voiced by Rashida, a 19-year old female Palestinian participant from Jericho.

“Football is my hobby. I have been playing for 7 years now in the various projects of the Peres center. In the first year I didn’t want to play with the Jews and now, after I went abroad with them, I like playing with them a lot. I don’t feel like I play with Jewish girls, from the people who occupy us. I feel that I play with my friends.”

The Peace -Football Project

The project involves 2000 Palestinian and Israeli children, 1000 of whom are girls, who regularly come together to play football, learn and spend time together. Even those who come from areas under fire meet up and play sport.

Many of those involved in running the programme are volunteers who recognise that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be solved overnight and are thus on board for the long-term. Many experience pressure from their communities who harbour ingrained prejudices and denounce fellow Palestinians involved in the project as ‘normalizers’ ie those seen as collaborating with the enemy to normalize a system of injustice, or their fellow Israelis, as traitors. They persevere regardless due to their commitment to the children and to creating a different reality.

Joint football activity is organised around events that include bi-weekly practices, training and games as well as mini world cup events and other bi-lateral encounters that involve trips abroad as well as visits to cultural places of interest. The coaches are well-trained, invest considerable personal time in the children and youth and have a great deal of affection for them. They also have a strong connection with their fellow coaches across conflict lines. Many are deeply committed to changing the views of parents and the community about the peace process and a simple sign like children running around on a football field wearing peace t-shirts is a healthy indicator of gradual progress since it is more than anyone else is providing in Israel or Palestine at the moment.

Other key figures in the project are the female managers or escorts who largely donate their time, co-ordinate the program and are the liaison point between the project, the coaches, parents, families and communities. Their role also serves to promote social change both from a female empowerment perspective and in the facilitation of cross-border acquaintances.

The project is subsidized which acts as a powerful incentive for parents who would not otherwise choose a sport for their girls to play, particularly a sport considered 'manly'.

A further activity offered as part of the project is language tuition in Arabic and Hebrew as communication is largely verbal and the children want to be able to converse and learn with and from one another.

The Research and Key Themes

The research took place at the Peres Center for Peace in Israel between 2008 and 2016. The Peres Center for Peace is the largest NGO in Israel and is generally held in high regard due to its work and sphere of influence. It has its critics of course. Progressives say that it does not do enough to challenge issues of structural violence. Palestinians criticise its work stating that it is getting Palestinians to accept the occupation by normalizing the situation in the name of peace. Israelis says the center is a vehicle for generating party voters for the Left. Nonetheless it has more legitimacy in the eyes of various actors such as municipalities, rights holders, community organizers than any other peace organisation in Israel.

The research was conducted to assess how lessons learned in the twinned sports and peace project may be utilised by other organisations and to determine how the existing offering might be improved in the future. In addition to describe and examine how girls and young women from diverse background can build peace through sport in general and what conciser a masculine sport- Football in particular. The instruments used were interviews, focus groups, discussions and experiential learning exercises for youth. It involved 200 girls, 100 parents, 20 local partners of the Peres Center for Peace and the community of Israeli and Palestinian football coaches.

Four themes were qualitatively raised by the interviewees. The first was the gender component of the project and its significance. The coaches, parents, project co-ordinators and the girls talked in the main about gender, female empowerment and subsequently about peace-related aspects.

The second theme raised by all interviewees and especially pointed out by the Palestinian beneficiaries of the program (those both living in Palestine and Israel) was the ability to be acquainted with the "other" and form cross-border friendships with girls from the other culture who share similar experiences with regard to girls and sport in general and football in particular.

The third theme was the subsidization of the girls' football project by the Peres Center for Peace. This proved to be a major contributor to the success and effectiveness of the project and the implementation of its goals.

The fourth theme was the contribution of the female co-ordinators, their drive, motivation and role-modelling.

The Outcomes of the Football Project

These were many and varied and in the interests of brevity it is not possible to cover all of them in this paper. However several of the more significant examples of gender and peace education outcomes are detailed below.

When looking at the gender component of the project and its significance the combination of allowing the girls to experience a sport which lacks social acceptability for females; the additional extras like trips abroad, the equipment and sponsored gear; the role-modelling of the team co-ordinators; the opportunity to meet other girls through the shared football experience and create cross-border friendships, provides a compelling formula of mutually reinforcing wins.

Through playing football girls make themselves stronger physically and emotionally. The hard work needed to acquire the skills, as most have no prior experience with football, and the visibility of the project allow them to build their self-esteem and confidence. Trainers state over and over again the eagerness of the girls to face and surmount the obstacles, play the best they can, and play as well as the boys. One mother I interviewed said that she stopped her daughters' swimming lessons so they could go to football because they liked the game and enjoyed it so much. Her daughters will not miss a practice and they change family schedules to accommodate it. As Rawaan, the Ein-Rafa (a Palestinian Arab Village in Israel) co-coordinator whose work with parents and the community was instrumental in making it possible for the girls to experience football, commented, girls recognise over time that they can play football and verse the boys without any feelings of inferiority despite the boys' more advanced training.

Football also enables them to face their families and society's objections. Latifa, a 14-year old girl from Ein Rafa (a Palestinian Arab Village in Israel) said, "My father told me that it is not a game for girls with Hijab but I came and I played and I saw that it is something good and beautiful." Other religious girls went further to state that even in their village they were looked at in a strange way having chosen to wear Hijab and play football, and that being involved in the project and accepted for who they are, gave them the power to handle the social pressure.

The sports equipment, clothes and shoes they receive as participants of the project make them feel pampered and respected and assists with the way they perceive themselves as serious players. The gifts also have an effect on how they are perceived by family, friends and their community as families as a general rule do not invest money in sports equipment or sporting activities for females. In addition the opportunities to go abroad and spend time away from their hometowns and participate in bi-lateral encounters with the other side, have a strengthening and liberating effect on them. The role model of women who play sport, study and travel overseas is highly meaningful to them.

In addition the role-modelling of the older girls who have played in the project for several years and choose now to be the co-ordinators and managers, give the younger ones legitimacy to be different kinds of girls. During their bi-weekly practices the girls also meet older girls from Jericho who are now football trainers or the girls from Sde Yoav (a Jewish Israel village) and Ein Rafa (a Palestinian Arab Village in Israel) who play in the professional league and voluntarily assist with the girls' training and camps. The younger girls talk about the older girls saying, "I would like to be like her." The older girls say that volunteering in the project empowers them to be a link in the chain between girl footballers and women footballers and allows them to be community role models working to legitimize girls' sports and autonomy, and girls' football in particular. The negative stereotypes of females who play football disintegrate as the young girls see there are many roles they can choose from whether as a professional footballer, a religious footballer, an adult woman who still loves and plays football or a coach. They recognise, they do not have to give up on their femininity, religious beliefs or their dreams. As Zinat, an 8-year old from Jericho says:

"I have always wanted to play football but before I didn't play because I had no place to play. The boys play on the street and I didn't have a place or someone to play with. Playing football is my dream. The project has fulfilled my dream."

The opportunities to meet other girls through the shared football experience is seen as a conduit for opening up the space to talk, make friends and dismantle fear. Fear and stereotypes are particular concerns for the Jewish girls. As one Jewish participant from Sde Yoav recalls, "The game made us friends. At the beginning we were afraid, we worried about our bags and we didn't want the Arab girls to touch our things. The summer camp and playing together helped us to overcome our fear." The Palestinian girls in general said that playing football makes them feel strong and equal to the Jewish girls. A 14-year old participant from Jericho (A Palestinian city),

Dina, said, "I feel that I have learnt a lot during this year about the other people, the other culture, and that you can play with the other side. There is no difference between me and the Jewish girls."

When looking at the peace education outcomes of the project the role of the trainer is extremely important as there is a strong correlation between the attitudes and enthusiasm of the trainers towards activities that dismantle stereotypes and promote peacebuilding, and the attitudes and enthusiasm of the girl participants.

During one joint activity to a mosque, for example, trainers who entered the place of worship, demonstrated curiosity and respect and engaged with the Imam, were a source of encouragement for the girls to ask questions and participate. Afterwards all shared that the visit was an interesting process of learning both intellectually and emotionally. For the Jewish girls it was the first time to enter a mosque and their experience listening to the Imam was meaningful.

The trainers from Kiryat Gat (Jewish Israeli city) stayed outside of the mosque and the majority of their players stayed with them. Some of the trainers said the girls did not want to enter the mosque as they felt, it would desecrate their religion and that it is forbidden by Judaism in general. The girls for their part said they were not told they would be visiting a mosque and it came as a surprise as they were not prepared, a little scared and unsure what to do as they had not had the opportunity to discuss the visit with their parents beforehand.

In contrast to the Kiryat Gat (Jewish Israeli city) trainers all other participating groups were well-prepared and the outcome among the girls was positive. While playing football much later, they connected the call of the Muezzin they had heard during the game to their learning at the mosque and during their Arabic language class participated fully and asked questions about the topic.

For the Kiryat Gat girls their stereotypes remained in place and were even reinforced after the trip with them expressing the view that their religion is culturally superior to Islam. The reflection they offered about the trip was that Muslims do not have a mall in their village. Had they taken an active part in the mosque, listened to the Imam and had on hand a significant adult (trainer or co-ordinator) more open to dismantling stereotypes, they would probably have had a more meaningful experience.

Communication between the groups of girls is another vital tool of peace education. In their case it is mainly verbal and they report that they have

stopped being afraid (mainly Jews) and feel equal (mainly Palestinians) through talking, conversing informally and becoming friends. The language classes offered in both Arabic and Hebrew help them to introduce themselves and present small group activities in the 'other language'. Although this is difficult, it is extremely meaningful as they learn to rely on one another in mixed groups and the activities create a platform for dialogue and discussion about their lives, culture and politics.

It is notable that whenever trainers ask the girls to share their names and share something about themselves, or in groups where the project co-ordinators add a peace education activity, the girls link the sporting activity to peacebuilding and the creation of dialogue. In the one group where the trainer was more sports-oriented and did not include a peace activity (even bypassing introductions because he felt the time needed to be used for football) the girls did not mix or interact during and after the game and remained in their uni-national groups.

Perhaps one of the most insightful outcomes that intertwines the dual aspects of gender empowerment and peace education lies in the statement offered by Israelis and Palestinians alike, whether trainers, co-ordinators, parents or participants – namely that the project serves as a mind opener. The girls encounter 'the other' and learn about 'the enemy' while being able to humanize them. In addition their exposure to knowledge of the wider world and different ways of living and being help them face and confront negative stereotyping which is liberating.

The Success Factors of the Football Project- lessons leaned

What makes it work? There are several factors that make the project Peace Football projects successful including the project's professional working model, the subsidization, the joint activities, events and trips, word of mouth and other mechanisms that attract new participants and discourage dropouts, the project's Facebook site as a communication tool, the role of the female co-ordinators and the girls as social change agents.

The combination and distribution of work between the mostly male trainers and the female managers or escorts who function as co-ordinators, works extremely efficiently and results in a smooth and smartly-run operation. Palestinians have the requisite permits to enter Israel, the buses arrive on time for the games, water and food is ready for the youth to consume, the fields are groomed and able to be played on, the schedule runs as planned and training practices are professional, relevant and appropriate.

Parallels can be drawn to the working model used by professional teams where each has a trainer and manager with divided responsibilities. In the case of the Football Project the trainer is responsible for working with the girls on all physical and mental aspects related to football, making sure the practices suit their ability level and that the degree of difficulty proceeds in line with the advancement in the girls' skills and physicality. In a complementary manner the manager deals with personal issues, provides a comforting presence if they need advice, a hug, help to tie a shoelace or fix a ponytail, assistance with social pressures and some strategies on how best to tackle them. The managers are also the link between the Peace Center, the parents and community, help with the visibility of the project and work to legitimize girls' football in general. They describe their work as a mission, talk about the satisfaction they get from a position that attracts no salary and do not make it a condition of continuing. They welcome the chance to participate in gender social change for the girls as much as for their families and society.

Joint activities, trips and events

These have been mentioned elsewhere in the paper but it is worth emphasizing that all the participants, parents, trainers and managers feel they provide a strong incentive for existing participants to continue with the project and new ones to join. These encounters build one big team of girls who interact socially and through sport and create space for safe and constructive dialogue. The most meaningful identity characteristic of the participants during these events, activities and trips is that of a football player - not of an Arab or a Jew.

Subsidization

Paying small amount of money- 500 shekels (US\$133) for the whole year and being able to get sports equipment and participate in the trips, encounters and weekly trainings is another powerful incentive for the parents to support the girls in their choice to play football. All the parents interviewed echoed the sentiment expressed by this mother, "Even now, when she's really happy about it ... I still don't think I would pay for my daughter to go to a football class. But as it only costs 500 shekels a year we will for sure continue with it". Or this mother, "I would not invest the real amount necessary for the trainings for a sport like football for my daughter."

Word of mouth

The positive experience the participants and parents share with their friends about the new sport, the encounters and the benefits means others get to hear about the project and interest spreads. Ma'ha, a 14-year old from Ein Rafa (a Palestinian Arab Village in Israel) sums this up well:

“All my friends were shocked that I started to play football. Now my friends want to join next year – because of the game, because of the trips, and because of all the stories about all the new friends from Israel and Palestine.”

These types of positive interactions have led to an increase in numbers across all the teams and a growing pool of new recruits who wish to join next year. In Jericho there is a waiting list which if funds were available, would result in two additional teams. In Ein Carem (a Jewish twob in Israel) 2 groups will open next year. Another important element that plays a large role in the visibility of the project is the work of the managers who are active in their communities raising and strengthening its profile, staying in constant contact with the parents and motivating the girls to reach their potential.

Facebook

The use of the project's Facebook page as a communication tool allows the girls to create a stronger personal connection with the players from all the teams whom they wish to become socially acquainted with alongside being their sporting buddies. This strongly articulated need of the girls to build a social network that acts as a support network is seen as critical as the lack of informal settings in which to meet and the insufficient time available at bi-weekly practices do not provide the space to develop this. Their verbal communication and friendships can however continue and grow through their Facebook posts enabling them to talk, share and learn more about one another so as to better support one another. As mentioned earlier these types of interactions also help with humanising 'the other', dispelling fear dismantling stereotypes and building bridges between their societies.

In addition to encouraging stronger connections between players, the project's Facebook site also enables the girls' teams, particularly in the south region in Israel where activities are interrupted due to missiles, to create stronger connections with the trainers. In the interviews they stated they are more comfortable conversing with the trainers in writing about their concerns, questions and thoughts than having face-to-face conversations. This was reinforced by the trainers who use the project's Facebook page as an effective communication tool to discourage drop-outs.

Drop-outs among females which usually occur when participants reach adulthood can also be contained due to the continuity and social acceptance offered by connecting the project to the women's league and women in sport in general. The various links in the chain which connect girl footballers to women footballers are demonstrated in the different roles modelled by females involved with the project. These women highlight the ways in which the younger girls can emulate them, how the sport can broaden their options as they grow up so they see a future in football beyond their youth which provides the motivation to continue.

The Role of the Female Co-ordinators

The meaningful work that the female co-ordinators do has already been pointed out but four in particular stand out, namely Amira, Moran, Rashida and Rawaan. They all function as effective role models for empowered femininity and social change agents with their passion, zest and drive for empowering women through sport, and promoting and modelling cross-border friendships. In the case of Moran and Rawaan, their fortitude and commitment as unpaid helpers and volunteers, counsel, stewards and guardians who free the trainers to focus on the professional side of football while they provide a safe space, reassurance and support to the parents, children and youth, helps legitimize the project and they get tremendous satisfaction from this. In Jericho, Rashida and Amira who are both graduates of the project, hold the dual role of trainer and co-ordinator. Their motivation, strength and desire to enable a different reality further emphasise their role as social change agents for the girls, their families and society. They are extremely charismatic and active in breaking down stereotypes among their teams saying that Jewish girls are "like us, not all Jews are soldiers" and that girls can do as well as boys and even better. Their personality and the example they set incorporate the strongest elements of peace education and women's empowerment in Jericho.

The Girls as Social Change Agents

The girls' process of empowerment makes them agents of change in their communities and it is one of the main and most impressive achievements of the project. Together with their empowerment they develop leadership skills. Football assists very much with the way they perceive themselves as serious players and successful sportswomen. It ignites in them a strong and independent personality. This effects the way they are perceived by others particularly friends, their families and communities.

All of the girls feel like they are pioneers, opening the way for others in their communities, not just as footballers but as a bridge between their society and the other society. In this way they also function as social change agents as they insist with their families and friends that the other side is "just like us – girls, nice and good and cute". Many report changes they have instigated amongst family and friends with respect to co-operation with the other side.

This social and familial acceptance which is built by the girls as much as by the project's structure and management leads to the legitimization of the project, girls' football and of encountering the other side. This is of particular note considering the current trend of conceiving such encounters as normalization in both societies.

Suggested Enhancements to Strengthen and Expand the Project

The project as a whole serves a meaningful and important purpose and achieves its goals admirably whether at the level of girls and women's empowerment, girls' sports, peace education, participants as change agents in their societies, or creating larger social change.

Several recommendations arising from the research have been put forward for consideration as part of next year's project plans to help strengthen and expand the programme in the years that follow:

1. A positive step towards creating a powerful environment for achieving the project's goals would be to formally recognise the professional working model of a trainer and a manager. In addition the formal and financial recognition of the roles of the female coordinators as managers would lend the importance of their work the gravitas it deserves and be an appropriate gesture supportive of women's empowerment. Even though they are prepared to do the work for free, a financial contribution for the job they do is a symbolically powerful way of positioning the idea in their minds that they are more than volunteers and helpers. Extending invitations to participate in staff meetings and training on both gender and peace education would serve to reinforce this.
2. The girls hunger to play more football, as they cannot join the games that boys play in schoolyards and on the streets, could be satisfied with supplementing a third weekly meeting in next year's schedule dedicated solely to experiential learning ie playing the game. All the players expressed interest in playing more football either in their

local team, with other teams in the project, or even against the boys' teams. This might be achieved by arranging joint trainings and games between additional groups and teams or extending the time allocated for playing at the joint encounters.

3. The need for experience on grass fields rather than cement is another recommendation raised by the interviewees. Cement is not forgiving and therefore trainers do not teach certain aspects of the game for fear of creating injuries. Moreover the older girls play on grass fields and thus the younger girls come unprepared when they join the youth league. As this is largely a question of budget next year's agenda might include opportunities for the joint encounters to include practice sessions oriented towards playing on a grass field.
4. A common desire exists to have more time for social activities and teambuilding to strengthen friendships beyond the practices, joint events and the project's Facebook page. The girls in particular want to establish and deepen the connections with their friends on the other side as much as they want to build a social network of girl footballers, a safe network against social pressure and a space to share similar experiences related to the specific needs of girls. Next year's schedule might look to accommodate more social activities unrelated to football.
5. The trainers voice a need similar to that of the girls. They too wish to deepen existing connections between other trainers and themselves, both personally and professionally. They would appreciate the opportunity to be able to share knowledge about effective training methods for girls and not feel isolated in their decision-making and analysis of what girls need. They would like the joint training of trainers to be strengthened by emphasizing more knowledge sharing and for more time to be allotted to getting to know one another better. As the girls interact with many strong women in the project adding a gender component to these training of trainer sessions may help the trainers think about gender in a more reflective manner and conceptualize it in the context of women's empowerment which would directly benefit the girls in their empowerment process.
6. Strengthening the peace education component of the bi-lateral encounters is a further recommendation that would add weight to the project. With the organization of these bi-lateral events the perfect conditions exist for dialogue. Perhaps there is now room to

consider adding more structured features to the dialogue encounters that invite time for reflection by players before, during and after each encounter even if this only occurs in their national groups. How for example was it to converse with the other side, to be friends with them? These reflections can function as prevention and resolution mechanisms for conflicts that might arise periodically from informal dialogue already taking place.

7. To try and prevent girls dropping out of the project between the ages of 14-16 a three-pronged focus is suggested by the interviewees. Firstly establish a base for the girls to meet and develop into adult role models alongside being adult female footballers and other successful sportswomen. Secondly brand the project as an elite, top quality program that offers the best equipment, facilities and benefits. Thirdly allocate resources in a way that more meaningfully integrates parents into the project as they critically influence the future choices that girls make.

Conclusion

On all levels – peace education, girls' empowerment, creating a safe space for dialogue encounters and providing a unique model of women's sports, the twinned sports and peace project offers optimal conditions for creating effective communication between Jews and Palestinians. This opens the door for the project to serve as a mind opener liberating the trainers, coordinators, parents and participants of their stereotypes as they learn to humanize 'the enemy' and forge cross-border friendships.

As to the project's portability to other contexts this project amply demonstrates a strong correlation between girls' empowerment, sports and the peace education process. It certainly gets strong endorsement from Latifa and Ma'ha, 14-year olds from Ein Rifa, "We hope the project will last forever and that the whole world will know about it and how are are building peace with our ball."