Warriors Without Weapons: How Learning Moves Trans-locally

Aerin M. Dunford
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How Learning Moves Trans-locally

“Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.”
– Victor Hugo

Sixty youth from sixteen countries stand in a river in Southeast Brazil slapping their hands on the water, chanting, “HE-áh-na-na-na, HE-áh-na-na-na, HE-áh-nah-nah-HE!” In a fraccionamiento (housing subdivision) outside Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico, anarchist activists work side-by-side with elderly housewives to build an altar for the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the neighborhood of Shivaji Nagar, India, a group of local children and youth from far-flung Indian provinces belt out songs as they clear rubbish to create space for an earthen bench. University students across Brazil send messages via Twitter to organize the delivery of a hundred square meters of grass to Santa Catarina, a region devastated by flooding. In Toronto, participants in a nationwide youth conference pile on top of one another in a cooperative version of musical chairs.

These scenes appear entirely unrelated on the surface. Each one occurs in a unique setting; places with distinct histories, cultures, characters and contexts. Yet something profound and synergistic underlies these moments: Warriors Without Weapons and the Oasis Game.

Warriors Without Weapons is a program dreamt up by four young architects who shared a vision to use their training and skills to build a better world. Elos Institute founders Edgard Gouveia Júnior, Rodrigo Rubido Alonso, Mariana Gauche-Motta and Natasha Mendes Gabriel co-created this ingenious youth program
that combines indigenous ways of knowing, a unique methodology for rethinking community engagement, transformative group processes and a hands-on construction project. For one month, 20 to 60 youth immerse themselves in the daily lives of a local community, oftentimes slums, ghettos or marginalized migrant neighborhoods. Participants work hand-in-hand with the community to plan, design and build something tangible like a park, cultural center, daycare or playground. The methodology is based on the belief that every community is rich with resources that, when recognized, encourage self-reliance and build confidence. By sharing stories of the community’s history, exploring their gifts and their potential and dreaming together, people begin to reimagine what’s possible, starting with what they already have.

The Oasis Game is a 2-4 day event that invites a community to come together to identify a shared dream, co-create a plan to bring that dream to life and cooperatively realize it with a spirit of joy and playfulness. The goal is to awaken a creative, cooperative spirit in community members, strengthening relationships and cultivating a sense of opportunity and responsibility to take care of their neighborhood and each other.

The Story
From the beginning, the innovators of Warriors Without Weapons envisioned it spreading like wildfire. In 1999 Elos Institute facilitated the first program for Latin American architecture students in Brazil. They thought that the following year participants from another country would run Warriors Without Weapons on their own. They all believed it was possible. The conditions seemed favorable: an established network of students, small groups of former participants in the same geographic areas, support and encouragement from the founders and strong relationships forged via the shared transformative experience of the program. They were motivated, inspired and committed.

However, when the year 2000 rolled around, the Warriors of South America responded saying they wanted to co-facilitate the program before attempting it at home. So Elos created the second edition. It became clear to program founders that they held implicit knowledge about the process that they had never before shared. The former Warriors wanted to know how to work as a team, talk with people in the community, fundraise and host cooperative games. There was so much to learn. During the early years, Elos noticed that how the program was facilitated and

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designed was as important as the outcome. They begin to realize that play, trust and openness to chaos were all key ingredients of the program’s magic. Plans were laid for Warriors Without Weapons Paraguay and Argentina, but the first few sparks didn’t ignite the great blaze they had hoped for. At the last minute, the organizing teams in both places decided to cancel.

In the end, Warriors Without Weapons was hosted in Argentina (2005) and Paraguay (2006). The young organizers were ambitious. They tried to create something spectacular, yet distinct from what they had experienced in Brazil. They worked very hard, talking with many “experts” in psychology, sociology and community development to learn about how to improve the program. They made changes to the design so that it would fit into the culture of their places and decided to work with significantly smaller groups. For the participants the experience was incredible. They loved it. But some facilitators were disappointed, feeling that their versions lacked the magic of the Brazilian original. Still no wildfire.

In 2007 the Hemingway Foundation, a family philanthropy that supports innovative initiatives, teamed up with The Berkana Institute to fund the participation of 6 youth and 5 members of the Berkana Exchange (a trans-local learning community focused on healthy and resilient communities) in the third edition of Warriors Without Weapons. They came from Pakistan, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Canada, Mexico and the U.S. The explicit objective of this collaboration was to catalyze the spread of the program. As a result, members of the Berkana Exchange in Oaxaca hosted a full Warriors Without Weapons program in 2008 and Oasis Games took place in India (2009, 2010, 2011) South Africa (2011) and Zimbabwe (2011).

The collaboration between Elos, Berkana and Hemingway was just one of several partnerships and experiments that has initiated the trans-local movement of Warriors Without Weapons and the Oasis Game. Elos formed strong relationships with organizations in Europe where several Oasis Games have now been hosted. The Game has also been played in Shanghai, Guinea Bissau, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, the U.S., over 40 sites in Brazil, and in 3 communities in Kenya. In 2011 alone there were over 90 Oasis Games.

We notice from the example of the Oasis Game that this kind of learning may take some time at first but, like a wildfire, once it catches on, momentum grows quickly.

**Trans-local Learning**

The many manifestations of Warriors Without Weapons and the

Oasis Game in communities around the world provide insight into a concept that The Berkana Institute has called trans-local learning. Deborah Frieze and Margaret Wheatley describe this idea in *Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now:

What if people working at the local level were able to learn from one another, practice together and share their knowledge—freely and fluidly—with communities anywhere? This is the nature of trans-local learning, and it happens when separate, local efforts connect with each other, then grow and transform into active communities of practice that together give rise to new systems at greater levels of scale. (p. 29)

An illuminating metaphor for this trans-local idea is offered by one of the largest living organism on earth: a grove of aspen trees. Though each tree stands alone and no two are the same, all of these seemingly distinct manifestations are actually one being, connected through an intricate root system. The quality of the soil and the amount of sunlight and water—in other words, the local conditions in the specific place each sapling emerges—affect the size, shape and nature of each particular tree. But at an essential level, they are all one.

**Getting to Essence**

Before learning can spread trans-locally in a meaningful way, it helps to identify that which cannot be adapted. What’s at the core of the idea, program or practice? What is its essence? Figuring out how to identify essence is central to our inquiry around how learning moves trans-locally. Naming, describing and sharing this essence grounds the concept in a way that then allows it to be adapted according to the local conditions without diluting its transformative potential. Aspects of the Elos methodology and design offer cornerstones that can be built upon in unique ways as the program and worldview move to new places.

Following Warriors Without Weapons 2007, community leaders, program participants, funders, members of the Berkana Exchange and the entire Elos staff came together to think about how this program might spread. We identified several characteristics of the program’s essence. Some of these were design elements like the 5-stage process (perception, information, reflection, proposition, action), and multifaceted challenges that require creativity and cooperation amongst the Warriors. Others were key values: cultivating connections to spirit and nature and genuine community engagement and participation. Others were activities like collective play and the physical transformation in the community.
We’ve seen instances where Warriors Without Weapons has been attempted with an alteration or omission of one of these elements and it has changed the nature of the experience. In Argentina and Paraguay, facilitators tended toward softening the challenges due to fears that frustration would overwhelm the Warriors or that hosts would not be prepared to deal with major crises. Elos noticed that without the intensity of complex challenges the program loses some of its magic. These tasks are the stepping-stones that create the conditions for success in the final challenge of transforming a physical space alongside the community.

In seeking to define essence we have come to realize that often what is common in all of these experiences may be more of a feeling than a tangible list of characteristics. Those who have hosted Oasis Games in their own cities and towns name a quality of passion, energy and celebration linking experiences across place. They speak of communities ignited by collective action for the good of all and seeking out the points of light, the beauty present in each and every individual and place, no matter how different or downtrodden they might appear.

As the Oasis Game has spread to more than 15 countries, facilitators often reflect that the process has a basis in universal values that are part of our human nature. The essence of these experiences is about awakening and manifesting dreams—not just individual dreams but collectively constructed community dreams. While this felt experience is not easy to communicate via a manual or guide, it is vital that we try to describe these subtle qualities as a way of preserving the program’s power and potential.

Open Flows of Learning
The trans-local approach works best when the learning also comes back home. As an idea, program or methodology leaves the safety of its own place, venturing out into the world to be molded, adapted and put into practice, there must be a way to gather learning from the far flung corners of the world and apply it back in the place where it was developed. This way, the concept continues to improve over time as it is enriched with an incredible diversity of worldviews, creativity and practical applications. The essence is polished and refined as the learning continues to flow back to the point of origin.

Warriors Without Weapons and the Oasis Game in Brazil have changed in many ways over the years. The various iterations of these programs around the world have led their creators to improve the methodology and polish the essence. For instance, Elos learned that while it’s critical to include complex challenges in the program, withholding information detracts from participants’ ability to learn. This was especially true during the 2007 Warriors program, when the facilitation team refrained from giving participants all the information that they held about
available resources. Elos believed that this would push the participants to be even more creative in their responses. In the end, it led to conflicts and resentment between facilitators and participants.

The Warriors Without Weapons selection process in Brazil has been refined over the course of 12 years. Instead of only accepting architectural students or solely focusing on geographic diversity, Elos now seeks out impassioned, entrepreneurial youth that are ready to catalyze change in their community now. They’ve made the application process (an incredible virtual game) more challenging and more specific. At the end of the program, partly as a result of learnings from Oaxaca, Elos now incorporates space for analysis into Warriors Without Weapons. The month used to close with the completion of the construction project. They now include nearly a week of reflection, giving Warriors the chance to assimilate what they have learned and identify next steps for when they return home.

It’s fascinating to witness how learning in one place accumulates and combines with experiences and lessons from other contexts. When Edgard co-hosted the Oasis Game with Vishal in India, team members noticed the way his hosting and use of process had been influenced by Warriors Without Weapons Oaxaca and involvement with the Berkana Exchange. His language had become much more powerful and precise. The beauty of the trans-local concept is that there really is no limit to the ways learning and inspiration can move, morph, combined and expand.

Adapting to Local Realities

Once clear on essence, we need to understand how a process, program or idea can be adapted to fit local realities. Stories from Warriors Without Weapons Oaxaca and Oasis Games around the world illuminate modifications that have helped these programs succeed in new contexts. We also learn from friends in Pakistan and Canada that have never hosted a program, but have woven aspects of the methodology into their work or considered how they might need to adapt the program to their place.

In 2007 Melissa was a Warrior in Brazil. She said, “As soon as I made the decision to go, I knew I was committing to host the program in Mexico in the best way possible.” The political context in Oaxaca in the wake of the 2006 people’s movement was a significant motivator for bringing the program north. Though the uprising was a powerful example of community self-organization, the brutal repression of the movement meant that most people were only focused on fighting the current political regime. Melissa went to Brazil with the hope of finding more creative and positive alternatives to protests and marches. She said, “The conditions in Oaxaca
The Berkana Institute

seemed perfectly ripe for the program at this time as people were looking for and open to new ways of working and struggling.”

As Melissa journeyed the Warrior’s path, she realized that there was a missing element in her experience: an in-depth analysis of the social, cultural and political context. Without this, she thought, the program would never fly in Mexico. Current political and social realities were more than just the backdrop; they played a principle role. The design of the Oaxaca program contained more critical analysis, including not only a theoretical basis for reflection, but also hands-on training in constructive practices (like natural building and community media). These kinds of workshops grounded the experience firmly in place and offered the Warriors useful tools when it came time to take action.

There were some surprises in the process, too. From the beginning, organizers thought there was no way people in Oaxaca would join in the circular dances that are a big part of the group building process in Brazil. But Edgard persuaded the team to give it a try. Everyone was shocked when they saw the leaders of large NGO’s and government officials dancing in circles in the abandoned lot in the neighborhood where the Warriors gathered daily.

Adapting to Culture
Local culture, social norms and traditions have all been taken into account as these methodologies have been molded to fit different contexts. Understanding how people think and approach challenges and what draws them together makes adapting the program easier.

India
During an Oasis Game in India, Vishal found community members to be more shy and reticent to come out and work together than in partner communities in Brazil. He learned that people normally only come together if something negative or traumatic is happening. The caste system and great diversity within neighborhoods can often create barriers to collaboration and communal work. These subtleties can be hard for outsiders to see and understand. Vishal said, “The community actually contains three or four smaller communities within it, and they don’t talk to each other.” He was worried by this, but also excited. Little by little, adults started sharing some of their things with children from other parts of the community, and in this way offered their resources to the building process. In Shivaji Nagar children created the bridge, so organizers created plenty of space for kids to participate.

Pakistan
Ali from Pakistan explained that it takes time to figure out how to adapt an activity to a given cultural context: “It’s the delicacy of trans-local things,” he said. “What you can
think of doing quite easily in Brazil may be very challenging for us here in Pakistan. How do we think about adapting something to create the desired effect but using a different process?” In Brazil, physical affection is merely a part of daily life; complete strangers of the opposite gender may greet each other with a kiss or a hug. But in Pakistan, in many cases it is socially unacceptable for men and women to touch, make eye contact or participate in some of the same activities. The same can be true in India where they modified the physical contact included in many Oasis Game activities, using dynamics like local games and songs instead. They still had the same unifying impact, but were more culturally appropriate making it easier for both men and women to participate.

The Netherlands
Organizers of the first Oasis Game in The Netherlands were initially overwhelmed by the challenge of adapting the methodology to this radically different context. While the physical conditions of the neighborhood they partnered with were better than those in Brazil, the community was deeply divided. The Oasis Game ended up being a mechanism for building bridges between the sub-communities of Dutch residents and Moroccan, Afghani, Surinamese and Turkish immigrants. Each of these groups were well established in the place, yet mostly isolated from one another by prejudice. Organizers sought out specific people in the neighborhood and invited them to offer their gifts during the game. Rodrigo invited a Dutch housewife who had a way with plants to be in charge of the herb garden project. It happened that the garden was in the backyard of the local mosque. Suddenly religious leaders at the mosque (who had also been invited in by organizers) and this woman had a reason to connect in a way that they never had before.
Mexico
The facilitation team in Oaxaca customized Warriors Without Weapons to include local governance techniques like the *assemblea* and *cargo* systems, as well as key principles of communal life like the *tequio* (collective work) and *fiesta*. These elements blended beautifully with the original design of the program, while helping the community understand and be more involved in the Warriors’ process. It also grounded the experience in place, allowing participants already familiar with the worldview of indigenous communities in Southern Mexico a chance to deepen their understanding.

Resourcing
Facilitation teams have made their own decisions about how to resource the programs. Elos relies on a diversity of funding sources: gifts from individual donors, foundations, federal and local governments and national corporations. And they offer prospective Warriors creative ways of raising the money to cover expenses like crowdfunding or airline mile campaigns. Strategic alliances have been the key to widespread impact, visibility and financial sustainability for Elos.

In Mexico the social context and a deep mistrust of local and national governments made the Warriors Without Weapons organizers decide to reject funding from corporations or the government. Financial support was only received from local businesses, individual donations and grants. This decision was made as a way of maintaining autonomy and demonstrating to the community that Warriors Without Weapons implied true partnership without a hidden political or corporate agenda. Another economic factor in Oaxaca was that no applicant was turned away for lack of financial resources. Only a couple of participants paid the full tuition. Unfortunately, this meant that the program generated significant debt and led to conflict within the local team. The lesson was that while it’s vital to make decisions aligned with values, it’s also important to be realistic about a program’s real costs.

In other places, like India, where physical and building resources are scarce they encouraged the use of natural building materials with compacted earth and mud. A guideline during the Oasis Game in Shivaji Nagar was that all resources (human and material) needed to come from within the community. Because a local NGO had been working there, a charity mindset had begun to take hold. It was critical to organizers that the residents of that neighborhood not see the Oasis Game as a handout.

Conditions for Trans-Local Learning
By engaging in ongoing conversation with Elos founders and program hosts in other places like Vishal and Melissa, we have identified some key conditions that have made it more or less likely for Warriors Without Weapons or the Oasis Game to manifest in a particular place. The section that follows illuminates these conditions, as well as names potential barriers to the trans-local movement of a program of this kind. These are not meant as a prescriptive list for future organizers, but rather to highlight a few issues to take into consideration when engaging in trans-local learning experiments.

Strong Relationships
Trans-local learning often moves more fluidly within networks of friends. Deep trust and healthy relationships create a strong container in which risks can be taken, failures welcomed as learning experiences, and honest, heartfelt feedback flows from place to place. Building deep, meaningful relationship is not only vital in our trans-local collaborations across geographic distance, but also within organizing teams. Hosting these types of processes requires more than hard work and dedication; it is a labor of love, calling for mental, physical and emotional engagement. As Vishal said, “The Elos team just looks at...”
one another and they know what to do. They have worked together for so long and have gone through so many good and bad times that they sense in the air what is coming, and each one knows what to do.” Deep intimacy, openness and vulnerability are necessary qualities in a facilitation team.

**Presence of Innovators**

Melissa was the only member of the Oaxaca facilitation team to participate in the program in Brazil. Even though she meticulously planned out the process, she felt it essential that someone from Elos co-facilitate in Mexico. We know that depending on the presence of a founder is not a sustainable model for trans-local learning. Little by little, Elos is learning how to share the Warriors Without Weapons philosophy via written materials and online spaces. They are also building capacity in the Warriors before, during and after the program so that they are equipped with more skills to host on their own.

**Community of Practice vs. Network**

Facilitators in Mexico were first inspired by the idea of Warriors Without Weapons when they became involved with the Berkana Exchange in 2005. As a result of connections with Berkana and Elos, the Oaxacan team received support in multiple ways from organizations like the Hemingway Foundation. The process of collaboration and relationship building within a community of practice created the fertile ground in which the seed of Warriors Without Weapons Oaxaca was planted. Perhaps in contrast, teams in Argentina and Paraguay were part of a network of other students with support from Elos and other Warriors.¹ This may not have been a sufficiently strong support system for the young pioneers of the program in South America to succeed in the same way.

**Community Ties**

Authentic, transparent connections with partner communities are a key element of these programs. Elos builds these relationships in various ways: sometimes they are invited in, other times they connect first with impassioned community champions and in certain cases they started building relationships

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¹ For more on this distinction see Lifecycle of Emergence: Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale by Deborah Frieze and Margaret Wheatley.
with a specific program in mind. In Oaxaca, Colonia Diamante was integrated into the planning process from the very beginning as a way of mitigating negative impacts typically associated with community intervention and of creating the conditions for ongoing collaboration afterwards. An ideal community partner demonstrates a need or a dream and an openness to receive a group of foreigners that will work side-by-side with them.

Barriers to Trans-Local Learning

Bureaucratic Challenges
Concerns often arise about institutional red tape that might prevent this methodology from working in more bureaucratized countries. One Canadian participant mentioned that in her country direct action is often blocked or co-opted in order to protect private interests. “You couldn’t just take an abandoned building and do something with it. You would have the police there immediately if you even tried to paint a building,” she said. Given that the idea is to work emergently in cooperation with a community to design a project that will meet a local need, there is no way to know beforehand what will be built.

Organizers of the first Oasis in Amsterdam were suspicious that this kind of bureaucracy might be a barrier. They thought about the complexities of coordinating with institutions like the city council, housing department and local water company. What they found was that engaging governmental officials and other local power brokers early in the planning process gave them freedom to make alterations to public spaces. Government representatives actually loved the idea and had been searching for a way to facilitate similar processes.

Impeding Political and Social Conditions
Political, social and economic conditions in many contexts around the world are so volatile that programs of this type are extremely difficult, even dangerous, to implement. This was particularly true in Balochistan, Pakistan where nearly any intervention or action taken by non-governmental organizations is highly politicized and seen as a threat to the existing political infrastructure. Ali explained, “Even talking about these issues creates polarization. The division is so blatant that you really cannot raise your voice… Even now, doing a small version of Warriors Without Weapons would be absolutely impossible here. If you dilute the program, it loses the power. If you do it full force, you risk exposing yourself.”

Zimbabwe faced similar instability in 2008, when the country was confronted with incomprehensible inflation, severe food shortages, election violence and a cholera outbreak. The majority of the population was living in survival mode, making it impossible to even consider an Oasis Game. Three years later, conditions had improved a bit. More than fifteen young leaders from Southern Africa had participated in Warriors Without Weapons in Brazil. Organizations and initiatives in the region had a strong network and deepening relationships with rural communities. And in 2011 more than 30 people from the region and beyond came together to play the Oasis Game alongside the community of Rusape.
Insights on Trans-local Learning

So what does this story tell us about how learning moves trans-locally?

Cultivating a “learning stance” is essential. Instead of asking what’s “right” or “wrong,” inquire into what might be learned each step of the way. In a trans-local community, that learning is of enormous benefit to people. An experiment of this nature is a collaborative, “open source” endeavor in which everyone is invited to contribute and to build on the creations of others. The important part is that everyone involved—individuals, organizations, innovators and early adapters alike—remain open to receiving and integrating new information, even if it disrupts or challenges business-as-usual way of thinking and working.

Those who wish to learn and grow in this way are invited to offer their gifts freely. There can be no patents, no copyrights. Without freedom and trust, trans-local learning is impossible. It can be challenging to release openly into the world something that you have invested so much time and energy into creating, refining and applying. Elos compared Warriors Without Weapons to a child, their child. And they were somewhat concerned when the time came for the baby to grow up and leave home.

People have very real fears that their program or idea will be misused or changed too radically. This is why the work of getting clear on essence is so important. We need to feel confident that the gifts we offer will come back to us in greater abundance. We need to trust that when we send our knowledge out into the world, it will grow much more than if we had held onto it tightly and continued applying it in the same way day after day. In a trans-local community based on friendship, rich learning always comes back to its source.

This way of working creates space for, even welcomes, so-called failures. We recognize that finding success stories of trans-local learning are not necessarily our only goal. Eventually, we will face immense challenges and conflicts as we step into this new way of engaging. It is critical that we avoid sweeping these difficult, complex situations under the rug of tidy, inspiring successes.

This kind of learning may be messy, organic and emergent. It doesn’t fit neatly into the mechanistic, causal mindset of efficiency and verifiable results. Planning or strategizing with traditional methods doesn’t produce the same outcomes. It is impossible to understand all of the factors that make a community or individual “ready” to engage in
a process of this nature. The best we can do is create the conditions for knowledge to move from place to place in this way. We reflect on what has worked, where there has been energy and flow, what obstacles we have encountered and how we have dealt with them. And we continue experimenting, sharing ideas, prototyping, facilitating and coming together to reflect again.

Patience is crucial. It takes time for the conditions to be cultivated and for the right people to be invited in or find each other. In the case of Warriors Without Weapons and the Oasis Game, those who have had exposure to the idea need to carefully consider how and why they would adapt it to their place. The journey a community takes to determine whether or not to call one of these programs may be at least as significant as actually running the program. Essence may not even be expressed in the same way. How can we come to truly know and understand essence (more than intellectually) so that it can be clearly expressed in a community far from the place it was conceived?

Looking Ahead

New versions of Warriors Without Weapons and the Oasis Game are now manifesting around the world. The idea, methodology and design of these programs are like mighty little seeds. Sometimes the seed might need to germinate for a long while or require specific nutrients to sprout in a new place. Within the network of former participants, facilitators, organizations and communities supporting and experimenting with these methodologies there is an understanding of our interconnectedness. We recognize one another. In the trans-local learning framework, we trust that even though there may be many diverse manifestations of an idea, we are part of a common movement. It is clear that the many Oasis Games appearing around the world are also connected to larger cultural and systemic changes happening at this time. The trans-local approach may be one way that brilliant ideas can scale across geographic distance and difference, amplifying these transformational shifts in perspective.

One of the most exciting aspects of these communities is that they are open for all to join and participate in! If you are interested in learning more about Warriors Without Weapons or connecting with the network of former participants you can visit the website or Facebook page. For more information about Elós’ methodology visit their website, follow them on Twitter (@Instituto_Elos) or email them (guerreiros@institutoelos.org). To learn about Oasis Games that might be happening next in your area check out Oasis Mundi, a social networking platform.

Photo by Carolina Kowarik.
MEET THE PLAYERS

Rodrigo Alonso
Santos, Brazil
Rodrigo is a co-founder of Instituto Elos. He graduated from the College of Architecture and Urbanism at The Catholic University of Santos. Rodrigo is a social entrepreneur and musician who connects people in powerful, collaborative endeavors. He was also a key steward of the trans-local learning community, the Berkana Exchange; and co-founded Elos Institute Foundation in the Netherlands in 2010.

Edgard Gouveia
Santos, Brazil
Edgard is a dreamer, entrepreneur and inspiration to many. Together with classmates from Architecture and Urbanism College in Santos, he founded Elos Institute. He holds a post-graduate degree in Cooperative Games and was an Ashoka Fellow in 2006. Edgard believes that by learning to work collaboratively we can overcome unimaginable challenges. In 2012 he kicked off "Play The Call," a global game that strives to engage 2 billion people in transformative action through the power of play.

Mariana Motta
Santos, Brazil
Mariana is the behind-the-scenes genius of Elos Institute. One of the organization’s founders, she is responsible in large part of the operational and administrative activities that make programs like Warriors Without Weapons and the Oasis Game successful. Mariana studied Architecture and Urbanism in Santos. She participated in Berkana Exchange gatherings in Mexico and Greece.

Melissa Mena
Oaxaca, Mexico
Melissa was a partner and collaborator with Universidad de la Tierra when Elos first introduced Warriors Without Weapons to the Berkana Exchange community. In 2007 she participated in the program in Brazil. The next year, she and a close group of friends from Unitierra and CACITA (Autonomous Center for and Appropriate Technology) hosted the first full Warriors Without Weapons program outside South America. Melissa is also an accomplished chef and community organizer.

Vishal Singh
Udaipur, India
Vishal is an involved and committed collaborator at Shikshantar: The People’s Institute for Rethinking Education and Development in Udaipur, India. He is a deeply creative and inspiring individual who loves to upcycle trash into beautiful, useful and durable items. Vishal learned about Warriors Without Weapons via the Berkana Exchange network in India and attended the program in 2009. Since then he has co-organized at least 4 Oasis Games in India. He continues to search out new uses for the methodology wherever he goes.

Ali Naviq
Quetta, Pakistan
Ali co-founded the Institute for Development Studies: Pakistan (IDSP) in Quetta, Pakistan. He attended the last week of the 2007 Warriors Without Weapons program in Brazil helped explore the trans-local movement of the program afterwards. These experiences and Elos’ methodology have impacted the way IDSP operates on a day-to-day basis. Ali speaks about his experience in Brazil as a transformative time for himself and the young people from Pakistan who participated in the program.
Aerin M. Dunford is a writer, upcycling artist, urban farmer and yoga instructor. She works with the initiative Walk Out Walk On, a community of people around the world that are walking out of intractable problems and destructive individualism and walking on to create their own future now. Aerin is also a member of the Board of Directors of The Berkana Institute, a non-profit organization based in the U.S. that collaborates with a rich diversity of people around the world. Aerin has a master’s degree in Organizational Management with a focus on leadership and change. Since moving to Mexico in 2009 she has been working with organizations, networks and individuals to facilitate dialogue and create the conditions for authentic collaboration and participative leadership.

www.berkana.org