

# Facilitate Social Change through Theatre

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## Rio De Janeiro & Florianópolis, Brazil

The Federative Republic of Brazil (Portuguese: *República Federativa do Brasil*), is the largest country in both South America and Latin America. Brazil is the world's 6<sup>th</sup> most populous country, with over 208 million people, and the world's largest coffee producer by country.

For my GIS project, I visited Rio De Janeiro, home of gorgeous beaches and Christ the Redeemer statue, as well as Florianópolis, the capital of southern Brazil's Santa Catarina state



## Turbulent Times

My visit to Brazil coincided with a few events that caught local and international attention. A trucker's strike led the country's economy into a halt. A third of itinerary was cancelled and replaced with alternative activities because buses couldn't get gas. In almost every restaurant in Rio, more menu items became unavailable as food supply posed an increasing challenge as days went by.

While I was in Rio, one of the city's most touristy areas, the Sugarloaf mountain, was shut down for a brief period of time as the police engaged in a shootout near the military base in the area. My group and I were evacuated from our location which was ten minutes walking from where the crossfire happened. Six people were killed in that incident.

## About This Project

From May 21 to June 12, 2018, I travelled with Professor Ashley Lucas from School of Music, Theatre, and Dance and a group of her to Brazil where I observed and/or participated in:

- Theater and dance classes taught by faculty at Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro and Santa Catarina State University.
- Theater workshop in women's correctional facility in Rio de Janeiro
- Theater workshops organized for elderly and youth living in favelas in Rio
- Weekly singing and theater groups at local hospital (O Hospital Como Universo Scenico) in Rio
- Performances and post-show discussions of plays around racism, sexuality, domestic violence, and other social justice related issues.



## Community Partners

Most of my community and academic experiences were arranged by faculty members from Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro and Santa Catarina State University. Both institutions have established theatre programming with local correctional institutions and community groups.

## Outcomes

Through this project, I learned about various ways theater was used to facilitate social change in community and performative settings. I gained a deeper understanding in the different theater workshop facilitation styles between the programs in Brazil and at University of Michigan's Prison Creative Arts Project where I work and facilitate theater and music workshops.

## Skills Utilized/Developed

**“Listening”**: receiving and integrating information from multiple sources in addition to verbal input (e.g. body language, gesture, etc.)

**Engagement**: working through language barriers to foster relationships with community members

**Documentation**: Retain and record information in ways that are respectful, ethical, and non-intrusive.

## Classroom Connections

Prior to this project, I took Interpersonal Practice with Groups. The simulations and discussions in that class prepared me navigate group dynamics as I enter communities for temporary periods of time and try to facilitate productive workshops in my realm of expertise – theatre!



## Lessons Learned

Through this trip, I expanded my toolkit of theatre activities. I learned to engage different sensory and somatic inputs when designing exercises that are tailored towards enhancing communication.

One group of performers I met with demonstrated co-directing: a process where no cast members were assigned leading roles such as director or playwright. The idea was to maximize incorporation of everyone's unique input. I was pleasantly surprised to witness and learn how the rehearsal process of theatre can be used as a form of democratic practice.

## Career Connections

This trip inspired me to explore different roles I can play in communities as I further my practice as a theater workshop facilitator and a social worker. I was deeply inspired by the way theater served as a platform for practicing democracy, and I intend to create spaces for communities to manifest autonomy through theater.



## Advice

Visa, visa, visa. Have all the information you need about visa requirements, processes, etc., especially for transit visas and “digitized” visa applications.

Stay flexible and curious at all times. Although my plans were interrupted by unpredictable events, being adaptable and creative allowed me to be exposed to aspects of the community that I otherwise would've missed.

## Acknowledgments

I'm grateful for the School of Social Work Office of Global Activities, Center for World Performance Studies, International Institute, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and my friends who helped me through my distressed flight situations for making this trip possible.

A piece of my heart stayed in Brazil, with my friends who show up every day with passion, joy, and dedication to bringing hope and care to their communities through theatre.