

## Playing peace in the classroom: How simulations train students to comprehend the world

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As a professor of international relations, I always look for active learning tools which make students understand that war and peace are daily problems for every single person in this world. Since International Relations and Peace studies are practical knowledge, serving policy-makers, citizens and communities, here I share my experience and the positive results I have collected over the last years, together with my students, who are – and will always be – my first source of inspiration.

In my course on Global Civil Society, which is part of the [MA programme on Global Politics and Euro-mediterranean Relations \(GLOPEM\)](#), at the [University of Catania](#), I have developed Games of Peace (GoP), a simulation which is providing an increasing level of satisfaction to me and a unique opportunity to learn by doing (and by having fun) to my students.

GoP is a face-to-face, theory driven, role-play simulation which involves students in the management and resolution of a conflict and provides them with opportunities to practice and improve their negotiation and relational skills.

The preparation of sessions requires a preliminary work, the building up of an initial scenario, the assignment of specific roles to students, the formulation of detailed instructions and the organization of negotiation dynamics. Being constructed around real and intractable conflicts (like Syria, Donbass, Afghanistan, Darfur), the final and desirable outcome is a sustainable peace plan, based on power-sharing agreement and responses to side effects, like refugees management, human rights and minorities protection. Last semester, in Catania, a group of 20 bright and smart students of Global Civil Society has been asked to manage the Syrian war.

Working in groups, students had to depart from the current situation in the country, analyze the territorial divisions, the relations among different actors and prepare their own policy strategy accordingly. Next to local actors (the 'official' government led by Assad and the Kurdish opposition), external relevant actors (Russia and Turkey) tried to influence the crisis, on the basis of their own interests, whereas the hegemonic power (the US) dominated the overall situation, using a 'Trumpian' approach. The hard task to identify a common framework for discussion was given to the United Nations representatives.



During the first informal session, the groups interacted a lot, made use of 'secret diplomacy' and tried to identify a convenient agreement with the UN, while Russia maintained an unemotional approach, Turkey was always offended, Kurds ignored and the US unexpectedly accommodating. In the second session, a peace conference, chaired by the UN Secretary General, was long, troubled and debated. The final agreement, signed by everyone, stopped violence and started decommissioning, although did not provide independence to Kurds. The usual complain is that time is very limited, however, the final debriefing session revealed that students enjoyed experiencing different views, applying theories to real problems and being pushed to interact, convince, negotiate. In a nutshell, a good experience, which enhanced students' skills, abilities and knowledge and upgraded my teaching style. This is something I suggest to peace instructors and that, perhaps, could educate a generation of future leaders.