Simulating conflict resolution dynamics and fostering negotiation skills

Daniela Irrera*

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the use of simulations as an active learning tool and explores their suitability in International Relations (IR) studies, involving different student populations. Previous negotiation experiences are used to describe Game of Peace, a negotiation model, developed by the author, for encompassing students in taking on the role of several factions involved in a civil war. By assessing students' feedbacks, it is here sustained that simulations are extremely functional to IR courses, in improving learning abilities, encouraging skills and relational capacities, and in bringing theories and concepts to real life. The article consists of three parts. Firstly, the most recent literature on simulations is assessed in order to reflect on the suitability of simulations; secondly, the Game of Peace experience is presented in its major steps, roles and interactional features. Lastly, its main outcomes are used for assessing its pedagogical impact and envisaging further research.

Keywords: simulation, conflict, peace, negotiation, skills.

La simulación de la dinámica de resolución de conflictos y la promoción de habilidades de negociación

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza el uso de simulaciones como una herramienta de aprendizaje activo y explora su idoneidad en los estudios de Relaciones Internacionales (RR. II.), que involucran a diferentes poblaciones de estudiantes. Las ex-

* PhD in International Relations. Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania (Italy). [dirrera@unict.it]; [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1572-2922].

Recibido: 3 de enero de 2020 / Modificado: 8 de abril de 2020 / Aceptado: 5 de mayo de 2020

Para citar este artículo:

Irrera, D. (2021). Simulating conflict resolution dynamics and fostering negotiation skills. *OASIS*, 33, pp. 13-28.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n33.03

periencias de negociación anteriores se utilizan para describir *Game of Peace*, un modelo de negociación, desarrollado por el autor, para abarcar a los estudiantes en el papel de varias facciones involucradas en una guerra civil. Al evaluar los comentarios de los estudiantes, aquí se sostiene que las simulaciones son extremadamente funcionales para los cursos de RR. II., para mejorar las habilidades de aprendizaje, fomentar las habilidades y capacidades relacionales, y para llevar las teorías y conceptos a la vida real. El artículo consta de tres partes. En primer lugar, se evalúa la literatura más reciente sobre simulaciones para reflexionar sobre la idoneidad de las simulaciones; en segundo lugar, la experiencia del *Game of Peace* se presenta en sus principales pasos, roles y características de interacción. Por último, sus principales resultados se utilizan para evaluar su impacto pedagógico y prever más investigaciones.

Palabras clave: simulación, conflicto, paz, negociación, habilidades.

The article focuses on the use of simulations as an active learning tool to be used in the classroom with BA and MA students. *Game of Peace* is a model, based on conflict resolution, diplomacy and negotiation, which I have developed primarily for students enrolled in my own courses of International Relations and Global Civil Society at the University of Catania. Having used simulations also in other academic contexts and applied them to different student populations, it is possible to affirm that this is a model which can be easily used by all students of International Studies. It is particularly aimed at helping students take on the role of several factions involved in a civil war, or of the international mediator who has intervened to try to bring peace and stability to a country torn by a civil conflict.

Assessing the results of several simulation experiences, the article aims at investigating the potential benefits for stimulating students' curiosity and commitment; improving learning abilities and encouraging skills and relational capacities. The article intends to contribute to the ongoing debate on the relevance and pedagogical added value of active learning tools, by offering results of a simulation model shaped on different student populations and assessing the specific impact of such tools on their learning of International Relations theories and concepts. It is here maintained that even a 'traditional' simulation, based on role playing and not necessarily requiring technological resources, can reach a high level of sophistication and enhance students' learning and comprehension.

The article consists of three parts. Firstly, the suitability of simulations is analysed through the lens of the most relevant literature in order to understand the state of the art. Secondly, the *Game of Peace* experience is presented in its major steps, roles and interactional features. Thirdly and finally, students' perception and survey results are used for evaluating its pedagogical impact and envisaging further research.

THE USE OF SIMULATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COURSES

In the political science field, the need to stimulate and enhance students' learning has produced a greater interest towards active learning

tools. Games, movies, role play, interactive models and simulations have been extensively analysed because of their potential pedagogical impact and their capacity to increase knowledge, on the basis of a 'learn-by-doing' approach (Ayahn, 2019; Asal, Miller & Willis, 2020).

Simulations have been used by academics in political science courses and research for several decades, and they no longer represent an innovation. It has been observed that this strategic tool can be essential for testing theories, verifying procedures and assessing the validity of potential scenarios and outcomes. Additionally, simulations have been particularly useful to explain decision-making processes in different policy fields. Their predictive potential is used, for example, to identify and evaluate diverse policy outcomes and strategies. In this sense, they have been utilised for developing policy prescriptions and shaping research impact on policy-makers' preferences and needs. At the same time, simulations have also been considered as educational tools to help students to test their knowledge and understand real-world environments (Lantis, Kuzma, & Boehrer, 2000; Raines 2003; Klabbers, 2009).

In the International Relations (IR) field, war gaming has dominated for years. Originating from the close relationship between foreign policy analysts and the military communities and from the consideration that political analyses were serving strategic plans, simulations have been the most commonly used tool to train military officers to understand which tactics and decisions were more efficient in the battlefield and to develop successful battle plans. Therefore, most IR scholars agree on the fact that the introduction of simulations in the IR discipline has benefited greatly from the dominance of war gaming, particularly, after World War II. Among them, some continue to be sceptical towards the potential impact of active learning approaches and maintain that traditional lectures, debates and case studies analysis are more effective in making students learn basic concepts. In their view, what is perceived as active is rather a waste of resources for students, and time for instructors (Raines, 2003, p. 432).

Despite these opinions, over the past 50 years, students of International Relations have found simulations particularly useful to understand the mechanisms of the international system, and to make decision-making theory more vivid by applying it to the solution of actual global problems (Newmann & Twigg, 2000; Shellman and Turan, 2006). More recently, the use of simulations specifically shaped on IR scenarios and theories for teaching purposes has rapidly expanded, bringing even more sophisticated models and games, designed on historical periods, case studies, past and ongoing conflicts, and involving the use of computer, social media and various other technological instruments (Lantis, 1998; McIntosh, 2001; Stoven 2005; Tessman, 2007; Rothman, 2012).

Whatever techniques, purposes and structures they involve, simulations are considered extremely relevant for various reasons. At least three factors make them useful in teaching. Firstly, simulations have a pedagogic impact, albeit a debated one, mainly due to the roles students are asked to play. Many simulations used for decades in political science have been based on role-playing, as the easiest way

to involve people and make them to delve deeper into the interactive setting. On the one hand, as Raymond and Sorensen argue, although roles constitute a feasible technique, they may bring a host of potential problems. For example, interactions can produce frustration, depression, and anger among participants; emphasise differences in capacities and learning; oversimplify issues and potential responses (Raymond and Sorensen, 2008). On the other, roles enhance personal abilities and skills, allowing students to work in teams, to test knowledge and to build strategies and planned actions in a collective way. This is usually beneficial to provide reciprocal awareness and motivation (Cusimano, 2000). As Bridge and Radford argue, students are assessed on the quality of their participation, and not just because of their involvement. Thus, since they effectively model an essential part of the discipline, traditional role-playing will always be part of the IR (Bridge and Radford, 2014). As Asal points out, there is an urgent need to deepen a real pedagogic meaning in the use of simulations. He argues that: *'Content-focused simulations emphasize the amount of information the student needs to absorb about the background scenario or case while process-focused simulations emphasize and require more student effort in the process of interaction.'* (Asal, 2005, p. 362).

Faced with an increasing number and typologies of simulations and games, each of them reported, described and assessed in the literature, instructors may be cautious or somewhat confused. The adoption of a specific model, and the consequent variety of outcomes it may bring, should be shaped on students' preparation, level of understanding and capacities. An accessible pedagogy for use of IR theory simulations can assist (Asal, 2005). Secondly, simulations can help with better learning of IR theories, which are not always easy to apply to the real world. In order to involve students in the application of decision-making processes to current problems, simulations need to replicate the most important aspects and actors of the international system. Therefore, theories are essential in the preparation of scenarios, the distribution of roles and the provision of instructions. As has been observed, this makes the divergencies in the theoretical approaches more evident, basically between the realist and liberal schools (Ben-Yehuda *et al*., 2015; Stoll, 2011; Strand & Rapkin, 2011).

Initially, simulations focused on international phenomena, the management and resolution of a specific conflict or the building up of a global policy, and only included states as main agents. This reflected the dominance of realist and neorealist paradigms. However, these have been criticized by non-realist IR scholarship, which rather underlined the need to include all different dimensions of international politics. As Pepinsky maintains, attention should be paid by instructors to the ontology of relevant agents in a simulated environment. For example, in simulating a conflict, most commonly it will be hypothesized that an agent 'attacks' a neighbour, and if it prevails, it then 'conquers' that neighbour. Therefore, strong assumptions about the nature of the behavioural parameters are fundamental in simulations of international processes (Pepinsky, 2005).

Furthermore, while interactions among states and their impact on global problems emphasize non-zero-sum aspects of relations themselves, diplomacy rather stresses the convenience of alliances which produce the zero-sum condition. Simulations based on diplomatic negotiations push participants to adjust their strategies, to adapt to their counterparts' action, in a constant 'learn-by-doing' set of negotiations (Starkey and Blake, 2001). This necessarily entails the application of other theories and the inclusion of additional interactive tools. As Shellman and Turan point out, the rising importance of pluralism, international democracy and comprehensive security, the ethnic, civil and transnational dimensions of conflict have been included in simulations, in addition to the traditional state-to-state approaches. The use of international negotiations has expanded enormously as well. The inclusion of non-state actors, both international organisations and civil society groups, NGOs, and lobbies have become essential for exploring Track Two approaches and other relevant dimensions parallel to the political arena. Next to traditional negotiations, students are offered a wide variety of concepts to experiment and incorporate, such as mediation, signalling and the prisoner's dilemma (Shellman and Turan, 2006).

These considerations bring us to the third factor, the fact that simulations can help the understanding of IR concepts, which are somewhat difficult because they are too broad. In this respect, Hemda Ben-Yehuda has extensively studied the efficacy of simulations in elaborating political fanaticism. A fanatic actor is defined as: '*characterized by a predisposition to challenge the status quo, violate universal norms, and undermine existing policies by support or resort to violence to achieve political goals*' (Ben-Yehuda and Zohar, 2018, p. 3). This opens a huge set of interpretations and applications, particularly in conflict resolution simulations. According to the definition, not all actors who are usually involved in a terrorist attack or a civil conflict can be automatically labelled fanatics, but certainly those (state and nonstate actors) that are likely to violate international law and universal principles, and to challenge the regional balance of power can.

Operationalising political fanaticism in the international system through simulations may be useful to students for several reasons. Findings on simulations of various regional crises reveal that they foster critical thinking in respect to fanatical behaviour and to the effective ways of handling it (Stover, 2005; Weir & Baranowski, 2011; Taylor, 2013). These exercises may enhance the value of diversity among participants. Given that everyone interacts on the basis of personal values, educational level and life experiences, perceptions of fanaticism and ways of coping with it are expected to differ considerably from one student to another. Finally, through simulations, students can learn to 'live' in the current world and have a proper conception of the most urgent problems which are affecting daily life of millions of people in the world (Ben-Yehuda, *et al.*, 2015).

As Ben-Yehuda and Zohar underline, instructors need to teach students how to manage problems and issues beyond the

academic environment. In the case of IR students, this is particularly meaningful, since they prepare themselves to act as the prospective leaders of tomorrow (Ben-Yehuda and Zohar, 2018). The awareness of living in a world affected by brutal terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, ethnic conflicts and essential decisions in the hands of irresponsible leaders, should be a global concern, even though perceptions may vary depending on where students are located (Fowler, 2009; Brynen, 2010). Simpson and Kaussler (2009) debate, for example, that European and American students may find it difficult to understand the roots of political violence and terrorism and to identify with local and regional grievances, until they play non-Western teams. At the same time, students who regularly experience instability (like the ones studying in the Middle East or Latin American countries) may have a more sensitive conception of fanaticism.

This brief overview clarifies the factors which explain why active learning tools are particularly useful in the IR field. In combining theoretical knowledge, empirical data, and actual practice, simulations and games not only contribute to a better understanding of theories and concepts, but also improve awareness on the actual conditions of the world in which we live and shape beliefs and values in a more pragmatic manner. Although there is nowadays a wide range of models that instructors can select, there is still room for more innovations and experimental action. *Game of Peace* has been developed within this broad context.

EXPERIMENTING WITH WAR, PEACE AND NEGOTIATION: *GAME OF PEACE*

The first experiments I brought into the classroom involved my students enrolled in the Global Civil Society course. The 'NGO simulation' I have developed over the years aims at promoting their ability to work in a group, to mature a pragmatic approach to various issues and increase their problem-solving capacities. Smaller groups are asked to 'build' a specific NGO profile (in terms of identity, geographical location, objectives and tools) and to prepare a project, to be submitted to various international donors (the European Union, or UN agencies). The project should fulfil some rigid criteria, include the policy objectives, a list of selected partners and a detailed budget. Students work over two different sessions. The first one is necessary to allow them to become familiar with their fellows and plan the activities, whereas a collective public session is based on the presentation of projects and their attempts to convince donors to provide funds. Over the years and given that the course is part of an MA program in Global Politics, I have started to introduce additional models, more theory-driven and requiring more commitment on the part of students. Within the same course, I have started to use different scenarios, to assign more demanding roles and organise negotiation sessions for various purposes, including conflict resolution and peace talks, next to NGOs project design and implementation (2016).

The *Game of Peace* simulation is the most sophisticated outcome of my own experiments, and I have replicated in the following

years. Scenarios have been shaped on students' feedback, preferences and needs, and built around the current international situation, referring to contemporary conflicts and crises. As described in Table 1, I have used this model with both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Catania, as well as during my stay as visiting professor at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and at the Institute of International Studies in Barcelona (IBEI). The majority of these groups were composed of students from different countries, cultural and educational backgrounds.

Like most simulations developed by instructors in IR courses, *Game of Peace* is made up of several phases and requires preliminary work on the initial scenario, description of the main objectives, role design, and procedural components. Before going deeper into each specific component, the main general elements should be considered. As Ben-Yehuda *et al.* (2015, p. 13) explain, efficient simulations are characterized by four elements: a) *platforms*, which are the setting where students interact; b) *boundaries*, as spatial and temporal elements shaping the contents; c) *interactions*, that is to say the dynamics of the simulation and its planned and unplanned developments; and d) *study efficiency*, as the core functions and the suitability to be used.

As for the platform, *Game of Peace* is a traditional face-to-face model. Students interact in the classroom, in separate groups and during collective sessions. They may prepare documents, need to use videos, pictures or other materials, but they do not meet nor communicate in virtual spaces. Boundaries are essential for the simulation purposes. Being a conflict resolution model, *Game of Peace* starts from a given political scenario which refers to a specific conflict, which I prepare and assign in advance, for consenting students to familiarise and study. Geographical location, timeline of the crisis, local, regional and international actors are clearly defined. Although students are allowed a certain level of self-regulation during the simulation, interactions are guided by specific instructions given together with the scenario and should happen in a predetermined number of sessions and within a clearly defined schedule which is provided at the beginning. Such a schedule includes some room for unplanned developments which may, and usually do, occur.

Study efficiency refers to the debriefing and follow-up phase which takes place at the

Table 1
Game of Peace simulations

Topic	Course	Level	No. of Participants
Conflict in Syria	Global Civil Society	MA Course (University of Catania)	19
Conflict in Darfur	International Politics	BA Course (University of Catania)	50
Conflict in Syria	Global Civil Society	MA Course (IBEI)	18
Terrorism in Afghanistan	Political Violence and Terrorism	MA Course OSCE Academy	30

end of planned sessions. During all phases, students are observed and evaluated in their performances, ability to play roles, to interact with others, and to properly go deeper into the conflict rationale. At the end, a debriefing session asks students to reflect on their experiences, to comment on their strategy, and to analyse their actions. The debriefing session is necessary to complement the evaluation and to understand whether the simulation has produced an impact on students' learning and, most importantly, whether some adjustments and revisions are required (Torney-Purta, 1998).

These broader elements are necessary to understand how *Game of Peace* is structured in its detailed steps. The central part of the preparation is represented by the initial scenario and the policy formation, that is to say, the description of the main objective, which will guide the entire process. In my simulations I have employed various actual conflicts: Darfur, Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan, trying to select those which may better correspond to the students' educational, cultural and political background. All those conflicts are characterised by a high level of violence, ethnic and religious divisions and political fanaticism, as well as a relevant presence of external actors. Whereas the initial scenario is usually based on real developments of the conflict, the policy objective is always the achievement of an agreement which can provide sustainable peace and is driven by two main components. Firstly, students are requested to negotiate. An external mediator (usually the European Union or the United Nations) is expected to intervene in the conflict, favouring decommissioning and peace talks, to bring as many actors as possible to the peace talks and finally chair a formal peace conference. Secondly, given the nature of all selected conflicts, peace should be sustainable, based on those institutional tools which support power-sharing and protection of ethnic and religious minorities. According to the general instructions, students should develop a more or less stable situation, being aware that they are managing an intractable conflict and that to reach power-sharing it is necessary to consider that all parts need to compromise, no part can reach full satisfaction and that all parts need to gain something.

Once the initial scenario is set up, roles and assignments should be clearly described. Depending on the conflict and the actors involved, students are split in groups and asked to play one of the following roles:

Head of State;
Opposition Leader;
Minister of Defense;
Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Each political team are asked, first, to identify the values and goals which will guide its approach and upon which their own policy plan is based. Then, it must pinpoint a political and territorial settlement to support and develop solutions to side issues, such as preparing peacebuilding initiatives, managing refugee issues and ending terrorist activities. Political Teams are allowed to select their actions, among a wide list, which includes humanitarian moves (promotion of diplomatic efforts, offering a peace plan, signing agreements, granting economic or humanitarian aid) and military measures (issuing an ultimatum, declaring a state of emergency or

high alert, threatening to use military force, or other forms of coercive diplomacy). Some more extreme measures, such as imposing a blockade, ordering military buildups, announcing the use of terror, taking hostages, and other limited violence short of war, are allowed depending on the development of unplanned events, which are likely to happen.

A particularly sensitive role is the one assigned to the group of students who act as diplomatic mediators. It is an essential role, expected to have dialogues with all parts and convince them to discuss. The mediator should be creative, but also extremely realistic in the difficult task of trying to restore order. The mediator usually tries to get the parties to take steps toward a "self-enforcing peace" by addressing the underlying sources of conflict. However, only a cease fire agreement between the combatants is more likely to assure that. The mediator can offer certain incentives or disincentives to the parties to gain their cooperation. The group is aware that, representing the EU or the UN, they are provided with all the resources and political support of most developed countries around the world. However, this support might not continue if extensive demands are made in terms of military support. Therefore, whereas a diplomatic solution is always the first thought, the mediator should be able to draw on limited military resources to help implement it. According to the instructions, the mediator usually begins by establishing the positions of each of the factions and seeking further negotiating points to determine under what conditions the sides will agree to end the conflict. Then, they try to get the parties to negotiate specific details of a settlement: structure of government, division of territory and resources, protection of rights.

Clearly, the preparation of these roles and the ability to efficaciously play their respective roles require students to have a good knowledge of IR theories. Simulating political processes is expected to push students to select the theory which can fit better into the initial scenario and shape their group's policy plan. *Game of Peace* is usually scheduled at the end of the course and expects students to apply the theories and concepts they have already studied, to the simulated events they are generating. Two main aspects are particularly useful when putting theories in practice. Firstly, the simulation schedule: *Game of Peace* usually runs over two days (as summarised in Table 2).

Students are initially allowed to have informal contacts and interactions. During this session, political teams can develop their policy plans, adapting their approach to their counterparts' positions, whereas the diplomatic mediator can approach any other actors, offer incentives, suggest proposals. On the second day, a peace conference is chaired by the mediator, discussing formal policy plans brought by all parts. Students must distinguish between the formal and informal dimensions of negotiation, identify principles and act accordingly. Secondly, this model includes not only state actors, but also non-state actors, that is to say, self-determination movements, insurgents, as well as civil society organizations, NGOs, private companies, press. Depending on the conflict and on their preferences, students select their tasks, which may be military and diplomatic, and even track-two structures. During both sessions, I have observed that

Table 2
Game of Peace schedule

Time	Action	Tasks
One week prior to the simulation	Instructor provides the political scenario, the list of groups and roles and instructions.	Students have to study the conflict, analyse the scenario, familiarise with the assigned role.
During the week prior to the simulation	Instructor provides a list of readings and websites which students can consult.	Groups of students identify the values and goals and prepare a policy plan.
First day of simulation (2 hours in the classroom)	Groups interact in an informal way; the mediator can informally approach all groups	Political actors have to structure their pre-arranged policy plan and informally verify other actors' approach.
Second day of simulation (2 hours in the classroom)	A formal Peace Conference is convened and chaired by the mediator. All political parties are invited to join.	The mediator has to promote the signature of an agreement by all or the majority of parties.
Immediately after the peace conference (30 minutes)	Debriefing session chaired by the instructor	Students are free to express their views, evaluate, criticise, make recommendations
One week after the simulation	A questionnaire is prepared by the instructor and sent by email to participants.	Students reply anonymously to the questionnaire.

students tend to automatically apply a theory or concept from the course content to explain and/or justify each action taken.

Although it may look like a very traditional face-to-face and role-based model, *Game of Peace* represents an extremely useful tool to complement IR theories, stimulate interactions and favour a deeper knowledge. Its added value is its pedagogical and educational potential. Students are asked to preliminarily study the scenario, to know all relevant aspects of the conflict, and to deepen internal and external actors' approaches. Then, in order to be successful they need to pursue the main goal by providing some feasible and realistic solutions while interacting with their counterparts. This has a twofold impact: on the one hand, they apply theories and concepts and, inevitably, discover them come to life and be less immaterial. On the other hand, they are forced to interact with others, who may be enemies or friends and discover skills and abilities which are not necessarily exploited. In the end, being 'forced' to spend two days together, sharing the same environment and the same problems, a sense of community is usually developed. All these benefits clearly emerge from students' feedback.

ASSESSING STUDENTS' FEEDBACKS AMONG SATISFACTION AND FRUSTRATION

As already explained, the debriefing session is an extremely important phase of the simulation itself. This is another collective session, during which students can finally express their enthusiasm or frustration. As stressed by Giovanello, sometimes instructors may not pay enough attention to students' perceptions after the end of the simulations. The students may

have different opinions to individually express, which may also be different from what they declare collectively or a few days or weeks after the sessions in classroom (Giovanello *et al.*, 2013). This is an extremely important aspect, not only for assessing what students have truly learned, but also because it influences the next round of simulations and helps the instructor to build a better model. The administration of an anonymous questionnaire, usually by email, is the last and more important step to assess the study efficiency and to measure the effective level of learning.

In this part of the article, I introduce the results of the survey taken by all students who joined the simulations listed in Table 1 above. The anonymous questionnaire was sent by email to everyone a few weeks after the collective sessions. The questionnaire was the same for all students. Although they worked on different political scenarios and diverse conflicts, the simulation structure and objectives did not change. The answers were collected on Google Drive and reveal a variety of ideas, approaches and experiences related to the different characters of the groups. Each question allowed respondents to add opinions and/or suggestions.

Although students were asked to reply to several questions, dealing with more detailed aspects of the simulation, my attention was particularly focused on four clearly defined factors, common to all models and necessary for understanding learning advancements. The first one is the acceptance of roles and the easiness with which students play. The way roles are played and shaped also reflect students' preferences towards IR theories.

As demonstrated in Table 3, the most preferred roles are Head of State, either President or Prime Minister (36,8%) and the Diplomatic Mediator (26,3%). Answers confirm these roles are associated to power, to the capacity of elaborating a real strategy and coordinating the rest of the group. Some students confess they like to exercise leadership and express preferences towards state-centric realism, whereas institutionally-oriented students ultimately enjoy chairing a peace conference, particularly when they represent the United Nations. The role of Opposition Leader is obviously associated with weakness and lack of opportunities. The Minister of Defence or Foreign Affairs are perceived as secondary roles, but still necessary to complement strategy planning and sometimes relevant, particularly when military missions are deployed. Usually, students who prefer institutionalist approaches do not feel comfortable in these roles.

Table 3
Preferred roles

Question	Head of State %	Opposition leader %	Minister of Defence %	Minister of Foreign Affairs %	Diplomatic Mediator %
What is your preferred role?	36,8	--------	21,1	15,8	26,3

The second factor deals with the perception of fanaticism which, as stated above, may be a very sensitive issue (Table 4).

Fanaticism is usually perceived as a very negative characteristic which needs to be stopped and tackled as soon as possible. Although students play real actors, when asked to rank the actor they represent, they prefer to decrease the impact of political fanaticism in their approach and strategy, so the majority reduces this to neutral (38.9%). When it comes to adversaries, things are quite diverse. Some adversaries, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Assad in Syria or the pro-Russia factions in Ukraine, are considered highly fanatical (36.8%), but the Ukrainian government and the Kurdish movements are perceived as neutral (31.6%) or less fanatic (15.8%). However, almost all respondents prefer not to deal with fanaticism and tend not to include it in their planned strategy.

The acceptance of the overall experience and the impact on their knowledge of IR theories is the third and relevant factor. As summarised in Table 5, students were asked to express how much they agree or disagree with a statement.

Although simulations are used more and more in BA and MA programmes, most students had never experienced a simulation (73.7%) or had limited experience (10.5%) until Game of Peace. Overall, they enjoyed the simulation and were very (47.4%) or quite (36.8%) satisfied with their own performance in representing the role they had been assigned. Although it is clear to everyone that negotia-

Table 4
The impact of fanaticism

Question	1 (very low) %	2 (low) %	3 (neutral) %	4 (high) %	5 (very high) %
How do you rank the actor you want to represent in terms of fanaticism?	11,1	11,1	38,9	22,2	16,7
How do you rank your main adversary in terms of fanaticism?	-------	15,8	31,6	36,8	15,8

Table 5
The overall experience

Question	1 (Strongly disagree) %	2 (Disagree) %	3 (Neutral) %	4 (Agree) %	5 (Strongly agree) %
I have previously experienced a simulation	73,7	10,5	10,5	5,3	
I am satisfied with my own performance during the simulation	----------	----------	15,8	36,8	47,4
The simulation has been a learning experience	----------	----------	10,5	----------	89,5

tion is a very hard task, some respondents suffered some kind of frustration and were expecting to be more effective leaders (15.8%). When it comes to their own assessment of what they have learned, the majority (89.5%) believe Game of Peace helped them to learn IR theories and concepts, understood their practicability and perceived them as 'tangible' phenomena. Some respondents (10.5%) asserted they did not feel comfortable for various reasons, for example because of a discrepancy of abilities or performances within the group, and preferred more traditional frontal lectures.

To complement these results, questions on the likelihood to join another simulation allow a final evaluation of the overall experience and provide feedback to ameliorate the model (Table 6).

These data demonstrate that the majority would definitively be interested in getting involved in another simulation (84.2%) and consider their experience as an efficient active leaning tool, useful in an IR course (94.7%). Once again, some groups of respondents are hesitant or not willing to replicate the experience, because of the abovementioned reasons.

The anonymous suggestions were quite diverse, creative and spontaneous. On the one hand, everybody liked the 'learn-by-doing' approach, but personal soft skills and abilities are determinant in having a good performance and emerging as powerful leaders or efficient diplomatic mediators. The difficulty in achieving international agreements reflects how successful groups can be in acting on their assigned role's interests. On the other hand, they complained that the time to negotiate was never enough and they would probably like to spend an entire week in simulating. In the end, what is important is not primarily the achievement of a sustainable peace in Syria, Ukraine, Darfur or Afghanistan, rather the formation of a community of skilled students more aware of the fact that IR has to serve the world system.

CONCLUSIONS: THE FUTURE OF ACTIVE LEARNING TOOLS

This article aims to discuss the use of simulations as an active learning tool and to explore their suitability in IR courses involving different student populations. The current debate on the relevance and pedagogical value of active learning tools is fascinating and intense. In the Political Science field, simulations have been used over the last 50 years for testing theories and assessing potential scenarios and

Table 6
The level of satisfaction

Question	Yes %	Maybe %	No %
Are you interested in joining another simulation?	84,2	10,5	5,3
Would you recommend this experience to other students?	94,7	5,3	

outcomes. As the most recent literature has shown, simulations are particularly useful to instructors teaching IR courses, since they facilitate the development of more multifaceted and sophisticated representations of the international system.

The article is based on the assessment of Game of Peace, a model specifically designed for students of International Studies, based on negotiation and the identification of a power-sharing agreement in a civil war. Game of Peace is a very traditional face-to-face, theory-driven and role-based model. The literature offers a wide list of sophisticated models, making use of Internet, computer and virtual spaces. Although their pedagogical meaning and their ability to empower learning is widely recognised, it is here maintained that even a 'traditional' simulation, based on role playing and not necessarily requiring technological resources, can reach a high level of sophistication and enhance students' learning and comprehension.

Assessing the results of four rounds of Game of Peace, involving different groups of students in different countries and using various contemporary civil conflicts, I can affirm that including a simulation in an IR course presents at least three main benefits:

Firstly, simulations are a very effective active learning tool. Students must study and analyse the initial scenario, which always requires preliminary reading and source investigations.

Secondly, they stimulate students' curiosity and commitment to study and learn IR theories. All students have a role and must fulfil a specific purpose. In so doing, they tend to apply what they have learnt and understand how tangible IR concepts are, including the most sensitive ones.

Finally, simulations encourage and develop students' soft skills, as well as their expertise and relational abilities. Even though they obviously require more effort and time on the part of instructors, simulations can almost unanimously be considered as an essential tool for 21st century instructors, required to face the challenging task of making IR theories come to life and demonstrate that the international system is constantly changing and transforming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The article is the result of several simulations played with different groups of students, of the assessment of their opinions, of my own reflections on what I observed in their performances and learning. If my teaching style is much more productive now, I certainly owe it to them. Games of Peace was also linked to my activities within the European Peace Research Association, where I serve as President. Interactions with distinguished scholars, colleagues and practitioners on various aspects of peace have immensely increased my knowledge and influenced the simulations I have planned.

Finally, I need to express my gratitude to Hemda Ben-Yehuda and Guy Zohar, as well as other members of the International Politics and Innovative Learning (IPIL) Network, born during ISA conferences, after sharing several simulations, roundtables and innovative panels. I have learned a lot from all of them, but if I have developed an enthusiastic approach towards active learning tools, it is uniquely due to them.

REFERENCES

Ayhan, K. J. (2019). Transferring Knowledge to Narrative Worlds: Applying Power Taxonomy to Science Fiction Films. *International Studies Perspectives*.

Asal, V.; Miller, I. & Willis, C. N. (2020). System, State, or Individual: Gaming Levels of Analysis in International Relations. *International Studies Perspectives*, 21 (1), 97-107.

Asal V. (2005). 'Playing Games with International Relations. *International Studies Perspectives* 6: 359–373.

Ben-Yehuda, H. and Zohar, G. (2018). Fanaticism Through the Looking Glass of Simulations, *Journal of Political Science Education*, 14(2): 1-25.

Ben-Yehuda, H.; Levin-Banchik, L. & Naveh, C. (2015). *World politics simulations in a global information age*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Brynen, R. (2010). (Ending) civil war in the classroom: A peacebuilding simulation. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 43 (1), 145-149.

Blake E. L. and Starkey B. A. (2001), Simulation in international relations education, *Simulation & Gaming*, 32(4: 537-551.

Bridge, D., & Radford, S. (2014). Teaching diplomacy by other means: Using an outside-of-class simulation to teach international relations theory. *International Studies Perspectives*, 15 (4), 423-437.

Cusimano, M. (2000). Case Teaching Without Cases. In J. S. Lantis, L. M. Kuzma and J. Boehrer (edited), *The New International Studies Classroom: Active Teaching, Active Learning*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Fowler, M. R. (2009). Culture and negotiation: The pedagogical dispute regarding cross-cultural simulations. *International Studies Perspectives*, 10(3), 341-359.

Klabbers, J. H. (2009). *The magic circle: Principles of gaming & simulation*. Brill Sense.

Giovanello, S. P.; Kirk, J. A. & Kromer, M. K. (2013). Student perceptions of a role-playing simulation in an introductory international relations course. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 9(2), 197-208.

Irrera, D. (2016). *The use of simulations as a teaching tool*, www.e.ir-info, https://www.e-ir.info/2016/05/26/the-use-of-simulations-as-a-teaching-tool/

Lantis, J. S.; Kuzma, L. M. & Boehrer, J. (Eds.) (2000). *The new international studies classroom: Active teaching, active learning*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Lantis, J. S. (1998). Simulations and experiential learning in the international relations classroom. *International Negotiation*, 3(1), 39-57.

McIntosh, D. (2001). The uses and limits of the model United Nations in an international relations classroom. *International Studies Perspectives*, 2(3), 269-280.

Newmann, W. W. & Twigg, J. L. (2000). Active engagement of the intro IR student: A simulation approach. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 33(4), 835-842.

Pepinsky T.B. (2005). From Agents to Outcomes: Simulation in International Relations, in *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(3): 367-394.

Raines, S. (2003). 'The Potential Perils of Slack (not Pack) Pedagogy: A Response to J. Martin Rochester's Remarks about Active Learning Strategies. *International Studies Perspectives* 4: 432–435.

Raymond, C. and Sorensen, K. (2008). The use of a Middle East crisis simulation in an international

relations course. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 41.1: 179-182.

Raymond, C. & Usherwood, S. (2013). Assessment in simulations. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 9(2), 157-167.

Rothman, S. B. (2012). Developing and adapting simulations through six points of variance: An example of teaching applied game theory through international negotiations. *International Studies Perspectives*, 13(4), 437-457.

Shellman, S. and Turan, K. (2006). Do simulations enhance student learning? An empirical evaluation of an IR Simulation, *Journal of Political Science Education* 2(1): 1-14.

Simpson A., W. and Kaussler, B. (2009). IR Teaching Reloaded: Using Films and Simulations in the Teaching of International Relations, *International Studies Perspectives*, 10, 413–427.

Stoll, R. J. (2011). Civil Engineering: Does a Realist World Influence the Onset of Civil Wars? *Simulation & Gaming*, 42(6), 748-771.

Stover, W. J. (2005). Teaching and learning empathy: An interactive, online diplomatic simulation of Middle East conflict. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 1(2), 207-219.

Strand, J. R. & Rapkin, D. P. (2011). Weighted Voting in the United Nations Security Council: A Simulation. *Simulation & Gaming*, 42(6), 772-802.

Taylor, K. (2013). Simulations inside and outside the IR classroom: A comparative analysis. *International Studies Perspectives*, 14(2), 134-149.

Tessman, B. F. (2007). *International relations in action: A world politics simulation*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Torney-Purta, J. (1998). Evaluating programs designed to teach international content and negotiation skills. *International Negotiation: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, 3(1), 77-97.

Weir, K. & Baranowski, M. (2011). Simulating history to understand international politics. *Simulation & Gaming*, 42(4), 441-461.