7 - Viva Rio

digital inclusion in the fight for human security

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7 - Viva Rio: Digital Inclusion in the Fight for Human Security

Viva Rio

Viva Rio was born at the same moment as another movement that mobilized the population of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil as a whole, the Campaign against Hunger, launched in 1992. Led by the late social activist Betinho, director of IBASE, an NGO founded in the 1970s, the campaign shared common goals with Viva Rio: to create a space where all social strata could collaborate to confront the problems generated by social inequality. For a country that had recently come out from under more than 20 years of military rule and consolidated a cultural ideology of class warfare and confrontation, the idea of seeking the support of the business class and spreading a message of peace and solidarity, with nearly-religious overtones, seemed to many a sociological impossibility. But Brazilian society had changed. A new perception had taken hold, even among the dominant elite: all social groups, including the wealthiest, are affected by poverty and violence; extreme inequality impedes economic growth and denigrates the image of the country's cities, a central factor in attracting foreign capital in a globalized world. The combination of these factors -this new social sensibility, this desire to not let social fractures grow deeper, this need to create channels of communication between the “*morro*”¹⁰ and the “asphalt”— led to the creation of Viva Rio.

In July 1993, a small group of homeless children that slept on the sidewalk in front of the Candelária Church in downtown Rio was attacked and fired upon by local policemen. The policemen, who had been paid off by local shopkeepers, killed eight of the children. The episode shocked the entire country, and was widely reported in the international press. Just one month later, Rio was home to a second tragedy, this one in the Vigário Geral *favela*: after a skirmish with local drug traffickers, a group of military police invaded the *favela* and killed, at random, 21 residents. That same summer, the beaches of Rio witnessed a rash of so-called “*arrastão*” attacks, in which large groups of young delinquents would sweep along a beach, frightening away bathers and stealing everything in their path. This practice provoked numerous conflicts with police, and created havoc in an area traditionally dedicated to leisure and tourism.

As a way of reacting to these episodes, a group of entrepreneurs decided that it was time for civil society to voice its concerns. A first meeting was called, with various businessmen, intellectual and union leaders in attendance. Betinho, also present, invited Rubem César Fernandes, coordinator of ISER, to represent the diversity of religious currents.

¹⁰ *Morro*, or hill, is commonly used to refer to *favelas*, though not all *favelas* are built on hillsides.

The first campaign launched by the group was an invitation for society at large to participate in a great public act. The idea was for the residents of Rio to dress all in white and dedicate two minutes of silence in hopes for peace. Christened with the slogan “Take a moment for Rio – Stop in order to begin anew”, the campaign brought thousands of people to the doors of the Candelária church. The movement was strengthened, and the next day a manifesto was published by a multi-faith group of 24 religious leaders who had joined in prayers for peace.

In the course of the group’s meetings, Rubem César’s leadership was affirmed, and he offered the ISER headquarters to house Viva Rio’s activities. ISER, still Viva Rio’s principal research partner, was founded in the 1970s by theologians and researchers, most of them protestant. Originally dedicated to research on the diverse forms of Brazilian religiosity, ISER eventually began acting in social issues, in particular after receiving a number of catholic researches with links to liberation theology. In the 1980s, ISER expanded its research and social activities into diverse areas, and by the 1990s was involved in projects not directly linked to religious themes, such as Public Security, Racism, Violence, and Prostitution. This tendency to expand into diverse areas foreshadowed the development of Viva Rio, not surprising given the leadership of both organizations by the same person.

One and a half years later, Viva Rio was formally created, organized around a Board of Directors made up of business executives, journalists, artists, academics, directors of commercial associations, and community leaders, with its central objective to invent strategies for reducing violence and to develop projects and campaigns that would receive the support of civil society and the state. Viva Rio’s first actions were symbolic and media-savvy campaigns for social mobilization. Organizers also defined the organization’s mission: “To integrate the divided city and create a culture of peace, interacting with civil society and public policy, especially in *favelas* and poor neighborhoods, through local social action, campaigns, and communication.”

The Campaigns

Organized in 1994, the second big Viva Rio campaign was aimed at creating an anti-violence movement, integrating the public security structures of the federal, state, and municipal governments with civil society. In November 1994, another campaign, “Disarm, Rio”, was a kind of counterpoint to the occupation of the *favelas* by the Brazilian army – an emergency measure taken by the government in response to the alarming level of violence in the city. This campaign lasted until February of the following year, the longest Viva Rio campaign to date.

With each new campaign, Viva Rio won over new volunteers and collaborators. Businesspeople, liberal professionals, artists, and common citizens participated as volunteers in the creation and publicizing of the campaigns. One of the most successful and expressive was the “React, Rio!” campaign, in 1995. Created in response to a wave of kidnappings that year -at one point, three people were kidnapped in a single day- the campaign brought

together close to 400,000 for a “Peace March”, under heavy rain, through downtown Rio. (See Box with Viva Rio’s Campaigns in the Appendix)

One of the characteristics of Viva Rio’s campaigns –in part due to ties with ISER, but above all to Brazilian culture- is its semi-religious and ritualistic components. Those who have had the chance to witness these public acts are always impressed by the profound impact of religious values on a large part of the population, which allows them to find the strength to confront situations of great suffering, such as the loss of loved ones, without giving in to destructive anger, intolerance, or prejudice.

Integration with the Communities

The first social initiatives aimed at low-income communities were born out of the campaigns themselves. In the beginning, there was still a great deal of distrust on the part of *favela* leaders in relation to Viva Rio’s efforts. For example, the “React, Rio” campaign, though it mobilized many different sectors of Rio society, it also was criticized by some communities for defending the interest of the wealthy business executives who were the main target of the kidnappings. Representatives from the Vigário Geral *favela* even referred to the campaign as “React, Rich Man”¹¹. In response, Viva Rio began organizing meetings with community leaders, and learned that for many of them, one the principal problems facing their communities was the negative image of the *favela* which the media projected: a no-man’s-land entirely dominated by violence.

These leaders conditioned their participation in Viva Rio projects on the development of strategies for changing the negative public image of the *favelas* and improving the quality of life of local residents. After unsuccessful attempts to negotiate the issue of public image with print and television media –special newspaper sections dedicated exclusively to these populations were considered– Viva Rio decided to expand its scope to include direct social action, putting off for the time being its project for communication aimed at *favela* populations.

Human Security and Digital Exclusion

Viva Rio thus began the journey that would transform it into one of the foremost NGOs in the world working in the area of Human Security. Though unfamiliar with this concept when it began its work, Viva Rio engaged itself in a number of activities that converge on what today is called Human Security. This concept joins the right to live in security with the right to access to basic necessities, or, to put it slightly differently, the right to live without fear of violence and the right to live without fear of not being able to supply the minimum material

¹¹ An untranslatable pun. In Portuguese, the name of the campaign was “*Reage, Rio*”, satirized as “*Reage, Rico*”.

necessities. Human Security is the utopian horizon of contemporary society, and it should be the end result of the efforts of each society and the international system to ensure economic and social development and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. As the principal global public good, it should be the fruit of new forms of international governance.

Urban violence has traditionally been considered a by-product of poverty. However, beyond a certain level of crystallization, urban violence reaches epidemic proportions, requiring a change in perspective. Violence must be treated directly, with specific instruments, whether in terms of direct prevention and repression or within social actions that seek to transform the social groups directly involved.

In this sense, Viva Rio's work represents a breakthrough experience. Using research instruments and practical experience to identify groups at risk of violence (low-income adolescents and youth, especially those that dropped out of school before completing their elementary education, living in *favelas* and poor neighborhoods on the periphery of the city) and one of its principal vectors (the easy circulation of firearms), Viva Rio developed a series of activities that, taken together, form a true Human Security program. These activities, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, include direct actions aimed at high-risk groups (tele-courses for completing elementary and secondary education, computing classes, training of local leaders, job creation), more general actions for low-income areas (income generation projects, culture of conflict resolution, dissemination of citizens' rights, improvement of self-image), and specific actions in the area of local security and the fight against violence (arms control, disarmament campaigns, training and improvements of quality of life for police, and reform of the public security system).

In the area of human security, Viva Rio's principal vocation is the mobilization of all communications media – radio, print, video, Internet – both to raise public consciousness and to develop specific instruments of action, changing living conditions and opportunities through education, creating a culture of conflict resolution, transforming the security system, and improving working condition. Viva Rio's legitimacy stems from its ability to be a bridge between many different sectors of society, the state, the media, and in its capacity to develop effective action in the fight against violence and urban poverty.

In all of Viva Rio's activities, therefore, the theme of digital inclusion can be seen not so much as an end but a means, an instrument in the fight against various inequalities and the transformation of a social context that perpetuates poverty and violence.

Current Dimensions

Viva Rio develops its projects in partnership with local institutions, thus constituting the central hub of an extensive network. Partners offer infrastructure, personnel, and knowledge of local conditions, while Viva Rio provides project elaboration, professional and technical training, didactic material, and other services. As of 2002, Viva Rio had **668** local partners,

including residents' associations, NGOs, unions and cooperatives, schools, military police battalions, community radio stations, churches, and prisons. **94** public events were held, part of some **741** local projects. Of these, **258** were in the area of education, **113** in the area of communication, **91** in community development (income generation), **93** in security and human rights, 41 in environment, **1** in sports, and **144** in volunteer projects. The projects are split more or less equally between the municipality of Rio de Janeiro and other regions within the state.

In 2002, Viva Rio engaged the services of 825 remunerated personnel and mobilized **3,941** volunteers. Many area coordinators and the great majority of remunerated personnel are *favela* residents. Except for a small number of core staff members, the majority of Viva Rio employees are organized into cooperatives contracted for specific services. Viva Rio is not identified with any political party, and does not consider party affiliation when hiring.

Viva Rio's income in 2002 was R\$17,712,014 (around 5.5000,000 U\$ dollars) , a 13% increase over the year before and 27% higher than in 2000. Within a universe of 75 donors, 47.9% of donations came from business, 20.7% from governments, 15.5% from foundations and NGOs, 13.7% from its own sales and fundraising efforts. Though financed principally by Brazilian sources, in the last few years international support has been growing in importance, from 4% of the operational budget in 1999 to 27% in 2002. The areas of Public Security and Human Rights, Community Education, and Environment absorb, in roughly equal proportions, 80% of the operating budget. 21,793 people have directly benefited from Viva Rio's educational activities, and 26,497 people have benefited directly by actions within the Public Security and Human Rights area.

One of Viva Rio's most important partnerships is with the press, aided by the presence of numerous representatives of Rio de Janeiro's television and print media, which has allowed it to effectively publicize its campaigns and projects. Viva Rio's media presence is impressive: a daily average of 74 cm² of print media exposure; 4 minutes and 48 seconds of exposure per day on television.

Organizational Structure

Like so many leaders of large NGOs in Latin America and Europe, the founder and executive director of Viva Rio belongs to the "generation of 68". Rubem César Fernandes was born in Niterói, on the opposite side of the Guanabara bay from Rio de Janeiro, in 1943. In 1964, now a young militant leftist, he fled the newly installed military government and went into exile in Poland, where he studied Philosophy. In 1968, in response to the repressive and anti-Semitic policies of the Gomulka government, he left Poland and went to the U.S., where he received his PhD in history of thought from Columbia University, in New York. He returned to Brazil in 1976 and joined the anthropology faculty at the University of Campinas, later moving to the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro, where he eventually retired. Rubem César had a central role in dynamizing ISER, which he directed in the 1980s and 90s, and is

currently the principal executive of Viva Rio. As in many businesses and the majority of NGOs, the director/founder occupies a central place, and Viva Rio will certainly, in the coming years, traverse a complex path to ensure the continuity of the institution independently of the charismatic presence of its executive director.

Viva Rio is run by a Board of Directors which meets monthly, and is made up of a group of businessmen, representatives from the media – the heads of the principal Rio newspapers among others -union and community leaders, athletes and cultural figures, liberal professionals, and the executive director. Unlike the board of directors of the majority of institutions, which have a purely honorary function, Viva Rio's board meets monthly and has an active voice in the evaluation of activities and the definition of lines of action.

Operational questions at Viva Rio are analyzed monthly in meetings of the area coordinators. Recently a Managing Committee was formed in which participate the executive director, the finance director, an area coordinator and two volunteer business executives who review and consult on the direction of the institution, and in particular on problems relative to the management of resources and administration.

Internationalization

Initially concentrating its actions almost exclusively on the city of Rio de Janeiro, Viva Rio's success has meant an increasing tendency toward internationalization in its sphere of action. Viva Rio has transformed itself into a pole of attraction for youth from Latin America, the U.S. and Europe, who, passing through Brazil, become interested in Viva Rio's activities and remain in the institution, often occupying positions of responsibility.

Solicitations from other cities in Brazil and abroad to repeat the experiment are frequent, and, as we will see, the activities and research developed by Viva Rio are today considered benchmarks by international organizations; more than ever, Viva Rio is integrated into international networks of NGOs and institutions. The growing demands from this sector make it necessary to create a new equilibrium between international activities and its focus on local efforts, principal source of Viva Rio's projection and legitimacy.

Viva Rio is a member of the Latin American secretariat of the International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT), an advisory board member of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), and a member of the "Peace to the City" project of the World Council of Churches. It is also responsible for coordination of various research projects and the training of NGOs in the area of urban juvenile violence and the fight against illicit small arms traffic, especially in Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries.

Recently Viva Rio has been invited by the UNDP and European national cooperation agencies to create an International Training Center in Human Security, which will begin to function in 2004.

It is becoming increasingly clear to people associated with development-oriented cooperative efforts that relations between the NGOs of the first world and those of developing countries are determined by the agendas of the NGOs of the north. In response to this realization, Viva Rio has begun to experiment with internationalizing its experience. The idea is to publicize Viva Rio's activities and develop cooperative projects that build on experiences in Brazil. With due precautions, partners will be sought to develop similar projects in other developing countries, and even in developed countries, since in certain areas, such as combating violence, mobilizing low-income urban populations, and Internet applications, Viva Rio possesses a relevant knowledge base.

In 2002, local volunteers in France created Solida'Rio, which will act as a local representative of Viva Rio. Initially, the group intends to work in the area of Fair Trade. A parallel project is to organize the Solidarity Games, a soccer championship between Brazilian and French youth from low-income areas. In addition to Solida'Rio, the creation of representatives in Italy, the U.S., and the U.K. is under study.

Box H - Principal Campaigns of Viva Rio

1993

Take a moment for Rio – Stop in order to begin anew

First of Viva Rio's social mobilizations for peace. Brought thousands of people together in front of the Candelária church in downtown Rio. The campaign published a manifesto signed by 24 representatives of different religions who came together to pray for peace.

1994

Disarm, Rio

Campaign in protest against the occupation of *favelas* by the Brazilian Army – a measure adopted by the government of Rio de Janeiro state in response to alarming levels of violence.

1995

React, Rio

Public protest against the wave of kidnappings in the city. 400,000 participants.

1997

Rio 2004 – Candidate City

Campaign in support of the city's candidacy to host the Olympic games of 2004.

International Campaign – World Council of Churches – Viva Rio's first international campaign. Promoted by the World Council of Churches, the campaign involved seven world cities selected for their high levels of violence and established the creation of community action directed at at-risk youth, as well as training for police and community leaders.

1998

School Friends

Rio de Janeiro schools established connections with 672 schools from the draught-ridden Northwest. R\$142,512 was donated to pay for school lunches in afflicted areas.

Peace in Traffic

Drivers' education campaign by students of the Volunteer Civil Service project, with distribution of pamphlets explaining the National Traffic Law.

Holiday Reading

Campaign to collect and distribute children's' books, with the support of the Globo Television Network. 234,000 books and magazines were collected and sent to 200 community organizations.

Blood Donation – Future Agents

Campaign for blood donation at the Hemorio – the city's homologous center – by the students of the Volunteer Civil Service project.

1999

Rio, Drop Your Weapon

A petition campaign that collected 1,312,929 signatures in favor of a national law to restrict the sale of firearms in Brazil.

2000

Drop Your Weapon

National campaign to raise consciousness of the need for disarmament, extending the movement begun in Rio de Janeiro in 1999.

2001

Choose Gun Free! Its Your Weapon or Me

At the first event in this campaign, popular artists and mothers of victims spoke out against gun violence. White flowers were distributed, along with pamphlets warning that a firearm does not guarantee the safety of your family, but rather puts them at risk. Through monthly events and national television spots, the campaign seeks to promote reflection on the dangers of gun ownership, increase popular pressure to disarm, and expand the movement to other states and countries. The project was presented in July 2001 at the United Nations conference on Illicit Traffic in Small Arms, in New York.

Rio Without Guns

Public destruction of 100,000 firearms, the largest simultaneous destruction of firearms ever carried out. Close to 20,000 people participated in the destruction ceremony, carried out in partnership with the Rio de Janeiro state government. The event sought to publicize the UN conference on Illicit Traffic in Small Arms, held in July, in New York.

No More Terror! I Want Peace!

Campaign against terrorism and all forms of violence, in response to the September 11 attacks and the war in Afghanistan. After the inauguration of the campaign at the Maracanã soccer stadium, thousands of people took to the streets of downtown Rio for a peace march. An Internet petition against the propagation of violence in the world was circulated over more than 30 websites, and received 7,000 signatures.

Viva Lagoa

Protest against the pollution of Rio's beaches, bays, lakes, and rivers. 70,000 participants completely encircled the Rodrigo de Freitas lagoon in Rio.

Enough! I Want Peace!

National campaign for peace that mobilized 16 state capitals. On July 7, thousands of people wore white, lit candles, and participated in peace rituals. In downtown Rio, the Wall of Pain, made up of 40 panels and totaling 154 m², exhibited photos of victims of violence, drawings, graffiti, and messages of peace. A sculpture made from revolver bullets showed people on

their knees, praying for peace. That night, 25,000 people came together in the city center, which was lit by nearly 5,000 candles.

Mother, Disarm Your Son

Organized by the AfroReggae Cultural Group, the rapper MV Bill, and Viva Rio, this campaign included free hip hop concerts followed by open public debates, and sought to promote disarmament in Rio's favelas by appealing to mothers to act in defense of their children against gun violence.