



## ENDLESS SEA - CASE HISTORY 02

### NOSSAS

#### 1. From the local project "Meu Rio" in 2011 to Nossas in 2015

In 2011, the local project "[Meu Rio](#)" was launched in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At the time, the city was in an ebullient state of flux preparing for the Soccer World Cup (2014), Olympic Games (2016) and a presidential election (2014). In this very optimistic and dynamic context, major public and private investment projects and new constructions were on the horizon. Aware that the city was about to undergo great transformations and convinced that these transformations had to take into account the aspirations and desires of Rio's inhabitants, Alessandra Orofino, a young Brazilian activist, decided to launch "Meu Rio". [Her goal](#) was to control as well as influence the changes to come in Rio, so that her city would be transformed, yes, but for the better.

Then, in 2013, the cities of Brazil became scenes of numerous and intense protests ("the Vinegar Revolt"). The demonstrators denounced, in particular, the government's spending on the soccer World Cup and the increase in the price of public transportation. In this context, various activists, eager to reproduce the "Meu Rio" project in their cities, contacted Alessandra Orofino. The idea of extending this local project throughout the country was developed, giving activists who wanted to do so the necessary tools and advice to reproduce the "Meu Rio" model and create their own organizations. This development officially materialized in 2015 with the creation of the "Nossas Cidades" network, and more broadly "Nossas Brasil".

In general, it is important to note that in Brazil, most public services are provided by local governments. They play a very strong role in employment, education, health and transport policies, and are responsible for the majority of public spending. Yet at the same time, there are very low turnouts in municipal elections, due to citizens' distrust of government, which they often see as corrupt, inefficient and out of touch with their real needs.

#### 2. A structured and independent network of local actions

Nossas is an activist organization, which has gradually developed from the "pilot project" "Meu Rio" launched in 2011. It defines itself as a "laboratory for activism and a network of citizen engagement structures".

The structure, chaired by founder Alessandra Orfino, is composed of a team of 25 people, mostly young activists and committed militants, and relies on a network of 1,600,000 people. In Rio alone, the organization now has over 300,000 members who



have already created dozens of campaigns to improve their city. 43% of these campaigns are citywide, while 36% focus on "priorities in poor and disenfranchised areas".

Its offices are located in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, but its collaborators are spread throughout Brazil.

To guarantee its independence, Nossas refuses financial resources from public institutions, political parties or companies with public contracts. It operates with donations from national and international philanthropic foundations and citizens.

### **3. Preserving and reviving democracy in Brazil from the cities**

Nossas' work is based on three strong convictions:

- It is possible to "act" for society without being a bureaucrat or an elected politician;
- Citizens can get involved in important issues and act for the community outside of elections and campaign periods;
- The reclaiming of the management of politics by citizens must start from the cities, because these places - especially in Brazil - have a huge impact on the future of the people who are born, live, work, etc.

Based on these convictions, Nossas aims to preserve and revive democracy in Brazil by:

- Creating a new culture of political participation, especially among Brazilian youth;
- Lobbying policy makers to make the country more equitable;
- Breaking down oppressive power structures in society;

Nossas aims to create a "generation that does not take democracy for granted".

### **4. Concrete results on the ground**

Nossas has coordinated numerous grassroots campaigns and launched various projects that have a concrete effect on the daily lives of citizens. The themes of these projects range from the defense of minorities to the fight against government corruption and police violence, etc.

In general, these campaigns and projects create new technologies, solidarity networks and mobilization opportunities for citizens who want to act and have an impact on their



communities. Some projects are integrated directly into the Nossas structure while others are supported by the organization but are independent.

Among the projects, we can identify:

- "Rede Nossas Cidades":

Composed of local organizations located throughout the country (Minha Sampa, Meu Recife, Minha Porto Alegre, Minha Campinas, Minha Jampa, etc.), this project aims to make cities more participatory and ensure a better quality of life for the inhabitants. Thus in 2014, [Alessandra Orfino states](#), "It is up to us to decide whether we want schools or parking lots, recycling projects or construction sites, cars or buses, solitude or solidarity."

As an example, in 2011, this program saved a school threatened with demolition because of work related to the preparation of the World Cup and the construction of a parking lot. To save the school, "Meu Rio" activists, along with parents and students from the school, created a Whatsapp message chain, an on-site monitoring committee and a crowdfunding campaign to rent buses to take students to public hearings where the future of their school was discussed. Webcams had also been installed to monitor the school continuously.

- "Panorma de Mobilizadores":

Through this training program in activism methodologies and technologies, Nossas shares knowledge about mobilization and activist organizing with people who want to take action to transform their cities and communities.

- "Beta":

This feminist chatbot, developed by Nossas and inserted on Facebook Messenger, engages over 150,000 people to take action to protect women's rights.

- "Mapa do Acolhimento":

This solidarity network connects women victims of violence with psychologists and lawyers ready to support and accompany them for free.

- "BONDE":

This technological tool was created for activists to autonomously create sites capable of mobilizing people around causes, without the need for developers.

- Acolhe LGBT +:



This platform connects LGBT + people with volunteer psychologists who are willing to coach them for free.

- Defezap:

This innovative system facilitates collaborative reporting of abuse of authority by state officials. It was shared with the Commission for Human Rights of the Rio de Janeiro Legislature, to become "Citizenship zap".

- #MeRepresenta:

This platform connects voters with candidates committed to the defense of human rights. The project is now an independent organization run by a group of diverse collectives.

Among the campaigns, we can identify:

- Supplies for indigenous communities campaign:

In collaboration with the Federal University of Amazonia and other institutions, this crowdfunding campaign was created to raise funds to help different urban indigenous communities combat the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. With the funds raised, 1200 families were able to receive hygiene products and food for six months.

- Internet access for low-income students campaign:

In the context of the Covid-19 crisis and the introduction of distance learning, a crowdfunding campaign was launched to fund internet subscriptions for low-income students preparing for their university entrance exams.

Nossas' work also led to the passage of a bill preventing people convicted of corruption from being appointed to public office, the removal of a tax on solar panels, and the creation of a 24/7 police station exclusively for women. It has also led to better regulation of the state's use of firearms and ammunition.

## **5. Directly influencing public decision-makers and empowering citizens to become involved**

Nossas presents itself as a "laboratory of activism" that mobilizes citizens through the use of technology and grassroots actions. The structure relies on its extensive knowledge of methods for mobilizing citizens and putting pressure on governments and uses a variety of tactics to act and carry out projects.

- Direct actions on public and political decision makers (legislators, mayors, governors):



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- ==> Direct lobbying actions on public decision-makers via emailing;
- ==> Creation and use of a platform for collaborative drafting of bills;
- ==> Creation of a chatbot to disseminate information on the progress of legislation;
- ==> Live monitoring of threatened infrastructure.

- Actions to amplify actions and facilitate citizen engagement:

- ==> Launching calls to action in collaboration with local teams in cities;
- ==> Sharing of social engagement methodologies and technologies with activists who wish to do so;
- ==> Funding local campaigns and projects.

To act effectively, Nossas also studied the characteristics and availability of its potential activists, who can be classified into two groups:

- ==> Citizens who have little time to devote to civic engagement, and therefore must be mobilized via digital means.
- ==> Citizens who have more time to devote to civic engagement, often younger or unemployed, and whose work must therefore be valued so that they regain confidence and feel useful to society. These people need to be pushed and trained to become leaders.

Nossas actively uses Whatsapp (first application used in Brazil) and Facebook, as these are the two networks most used by young and poor populations in Brazil.

### **6. Lessons Learned from Nossas**

The Nossas experience has a particular significance because it is part of a society, such as Brazil's today, marked by an unprecedented level of social mistrust. It proves that, even in a difficult context, citizens are capable of committing themselves and acting for the community when they are given the means to do so and when they can see the effects of their actions on the ground.

However, for this to happen, concrete actions need to be deployed at the local level by giving the means and methods to citizens to develop their own interventions and commitments, by combining online actions and actions on the ground and by adapting communication and mobilization tools to the real uses and availability of citizens.