A year of pandemic and a beacon of hope

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Welcome to Floripa
I was here during lockdown
And here
This is also Floripa.

This is the face of urban misery in Brazil.
Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world.
Every developing country faces

- Urban misery
- Urban violence
- Squandered human capital

Urban violence is the thorniest problem of all. Brazil effectively faces an undeclared low grade civil war. Over 55,000 violent deaths every year.
We need to figure out how to live well in cities.

- 4x population growth in the past 100 years: from 1.9B to 7.8B
- >50% of people live in cities, and that keeps growing
Why am I here?

Because I had education and opportunity.

- Upper middle class family, parents were professors.
- Access to good public education in Brazil.
- Government exchange program got me to the US.

What could I do?
From Floripa to Caltech

1992  born in Floripa
2007-2010  Public vocational high school in Floripa
2011  Start public university in Floripa
2014-2015  Undergrad exchange program at Brandeis University
2016  Transfer to Brandeis University, biophysics major
2017  Bioengineering graduate program at Caltech

...never looked back to Brazil

...until the pandemic made me pause and think hard.
My search led me to the Vilson Groh Institute

- Decades of work in marginalized communities in Floripa
- Reaches over 5000 people and 2000 families.
- Education, social support, integration, professional preparation and community development
- Coordinates six organizations
Vilson Groh - the man

Vilson Groh moved in 1978 to Monte Serrat, a marginalized community in hills of Floripa and never left.

He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1981. Now 67 years old and going strong, Vilson Groh's vision and passion have blossomed into a network coordinating almost 400 volunteers working across multiple organizations.
Impact over the last 10 years

- 288 volunteers per year on average
- 4,866 people supported per year on average
- 2,219 families supported per year on average
- 2,105 people training and work programs
- >7 million meals offered
- >1000 participants in university prep courses
- > 200 education scholarships

This organization is a complete outlier in Brazil. They are successfully addressing Brazil's thorniest social problems.
A vision for the future: Pode Crer Program

- A way out of urban misery and violence
- Focus on youth in marginalized communities
- Complementary education from birth to university age
- Provide perspective and empowerment
- Social and economic integration and support
- Education focused in civics, technology and creative economy
- Physical transformation of these communities through public spaces and building five social innovation centers
A vision for the future: the Pode Crer Program

- Change marginalized communities from the inside out through education
- Lifelong complementary education
- Focus on civics, technology, and skills for the creative economy
- Construct hubs in each communities - "social innovations centers"
Pode Crer Pilot Program

- Pilot program started in March 2021 with 320 youth across 3 age tracks
- One year of civics and technology focused education.
- Matched with technology companies for internships
- Results are already very visible
Pode Crer Pilot tracks

11-13 years old
70 students
robotics, art, music, english, sustainability

14-24 years old
250 students
technology, social and emotional skills, solving community problems, thinking about life projects
Pode Crer pilot program
Como ser acessível e sustentável?
November 2022 goal: construction of social innovation center atop Mont Serrat community (and then 4 more over the next 5 years!)
Some stuff I've helped with

- Creation of a fiscally sponsored fund within the BrazilFoundation (an American 501(c)3 organization) that enables US tax-deductible donations to the Vilson Groh Institute. [https://www.brazilfoundation.org/podecrerfund/](https://www.brazilfoundation.org/podecrerfund/)
- Collected English media resources at [https://vilsongroh.org](https://vilsongroh.org)
- Introductions to helpful people in Brazil and the US.
- Money donations to support the Pode Crer program students, teacher salaries, purchase of 3D printers and educational kits.
- Published article on the Harvard Latin American Review: [https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/a-beacon-of-hope-for-brazil-in-a-pandemic-year/](https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/a-beacon-of-hope-for-brazil-in-a-pandemic-year/)
Thanks!

Questions & discussion

For more english material visit https://vilsongroh.org