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A real and virtual game to change the world now

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The Elos Institute is a non-governmental organization with the mission of propelling the movement that aims to turn the world we all dream of into a reality, now. To that end, it proposes innovative solutions for constructing the best of worlds in a collective and pleasurable way through a simple formula: where scarcity is generally sought, we seek abundance. It is more evident every day that this planet's greatest treasure is its diversity and we count on that diversity for the task of constructing strategies to transform the world. In our vision of a better world, companies and communities, adults and children, governments and civil society, work, coexist, live side by side and offer their best for the best possible world.

That belief is reflected by a diverse team, a composition of experiences and a mosaic of knowledge that are being built over the course of a story that began in the year 2000. Elos was born from a meeting of five young architects and became a multidisciplinary community

focused on designing strategies for the construction of the best possible world, beginning right now.

Some years ago, we discovered that one of the best strategies we can use to realize our mission are games. Because of that, we have invested a great part of our time on tools of that kind.

The group activities which, previously, became the Elos Institute began in 1995, when a few young architecture students from the Catholic University of Santos (Santos, Brazil) decided to undertake the total reform of the, then, abandoned Fishing Museum of Santos (Santos, Brazil) Find out more about that story here:

Video 1: Experience of "Reviver" Project at Fishing Museum of Santos. Source: Mkt Virtual, 2011. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICHH-UYB8_g&feature=player_embedded.

Thinking of alternatives to replicate that experience providing the same quality of learning became a constant search. First, the Warriors Without Weapons¹ project arose, and then came the first drafts of the Elos Methodology. In 2003, the Elos Institute launched a community effort that reconstructed the Paquetá-Nagasaki square in Santos, São Paulo, in partnership with the Associação dos Cortiços do Centro (ACC). It became a historical moment: the first communitarian effort named "Oasis", clearly applying a game dynamic to its fundamental structure.

The story and video of this action spread around, and Oasis started to become known, especially in the state of São Paulo. We had other successful experiences and many people began to show interest to implement Oasis in several different locations. Aware that it would be impossible to be in all these places, a team from the institute made a decision that changed the direction of its work: to make Oasis a free-use social technology. Therefore, a new challenge surfaced: how to make the methodology available for replication, guaranteeing the quality of the actions? "Game" was the answer.

¹ The "Guerreiros Sem Armas" project can be translated as "Warriors without Weapons".

Oasis is the fruit of Elos's experience with various communities (caçara², rural, urban communities...) and, by its nature, would have to be a cooperative game; after all, in realizing a common dream, everyone wins – there are no losers. The community wins a new space to enjoy and all the promoters and supporters win the opportunity to exercise the best version of themselves, to strengthen themselves personally and strengthen the trust in collective work, among the many other learnings.

As Val Rocha published in the text "Learning together, learning more!":

'The experience of participating in a cooperative game is an opportunity for experiential learning: one learns about his own limits and how to relate to others. This form of learning bases itself on the Pedagogy of Cooperation: an arrangement of processes, procedures, signals and indicators that support those that offer themselves for the finding of cooperative solutions to complex situation-problems.' (ROCHA, 2011).

When we go to the communities, we seek to reestablish ties and assist them in recognizing what they have in common, because for us, this is what makes them a common-unity or a collective of different people with one very important common element. The Game Oasis becomes, thereby, a way to nourish this feeling, because as Fábio Brotto says in his text "The Pedagogy of Cooperation: Constructing a World where everyone can Win!",

'it is necessary to permanently nourish and sustain the process of the integration of cooperation in the personal, communitary and planetary day-to-day, recognizing it as a "lifestyle", a vital ethical conduct, that was conscious- or unconsciously present over the course of our civilization history.' (BROTTO, 2009).

After many investigations and hours dedicated to creation, we had in 2008 the first version of Oasis game with a structure similar to the one we use today, with cards, rules and an instruction sheet. The first ones to test it were the participants of the 2009 edition of Warriors without Weapons, at the same time as the project's communitary efforts. At the end of the training, the warriors (how we call the participants of this training) received the challenge (and they accepted!) to produce 82 Oasis games in six months. In order to accomplish that, everyone would have to risk themselves and face the challenge of facilitating alone, a technology to which they had just been introduced to.

² Caçara is a word derived from Tupi, which refers to the inhabitants of coastal areas. It is commonly used on the coast of São Paulo, Brazil.

When the time arrived to undertake their mission, many doubts and fears arose and the Internet became the main ally of the group, who created a social network³, produced a great deal of content and fed various discussion forums which not only removed the doubts, but enriched the practice through the exchange of experiences. Many other people interested in the game and in actions of transformation joined the network and began to contribute with their own experiences not only in this one, but also in other social technologies (such as cooperative games, circular dance, World Café, Open Space), which caused the process to become increasingly rich.

This group of young people is part of a generation that knows how to use the power of the web to full effect. And that had already lived a real experience in how to use the Internet as an ally for real actions. We will talk about that below.

Today, after 3 years, the Oasis Game is being consolidated as a support tool for citizen mobilization for the realization of collective dreams, with a brochure about it registered at the National Library, and we will continue working toward its constant improvement.

The Warrior's Path

Today, one of the most consecrated names in the world of games is that of the game designer Jane McGonigal. In her researches, she observed the behavior of people and describes a defining characteristic of players regarding the challenges that games present: they are willing to help whomever needs it, they dedicate themselves to the resolution of the problem in the necessary time and, most important, regarding obstacles or defeat, the player is always willing to try again. In the game, says McGonigal (2010), we move closer to the best version of ourselves.

In the article "What about creating a game?"⁴, Felipe Vila and Magda Vila (2011) claim that:

³ Available at <<http://www.oasismundi.ning.com>>.

⁴ From original: "Que tal criar um jogo?"

'Games are fantastic tools for adult learning: they involve, expedite learning and are capable to develop diverse competencies through direct experience, something very valuable in these times in which almost everything is virtual.' (Vila and Vila, 2011).

What, then, can we say of an experience in which real actions of mobilization are carried out and described in a blog? We have the opportunity to observe that clearly in the process that we use to select 60 young people from diverse parts of the world to participate in the Warriors without Weapons project⁵. Since 2006, in order to participate in the Warriors without Weapons project, the young people must participate in the game "Warrior's Path". For a month, they carry out practical actions based on six tasks developed by the Elos team and document the entire process in a blog created exclusively to this end. They are invited to practice creativity: it is worthwhile to enrich the material with videos, songs, drawings and anything else they manage to imagine and that helps them express themselves in the best possible way! And along the way, they discover that the distance between two worlds is much smaller than it seems.

The selective process invites the players to perform six tasks that lead them to a profound individual reflection, passing through the perception of the impact and relationship between the person and its surroundings and culminates with the materialization of an action capable of transforming reality. The first application of this tool occurred in 2007, in the form of a board game. Those registered had to play, relate the results in a notebook and send that notebook to Elos. In 2009, it became a virtual challenge, recounted in a blog. The 2011 edition followed this format and produced even more impactful results⁶. In 2012, the selective process reunites more than 600 young people from 60 countries⁷.

Beyond the format, many things changed over the course of the five years since Warrior's Path was created. What has also changed is society's perception of games and of the fact that these games can support world's transformation.

⁵ Available at <<http://www.guerreirossemarmas.net>>.

⁶ Warrior's Path [blog], Available at <<http://www.caminhodoguerreiro2.wordpress.com/>>.

⁷ For more information about the third Warrior's Path, access: <<http://prezi.com/epbe4ocdjnsf/caminho-do-guerreiro-iii/>>.

Innovations in 2012

The game used for the selection of the Warriors is not a competitive game since its beginning and each issue are dedicated to seeking ways to encourage cooperation and interaction between participants. In 2012, we created an exclusive blog for the selective process which seeks to be a favorable environment for interaction between players and to give more visibility to the actions carried out by them in the game. Unlike other years, in which we sent the tasks via e-mail, now the players must check the tasks at the blog⁸. This was a strategy to stimulate them to meet the other players who had set themselves to the task of transforming the world right now, as the names of all the players appear on a lateral tab (we have a blog in Portuguese, one in English and one in Spanish and the players are also divided by language).

Another change is that, this time, warriors from other editions can interact very closely with the players of Warrior's Path, supporting those who are performing the tasks as sponsors. As they have already lived the same experience and know what awaits the players in the program, these outside warriors become fundamental components through motivation, providing tips and encouraging the search for new paths.

It falls also to the sponsors to read the blogs and make suggestions that assist the candidates in making the content of their blogs clear and interesting. This new character was introduced to bring more change to the game and elevate the level of the players through the discussion of the themes tackled in each task.

The results of the selection process have a direct impact on the lives of the players, but it goes beyond that and has great potential to inspire other youths in and outside of the game. Upon realizing this, we adopted in the 2012 edition the practice of pointing out remarkable results from tasks in previous editions.

⁸ Available at <[http:// www.caminhodoguerreiro2.wordpress.com](http://www.caminhodoguerreiro2.wordpress.com)>.

For the second time in a row, we perceived in the young people that participate in Warrior's Path a great potential for dreaming, a combination of useful abilities and a history of enviable education, sometimes accompanied by a difficulty in putting all those resources into practice in order to reach the desired objective. Our role in this path is to stimulate these young people to take the first step in the direction of implementing their ideas. It seems very simple said like that, even obvious, but when we place the level of perfectionism of these people on the scale, the fear of judgment and the generalized perception that "to change the world" is not an easy mission, the challenge can become discouraging and intimidating.

Regarding these obstacles, it is common to encounter excuses used to avoid the pain and frustration: there isn't enough time, the challenge is too great, people don't want to cooperate, etc. The most important fact to remember on this point is that the challenge of Warrior's Path is open and each person is responsible for deciding its actions. We ask the participants: what can you do, in 10 days, with the available resources, to transform a reality of which you are part? We constantly reinforce the idea that Warrior's Path is not a game of competition. It is an opportunity...

- for the players to put into practice their best abilities and transform reality
- for Elos to find people with the ideal qualities in order to compose a group of social entrepreneurs
- for a community to receive a gift.

We have had already experiences with young people who performed amazing acts, they were selected, but became so passionate by the project they carried out, that they did not come to the program, as they decided to pursue their dream at that very moment. For us, this is a victory! After all, to contribute to someones becoming confident enough to start to change the world, right now, giving all he or she has to give is exactly what Elos set out to do.

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