

Community outreach researchers share with UFRGS their



UFRGS research team of the Rondon Project that participated in Operation Parnaíba were in the Noble Hall to talk about the activities in the city of Nossa Senhora do Nazaré (Piauí state). Operation Parnaíba operated in 15 cities of Piauí and involved teams of 30 universities, including UFRGS. In addition to workshops held at the headquarters of the town hall, which has 4.7 million inhabitants, UFRGS team visited four rural communities in the city. Thematically, the activities had to do with work, income generation, and sanitation.

One of the participants, Architecture Undergraduate Student Juliana Giazzon Cavalli, highlights motivation as main legacy of Rondon Project to the community. "We seek to help residents love their town, care for the climate and environment; we mean to show that it is possible to implement improvements and that the university is there for them," the student says. One of the workshops that surprised Juliana the most was the chat with local women, which dealt with harassment and violence against women. The group had a significant attendance during the discussions, with several reports of abuses and discrimination. As a result of these discussions, the community got motivated to create a women's association.

"We planted some seeds that in time will grow," says Vitor Goulart, a Geology Undergraduate student, also a participant in the project. Vitor gave guided tours around the localities, giving out information about the local vegetation and other geological features of the place. The student also promoted a workshop on the granting of artesian wells, improving what the city administration had already started.

The experience brings new knowledge to the community visited by the Project and new lessons to the "rondonists". "Everybody can grow awareness in favor of change no matter which field they belong to. I want to study urban development. Having been there gave me a sense of what urban spaces are, of the whole thing. From now on, I'm going to work with a much broader and more complex world view," says Juliana. Based on his experience with the project, Vitor is now more aware of how individual actions can make a difference in society and is more motivated to work in his field. "The town is significantly aided by the Rondon project, but we students benefit the most. You learn the dynamics, you have to adapt to different situations when you promote the workshops, and you have to get by. In the end, you get to learn to be very proactive," states Vitor.

The students and teachers held meetings every Saturday since September 2018, at the Rondon Center of UFRGS, to prepare for the Operation. Prep studies, as Vitor and Juliana pointed out, were vital for them to get a good idea of what they would find at the destination, as well as to have adequate training to promote the workshops, which, quite often, are not directly related to their specific field of study at UFRGS.

Despite the preparation, the arrival in Nossa Senhora de Nazaré surprised the students: "There's an expectation clash, because you realize the situation is better than you expected but still precarious. We faced problems that happened to be different from those we thought we would find. Local children don't have access to proper education and care, and there is scarcity of job opportunities," claimed the students.



The project was an opportunity for interaction with the countryside community of Piauí - Photo: Gustavo Diehl / UFRGS

The vice-coordinator of UFRGS team in the Operation, Liliane Ferrari Giordani (School of Education – FACED), said that she has always participated in the training of Rondon teams, but this was her first actual trip with the group. In addition, she mentions that the experience of going to the municipalities aided by the project is unique. The most difficult thing, in her words, is to answer the question "when are you coming back?", because she knows the participants will not come back and, on top of that, she had no choice but telling the truth.

UFRGS President Rui Vicente Oppermann shared his words on the importance of the teamwork developed among those who participate in the Rondon Project. He also mentioned the quality of the activities promoted by the Brazilian universities when compared to those of other countries. Executive Vice-President of Community Outreach, Sandra de Deus, said a project similar to Rondon, named "Convivências", but directed to the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul, aids small towns of Rio Grande do Sul, and, differently from Rondon, under a continuous conduction.

Besides Juliana and Vitor, Ana Carolina Schuh Frantz (Materials Engineering), Marina Fagundes (Environmental Engineering) and Tobias Bertoldi Agostini (Metallurgical Engineering) also attended the reception at the Noble Hall. UFRGS team was coordinated by Álvaro Meneguzzi (School of Engineering) and was formed by the following students: Cecília Charpinel Diniz Gomes (Medical Science), Gabriel Sehnem Heck (Environmental Engineering) and Matheus da Silva Camargo (Biotechnology).

"Rondon – The Rondon Project", managed by the Ministry of Defense, is a social integration initiative that comprises the voluntary participation of university students willing to find solutions for the sustainable development of poor communities. Volunteers participate in training meetings to prepare for the Operation.

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