Puerto Rico Disaster Mitigation and Recovery Studio

Joint work product of students in the Spring 2019 Studio
Poster compiled by Laura Geronimo

ABSTRACT
Category 4 Hurricane Maria touched down over Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, with wind gusts of up to 147 mph (FEMA Report, 2017). Against a backdrop of ongoing economic malaise, the hurricane caused widespread devastation, resulting in the collapse of critical infrastructure systems. In the aftermath, Puerto Rico continues to struggle for stability, amidst an ongoing humanitarian crisis, which has also affected government functions and economic activity.

Given this context, Georgia Tech students and allied faculty interested in Global Development proposed a pilot joint studio between the University of Puerto Rico’s Graduate School of Planning (EGP), and Georgia Tech’s School of City and Regional Planning (SCaRP) focused on disaster mitigation, recovery and socio-economic development. Faculty are currently running parallel courses and an exchange program for the Spring of 2019, with the goal of contributing to the island’s long-term recovery and development. This joint studio is funded by the American Planning Association (APA) and it is intended to be the pilot in a multi-year collaboration ending with an implementation component.

CONTEXT / RESEARCH PROBLEM
- Low income and historically marginalized communities located along a degraded 3.75 mile-long tidal channel.
- Communities developed informal settlements along the borders of the channel, which has since become clogged with sediment, debris and waste.
- Over 3,000 structures still discharge raw sewage into the channel (EPA 2015).
- Communities experienced severe damage during Hurricane Maria, and remain vulnerable to climate threats such as hurricanes, sea level rise, and extreme heat.

OBJECTIVES
- The development of a transferable model to channel planning assistance to other vulnerable communities – one which captures local and international institutional resources and talent.
- Enhancing the capacity of next generation planners to manage climate change issues and devising transferable tools and analytics that strengthen the planning capability of local communities and organizations.

METHODS
- Field work
- Interviews
- Workshops
- Round table discussions
- Empirical Work
- Data Collection and Processing

RESULTS
- Students helped fundraise $15,000 through the APA Disaster Grant
- APA Foundation Awards $78,000 in Disaster Recovery Grants

STUDENT-DRIVEN, CO-DESIGNED STUDIO
- Student-driven studio that leverages student connections and experience
- Students involved in all aspects of planning:
  1. Conceptual development
  2. Proposal writing & Funding
  3. Partnerships & communications
  4. Research & content

STUDIO FORMAT

LIMITATIONS and OPPORTUNITIES
- Limitations:
  • Significant burden of coordination and fundraising on student coordinators

- Opportunities:
  • Recommendation 1: Establish revolving funding support for student-driven studios
  • Recommendation 2: Establish administrative support, and draw clear lines between faculty and student responsibilities

REFERENCES