



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
Jessica Ortiz

Will defend her thesis

**Social Contracts, Resilience, and Adaptive Capacity: A Case Study of
Post-Hurricane Maria Puerto Rico**

Abstract

Post-disaster adaptation has not commonly been viewed through the lens of social contracts. Many aspects of disaster recovery, however, manifest through arrangements among the affected citizens, entities who claim responsibility for relief, and other actors that might participate in reestablishing normalcy which necessarily raises questions about the negotiation of social contracts. This research explores two narratives surrounding post-Hurricane recovery both for their perspective of successful recovery and of the unwritten negotiations and understandings of responsibility and rights in hurricane relief. This research uses a community case study along with central documents to define the negotiation of a contract surrounding recovery, including who should be involved, where to prioritize change and adaptation, and what tools or resources are necessary for success.

This case study focused on a community in rural Puerto Rico who have self-identified as having successful response and recovery from Hurricane Maria in September 2017. Simultaneously, I examined major plans for response and recovery post-Maria from the central government. Since resilience is at the forefront of island-wide narratives surrounding recovery, I use this concept from literature along with adaptive capacity to understand how this community frames their ability to bounce-back after the storm as well as how those dictating recovery envision a “resilient” outcome for the island. Interviews revealed strategies, social networks, community input and work as central components to success in hurricane recovery, while government documents showed a fixed approach that intends to increase resilience through innovation and

federal support. Community resilience and success in recovery post-Hurricane is attributed to flexible decision-making without mention of responsibilities of government. This research adds to our understanding of resilience in the context of disasters by showing two distinct framings being used to define and achieve successful recovery on the island. For Puerto Rico, this research is relevant within the re-negotiation of the island's social contract with the United States while aid funding is currently being debated.

Tuesday, April, 9, 2019
11:00 a.m.
Wrigley Hall, Room 401

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
David Manuel-Navarrete (co-chair)
Sonja Klinsky (co-chair)
Tischa Muñoz Erickson (member)