

The dates when Hurricane Maria took place were during the middle of the fall semester, which meant that all university work was placed on hold. Everything in Puerto Rico was paralyzed for a little over a month, and many challenges were encountered. Personally, the biggest challenge encountered was the lack of communication with loved ones and the outside world. It felt like we lived in the past, where mobile phones didn't exist. The only way of communicating was visiting the person or leaving notes on their doors. Another obstacle faced was the environment: many trees fell, blocking major streets. Tree branches were dried out and crops had died. Several roofs were either damaged or flown away by the wind gusts, including my house and my grandmother's house. The island's infrastructure was also severely damaged; light posts either fell or were about to fall, traffic lights and antennas had to be replaced, several bridges had collapsed, and so on.

Even though there were many obstacles, there were just as many takeaways from the situation. In my experience, I had never felt such closeness to my neighbors and those nearest to me. Seeing children playing and running around in the street I live in was something I had never seen before. You had no option but to go outside and spend the day away. It made me realize that all the years living in my neighborhood I had taken everything for granted. The experience also taught me, as an architecture major, to design resiliently and focus heavily on the environmental issues that designs face. Many buildings were severely damaged by the Hurricane, to the extent where Puerto Rican designers had to make a new set of codes for future development projects in the island.

Things that could've improved my Post María experience could be organized local programs that help the ones that need it most, as well as better communication with those outside the island.

If anyone is near to experience a situation similar to what we faced, I would recommend to definitely stock on food, water, and cash. Similarly, they must stay in touch with those nearest to them in case of emergencies. If universities and colleges have sufficient funds and are willing to donate them to their town, that could possibly speed up the recovery process. These institutions can also help by creating groups dedicated to offer different aspects such as: food, shelter, cleaning and transportation in order to make sure their students and the public in general are taken care of. Post María efforts can improve by being broken down into clusters, where possibly each sector or neighborhood can distribute the efforts. This way, the chances of everyone receiving help is higher. I would recommend the existing programs to make themselves more known to the public, by either visiting schools, colleges, universities, and/or neighborhoods in order to appeal to the public.

CIUDAD DESTRUIDA, GENTE UNIDA



Unity in the Aftermath

Naomi G. Sánchez Carmona, Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico

B.Arch, Graphic Design Minor | Undergraduate, Senior 6th year