

Mapping Collaboration as Resistance to Neoliberalism: A Case Study of Participatory Action Research in Puerto Rico

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Abstract

La ricerca-azione partecipativa (RAP) è una metodologia di ricerca e una forma non gerarchica di produzione di conoscenza che riunisce partecipanti provenienti dal mondo accademico e dalla comunità locale in un partenariato di ricerca collaborativa che mira alla trasformazione sociale. In questo contributo discuto uno studio qualitativo della durata di un anno che ho condotto in un campus universitario pubblico a Cayey, Porto Rico, esaminando etnograficamente il rapporto di collaborazione tra le persone coinvolte in un processo di PAR. Il contesto della ricerca era un corso interdisciplinare che ho tenuto durante l'anno accademico 2019-2020. Nel contributo, discuto alcune delle sfide della PAR in un contesto istituzionale precario e metto in evidenza i modi in cui il gruppo di ricerca ha superato questi ostacoli. Di fronte a una recessione iniziata nel 2006 e all'imposizione di un Consiglio di Amministrazione e Controllo Fiscale da parte del Congresso degli Stati Uniti, l'esistenza dell'unica università pubblica di Porto Rico è *minacciata* da drastici tagli di bilancio. Sostengo l'importanza della collaborazione e della solidarietà nel contesto della realtà fiscale, sociale e politica di Porto Rico.

Participatory action research (PAR) is both a research methodology and nonhierarchical form of knowledge production that brings together participants, from academia and outside communities, in a collaborative research partnership that seeks social transformation. Drawing on fieldwork spanning the 2019-2020, I present a case study of an interdisciplinary undergraduate research course I taught at a campus of Puerto Rico's only public university. I illuminate the challenges of initiating PAR in the Puerto Rican archipelago, a non-sovereign US territory; I discuss some of the lessons learned throughout the collaborative partnership and conclude by offering possible avenues in PAR grounded in a prefigurative politics of liberation.

Parole chiave: ricerca- azione partecipativa; austerità; solidarietà

Keywords: Participatory action research; austerity; solidarity

Introduction

Participatory action research (PAR) is both a methodology and nonhierarchical form of knowledge production that brings together researchers from academic and nonacademic spaces in a collaborative research partnership that seeks social transformation. Drawing on fieldwork spanning the 2019-2020

academic year, I present a case study of an interdisciplinary undergraduate PAR course (IPAR course hereafter) I taught at the Cayey campus of the University of Puerto Rico, the only public university system in the archipelago. The course implemented the principles and foundations of PAR, incorporated an intersectional social justice curriculum, and integrated critical dialogic techniques grounded in reflection and action. The questions that guide this article are: 1) how can PAR create the conditions for collective agency? and 2) what role can public/private space play in countering neoliberal logics of privatization and dispossession?

This article answers the abovementioned research questions by presenting the challenges of establishing a community-university partnership in a precarious institutional context during the initial phase of PAR. I highlight the ways the research team navigated these obstacles and offer some of the lessons gleaned from our year-long partnership. Two important lessons emerged from this case study. The first foregrounds the importance of the intersectional social justice approach that laid the groundwork for critical engagements around social identity and its relevance to Puerto Rico's historical and current context. The second lesson highlights the importance of establishing research practices that center collective ways of being and relating, such as decision-making processes, leveraging differences as assets in collaborative work, and engaging in a gradual trust-building processes through dialogue. These practices can be a useful approach in PAR, not only in Puerto Rico's colonial setting, but in other contexts.

Researcher positionality

Although I am part of the Puerto Rican diaspora, having spent roughly half my life in the archipelago, I remain closely connected to it through my family, scholarship, and political commitments. Thus, when I began my doctoral studies in the Social Justice Education program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I knew that my dissertation would take me back home. Through a qualitative and ethnographic study, I sought to understand how students, community partners, and I made meaning of our collaborative relationship from our own subjugated positionalities, bringing our «whole set of knowledges that

have been disqualified as inadequate» (Foucault, 1980: 82). My research agenda is inevitably entwined with my own identities and serves to push forward anticolonial approaches to inquiry that seek to transform oppressive conditions in Puerto Rico and beyond.

In the first two sections of this article, I describe the fiscal and political context to Puerto Rico's current juncture and introduce the college campus where I taught the IPAR course. In the *The Origins of (Participatory) Action Research* section I discuss the elements of action research and participatory action research, highlighting similarities and differences among the two. I then outline the IPAR course and projects that are the object of this case study. The article concludes by presenting the challenges and lessons learned from the case study and the implications for the practice of PAR in other contexts.

Compounded Crises in an Old Colony: Debt, neoliberalism, and austerity

Under US occupation since 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico is neither a self-determining nation nor a US state. The archipelago's lack of fiscal and political autonomy, along with local mismanagement contributed to massive debt accumulation (Melendez, 2018). To offset the deficit, neoliberal austerity measures such as massive public worker layoffs were adopted through legislation¹. Neoliberalism, as «a theory of political economic practices, proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework» (Harvey, 2005: 2). This is done through «privatization, reductions in social protections, financial deregulation, [and] labor flexibilization» (Gago, 2017: 1). Perhaps one of the few advantages Puerto Rico's unique colonial situation has is that it is precluded from undergoing structural adjustment policies that have placed independent countries in a state of onerous indebtedness to international financial institutions (Forster, Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King, 2019).

The crisis came to a tipping point in 2016 when the governor at the time, Alejandro García Padilla, announced that the

¹ Law 7 of March 9, 2009, implemented during the administration of former Governor Luis Fortuño, resulted in the layoffs of about 30.000 public workers.

72-billion-dollar municipal bond debt (with an additional 49-billion-dollar debt in public worker pensions) was unpayable. In June of that year the United States Congress passed the PROMESA² law, which resulted in the imposition of a Fiscal Oversight Management Board (FOMB). The FOMB delineated several draconian budget cuts in the areas of health services, employment benefits, retirement pensions, and education, including massive elementary and secondary school closures (Santiago Ortiz, 2020). The territory's subordinate political, economic, and social status have impeded pursuing other avenues to economic recovery, including a transparent audit to the odious debt accrued over decades (Molinari, 2020). These measures also included a proposed scaffolded budget reduction of 500 million dollars for the University of Puerto Rico, considered «a neoliberal testing ground» (Brusi, 2011: 7). Students have long resisted measures such as tuition hikes and the elimination of tuition waivers through at least eleven large-scale strikes and hundreds of protests, many of these repressed by the state (Atilés-Osoria, 2013; LeBrón, 2019).

Locating the research site: University of Puerto Rico and the Cayey urban hub

The University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Cayey campus inaugurated as a regional college in 1967 before becoming a formal university campus in 1969. The campus is located in the central-eastern mountainous region of Puerto Rico and is adjacent to the town center, or urban hub of Cayey. The urban hub features a central square or *plaza* surrounded by a cathedral, city hall, businesses, and residences. Up until the late twentieth century, the urban hub was the center of commerce until various factors led the center to lose its vibrancy. Among these were the automobile boom that began after the first World War and later, due to the proliferation of highways that facilitated intra-island travel (Picó, 2007). The shift towards multinational stores caused many younger and middle-aged adults to move towards the suburbs, with an aging population remaining in the town center (Bernabe, 2002; Picó, 2007). Moreover, the massive exodus of the last decade, exacerbated by Hurricane Maria in September 2017, has also contributed to the decline in urban hub residents. Studies estimate 630,027 Puerto

² Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act.

Ricans have left the archipelago between 2006-2016, at the start of the financial crisis (Hinojosa, 2018). Between 2017-18, an additional 223.861 Puerto Ricans left the archipelago.

According to the 2010 census, the town of Cayey has an estimated 48.119 residents³, with 16.680 of these living in the urban zone of the municipality. On weekdays, the town center bustles with pedestrians running errands, visiting local government agencies, dining at restaurants, going to the *Plaza del Mercado* (local marketplace) or visiting the town's various museums. When businesses close in the late afternoon, the town goes quiet, save for a handful of bars that stay open until late night.

Connecting the community to the campus is part UPR-Cayey's mission. The institution states in its vision that it seeks to be «an educational model of intellectual transformation for undergraduate students, through the integration of research, artistic creation, and community service» (author's translation)⁴. One of the initiatives that makes this mission and vision possible is the Interdisciplinary Research Institute (IRI). It was through the IRI's Research Mentoring Program that I designed the two-semester PAR course I taught over the 2019-2020 academic year that would also be the site of my dissertation research. The course allows visiting professors from the diaspora or Puerto Rican Studies scholars to teach an interdisciplinary research courses with undergraduate students as their research assistants. During the semester prior to arriving to Puerto Rico, I began conversations with a board member of a university-affiliated space in the urban hub called *The U*, who was interested in collaborating on various research projects. Although the original intent was to work with *The U*, various challenges impeded the partnership. Before I turn to these challenges, I discuss the origins of participatory action research differentiating this form of knowledge production and methodology from the broader field of action research.

The Foundations and Origins of (Participatory) Action Research

Action research are seeks to understand on «the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action» (Lewin, 1946: 35). AR, as a «family of practices» draws from a variety of theoretical frameworks and perspectives

³ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

⁴ <https://cayey.upr.edu/mision-vision-y-objetivos/>.

such as Marxism, pragmatism, and experiential education, and is widely used in practitioner research (Bradbury Huang, 2010: 94). While the origins of action research (AR) cannot be traced to one person or group, two key (Western) figures that were fundamental to the development of AR were German social psychologist Kurt Lewin and philosopher, psychologist, and US educator John Dewey (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014). Lewin's model of AR outlined praxis by way of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and the repetition of this steps in a spiral (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014). Action and reflection are fundamental to AR because they allow for flexibility in the inquiry process instead of a rigid set of steps that do not adhere to the reality of what is studied.

Participatory action research is located within the broader umbrella of AR, and like AR, takes a praxis approach to inquiry. However, PAR is characterized by the integration and participation of those that have been traditionally the object of research. PAR is defined as a

«methodology that fosters horizontal relationships, erases distinctions between researchers and 'the researched', encourage[es] a dialogue between academic and people's knowledge, and transform[s] research into a tool of consciousness-raising and political organizing» (Rappaport, 2020: xvii).

PAR seeks to transform the researcher-researched relationship into a subject-subject relationship, where all participants have equal say in the way research is «conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the outside world» (McTaggart, 1997: 28). What makes participation authentic is the collaboration of the co-researchers during all stages of the research process: from planning to acting, as well as the observation and reflection stages (ivi, 35).

PAR shares many of its theoretical underpinnings with AR, particularly that of Marxism and emancipatory approaches to understanding lived conditions and experience. One of the key figures of PAR, Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda, put forth a PAR philosophy that critiqued positivism in the social sciences, opting instead for experiential approaches to inquiry from the locus of the oppressed and the grassroots (Fals-Borda, 1991). He drew from Marxist analyses of historical materialism, the

work of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1996) on dialogue and critical consciousness, as well as Lewin's work on action research (Fals-Borda, 1987, 2001). The work of Paulo Freire, particularly around dialogue, action, and reflection, was instrumental in shaping PAR's commitment to praxis and social transformation (Fals-Borda, 2001). Fals-Borda viewed PAR as a way to organize «countervailing power, for the poor, oppressed, and exploited groups and social classes» (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991: 3). In other words, PAR has an explicitly political dimension to knowledge production and transformative action.

Fals-Borda centered a class-based approach to PAR, rather than issues of gender and race. However, other scholars provided necessary critiques and dialogues within the field of PAR. Ella Edmondson Bell (2001) attributes the lack of racial discourse in Latin American approaches to PAR to the prioritization of anticolonial struggles in social movements. In the US, however, race has been visible in PAR scholarship, as well as issues of gender (Fox and Fine, 2015; Maguire, 2001). In the 1980's Patricia Maguire (1987) called attention to the androcentrism of PAR, manifested in language and lack of participation, representation, and involvement by women in the research process. Researchers, scholars, and practitioners have since engaged with issues of race and gender in PAR in meaningful and intentional ways (Akom, 2011; Torre, 2009). For example, Akom's (2011) Black emancipatory action research framework infused a theory of structural racialization into PAR approaches, so researchers can analyze how historical legacies, individuals, structures, and institutions work interactively to distribute material and symbolic advantages and disadvantages along racial lines (ivi, 113-114).

The PAR project our research team developed and implemented were informed by antiracist and feminist approaches to that incorporated an analysis of structural inequities within the classroom and in our project planning meetings. This meant bringing to the fore, for example, the ways nation-building discourses of racial mixture obfuscate and continue to hide antiblackness in Puerto Rico and the ways heterosexism begins with familial and institutional socialization since birth. The process of theorizing through critical thinking and awareness was crucial in creating PAR projects that were inclusive of the most historically marginalized sectors of society. In the next section I discuss the IPAR course in more detail.

IPAR Course Objectives, Methods, and Participants

The three-credit undergraduate IPAR course I taught for two semesters focused on the principles and foundations of PAR and intergroup dialogue (IGD). IGD is a critical dialogic methodology that cultivates learning and engagement across different social identities such as class, gender, race, ability, and sexuality (Zúñiga, Nagda and Sevig, 2002). IGD also fosters active listening and communication skills across difference, which are useful when establishing a community partnership. As a trained facilitator in IGD, I chose to couple this methodology with PAR because both seek to create alliances and solidarity in the pursuit of social justice and liberation.

IGD and PAR are also influenced by from Brazilian critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1996). Freire viewed dialogue as a crucial element for critical consciousness, or the awareness of structures of oppression and domination. This understanding enables those that experience oppression to «take action to transform the status quo» (Rappaport, 2020: 13).

The content of the IPAR course was framed within a social justice curriculum exploring issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and colonialism and their intersections to contextualize the social, political, and economic circumstances of the archipelago. The course was grounded in a feminist and critical race pedagogy, where we theorized about our oppression through sharing our experiences as a form of resistance to dominant narratives. These theoretical underpinnings connected understandings of oppression and resistance in Puerto Rico and beyond to the PAR projects the research team carried out.

The PAR Projects

Generally speaking, the PAR projects sought to connect the urban hub of Cayey with the university. We visited various potential sites that provided services to Cayey residents, and ultimately decided to partner with *The U*, a university-affiliated space in the urban hub. This decision, like all subsequent ones, was made via dialogue that sought consensus, yet prioritizing those that lived in the town of Cayey. The Director of *The U* requested we create and administer a survey to urban hub residents detailing their needs and interests. The results would be used to assist the center with their programming and outreach.

The second PAR project, completed in the Spring, consisted of a digital oral history exhibit. Students collaborated with seven Cayey women, designing the interview questions together and meeting prior to establish rapport. Oral histories are powerful tools for collective memory recuperation that «correct, complement, or clarify official or academic accounts written with other class interests or biases in mind» (Fals-Borda, 1991: 8). This is of particular importance in Puerto Rico's colonial context, where nation-building myths center Hispanophilic national narratives that privilege whiteness (Godreau, 2015), and government collusion with corporate interests leads to the disintegration of communities through forceful government expropriations in the name of 'progress'.

PAR Team Participants

The undergraduate course purposefully lasted two semesters to establish a deeper relationship with the community partners. In the Fall Rosa, Bianca, Malena enrolled, with the latter two continuing re-enrolling in the Spring⁵. Chris, Joa, Lisa, and Ana enrolled in the Spring. Students enrolled in the course as well as community partners were participants in my dissertation study but could discontinue participating at any moment and remain in the course. I interviewed all participants at least three times during our partnership and conducted participant observation of our meetings for my dissertation study.

The first community partner that joined our research team was Mercedes, the administrative assistant of *The U*. In her early 60's, Mercedes was a lifelong resident of the urban hub of Cayey. Mercedes' knowledge about the town was crucial to our project for various reasons. When she took students and I on a walking tour in September, she introduced us to business owners, key cultural workers, even introducing us to the mayor when we bumped into him that afternoon. At the end of our tour, we stopped at a coffee shop where the barista mentioned that his co-worker Miguel, might be interested in the project. I contacted Miguel and he was interested in working in our project.

Miguel was an alum of UPR-Cayey and was involved in the student anti-austerity movement as well as the People's Assemblies. The assemblies emerged as dozens of de-centralized groups in the

⁵ All names are pseudonyms throughout the article.

aftermath of the resignation of former governor Ricardo Rosselló. Rosselló's resignation was demanded by hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans, in response to his corrupt administration and his misogynistic, racist, and ableist comments in a Telegram chat leaked to the public (Santiago Ortiz, 2019).

My students and I attended three People's Assembly meetings with the hopes of recruiting co-researchers. We invited anyone interested in joining our research project. It was here that we met Carla and Carlos, a couple of agricultural workers and environmental activists living in rural Cayey. Carlos, Mercedes, and Miguel all knew each other through their involvement with *The U*, particularly after Hurricane Maria when the space served as a donation collection and distribution center. These pre-existing relationships among the community partners made the trust process and dialogue easier among the group, according to Rosa (interview, February 28, 2020). With the four community co-researchers recruited, our PAR team was complete.

Methods and Research Process

With the PAR team organized, our goal was to plan, develop and implement projects benefitting the Cayey community. The PAR team employed several methods to do this, one of these being the oral history interviews. The other was a community asset map Bianca, Rosa, and Malena created in the Fall. Mapping the urban hub by foot, students created a structural census of the town hub's buildings, documenting the services, cultural landmarks, and institutions in the space. The census also indexed which buildings were unoccupied, an ever-present issue in Puerto Rico's urban hubs. Students presented the results in a quantitative report that is available to all online. This report informed our later work as we developed our PAR projects in a more concrete manner.

Challenges to establishing the PAR partnership

The main challenge the PAR team faced was finding out, rather abruptly, that *The U* would be temporarily closing for maintenance at the end of the Fall semester. Without a place to meet, the PAR research team decided to move ahead without an institutional community partner and continue working towards projects that benefitted the urban hub of Cayey. In December,

Mercedes offered her home as our new team headquarters. The lack of a meeting space led our team to refocus the PAR project towards opening a community center. The center would support various populations such as the elderly population, the LGBTQIA+ community, and survivors of gender violence in the town. We began scouting the abandoned properties mapped in the structural census Malena, Bianca, and Rosa conducted Fall semester with the goal of eventually being able to open the center. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to shift our meetings, projects, and classes online in mid-March, Mercedes suggested we create a virtual community center that would enable communication with the Cayey community. The site also serves as a platform to present our projects, research, and community resources. Although the website was not a substitute for the direct outreach work we needed to do to connect with residents of the urban hub who did not have internet access or knowledge of web navigation, it was a way to create an archive of our work and reach some of the population. The pandemic also affected the way the oral history project was carried out. Most students were able to meet with the women that would be sharing her story, but ultimately had to conduct their interviews over the phone.

'El Pueblo Ayuda al Pueblo'

The questions I posed at the beginning of this article are concerned with how PAR process can create the conditions for political and collective agency and how public/private space can be repurposed or reclaimed to directly counter neoliberal logics of privatization and dispossession. I summarize some initial findings and lessons that address these interrelated questions before concluding with suggestions for future practice in community-university PAR contexts.

Building Solidarity and Political Agency through Collaboration

Our research group brought together people from different ages, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, and sexualities. These differences became more evident when the pandemic began. For example, some students had to connect to class on their cell phone, some community partners could not connect at all and one student lost a family member suddenly

and tragically. Our team built a mutual aid network anchored in collective care where they not only offered each other support in the PAR projects, but shared resources to navigate, for example, obtaining unemployment benefits.

As a facilitator of our project meetings, I was attentive to power dynamics, acknowledging my own class privilege which afforded me working internet and steady employment. To address power dynamics to a certain degree, project and class meetings had a nonhierarchical structure «where everyone's voice was taken into account». This structure fostered collaboration in our project (Malena interview, June 2020). This meant that although some co-researchers were more vocal than others, everyone's role in the project spoke to their strengths and what they could contribute to the group. Sharing our own past experiences in activism, social movements, or even community work helped build a collaborative relationship grounded in education but also action (Carlos, interview, August 2020). Miguel noted:

«*El pueblo ayuda al pueblo* (the people help the people). When we all have the same goal, it doesn't matter what differences you have. If everyone is willing to help, it will happen» (interview, June 2020).

Mercedes was crucial for the continuation of our project once our partnership with *The U* fizzled. Her cozy home became our headquarters, where we would gather around in her dining room table breaking bread, checking in on how we were doing that week. Infusing dialogic principles in the classroom and in our PAR meetings provided communication skills that facilitated knowledge production and strengthened interpersonal relationships. Our conversations about class, race, gender, and colonialism allowed us to critically engage with how systemic oppression impacts us and those we know. By knowing each other's struggles we were able to «build affinities inside of difference» (Sandoval, 2000: 63). In Carlos' words, we «built a solid community» (Interview, August 2020). This community was grounded in a feminist and antiracist relational framework, and «a solidarity method by which we can achieve significant change» (Ana, final project report).

While not everyone that participated in the project was politically active or considered themselves an activist, our collaboration had an explicit political dimension to it. Our conversations

constantly mentioned the ways the local and federal government failed the people of Puerto Rico. We debated whether to seek the town government's assistance to locate a community space to hold meetings before the lockdown began. We were asked to go through time consuming processes that discouraged using publicly designated spaces for meetings. We ultimately took a political stance by working at margins of the government because «they do not provide the necessary tools for citizens to have just or fair conditions», as Lisa mentioned.

Once we began working on opening the community center, we reached out to other community organizations that did the kind of mutual aid work we were interested in doing, especially around reclaiming abandoned buildings. After our course ended, some of the members of the research team decided to continue working towards opening the center as well as projects to address the problem of food insecurity the town and rest of the archipelago experiences. Thus, the Cayey Urban Hub Collective was born.

Reclaiming Space as Resistance to Neoliberal Logics

The topics of colonialism, government mismanagement, and the austerity measures mandated by the FOMB were ever-present in the IPAR course and partnership meetings. Both students and community partners discussed their own struggle and resistance to the precarious conditions affecting most of the population. Some students and community partners participated in the 2017 students strikes, the #RickyRenuncia protests, and community kitchens (Santiago Ortiz and Melendez-Badillo, 2020). The latter are part of a network of grassroots community and mutual aid organizations that have emerged within the last decade in response to the government abandonment of the most vulnerable and marginalized. '*Solo el pueblo salva al pueblo*' (only the people save the people) became a popular slogan for community groups and organizations that have organized under the principles of mutual aid and anticapitalist politics to resist because they lacked functioning internet, neoliberal policies that have privatized public services (Garriga-López and Gies, 2020; Vélez, 2020).

These mutual aid and collective initiatives have also taken the form of abandoned building occupations. For example, Urbe

Apie⁶, a grassroots organization and now nonprofit organization, has turned abandoned buildings in the urban hub of Caguas into a used boutique, community garden, art gallery, and a living space, among other initiatives. We visited the organization when we decided we wanted to occupy an abandoned property and transform it into a community center. While working on this long-term goal, Miguel, told me how he, along with his partner and a friend, had been buying food for houseless people in the urban hub with leftover funds from public assistance. Inspired by Miguel's act of resource distribution, I suggested we organize *alacenas solidarias*, or solidary pantries as the first initiative of our Cayey Urban Hub Collective. For one afternoon a month we set up a donation distribution and collection tent diagonal to la Plaza del Mercado with items such as nonperishable food, clothing, and hygienic supplies for people to leave, take, or both. Our initiative emerged around the same time *alacenas feministas* (feminist pantries) were established as a solidary alternative in the wake of COVID-19⁷. The *alacenas feministas* were set up in abandoned urban spaces such as schools, repurposing the proprietary casualties that the neoliberal state left behind. Our collective identified an abandoned property where we will be opening a permanent solidary pantry and community garden, and eventually, the community center.

Conclusion

The case study I have presented in this article outlines the ways in which collaboration in PAR can catalyze political agency, reconfigure social relationships, and repurpose private property for the benefit of the public. In doing so, my hope is that other scholars interested in working with communities and students find the lessons outlined in this article useful. Far from romanticizing the challenges we faced, I have focused on the how a group comprised of differently situated people, worked together towards accomplishing «the mutual goal of advancing knowledge in the search of greater justice» (Fals-Borda, 1991: 152). PAR was the vehicle that ultimately led us to coalesce and transcend the course through our community collective which continues to meet every week, virtually.

⁶ <https://www.urbeapie.com/>.

⁷ <https://www.bandera.org/alacenas-feministas/>.

Although these acts do not eliminate the neoliberal state, they create the possibilities for self-determination by transforming relationships and building infrastructures of resistance that counter the fragility of the urban landscape (Santiago Ortiz and Melendez-Badillo, 2020; Villanueva, Cobián and Rodríguez, 2018). In Puerto Rico, these infrastructures laid the groundwork for the summer '19 protests that ousted former governor Ricardo Rosselló and live on through the work of some of the organizations I have mentioned in this article. Although «these projects should not replace the role of the State and release them from their responsibility and obligation», we cannot afford to wait for the government to fulfill their mandated- role, as people's lives are at stake (Rodríguez Soto, 2020).

I have also pointed to the ways PAR fosters solidarity among co-researchers, as a form of resistance to neoliberal logics of individualism and transactional relationships. Our experience working in a research team with people that were radically different from one another demonstrates that it is possible to sustain a collaborative project and experience disagreement or conflict. Sustaining collaborations takes effort, care, mutual responsibility, and valuing everyone's opinion, knowledge, and contribution equally. Puerto Rico's situation is not unique. The current landscape of increased precarity, inequities, natural disasters, and punitive governance shows us the urgency of collectivizing the surplus of abandoned spaces, and «practic[ing] new ways of being [by] collectively meeting our own needs rather than relying on harmful institutions» (Spade, 2020: 133, citing Gerderloos, 2015). Our collective survival depends on it.

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