

CASE STUDY #8 by P. Madrigal

# ENVISIONING AN EQUITABLE FUTURE FOR MIAMI’S SEA LEVEL RISE CRISIS

Positionality statement

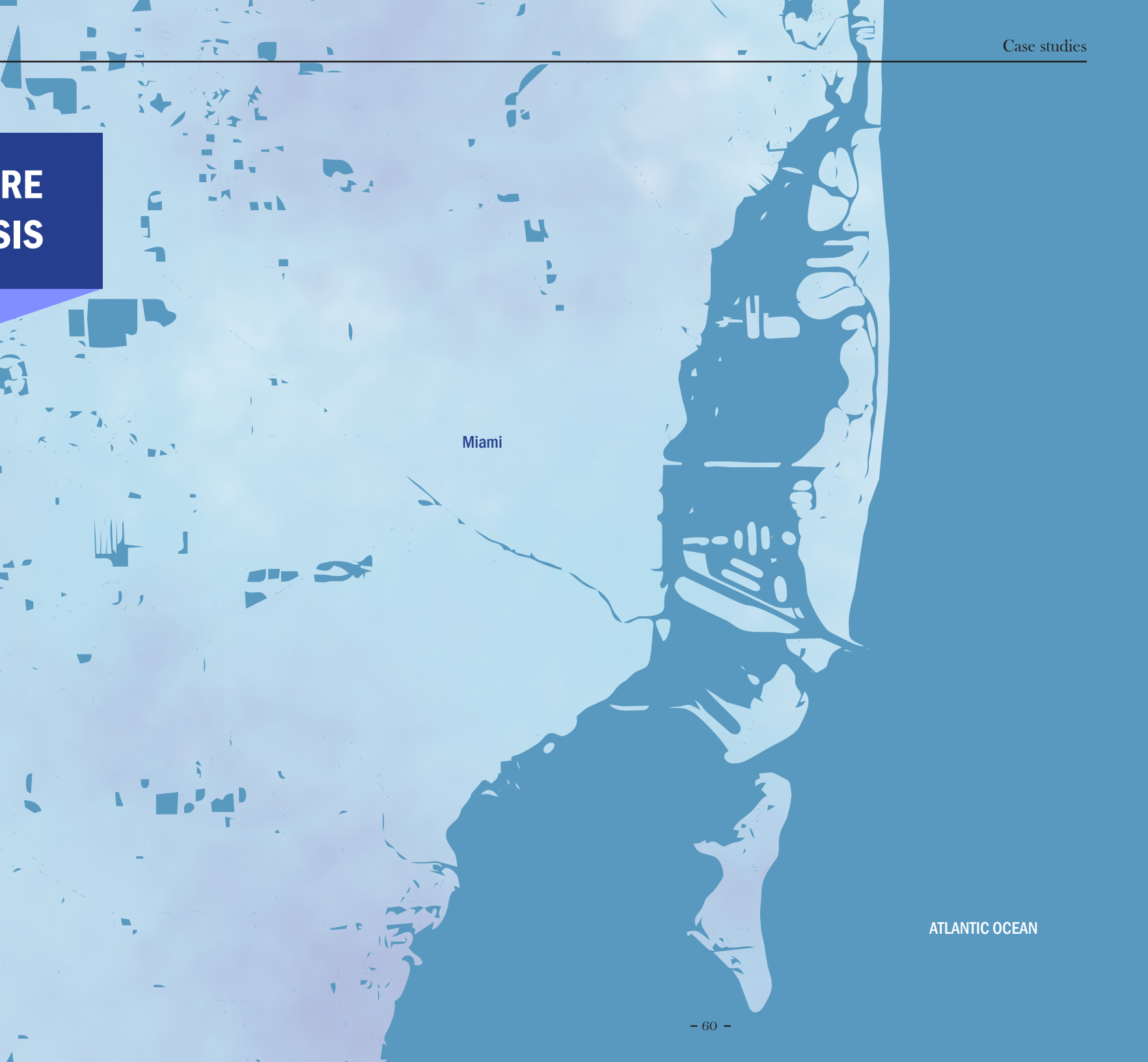
My name is Pablo Madrigal and I am a 23 year old, senior year university student at The University of British Columbia. I was born in Mexico and moved to Canada 10 years ago and I now hold Canadian citizenship. Being the son of two doctors, I grew up in a privileged environment and I could never understand to its fullest extent what the communities I will be talking about have had to endure throughout generations of oppression and marginalization. However, growing up queer in Mexico has meant I’ve had to endure some hardships myself.

Root cause analysis and Inequalitree

For this assignment I chose a very specific issue that limits the amount of everyday impacts but it’s very good example of the horrifying influences power dynamics have over marginalized communities. Particularly, highlighting how resilience

to climate change should be an inclusive dialogue between communities and stakeholders in order to ensure no one is left behind. The two most substantial factors that have contributed to sea-level rise over the last 20 years have been warming ocean water temperatures - contributing about 39% - and the influx of fresh water from melting ice sheets, ice caps, and glaciers - contributing about 49%. (Climate Change, 2013). The communities that will be mostly affected by these are the ones located in coastal areas of the world. Heavy tourist development in the form of luxury condos and resorts occurs in the more affluent areas of the world in coastal areas such as Florida. Miami particularly, is a low-lying city with the majority of the people living in elevations less than 10m and its subtropical location allows for frequent cyclone activity (Genovese et. al., 2011).

Some communities that will experience climate gentrification



ATLANTIC OCEAN



in Miami, will be the neighbourhood of “Little Haiti” which has been a historically a black neighbourhood, as well as Liberty City which includes undocumented migrant workers and Latino communities.

These neighbourhoods are situated at higher elevations than the coastal zones and because of this, real estate developers are looking to build new luxury condos, elevating property values in the area making it impossible for the current demographic to afford housing. This will displace these communities away from their homes (Keenan, 2018). An example of this is a home valued at 100,000 USD that was renovated and is now listed at 559, 000 USD, that’s almost double the price in a span of three years . These news are even more shocking when you consider the fact that low-income marginalized communities have been historically denied access to waterfront locations in “developed” countries because forces such as white supremacy, capitalism, and racism, allow for these areas to be “claimed” by wealthy developers that cater to the rich. Under a capitalist framework, there is an incentive to protect valuable assets within cities against climate change regardless of who you are displacing, or the communities that will be targeted by renovating neighbourhoods to fit

in Miami, will be the a particular aesthetic. Waterfront properties are seen as amenities that only wealthy people can afford. However, since these areas are the ones with most exposure to the elements and are the ones that are at most risk, and there is a projected decrease of about a 10 percent in home value due to climate change in the coast (Chakraborty, 2014). From a developer’s perspective, investing in a home in a neighbourhoods like “Little Haiti” or Liberty city makes more sense now when taking into account the severe storms and increased weather events that will be more apparent in Florida over the next couple of years. An example of this was evident following Hurricane Irma where valuable properties in the heart of downtown were underwater. Higher elevation properties will be worth more in the future.

Some questions to keep in mind after this is how can decision-makers formulate strategies that will make resilience against climate change in areas that are at risk equitable? Like Jonathan Hahn pointed out in his article, “The waters are rising in South Florida, and simply building a seawall isn’t going to solve the climate crisis that’s coming , or the socioeconomic one that’s already here” (Hahn, 2018). I’ve personally never been to

Miami so writing about the implications these marginalized low-income communities will endure when the city is faced with sea level rise is strange. I don’t presume to understand the level of hardship these groups have had to endure throughout their history. However, the thing that upsets me the most was that this is yet another example of how the people in power that have always benefitted from keeping the economic gap between demographics are getting away with displacing entire communities because they are now faced with the possibility of their luxury oceanfront villa to be flooded. Stripping away the heritage of neighbourhoods by making them more suited to the likes of the upper and middle classes.

Envisioning climate futures

After exploring some of the root causes of the climate issue in Miami like colonialism, market capitalism and the effect these have had on the relocation of marginalized groups in Miami in the face of a climate crisis, we will now explore envisioning scenarios that strive for the creation of an equitable and empowering future for the marginalized communities in the Miami area. One of the issues of great concern surrounding this problem is how developers go about the acquisition of property

from the communities that are most vulnerable.

Neighbourhood located at higher elevations are increasingly becoming more valuable as Miami is preparing to deal with sea level rise, this causes what Keenan has identified as ‘Climate Gentrification’ through the redistribution into areas that are at least risk of flooding (Keenan, 2018). Developers will come into their neighbourhoods, which have been historically non-white and they will cheat the people by purchasing land from them at a much lower price than market-value. Redevelopers build luxury properties in these areas which increases the cost of living, gentrifying the area, and making it impossible for the previous members of the community to acquire property in the neighbourhood forcing them to settle outside their own communities (Chakraborty, 2014).

At the core of any community development project, the emphasis should be placed on extensive consultation with local communities prior to the implementation of the project itself. The current plan to deal with sea level rise is to spend a lot of money on creating infrastructure that will withstand these changes. However, efforts should go beyond injecting millions

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of dollars into projects that will improve the resilience of infrastructure to the effects of sea level rise, and instead introduce smart design and policy with the hopes of amending years and years of taking advantage of minorities that were displaced from the coast by the very same developers that, are trying to relocate them again.

So when it comes to reimagining what the future will hold for these communities, you have to keep in mind the intersections between racism, legislation, displacement, and development. A few things that are not necessarily progressive but have proven effective include giving these communities the resources to know how much the value of their properties actually is, and to equip them with the tools to fight developers so that if they want to sell, they

want to sell, they do so at fair prices. And if they don’t want to sell, they know how to assertively get them to retreat from the community. The hope of this is to stop climate gentrification by helping these different communities like “Little Haiti” and Allapattah, create a mobilized community activism network that will question developers when they come, or when affluent residents from coastal areas go into the neighbourhoods and try to purchase homes at lower values, taking advantage of the community members (Hahn, 2017).

Another way to achieve this is by having legislation in place that will ensure that an increase in density and affordable housing in those buildings go hand in hand. This puts pressure on developers to include the communities as stakeholders and

to maintain the integrity of the neighbourhoods. More density in higher elevation but don’t push out the people or have fair alternative living plans can be implemented in different ways. Density bonuses as ‘Community Amenity Contributions’ can be a good way in which the city of Miami as policy can get developers to reserve certain parts of the building that go towards affordable housing, or by benefiting the community culturally, and this is already being done in cities like Vancouver. By incentivising developers that want to build density in an area they have to provide an amenity to local community in form of affordable housing or cultural planning. These can include more dance studios, artists’ studios, and cultural spaces that will help retain the culture of the community as density increases (City of Vancouver). The city can also restrict developers on where they plan on increasing density, and ideally they would set up these restrictions in the neighbourhoods that are already receiving pressure to re-locate its constituents.

Another way is realizing the importance of community. This is already being done in the form of community trainings in vulnerable neighbourhoods with workshops series. Studies on food security have found that

the best way to build resilience is empowering women and girls in communities (Mercy Corps, 2014). Similarly, an initiative that brings workshops series for resilience against climate crises in the low income neighbourhood of Allapattah already exists. The Cleo Institute offers workshop series called “Empowering Resilient Women and Girls, The Power of WE” and it’s described as “a program for women and adolescent girls to connect the dots between climate change, health risks, economy, emergency preparedness, and civic engagement.” The program is divided in different categories including “We Learn” plus yoga class, “WE prepare”, “WE act”, “WE lead”. They offer free child care, and community dinners while the communities are being educated on how to build resilience against these climate issues (Cleo Institute, 2019).

A more design based approach that can help is creating requirements that coastal developers have to follow as special provisions on the design. Cities all over the world are already doing this and these provisions could include green design, no homes on the ground level, as well as regulating the design measures to protect property and assets against flooding and sea level rise. Buildings could have different types of certification including,

Water Sense, FSC, GreenSeal, or Cradle to Cradle materials (Vierra, 2016). These are all scenarios that have the possibility to help in changing the narrative of inequality that has been perpetuated onto marginalized communities by creating an equitable future built on the foundation of community engagement and resilience.



TIMELINE of Miami’s sea level rise crisis

Events related to climate, race, and the Miami’s sea level rise crisis; inspired by the opening activity of Conversations.

**1800s**  
Many people from the Bahamas start to settle in the Neighbourhood of Coconut Grove looking for jobs

**1920s**  
African American settlers start to join the original settlers from the Bahamas

**1960s**  
People from Haiti start to arrive to Miami. Overtown is known for its music scene and it’s regarded as “The Harlem of the South.” But construction of the I-95 highway tore the community into four quadrants and it hasn’t been unified since then.

**1980s**  
A peak 25,000 refugees from Haiti is recorded

**1980**  
The Mariel boatlift brought 125,000 Cuban immigrants and significant change to Miami.

**1981**  
The Miami Beach Community Development Corporation devised a plan to revamp the city, exploiting its tropical climate, beaches and a nearby available workers

**1994**  
The Florida Centre for Environmental Studies (CES) was established by Florida’s State University System’s Board of Regents.

**2005**  
Hurricane Rita

**2005**  
Hurricane Katrina

**2005**  
Hurricane Dennis

**2004**  
Hurricane Jeanne

**2004**  
Hurricane Ivan

**2004**  
Hurricane Frances

**2004**  
Hurricane Charley

**2004–2005**  
Between 2004–2005, hurricanes caused over 3 billion dollars in damage. Although most of these numbers include damages to coastal infrastructures, there was an incredibly disproportionate crippling effect on minorities and low-income communities

**2001**  
Efforts to restore the cityscape of Overtown include renovations to the Lyric Theatre and the creation of the Miami River Action Plan

**2006**  
CES started to focus on impacts of climate change on the infrastructure and ecosystems of Florida.

**2008**  
A sustainability plan outlining 137 initiatives that build a blueprint for Miami to meet its goal of reducing greenhouse gases was drafted by GreenPrint. This plan was accomplished from a collaborative process between many stakeholders involving county staff, community members, and business experts, as well as residents

**2009**  
Climate Change research was designated as a Florida Atlantic University (FAU) research priority.

**2010**  
Four country governments in Southeast Florida established the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact. The aim of this agreement is to create mitigation and adaptation strategies that will inform critical policy making and funding decisions at state and federal levels of government. s

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