Puerto Rico is a Caribbean island, the smallest of the Greater Antilles. Our origins evolved from the “indios tainos” who were colonized in 1492 by the Spanish Crown. Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony until 1898 when the United States won the Hispanic American War and the island became a colony of this North American country ever since. Because of the Spanish colonization and the approximately 400 years of Spanish rule we are considered part of Latin America, sharing a similar culture and language; but the United States’ influence is more evident everyday in our traditions: language, music, architecture and life style. Being part of the Antilles Archipelago and the lack of a common frontier with other countries recognizes the sea and the coast as two very important factors in the economic and recreational aspects of our country. One of the most important activities, which emanates from our relationship with the sea, is the fishing industry.
History tells that ever since the natives lived in the island fishing was one of the most important means of obtaining food. The 1950’s brought a new era of industrialization to Puerto Rico and, looking for a better quality of life, the fishermen changed the coastal work for the factory work. But, being an island, it was very difficult to abandon the fishing industry altogether. Time eventually demonstrated how both the local and tourist market's demand for good fresh fish was ever increasing.

In 1959 the government created an economic program that provided tax credits to the fishermen while helping them buy motors for their boats. With this program the government directly approached the seafood market trying to bring back the fishery as a mean of maintaining an active fishing industry and improving its status as an important economic activity necessary for the island’s well being. This government activity helped promote the reappearance of the fishery as an economical activity in coastal towns across the island.
Looking for better exposure and more organized working conditions fishermen developed fishing villages throughout various coastal towns. One example of such fishing villages in Puerto Rico is the “Playa de Ponce Fishing Village”, home to approximately twenty fishermen. The more proficient villages provide the fishermen with storage areas for their work equipment, pier space for their boats and a market, which prepares and sells their daily catch to consumers and restaurants. The fishermen in this village work daily employing their fishing activities as their main economical activity used to sustain all their families. The village presents the fishermen with better working conditions, thus providing a more efficient, profitable and safe workplace and lifestyle.

Fishermen who utilize small boats, usually smaller than 20 feet, regularly start their workday at 12:00 am and continue on to 7:00 am. This routine is usually repeated six days a week. Fishermen with larger boats leave for periods of up to two weeks and return either late at night or early in the morning with tons of fish. In both cases the availability of docking space for their boats and working space for themselves is critical in order to safely perform their daily duties.
Puerto Real is a small village in the coastal town of Cabo Rojo that actually functions as a big and independent town by itself. Its main economical activity is fishing. The picturesque and vernacular architecture with a geographical location depicted by an enclosed bay in the southeast coast of the island gives Puerto Real a special sense of authenticity. This village is a place where the hostility and modernization of the city has not interfered with its population. Puerto Real was the first fishing village established in Puerto Rico and probably the most important of all fishing centers in the island.

Recognizing the fishermen influence and contribution to the island's fishing industry and being the village's main economic activity as well as its main source of food, Puerto Real celebrates a yearly Fish Festival during Lent season. During this festival the residents of Puerto Real, visitors and tourists alike gather in the streets of the town to enjoy tropical music, typical food, artisans and logically to buy fresh Caribbean fish. The last day of the festival's festivities include a fishing tournament and a display of their most unusual catches. The fish displays are famous among the kids that visit the town looking for the big shark that is the exclusive culmination of that special occasion.

Although Puerto Real is the most important fishing center in the island, it still provides less than adequate facilities for the yearly festival and even worse facilities and conditions for its working residents. In addition, there are no services or amenities offered to both residents and tourists alike. Therefore, I took notice of all the facilities missing in the village while maintaining all the authentic characteristics of Puerto Real to propose the design of a Fish Market. This Fish market provides the fishermen working area facilities to prepare the catch of the day alongside several commercial spaces available to sell fresh fish to their customers on a daily basis. This marketplace will become the economic and entertainment center of the village: a place where anyone can enjoy the natural resources the town and its adjacent bay has to offer.
“The Hispanic heritage of the Caribbean world entails much more than the impact of a single cultural force; it certainly embraces Spain, but also the influence of the many immigrants of diverse nationalities—Africans, Danes, Germans, Catalonians, Corsicans, French, Dutch, British, and a considerable number of North Americans—who settle in the region under the Spanish government’s auspices.” 1.

This multicultural influence is evident in architecture, literature and art. Since Spanish colonial days the marketplace has become an important element in the architectonic, cultural and economic development of the island. The design of market places, under the Spanish colonization, developed a building typology that has been adapted through the years up to the modern architecture of the island, in its actual political as a United States colony.

“Their quality and charm lie not in their ancienneté but in the beauty of their proportions and the quality of their dimensions, in the efficacy of their composition and construction methods. These are not only vastly different and superior to all the environmental garbage which in the name of progress was unloaded onto Puerto Rico in the past decades, but they represent the very material which makes the island a civilized country, a homeland to long for, to be proud to come from and to return to.”

The site of this project has two existing wood and brick abandoned buildings. The lack of use, poor maintenance, and a deficient structure design has left these buildings in very bad condition. Presently only a small amount of space is utilized for a small fish market. When these buildings were built back in the 1950’s, their foundation was located in land stolen to the sea by the placing of large amounts of soil and rocks. This action caused an irregularity in the coastline but made the piers more accessible to bigger boats. Large fishing and recreational boats nowadays use these piers for their daily activities.

The site of the project is the only site left in this coast with free uninterrupted access to the bay around the coastline of the village. Private houses and buildings, many of which obstruct the physical and visual access from the land to the water, have mostly occupied the coast of Puerto Real, as in many parts of the island. Only the house owners have free access to the water. When people walk through the streets of Puerto Real they totally forget how close they are to the water. The accessibility of the site to the bay, its location in the village and the existing four piers, made the site a perfect one to develop a fish market as the center of this fishing village.