A Farmers’ Market Hall for Eugene, OR

“The market hall is a joint building for a large number of individual shops.”
Nikolaus Pevsner in A History of Building Types

The market hall is one of the oldest and most enduring of public buildings. It is a place where farmers, artisans and merchants come together to offer their produce and their wares to the public. Historically, it was located in a public place set within the very heart of the city. Indeed, in many European settings the market was often conceived as a large open-air room positioned in one of the most important squares of the city. Sometimes the market could occupy an important civic space but at different times of the day or week such as the Campo dei Fiori, Rome. The market as it evolved, in northern countries, consisted of a covered space, which could be a linear arcade along the street (as in Bern, Switzerland) or as a free-standing covered structure. The market was interpreted as a covered linear shopping street in Islamic cities like Isfahan and Istanbul, resulting in the famous bazaar type.

In the 19th century, technical advances in the use of iron and glass helped facilitate the emergence of the grand market hall, including such impressive structures as Les Halles, Paris by Victor Baltard. Another interesting variation on the theme is the covered arcade or gallery. The Victor Emmanuel Gallery, Milan is perhaps the most famous instance of the type but American examples also bear witness to its use in diverse cultural and climatic settings as in the Cleveland arcade by John Eisenmann. Another interesting hybrid example is the Pike Place Market, Seattle, which is a combination of linear street-like passageways and buildings.

Oregon has an interesting tradition as regards the public market and community space. The founders of several Oregon cities, including Portland and Eugene, set aside groups of city blocks in the center of the city for public use. These were for agriculture use, training militia and for public markets. Eugene’s four park blocks, located within the historic core, next to important civic institutions, have traditionally hosted a public market. The Saturday Market and the Lane County Farmers’ Market have enjoyed great public support over the years. The market is a success story for the city, its citizens and visitors, not only in economic terms but also by providing a needed sense of identity and source of pride for its citizens.

Challenge

Eugene’s park blocks have been compromised over the years. This situation has made it more difficult for the market activities described above to flourish. In particular, the northwest block of the group of four has been almost entirely eclipsed by an ill-conceived parking structure built in the 1950’s. Our plan is for the city to remove the parking structure, and reimagine the quadrant as an integral urban element, which is simultaneously a focus for the downtown and a complement to the park block idea of “public market.” The design is intended to be a vibrant, accessible and permanent market hall that can host the dozens of small shops that support local farmers, artisans and others who otherwise would have no dependable venue for their goods. The project is involved with the architecture of the market hall and its individual shops at the micro scale and the landscape/urban design structure of the entire design at the macro-scale.

Photos: Grand Bazaar, Istanbul; Market Hall, Ledbury, England; Great Market Hall, Budapest, Hungary; Quincy Market, Boston