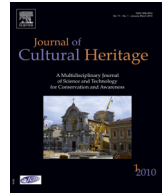




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Original article

Public abattoirs in Spain: History, construction characteristics and the possibility of their reuse



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ABSTRACT

During the final decades of the 19th century and first half of the 20th, over 2100 public abattoirs were built in Spain with the aim of improving the hygiene conditions associated with the processing of meat for human consumption, and to facilitate its marketing. Strict new health requirements that came into force in the 1970s, and the progressive substitution of public abattoirs by more modern, private, industrial-type slaughterhouses with larger handling capacities, gradually led to the closure and abandonment of these public buildings. This article traces the history of public abattoirs in Spain, examines their main architectural characteristics, and discusses the possibility of their reuse for new purposes. A specific survey on this typology of buildings, built between 1888 and 1930, has been carried out throughout the country (10 vacant abattoirs and 18 reused buildings) during the period 2008–2012. The paper provides ideas for the preservation of this interesting agro-industrial heritage and examines how some vacant abattoirs have found new uses as libraries, sports centres, exhibition centres, auditoria, museums, offices, restaurants and bird recovery centres, etc.

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1. Introduction and research aims

The slaughter of animals to provide meat for consumption is one of humanity's most ancient activities. The first attempts to regulate it, and indeed the marketing of meat for the human population, were made by the early Roman Empire, which set up public spaces known as 'macella' where animals could be slaughtered and meat and other food products sold [1]. The funds needed for the procurement of the land and buildings required were either public or private [2]. Until the beginning of the 19th century, however, most animals destined to provide meat in Europe and the US were slaughtered in the open air, usually in yards at the back of small, private butcher's shops [3].

The transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, the increasing size of urban populations, and growing concern over hygiene, saw the appearance of the first public abattoirs of more recent times [4]. In 1807, Napoleon ordered the building of public abattoirs to provide meat for Paris, and then for other French cities [5]. The idea was to centralise the slaughter of animals for food in

installations that gave greater guarantees of hygiene – installations that could be routinely inspected [6].

Spain followed the example of France in its attempt to regulate the slaughter of animals and meat marketing, and in 1918, after several failed 19th century efforts, it established the *Reglamento General de Mataderos* (General Legislation for Abattoirs). This required the construction of public abattoirs in municipalities with over 2000 inhabitants, its aim being to end the clandestine slaughter of animals, to control the quality of meat sold, and to guarantee its provision to the population. Over 2900 abattoirs were built (2100 with public funds), most of which had a production capacity of under 100 tonnes of meat per annum [7] (Fig. 1).

The technical and health requirement imposed upon abattoirs and the meat industry in the 1970s eventually saw most of these older slaughterhouses lose their original function and fall into disuse. Currently, many stand abandoned and some have been demolished, but others have been given a new lease of life as libraries, social centres, exhibition centres, sports complexes, etc.

There are good socioeconomic reasons for the conservation of these buildings. Their reuse as restaurants, artists' workshops or old people's homes, etc., could encourage new economic activities in rural areas and help to maintain the rural population (both of which are important goals). Reuse of these and other redundant buildings would also save on construction materials, minimise the economic and energy costs involved in handling demolition waste,

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Fig. 1. Several examples of public abattoirs in Spain. From top to bottom and left to right: the public abattoir at Orgaz (1905), the Los Molinos abattoir (1930), the Navalcarnero abattoir (1892), and the Navalperal de Pinares abattoir (end 19th century).

limit soil consumption and help preserve features of village landscapes [8,9].

The present work traces the history of Spain's public abattoirs, examines their construction characteristics, and offers ideas for their reuse. In order to achieve this aim, a specific survey on this typology of buildings has been carried out across the country (10 vacant abattoirs and 18 reused buildings) during the period 2008–2012. The information obtained is valuable to those seeking to learn more about these constructions, and could be of great use in projects designed to conserve and find new uses for this piece of agro-industrial heritage.

2. Methodology

A literature search was performed to determine the number and location of the old public abattoirs in Spain. A selected sample of abattoirs (10 vacant abattoirs in the vicinity of Madrid and 18 reused buildings all around the country), built between 1888 and 1930, were then visited to undertake detailed analyses. Selected buildings tried to cover different typologies, from large buildings in big cities (i.e. Madrid, Valencia or Seville) to minor constructions in small towns or villages (i.e. Navalperal de Pinares –950 inhabitants–). According to the geographical location and date of construction, different plan layouts, materials and construction techniques could be identified. Floor area of the selected buildings ranged from 200 to more than 85,000 m².

A complete photographic record was made of each of the visited abattoirs. Measurements were taken, and the most representative characteristics recorded (location, year of construction, layout design, architectural characteristics, current state of preservation and perspectives for future use). Persons involved with these buildings – town architects, old workers, security guards, persons

charged with the buildings' care, etc. – were then interviewed. Information was also obtained on different projects across Spain that have brought new leases of life to these old buildings.

3. Geographic distribution and history of Spain's public abattoirs

Although Spain's public abattoirs were not built until the later 1800s, examples of concern regarding the hygiene associated with the treatment, processing and selling of meat and other food products go back as far as the Middle Ages (e.g. Municipal franchises of León (1020), Madrid (1202) or Toledo (1398), among some others). A project to build a centralised abattoir in Barcelona in 1456 [10] and documentary evidence of several places for the slaughter and butchering of livestock in Madrid from 1495 [11] might be considered the forerunners of the country's public abattoirs.

In the second half of the 19th century, a number of attempts were made to regulate the slaughter of animals and the meat business in all Spanish towns, but all failed [12]. The Meat Inspection Legislation of 1859 [13] came into being under the auspices of the General Health Law of 1855 [14]. While this gave rise to the construction of abattoirs in the main cities, it was not successfully implemented in smaller towns.

The General Regulations of Abattoirs of 1918 officially required the construction of public abattoirs in municipalities with over 2000 inhabitants [15]. The difficulty in preserving meat due to the lack of refrigerated transport led to these buildings being constructed close to centres of consumption (the French model), and generally close to a livestock market to which animals were brought from areas of production. In contrast, in the US, the Netherlands and Denmark, the decision was taken to preferably locate abattoirs with

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