

A Cultural Landscape of Bridges

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Abstract

The City of Montreal is an island. Bridges have therefore always been a part of its history. At first, ice bridges and barges were used to link the island to the shores of the mighty St. Lawrence River. Inaugurated in 1837, Victoria Bridge was the first permanent structure to span the river. This railway bridge launched Montreal into a new and formidable phase of its history, one that proclaimed the city as the industrial hub of Canada until the Second World War era.

But Montreal's association with bridges does not limit itself to those structures crossing water. The city's territory comprises a multitude of viaducts and tunnels for cars and pedestrians which are the result of an extensive network of railway lines covering most of the Island's 483 km². These tracks were laid out from the 19th century onwards, many cutting through residential neighbourhoods, while others acted as boundaries separating communities.

This paper aims to look at the role of bridges - and some of the bridge's variations, such as viaducts and tunnels -, as determinant structures in the making of a cultural landscape. Defined by UNESCO as *the combined works of nature and humankind*, a cultural landscape brings together places and people and celebrates the way they have mutually shaped the built environment through time. What is of particular interest in the case of Montreal, is that these bridges have not only had an impact on the development of the city historically but also currently as new bridges are being built while others are being torn down, thus creating new urban landscapes and social patterns. With the help of examples of urban transformations in Montreal taken from history as well those presently underway, the presentation will posit that bridges are a powerful tool to understand the cityscape.