

World Heritage Bridges in Steel – Types linking communities

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Abstract

Bridges link communities local and global through recognition of commonalities. This paper will compare transporter and cantilever bridges. The Vizcaya and Forth Bridges were inscribed on the world heritage list in 2006 and 2015, representing (to the global 'Pontist' community) each of these bridge types.

Outstanding universal value must be proven in comparison to similar properties without diminishing them. The four single bridges now on the world heritage list do not give meaningful context on their own but the TICCIH/ ICOMOS study by Eric DeLony gives a starting point.

Transporter bridges are found at river mouths of shipbuilding districts in the decades around 1900. These landmarks have suffered attrition and the pool, around 8-10, from which to choose is small.

Cantilever truss bridges achieved the longest spans known in that same era, and are represented in their hundreds. World Heritage listing of the Forth Bridge aimed to bring appreciation to bear on the value of an awkward bridge type -their challenging aesthetic sparked debate, contrasting American and European engineering methods. Research has located the big survivors in America, Europe, South Africa, Pakistan, China and Vietnam. Recognition of a family of bridges that reaches around the world helped make the case for outstanding universal value of the Forth Bridge, which held the record for longest bridge span (521m) for a full 27 years. In the last century only the Golden Gate Suspension Bridge (1937-1964) would match that timespan.

Now the international community has agreed on two standard-bearers for great steel bridges, will inscription stimulate interest in parts of the world under-represented in the List? Having a bridge on the world heritage list is not so much to say 'ours is best', but to support and put into perspective the value of other bridges, promoting the dividend that good conservation can repay.