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Miles Oglethorpe shows US Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, the Forth Bridge during the COP26 climate conference in 2021. Photo: Melissa Schartz

TICCIH PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

REFLECTING ON 2021 - FROM COVID TO COP26

Miles Oglethorpe

First, let me take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy New Year, and to hope that 2022 is an improvement on 2021. A year ago, many of us entered 2021 thinking exactly the same thing, and we are anxious that it will be significantly better this time. So, we desperately want to move on, and the fact is that, despite the continuing uncertainty, there are some good things to look forward to in 2022. Of these, our Montreal Congress in August is, of course, a major highlight.

Looking back on 2021, I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary resilience and power of the Internet, and to the armies of usually invisible IT technicians who have not only kept our systems working, but have also improvised, innovated and improved them. It is extraordinary to think that we are now routinely speaking to networks of people across the world (despite the occasional time-zone glitch here and there), and although it pains me to say it, sometimes you can see and hear people's presentations far better on your computer than you would in meeting rooms or halls. The significance of this is heightened by the fact that I have recently attended meetings with high-quality simultaneous translation piped in via optional audio channels embedded in the video platform. For international discussions, we have therefore entered a totally new era.



The famous Veresk bridge has a 66 m span and a height of 110 m and was built without using any metal materials or armature. Photo: Ahmad Jamali M, 2017

IRAN

THE TRANS-IRANIAN RAILWAY: A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Hassan Bazazzadeh,¹ Mohsen Ghomeshi,² Asma Mehan³

The construction of railways has been one of the symbols of the advanced technology and modernity in various societies and is known as a means of expanding and transferring goods, men, and their ideas.

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Brief History

During the political-economic circumstances of the second half of the 19th century, the first rail line of Iran was built under the Qajar rule. This was an 8 km railway to connect Tehran to Rey with some small wagons, most local people tended to call it Mashin-Doodi, which translates as Smokey Machine. The railway then appeared in south-west Iran as a means of transport for the oil industry which was booming after oil discoveries in Khuzestan. The intercity railway started to operate in 1923 and was 57 km long, connecting Masjed-i-Soleyman to Dar-i-Kahzineh. It was established for exploitative purposes of foreign states resulting in a few small-scale and temporary projects, but the idea of constructing and expanding rail lines based on national investments finally materialized with

the first national railroad. Soon after the preparation of a massive railway embarked upon the orders of Reza Shah as one of the main infrastructures for modernizing the country.

While it may not be as long or as well-known as Russia's iconic Trans-Siberian Railway, international recognition is long overdue for the 1,394 km route. The Trans-Iranian Railway connects the Caspian Sea in the northeast with the Persian Gulf in the southwest crossing the whole country. The Trans-Iranian Railway was started at the beginning of the Pahlavi period in 1927 and operated in 1938. The railway is a constructional-engineering masterpiece, which passes through eight provinces (Golestan, Mazandaran, Semnan, Tehran, Qom, Markazi, Lorestan, and Khuzestan) with different climates ranging from hot and dry-arid to mild and arid, with 103 train stations, more than 4,200 small and large bridges, and 245 tunnels and accessory across its long journey.

The railway development in Iran is a living history of the modernization and industrialization of the Iranian society through the community link. The preliminary plan of the Trans-Iranian Railway was drawn by Sane al-dowleh, the first head of the National Consultative Assembly of Iran which was then executed by Kampsax, a Danish company that had previously built the railway network of neighboring Turkey.

This project has a bilateral relationship with the development of the whole country. On the one hand it has been heavily depended on the climate of each area as well as the variety of indigenous cultures mixed with local know-how and technology. On the other hand, its role in the transfer of technology, as well as rural and urban development of different regions of Iran is undeniable. To be more precise, using new materials (concrete and steel) in this project had a profoundly deep impact on local industries and heralded the industrialization of Iran. The construction of factories, depots, and accessory buildings along the route and finding a new uses for indigenous materials contacted rural and urban knowledge possible. Construction of factories, depots and accessory buildings along the route and finding a new uses for indigenous materials made contact

possible with rural and urban knowledge leading eventually to the substantial development of urbanization and architecture in each region, such as the Qaem-shahr railroad fabrication factory, which has created an expansive industrial landscape. In the southern part a city was established through establishing a railway station, Andimeshk, which nowadays holds more 150,000 population, used to be a small village. Moreover, between these two main cities there are also bridges, stations and tunnels which should be mentioned as famous landmarks along the route of the Trans-Iranian Railway.

WHS impact

The railway was accepted as a World Heritage site by UNESCO on July 25, 2021, not as a communication path but as a significant part from memory of a committed engineering. It is important to note that recognizing the railway as a World Heritage site emphasizes the outstanding construction of the railway infrastructure in Iran as the symbol of modernization and urbanization of the traditional society.

Moreover, it will inform the national and international community of conditions that threaten the main characteristics and important elements for which the railway heritage is inscribed on the list and encourage a collective and correction action to the potential threats and local neglects. This inscription will preserve the site in the face of problems caused by future uneven and uncontrolled development and construction, man-made and environmental hazards, wars, conflicts and unchecked interventions and modifications. The lack of an integrated and holistic conservation policy is another important factor that should not be neglected by local authorities. The major current challenge for the Iranian railway industry is finding sustainable and culturally resilient solutions for historic infrastructures of the Trans-national Iranian railway heritage that have become substitutes by new operational automations. As the pioneer of industrialization and modern movement in Iran, this UNESCO selection highlights the geological, cultural and social importance of the railway infrastructure as well as its tangible and intangible heritage to Iranian society, cultural values and national visions toward the industrialization and modernization of the society.

Industrial Heritage Reloaded

Le patrimoine industriel rechargé



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