

Highlighting Landscape Events in the Way of Saint James: Rapperswil and Puente Villarente

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The Way of Saint James, declared its stretch in northern Spain as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO since 1993 (Reference: 669bis), it is one of the most important cultural pilgrimage routes of the Christian world. Throughout its complex evolution, it has become a catalyst for landscapes and times which give it different meanings that can be read in deferential ways: mystical, narrative, aesthetic, etc. Landscapes of great intense value are present along the route that need to be empowered through subtle but effective actions to make them visible. This potential precise an energetic action but endowed with aesthetic sensitivity and legitimized by the knowledge of all its complexity.

These special areas are use to be detected near distinguishing elements in the way that have made complex the evolution of their landscape, like it happens with the presence of obstacles to save. Two distant case studies are analyzed in the Way of Saint James: The footbridge between Rapperswil and Hurden (Switzerland) and the footbridge in Puente Villarente (Spain). In both cases, the introduction of a new infrastructure for crossing lake and river respectively is intentionally used as a landscape strategy to extract, display and explain the meaning of their environment characterized by the presence of water.

Overcoming Obstacles

“The bridge is light and strong tend above the current. It carries the current and the two extensions landscape that are behind the banks to mutual neighbourhood: gathers the earth as landscape around the stream” (Heidegger,1951).

Building bridges is needed to overcome the obstacles of the way. These brave and helpful infrastructures transform the place and turn it strategic, becoming the tool to sprout the intensity of a particular landscape.

Overcoming Obstacles in Rapperswil

The landscape of Rapperswil sits on the pilgrimage path that has been involved in a mutable landscape known to be inhabited since prehistoric times. The walkway, of medieval origin, was historically due to two needs: for trade and for pilgrimage towards Einsiedeln Abbey, the nearest sanctuary on the Way to Santiago de Compostela. The disappearance of the footbridge was a result of the construction of a dam for a railway and vehicles (1878). As traffic increased, the dam became inappropriate for pedestrians because of the danger and the high level of noise and pollution.

The construction of a new footbridge in its original place restored one of the most important functional and historical line connections, as it was demanded by society, as well as this it returned the original access to the small Heilig Hüsli chapel (1551). The architect Reto Zindel, author of the design said: "the way is the purpose" according to a proverb, but he preferred to think that "the road is the place", because it joins what is close and what is far away, reflections of man on their origin and destiny (Zindel 2010). The strategy regains the scale of man in a place where rail and road have become the only players elements. (Figure 1)

The road, as a place over the water.

“The essence of the project is not the union of the two banks, but the place itself, walking over a calm body of water, it becomes a fundamental experience based on immediate sensory perception.” (Zindel 2010)

The walkway is designed as a segment of the road that runs and breaks at the mercy of natural and landscape factors. The project aims firstly to recover in a contemporary key, a tour of abstraction with a strong mystical component emphasizing the sensory qualities of the place. The pedestrian is immersed in a complete experience of pilgrimage that takes place along the 841 meters walking across a line in permanent contact with the lake, few meters over the surface, inducing the user the illusory and utopian feeling of "walking on water". The gateway not only connects the two banks but as Walter Zschokke says: it does the same between water and sky. In this sense, the succession of pillars that shape the walkway make us a rhythm of travel, a cadence that describes the sequence of elements and accompanying the idea of an individual who goes through a particular stretch at a particular time but is immersed during its route in a timeless experience.

The Experience of Crossing the Landscape of Lake Zurich

The new walkway, articulated through a broken axis that sometimes shows us directions and others not, retrieve the direct and irreplaceable contact between man and the landscape he had lost. It makes it possible to walk and discover the path as you move through the centre of one of the most beautiful lakes in Switzerland, located at the foot of the Swiss Pre-Alps, understanding two of the most important signs of identity of Switzerland: the mountain and glacier lake.

The footbridge works as a tool that provides a complete reading of context. From north to south in its first perpendicular contact with the lake it focuses on the presence of the dam, its conceptual heir. It is the symbol of communication and travel and describes a contemporary horizon line with an incessant flow very attractive in the middle distance. After the first break, the walkway introduces you into a journey through time, starting with its medieval existence through the connection to Heilig Hüsli chapel, the only surviving witness. The path at this site is closed to the inner island established for the protection of native birds, while open to the lake coinciding with the place of the underwater prehistoric stilt remains, and part of a set declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2013. The rest of the tour continues with a view of the lake, unchanging over time, which gradually brings us back to our tour into the present. (Figure 2)

Overcoming Obstacles in Puente Villarente

The landscape of Puente Villarente sits on an important route of communication that dates at least to Roman times (Lancia - Legio VII Gemina), consolidated during medieval times because of its coincidence with the Way of Saint James. A large medieval bridge has historically saved all types of traffic over the River Porma and its wide bank of remarkable natural wealth. However, the pedestrian way across the river had become impossible mainly because of the dangerousness of going across the narrow bridge.

The new walkway retrieves the connection in a mismatched mode. Pedestrians descend to the river to value the presence of the medieval construction as the protagonist in the valley landscape composition.

The broken axis of the footbridge crosses the river bank between trees and is designed as an abstract element placed downstream at a lower level than the bridge. The walkway point of view returns its truly scale to the bridge and also to the valley as a measure instrument. (Figure 3)

The Road as a Place Over the Torrent

On leaving the road and walking down towards the river, the pilgrim moves away from reality and towards time suspended over the river, evoking all the memories of the place. (Álvarez et al. 2010, 100)

As it happens with the Rapperswil case study, a tour of abstraction is set out with a strong mystical component emphasized by the sensory qualities of the place. The path descends into the valley through the filter trees of the bank of the river that contribute to the beginning of a progressive abstraction exercise. The road and the new gateway is integrated into a path that runs and breaks at the mercy of natural landscape factors. Condensed intensity factors in a path section contributes to the feeling of living a synecdoche, in which each part of the road for the above deals with the whole, and in turn, the whole identifies each of the parts. (Álvarez 2015, 103).

The Experience of Crossing the Landscape of the Porma River

“A footbridge has been chosen in the form of a low water crossing, an element of wood and concrete, silent and poetic.”

(Darío Álvarez 2010)

The new footbridge at Puente Villarente is designed to recover the direct and irreplaceable contact between the pilgrim and his landscape as it happened with the Swiss case study. The broken route illustrates the pilgrim as going along and discovering the following stages. The experience of the broken route surprises the pilgrim as going along and discovering the following travel elements. The road descends between riparian vegetation and takes the first stretch of the walkway having the greenery as the only horizon. After that, the path makes a break forcing the viewer to turn right to face the river and grandeur of the medieval bridge and the valley. It's the beginning of a stretch walking across a line in permanent contact with the river, few meters from the water, feeling close its freshness and sound, inducing the user the illusory and utopian feeling of "walking on water torrent". The following breaks direct pedestrians across the valley and indicate the continuation of the road to the next village and ultimately to Santiago de Compostela. (Figure 4)

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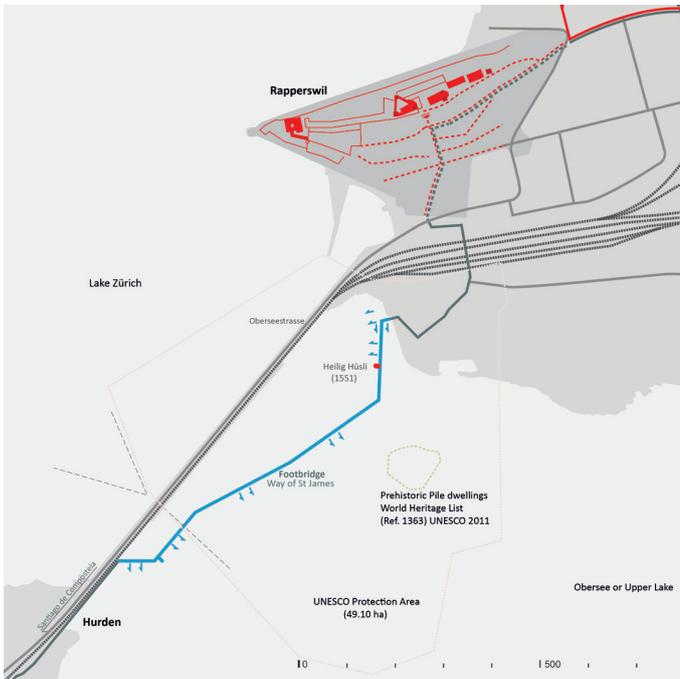


FIGURE 1. Rapperswil-Hurden footbrige plan, Lake Zürich, Switzerland.

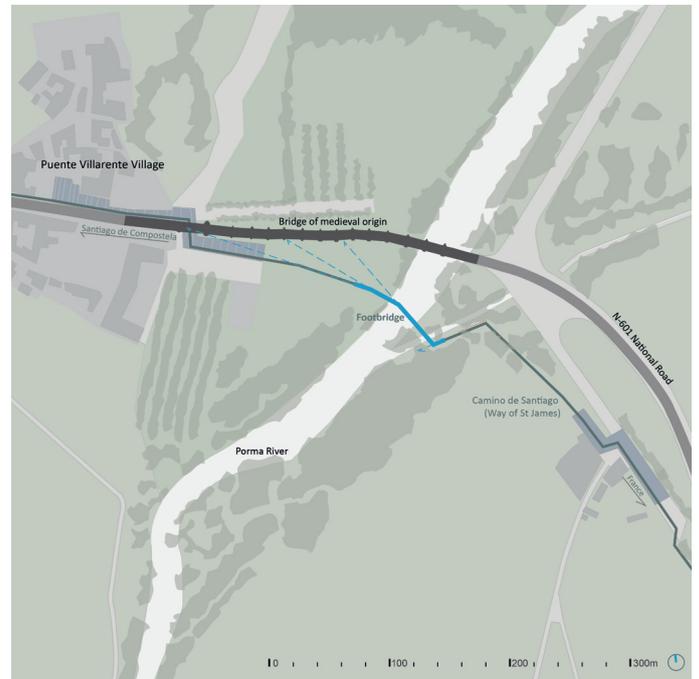


FIGURE 3. Puente Villarente footbrige plan, León, Spain.



FIGURE 2. View of Rapperswil-Hurden footbridge, Switzerland. (Roland zh, Wikimedia Commons 2011)



FIGURE 4. Image of the footbridge at Puente Villarente, Spain. (LABPAP, 2010)

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