

Public works heritage: the G·O·ING pilot project

Identification and assessment of public works heritage: a methodological approach

Patricia HERNÁNDEZ-LAMAS, Department of Civil Engineering UPM, Spain.

Rita RUIZ, Department of Civil Engineering UCLM, Spain.

Beatriz CABAU, Department of Civil Engineering UPM, Spain.

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Background and context

Public works are heritage assets with enormous historic and cultural value that is scantily recognised and insufficiently appreciated. Their protection and acknowledgement have traditionally been limited to large structures erroneously likened to historic-artistic monuments, ignoring factors such as their technological or social dimensions. As a result, much of that heritage has been lost in recent decades: some historic public works have been demolished to make way for new structures and many of the ones still in use have been drastically transformed (Cross-Rudkin et al, 2000). Industrial archaeology is helping reverse the latter trend by adopting a few examples of works designed and built by civil engineers. Nonetheless, due to the complexity surrounding the public works heritage, specific strategies must be defined to ensure it is satisfactorily characterised and its worth publicly acknowledged (Fernández Ordóñez, 1985; Prashuhn, 2003). In the absence of such strategies, particulars such as the territorial scale normally involved in transport infrastructures, the generally public ownership of such works, their long service life and acutely functional dimension will continue to be ignored (Ruiz et al, 2016). As a preliminary to protecting public works, action must consequently be conceived and implemented to heighten societal sensitivity to their heritage value and convey the historic, economic and social significance of civil engineers and their oeuvre (Ruiz-Bedia et al, 2014).

Research aims

Given the situation outlined in the preceding paragraph, the aim of the presentation is to describe a programme implemented in Spain under the name G·O·ING (Spanish acronym for Grandes Obras de INGeniería, great works of engineering), geared to explaining and disseminating the heritage value of engineering works on social media targeting the public at large. The project, headed by Asociación de Ingenieros de Caminos, Canales y Puertos (AICCP) and implemented by Fundación Miguel Aguiló and the Castilla-La Mancha University's School of Civil Engineering, would be readily applicable to other geographies.

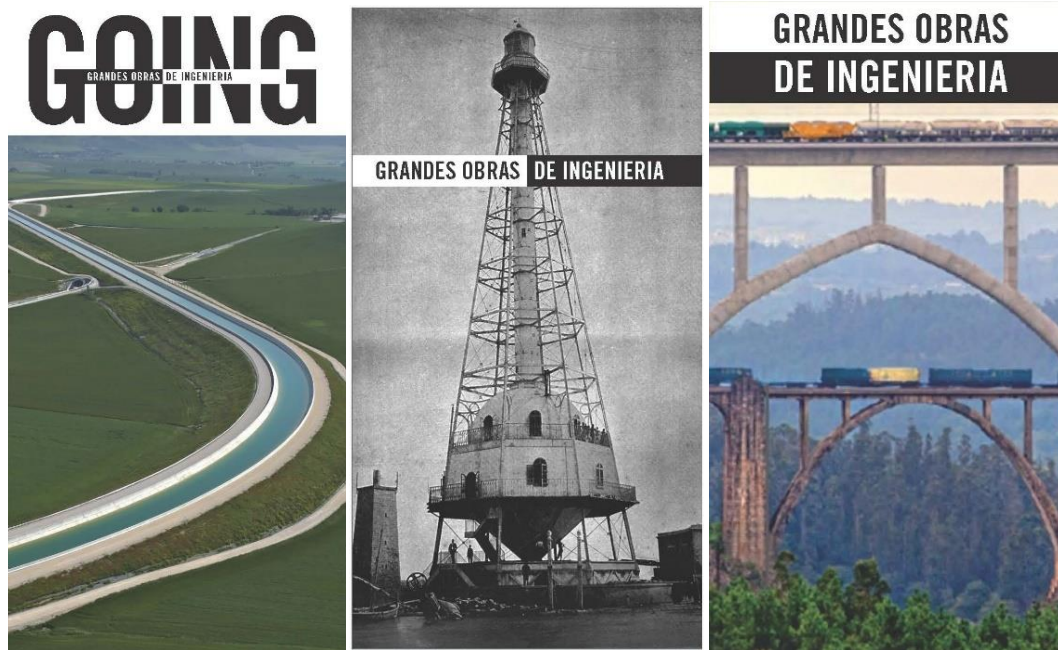


Fig. 1. Programme presentation photos and project logo. (©Hernández-Lamas, P, Ruiz, R. and Cabau, B.).

The article describes the methodology deployed, that entails four stages: (1) the identification of possible landmarks for inclusion in the programme, (2) the definition of criteria for selecting and assessing programme landmarks, (3) the geolocation and analysis of the selected public works, and (4) the design of a programme dissemination strategy, including both a mobile app to enable potential visitors to locate and understand the significance of landmarks and a campaign to ensure the programme is referenced in regional tourist and cultural information.

Results

The methodology developed identified a total of 130 landmark public works in Spain based on their historic importance, their technological quality, their social significance, their singularity, their documentary capacity and their scenic interest (<http://ingenieria-civil.org/GOING/index.php>). In this way, it has been obtained a representative sample of public works that ensure the inclusion of both nodal works, in particular bridges, dams, lighthouses, ports and singular buildings (stations, market halls, towers), and geographically extensive infrastructures and endeavours such as canals, railways, roads, carriageways and highways, tunnels, urban planning (city enlargement or inner-city reform), water supply and drainage systems. The programme was also intended to ensure a locational variety by including significant public works from every region, and to span an extensive time frame, including assets from the Roman era up to the twenty-first century.

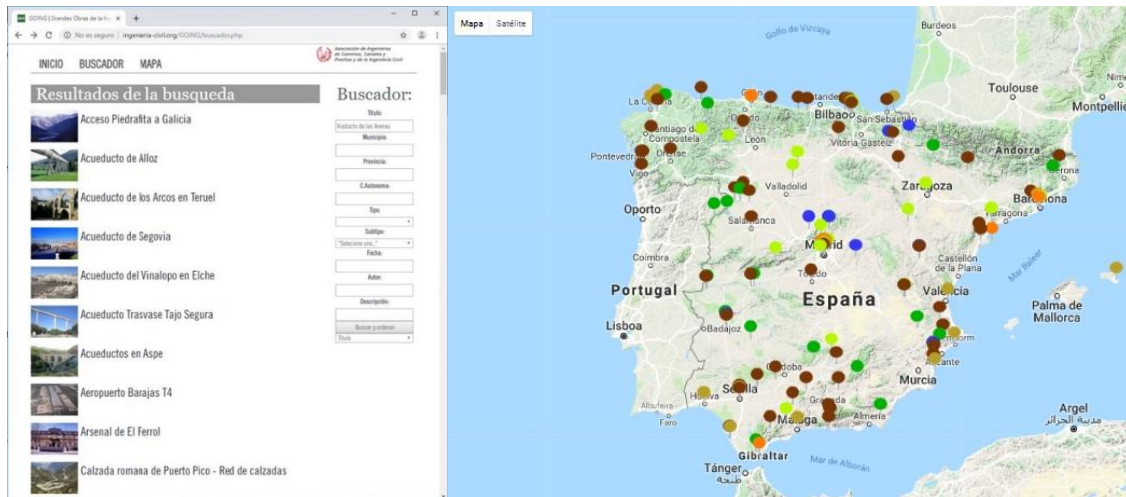


Fig. 2. List of works, search engine and geolocation on a map of Spain <http://ingenieria-civil.org/GOING/buscador.php>. (©Hernández-Lamas, P, Ruiz, R. and Cabau, B.).

Contrary to the fairly narrow contexts in which a country’s heritage is ordinarily promoted, such as lectures or exhibitions of interest to a very specific segment of the population, this initiative seeks to effectively connect with citizens potentially interested in civil engineering works. In fact, the G·O·ING project provides users access to high quality cultural information (texts, historic and recent photos, maps on different scales, normally with large, voluminous and weighty original formats) for a convenient, suggestive and highly educational travel experience. The overall focus is on a fresh look at the heritage value of public works and their surrounds. Both the application and the website are essential, consolidated tools that provide a channel for inter-researcher communication as well as access to vast amounts of orderly, geolocated information.

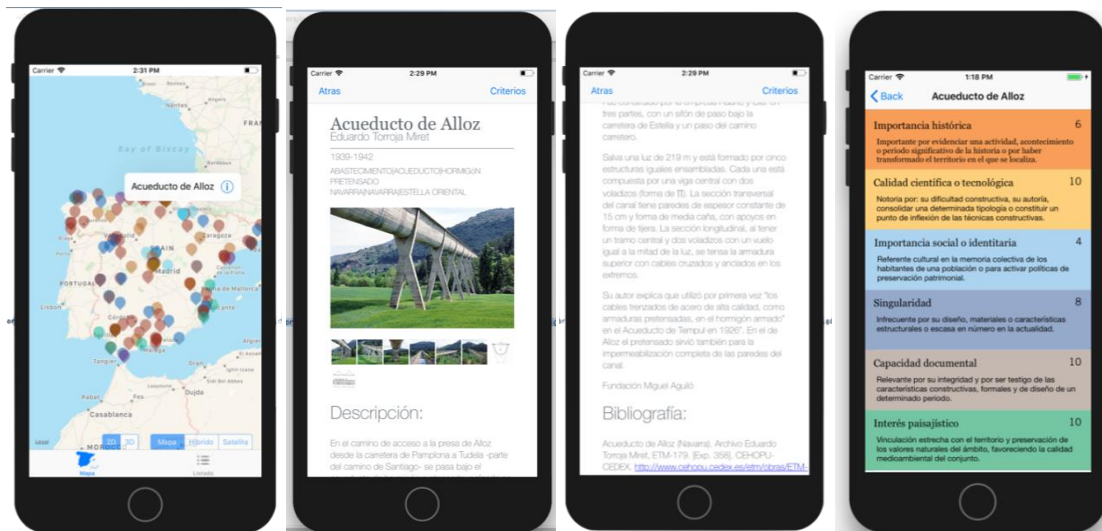


Fig. 3. Example of public work contained in the programme Alloz aqueduct: geolocation on map, fact sheet with photographs and bibliography and assessment criteria (©Hernández-Lamas, P, Ruiz, R. and Cabau, B.).

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Conflict of Interests Disclosure

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: P.Hernández-Lamas and R.Ruiz.

Funding acquisition: R.Ruiz

Methodology: P.Hernández-Lamas, R.Ruiz and B.Cabau.

Software: O.Castro.

Supervision: P.Hernández-Lamas, R.Ruiz and B.Cabau.

Validation: P.Hernández-Lamas and O.Castro.

Writing – original draft: P.Hernández-Lamas, R.Ruiz and B.Cabau.

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