

## Footbridges as an important part of a system: the context as an experience

Authors: Toon MAAS<sup>1</sup>, Mohamad TUFFAHA<sup>2</sup>, Laurent NEY<sup>3</sup>

Affiliation: <sup>1</sup> Architect-Engineer, NEY & Partners, Brussels, Belgium – tma@ney.partners

<sup>2</sup> Junior Engineer, NEY & Partners, Delft, the Netherlands – mtu@ney.partners

<sup>3</sup> CEO, Ney & Partners, Brussels, Belgium – ln@ney.partners

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“A bridge has to be designed”. Every bridge is the exploration of all degrees of a freedom of a project: the context, cultural processes, technology, engineering and industrial skills. A successful bridge aims to dialogue with these degrees of freedom to achieve a delicate equilibrium, one that invites the participation of its users and evokes new perceptions for its viewers. In short, a good design “makes the bridge talk.”

Too often, the bridge, as an object, is reduced to its functionality. Matters of perceptions and experiences of the users are often not considered in the design process; they are relegated to levels of chance or treated as simple decorative matter. The longevity of infrastructure projects, in general, and bridges, in particular, highlights the deficiencies of such an approach. The framework to design bridges must include historical, cultural, and experiential dimensions. Technology and engineering are of paramount importance but cannot be considered as “an end in themselves but a means to an end”. This paper proposes to discuss three projects by Ney & Partners that illustrate such a comprehensive exploration approach to footbridge design: the Poissy and Albi crossings and the Tintagel footbridge.

The footbridges of Poissy and Albi dialogue most clearly with their historical contexts, reconfiguring the relationship between old and new in the materiality and typology use. In Tintagel, legend replaces history. Becoming a metaphor for the void it crosses, the Tintagel footbridge illustrates the delicate dialogue of technology and engineering on one side and imagination and experience on the other.