

# RAILWAYS AS INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: A CRITICAL STATEMENT. THE FRENCH CASE.

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## Workshop 12. Infrastructural networks: railways, canals, water systems

Is the railway to be a substantial part of the industrial heritage of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The interest shown by a growing part of the public towards museums, heritage train and residues of the rural narrow gauge network is spreading far beyond the limits of the so-called railway buffs groups and preservation societies. The 6 millions visitors who came and saw the exhibition of railway past and present organized by the French railways on the Champs-Élysées in the spring 2003 (Train Capitale), as well as the success met by some heritage railway attractions (up to 350,000 visitors per year for the Train de la Rhune in the Pyreneans) or the re-opening and new design of the railway museum in Mulhouse enforce the common belief of a well- and sufficiently preserved railway heritage, well known through scholarly research and well kept by flocks of dedicated volunteers.

When one considers the railway's historical role in the industrial take-off of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the impact of the railway network in urban and industrial landscape as well as its input on economic and cultural development of rural areas, it should certainly be a substantial part of industrial heritage (although, belonging to services, not to industry, transport heritage is not supposed to be a part of industrial heritage as such in the French terminology.)

Focusing on the French case, we'll first examine how railway preservation doesn't illustrate to-day this supposed pre-eminence, widespread public backing and scholars' consensus. Reviewing museums, heritage trains and contemporary heritage, we'll try to analyse to-day perspectives for railway heritage, stressing on the emergency cases and calling for a heritage-minded conscience which should be common to the railway sector, public communities and planners and by no means restricted to the professional body of heritage so-called 'specialists'.

### I. Railway heritage preservation: a critical assessment

'Heritage' is now widely criticized for being too wide a notion, which includes any field of human activity of all ages, future included, as well as nature and is extended to intangible heritage. We won't step in into this discussion but understand as railway heritage all the categories and forms of heritage common to industry and economy: monuments and buildings, sites, railway technology, industrial processes and professional know-how, archives (business and public archives, private papers, pictures, photographs, oral archive), cultural expressions and practices, landscapes. We shall review railway heritage from a matter-of-fact point of view, following railway heritage from the safe places where acknowledged heritage is preserved and valued by professional curators, i.e. museums, collections, archive centres, to the specific way in which transport heritage is interpreted and shown to visitors: by moving, involving a whole social world of dedicated volunteers. We'll turn eventually towards railway heritage in progress which may be also threatened railway heritage, as is a railway 'landscape' in an urban area under development: there professional concern for heritage is scarce and has not momentum in decision making.

## *'Labelled heritage': Railway museums*

The railway museums, inherited from a golden age of victorious steam, have undergone a complete mutation to meet to-day visitors supposed wishes and culture economy imperative requirements.

As Divall and Scott note, transport museums are often too plainly indebted to their corporate origins and fathers engineers.<sup>1</sup> To put it bluntly and quote a well-trodden topic, there engines are at the core of the collections and typology is the main principle of exhibitions' design. Moreover, the visitors' common knowledge of the railway system and rail transport is taken for granted, which is not the case in other industrial sectors.

Shifting to average visitors who (a) are not trained in engineering or technology (b) never saw steam engines in operation (c) are rather and more often motor car users than train passengers was a long process.<sup>2</sup> In the 1990's it came across the sloping figures of museums goers and increasing attraction of leisure parks promising fun first and possibly vintage transport experience. The impact of this environment on railway heritage is a negative one. First, railway museums budgets depend more and more on public sponsors as they cannot rely on entrance fees, if they ever did (not to mention free museums as the National Railway Museum in York, UK). This means, of course, reduced resources for purchases and preservation but also priority given to the sponsors' wishes (e.g. railway companies and/or local communities), and simultaneously to hunting visitors and alluring them with events in which heritage knowledge or interpretation has not much, if anything to do. Railway museums are then confronted with their identity as museums<sup>3</sup> and their ability to preserve and communicate railway heritage.

The French "Musée Français du chemin de fer", founded in 1969, opened in 1971 and was transferred in 1976 in its present location. Although run by an association of private individuals – subsidized by public bodies –, it aims at conserving the national railway (SNCF) heritage and belonged till its reopening in 2005 to the "engineers' for engineers" museum category<sup>4</sup>. It solved the problem, so it seems, by a renovation process, which begun in 1998 and ended in spring, 2005. The legal status of the museum involving many partners<sup>5</sup>, a circumstance which may be a resource but also an obstacle to reform, the decision was made to delegate the museum's renovation to the architect François Seigneur, and to trust the renovated museum operation to a private company in charge of staff management, ticketing, sales, bookshop, restaurant, and so on, the curator and his administrative assistant being the only employee of the museum's association.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Divall and Andrew Scott, *Making Histories in Transport Museums*. Leicester University Press, London and New York: 2001, 231 p. According to Divall & Scott, The first railway museum was opened in Hamar, Norway, in 1897, followed by the German state railway museum in Nürnberg (1899, still in operation as "DB Museum"). LNER Museum was opened in York in 1927 and became the site of the National railway museum in 1975 (enlarged in 1992 and lately in September, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See: "World Railway Museums", *Japan Railway & Transport Review*, Nos. 43-44, March 2006, 6-45 (reviews of recent changes occurred in Tokyo, Nuremberg, Berlin, York and Mulhouse railway museums by the museums heads or curators) and the *Journal of Transport History* museums and exhibition review (quarterly).

<sup>3</sup> "A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment (...)", ICOM Statutes, art.2, para.1. See also ICOM News Thematic Files: The Definition of the Museum, *ICOM News*, vol. 57, 2004 n°2.

<sup>4</sup> Ca. 30 railway museums or railway collections exist in France, run by private individuals, associations, or are town museums. Many of them are the extension of a heritage train or rolling stock collected by the heritage train team to be restored in operating condition.

<sup>5</sup> The major part of the collection belongs to the French National Railways (SNCF); the buildings to the museum association (no-profit society of ca. 570 corporate and individual members, mainly railway scholars and preservation movement leaders), till the mid 2010, when they result to the city of Mulhouse, which is already the owner of the land on which the museum is built. The association new chairman is a SNCF representative (the current head of the SNCF press department), the two vice-chairs are the mayor of Mulhouse, a former cabinet member, and another SNCF representative. The *département du Haut-Rhin* and the Alsace Region elected councils chairpersons are also members of the board.

Several issues are raised by the reopening of the museum under the name: the City of train. The choices made to appeal to the general public include a new multicoloured building, hosting the main entrance, ticketing office, bookshop and facilities and a brand new presentation of the railway world which presents in a mix of calculated darkness and artificial lighting a summary of the railway world under 6 main topics: The summer holidays; the French Presidents official trains; rail travel in the mountains; railway at war; the railway workers' world; the world of travel. Each section of the exhibition stages rolling stock and/or engines (27 out of 102 for the whole collection), inhabited by life-size puppets of an unrealistic theatrical design supporting recorded dialogues of a somewhat typical nature which enforces myths rather than they explain history. Some cars are open to the visit, animated by cases and parcels left on the luggage racks and videos showing period movies. Wagons-lits sleeping and dining cars are fully furnished (Maurice Dekobra's *Madonna of the Sleeping Cars* included). Historical information for each section is given on TV sets in front of which the visitor may sit and watch a movie made out of film archives with historical voice-over comment. The overall staging is grand and impressive, details are nicely and aptly seen to and a sense of humour pervades the show.

Anyhow, the architect and museography professionals involved in the museum project had obviously in mind to obliterate the historical or at least educational character of the museum - and dwell on visitors' emotion raised by audiovisual effects. Each section refers to a period of time in a non-chronological sequence – summer holidays to the post-1936 paid holidays, suburban travel to the early 1900', railway at war to both world wars – when movies and their comments give, for each topic, a glimpse of the whole period under review. The programme excludes explicitly freight transport, railway companies' history, railway geography, economy and technological explanations; the railway workers professional and social world is only alluded to, as the passenger experience is enhanced, although the picturesque puppets prevent visitors from empathy. As no post-1950 item is shown, continuity with to-day railway sector and passenger experience is deliberately rubbed out.

The former museum hall, a large day lighted space with wooden vaulted roof, is intended to fulfil curatorial and educational aims and please the ca. 5% 'specialist' visitors supposed to be railway technology connoisseurs, the remaining 95% being attracted by the new hall. The 70 vehicles collection is parked on parallel tracks in a conventional way, each track corresponding to a theme or period. Comprehensive technical and historical comments on the main pieces are provided by free 'audioguides', some are on show on small signs in front of each exhibit. Farther in the hall, tracks are allocated to the reserve in which access is permitted, 4 items being kept in an outside shed.

The contrast, if not conflict between classic transport museum organization and aims – technology culture and education, railway system continuous history – and new museography based upon image and experience of a remote past is explicitly the key of the exhibition. Unfortunately, recent surveys show the visitors would love to come and see high speed trains<sup>6</sup> and steam ones in operation. Visitors figures will then tell in the coming years whether this 8.6 M€ project was a good decision for public bodies which invested in it and the private operator, and if a larger public is getting interested in railway heritage and history through the new museum.<sup>7</sup>

In any case, railway heritage benefits from the enlargement and multiplication of railway museums.

First, they keep the public interested in railway heritage, although people coming to railway museums may not be coming for the railway sake; they attract a new audience to railway heritage and make them aware of the consequence of heritage preservation.

Secondly, museums' collections are not closed. Although earlier periods of railway history are well known and hardly all possibly existing rolling stock recorded and protected, there are many more items to protect and collect which date from the 1950 onwards. It is time, for instance, to

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<sup>6</sup> As for the visitors interest for discovering to day technology and technology icons, the *Concorde* and the *Boeing 747* are the most patronized attractions of the French Space and Air Museum (Le Bourget).

<sup>7</sup> 135,000 visitors (112,000 of them paying full entrance fees) visited the City of Train from March to December, 2005. Source: Culture Espaces and the chairman's report to the Museum association general assembly held on June 17, 2006.

collect exhibits concerning the history of high speed trains, which began officially in 1966 in France. When an APT tilting train prototype is now sheltered in the new NRM branch in Shildon, Locomotion,<sup>8</sup> no TGV prototype is in a Museum.<sup>9</sup>

Third, the value of heritage for to-day society dwells less on the past as such than on the link created between past and present. This doesn't imply a teleological interpretation of (railway) history but a sense of continuity between times and a relationship created by heritage between past and present which expresses it self in questions: is this the same train as to-day? Are they related in some way? Why is it so different, how is it different (how does it work, etc.)? How did things change, and why? Do I learn something from it? Why is it valuable?

By saying so, we adhere to the UNESCO's museum definition: "A museum's primary purpose is to safeguard and preserve the heritage as a whole. It carries out whatever scientific study is required to understand and establish both its meaning and its possession. In this sense, it helps in the preparation of a global ethic based on practice for the conservation, protection and diffusion of cultural heritage values. A museum's educational mission, whatever its nature, is every bit as important as its scientific work."<sup>10</sup>

In such a perspective, railway museums should include to-day interests in new technologies, economy, high speed network and technology, intermodality and mobility, travel and tourism, as they may convey history through histories – for instance goods traffic and railway people work –, and keep in mind the role of heritage in the understanding of technology and technology culture.

### ***Enthusiasts' heritage: Heritage trains***

Aptly named in French 'tourist trains', heritage trains try hard to meet technical and security requirements and an acceptable balance-sheet. In the same time they make a great public success and the main French heritage train federation, *FACS-UNECTO*, which groups 60 heritage trains, handpump cars and rail bicycle (*vélorail*) out of ca. 80 in operation (table 1)<sup>11</sup>, boasts of 3 millions visitors per year, "more than the Palace of Versailles" (table 2). They are now a partner of the tourism industry and an asset for local development in rural areas.

**Table 1. Heritage and touristic trains in France: trains in operation, 2006**

Heritage trains run on dedicated tracks (mainly bought off from the State by Regions or <i>Departements</i> councils, or national networks tracks operated on weekends)	
by non-profit associations	75
by companies	5
Subtotal	80
SNCF branch trains in touristic and picturesque areas, marketed towards tourists in the summer season	27
Heritage rolling stock used for special trains operated on the national network	12
Total	<b>119</b>

Sources: *La Vie du Rail*, June 7 and June 14, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> APT-E experimental train which had tested innovative braking and tilting systems since 1971 arrived at the NRM in 1976 and was eventually exhibited in Shildon in 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Both engines of the gas turbine prototype TGV 001 are exhibited along highway exits near Bischheim and Belfort, where important railway works are located. The Z7001 experimental electric engine wasn't saved from the scraping yard about ten years ago. A TGV of the first Paris-Lyons line series was designated to join the museum collection when it comes out of operation.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO website, <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php->

URL\_ID=15553&URL\_DO=DO\_TOPIC&URL\_SECTION=201.html. Topic: 15553, added 10- 29-2003- and updated 05-2006, read 06-25-2006.

<sup>11</sup> FACS UNECTO, Fédération des amis des chemins de fer secondaires / Union des exploitants de chemins de fer touristiques: <http://www.trains-fr.org/> Thanks to Jean-Michel Gasc, *conseiller technique* of the Federation, for this information and datas collected by him for the TICCIH 2006 conference.

**Table 2. Heritage trains in France: 2005 visitors**  
**Total number (est.): 3 Millions**

NAME	COMPANY	REGION	LENGTH	VISITORS
<b>Chemins de fer associatifs/ Charities helped by communities subsidies (some examples)</b>				
Con'ifer		Franche-Comté	7,5 km	40,000
Chemin de fer du Vivarais		Rhône-Alpes	33 km	60,000
Chemin de fer du pays de la canne		Guadeloupe	7 km	60,000
Chemin de fer de la Baie de Somme		Picardie	27 km	120,000
Train à vapeur des Cévennes (CITEV)		Languedoc-Roussillon	17 km	150,000
<b>Companies (all)</b>				<b>1,282,021</b>
Train des mouettes	Veolia Transport / Trains touristiques	Poitou-Charentes	20 km	23,047
Vapeur du Trieux*	Veolia Transport / Trains touristiques	Bretagne	17 km	31,474
Chemins de fer de Provence*	Veolia Transport / Trains touristiques	Provence		70,000**
Chemin de fer de la Mure	Veolia Transport / Trains touristiques	Rhône-Alpes	30 km	79,581
Petit train d'Artouste	Altiservice (Lyonnaise des eaux)	Aquitaine	9,5 km	120,000
Train de la Rhune	Veolia Transport / Trains touristiques	Aquitaine	4,2 km	357,929
Train du Montenvers	Compagnie du Mont-Blanc	Rhône-Alpes	5,4 km	600,000

\* Seasonal steam train on regular public network tracks

\*\*Total, city and intercity regular transport incl.: 489 770

Sources: FACS-UNECTO (Jean-Michel Gasc); Veolia Transport / Trains touristiques (Olivier Lemire); *La Vie du Rail*, June 7 and June 14, 2006.

At the same time, constraints on heritage railway operation are increasing, as well as costs implied by compliance with security rules and new technical standards. Removal of asbestos from all rolling stock in operation was thus a hard blow for some associations' finances. As in any railway operation, safety is the keyword for heritage trains. New safety rules were approved in June, 2004. They include recommendations regarding all parts of the railway system, engines and rolling stock, tracks, level-crossings, signalling, operation, maintenance. The specific characters of historical rolling stock are nevertheless taken into account by the text. But the paragraph "rolling stock transformation", which may mention heritage issues, was not drawn up in the original text, but is reserved to be filled later. This blank points out a main difficulty of transport heritage operation, maintenance and repairs, the harmonisation between heritage vehicles' preservation in their authentic original state *and* restoration in operational condition. Both demand highly specialized skills, huge amounts of fresh money and a clever project coordinator.<sup>12</sup>

Heritage trains operators are traditionally enthusiasts, members of non-profit associations, the financing of which depends mainly on thousands of volunteers' work hours and public subsidies,

<sup>12</sup> See: Luc Fournier, "La restauration de matériel ferroviaire roulant classé Monument historique" [the restoration of listed railway rolling stock], in: *La conservation du patrimoine technique et industriel* [preservation of industrial and technical heritage], proceedings of the Lewarde conference, 6-8 March, 2002. Centre Historique Minier, Lewarde: 2002, p. 37-45, and the following discussion.

apart from travel fees and by-products (souvenirs shops). Profit-making companies are newcomers. They are branches of worldwide transport groups attracted by rail transport deregulation (*Veolia*) or tourist services, especially cable-car and ski-lift operators, which include mountain trains in their realm.<sup>13</sup>

When submitted to the market laws, heritage train performance is rewarding but one may fear that investors may not be as keen on heritage preservation as they are on return on capital, whatever are their abilities in professional curatorship. Is it prejudice from the part of heritage professionals, resentment from volunteers who are not conversant with business plans? In any case such a schematic view of the situation should be discussed by case studies.

Let's turn to the *chemin de fer de La Mure*. Built between 1882 and 1888 in the Alps, at a 20 km distance from Grenoble, this 30 km line in metric gauge was designed for coal transport. Coal fields had been extended uphill and it was essential that the coal could be sent down to the point where the metric line met the PLM network, in Saint-Georges-de-Commiers. 142 tunnels, small and larger bridges, viaducts were built through the mountain to reach the small town of La Mure. In 1900, 200,000 metric tons of coal are hauled over the line on which passengers and mine workers trains are also travelling. The traffic being too heavy for steam operation, electric traction is used from 1904 onwards, taking advantage of the development of hydroelectricity in the Alps. Dams and a power house are built and locomotives built by the Swiss inventor René Thury (1860-1938) are set into operation. The works are completed in 1912. The production of coal lasts till 1997, the record-breaking year being 1966, when the traffic goes up to 791,000 metric tons of coal. Coal trains operation stops in 1988 and the line remains State property, but has never been included in the SNCF network. In 1989 the line is leased to the Department community, to which the rolling stock is also given.<sup>14</sup>

The line's exceptional landscapes, heritage rolling stock and the vicinity of a large city made soon the *La Mure* line a tourist attraction benefiting from many advantages: one can easily get to the first station with a private car through an efficient road and highway network; buses services are available from Grenoble; train connection with the SNCF network is also a possibility. Besides, the line is located in a region which is attractive to tourists: potential clients are already on the spot. The *Isère département* subdelegated the line operation to *Veolia* which is making a success of it, with 80,000 passengers in 2005. One may assume that the *La Mure* train is now a good product of the tourist industry and a sound business.<sup>15</sup>

In the same time, the *La Mure* line is known by heritage professionals and railway amateurs to be a sad example of heritage rolling stock neglect. 198 vehicles are now scattered along the line, only 40 of them being in operation, which are not, for the main part of them, the original ones but rolling stock brought from Switzerland in the 1930-1940 to reinforce the fleet, out of which two are listed.<sup>16</sup> Out of the ca. 160 remaining items, 7 belong to the SNCF. They were originally in operation on another mountain train in the Alps (the PLM branch line Saint-Gervais – Vallorcine) and have been brought there at the beginning of the 1990's when the *département* was entertaining a big mountain railway museum project which it eventually gave up. 2 belong to amateurs' societies. The *département* was then left with 150 vehicles, most of them badly in need of repair and some in a desperate state. As the *Isère département* is known as a pioneer in the taking over of responsibilities from the State in the field of culture and heritage, a process which began officially in 2000 and is now, since 2004, in its full, the *département's* heritage agency made a point of leading a thorough historical study of all this rolling stock. As far as the rolling stock belonging to

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<sup>13</sup> The administration in charge of heritage train safety control is also in charge of ski-lifts, cable-cars, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Wurmser, *Le chemin de fer La Mure: un siècle de traction électrique*, Grenoble: Isère, Conseil général, coll. "Patrimoine en Isère", 2004, 64 p.

<sup>15</sup> The product is fully advertised on the web and through leaflets which claim the line to be 'an experience you will never forget', something 'spectacular', and detail the services offered to individuals, families, sportsmen and hikers.

<sup>16</sup> An illustrated list and technical details may be found on the amateur website:

<http://www.railfaneurope.net/lamure/french/pres.html>

the *département* was concerned, the study concluded to the conservation of ca. 40 items of historical interest as such, the renovation of ca. 20 for the line operation and the definitive sale or destruction of 60.

To sum up the case, local community involvement proved essential to heritage preservation, when listing items as national historical monuments proved to be a dead end: the *département* proposed 36 items of historical interest to be listed, but the State didn't follow up. By the way the 7 listed items belonging to the State were so neglected and are in such a state of decay that they are now beyond hope. Finally, the operator, the *Veolia* company, is not responsible for the situation of the rolling stock. He would be involved if the historical rolling stock he is using would lose its historical and authentic character. He is interested in promoting the historical past of the line and working in close relationship with the *département* heritage agency to enhance the line's assets on the market. One may regret however that there is no possibility in the present situation to finance heritage restoration with the income of tourist operation.

The *La Mure* case asks then several questions.

First, the decreasing involvement of States in culture and particularly in heritage preservation is a tendency in Western European countries. The investments demanded by mere maintenance and of course restoration of railway heritage, for instance a disused viaduct, a steam engine in operating condition, cannot be made by amateurs' societies or even local communities. This situation should lead to drastic choices made in the coming future among railway heritage items as it is the case for the *La Mure* line. The costs and difficulty of proper heritage railway vehicles restoration are highlighted here by the failure encountered in the maintenance in proper condition of more than one hundred items, even only 7 listed ones when there isn't sufficient investment or specialized skills involved.

Secondly, there is certainly a major discrepancy between State procedures for the listing of historical heritage and the preservation of railway heritage (a) in operating condition (b) as a comprehensive system (line, equipment, rolling stock), beyond separate items which may be listed as 'monuments' (one car, one viaduct). On one hand, the French law listing procedures exclude lines – canals, railways, roads – as they concentrate on monuments (World Heritage acknowledges cultural landscapes). On the other hand, operating railway heritage as in *La Mure* asks the question of the authenticity of transport heritage and industrial heritage as a whole. When authenticity is a key touchstone for restoration, for State listing but also world heritage listing, transport heritage in motion centralizes the problems which industrial heritage professionals encounter daily: how to preserve the authenticity of a machine which is wearing down by its own motion?, not to mention maintenance and visitors' security. One may finally ask if listing, which is still considered in France as a top distinction, is of any use to ensure railway heritage preservation<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, the interest shown by the public in heritage trains operation and experience is clearly *not* an interest in railway heritage as such. This stresses the need for proper heritage interpretation. Whatever be the attraction of heritage in motion for the general public, motion is not enough to convey the manifold history, technical knowledge and culture which are born by railway heritage. Comments on the railway operation, demos, exhibitions, publications, preservation of the industrial landscape, first of all of the line equipment seen from the train, then the mining areas, etc., are possible means for giving such a site its full dimension. The *La Mure* line illustrates how often railway heritage is linked to industrial heritage and has to be explained in its original geographical and economic context. One may regret that the line was not the backbone for a comprehensive project of industrial heritage preservation, because of the too many participants involved (towns and communities, preservation societies, mining State-owned company, in addition to the State, its local agencies, the *département*, etc.). What could have been possible in 1988-1990 has to be tried again *ex novo* 20 years later, when most of the relevant heritage is gone.

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<sup>17</sup> Shouldn't listing come later as the coronation of efforts made by others than the State, here the local community?

## *Heritage to be: What becomes of an obsolete railway system?*

The complete change undergone by railway operation and management in the last 20 years seals the fate of 19<sup>th</sup> century up to date surviving serial or more exceptional equipments which lack documentation and archaeological study. Changes are progressive and inconspicuous. I remember lately bringing for once my camera at the train station I patronize every week-end to discover that the two one-person air-raid concrete shelters which had been left at the end of the now disused small goods traffic yard had been removed some days before after having been stocked there for 60 years. It could have been any kind of serial equipment or rolling stock, a section of disused track with a particular overhead wire dating back to the first 1920's electric systems, a switch or a signal. The line Lyons-Bellegarde-Genève was thus recently re-designed for higher speed and new traffic: it sealed the fate of several roundhouses dating back to the line building in the late 1850's or some years afterwards, which were disused but left alone since the beginning of the 1970.<sup>18</sup>

There isn't any systematic record of buildings before they are dismantled – thus the PLM semi-roundhouse of the *Gare de Lyon* former depot which still retained its typical original shape in 1995, with its central small clock tower which could have been found anywhere in the Alps. It can now be seen only on a documentary movie on the big railway 1995 strike. When in 1998 the SNCF headquarters were modernized and moved from their original district where the services were scattered around the *Gare Saint-Lazare* in the former private companies pompous buildings with their stuccoed ceilings and unending corridors, no study or photographic record was made before they were fully renovated by banks and insurance companies: what is sold or disused and replaced in the course of business operation isn't considered as heritage. The idea of a national record for the railway network which would preserve a track of by gone equipment is not on the agenda. The French law makes compulsory emergency archaeological excavations when a building, a new highway, a new railway line may destroy ancient sites of historical or pre-historical interest, at the expenses of the contracting owner of the project. Recording industrial heritage of the present times is not – not yet? – a public responsibility. It may be interesting in the near future to assess the impact of the TGV 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrated in 2006. Will it be a short commercial event, or the beginning of some enthusiasm for railway high-speed future heritage? Time will tell.

In any case public interest seems to be shifting towards the intangible heritage of the railwaymen trade, illustrated by a bunch of recent publications (2001-05) using oral history and photography archive.<sup>19</sup> Life stories are recorded and oral archive funds are constituted by institutions as the French railway historical society (*AHICF*).<sup>20</sup> Railway businesses and unions tend to be interested and help books and CD projects which include both recorded voices and images.

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<sup>18</sup> Ambérieu' roundhouse was partly destructed in 1972, Annemasse closed in 1972 and threatened in 2003, Bellegarde dismantled the same year.

<sup>19</sup> Following Sebastiao Salgado, *Les Cheminots*, Paris, Comité central d'entreprise de la SNCF, 1989 (photograph album ordered to a world known photograph by the SNCF works council), and Gérard Mordillat, *Trains de vie, Les cheminots dans l'aventure du siècle*, Paris: Editions de la Martinière, 1999, 186 p. (ordered by the same to a well-known writer and filmmaker), ancient and new photographs and oral history are now on the fore. See for instance: France Berlioz, Jean Ber, *J'aimerais tellement vous dire... 26 parcours de jeunes cheminots à la SNCF*, Paris: Textuel, 2002, 175 p. (interviews of young recently hired railwaypersons, with photos, ordered by SNCF); Jean-Charles Huitorel, *Cheminots. Gestes et paroles. Mémoires du Réseau breton*, Brest: Le Télégramme, 2003, 118 p. (photograph album on the railway workers on branch lines closed at the beginning of the 1970's in central Brittany) (both authors being professional journalists); Éric Bonneau, Christian Malaurie, *Mémoire entre les voix. Histoire des ateliers SNCF de Bordeaux (1854-1994)*, Pessac Bordeaux: La part des Anges éd., 2005, 96 p. (interviews and photographs by a local committee after the closure of big SNCF repair shops). Pascal Rabot (photos), Florence Coudert (texts), Martine Robert-Monteil (coordinator), *Chemins de Faire. Le Savoir Cheminot*, Jugeals-Nazareth: F. Coudert, 2005, 155 p. (photograph album on the railwayworkers' skills and professions). The book *Cheminots et chemins de fer en Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Identités régionale et professionnelles. 1830-2030*, by Alain Barré, Denis Cacheux, Odette Hardy-Hémery, Olivier Kourchid, Philippe Menerault, Chantal Pétilion, François Schuiten, Didier Terrier (Paris: La Vie du Rail, 2004, 239 p.) was written by well-known scholars for the SNCF works council of the Northern region; another book was made for Provence and published in 2001. both appealed to life-stories and well-chosen documentary photographs as well as the archive.

<sup>20</sup> Official website : <http://www.trains-fr.org/ahicf/>

This trend increases public interest in railway history and make railway workers popular, but shouldn't let 'hardware' heritage sink into neglect or oblivion.

## II. Factors of change and new perspectives for railway heritage

In this shorter section we shall ask more questions than we give answers, but state facts which have to be accounted for in designing the railway heritage future.

### *Skilled workforce wanted!*

The railway enthusiasts' movement decline is a common factor of change for museums and heritage trains.

One adheres to Colin Divall judgement when he writes: "...it is also clear that the public history of transport would be very, very much the poorer without the efforts made by amateurs and volunteers over the last 50 years or so. They have rescued vehicles and other artefacts from scrapping, restored many of them, rehabilitated infrastructure, and put a considerable proportion of all of this on public show - and all at a good deal of personal, and very little public, expense."<sup>21</sup>

National railway amateurs' societies go back in France to the 1920's.<sup>22</sup> Their mission was first railway connoisseurship and enthusiasm; it became closer to railway operation and railway heritage restoration. Many smaller groups were constituted over the whole country in the 1960-80 to foster one pet vehicle's preservation. Although the French enthusiasts' movement cannot be compared with the UK situation, railway enthusiasts' support did much for railway preservation. The FACS (Branch Lines' Friends Federation) in particular was the origin for many heritage trains at a moment when branch lines were closed and rolling stock sold. Some enthusiasts even bought privately some and launched a heritage train. Others made up a collection of rolling stock, restored it and opened open air Museums.<sup>23</sup> The question is now how to ensure an adequate apprenticeship for newcomers who will be in charge of heritage railway operation and maintenance in the future and never, for instance, saw steam trains in operation. Several heritage trains make a point of training lay people to steam engines maintenance, overhaul, stoking and driving.<sup>24</sup> Joint initiatives with the State administration of Education, or of Transport, are still to be made durable.

The concern is the same when one comes to communication. As in other sectors, e.g. mining heritage, comes the question: 'How to convey professional experience' to the public when there won't be any railway worker left with an experience of the steam engine?

Another question is the future and legal status of collections linked to one individual or a small group.

To sum up, railway heritage needs continuous attention and ensuring continuity in care, attention, finance, professional abilities, and legal status is an everlasting matter of concern.

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<sup>21</sup> "Going places? Visitors, enthusiasts and the public history of transport", Lecture delivered by Colin Divall at the National Railway Museum as his inaugural address as Professor of Railway Studies in the University of York, 12 March 1999, <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/irs/irshome/papers/inaugural.htm>

<sup>22</sup> AFAC (Association française des amis des chemins de fer) in 1929 ; FACS (Fédération des Amis des Chemins de fer Secondaires) in 1957. It merged later with the UNECTO (Union of Heritage Trains Operators), see above.

<sup>23</sup> As for instance in Miramas, where a collection belonging to the association 'APPAP' (Association Provençale de Préservation et d'Animation Ferroviaire) is exhibited in the depot and on the adjoining yard.

<sup>24</sup> The Cercle Ferroviaire et Touristique du Vermandois - Chemin de fer Touristique du Vermandois – CFTV, constituted in 1977 in Saint-Quentin (Picardie), is a training centre for volunteers and offers one-day training courses to stir up conversion to the religion of steam.

## *Heritage business is business*

The French state restricted finances, the fact that culture, heritage and tourism budget is now transferred to Regions communities call a halt to many heritage railway operation and private museums, not to speak of vehicles' and engines' restoration. In the same time, commercial operation of main heritage railways or museums by dedicated businesses makes a hit.

This doesn't mean that non-profit heritage preservation is doomed: Railway heritage has to meet financial requirements and become reasonably market oriented. This is a fact for all sectors of the culture and tourism industry. Being based on volunteers' contribution and non profit societies, the railway heritage world wants professional skills in marketing or management as in railway technology and staff training. When English railway heritage societies welcome you with the figures of money invested or the money value of volunteers' work done, making apologies if they admit there are one or two hired staff members on the premises, the French ones sigh for public money and professional hired staff and are reluctant to 'lose time' with the duties of the 'heritage business'. Apart from this cultural discrepancy, one must acknowledge the high costs of railway heritage operation but, also, maintenance, which are beyond the reach of individuals and amateurs societies. The overhaul of a boiler is usually said to cost ca. 150,000 / 200,000 euros. They have to raise funds from local communities, regions, the State and the European Union as any project dealing with culture or heritage does. This demands proven professional skills in administration and finance and perseverance as a special virtue. Sponsors quite rightly want to make sure the work will be eventually done, which may take some years, and the rolling stock eventually kept under shelter, when so many hazards may afflict the renovation process.<sup>25</sup>

Tourism industry is now the key-word for heritage railways future and heritage railway operation must be included in the tourism supply. This is the goal on which the FACS UNECTO is setting its sights, following convergent studies by tourism specialists and geographers who stress on heritage trains potential for tourism, although operation costs are higher than for other tourist attractions.<sup>26</sup> The FACS-UNECTO published a tourist map of France featuring all heritage trains available and does feasibility studies for local communities which may be interested in backing up a heritage train as a tourist attraction, although the cost of operation may prove to be higher than for 'circuits' of another kind.<sup>27</sup> Reciprocally is railway heritage understood as a tourist attraction and included in the tourism supply: The popular publisher Reader's Digest's French branch thus recently published a comprehensive and reliable 'Guide of French railway tourism' which shows the public interest for railway tourism and heritage. Entries include mostly historical stations, in operation or not, bridges and viaducts, all kind of railway museums and all heritage trains, *vélorails*, etc., i.e. what a tourist may (a) come and see specifically as a railway heritage monument or landscape, or see when coming for another purpose (a bridge, a viaduct), (b) see during a railway trip, and learn to notice during his or her city tour (a station), (c) experience as a leisure (heritage train), which means railway heritage is the destination of the trip.

Railway heritage is then an asset for the tourism industry and tourism may be developed as a mean for financing heritage preservation. Tourism is a perspective for railway heritage specifically,

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<sup>25</sup> See the cases analysed by Fournier, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> See: Pascal Desmichel, "La ligne Bort-Neussargues : un patrimoine ferroviaire des hautes terres du massif central", *Industrial patrimony. Resources, practices, cultures*, No. 14 (2005/2), pp. 75-86; Etienne Auphan, "Les chemins de fer touristiques entre patrimoine et tourisme récréatif", *Revue d'histoire des chemins de fer*, No. 20-21 (1999), pp. 255-268. Jean-Michel Gasc, "Les chemins de fer touristiques ouvrent la voie à des itinérances multimodales", *Espaces*, No. 320 (oct. 2005), special issue "Mobilité touristique et intermodalité". Stefano Maggi developed the bibliography on this topic in Italy, as a transport historian and the manager of a "tourist" train (*Treno Natura*, in Tuscany): *In treno per diporto. Dal turismo ferroviario alle ferrovie turistiche. Esperienze e prospettive*. Siena : Copinfax, 1997, 60 pages; "Il futuro dei treni storici". In Neri Baldi (dir), *Il Deposito Rotabili Storici di Pistoia*, Florence: Pegaso, 2001, pp. 83-99.

<sup>27</sup> Jérôme Camand, *Guide du tourisme ferroviaire. Trains, gares, ponts, viaducs, musées du rail*, Bagneux, Sélection du Reader's Digest, 2005, 192 pages.

as long as the latter is not marketed at the expense of preservation, restoration programmes and public education.<sup>28</sup>

### *From European integration to urban transformation: factors of change*

The new frame settled by EC directives for railway operation could be understood as an advantage for railway heritage preservation, as the new administrative bodies or companies in charge of the railway network everywhere in Europe may have an interest in what is now *their* heritage's preservation. The concrete legal situation created by the EC rules may also press for finding solutions to keep railway heritage and care for its preservation. Although not in the EC, Switzerland thus settled an example with the creation of a foundation dedicated to railway heritage preservation, when in the late 1990' rolling stock was attributed to new sections of the Swiss railways (freight, intercity passengers, etc.), leaving historical rolling stock in between, in need of a new structure to take charge; in the same time, the need for an organized and centralised archive became pressing, in order to answer the questions asked by the studies then in progress on the history of the Swiss administration during the Second World War. The SBB Historic is now responsible for historical rolling stock maintenance, special trains operation, the central railway archive and cultural events linked to the railway world.<sup>29</sup> In the UK, the Railway Heritage Act came in 1996 to the rescue of railway heritage divided between the numerous franchise operators and the track owner which sprang from the British Rail's privatization 3 years before and enforced the Railway heritage trust instituted in 1985 by British Rail. In France, where the railway *Réforme* was not drawn to such an extent, no structural change occurred in railway heritage management but the change in ownership: A new body dedicated to railway infrastructure ownership and management was created in 1997. With now some 700 staff members, *Réseau ferré de France* (RFF) is in charge of the railway network and its hundreds of bridges, viaducts and lines as well as real estate and millions of square meters of disused railway yards, some of them crucial for urban development. In 2005, out of 75 stations and other buildings and 38 bridges, viaducts and tunnels listed by the State as 'Historical Monuments', 20 of the former belong to RFF together with the State (French national railway patrimony),<sup>30</sup> 24 of the latter belong fully to RFF. But RFF is not specifically in charge of preserving railway *historical* heritage; its main two missions are of a technical nature – maintenance and betterment of the railway network, investments in new equipments and lines and their design and building – and financial – valorisation of redundant railway real estate to finance investments and the railway debt and long-term loans brought about by the building of the high speed network which came to RFF together with the network ownership. RFF is not keen to acknowledge the possible historical value of what is put for sale, as it could be a constraint on the buyer's development projects. On the other hand, the urge to valorise the new society' patrimony accelerates railway properties transformation and development. The questions asked by this move are many and pressing: which are the perspectives for the railway network heritage in the context of urban transformation? Re-use of stations? A mere preservation of residues? The general preservation of the former tracks design in the new development? Should, for instance, a marshalling yard be kept as an open space, devoid of construction?

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<sup>28</sup> See: *Slow Train Coming. Heritage railways in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, proceedings of the conference held at the National Railway Museum, York, in 2001, by the Institute of railway history and transport studies and the Heritage Railway Association. Some papers were published in an enlarged version in *Japan Railway and Transport Review*, No. 30 (March 2002) & 31 (June 2002).

<sup>29</sup> See the official website: <http://www.sbbhistoric.ch/>

<sup>30</sup> After the Law No. 97135 passed on February, 13, 1997, art. 5, in a station tracks, platforms and their shelters belong to RFF, the building to SNCF. "Les biens constitutifs de l'infrastructure comprennent les voies, y compris les appareillages fixes associés, les ouvrages d'art et les passages à niveau, les quais à voyageurs et à marchandises, les triages et les chantiers de transport combiné, les installations de signalisation, de sécurité, de traction électrique et de télécommunications liées aux infrastructures, les bâtiments affectés au fonctionnement et à l'entretien des infrastructures."

If the park now planned in Paris on the location of the freight station *Les Batignolles*, dating back to the 1840, is an open space and the prize project should keep the artificial former railway yard level, the planned paths and streets won't follow the old tracks North-South direction; no rail will be found in the park and no railway building will be kept for its own sake or, if so, not in its original location.<sup>31</sup>

In the Northern suburbs of Paris, a new tramway line re-using the tracks of a former branch line is to be inaugurated in the fall of 2006. When the project was under completion the fate of 4 small original stations came to the fore: they had been overlooked by the project's leaders (SNCF and RFF) as well as the local heritage preservation societies which 'discovered' their heritage value some weeks before their dismantlement, which had been included in the line project from its beginning. After a hot debate,<sup>32</sup> three of them are to be kept and reused for cultural and social purposes, thanks to the involvement of the local community, the *département de la Seine-Saint-Denis*, which, as the *département de l'Isère*, was involved early in the taking over of responsibilities from the State in the field of culture and heritage, and dedicated in 2000 a section of its administration to industrial heritage knowledge and study and its promotion and defence in the process of urban mutation undertaken by this former industrial area.<sup>33</sup>

Both these examples show that railway heritage, with its large surface and tracts of overexpensive city-centre land is more often understood as an opportunity for city planning on *tabula rasa*. When acknowledged railway heritage 'monuments' are on the way, they may be stormed away with the approval of cities councils who are keen to see their development projects completed. The fate of the freight hall built in concrete by Eugène Freyssinet in 1927-1929 near the Austerlitz station in Paris is still uncertain, because the new district built on the railway premises is now on a higher level and follows another direction than the building, when the small Art deco footbridge across the tracks of the Arras station in the North of France was scrapped in January, 2006 with no more ado notwithstanding architects' and heritage specialists' disapproval because it was not included in the station surroundings new design.

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<sup>31</sup> See the forthcoming proceedings of the one-day conference held on June, 23rd, 2006: "Patrimoine ferroviaire et aménagement urbain". The Batignolles project status is not definitive and these remarks are drawn from my understanding of the debate held during the conference.

<sup>32</sup> The *ligne des coquetiers* transformed into the 'tram-train' Aulnay-sous-Bois – Bondy. See the debate in the local press, for instance *Le Parisien*: "Les gares en péril de la ligne des Coquetiers" (02/18/2006); "Mobilisation pour les gares de la ligne des Coquetiers" (03/09/2006); "La gare de l'Abbaye pourrait être sauvée de la démolition" (03/30/2006); "La gare de l'Abbaye sauvée de la démolition" (03/31/2006); "La gare des Coquetiers ne sera pas démolie" (05/04/2006); "Sursis pour les anciennes gares" (04/21/2006); "Tractations en cours pour les anciennes gares des Coquetiers" (06/07/2006); "L'ancienne gare rasée au bulldozer" (07/21/2006) and the numerous petitions presented on the web by local associations.

<sup>33</sup> Studies results are compiled on an online Atlas. See: <http://www.atlas-patrimoine93.fr/accueil.php>. The *Bureau du patrimoine* undertook a thorough study of railway heritage and landscape as an asset of urban development. See: Évelyne Lohr, "Le paysage ferroviaire en Seine-Saint-Denis, un enjeu patrimonial et urbain", *Revue d'histoire des chemins de fer*, No. 32-33 (2005), pp. 147-176.

## Concluding remarks

Railway heritage in France may well be said to be ‘in progress’.

As a field of study, it is certainly under searched and in need of scholarly and field studies. The applied research programmes launched by the *départements* and regions should lead to new approaches and perception of railway heritage by politicians, town planners, architects, agencies in charge of the tourism and economic development policies.

As a part of the national heritage, it is still underestimated and not sufficiently known nor understood for its own sake. Its potential for public education should surely be acknowledged and developed.

As an asset for local economic development through tourism, it is still in need of recognition in the proper quarters, although in a better position.

The final assessment is not free from discrepancies. Outstanding successes and rightly praised initiatives contrast with mere failures: up to date preserved rolling stock going to the scrapping yard, a railway ‘monument’ dismantled because re-use is not backed by a consistent project although its historical and architectural value is acknowledged, a private collection closed to the public or sold or a heritage train operation stopped, the memory of an entire railway district erased without prior documentation, progressive replacement of technical equipment witnessing a prior stage of railway technology. These casualties may be said to be the usual up and downs of industrial heritage: they are to my mind more frequent than they should be when it comes to railway heritage because of the railway heritage scale – the dimension of railway equipments, the nation-wide spread out network – and the lack of a national structure in charge of railway heritage knowledge, expertise and preservation.

We shall conclude by pleading for a broad definition and understanding of railway heritage in France, from well-known museums collections to heritage to-be, which should include the railway network future in a context of urban transformation as well as the notion of ‘railway landscape’, implying the long-term preservation of the railway contribution to rural and urban forms. This is to include the railway heritage preservation in decisions and budgets belonging to the tourism sector or land planning as well as raising more funds for railway heritage preservation and restoration. The unyielding public interest for railway heritage should help and call public attention to the future of railway heritage as a whole.

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