

Text 8

There are numerous problems with a disturbingly detailed proposal to turn the Eiffel Tower into the world's tallest eco-tourism attraction. Placing 600,000 hanging plants around the famous structure at a cost of £65m would be irresponsibly *louche* at the best of times, but with France facing economic collapse because of the eurozone crisis, it sounds criminal. Add the fact that the tower's deep bronze would convert to (...) green, and there is every reason to reject it outright.

But the worst aspect of the plan put forward by Ginger, a French engineering company specialising in ecological projects, is its abject ignorance of history. While working out how to hang and irrigate all that foliage, and ensuring it does not obscure the view of the 7 million visitors who go up the tower every year, they have completely missed the point of why it was built in the first place.

Gustave Eiffel created his *dame de fer* (...) as the entrance arch to the 1889 Universal Exhibition. It showed off Gallic engineering brilliance in an age when the Industrial Revolution was changing the world out of all recognition.

Its opening saw more than 18,000 pieces of (...) iron ingeniously bound together using 2.5m rivets. It was an incredible feat, encompassing all the skills Eiffel had acquired building railway bridges and other structures designed to spread trade, and so prosperity, at a time when millions of ordinary people were enjoying happier and healthier lives because of these rapid advances in technology.

(...)It became the ultimate symbol of modern France – innovative, forward-thinking and stylish.

Thomas Edison visited the tower soon after its opening and praised Eiffel as "the brave builder of so gigantic and original a specimen of modern engineering". Theodor Wulf measured radiant energy on the tower in 1910 and went on to discover cosmic rays. Eiffel Tower transmitters jammed German radios during the first world war. Then its lift cables were cut in 1940 to prevent Adolf Hitler taking a lift to the top (...).

If Ginger needs any further proof of what the tower's soaring iron really represents, it should read the 72 names engraved around its base. All are innovators – scientists and engineers who took France into an industrial future.

(...) Hanging plants, eco-tourism, and a thousand other green initiatives all have their place in 21st-century Paris, but they have absolutely nothing to do with the Eiffel Tower.