

IAHR AND THE NETHERLANDS – A LONG AND LASTING RELATIONSHIP

BY HENK JAN OVERBEEK



Prof. Thijsse, Prof. Harold J. Schoemaker and Dr. Egbert J. Prins



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For those of you less acquainted with the history of IAHR, it is perhaps interesting to note that IAHR's cradle stood in Brussels where the association was established in September 1935, as an offshoot of the Permanent Association of Navigation Congresses (PIANC). The association's mother tongue at that time was German, with French and English as second languages. Right from the start IAHR aimed for a truly international perspective and hence there was the need for a Secretary-General who was able to easily communicate with all participants and potential members of IAHR. Johannes Theodor Thijsse, Professor at Delft University of Technology and Director of Delft Hydraulics, was elected to the SG position in 1935. In years to come Prof. Thijsse was succeeded by Prof. Harold J. Schoemaker (1960), Dr. Egbert J. Prins (1980) and Prof Henk Jan Overbeek (1992). All of us combined our duties as managing director of Delft Hydraulics with the position of Secretary-General of IAHR.

After 66 years the Delft-based secretariat moved to Madrid in the year 2001, where it is now hosted at CEDEX with support from Spain Water.

It is not the first time that the IAHR hydraulic engineering community gathers in The Netherlands. In 1955 the 6th IAHR Congress was held in The Hague where some 250 engineers and scientist came together to discuss hydraulic engineering projects. A few years before that time (February 1953) the Netherlands had faced a severe storm surge in the SW part of the country and the country was still in the midst of detailed analyses of what had happened throughout the delta and, more importantly, what should be done to prevent such havocs in future. The final engineering solution – within the framework of the Delta Project – took about 25 years to complete: in 1986 with the closure of the Eastern Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier, and after that the Rotterdam Maeslant Storm Surge Barrier. During the 1955 Congress a photo was taken of all participants and it was possible to recognize clearly friends and colleagues. In these 'pre-selfie' days, this was one of the valuable items to take back home, to be able to show where you had been and whom you had met. At least half a year later you would receive (by surface mail) the printed congress proceedings.

For those of you who are acquainted with the low-lying country of the Netherlands, it should not be a surprise that the main theme of this Congress is "Deltas of the Future (and what happens upstream)", since most of the Netherlands is situated in the delta of the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt riversystems. More than half of the country is prone to flooding, either by the North Sea or by the rivers, and requires protection by dikes, dunes or barriers to create a

safe habitat. Together with the much-needed fresh water discharge from our neighbouring countries Germany, France and Belgium, the rivers also transport a multitude of industrial, toxic and agricultural wastes to the North Sea. A lot has happened since the previous IAHR Congress in the Netherlands. Not only are photographs being replaced by selfies that can be sent straight-away to all over the world, but also printed Congress Proceedings are no longer distributed afterwards by surface mail, but provided onsite on a memory stick or via an app that can be downloaded 'from the cloud'. And the IAHR family has grown from some 400 members in 1955 to almost 4000 in 2015!

But also the problems that we face have changed: global population growth leads to considerable pressures on our water resources, effects of climate change are becoming noticeable, dealing with uncertainties has become a major issue, environmental impact assessments have become an integral part of ever more complex engineering projects. Stakeholders views, multi-level water governance aspects, financial constraints on construction and maintenance have become as much a part of the puzzle as engineering design, spatial planning, biological and ecological issues. Nowadays, engineers are used to work in multi-disciplinary teams to find optimal solutions in close concert with clients and governments. Glancing through the abstracts submitted to this 36th IAHR World Congress, it becomes clear that a large variety of subjects awaits your attention and you can compare notes with a truly global mix of experts and scientists. A challenging week certainly awaits you. Some of the contributions from Dutch colleagues provide intricate details of the two major projects that are presently underway in the Netherlands. The first one is the 'Room for the River' project. It has been on the way since 2008 and most of the 40 projects involved will be completed by the end of this year. The second project is the so-called 'Delta Programme', which will be on its way for at least 30 years to come. It aims at providing a safer environment against flooding, both from the sea and from the rivers. Dikes will be reinforced to better withstand excessive water pressures during high stages and storm surges, spatial planning projects will consider future potential flooding impacts, all to have the country better prepared in the unlikely event of another flood havoc. The Netherlands is committed to remaining to be a safe place to live, work and invest in, despite the potential floodrisks. The latest scientific insights and most modern technologies are used in order to guarantee high safety standards now, as well as in future.

Looking forward to welcoming you on Monday 29 June 2015 in The Hague, the Netherlands!



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