



Conference Reports

FIDIC 1999 Conference 'Expanding the Boundaries', The Hague, The Netherlands, 19–24 September 1999

The International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC) and the Association of Consulting Engineers of The Netherlands (ONRI) organized a Conference on 'Expanding the Boundaries' in the Hague, The Netherlands, 19–24 September 1999. The objectives of this conference were to explore the present challenges faced by consulting engineers and to analyse the best alternatives available for successfully meeting them, as well as to discuss constructively the challenges for the new millennium, and their implications for the consulting engineering firms. Approximately 600 participants from 50 different countries participated in the conference.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Dutch consulting engineering sector (ranked third in the world) organized an excellent forum, both technically and socially. The plenary sessions were specially designed to be visionary, thus setting the scene for discussions with very broad and analytical perspectives on issues which are leading, and could further lead, to changes in the future activities of consulting engineers. The keynote lectures included analysis of global growth patterns, the evolution of technology over time, global warming, constraints of space in urban areas, and water crisis. The concept of ecocracy was also discussed. Intangible concepts such as sustainable development were effectively married with tangible ones, such as costs and benefits in real terms. It was recognized that the world is changing very rapidly and, with it, its needs, concerns and alternatives available for solutions. While in the past the role of the consulting engineers was mainly on technical issues, the present and, surely, future changes at the global level are demanding that the engineers play new and innovating roles. Skills on management-related issues, strategic planning, development of projects from an integral viewpoint, environmental and social issues as well as ethics, are important challenges that the consulting engineering field is likely to face on a regular basis in the coming decades. It was also argued that the days are now long past when foreign consultants could decide from their desks on the development and implementation of specific projects overseas. Appropriate knowledge, visionary approaches, use of new technology, understanding of socioeconomic needs, and recognition of cultural differences have become a must for those consulting engineers who wish to remain active abroad in the future.

The conference considered various issues that could well determine the successes or failures of consulting companies in the 21st century. The topics discussed covered a wide range of issues, ranging from technical innovations likely to take place in the coming decades and integrative project approaches, to fundamental issues which are normally not given enough attention at such gatherings, such as the profiles of consulting engineers in order to strengthen

their position in society, and future directions and roles of consulting companies in a rapidly changing world.

FIDIC has recognized that radical changes are taking place not only in the engineering field but also in all other fields at the global level. The magnitude and rapidity of these changes require special attention and major changes in strategies and approaches are needed from the consulting engineering firms. Probably one of the most notable facts was the urgency expressed by FIDIC in stressing the importance of considering new approaches and alternatives that match present and future needs in the global consulting field. Business as usual is no longer a feasible long-term option. This progressive attitude of FIDIC is in sharp contrast with most of the public sectors of the world, which still continue with a 'business as usual' philosophy and which yet do not see the importance and relevance of new alternatives in different fields.

Thousands of meetings and conferences are held every year all over the world. However, the vast majority of these meetings are best forgotten once they are over. Other international associations should consider the FIDIC Conference in the Hague as a model, in terms of its futuristic orientation, sharp focus and excellent organization of both its technical sessions and social events. In fact the FIDIC-type gatherings are likely to make a difference in delivering the message well beyond the conference halls, and in achieving their objectives.

Cecilia Tortajada
Third World Centre for Water Management
Mexico City

Xth World Water Congress, International Water Resources Association, Melbourne, 13–16 March 2000

The Xth World Water Congress of the International Water Resources Association (IWRA) was held at the Melbourne Convention Centre, Australia, 12–17 March 2000. The Congress was the first to be held in Australia and only the second in the southern hemisphere. A total of 518 registered delegates participated in the Congress, drawn from 47 countries. The central theme of the Xth Congress was: *Sharing the Waters of the Earth* and the message of *Sharing and Caring for Water* was reflected in the sessions and topics during the meeting. The theme served as a powerful reminder that balancing competing claims to water and ensuring the quality of the resource are global concerns. In many ways the Congress served as a timely opportunity to find new ways of exploring and resolving the complex water issues facing the planet. In achieving this, the Congress provided an ideal setting for researchers, professionals and community groups to come together, to share their knowledge and expertise, and to work towards solutions.

The Congress Opening Ceremony was addressed by the President of the International Water Resources Association, Professor Benedito Braga, the Federal Minister for the Environment and Conservation in the State of Victoria, Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, the Premier of the State of South Australia, Hon. John Olsen, and Brian Bayley, Managing Director of Melbourne Water, Patron Sponsor of the Congress. The keynote speaker was Graham Harris, Chief of Land and Water, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

In opening the Congress, Professor Braga summarized the disturbing situation