

A Scientist in Oman

Most people think that the life of a scientist is really boring. You sit lonely at your desk to find solutions to boring problems, problems actually nobody is interested in. Or you spend time in an ugly laboratory full of strange machinery, or even worse, you spend most of the time you are awake behind a computer to do complex and intangible computations...

By Prof. Dr. Ruud Schotting, Extraordinary Professor of the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair (SQAC) for Quantitative Water Management in Semi Arid Regions

Fortunately this is not my experience! Of course we need a lot of thought behind a desk to contribute to scientific progress, we need laboratory experiments and we need advanced computational efforts, no doubt about that. But it is in no way boring! To be honest, it is really exciting.

Traveling the globe

From the very beginning, my PhD supervisor Professor Hans van Duijn, currently Rector Magnificus (i.e. Vice-Chancellor) at Eindhoven University of Technology, encouraged me to participate in international conferences and to maintain international contacts. He encouraged me to go to Poland, the United States, France, England, Italy, Germany, Australia, etc, etc. Water science is not just a Dutch affair, but certainly an international scientific affair. After I finished my PhD research I continued traveling to many countries all around the world. Amongst others to Russia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Belgium, Romania, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. In my opinion, traveling the globe is one of the many privileges of being a scientist. Meeting different cultures, different habits and different religions is truly a beautiful experience. Early October 2008 I received a letter of Her

50 kilograms of books

What I have experienced in Oman is absolutely beyond any of my expectations! First of all the trip was extremely well organized. H.E. Ambassador Al Lawati put together a very interesting and efficient program of visits to research institutes, Ministries and the Sultan Qaboos University. The program comprised ten, for me extremely valuable visits, all related to water management and water-related issues in Oman. It is not possible for me to mention all the people I met in particular (due to editorial limitations), but I would like to highlight some of them.

I had the pleasure and honor to meet His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi, Secretary General of Foreign Affairs, and also the Under Secretary of Higher Education, His Excellency Dr Abdullah M. Al Sarmi. My visit to The Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Water Recourses was in particular interesting to me. Dr Saif bin Rashid Al-Shaqsi and his co-workers did not only provide me with valuable oral information about water resources in Oman, but also with 50 kilograms of books with background material. I am still extremely grateful for this, and in particular of the offer of Dr Saif bin

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Excellency Khadija bint Hassan bin Salman Al Lawati, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman in The Netherlands, with the kind invitation to spend eight days in Oman. I must admit that I was honored and excited to receive the invitation. My first visit to Oman! However I did not have any idea what to expect of it. Of course I already studied the water resources and water management issues in Oman and I tried to understand the (hydro)geology of the country. I even bought 'The Lonely Planet' and many other books about Oman. Just to get an idea what I could expect...

Rashid to assist and support the SQAC with regards to water management issues in Oman. I also want to mention the constructive and pleasant meeting with the Under Secretary for Ports and Maritime Affairs of the Ministry of Transport & Communications, His Excellency Said Bin Hamdoon Al-Harthy. And of course the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Environmental & Climate Affairs, His Excellency Mohamed Bin Khamis Al-Araimi.

At Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) I was kindly received by Her Highness Princess Dr Mona Fahad Al-Said, assistant to the Vice-Chancellor for External

Cooperation. Moreover I was given the opportunity to give two lectures at SQU. One lecture about the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair and one lecture about a truly scientific subject. Moreover, I had the opportunity to meet Professor Prathapar, Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural & Marine Sciences, and my dear friend and very respected colleague Professor Anvar Kacimov. It was a real pleasure to meet Prof. Kacimov at SQU. The first time we met is already 5 years ago in Kazan in Russia. Prof. Kacimov in my opinion is one of the brilliant exponents of the water-related mathematics school of Russia.

Respectful, open and friendly Omanis

My visit was not only about formal visits; the program also allowed me to experience Oman. I visited beautiful old fortresses, museums about the history of Oman, hot springs, falaj, the mountains, markets, and even a beach. This was a beautiful experience. However, I must admit that the most impressive experience for me was to see and experience the attitude of the Omani people. They are so respectful, open and friendly to each other and also to foreigners. I was really amazed. If this would be the worldwide attitude the world would definitely be a better place!

I also was lucky to meet our new Dutch Ambassador in Muscat, His Excellency Stefan van Wersch. We met twice, once formally at the Dutch Embassy, and once at a dinner that Ambassador Van Wersch organized at his residence in the honor of my visit. I was fortunate that I was allowed to invite several guests of SQU and even one of my former PhD students, Dr Bert-Rik de Zwart, who currently works for Shell STO in Muscat. It is indeed a small world!

Water seminar in Muscat

During our discussions in November 2008, Ambassador Stefan van Wersch suggested to me to come again to Oman January 17, 2009 to give a keynote lecture at a water seminar in Muscat. The Dutch Water Platform (NWP) organized the water seminar in the honor of the visit of Prince Willem-Alexander and Princess Máxima of The Netherlands to Oman. I kindly accepted the offer and traveled again to Muscat on January 16. It felt like coming home, even when I entered the airport. Good to be back!

Indeed it was. Not only to enjoy Oman again, but also to observe that Dutch water science and water technology are highly appreciated and taken serious in Oman. It was also a great pleasure to meet Prince Willem-Alexander at the informal reception at the Al Bustan Hotel.

I must emphasize that the Dutch Water Platform did an excellent job in Oman. They presented the Dutch water world, i.e. companies, research institutions and the scientific world, modestly but very efficiently. It was

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indeed a pleasure to meet former Ambassador Ronald Mollinger, who is now the newly appointed Director of the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) in Muscat. During my first visit to Oman, early November 2008, I had the opportunity to visit the new MEDRC laboratory. What an impressive and beautiful facility. This is 'the place to be' when it comes to the future of desalination research!

I am convinced that the visits of H.H. Prince Willem-Alexander, H.H. Princess Máxima, Minister of Foreign Trade Drs Frank Heemskerk and the Dutch Water Platform have contributed to new and exciting collaborations between The Netherlands and Oman with regards to water management research. The first projects recently started. So I am fully confident!

I am also happy to announce that I'll present my inaugural lecture as Sultan Qaboos Chair of Quantitative Water Management in Semi Arid Regions on March 2, 2009 at Utrecht University (4:15 p.m.) I hope to welcome you all at this special academic event!

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