Inspiration on the Doorstep

Although most non-geospatial professionals often don't realize it, everyone is constantly surrounded by numerous aspects from the world of geomatics. Ever since joining Geomares – the media company focused on the global geospatial and hydrographic industry, and publisher *of GIM International* – over a decade ago now, I myself have increasingly grown to appreciate the geological, geographical and geospatial characteristics of the day-to-day environment.

In fact, the place I was born and raised – and still live today – is an extraordinary example of (geospatial) engineering in practice. Created on land reclaimed from the sea, the Noordoostpolder is a carefully designed man-made agricultural landscape dating from the 20th century. The house where I grew up stands on what used to be the bottom of the Zuiderzee – an inland sea that was in effect a bay of the North Sea. From 1951 to 1996, the area was home to part of the renowned hydrological laboratory called *Waterloopkundig Laboratorium*. Between 1927 and 2008, the laboratory was an independent scientific institute in the field of hydraulics and hydraulic engineering. It is now part of Deltares, an internationally renowned research institute that mainly focuses on river deltas, coastal regions, river areas and offshore. It's hard to imagine nowadays, but how were complex forces on large structures ever calculated without a computer? Yet that's precisely what they did there at the laboratory. The surrounding area offered enough space to construct large-scale models of estuaries and harbours, which were used to predict the influence of hydraulic engineering works on waterways. The scientists could also make use of the large differences in surface water levels locally.

In 2002, the site was bought by Natuurmonumenten, a Dutch organization that purchases and manages land for nature conservation purposes. The woodland area was renamed *Waterloopbos*. The engineering models can still be seen; a footpath through the forest leads past the various waterways. Waterworks from all over the world have been constructed and tested in that forest in the polder. Test set-ups were made of the ports of a multitude of cities such as Bangkok, Istanbul, Rotterdam and many more: scale models that were built to calculate exactly how the port should be designed so that the man-made infrastructure would cope with the movement of so much water.

Autumn colours in the Waterloopbos forest.

It's a great place to visit, and I regularly enjoy walking through the *Waterloopbos* and marvelling at all the scale models dotted around the forest. Information panels by the models explain more about what they represent. As I wander past models of the port of Lagos in Nigeria, the port of Beirut and even the Delta Works (which was built in the Dutch province of Zeeland after the great flood of 1953), I think about how major engineering projects are surveyed today. And I realize that there's plenty of inspiration for new articles for *GIM International* right on the doorstep!

I hope some of that inspiration is evident in this bumper-packed edition of *GIM International*. Once again, we've set out to provide insights into the latest developments concerning gathering, analysing, distributing and visualizing geospatial data, how it's a key driver of today's information society and how it can be used for an ever-growing number of purposes to benefit the world as a whole. I'm always open to suggestions for future articles, so feel free to take a look on your own doorstep and let me know what inspiration you find.

The Deltawork, a 240-metre long artwork, originally was built as a test facility for the Oosterscheldekering storm surge barrier.