



Winner Rutger de Graaf on the Delta Competition

Over the course of 125 years Royal Haskoning has developed from a traditional engineering consultancy into a thinking factory where innovation is the focus of attention. Because Royal Haskoning is constantly taking on new challenges and is also socially committed, it was decided to organise a competition in the context of the anniversary on one of the major themes for the future: climate change and its implications for low-lying and densely populated delta areas. Students from all over the world were invited to participate in the Royal Haskoning Delta Competition.

The aim of the competition was to develop innovative and sustainable solutions for possible issues related to densely populated delta areas. Dozens of international teams took part and in the end a team of five students from Delft University of Technology won. Rutger de Graaf (leader of the winning team from Delft) tells us about it. 'The present climate problems call for sustainable water management. The film "An inconvenient truth" by Al Gore clearly shows why we need innovative solutions for, among other things, delta areas.

I thought the Delta Competition that Royal Haskoning organised was a good initiative. It stirred things up among students, challenged people to think about issues that would otherwise not be tackled. At Delft University of Technology we took up the invitation and presented the problem that Royal Haskoning put to us to six different faculties. In the end four different teams were formed. Our team focussed on the Rhine Delta areas but the other teams tackled India, the Pearl River and the Mississippi. I found the cooperation between the various professional disciplines the most instructive.

All the teams dealt with a different area but we all had a common perspective. Interdisciplinary teamwork costs a lot of time and energy. During an intermediate presentation it became clear that we hadn't really got very far. But if you look at the common end result, our teamwork has born a lot of fruit. Otherwise we'd only have been able to look at the matter from one point of view. The floating town in the IJmeer with which we ultimately won the competition is innovative in the sense that everything, including the whole town and the infrastructure, is floating. Floating structures as solutions to problems with water are not unique but a whole floating town has never been seen before. Since winning the Delta Competition I've been quite a bit busier. The media gave the floating town a lot of exposure. I've also presented the plan to the some officials and members of the Dutch parliament and government, and I went to an exhibition in Shanghai. Winning the Delta Competition has opened a lot of doors for me. Putting the plan into practice is another story. The Netherlands is not a country where you can implement this sort of plan quickly, but the fact that ministers in The Hague and other government agencies were prepared to listen is a good start.'