



Photo: T. Hrdinka

Interview with Ing. Tomáš Fojtík, director of the T. G. Masaryk Water Research Institute

He has been Director of TGM WRI for a year. How does he evaluate this first year and what has he already managed to change for the better in our Institute? How does he remember his twenty years at the Institute as regular employee? And what are his plans and goals for the future regarding the direction of TGM WRI? „I would like to continue fulfilling my vision of creating a recognized and functioning institute of national and European importance as a research base for the field of water management with such a working culture and environment that it would be a target and prestigious workplace for quality and satisfied experts willing to actively cooperate,” says the Director of our Institute, and newly also the president of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe, Ing. Tomáš Fojtík.

Mr. Director, allow me to start with a usual question. Do you remember the moment when water first appealed to you so much that you decided to dedicate your professional life to it?

I don't remember the specific moment. It is probably due to the fact that we are used to taking water for granted. I believe this approach is not good. Water is one of the most precious „things“ we need and we should treat it accordingly, value it and take proper care of it. The work at our Institute opened my eyes

even more in this regard, and thanks to it I began to perceive the importance of protecting water and the aquatic environment much more intensively.

You have been working at T. G. Masaryk Water Research Institute since 2004. Do you remember your beginnings and your first project?

I joined TGM WRI in the GIS and cartography department, where there was a wonderful team – I spent great times there that I would like to thank my colleagues for. One of the first projects I worked on and which I subsequently led was the collaboration with the Land Surveying Office and the Czech Hydrometeorological Institute on the creation and updating of ZABAGED®, specifically the geometry and numbering of watercourses, water bodies, and catchment boundaries. This long-term project, which continues to this day with other activities, showed me, among other things, how important quality and guaranteed data are and, above all, cooperation, without which it would be difficult to achieve the desired goals in water protection. The activities of the GIS and cartography department are intertwined with the activities of most branches of our Institute. Thanks to this, I came into contact with a wide range of implemented projects, and thus had a unique opportunity to get to know the entire scope of our organization. This experience helps me a lot in my current position.

You have completed your first year as Director of TGM WRI. How would you rate your year at this institution? Did it meet your expectations?

Rather, I ask myself whether I have fulfilled the expectations of my colleagues both inside and outside our Institute. Of course you have to ask them about that. I try to do everything to make my colleagues happy and our organization to flourish. We are only at the beginning of the journey. When I became Director a year ago, I found a lot more, shall we say „challenges“ than I expected. I started working immediately and believe me, it was not an easy year. But I could never do it all by myself. Success and progress would not have occurred if it were not for great colleagues who want to move our Institute forward. Many thanks to all of you for your joint efforts!

Do you consider your long-term work at TGM WRI as an advantage, or rather as a disadvantage?

Certainly as an advantage, BUT... During the more than twenty years at TGM WRI, I had the opportunity to get to know in depth its functioning, activities, people, but also areas that did not function quite as they should. For the position of Director, this is essential for understanding the organization and subsequent quality management. The above-mentioned „BUT“ hides the need to maintain sufficient perspective, impartiality, and distance. Which is very important, but also difficult. However, it cannot be done without it. I dare to say that I succeeded, although it was not always easy and painless. From this position, I would like to give back to the Institute and the people in it everything that they gave me... in a good way :-).

Where do you think TGM WRI should go and what are your goals and plans for the future?

I would like to continue fulfilling my vision of creating a recognized and functioning Institute of national and European importance as a research base for the field of water management, with such a working culture and environment that it would be a target and prestigious workplace for quality and satisfied experts willing to actively cooperate. Even though many things have already been set up correctly and changed for the better, we are still at the beginning of the journey, which will definitely not be easy, but I believe that we will manage it together.

It is absolutely necessary to continue to stabilize and strengthen the teams, to ensure decent financing and, above all, to provide high-quality and independent solutions not only for scientific and research projects. The role of our Institute as a departmental research institution is also key and unique. Thanks to our more than a century-old tradition and the experience of our employees, we can comprehensively grasp the contemporary fundamental topics in the field of water protection and water-bound species, water and waste management, climate change, hydrology, hydrogeology, but also geoinformatics and data management and publication. Subsequent outputs from the nature of departmental research are therefore not only publication ones, but primarily application ones, so that they are of practical and usable benefit, above all to the general public, a founder, or other providers or contractors. I would also like to invite everyone who is interested in getting to know our work to the Open Day, which will take place in June 2024.

Since the first of January this year, you have become the President of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe. Were you surprised by this offer?

I was very pleasantly surprised by this offer and I appreciate it very much. The position of President of the International Commission for the Protection

of the Elbe is not only prestigious, but also important. At the same time, however, it is a huge responsibility and an opportunity to participate in improving not only the state of watercourses, but also to contribute to a better environment for future generations. Our Institute, or rather my colleagues, have been members of expert groups and working groups, their spokespersons, or even their chairmen. In this way, we participate in many activities of the Commission and the formulation of strategic documents, such as the International Management Plan for the Elbe River Basin District and the International Flood Risk Management Plan for the Elbe River Basin District.

Is there a specific topic that you would like to focus on as the president of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe?

I would like to focus on strengthening international cooperation and joint cross-border projects that will have a real impact on water quality. As water knows no borders, international cooperation is very important. I greatly appreciate the work of my colleagues from neighbouring countries and look forward to working with them as well as with Czech partners within the framework of the ICPER.

However, I think I have talked enough, and as they say – let's work, and not just write about it :-).

Director, thank you very much for your time.

Ing. Josef Nistler

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Ing. Tomáš Fojtík

Ing. Tomáš Fojtík, born on 2nd December 1981 in Prague, graduated from the Faculty of Economics and Management at the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague. Here, in 2008, he obtained a bachelor's degree, and in 2011, an engineer's degree. He has been working at TGM WRI, p. r. i., since 2004, initially as a researcher in the GIS and cartography department. One of his first projects, in which he participated and subsequently led, was cooperation with the Land Surveying Office and the Czech Hydrometeorological Institute on the creation and updating of ZABAGED®, specifically the geometry and numbering of watercourses, water bodies, and catchment boundaries. In 2015, he became the head of this research department. On 1st February 2023, he was appointed to the position of Director of TGM WRI, p. r. i. On 1st January 2024, he also became the President of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe.

