

REFLECTIONS OF OUR EUROPEAN PARTNERS

In July at the Symposium in Stratford upon Avon in the UK our dutch colleagues in the Netherlands Association for Clerks Vereniging van Griffiers invited their UK partners to attend their annual Congress in Leeuwarden, Friesland, Netherlands 3 and 4 October 2019

What follows are the reflections of our European partners following their attendance at the congress and what we have collectively agreed to do to strengthen our partnerships across Europe;

Association of Democratic Service Officers (United Kingdom)

GO DUTCH they said – so we did in Leeuwarden

Following my attendance at the IIMC Conference in Birmingham, Alabama in May, it was clear to me that there was a synergy between the British Associations affiliated with the IIMC and the Associations in Europe with a real opportunity to learn from each other.

Weeks later, several of the colleagues whom had met in Birmingham Alabama met with the ADSO Chair at the Symposium at Stratford upon Avon and agreed my role within ADSO to act as a conduit and co-ordinator in the development of our Association's relationships across Europe.

Both the USA event and the Symposium have led to a renewed energy, resulting in the Associations across Europe working closer together. Evidence of this was the presence of ADSO, SLCC and SOLAR at the recent VvG Conference in the Netherlands.

At the beginning of October, I set off to Leeuwarden accompanied by Peter Sass and John Austin, two ADSO colleagues. What a great city, full of history with even one building leaning more than the Tower of Pisa (or was it the strong lager?! It was great to start networking again and it soon became apparent that there was a real enthusiasm to work closer across the associations with exchange programmes and participation in each Associations' Annual conferences. Colleagues also had discussions around our respective education programmes and the opportunities of broadening students' knowledge of different models of governance across Europe.

On the evening prior to the Conference, we attended a splendid social event which provided a marvellous opportunity to network with clerks from across the Netherlands and the many and varied sponsors for the Conference

The next day we were up early and registering at the Conference venue - a very impressive church with a history and connection with the House of Orange - the

Dutch royal family. In America, the IIMC deliver a Conference full of the razzamatazz as you would expect. The VvG put their equally effective local stamp on the event from the word go and you really felt part of the local culture.

At 9am delegates could be forgiven for thinking they were involved in a performance of the Phantom of the Opera as this haunting music filled the church and a rather frightening lady appeared from the crypt and traversed the church to the pulpit. We soon realised this was part of the history of Leeuwarden and the House of Orange.

Leeuwarden was the city of culture in 2018. Delegates heard how the organising committee had prepared and brought this year to fruition and what they had learnt in the process. It was useful for us to hear about these learning principles and stimulate our thoughts on how they could be used in our organisations.

We were then treated to twin brothers – both eminent criminal lawyers across the Netherlands and who practice in Leeuwarden. It was not unlike watching a ‘Two Ronnies’ sketch - full of humour but with some clear robust business principles which certainly stimulated delegates thoughts process.

We had the benefit of having all the morning’s proceedings translated from Dutch into English. This typified the very impressive attention to detail on the part of the VvG.

In the afternoon, delegates had the opportunity to attend a number of workshops which looked very interesting because they were the practical application of aspects of the role of the clerk or alternatively participating in a tour. As VIP delegates arrangements had been made for us to participate in a number of tours as it was not possible to translate the various workshops. We visited the historic maritime town of Harlingen. We were treated to afternoon tea in the splendid Council Chamber of the Town Hall accessible by some of the steepest wooden spiral stairs we have climbed anywhere. The curator of both the Town Hall and Museum gave us a fascinating insight into the history of the town and its strong links over many centuries with the United Kingdom.

The conference concluded with canapés and refreshments and another opportunity to network. Just when we thought it was time to go our respective ways, an impressive marching band in their splendid royal blue tunics appeared from nowhere to entertain us. Wow! What a conclusion.

What a great event VvG!! Thank you Hans and all your colleagues for a great conference and for looking after us so well. VvG have already extended an invitation for us to participate in their Conference in October 2020 and the UK associations have been asked to run a workshop at the event. We would be delighted to do so. We can’t wait!

The Society of Local Council Clerks (United Kingdom)

A First Timers View of the VvG Conference Experience in Leeuwarden, October 2019, an English Perspective...

Background: I have been involved in Central and Local Government in the UK for over 20 years, more recently in the local council sector where I have worked as a clerk and consultant. I now teach on the Society of Local Council Clerk's (SLCC) higher education course which is for clerks and officers from parish and town councils. One of the aims is to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge of the students so they can work with their councils and communities to improve their locality and community.

Why did I attend the Conference? I am working on bringing a group of students to the Netherlands in June 2020 for a comparative study between their community and an equivalent Dutch community, to learn new skills and knowledge and take lessons back to their own communities. An invitation to the conference accompanied the opportunity to discuss the student trip, and the experience quickly became much more than the study tour for next year...read on...

Thursday started with an excellent round table discussion with international colleagues from VvG, IIMC, SOLAR and ADSO on partnership working and what we can all gain from each other in terms of new skills, knowledge, new ways of working and the importance of education.

The party on the Thursday evening provided a great opportunity to network with colleagues, make new friends and discuss issues that affect all clerks and communities wherever they may be, and of course, the more broader topics such as politics, politicians and dare I say it....Brexit!! We all read and hear from various media sources about issues, but actually discussing with each other in person gives a greater sense of awareness, knowledge and understanding of what is happening and not just what others (the media) want us to read or hear. And, when we discuss and talk about issues it is the opportunity to learn from each other and look at issues in different ways and from a different viewpoint.

The conference venue on the Friday was an imposing and awe-inspiring building and what followed were some really useful and interesting sessions. As a non-Dutch speaker, the translation services were excellent and most welcome. Following the formal welcomes, the session on Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018 taught us many transferable skills to other projects and lessons including team working, listening, negotiation skills, skills management and planning.

The morning theme of "lepen meinskip" roughly translates as "open community", however, the sense was that it meant much more than that and "community" can mean many things to many people. The main lesson I took away was much more than simply "open community" it was to have a "sense of community" and all that it stands for and the broader issue of community, what it can and does mean in the many ways as we go about our daily lives. I got the sense taking to Dutch

colleagues, that our “Community of Clerks”, irrespective of our different countries, had similar issues and topics to deal with.

I really felt involved with the conference, particularly with the mention of our attendance and the study field trip during the general assembly. Many Dutch colleagues spoke to me afterwards and also later in the afternoon about hosting students and being involved in the field trip – it will certainly be a great opportunity for all.

The afternoon trip to Harlingen was fascinating and really interesting, so much history in one place and the real connection with the UK going back many years, with many shared interests, language and trade. It is understood that may be the opportunity to have a session at next year’s conference run by international colleagues, which would be a true innovation and be of great interest and value to all.

Irrespective of what the future may hold for the UK, a lesson I have taken away from this conference is that education and learning have no borders and we can all learn from each other. It brings to mind the quote that is linked to a number of different sources “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn’. Attending the conference was my involvement and I learned much from it.

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Assistant Course Leader: Community Governance
Society of Local Council Clerks
15th October 2019

Society of Local Authority Lawyers (SOLAR Scotland) (United Kingdom)

Arriving in the European City of Culture 2018 in Leeuwarden our expectations were immediately exceeded. A beautiful and inviting city lay before us and after a useful and productive meeting discussing the next European symposium for the IIMC in the Netherlands we were treated to a walking tour of the city and our first glimpse of the conference venue which in a first for us was being held in a church!

Later that evening we had the chance to meet informally a lot of the Dutch clerks and to discuss with them their issues and concerns, many of which we shared. The next day we attended the conference and through the excellent translation services provided, were able to follow the speakers , who were very interesting and inspiring. We knew we understood the content when we nodded or swivelled our heads a few seconds after the other delegates due to following the speeches through our headphone !

We are delighted to have been invited to attend the VvG conference and we found the meeting and networking with fellow clerks from another country to be most stimulating and thought provoking. We will be taking a report to a future meeting of

our Executive on how we can build on our friendship and look forward to receiving representation from VvG at our conference next year.