



ICOHTEC
43rd Annual Meeting | PORTO 2016



Book of Abstracts

Building land, moving water

Thomas van den Brink (Wageningen University)

During the nineteenth century, various plans were conceived in the Netherlands to dam and drain-
age the Zuiderzee. Some of them were deemed to be fantasies while others were perceived as
realistic.

Important to this investigation is the role that facts played, both in the justification of plans as well
as in the arguments to criticize them. After all, it is the mobilization of facts that led to the per-
ceived 'scientific' reality on which these plans were assessed. This (re)organization can be seen as a
highly dialectic progress with the acknowledgement of knowledge at stake.

Furthermore, such facts were colored by the local context in which they were used. It is imaginable
that the long Dutch tradition in land reclamation, with the corresponding technology and experi-
ence, promoted the acknowledgement of specific facts in favor of others.

To investigate this context-sensitive fact producing, the plan of engineer van Diggelen, published
in 1849 will be investigated in-depth. It is especially suitable for this inquiry for at least three rea-
sons. It was the first time such a large-scale plan was proposed and backed up with argumentation.
It was published at a turning point in the drainage-history in the Netherlands. It was ambiguously
received and not realized after all. Together, it means that the plan was conceived when facts and
scientific reality were not self-evident.