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Peter Vanrolleghem: First visitor of the SETS Synthesis Center

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As the first visitor of the planned Socio-Environmental-Technological-Systems Synthesis Center (SETS), Peter Vanrolleghem will stay at Eawag for three months until the end of September 2017. He is originally from Belgium, where he was a professor at Ghent University and then already collaborated with Eawag.

He moved to Quebec in Canada 11 years ago, where he built up a research group, who focuses on a wide range of aspects of water quality in urban waste water systems, at Université Laval. At Eawag he is working with the Urban Waste Water (SWW) and the Process Engineering (Eng) departments. Together they will reflect on the future of monitoring urban waste water systems, with the aim of having an impact on other researchers in the field.

Peter, you are the first visitor of the planned SETS Synthesis Center at Eawag. Could you explain your role a bit more in detail?

The idea is to stimulate and strengthen the research that is already going on at Eawag by inviting experts from abroad to Switzerland. If the departments want to invite a person, they have to write a competitive proposal in which they describe the topic of the collaboration and the benefits they aspire. In my case the topic is a horizon scan on the way we can envisage future (5-10 years from now) collection and treatment of data/information about the urban waste water system. In particular we look into new measurement devices, ubiquitous sensing thanks to the Internet-of-Things, new ways of treating data to extract relevant information. Together with the SWW and the ENG departments we work on a long-term vision for our field of research. And this is what Synthesis is all about.

What are your personal expectations about the synthesis?

To set far reaching goals is stimulating for the group, but also for me, because I will return to my group with a new perspective and my own new ambitious goals. The objective is clear, we want to get a concrete output to be shared with the scientific community. The deliverable of my stay is a paper and we would like to reach as many people as possible to influence other scientists research agendas.

Did you plan special leisure activities for your stay in Switzerland so far?

My wife is with me and we will certainly take advantage to visit the country. We already started: my mother was here the last two weeks and we went to see Chur and Liechtenstein and Lungern, where we spent our first holiday out of Belgium when I was 9 years old. And Peter Reichert from the SIAM department who has a plane invited me to a flight over the Alps. As a frequent flyer and airplane hobbyist, I look forward to that too!

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