



08 | RUBRIEK • INTERVIEW

4 NOMINATIES NATIONALE STAALPRIJS 2026

7 JEROEN #2
Join the dark side

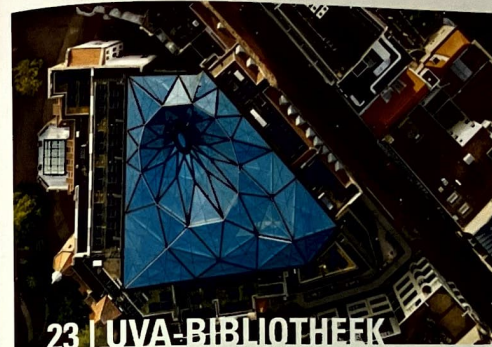
8 INTERVIEW MILAN VELJKOVIC,
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, FACULTY OF
CIVIL ENGINEERING AND GEOSCIENCES.
DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
'To the moon, and back'

19 DUO-INTERVIEW RWS ONTWERPT, EDO
VONK EN HARRIS BOURAS, UTRECHT
Terug aan de tekentafel

50 CONSTRUCTEUR EN CONSTRUCTIEF
TALENT VAN HET JAAR 2026
Met lof

61 VERENIGINGSNIEUWS

62 UIT HET VELD
GoldMember in beeld: Kristiaan Flierman



23 | UVA-BIBLIOTHEEK

24 UNIVERSITEITSBIBLIOTHEEK UVA,
AMSTERDAM (1): ARCHITECTUUR
Diepe wortels

30 (2): CONSTRUCTIEF ONTWERP
Bouwen onder, in en boven erfgoed
van der Sluis

37 (3): STAALCONSTRUCTIE
Kolommen van orakeltaal



12 | PROJECT • TECHNIEK

12 TIJDELIJKE BOVENLOOPKRAAN-
CONSTRUCTIE, CENTRAAL STATION
AMSTERDAM
Derde rail tussen spoor en kap

44 KANTOOR EN KENNISLAB TECHBANK,
ENSCHDE
Tweede aanleg
R.J. Stark, P. Noomen en M.J.M. Moons

60 BRANDVEILIGHEID
Opwarming galerijkolommen bij
realistisch(er) brandscenario
A. Aghaei en A.F. Hemertlinck



Foto's: Tumbleweed & Fireflies Photography | Eva Krebbers

'To the moon, and back'

A story of an engineer who began by stargazing in Sarajevo, ended up working on steel-sheet concrete floors in Sweden, and leaves Delft with four researchers where there used to be two.

On 26 June 2026, Milan Veljkovic officially stepped down as Professor of Steel and Composite Structures at Delft University of Technology. The man who arrived in October 2015 as the successor to the retired Frans Bijlaard leaves behind a section that he helped turn around financially through his own efforts: from a chronic deficit to a team of four young researchers, an international master's thesis prize, and a contribution in breakthroughs such as the C1 connection for offshore structures and demountable steel-concrete composite floors.

Links

Behind this list of achievements stands a man who would rather have spent the night gazing at the stars from a mountaintop near Sarajevo. He met his wife in his student years in the Bosnian capital, moved to Sweden in the beginning of the 1990s, and eventually, ended up in Delft. At the ECCS technical committee meeting "Connections" in Papendrecht, he explained: 'Jan Stark asked my supervisor if I wanted to come to TUD twenty years ago and work on my PhD topic.' He said this when he was introduced as a new professor to the engineering community, and added: 'After

giving it some thought, I've decided to come.' The audience laughed. So did Veljkovic. This farewell interview is inextricably linked to an earlier profile in *Bouwen met Staal* 245 (June 2015), published at the time Milan announced his appointment in Delft. He promised market-driven research, cross-disciplinary collaboration, innovation in offshore and infrastructure. 'There is no progress without competition,' Veljkovic said at the time. Eleven years later, that sounds like a programme that has been successfully implemented.

Moon, Stars, Steel

Milan Veljkovic was born in Sarajevo, former Yugoslavia. As a secondary school pupil, he was not a budding engineer; he was an



'astronomer'. He joined a young astronomers' club, helped build Yugoslavia's largest student observatory, and dreamt of a life amongst the celestial bodies. Every Monday there were lectures. The youngest members kept watch on the sun, recorded sunspots, and later that night headed to a hill in Sarajevo to gaze at the stars.

'That was fascinating for me,' he says. 'We had a four-storey-high observatory. Our eldest member had created a star map over the city. That's extremely important; if new stars appear, like an explosion of Nova Cygni (a 'new star in the Cygnus, the Swan, constellation), you can compare them with the previous state. With the help of older club members, I study it thoroughly.'

But the moment that changed the course of his life was not a scientific outburst. It was a barbecue.

Rectors from Yugoslavia visited the observatory as part of a showcase of Sarajevo University. They took a cursory look at the observatory building and then sat down to a



'I NEVER GO TO A CONFERENCE UNLESS I AM THE INVITED SPEAKER OR THE CENTRE OF ATTENTION. NOT TO SAY I AM THE BEST, BUT TO PRESENT WORK THAT CLEARLY SHOWS: THIS IS THE BEST.'

lavish meal. Nobody went upstairs. Nobody asked about the work. 'If these are the most intellectual people I can rely on,' thought the young Veljkovic, 'then I have to choose something that makes me independent.' His father's brother, a doctor, was less subtle: 'If you choose physics, I will never speak to you again.'

And his father? He was a professor of civil engineering, railways, and spoke nicely about it. Veljkovic decided: structural engineering. And specifically: steel. That final insight came from the father of his friend, an experienced steel structural engineer, Mr. Hilmo, who gave him a few ideas that opened up his thinking. 'That was the turning point,' he says. 'I was maybe twenty-one, twenty-two.'

Sarajevo, Sweden, Delft

Veljkovic and his wife Brankica have known each other for over 45 years. They met as second-year students in Sarajevo – he was studying engineering and she was studying medicine – living in the same neighbourhood. 'A medical student doesn't meet an engineer,' he laughs. 'Not often.' For his PhD research, Veljkovic moved to Sweden, to a university in the far north. Brankica followed. When the war in Bosnia broke out in early 1992, the decision was made: stay in Sweden. They married in Sarajevo, their first daughter was born there, and their younger one in Luleå – both live in Sweden now – and three granddaughters in total, and built a life in a country where, although it can be dark for



twenty hours in December, the snow lights up everything. 'I never felt it was dark. You have snow, and you have artificial light.' In Delft, it was different. 'When I first came here in the mid-nineties, it was October, November. Always raining. I felt it was darker here than in northern Sweden.' But the feeling of being welcome made up for everything.

Veljkovic now lives with his wife in Delfgauw. From their home, she works as a radiologist for Swedish hospitals. She has her own office. When they are staying at their flat in Belgrade, which happens regularly, she works from there, as well.

A connection that took 20 years to materialise

During his PhD research in Sweden, Veljkovic became familiar with the work of Jan Stark, the Dutch expert in the field of cold-formed steel sheets for steel-sheet concrete floors and composite floors. Stark was working at TNO at the time and had a major influence on the development of composite slabs in the Netherlands, and worldwide. Veljkovic visited him and his group on several occasions.

After some time, perhaps after a year or so, Stark wrote a letter to Milan's Swedish supervisor, Professor Bernt Johansson, asking: why doesn't this young engineer simply complete his PhD here, at Delft? Veljkovic saw the letter and replied to Bernt: 'I want to stay in Sweden; my wife and daughter Dejana have just arrived, and we are starting our lives here.' Twenty years later, at a Technical Committee meeting in Papendrecht, Veljkovic addressed a group from Bouwen met Staal. Director Frank Maatje introduced him. Stark was in the audience. 'Jan Stark asked me to come to TU Delft twenty years ago,' said Milan to the



'THERE IS NO PROGRESS WITHOUT COMPETITION.'

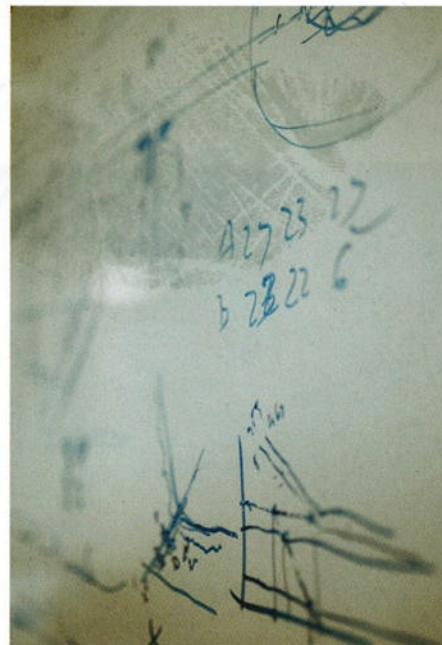
public. 'After some time thinking it over, I've now decided to come.'

'A very, very strange coincidence,' he says now. But anyone who knows Milan fathoms that he doesn't simply let such coincidences pass him by.

Organising, growing, fostering growth

When Veljkovic arrived in Delft in 2015, he inherited a section with a chronic financial deficit. One of the consultants had openly stated that the steel and timber groups had no realistic future prospects. At that time, Veljkovic was head of the steel, concrete and timber groups, as well as the laboratory. His first move: to split the big section up. Each section would have its own responsibilities and its own budget. 'If you have a system that you don't understand, you have to change it.'

His second move: recruitment. He had room for 1.8 FTE. The committee chose Marko Pavlović, his former PhD student, someone he knew through and through. Together they built up the teaching material and divided the research areas. Veljkovic focused on steel and composites, Pavlović on fibre-reinforced polymers (FRP). 'At that time, we didn't know that wrap joints would be a successful idea. But we agreed: this could be a really good challenge.' The result: from 1.8 FTE to five permanent researchers; later, it drops to four because of personal circumstances. 'Without our own projects, this could not be possible. We were able to generate funding, show the needs and impact.'



Pavlović is now taking over as head of the section. Milan wholeheartedly endorses the succession. 'I knew it would be difficult to find someone in Sweden who could work this hard. After I left, it was difficult to keep it together. Here, I can happily retire.'

That Sweden saw him as the man who bore the burden was already evident by the time he left. As a parting gift, his Swedish colleagues presented him with a small metal statuette: a tall, gaunt figure holding a large, heavy sack. The message was unmistakable – here was someone leaving used to taking a burden. Milan keeps the statuette in his room ('the biggest chamber there is') near the Stevin Lab. It says more about him than any list of achievements.

The Dutch Open

One source of pride that Veljkovic often returns to is the organisation of the TU Delft Master's theses. Not only what's in them, but how they're organised. The collaboration with the industry, the supervision of students, the motivation that stems from it. 'I still believe that the organisation of the Master's Thesis project is the best in the world,' he says without hesitation. That conviction led to the establishment of the Dutch Open Structural Steel Award (DOSS) during Covid: an international thesis prize with a jury comprising representatives from Imperial College, Aachen, Sydney, Beijing and Singapore, amongst others and an industrial representative. The name, inspired by tennis (he is a sporty man), met with a minor internal resistance. 'My colleagues said: how can I explain to my students that they should compete for an award called "Dutch" even if it is "Open"? And people from Arce-lorMittal said it should be more international.' Milan stood his ground: 'I wanted to



point out that the Dutch Master's thesis is the greatest achievement one can attain.'

Some of his master's theses have also led to specific innovations. Jasper Winkes, for instance, developed the C1 connection, a bolted wedge connection for monopiles in offshore wind farms, suitable for diameters of ten to fifteen metres where traditional ring flange connections cannot be used. The connection is now certified, and the company generates millions in turnover. 'It all started with a master's thesis student,' says Veljkovic. 'One day Jasper just walked into my office – a man I'd never met before. He proposed an idea which we developed into a very promising connection.'

Legacy: connections, composites and fatigue

Veljkovic's research interests are wide-ranging. In addition to the C1 connection and steel-sheet-concrete composites, he worked intensively on the fatigue behaviour of infrastructure, a field he had to familiarise himself with from scratch after Frank van Dooren (Rijkswaterstaat) asked him during his job interview what he knew about bridge fatigue. 'Nothing,' I said. 'But I can learn.' And he did learn. About twenty master's theses and a couple of PhDs later, he was focused on fatigue. 'I was happy to meet Johan Maljaars, a professor at TUE and TNO, and colleagues from mechanical engineering who helped me along the way.'

Another notable innovation is the demountable steel-to-concrete connection using injected bolts, a concept that enables the recycling of composite slabs that traditionally

'THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS A WHITE PAPER. SOMEONE HAS TO PUSH YOU: GIVE A FIRST IDEA, WRITE THE FIRST SENTENCE, THEN THE SECOND. THEN YOU START WRITING A STORY.'

had to be cut away. 'Before, you had to cut it into pieces. Now you can remove it and reuse it.' The market reacted cautiously: contractors prefer to work with known margins rather than innovative unknowns. But Veljkovic believes that circularity will eventually find its way. 'When you can demonstrate the benefits of reusing it and develop the business of reusing, people will start doing that.' For Dutch Engineering, a manufacturer of deep-drawn steel sheet sections, together with Florentia Kavoura and a PhD candidate, they developed a special monitoring and evaluation programme for sections up to 210 mm (Comfort 210), which fall outside European standards. This enabled the company to certify its product for the German market as well. 'In the US they use it, they sell it. But on the Dutch market, you need approval. And on the German market, even more so.'

The next four years

On 26 June 2026, Milan Veljkovic turned 67 and is no longer employed. But he is not disappearing. Under a hospitality agreement, he will retain his TU Delft email address, supervise his seven PhD candidates, and sign their degrees. For four years, unpaid. 'That's what life is all about,' he says. 'That's why we have retirement.' After that, he and Brankica will return to

Sweden, to their daughters Dejana and Andrea, and three (or more) granddaughters. He is looking forward to that time. 'When we moved to Delft, I promised my family we would have more time together, travel around, have fun. That is what I didn't fully manage to do.' That time is coming. In Delfgauw, the house will be empty. A part of Milan lives on in the steel of European bridges, offshore foundations and composite floors. And in four young researchers, whom, by his own admission, he never consciously made his own copies, but who are, every one of them, better than the 'original'.

What he'll miss

What he will miss most is not the lab or the lecture theatre. It is the students. In front of the class, when he sees a room full of faces and searches for the eyes that light up – the sign that something has struck a chord. And one-to-one, in the conversations from which he himself also learnt. 'The most rewarding thing about university is really always meeting young people,' he says. 'Even if you're speaking to a large class, you look at a couple of people, and when you see that their eyes are shining, then you know you've done something good that day.' He'll take those eyes with him. The lecture theatre stays behind. •