



It all began in Siberia in November 1994. To be more precise, Ulf Ahlborg and I were travelling above the Siberian tundra on our way to the Dioxin symposium in Kyoto and we had plenty of time to discuss various items. Both of us were engaged in a Swedish research programme on the occurrence and effects of persistent organic pollutants. The programme had been initiated by the Swedish EPA a couple of years earlier and was now running at full speed. We discussed how the programme should be finalised in 1998 and how the results should be disseminated within the scientific society but also to decision- and policy-makers as well as governmental agencies and industry.

During this trip we realized that organising a dioxin symposium in 1998 could be an important factor in the finalisation process of the research programme. We therefore took two decisions before landing in Osaka:

- We should express the situation and our interest to organise Dioxin'98 in Stockholm to Otto Hutzinger and the other members of the International Advisory Board.
- If we were lucky to get this opportunity to organise Dioxin'98, the conference bag should be a backpack.

Unfortunately, we could not get a definite answer during the meeting in Kyoto. We were informed that Italy had already expressed its interest to organise Dioxin'98. Anyhow, as 1998 still seemed to be fairly distant we decided to wait and see. At the symposium in Edmonton 1995 Ulf and I were invited to present our plans to the International Advisory Board. Italy was still interested in organising Dioxin'98. 2000 was not a realistic alternative as "most of Italy was already booked up" as they expected extensive celebrations during all of 2000 and especially in a city like Venice. The symposium was generally held in Europe one year and in North America or Asia the next year. It turned out that there was no clear candidate in North America or Asia for the 1999 symposium. Therefore Italy was asked if it was possible for them to organise a dioxin symposium in 1999 instead of 1998. I will never forget the moment when Paolo Mocarelli after a short moment of hesitation but with a big smile said "yes". Thank you, Paolo!

Back in Stockholm we started the process by forming local and national organising committees and to identify a competent conference bureau that could assist us with the practical arrangements. We had a few meetings during the autumn and everything went on well until the tragedy struck us in January 1996. Ulf Ahlborg had a cerebral haemorrhage and died after a few days.

At the following meeting with the Local Organising Committee it was decided that we should continue with our task and that I should take over the chairmanship. Stockholm has very few conference facilities that can host up to one thousand participants. In these days there were actually only two that could fulfil our requirements; one in the city centre and one in the southern suburbs. The first one was perfect in most respects but the costs made it almost exorbitant. The second alternative was however judged as inappropriate for a number of logistical reasons. Åke Bergman brought us new information that the new meeting and conference facility “Aula Magna” that was planned at the University Campus area might be ready shortly before the dates set for Dioxin’98. This was a good alternative to the central venue. It should be considerably cheaper but as there are no hotels in connection to the campus area, participants would have to commute from central Stockholm, where most hotels are located. This could be solved by using the subway which takes around ten minutes between city centre and campus area. During a few visits to Aula Magna under construction, we were assured that the facility should be ready in due time so we got convinced that this was the ideal site for Dioxin’98. We therefore also decided that a travel card, valid for all public transports in Stockholm should be included in the conference package. Åke made a tremendous job in negotiating with the University on the economic prerequisites and took a lot of responsibility for the general arrangements. In practice Åke and I onwards had a shared chairmanship for the arrangements and I am still deeply thankful for his dedicated and responsible work.



Aula Magna a few months before Dioxin’98

We were lucky to get more abstracts than we had foreseen. The quality was generally high but there were, as always, a few that had to be rejected for different reasons. I guess we had many of the experiences that most conference organisers had been telling us. We had problems to get abstracts in time and had to extend the deadline. This seems to be a tradition for dioxin symposia. We were lucky to find sponsors that could turn our red budget figures into black and we got a lot

of practical in-kind assistance from central authorities such as the Swedish Chemicals Inspectorate, Swedish EPA and the National Food administration and others.

We were hopefully the last dioxin symposium to accept abstracts on paper only. I can still recall the relief I felt as the 2 400 pages were distributed into five packs, one for each volume of Organohalogen Compounds, with complete table of contents, pagination and list of contributors. We had an agreement with a printer that the material should be delivered at his printing house, located some 300 kilometres south of Stockholm, on a certain date. I planned to make a short visit to my summer house during these days and would anyway drive close to the village where the printer lived. As I came to the village I found the printing house but no printer. I asked the neighbours, and it turned out that he was a well-known man in the area but no one had seen him on that day. "He is probably on vacation". I asked if anyone knew where he usually would go on vacation. I feared they would answer Italy or Spain but it turned out that he had a summer house just 50 kilometres away. I got a description of the road and drove there to a nice house by the sea. There was however no printer around and there were no neighbours to ask at the spot. I tried once more to get phone contact with him without result. I had to give it up and drove to my summer house with the material still in my car. There it was as a bad conscience until three days later when I drove back the same way and found the printer in his home. I was invited to a nice dinner and there should not be any problem with the printing; "there is plenty of time". Still, I consider our decision to go for abstracts on paper to be, if not the only but by far the greatest, mistake we did in connection to Dioxin'98.

The printer made a good job and as he delivered some one hundred copies more than agreed, we could later load all the backpacks with five volumes and still have a few sets for orders. The number of participants exceeded our expectations so without these extra copies we would have been in trouble.

We spent a lot of work to get good publicity from the conference and we arranged a special service for the press. Every day we distributed a press release containing a popular summary of a few selected papers that were to be presented that day. We also arranged for the press to meet a couple of selected scientists every morning. The background material and the press releases were prepared beforehand with assistance from experienced personnel. All participants also got a book on Persistent Organic Pollutants produced within the research programme mentioned above.

1998 was a bad summer in most of Sweden and the week of Dioxin'98 was no exception so the weather was quite chilly and we had some rain most of the days. On the 17th of August the symposium was opened by the Minister of the Environment, Anna Lindh. Later in 1998 she became Minister of Foreign Affairs and stayed in that position until she was brutally stabbed to death in 2003.

The opening session contained one scientific presentation. It was delivered by Sören Jensen and contained his personal view on PCB more than 30 years after he had demonstrated its presence in the environment. Among the special sessions there were two that got a lot of attention. First the "Risk Assessment and Management – Ulf G. Ahlborg Memorial Session" that contained a presentation of the revised TDI from WHO but also an overview of non-cancer effects of TCDD. Secondly the "Polymer Additives and Monomers" session that contained five presentations on brominated diphenyl ethers and two on chlorinated paraffins. Daiva Meironytė presented a study that showed a dramatic increase of PBDEs in breast milk in Sweden during the last decades. This caused a lot of concern among scientists and it generated a number of articles in media. In her presentation Daiva compared the PBDE trend with temporal trends for a number of other contaminants, all showing more or less pronounced decreasing trends. Ron Hites asked Daiva after her presentation if she had an explanation to the increasing PBDE trend during the last decades. She looked at him for a moment and then answered: "I guess it could be a result of the increasing use of electronic equipment since 1972. I don't know what you did in those days but I

was just a newborn so you should tell me what happened.” I’m certain Ron will never forget that answer.

We were lucky to get the Vasa museum for the conference dinner. To me this was a great experience and as the dinner was arranged as a buffet with lots of small tables we had the opportunity to mingle and meet many friends that we hadn’t met earlier during the symposium. We got many words of praise for this arrangement and a couple of persons specially satisfied with the dancing and other *post festum* arrangements that continued until early morning. I’m not convinced that I have the same stamina today as I and many colleagues had that night!



The last memory I would like to share with you is from the last day of the symposium. We were aware of the fact that three scientists who had given extraordinary contributions to the symposium series, this year reached the age of 65. It was therefore a great honour to me to harangue Otto Hutzinger, Christoffer Rappe and Yoshito Masuda for their contributions. Without their dedicated work we would not experience this fruitful symposium series that has been keenly alive to pick up important and thrilling areas within the challenging field of halogenated environmental organic pollutants.

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