

Diver from IAHD
Adriatic in the
Hydro Lab at
Star City in
Russia

Star City

—Hydrospace without barriers

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Photos by Dmitry Sakharov

In late April 2013, a delegation of 16 people from IAHD Adriatic – International Association for Handicapped Divers visited Moscow in Russia to become the first disabled divers to dive in the Hydro Lab of the Russian cosmonaut testing facility located in Star City. It was the realization of a long held dream for the leader of the delegation, Branko Ravnak, who worked for years to make the event a reality. Svetlana Murashkina, the editor-in-chief of the Russian dive magazine *InVertum*, reports.

— *We did it!*

The delegation to Star City included Slovenians Damjan Peklar (CMAS Instructor), Barbara Slaček and Aleš Povse-Yoda, as well as Croatians Zoran Vlah—who gets around in a wheelchair in everyday life—and Peter Majcen who is on crutches. There were also several volunteers and helpers including Alenka Fidler, Blaž Ribič, Gaber Guna, Katarina

Richter, Matjaž Paj, Nevenka Richter Peče, Urška Gajšek, Rajko Prelog, Tomaž Bobik and Petar Vresnik.

The delegation was led by the president of IAHD Adriatic, Branko Ravnak, who flew to Moscow

specifically for the immersion event in the Hydro Lab (Neutral Buoyancy Training Facility) of the Gagarin Research and Test Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City. It was the first time wheelchair users have dived

in the facility. It was a dream come true for Ravnak—a dream he nurtured for several years and finally realized thanks to a friendship with the Foundation supporting the Russian federal program "Dostypnaya

Sreda" (Accessible Environment).

On the Russian side, disabled divers who participated included Nikita Vankov from Anapa, and Anna Demidova and Svetlana Fomicheva from Moscow. Volunteers included Elena Topyricheva

from St. Petersburg and Ilya Dubrovsky, Svetlana Konohova and Andrey Zaikin and Igor Murashkin from Moscow.

Underwater videography was taken by Vladimir Prokhorenko from Anapa, while underwater





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12m, and a capacity of 5,000 sq m) filled with water at about 30°C, has a mounting plate with a capacity of 40 tons. The density of the water is less than that of a normal swimming pool thereby achieving exceptional clarity.

It was here that cosmonaut training and development of operations took place under simulated weightlessness in a water environment, providing solutions for the problems of cosmonaut training in extravehicular activity, performing experimental

photography was done by Dmitry Sakharov, with the help of assistant lighting diver, Anton Sakharov, and land photography was done by Zoya Pechorkina—all of whom were from Moscow.

The dive went as usual. A briefing was held by Valery Nesmeyanov, director of the dive centre, SPACE DIVE, and distinguished test pilot of the Space Technology agency of the Russian Federation. Each of the two groups of divers spent at least 60 minutes underwater, during which time each diver could check out the construction of the ISS (International Space Station) and experience for themselves what astronauts do in training (and even in outer space!).

The divers exchanged experiences and posed for pictures in front of the spacecraft. Now in their log-books two stamps appear: one for the dive center SPACE DIVE and, as a special, memorable experience, a stamp from the Foundation supporting the Russian federal program "Dostynnaya Sreda" (Accessible Environment) as well as the signature of the president of CRASA (Russian underwater federation), Valentin

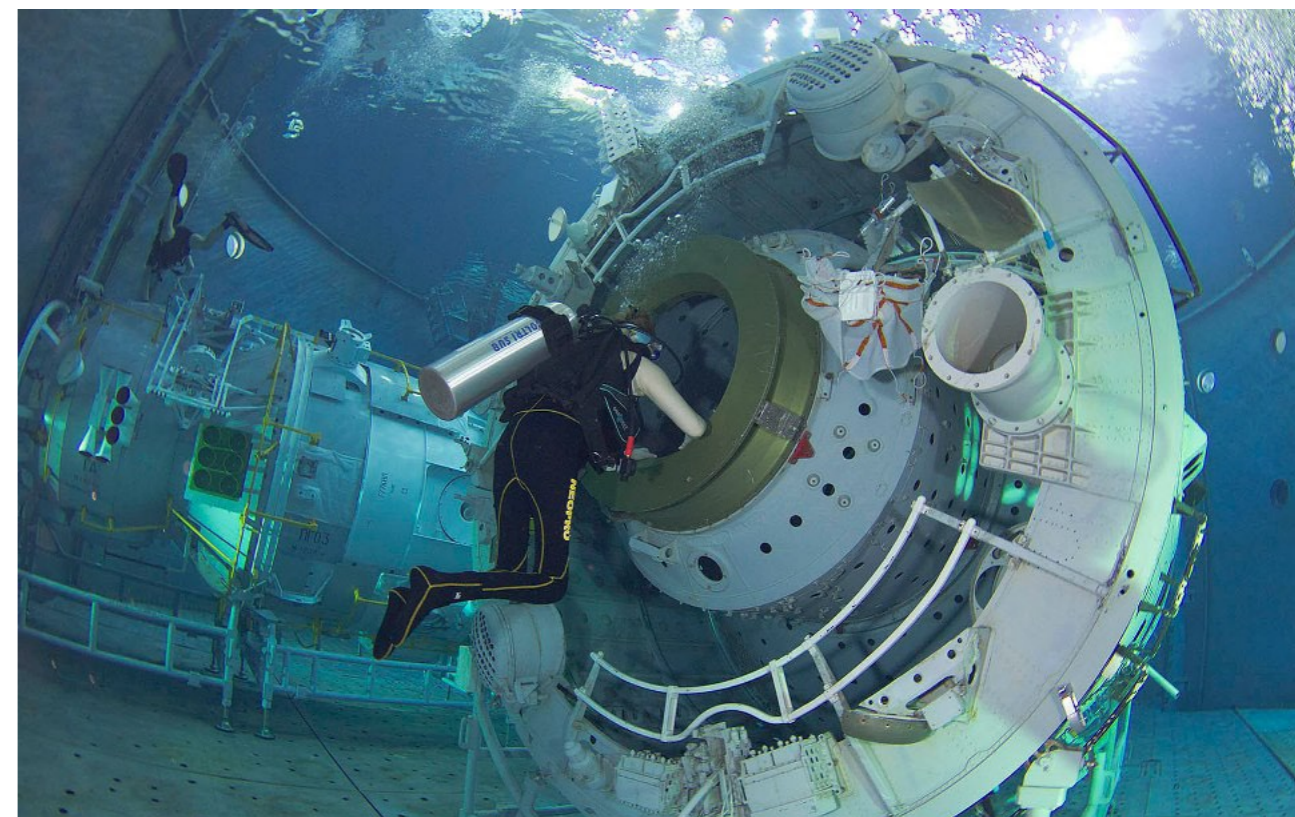
Stashevski, who personally observed the dives.

The famous Hydro Lab

The Hydro Lab was commissioned in 1980. This unique structure, the central part of which is a cylindrical vessel (with a diameter of 23m, a height of

studies, ergonomic testing of objects of space technology, and simulating maintenance work performed by astronauts in outer space. The same building houses office space, technology systems, equipment and other means of cosmonaut training.

On the side of the cylindrical surface



With the help of instructors and assistants, divers of IAHD Adriatic enter the Hydro Lab at Star City



of the pool are 45 windows through which one can take photos and shoot video, watch and monitor the activities of the astronauts in the pool. The

hydrolaboratory is equipped with a set of experimental facilities (the overall layout of modules) that can be placed on a moving platform and lowered

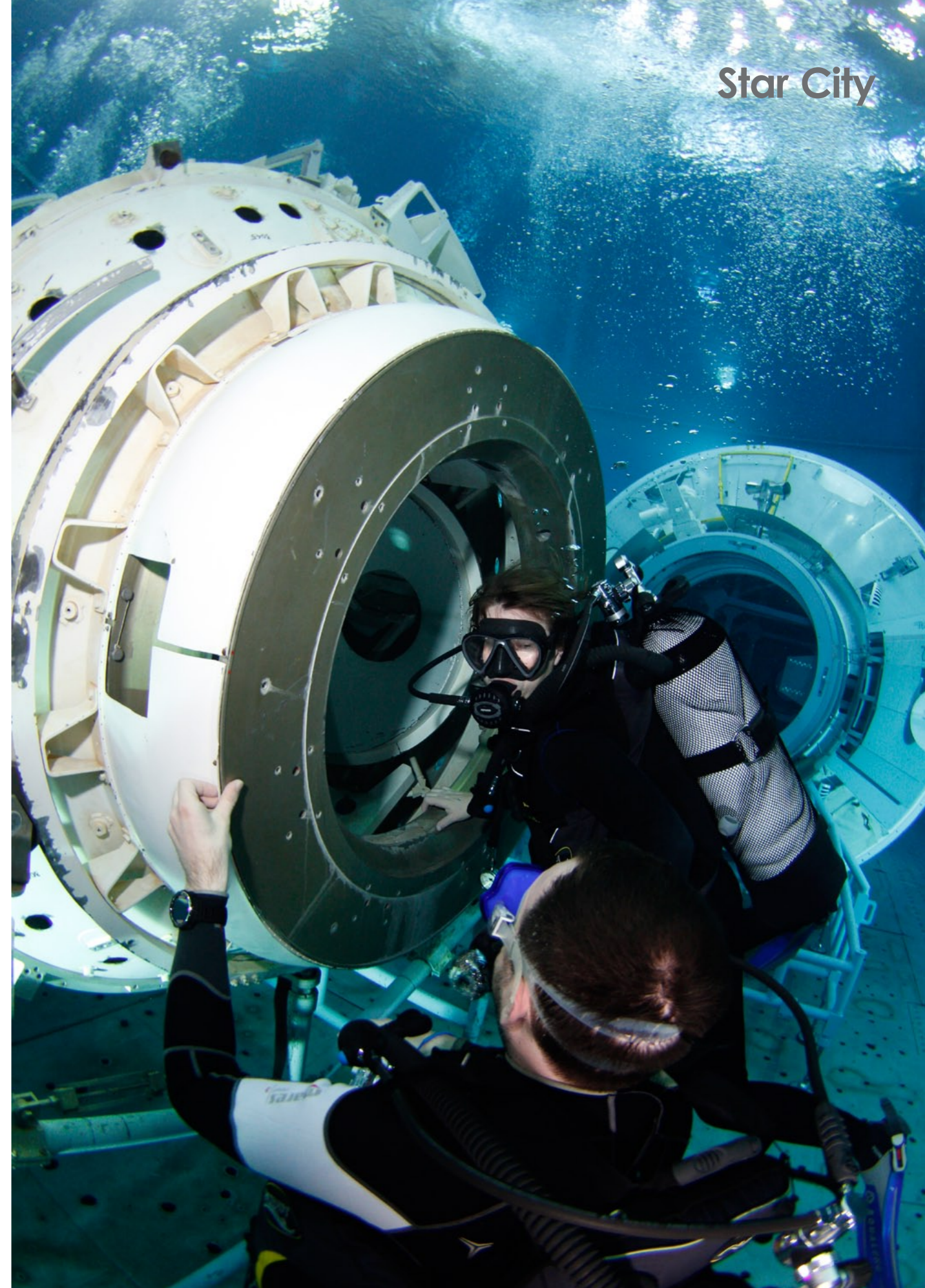
down into the hydropool for training. All experimental settings are done in full size with full volume simulation of internal and external contours of the structure. (See: www.gctc.ru)

Itinerary for the visit

The delegation from IAHD Adriatic had less than four days in Moscow to complete the entire event.

On April 27, the delegation arrived in Moscow. They participated in the International specialised exhibit and congress "Integration. Life. Society", on the employment and benefits of disabled scuba diving, including a round table discussion on "The Road to Paradiving" (we use this word in Russia for 'disabled diving'). In the evening, the participants attended the ballet *Spartacus* at the Bolshoi Theater and then enjoyed a tour of the Moscow subway.

On April 28, the delegation met at Star City. The first event of the day was immersion and diving in the Hydro Lab,



THIS PAGE: Disabled divers from Croatia, Slovenia and Russia explore the various elements of the Hydro Lab



followed by a stunning tour of the training center, a visit to the museum in the House of Astronauts, and even the office of Yuri Gagarin, where astronauts have traditionally come before their flight. There was a meeting with the head of the Urban District Star City, Nikolai Rybkin, and a meeting with the cosmonaut commander and hero of Russia, Sergei Alexandrovich Volkov, and

specialists from the Department of Social Development Administration. In addition, there was a laying flowers at the monument of Yuri Gagarin, a promenade on the Walk of Heroes to the House of Astronauts, and the awarding of diplomas to participants by the head of the city district administration and the head of the city



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chairs in churches) and toured Red Square. There was a reception at the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia and a meeting with Mrs. Ada Filip Slivni, Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia in the Russian Federation.

On April 30, the delegation had breakfast at the

district in Star City, Moscow region, for participation in the International Forum "Hydrospace without Barriers" program—"Social adaptation and rehabilitation of people with disabilities through scuba diving."

On April 29, the delegation toured the Kremlin (with stops to get wheel-

Embassy of the Republic of Croatia and a meeting with Igor Pokaz, Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia in the Russian Federation. Finally, the delegation got on their flight home to Ljubljana.

Barriers, the barriers...

There were stairs and steps everywhere in Russia—steps one does not notice until one starts thinking about disabilities, especially wheelchair users. The paraders

RIGHT: One of 45 windows around the lab through which observers can take photos and video



delegation was informed about this and prepared.

There were eight steps to the old entrance of the Moscow Hostel near metro station "Park Klytyri" where the delegation stayed (since the price was acceptable) and more at the entrance to the Hydro Lab pool, which was located on the third floor. There were ramps and lifts in underground passages; escalators in the subway; worn ancient steps on the entrance of the Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin. The delegation had to overcome everything. However, they did manage to acquire the use of special buses with rising platforms provided by a partner—the Russian Union of Disabled Sports! In addition, the administration of the Bolshoi Theatre offered an "upgrade" of tickets to orchestra seats where wheelchairs were placed near the stage, right behind the orchestra.

Despite all obstacles, it was a chance to meet again with colleagues and friends, and added another link to the chain of international cooperation in paradiving.

The Star City event was organized by the Foundation supporting the Russian federal program "Dostypnaya Sreda" (Accessible Environment) (dsfond.ru) and the Russian Disabled Sports Association (Rssii) (sky-open.com). ■

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Divers from IAHD Adriatic pose for a group shot (top right) before exiting the Hydro Lab (above)

Diver poses with InVertum banner in Hydro Lab