

## **Obituary Jo Henssen (1926-2015)**

Monday the 7<sup>th</sup> of September Jo Henssen passed away, at the age of 89. Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> he was buried in Bocholtz, a small village in the south of the Netherlands, close to the border with Germany and Belgium, where he was born the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1926, as a son of the local headmaster. The people of that province, Limburg, have a certain reputation of loving good food, wine and company. Jo was no exception. Living so close to countries famous for their beers, Jo was always good company to share a beer with. Such a 'burgundian' spirit also came back in his work. Having a degree both in geodesy and law, his career was to develop along the intersection of legal and technical aspects. His whole professional life being responsible for land law, by laws and regulations he succeeded in a complete reform of existing old fashioned and scattered rules on registration and cadastre, by getting a new Cadastre Act endorsed by the Parliament. That was in 1992, along with the renewal of the Dutch Civil Code, together providing the Cadastre and Registry Agency with a sound fundament, which the Agency still enjoys today. Meanwhile, in the '70s the first steps were taken to transform paper registers and maps into digital databases, and Jo took the responsibility for the registry part, the so called AKR system (Automation Cadastral Registration), which in the '80s started with the conversion from paper to digital format in the south western province of Zeeland, where undersigned happened to be the director those days. Jo's expertise attracted also international attention. Already in the late '60s he became involved in various UN activities, more and more, such as a member of the Ad Hoc UN Group of Experts on Cadastral Surveying and Mapping 1972. Increasingly Jo developed as an appreciated author of scientific and technical publications, the first for the FIG Congress in Vienna, 1962, on 'Some aspects in relation to proprietary rights and rights in realty in some Western European countries and to the transfer of such rights'. Since then many followed, and the FIG Congresses and Permanent Committees (nowadays 'Working Weeks') always formed a grateful audience for him. Jo saw the value of registration and cadastre in what he called 'a broader sense', as a prerequisite for wider land management and development, and that was the direction he gave to his papers for the rest of his publishing life. Today still quoted, are for example 'The development of a conceptual framework for the study of cadastral systems' together with John McLaughlin for FIG Toronto 1986, 'Land registration, cadastre and its interaction: a world perspective' with Ian Williamson for FIG Helsinki 1990 and the highlight of the adoption of a 'Policy Statement on the Surveyor's role in Land Management' by the General Assembly in held in Beijing 1991. A strong overall view on the field Jo gave at the occasion of this inaugural address as a professor at ITC in 1990, today a faculty of the University of Twente, but then still an independent scientific institute focussed on the developing world. He was adored by his students, all from the third world, because of his relaxed style and -as he used to say himself- because of 'my grey hairs', he was as a father to his students. He stayed at ITC until 2000, but still loved the work and was happy to continue as a guest professor at the Technical University of Munich. So regularly he travelled to Germany with his briefcase full of overhead slides. It was said that in the age of laptops and beamers the Munich' university was the only one in Europe still exploiting an old fashioned overhead projector only to accommodate Jo's lectures. Understanding the needs of the developing world, Jo was concerned about their limited access to scientific and technical publications. An old initiative of FIG (1953) to provide for a dedicated library in the form of a permanent institution, the OICRF, was developed further under Jo's leadership into what it is today, a digital library of more than 10,000 papers free downloadable. Jo liked practical jokes. Once he pointed at the eight-storeyed head office of the Dutch Agency, saying to a minister 'this is all OICRF', leaving the minister astounded. Ministers by the way became his normal company. During long advisory trajectories he worked together with the ministers of land of for example Turkey, China and Indonesia. After such a wonderful active life, after his retirement he went back to his beloved province of Limburg, to be part again of the 'burgundian' lifestyle, together with his lovely wife Irma. Now he passed away at such a blessed age, FIG is grateful for Jo's support, contribution and company. He was an honorary member

of FIG, as well as of the National Association for Geodesy. We wish his wife and family well.

Paul van der Molen.