

Klaas Jan Beek, 1935-2019



Klaas Jan was born in 1935 in Anloo in the Netherlands. He gained his MSc and PhD from Wageningen University, The Netherlands. In his early career he worked as a Soil Scientist. From 1960 to 1963 he undertook soil surveys in Grijalva Lowlands, for the Mexican Ministry of Hydraulic Resources. From 1963-1974 he was a Soil Scientist with the Land and Water Development Division of FAO. In this period he had duty stations in Rome (HQ), Brazil, Mexico and Chile. His main duties were surveys for the World Soil Map sheets of South America and the mapping of soil and land suitability and agro-ecological mapping for land evaluation. Through this experience he became an early expert in Land

Evaluation. He was one of the first to publish a dissertation on this topic by which he earned his Doctors degree of Wageningen University. He did his doctoral research in the period 1974-1980 as a senior Soil Scientist at the International Institute for Land Reclamation and Improvement (ILRI) in Wageningen.

In 1980 he was appointed as Professor of Land Evaluation at the *International Institute for Aerial Survey and Earth Sciences (ITC)*. At the same time he was appointed as Rector of the ITC. This made him the third rector of ITC and he was the first Rector who was not a photogrammetrist. His background in Land Evaluation helped him to understand in an early stage what the potentiality of GIS and Earth Observation would be for the ITC Community. The increased use of data from space platforms was the reason for a name change where the term “Aerial” was replaced by “Aerospace”. Under his leadership ITC made an important transition from aerial photo interpretation to satellite remote sensing and from analogue to digital geo-information processing. ITC’s main focus remained capacity development in economical and technological less developed countries. But these activities required more and more support of education and research at an increasing scientific level. He stepped down as Rector in 1996, at the occasion of the opening of the new ITC premises in Enschede.

When Klaas Jan came to ITC he became also an active member of the ISPRS community. Here too he understood the importance of GIS and Earth Observation for this community. This had certainly an important impact on the way he served ISPRS at different positions. From 1984 to 1988 he was president of Commission VII. In this term he organized a successful symposium at ITC in 1986. When he stepped down as Rector of ITC he was appointed ISPRS Congress Director for the period 1996-2000. The ISPRS Amsterdam Congress in 2000 was a great event, which many participants will remember; they saw Amsterdam at its best. Until his death he was Fellow of ISPRS and member of the White Elephant Club.

August 2000, just after the Congress he reached the age of 65, time for official retirement. This was for Klaas Jan no reason to stop his activities. He took up new duties as Vice-chair of the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment. He also became Chair of the Netherlands Foundation for Water and Climate.

His work for ISPRS did not mean that he stopped his activities in his original domain of interest. He served in the International Soil Science Society (ISSS) from 1978 to 1986 as chair of the *Working Group on Land Evaluation* and from 1994 to 1998 he was Chair of the *Sub-Commission on Land Evaluation for Sustainable Development*.

During his career he served on many Boards and Committees in the field of capacity development, environmental protection and climate change; among which:

- Netherlands University Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC),
- International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD, Kathmandu, Nepal),
- International Water Management Institute (IWMI, Colombo, Sri Lanka),

Through his work he earned many international honorary appointments; among which:

- Honorary professor of Wuhan Technical University for Surveying and Mapping (WTUSM), Wuhan China, and of Chinese Academy of Sciences;
- Honorary Fellow of the International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC);
- Honorary Fellow of the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC).

The last six years Klaas Jan suffered from a prostate cancer and his health deteriorated slowly. Whenever we met he would answer shortly when I asked about his health, but then soon he would be the lively and optimistic Klaas Jan again who loved to tell a good story or anecdote and he kept his interest in new developments. With Klaas Jan we lost a great friend and colleague; with his passing an era comes to its end. Our hearts and feelings are with his wife Herma and their children and grand children now that he is no more.

Martien Molenaar

Rector of ITC 2001-2009