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Geoethics: Status and Future Perspectives

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Dr Johannes (Jan) Boon

Jan Boon

9 December 1940 – 22 July 2020



Dr Boon presenting the poster of the white paper on Responsible Mining, co-authored with Giuseppe Di Capua, at EGU 2018, Vienna.

The world lost a very special person with the passing of Jan Boon.

Jan was born in Dongen, the Netherlands, a little town 'below the rivers'. He fulfilled his military duty before entering the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht to study chemistry. Jan was awarded the 1963/64 Unilever prize for Chemistry and obtained his MSc degree (cum laude) in physical and solid-state chemistry with a minor in soil science in 1968.

A British Council scholarship made it possible for Jan to register at the University of Manchester (UK) in the fall of 1969 to do the research for his PhD under the supervision of Dr William (Bill) Fyfe. A subsequent scholarship from the Dutch Ministry of Education and the Netherlands Organisation for the Advancement of Pure Research, allowed him to round off his research and defend his thesis in November 1971 at the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht with Drs Fyfe and Blasse (Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht) as co-supervisors.

Jan taught physical chemistry to graduate students at the Universidad de Oriente in Cumaná, Venezuela for 3 years before moving to Canada in 1975. After a year as a post doc at the University of Windsor (ON), Jan accepted the job offer from the Alberta Research Council, to work in Oil Sands in Edmonton. His tenure as Director of the Alberta Geological Survey led to later positions at the Geological Survey of Canada, first as a liaison officer between the provincial and federal geological surveys, then as Director General of the GSC, a position he held until his retirement. Jan was one of the few DGs to insist on speaking French at meetings in Québec.

Upon retirement, Jan pivoted away from geochemistry toward the social sciences, embarking on a second master's degree, this time in Globalization and International Development. Then, as a further challenge, a second PhD, in Sociology no less! He published his book, *Relationships and the Course of Social Events During Mineral Exploration: An Applied Sociology Approach* (Springer-Briefs in Geoethics), in early 2020. Much of the fieldwork for Jan's second PhD was focused on Ecuador where he visited as part of the 'Prometheus' program by which the Ecuadorian government brought experts to the country to share their knowledge. His curiosity, decency and deep humility allowed him to explore relationships between mining companies and communities in a sensitive and perceptive manner, leading to an innovative relationship model. Jan's second PhD and the accompanying book were influential, with at least one major Canadian company integrating Jan's work into its approach to community engagement.

While officially retired, Jan remained dedicated to sharing his expertise, making presentations and facilitating workshops in different parts of the world, including delivering webinars on Corporate Social Responsibility in both Canada and South America and working on projects with the International Association for Promoting Geoethics (IAPG). Jan was the coordinator of the Canadian section of the IAPG and the IAPG representative to the Board of the Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences. As a member of the IAPG Task Group on Responsible Mining, Jan co-authored the White Paper on Responsible Mining, represented the IAPG in mining meetings and conferences, and prepared comments for a document on deep-sea mining for the International Seabed Authority. Jan was actively involved in the IAPG sessions and short courses on geoethics at the EGU General Assemblies in Vienna. He also contributed a paper to the special issue on geoethics in *Annals of Geophysics*,

as well as a chapter for this book. Jan dedicated much energy and enthusiasm to promoting geoethical thinking in Canada and among his numerous colleagues worldwide. He was working on new initiatives to make geoscientists more aware of their ethical and social obligations towards the professional community and society as a whole. Moreover, he believed geosciences needed to open their professional horizon to other disciplines, in particular to sociological approaches, to search for a reasonable alignment of values between conflicting interests and needs of diverse stakeholders, especially in contested geoscience issues.

In addition to his formal degrees Jan pursued a range of other interests, including completing a certificate in Intercultural Communication and a certificate as Meetings Facilitator. He studied Japanese for many years, and also took courses in blacksmithing, woodworking, calligraphy and even (briefly) accordion. Jan was always doing something, whether it was fixing his VW van (a vintage 1978 model!), working in the garden, fixing something in the house, tapping the backyard maple, or making (and drinking) beer and wine.

Throughout his life Jan maintained an intense and indeed an almost childlike curiosity about the world around him. He was a gregarious and social man, equally at ease talking to a child, a taxi

driver or a colleague. He loved music, travelling (South America in particular), dancing, wine, and exploring different languages and cultures. He could converse in Spanish, French, English and Dutch.

A Renaissance man? Well, it was the norm in the Netherlands that when students submitted their PhD thesis, they had to include 10 ‘statements’, two of which were to have nothing at all to do with the thesis subject.

In 1971 Jan’s statements included the following:

- ‘People should be made aware of the fact that cars can no longer stay the holy cow of society and that the space problem, if not the lack of fuel, will force us to be pedestrians again.’
- ‘It should be made compulsory to sort household rubbish into groups e.g. glass, paper, plastic, food-stuff, before it is collected by the City Council Cleansing Department.’

Jan was very humble, always helpful, very patient, and above all a gentleman. He will be sorely missed by family in Canada and the Netherlands, as well as by his friends and colleagues all over the world.

– Hedda, Sonja and Sarah Boon