

Memo

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Obituary: Niels Krebs Ovesen, 1934-2005

Late in his career (from 2001) Niels Krebs Ovesen enthusiastically returned to basic engineering as project manager on foundations of oil tanks and services for the Batumi oil terminal in Georgia and as independent advisor on projects in Belgium, The Netherlands and Estonia. Thus, "*How is Niels?*" was lately a recurrent question at conferences and meetings where he was missed by his many friends world wide. Sadly, the answer now is that Niels passed away on the last day of 2005.

Niels was born in 1934 and received his engineering education at the Technical University of Denmark (MSc in civil engineering in 1957 and PhD in geotechnical engineering in 1961). To many of his international friends he is "Mr Eurocode", and Codes of Practice was definitely very close to his heart. However, he was much more than that. Five main corner stones come to mind: Teaching, Codes of Practice, management, craftsmanship and rigor.

Niels had extraordinary gifts in communication and conduct of meetings. He was the pre-eminent listener who at the end of a meeting could make divergent views converge and summarize these to everybody's satisfaction.

These skills served him well during his first very long assignment at the Danish Engineering Academy, where he was an inspired teacher and professor in geotechnical engineering from 1967 to 1987. He was Dean during the "youth rebellion" and the discussion with students and "left wing teachers" required all of his diplomatic, analytical and meeting skills. He was at this time instrumental in producing the first pedagogical Danish textbook in geotechnical engineering which has sold in more than 15,000 copies since the first edition in 1968. His devotion to teaching and students always remained and he was very actively heading the production of a new and modern format textbook during 2004-2005. Despite his illness this was very much on his mind and he took time to ensure that the work is completed.

His interest in teaching led to a heavy involvement in the European Society for Engineering Education, SEFI, where he was member of the Board 1973-77 and Chairman 1977-79. He was member of the UNESCO working group on Continuing Education 1979-87 and served as Chairman for the Danish Council for Engineering Education 1983-87, a body advising directly to the Minister of Education.

During a sabbatical leave, 1971-72 at University of Florida, USA, Niels took to centrifuge testing as a duck takes to water. After his return to Denmark he raised money and interest and established the centrifuge at DIAB which for many years was the only large (100 g ton machine with a radius of 2.3 m) continental European centrifuge facility.

Since 1979 Niels was heavily involved in Code of Practice works at the national as well as European level. During 1981-1998 he was chairman for the drafting committee for a European Code of Practice for Foundation Engineering - Eurocode 7 Geotechnical Design, a work which has had a very significant impact also internationally. Thus, limit state design is intimately linked to Niels Krebs Ovesen's name as are his contributions to the limit state symposia organised later under the auspices of TC23 of ISSMGE.

At the national level he was secretary for the Permanent Committee for the Danish Code of Practice for Foundation Engineering DS415 through the critical transition into the third edition in 1984 where a harmonized suite of Danish construction codes emerged. He subsequently, 1985-90, served as chairman of the committee. In the same period (1986 as member and 1987-92 as chairman of the Steering Committee for the Danish Engineering Society's Code of Practice Organisation) Niels had the very difficult and taxing job to transfer the code work to the Danish Standard Organisation after 99 years under the auspices of the Engineering Society.

Niels' skills in management and human relations were amply demonstrated during his tenure as Vice President for Europe of ISSMGE 1985-1989 and as managing director for the Danish Geotechnical Institute (later named GEO) 1987-1999. From teaching he now reverted to the "real" world" of consulting, a vocation he pursued in various Danish consulting companies through the first six years of the career. During his time at GEO the company was heavily involved

in the investigations for the three fixed links across Storebælt, Øresund and Femer Belt.

The interest in promoting and guiding young people was however not forgotten and Niels promoted the Young Geotechnical Engineers Conferences (YGEC) at a European level, where the first was held in Copenhagen 1987. To install rigor and to share his talent for communication and presentations the "bad guy-good guy" act was devised and many will remember this performance from the second YGEC in Oxford in 1988 or from the International Conference in New Delhi in 1994. During his career he gave numerous examples of good presentations as a sought after lecturer world wide. In April 2000 he gave the Laurits Bjerrum Memorial Lecture.

His dedication to the affairs of ISSMGE was spurred early on as he was secretary (1968-78) to the Danish Geotechnical Society, and later was instrumental in rejuvenation of the board, where he served as chairman from 1978-84. Niels was elected Honorary Member of the Danish Geotechnical Society in 2000.

The dedication, skill and rigor Niels exercised in his professional life was likewise demonstrated in his private life. Few may know this, but Niels was a very adapt craftsman who took great pride and satisfaction in renovating his different homes and he was very good at it. Moreover, visitors to the home of Hanne and Niels came to understand another hidden gift: Niels was an excellent cook. He appreciated good food and during his very extensive travels went out of the way to sample exotic dishes, a true Epicurean.

His textbook on soil mechanics and his fundamental research published on cellular cofferdams and anchor plates and his centrifuge work on modelling of models are unique achievements. He was awarded the Prof. A. Ostfeld gold medal for geotechnical research. His lectures with his easily recognisable hand drawn illustrations on the OH, his dinner speeches and his services to the Danish and the International Geotechnical Societies will be sadly missed.

Niels was a warm, interesting and warmly interested person; always there for you. It has been a privilege to know and interact with Niels, a great Friend, Teacher, Engineer and European!

Niels Krebs Ovesen is survived by his wife Hanne and the children Kamilla, Mette and Jakob.

Jørgen S. Steenfelt