

## **John George Muller (1935-2002)**

**Professor John Muller** died suddenly on 10<sup>th</sup> August after two and a half years of increasingly poor health.

He will be remembered as one of the intellectual leaders of the South African planning profession, having at various times been President of the South African Planning Institute, former Chairman of the Statutory Council for Town and Regional Planners, and co-founder of two other specialized planning Institutions: the Development Planning Association of Chartered Town, and the Regional Planners of South Africa (this was the equivalent of a local branch for SA members of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), although not necessarily meeting all the administrative criteria of conventional branches in the UK).

John Muller's services to Planning at both a local and an International level were also recognized when he was elected a Fellow of the RTPI – an honour restricted to only a few South Africans.

### **Academic record**

John received his schooling at Highlands North High School and Pretoria Boy's High, whence he matriculated in the early fifties.

He graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Architecture (1962) before switching to Planning. After obtaining his Postgraduate Diploma in Planning under Professor Mallow's tutelage, he began to lecture part time in the Postgraduate Planning Diploma course at Wits. In 1968, armed with a CSIR Scholarship he left to study for a Ph.D. at Princeton but was called back prematurely to run the University of the Witwatersrand's Planning Department. This prevented him from returning to complete his Ph.D. at Princeton, so they awarded him a Master's degree in 1971.

He returned to Wits as Professor and Head of Department in 1978, remaining so until his retirement in 2000. During that time he also served as Dean for ten years, and was the University Planner during that time, whilst Wits was expanding onto several additional campuses, most notably the old showground site.

He also was at different times a visiting professor/lecturer at the Universities of Cape Town, Central England, Natal, Rutgers (NJ), Pennsylvania, Princeton, the Technion, Haifa and the Technical University in Budapest.

### **Professional experience**

John Muller spent six years as an Architect at the Johannesburg City Council and five at Rand Mines Properties (1973-1978) as Chief Planner and sometime member of several of RMP's subsidiary company boards and of RMP itself.

Whilst chief planner at Rand Mines Properties he was simultaneously extremely involved in Institute affairs, being elected to the Council of the SA Institute of Town and

Regional Planners, and then as President in 1974. He continued to serve on the Council for many years, and when the statutory SA Council for Town and Regional Planners was instituted, he became both a member and Chairman thereof, for at least ten years of its first fifteen years existence. During that time he made many significant contributions, some of which have already been mentioned, but perhaps one of the most important was a document he prepared in 1995, for Council, redefining the standards by which ethical behaviour should be measured amongst planning professionals. It has transformed local thought on the matter and brought South African planning into alignment with overseas practice.

John also appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on behalf of the Council and Profession to admit the frequently prejudicial treatment of Black society by the planning system during the Apartheid years.

### **Academic contribution**

Since his return to Wits in 1978 as Professor John Muller:

- Built up the Planning programme at the University to make it the pre-eminent planning school in the country in terms of size and variety of offerings. It has produced a swelling tide of Black graduated in planning since the first black graduate in 1982
- Challenged the apartheid-oriented perspectives of many South African planners and refused personally to have any truck with the National Government
- He developed this standpoint into a theory – promotive planning – planning for the poor and the powerless in society. By presenting this in a paper at Oxford (1981), he gained support from the Royal Town Planning Institute to convert this theory into a practical programme for advancing the training and preparation of disadvantaged students for entry into the profession
- As researcher he produced 26 articles or chapters in books and 45 conference papers.

John was a man of purpose, commitment and drive, with clear goals for his career and the strength of intellectual discipline and research zeal to achieve them. Nevertheless he retained a soft spot for his students, particularly those disadvantaged through no fault of their own. He nurtured them with gentle affection and support. He also enjoyed stimulating good students to tease out their best abilities. It is easy to say he was so prolific and focused in his contributions to the profession and to academia, because it was central to his life, but this overlooks the high price he ultimately paid, in both stress and ill health, for these contributions. I believe he gave so much because he held nothing back, not even his well being and health – and the sacrifices he made for planning ultimately shortened his life by many years.

He will be sorely missed by the profession, by his former students, and by all who knew him.

### **Roger Boden**

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