

Obituary

In Memoriam: Professor Dr.-Ing. Habil. Tom Schanz (1962 – 2017)

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the much too early passing of Tom Schanz, Head of the Institute of Foundation Engineering, Soil and Rock Mechanics at Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany.

Tom Schanz was born on May 2, 1962 in Darmstadt, Germany. He studied Civil Engineering (October 1982 - October 1988) and Geology at the University of Stuttgart, graduating with a diploma in Civil Engineering. After his graduation, he was working from November 1988 - May 1989 on the "Kinematical Element Method" as a research assistant of Professor Peter Gußmann (Institute of Geotechnical Engineering, University of Stuttgart). In June 1989, he started to work as a research assistant of Professor Hans-Jürgen Lang in Zurich, Switzerland. He graduated in April 1994 as Dr. Sc. Tech. from ETH Zurich with a thesis entitled "Investigations of the mechanical behavior of granular mixtures using the example of concrete recycling material". During his PhD, he received a scholarship from Kagoshima University, Japan, where he worked together with Professor R. Kitamura (May 1991 - November 1991). In October 1993, he moved back to the University of Stuttgart starting to work first together with Professor Hans-Ulrich Smolczyk (till April 1994) and afterwards with Professor Peter Vermeer (till September 1994). In June 1998, he obtained his habilitation ("venia legendi") in "Geotechnical Engineering" from the University of Stuttgart with a thesis on the topic "Modelling the mechanical behavior of frictional materials".

In October 1998, Tom Schanz was appointed at the Bauhaus-University, Weimar, Germany. At that time, he was the youngest Professor in Germany in the field of Geotechnical Engineering.

He was setting-up an internationally well-recognized and cross-linked research group being active in various fields of soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering. From April 2009 on, he was appointed as a Professor for Foundation Engineering, Soil and Rock Mechanics at the Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany.

Tom Schanz's influence on the national and international scientific community was tremendous. He published more than 200 publications about various scientific topics. He was a member of the Editorial Board of "Environmental Geotechnics", "Geotechnical Testing Journal", and the "International Journal of Civil Engineering". Furthermore, he was also an editorial advisor at the editorial board of the journal of "Geomechanics for Energy and the Environment" and had served "Canadian Geotechnical Journal" as one of its associate editors. He organized various international and national conferences and symposia on different topics. The state-of-the-art content of the international conferences on unsaturated soils was summarized in a series of books published in the series "Springer Proceedings in Physics". Together with Professor Achim Hettler and under the auspices of the German Geotechnical Society (DGGT), he established the national soil mechanics conference as a forum for scientific exchange of senior and junior researchers in the field.

Under his supervision, 25 doctoral students graduated and several students were and are presently working with a scholarship in the modern and well-equipped laboratories in Bochum. He always supported his doctoral students and Post-Docs and motivated them to jointly work together with international researchers abroad. Furthermore, international researchers from all over the world joined the hospitality and open-minded scientific atmosphere of his group.

One of his latest efforts to gather scientists to discuss open problems and make further progress on the ongoing debates was organizing a summer school titled "Effective Stress in Multiphase Porous Media" in September 2016 in Bochum where leading scientists from around the globe working on unsaturated soil mechanics attended. Thereby, recent advancements were introduced and many interesting discussions were held. He also built long lasting collaborations with the young scientists of developing countries on various problems of interest. As such and so, he had also an important impact on developing countries. One can note, for instance, him being a great force behind bilateral Indian-German workshops on "New Generation Sensors for Unsaturated Soils and Water technology" where together with Dr. Snehasis Tripathy, Tom made a great platform to bring scientists of India and Germany, and to improve knowledge transfer on unsaturated soils and soil-water technology.

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His research interests were related to constitutive modelling and soil parameter identification, to theoretical, experimental as well as technical aspects of unsaturated soils, to liquefaction problems, consolidation theories, inverse problems in paleontology and biomechanics (e.g. “calculating the weight of dinosaurs from their footprints”), engineering geology, tunneling and innovative numerical methods in soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering.

Besides his professional research interests, Tom Schanz has been an enthusiastic teacher and a lively interlocutor. If a problem in soil mechanics and related fields was coming-up to him, e.g. in a discussion with students or well-respected researchers from abroad, it was not uncommon, that an intensive and long-lasting discussion at the black-board was following. In such discussions, he liked to bring together young master students and senior scientists sharing their ideas and expertise.

Tom Schanz has been greatly appreciated by his colleagues, his co-workers, and his national and international doctoral students and Post-Docs coming from various regions all over the world. For his students, his doors have been always open and he supports them to overcome scientific but also personal problems.

His early death leaves a deep void in the hearts of many. Our deepest sympathy is with his family.

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