Reflections on CIB Past and Future

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When in 1995 in Amsterdam I was elected President of CIB, after being for three years member of the Programme Committee, I embarked the leadership of an Organisation in which I had been active as member and Co-ordinator of working commissions since the beginning of the eighties. Shortly after my election and knowing the Organisation and its potential fairly well, I expressed in the CIB Information Bulletin a quite ambitious but confident message. A few sentences may be quoted from that statement.

"CIB is the international organisation which covers almost every aspect of building research, information and documentation. Embedded in this is a special responsibility to be the best able to interpret the signs and identify the RTD needs of the future in the building society world-wide. This is necessary if we want to remain the premier international network of building researchers and professionals, and indeed is also expected of the Organisation if we are squarely to confront our prime task - to serve the members in the best possible way.

And we certainly have the potential! The 5000 professionals from the 500 member organisations from about 100 different countries making up the CIB network together hold a unique insight and overview of the broad field of building research.

Do we have the tools? Absolutely, even if refinement and improvement are always possible and needed. The Working Commissions and Task Groups operate in delimited subject areas and possess and deliver in-depth knowledge in their respective fields. They are the natural instruments for detecting the future key issues and needs of research collaboration ......"

A healthy growth
Stemming from historical reasons the European membership in CIB has always been dominant. This predominance started slowly to diminish during the nineties as the total membership showed a healthy growth in all other regions.
Universities are the member category contributing the most to the net growth. CIB is today also attracting a significant interest from industry. Since the mid nineties a stimulating number of new industrial members has joined the organisation, but on the negative side one must also notice a loss of older members from industry. This latter phenomenon is partly attributed to the economic crisis in the Asian region.

Why is CIB attracting new members? There are of course many underlying reasons to this and it goes far beyond this brief editorial to give a full analysis. A generally increased awareness in building and construction research of the importance of international co-operation is most likely a main contributory factor. The CIB way of working, with its multi-disciplinary approaches to practical and research worthy problems, is in addition a concept with support in general, national as well international, R&D-trends, that attracts members.

**Member driven activities and the Pro-Active approach**

CIB is, and indeed should be, a member driven organisation. The (before 1997 only) way of working meant that proposals for new work areas normally originated from the interests of a smaller number of members. After formulating a proposal for a work programme and establishing a reasonable measure of international support the proposal was considered and evaluated by the Programme Committee and, if the suggested programme was judged to have attractive merit, a Task Group on the subject was started. As a result of the Strategic Planning Meeting in South Africa 1997, this way of working has been complemented by the Pro-Active Approach through which over-arching themes for future activities are applied.

The reasons for establishing the Pro-active Approach have been communicated to and intensively discussed in the CIB network – not the least via the CIB Bulletin. The underlying conviction for starting the Pro-Active Approach is that certain themes are so important and over-arching to the building and construction sector that an organisation such as CIB simply must be active and preferably take the lead. The two Pro-Active themes Sustainable Construction and Performance Based Building have already and so far rendered CIB considerable international credit considering that only the first steps has been taken on this path, and are thus benefiting the members. On a CIB initiative a Performance Based Building Network, to be partly financed by the European Commission, is now acknowledged and under contract negotiations. Similar initiatives are, after the successful launching of the Agenda 21 on Sustainable Construction, under preparation in the field of Sustainable Construction. The third theme, Business and Process Reengineering, is just now taking off.

The Pro-active Approach is a way for CIB to form the forces and allowing the Organisation to “speak with one mouth“ on issues of top priority to the international building and construction society. Could there be eventual drawbacks? Well, there exists to my opinion a dichotomy between the pro-active concept, which can be seen as a top-down methodology, and the more traditional bottom-up way of working in CIB. Too much of the top-down approach could result in too pronounced benefits for the stronger members of the Organisation. However, the two Boards I have been member of have shown these issues a considerable attention. With a continued lively discussion in the CIB network on the organisation of the Pro-Active Approach I am sure that it is here to stay – and that it is a necessary complementary way of working for an organisation with ambition to stay in the international lead.
Enrolling young researchers
The enrolment of young researchers, and for that sake researchers-to-be, into CIB affairs is probably the most vital future-shaping question of all for CIB. It is of course of invaluable importance for a young researcher, at an early stage in his or her career, to form and be an integral part of an international network in his/her research field. To know and understand the patterns, the progress and the development in a research field on an international basis is best done through on-going communication with colleagues. Here CIB offer a number of opportunities, but convincing approaches need to be developed and communicated.

CIB has since several years entered into various career development activities for younger researchers. The Young Research Managers Workshop is a good example; a forum where young research leaders can discuss common issues and e.g. propose topics they want CIB to take on.

If I remember correctly, training in research management was a proposed topic given high priority at the Young Research Managers Workshop in Ottawa 1997. I can only second and underline this prioritisation. Research is becoming more and more internationalised and it is today common, not the least in Europe, with multi-national research projects or programmes. This implies new aspects and challenges to research managers. How has, since Ottawa 1997, this topic and the conclusions from the workshop been administrated by CIB? A CIB awareness and mechanism to carefully follow up such proposals is essential. If this reflection signals a slight criticism it falls partly on myself as this happened during my period as President.

The establishing of CIB Student Chapters at member universities is probably one of the best initiatives so far to introduce young professionals, still in education, to the magnitude of possibilities an international network like CIB offers. The approach deserves all support and encouragement.

To end
When writing these few reflections I just received the number 5/00 of the CIB Bulletin and had the pleasure of reading the editorial by Chris Pollington. I wish to underwrite a couple of sentences from his concluding remarks: “CIB must continue along the path of large scale co-operative projects. It is the unstoppable way of the research world in the 21st Century”. I agree – here lays probably part of the explanation to CIB’s relative success on the international scene; to be further developed and exploited.