

# INFORMATION

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## The Secretary General's Column

### CIB and EU Projects: Problem, Threat, Opportunity or Necessity?



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By now most CIB members should be aware of the fact that in 2001, CIBdf in combination with some EU-based CIB members were awarded a 2 million Euro grant by the European Commission for the Thematic Network PeBBu – Performance Based Building. Making and submitting the proposal for this network, and later its actual management, required and still requires a substantial part of the staff capacity at the CIB General Secretariat. In 2002 we were again involved in a proposal for an EU-funded project: SCooBE – Sustainable Construction of the Built Environment. This proposal however was not accepted by the EU. And in the first three months of 2003 the Secretariat and especially myself was again involved in three new EU proposals, of which two with envisioned budgets in the magnitude of 50 million Euro. During the respective period this involvement generated a workload in the magnitude of three – four days a week for myself only and this concerned only the first step of the proposal stage. A similar involvement will probably be required for the next three to four months if the first-step proposals are accepted. And what the Secretariat's involvement on the envisioned management of such projects will require if the respective projects actually start, can at this stage not even be foreseen. Is the

envisioned profit from such EU funded projects to the CIB membership worth all this effort?

The focus for staff at the Secretariat on such projects – at both the proposal and the execution stages – certainly has some negative effects. As long as the required work is performed during normal office hours, that goes at the cost of various traditional Secretariat's tasks. A typical example of this is the involvement by the Secretariat and especially by myself in the programs and events of the CIB Task Groups and Working Commissions. After the second half of 2000, when the preparations for the first EU funded project started, my involvements in the programmes of Task Groups and Working Commissions became substantially less than what was customary until then. And as far as the required work is performed outside of normal office hours it goes at the costs of a staff's private life, in certain periods even to such extend that there is no more private life left.

And who actually profits from such EU funded project like PeBBu? In first instance it generates extra funding for EU based members only. If such projects could be used by non-EU members to attract their own extra

funding from their own national resources, it could be said that at least potentially, all CIB members including the non-EU ones, can profit from them. This very approach is being tried through setting up national/regional PeBBu Platforms both in the USA and in Australia, but so far not with any substantial success. As concerns the PeBBu project, only some Canadian members have been able to attract such extra funding, but to a limited extend only.

One of the new proposals for EU-funded projects that was being worked on by CIB during the past months even created major discussions on whether CIB's objectives on this were in fact competing with certain members' objectives and with the objectives of ENBRI; a European organization with national building and construction research organizations as members, almost all of which are also CIB members. In the context of these discussions, things heated up to such an extent that an organization was even considering to cancel its CIB membership if CIB continues its involvement in one specific EU-proposal.

Personally I think that CIB's involvement in such EU funded projects – and in other externally funded projects of a substantial magnitude – are crucial to CIB. The times during which we could rely on our commissions to produce a worthwhile output purely on a voluntary basis, are almost gone for most parts of the world. There still is a huge potential in our commissions, but only if we can find new ways to provide resources for their work will they continue to function as envisaged, and the externally funded projects are certainly one possible way for this. If we manage the proper structure to enable our commissions to profit from such externally funded programs and to supply their input into such programs, I am convinced that there is no organization in the world with more potential power to attract and successfully execute such funded international programs. It will require something of a culture change in CIB, it will require a solution to what some perceive to be a competition issue, it certainly also will require another and especially an expanded organization of the CIB General Secretariat and it will require another financial infrastructure for CIB. But if we manage all of this, CIB's future is a bright one; one in which we maintain the many positive characteristics of the traditional CIB and have found ways to merge these with what is required to successfully attract and execute major commitments and contract-based international programs.