



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION

INFORMATION

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Around the Task Groups and Working Commissions

TG47 – Innovation Brokerage in Construction

Report of the 4th Meeting of TG47

by

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Introduction

The fourth meeting of TG47 was held at Lund University, Sweden on 20th and 21st February 2003 at the invitation of Professor Bengt Hansson. It was attended by 13 participants from 7 countries. The meeting combined presentations with discussion of the group's final output and of the next stage in CIB's studies of innovation systems.

Meeting Report Summary

Graham Winch reviewed the Group's previous meetings and provided an overview of its likely final output, which would be a review of the role of brokers in construction innovation supported by a set of more detailed papers. He had previously circulated a draft of the review paper and invited comments on it. The Group endorsed the general approach of the review paper but thought that it should bring out the factors that influenced success in the brokerage function.

Jason Underwood outlined the history and aims of Construct IT, a member-based body formed in 1994 to promote effective use of IT and based at the Salford University. It held regular members meetings and produced a range of publications. The Group discussed the different ways in which Construct IT interacted with its members and with industry in general - acting as a broker in two distinct ways - and the benefits that it offered to both sets of interests.

Graham Winch summarised the activities of the Centre for Construction Innovation (CCI) in Manchester, founded in 2000. This aimed to improve the performance of construction firms in the North West region of England. It had links with the universities in the region its activities included seminars, workshops, the dissemination of Best Practice literature and the organisation of public debates on construction issues. Discussion focussed on the absence of a clear link with research outputs; CCI illustrated the role of innovation brokers in taking information from many sources and adding value through give assurance about the information provided

David Payne gave a progress report on CONSTRINNONET, a project funded by DG Enterprise of the European Commission under their innovation programme. This aimed to explore the mechanisms of innovation in SMEs and to provide guidance on how business support organisations could support innovation in construction SMEs. These did not have the time and skills required to access research information and the project team were considering how brokerage events might assist. The project had not shown construction SMEs to have innovation needs distinct from SMEs in other sectors, except perhaps in relation to the complexity of the construction process and therefore the number of other actors involved in any change.

Keith Hampson reviewed the factors that had led to the creation of the Co-operative Research Centre for

Construction Innovation. This was a Private-Public Partnership in R and D which acted as a broker in facilitating innovation through excellence in research and associated linkages. It also developed research skills and more general competence through its PhD and Masters programmes. The 'closed' nature of the Centre was debated in the discussion; it provided most benefits to its limited circle of partners – although an 'outer circle' was being planned. The aim was to enhance the performance of the whole industry by strengthening the leaders, but in some countries, this might not be a politically acceptable policy.

Andreas Hartmann reported an initiative to support innovation in Neumarkt, an area of Bavaria where construction accounted for 60% of employment. This provided services for the network partners through creating awareness of developments, co-ordinating pilot projects and drawing ideas out of employees. It was a 'top-down' broker, arranging programmes to enhance innovation skills and creating contacts. These increased self-confidence and motivated towards innovation. The very high proportion of employment related to construction was noted in discussion; this meant that it was – almost uniquely - exporting construction services, and so the competitive position of its construction firms was a direct influence on the economy of the area, rather than being an indirect influence as was normally the case.

Margaret Emsley reviewed the relative use of steel and concrete in UK building structures over the past century and the influences which had led to the dominance of steel. The role of professionals and their representative bodies, along with relevant trade bodies, had been central in influencing the selection of frame type. In particular, the more unified steel industry had been far more aggressive in their marketing strategies.

Marcella Miozzo summarised a study of factors that impacted on innovation in construction firms in different European countries, conducted through interviews with senior executives of major contractors. The study had found differences in behaviour which could be attributed to factors such as the form of ownership, the extent to which income was stabilised by operating in more than one country market, and managerial practices. The study could inform a review of the links between such firms and innovation brokers, whose role would vary according to the industry and government links in each country.

Henrik Bang gave a progress report on the Danish study of knowledge brokers. This had identified twelve categories (as reported in Cincinnati). Now, case studies were being prepared in each category. The first of these would focus on Danish Building and Urban Research (DBUR) and the Danish Technical University (DTU). Seven characteristics of innovation brokerage had been drawn up, and the activities of the case

study organisations would be assessed against these. These characteristics were discussed by the Group, which laid stress on the role of brokers in validating information.

Kristian Widen summarised a study which had examined the impact of 22 projects completed in 1997. A key conclusion was that participation in the projects was seen as beneficial by the firms concerned, irrespective of the success of the project in research terms; they had developed staff capabilities. The study had found that the form of output was very important in influencing take-up of results and had recommended that project funding should always include resource for preparing suitable output.

Discussions

The Group then returned to a discussion of its final output. This could be a book and Graham Winch would approach a suitable publisher. Contributors were identified and a timetable for contributions set.. Finally the Group considered the next stage of the work that had started with TG35 and continued with TG47. The intention was that the third stage would focus on the role of clients in innovation. This could link with the CIB Revaluing Construction strategy, since CIB wished to establish a network for clients. Keith Hampson said that the Australian CRC for Construction Innovation might be willing to lead this stage. The Group welcomed this and looked forward to receiving further information.

Next Meeting

It was agreed the next meeting of the Group will take place at Imperial College, London on 17th and 18th July 2003. This meeting will be the last in the planned programme but a number of those present indicated that they would be willing to attend a 'final' meeting in Singapore around 22nd October held in conjunction with the CIB W55/W65 conference

Graham Winch and all participants thanked Professor Hansson for his excellent hospitality.

Additional Info

The whole report can be downloaded from [TG47 4th Report Meeting](#)