



## CIB NEWS ARTICLE

International Council for Research and Innovation  
in Building and Construction

Providing a global network for international exchange and cooperation in research and innovation in building and construction, in support of an improved building process and of improved performance of the built environment.

December 2007

### Around the Task Groups and Working Commissions

#### W092 – Procurement Systems

## Report of CIB W092 Symposium held in September 2007, Australia

by

Kerry London

### Introduction

The 2007 CIB W092 Symposium was jointly hosted by the University of Newcastle Centre for Interdisciplinary Built Environment Research [CIBER] and the CIB W092 Coordinators. The symposium was opened by the University of Newcastle Chancellor Professor Trevor Waring. It was a delight for CIBER to host this symposium and there were many challenging discussions in our beautiful wine growing Hunter Valley region. We received 36 high quality papers from our colleagues and it was indeed an international event with presentations from academics who have travelled far and wide - Brazil, Helsinki, Hong Kong, Ireland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and Australia. It was a small boutique style conference, which encouraged a high level of "catching up" with colleagues in a friendly and engaging environment.



Associate Professor Kerry London, Professor Steve Rowlinson, Jesica Chen and Yunyan Jia in the Conference Centre Library after the conference dinner

### Keynote

Our keynote Professor Steve Kelman is a highly sought after speaker and we welcomed his insights. He is from John F Kennedy Harvard School of Political Sciences, Harvard University and he reflected upon his work to manage change within the US government during his personal appointment by the then US President Bill Clinton.

In that appointment Professor Kelman advised the Clinton administration on procurement policy and drove legislative and cultural change in the late 1990s. His keynote was entitled: "Unleashing Change in US Federal Government Procurement". Organisational change, in the common view, is very difficult because "people resist change." Using this statement as a starting point, the presentation discussed achieving change in large organisations in the context both of procurement reform in the U.S. federal government during the 1990's "reinventing government" movement and also of building bridges across boundaries in organisations. The presentation critiqued the idea that change is difficult because "people resist change," and discussed how change can be "unleashed" rather than being coerced or cajoled. The presentation discussed both the initiation and consolidation of change efforts in organisations.

### Symposium Themes

Our broad theme for this symposium was Building Across Borders. To understand procurement policy, process and practice issues researchers are crossing disciplinary boundaries either through exploring multidisciplinary problems or borrowing concept and methods from other disciplines.

This conference sought to provide a forum to progress ideas about how researchers were explore research and practice intersections between the traditional internal built environment disciplines:

- architecture
- construction management
- construction economics
- property
- facilities management

and the external traditional humanities disciplines:

- economics
- business
- sociology
- law
- design
- linguistics
- management and information sciences.

Many of our design and construction procurement problems arise because of crossing borders whether they are geographical, physical, legal, organizational, cultural or professional and it is the investigation of such complex interdisciplinary problems which will be reported at this symposium.



*Jessica Chen, Associate Professor Kerry London, Yunyan Jia and Professor Steve Rowlinson*

This symposium was distinguished by nine sessional research themes including: Targeted procurement; Private-finance initiatives; Project learning; Supply chain procurement; Client – professional relationships; Project delivery – price and performance; Technology and systems; Public private partnerships and risk; Competition and procurement; Construction professionals and Interdisciplinary urban development. Within these themes a broad range of topics were presented.

## Presentations

The symposium, Building across Borders, was distinctive in that research was presented which was concerned with exploring conflict and change when

using the procurement strategy as the vehicle for achieving sustainable urban development including social, economic and environmental objectives across professional, regulatory, regional and cultural boundaries. Sustainability remains a key point of discussion within the Procurement Working Commission delegates. Achieving sustainability has become a difficult, regulatory process and as time costs money in construction - will this ultimately impact housing affordability? There are numerous organizational and cultural boundaries involved in development – how do we traverse those boundaries for speedy and efficient approvals? What initial starting conditions are set up in the early stages of projects and how do these impact upon project delivery and various phases of procurement?

Research was also presented on professional relationships and roles. Private Finance Initiatives or Public Private Partnerships was another interesting topic considered by researchers from the perspective of the changing way the traditional 'builder' is casting themselves in a new role – so what is this new role? The PPP market in Australia similar to many countries represented at the conference has now reached a level of market maturity and so what are the stages of this development?

This symposium also saw delegates present on the oil and gas sector – the search for oil and gas also has no boundaries! How do we manage this process in a world questioning the use and viability of such energy sources? Problems in other sectors were explored as well – health care design is such a complex and difficult process which involves numerous stakeholders – again how to develop collaborative relationships in a collective problem solving environment with such diverse objectives from stakeholders from different disciplines as design, health, business, administration and sociology.

Many of the papers presented were exploring areas of conflict, change and discord. Integrated infrastructure procurement is perhaps an unachievable aim with such a diverse and fragmented industry but we challenged whether or not there are winds of change – are we slowly understanding the value and complexity of crossing boundaries to create socially, economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable urban environments?

## National Appreciations

The conference made its mark on the city of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley and was well received by the community through the local and national media. We were fortunate enough to have 5 radio interviews including an Australian wide national broadcast and a newspaper article which featured the CIB W092 conference delegates and their innovative research.

## Proceedings

The proceedings from this conference will be introduced in a next CIB News letter.

## Additional Information

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