



## 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.

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### Around the Task Groups and Working Commissions

#### W111 - Usability of Workplaces

#### OECD - CELE Challenge

The CIB Congress in Salford in May 2010 provided an opportunity for CIB to demonstrate again its ability to respond creatively to important challenges issued by international organizations representing the interests of the whole world.

CIB can bring to bear on such challenges the unique combination of knowledge, experience, and research capability that is embodied in its international membership. In this case previous work carried out by a far-sighted Commission proved to be ideal preparation for the task of responding constructively to another challenge of international importance.

#### Origin of the Challenge

The challenge originated from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), which shares with CIB an interest in the transformation of organizations and communities through effective learning. Recognising the international importance of the work the OECD has established a Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE) to promote a better understanding of facilities performance and improvement of the usability of learning environments.

The OECD challenge, clearly expressed prior to the CIB Congress in May 2010, was:

- "How do you create effective environments for education that are usable and sustainable in the long term?"

#### History of CIB Activity in this Research Area

Anticipating the growth of interest in the usability of workplaces CIB established the Commission CIB W111 as long ago as 2001, building on the expertise and experience a network of researchers and practitioners that had originally been formed as a CIB Task Group TG51 to investigate the application of an international standard on usability (ISO 9421), previously applied in the evaluation of consumer products, to the built environment.

A first round of exploratory case-studies carried out between 2002 and 2005 sought to investigate the applicability of usability concepts and techniques, adapt them for use in the built environment, and to identify methods and tools that would enable a more positive user experience in organizational settings. This work was published as CIB Report 306.

The second phase of the project (2006-2008) included three further case studies, five workshops, and a final research seminar. The work that comprised this stage of the project focused on contextual issues that were seen to define the difference in applying usability to the built environment as opposed to other consumer products. This work was published as CIB Report 316.

#### CIB and OECD Collaboration

With its productive history of research in building usability since 2001, described above, CIB became the most logical organization to begin collaboration with the OECD, and in particular with CELE. Both parties realized that learning environments are work places for both the teachers and the taught. That collaboration began in earnest in 2009, and has already produced tangible results in the form of the third CIB Report entitled Usability of Workplaces – Phase 3 (CIB Report 330, downloadable at <http://cibworld.xs4all.nl/dl/publications/pub330.pdf>), which was produced in time for release at the CIB Congress in Salford in May this year.

#### Two-day International Symposium at CIB World Congress 2010

This international symposium was co-hosted by CIB and the OECD. It considered not one, but three challenges. The first was the OECD CELE challenge:

- "How do you create effective environments for education that are usable and sustainable in the long term?"

The second was a challenge from W111:

- "What is the positive role that users can play as co-producers of learning environments?"

The third challenge was from the British Council for School Environments (BCSE):

- "How can learning environments and buildings – the "third teacher" – be used as a tool for learning?"

This symposium provided an opportunity for the emerging answers to these challenges to be reported and discussed. The symposium heard speakers from OECD CELE, the CIB W111 Commission and the British Council for School Environments. The CELE speakers gave an update on the CELE project on Evaluating Quality in Educational Spaces, in which there is a pilot project due to be reported on this year.

The relevance of the study of workspaces, and therefore of the CIB/CELE work, was emphasized by the British Council for School Environments' update on the "Great Schools Inquiry" which it is organizing and which explores the role that schools and learning environments play in improving the life chances of children and young people and tackling social inequality.

On the second day there was an opportunity to attend facilitated workshops held in actual educational environments so that the users of those environments and the symposium attendees could all share a learning experience in a workspace. As the symposium heard, to create usable environments it is essential that the users should be engaged as "co-producers". The facilitated workshops were designed to engage with teachers and students, to listen to their views, and to learn from their practical experience.

### The Response from the Symposium

The symposium response to the three challenges was to merge them into one:

- "How do you create usable environments for learning?"

and then to say:

- "A learning environment is made up of physical, digital and social qualities;

A usable environment is efficient, effective and provides a positive experience that is valuable, memorable and enjoyable:

- Users should be engaged as co-producers;
- The learning environment can be considered as the "third teacher;"
- Pupils can be enabled and enriched by new methods, processes and tools."
- Summary of CIB response to the OECD challenge

It can be seen that the CIB response has been a strong and sustained one, consisting of three consecutive stages.

- The extensive work carried out by CIB W111 since 2001 in anticipation of the growing

appreciation of the importance of facilities performance for the effective design of working environments, and predating the articulation of the OECD challenge.

- The constructive collaboration with OECD CELE leading to the seminal symposium in Salford in May 2010, also attended by the BCSE, at which there was a constructive response not only to the OECD challenge, but also to the challenges BCSE and W111 had posed.
- Ongoing collaboration with OECD CELE in the next phase of the work.

For further information about the International Symposium in Salford

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