

W92 - Procurement Systems



Professor Colin Davidson's productive involvement in CIB affairs dates back perhaps more years than he would care to mention!

A very recent example of this association was his initiative in organising the highly successful W92 Symposium in Montreal last May.

Information is indebted to him for the following review of the Symposium emanating from himself and the two Joint Coordinators of W92: David Jaggar and Steve Rowlinson.



Lorna Tardiff who was one of the keynote speakers on 22nd May with her Chairman Philip Bobrow.



Other Speakers included CIB Past President Gérard Blachère



Dennis J. Cahill (North Union Associates) and



Christopher Gobin (Director of Research, Dumez S.A.)

During breaks, participants mingle with Business School staff and students in the atrium. (Photo: Dan Hanganu, Architect of the Business School)



A notable highlight of the Symposium was a keynote address by Sir Michael Latham (seen above left with Session Chairman Alain Dagenais). Afterwards Sir Michael Latham led an informal Seminar.



Procurement - A Key to Innovation

It was this challenging theme that brought together about 100 experts for W92's 1997 Symposium. Held in Montreal from 19th to 23rd May, the Organisers - the IF Research Corporation (affiliated with the Université de Montréal) - chose to associate the power of procurement systems with the opportunity for much-needed innovation in the building sector.

What is the power of procurement - and why might it be a key to innovation?

On the power of procurement, there was little doubt expressed by the Symposium participants. Indeed, the leverage of procurement was taken for granted by most of the authors of the 85 papers published in the Proceedings. The importance of the building owner's decisions was clearly recognised as fundamental in setting up the framework for all subsequent activities - design and construction - and for their management. However, it is no longer sufficient to accept the important role of procurement; one must also be able to choose the best approach, that is to say the strategy best suited to the circumstances of each project, of its initiator and of its socio-technical and cultural environment.

On the key to innovation question, there was no such consensus. Indeed, the organisers themselves proposed, from the outset, two contradictory hypotheses: (a) building owners, singly or together, by their choices of procurement strategy can open the door to innovative proposals in design, manufacture and/or construction, or (b) building owners can view buildings as economic assets and have no desire to be involved in any way with their production, whether innovative or not. The Symposium participants imposed their views, suggesting that the two hypotheses were not so mutually exclusive as might seem at first, but are rather the extremes of a continuum.

The Symposium, held in the elegant and functional new École des Hautes Études Commerciales de Montréal (see photo), was structured to stimulate debate. Most mornings started with invited presentations by 'practitioners' of procurement from the public or the private sectors from Europe or North America. Then followed four sets of parallel workshops, which enabled the Symposium theme to be explored in more detail.

Each morning, the 'practitioners' situated procurement strategies in their contexts: public or private sectors, inter-firm integration or fragmentation, legal or learning environments, professional or contracting activities.

The workshops - scenes of argument and discussion - then examined the issue of procurement in terms of its legal, organisational, financial and functional impacts. Each workshop produced recommendations addressed to building owners and to the building industry; these recommendations were also discussed in the closing plenary session and are soon to be published in a synthesised form, together with the keynote presentations.

Procurement - the central domain of W92 - also interfaces with work of other CIB Commissions, particularly W87 - Post-Construction Liability and W65 - Organisation and Management of Construction. A special session was reserved to explore these broader CIB issues and to position W92's responsibilities within them.

Seventeen countries and all six continents were represented - though somewhat unequally; academics and practitioners from several professional domains participated in the Symposium, contributing to the broad spectrum of opinions that were expressed and to the richness of the debates.

The Québec Department of Industry, Trade, Science and Technology contributed a major and much appreciated grant to help with organising the Symposium and with ensuring its success; indeed, its success is the best 'thank you' we can extend to the Government of Québec.

David Jaggar and Steve Rowlinson (Joint Coordinators W92), Colin Davidson (Symposium Organiser)
September 1997