

SECRETARY GENERAL'S COLUMN

READY FOR THE NEXT TRIENNIUM

During the Triennium 1995-1998 much attention has been given to what can be called "cleaning up the CIB system". This concerned:

1. the CIB Fee System,
2. the payment behaviour of CIB Members,
3. Membership of CIB Commissions,
4. the functioning of the CIB Commissions,
5. the functioning of the CIB General Secretariat and
6. the CIB Home Page.



CIB Fee System

Following several years of in depth discussion, in 1995 a new Fee system was introduced. Prior to 1995 while there was in fact a scale of Fees, the actual fee to be paid was on occasion the result of negotiations between an individual organisation that wanted to join CIB and the CIB Secretariat. In such negotiations criteria for the calculation of Fees could differ in each case. The new Fee System contains 6 clearly defined fee levels and consistent and transparent principles for establishing the proper level for each new CIB Member.

In general the current Fee System is perceived by the CIB Membership as being equitable. However, the fact that over the past four years it has not been necessary to increase the Fees, not even to compensate for inflation, may have had a positive influence on this perception.

It is to be expected that during the next Triennium 1998 - 2001 the CIB Board will carry out a comprehensive review of the CIB Fee and Membership System. This may, and very probably will, result in changes in the current Fee System in the year 2001. Until then, however, the current Fee System can be relied upon.

Payment Behaviour of the CIB Membership

Before 1995 it was regarded as 'normal' that at the end of a year roughly 20% of all Fees invoiced during that year had not been paid. Only after the introduction of a new Information System at the CIB Secretariat in 1995 was it possible to make more detailed analyses of the underlying payment behaviour of the CIB Membership. The results of such analyses were staggering. Roughly 50% of the CIB Membership showed outstanding debts, which surely had to be regarded as unacceptable.

Outstanding debts stretching back two or three years were not exceptional and there were even Members with outstanding debts for as much as five years.

For some years now the CIB Secretariat in close cooperation with the CIB Administrative Committee have been tackling this problem very intensely. The prime result is indeed an improved payment behaviour. At the end of 1997, roughly 95% of all invoiced fees had been paid. In other words: the percentage of non-paid fees at the end of a year had decreased from roughly 20% to roughly 5%. Another result however, is the loss of over 30% of the CIB Membership as it was constituted before 1995. By far the majority of these Members lost concerned Members who were not able or willing to fulfil their outstanding debts and who, after having received reminders or warnings by the CIB

Secretariat either cancelled their Membership themselves or simply did not respond and subsequently were cancelled by CIB.

Of course such a large exodus of Membership is to be regretted, but on the other hand it does mean that the remaining Membership now is a reliable one. And luckily over the same period CIB has been able to attract even more new Members than were lost so that in terms of numbers the overall result is still a substantial growth.

Membership of CIB Commissions

The possibility to participate in CIB Commissions has in fact always been the most important 'product' CIB has to offer to its Members. However, after some detailed analyses executed in 1995 by the CIB Secretariat in consultation with the respective CIB Coordinators, the following was concluded:

- Over 1/3rd of all registered Commission Members were non-CIB Members. Some Commissions even had a majority of non-CIB Members as its Membership. And to cap it all a substantial number of the CIB Coordinators were non-CIB Members.
- Coordinators and the CIB General Secretariat applied different criteria to define a Commission's Membership. They produced separate Commission Membership lists, which differed in some cases for a clear majority of a Commission's Members and in most cases there was no communication about the disparity.
- In most cases experts joined a Commission as an Individual on a voluntary basis. In other words: not as the appointed representative of an organisation and most often also without the knowledge - let alone the support - of the organisation's leadership.

In communication with the respective Coordinators, the CIB Secretariat has contacted all those non-CIB Commission Members and has urged them to apply for CIB Membership as a condition for a continuation of their Commission Membership. More than 50% of the new CIB Members who joined in the past three years is immediately attributable to this. At present the communication between the CIB Secretariat and the CIB Coordinators concerning the Commission's Membership is satisfactory; the criteria for a Commission's Membership are now based on clear procedures and are regarded as acceptable by everyone concerned and a Commission's Membership has become a privilege exclusively for CIB Members only.

Also over the past years a Commission Membership, has gradually been developed from an often somewhat loose indication of interest by an individual expert into an officially appointed representative of an organisation, based on a stronger organisational commitment. It is assumed that in the medium term future this development will have a major and beneficial impact on the culture as perceived in the CIB Commissions.

Functioning of the CIB Commission

Many of CIB's Commissions in the past functioned rather well: they were headed by an active Coordinator, they had a clear Scope and well defined Objectives, an active Membership, regular meetings with focused programmes, in some cases tangible products like well produced publication and also well established relationships with other international organisations. However, there were also many Commissions that did not function that well. And this could be for various reasons: the lack of a reliable and active Membership, a Coordinator who could not be as active as would be required, no clear focus in its Work Programme, no regular meetings or even no meetings at all for some years, no products, etc.

The current CIB Programme Committee and the CIB General Secretariat over the past three years have been dealing with these inadequately functioning Commissions and among other results the following may be noted:

- o a substantially intensified periodical review of the functioning of the CIB Commissions
- o the termination of Commissions.

The following Table shows the number of CIB Commissions terminated and newly established during the Triennium 1995 - 1998.

	June 95	Terminated	Newly Established	June 98
Task Groups	11	7	18	22
Working Commissions	41	10	2	33
Totals	52	17	20	55

Next to this, in the Commissions that existed already before 1995 relatively many new Coordinators were appointed and great care was taken that these Coordinators would be really committed to their task for a longer period and based on declared institutional support.

In addition the CIB Programme Committee has introduced the principle of giving new CIB Activities the form of Task Groups only. Only when a Task Group has proven its capability to function over a two or three year period, is consideration given as to whether or not to transform it into a Working Commission.

And maybe the most important, although somewhat implicit change in the general functioning of the CIB Commissions, is the incorporation into their Work Programmes of a focus on producing pre-defined products. For some Commissions that - to put it rather impolitely - were little more than unfocussed but enjoyable talking shops this presented a major change in their structure and culture of behaviour. At present all Task Groups and almost all Working Commissions now have projects in their Work programme aimed at producing for example, an International State of the Art, Status or Best Practice Report, or specific pre-standardisation documentation, or certain Recommendations for Group Practice or certain Case Studies, etc.

And on top of this introduced commitment to producing pre-defined deliverables, in general in the Triennium 1995-1998 the principle was applied of asking the CIB Commissions to initiate activities aimed at contributing to the overall theme of Sustainable Construction. Many Commissions initiated targeted projects in response to this and in conjunction with the forthcoming CIB Congress in Gävle, the results of these projects are to be presented.

CIB General Secretariat

It is difficult for the CIB Secretary General himself to speak about an improved performance of the CIB General Secretariat, without sounding a bit pretentious, even though this was never intended. Nonetheless the following can be said.

In 1995 a new Information System was developed and implemented in the operations of the CIB Secretariat, which includes reliable and rather detailed data about the CIB Membership, all the approximately 6000 individuals with whom CIB has a contact and the CIB Commissions with their Members, Publication and Meetings. This Information System has enabled the CIB Secretariat substantially to intensify its communication with the CIB Membership, the CIB Coordinators and the CIB Commission Members.

Also this Information System has generated an increase in both the level of productivity in various Administrative procedures and in the reliability of the results of these procedures. A special feature of this Information System concerns the registration of all symposia, congresses etc. in the area of Building and Construction Research and Innovation. Based on this the CIB-Masterlist of Meetings has been offered as a new service to the CIB Membership.

In summary it can be claimed that the operations of the CIB General Secretariat have become somewhat more efficient and reliable over the past period as befits an organisation in which reliable global communication and information exchange is crucial.

CIB Home Page

In 1995 a provisional first version of a CIB Home Page was developed by the University of Florida. In the first half of 1998 a new version has been developed at the CIB Secretariat itself. An important part of this version is an on-line database, which features information on CIB Members, Contact, Commissions, Meetings and Publication, and also electronic copies of the CIB Bi-Monthly Information Bulletin. In another article more detailed information is given about the CIB Home Page. Already it has been decided that the CIB Secretariat will in principle no longer produce an annual updated CIB Membership list and a CIB Compendium of Task Groups and Working Commission and the CIB Masterlist of Meetings on the traditional paper format. All the information in these former documents is now available in the database, which is part of the CIB Home Page, and, it is emphasised it will be updated at least once every month.

Next Step : the CIB Pro-Active Approach

Now that CIB disposes of a somewhat more reliable, and in fact also a more directly involved Membership, more active, better committed and also better focused Commissions and a more effective Secretariat, that provides more reliable information, CIB, in my opinion stands ready to take the next major step.

The now envisaged implementation of the Pro-Active Approach during the next Triennium will be that step. In recent issues of the CIB Information Bulletin and again in this issue, in the Triennial Report of the CIB Programme Committee you can read about the principles and the objectives of this approach. If implemented as is now envisaged, it will exert a major impact on CIB's Programme, Structure and Culture. And it is my sincere conviction that without the changes that have taken place during the past CIB Triennium, a successful implementation of that Pro-Active Approach would not have been possible.

Wim Bakens

