

TG23 - Culture in Construction

Joint Coordinator Richard Fellows has kindly sent in the following report of the TG23 Meeting in Gävle on 10th June 1998.

Two papers, 'A Literature Review on Studies in Culture' by Barthorpe, Duncan and Miller and 'A Future Agenda for Cultural Research in Construction' by Dainty and Wright were presented by Stephen Barthorpe. The other Joint Coordinator, David Seymour delivered a brief paper on 'Definitions and Treatments of Culture'. The papers were the interim results of the work of the three (sub) task groups which had been established at the inaugural meeting of TG23 in September last year.

The papers presented and the consequent discussion served to confirm that Culture is a vast subject area and that there are many legitimate approaches to its study. Since Culture informs everything people do, it was recognised that the word 'Culture' is used in a variety of ways to refer to many different things.

Clear Answers Needed

It was proposed that in order for the work of TG23 to proceed effectively, there was a need to address certain questions explicitly: Why do we want to study Culture? What kinds of findings do we hope to produce, for what purposes and for whom?

While the answers to the questions tend to be taken for granted, making them explicit may be expected to bring greater clarity to questions of method and treatment.

Says Richard: We take it that answers to the questions will be of the following kind:

- To be able to get on with, work with and do business with people who differ from us with respect to some/all of the manifestations of Culture.
- To be able to record, provide an account or analysis of what facilitates and what impedes that.
- To communicate findings for the benefit of others.

'Deliverables' may take many forms:

- To provide a 'guidebook' - the "do's" and "don't's" of relating to people from other cultures.
- To provide (abstract) descriptions in order to make comparisons of cultures.
- To provide ethnographic accounts of cultures with which we are familiar.
- To establish causal connections (eg. Impact of culture on safety/accidents; impact of the 'macho' culture of construction on females' careers; impact of national culture on 'take-up' of new forms of procurement; transfer of technology. These, incidentally, were on the list of themes for TG23 discussed at the inaugural meeting.)

Since these objectives may be achieved in many ways, it would be a mistake to judge contributions on the grounds, for example, that they were arrived at 'unscientifically' etc. without making clear what criteria are being employed to effect judgement. Thus, it seems that a major challenge for TG23, perhaps signalling a distinctive contribution that it can make to the work of CIB generally, is to encourage methodological awareness; that our treatment of Culture, this most complicated of topics, fosters precision and scholarship.

Next Meeting

Richard speaks for all the members of the TG when he says that they are looking forward to yet further papers contributing to the study of Culture in Construction at the joint conference with W92 - Procurement Systems, at Chiang Mai, Thailand from 25 to 28 January 1999.