

TG35 - Innovation Systems in Construction

This newly created Task Group has excited considerable interest since it was first announced.

It held its first meeting on 10th June 1998 in Gävle where Mr. André Manseau, its Coordinator, reminded those present of the general objectives of the TG.

These were:

- To advance understanding of practical measures that can be taken to strengthen innovation systems in the construction industry, and
- To provide its participants with access to information, knowledge and analytical tools necessary to further develop their own policy and management frameworks.

Being a new addition to the CIB network, he invited CIB Secretary General Wim Bakens to present the CIB context and framework with regard to the TG and CIB Past President Mr. George Seaden to provide brief background information.

Dr. Bakens stressed that one of the major CIB roles is to stimulate innovation in the industry, but effective measures that can be taken to strengthen innovation were still poorly documented and understood. The need for such data and understanding called for the creation of a "Special" CIB Task Group; "Special" because members make a commitment to conduct national studies and to actively participate in the international comparative analysis, as well as to respect a specific schedule.

Mr. Seaden, now at the University of Ottawa, reported that the Institute for Research in Construction (IRC) of the National Research Council of Canada had sponsored an international workshop entitled "Innovation Systems and the Construction Industry" in January 1997. Innovation in construction was seen as a very complex and multi-actors' issue that called for a broad and systemic industry-wide perspective. It was also seen as important to consider the overall innovation process, from problems and opportunities to applications and commercialization of new products or processes.

Proposed organisation

A discussion paper setting out a proposed organization had been distributed prior to the meeting and in response to a question that was posed, it was confirmed that the TG would have no hierarchical structure.

It would be composed of the following groups that would interact with one another and with others as mutual partners.

- A Steering Committee, comprising different sponsors and representatives from Research Teams, which will review TG progress and provide overall direction
- Various Research Teams, which will conduct national or sub-national studies of construction innovation systems, and participate in the international comparative analysis
- General participants, including the above two groups and others, who will contribute by providing complementary studies/analysis, and/or support for other TG activities.

The Coordinator presented a preliminary analytical framework and a proposed scope for a study of construction innovation systems, as well as definitions of three kinds of innovation (product, process and organizational innovation), inspired from the OECD "Oslo Manual" - Guidelines for measuring innovation. These instruments will be refined, and participants agreed that other complementary approaches and studies will also be taken into consideration, if they can provide useful knowledge on innovation systems.

Particular attention will be paid to studies on drivers, success factors, and barriers to innovation, as well

as to the assessment of impacts/benefits from innovation.

Research Teams

To date, nine Research Team had expressed strong interest in conducting studies on construction innovation systems. Five of them were within the Groupe Bagnolet.

- Groupe Bagnolet has proposed a project to EU - 5th Framework related to innovation systems in construction
- Alfredo Serpell (Catholic University of Chile) had ongoing studies on the topic
- Dora Mabel Zeballos (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina) was engaged in preparing a survey on innovation in the construction industry
- Keith Hampson (QUT, Australia) had initiated contacts with government agencies and industry associations
- André Manseau (IRC-NRC, Canada) was leading a national study on the topic, with a survey of about 6,000 firms planned for early 1999.

Development Program

Participants reviewed the TG35 development plan and agreed that the next major steps would be as follows:

- (Jun 98) Provide a membership list to all members, with addresses, fax, etc., and revised TG 35 information included in the CIB Web site;
- (Jul-Aug. 98) Ask participants to start involving other participants and/or sponsors, as well as to provide information on their ongoing work/activities related to the topic of innovation systems in construction;
- (Jul.-Oct. 98) Refine the analytical framework and scope of TG35 work;
- (Nov. 98) Reach agreement on a set of key concepts and instruments;
- (Nov. 98) Hold a first meeting of the Steering Committee to get the perspective and orientation of policy/program makers;
- (Jan.-Jun. 99) Start the various national or sub-national studies;
- (Sept. 99) Review progress and plan; hold annual TG 35 meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, in conjunction with a CIB Symposium on Customer Satisfaction (organized by W55 & W65).