

EDITORIAL

CIB In The Internet Age

by

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CIB A Continued Role in the Electronic Age

Communication barriers are down

CIB was founded in 1953. International air travel then was slow and expensive; international telecommunications links were scarce and great political barriers inhibited scientific contact between East and West, North and South. An organisation that helped to bridge geographical and political divides was clearly valuable. Today, these barriers to communication have greatly diminished. Air travel has never been cheaper; telephone and fax communications are, for most of us, abundant and cheap and there are far fewer political barriers to information exchange (even though there are still high economic barriers for developing countries). Above all, the World Wide Web enables us to locate organisations and individuals with shared interests anywhere in the world. An hour or two of intelligent searching will reveal institutes, universities and individuals whose research can illuminate and complement one's own, and with whom we can communicate immediately and directly.

Added Value Must Result

So what role does CIB play in this new world? Why should anyone pay a subscription to belong to a network when - apparently - all the links that one wishes to make are available from a PC?

This question is fundamental in the discussions of the CIB Board and Programme Committee. We have to ensure that Members' subscriptions do genuinely result in added value, that members are better able to carry out their research and are more knowledgeable as a result of their membership of CIB.

Firstly, CIB can help to provide new insights by reflecting the breadth and diversity of building research. A glance at the subjects covered in the papers presented at Commission meetings, as reported in CIB INFORMATION, will show that CIB members are contributing to the development of a multi-faceted subject, where disciplines as diverse as engineering, psychology and law have a part to play. The CIB Congress in Gävle last year enabled a host of different groups to explore their contribution to sustainable construction. The trend towards "grouped" meetings of Working Commissions, such as those that will take place in South Africa in September, is to be welcomed, and has been encouraged, since it facilitates these interactions. The Congress in Wellington in 2001 will be an opportunity to bring the whole CIB range of interests together. No Internet search will adequately explore or reveal such links.

Secondly, CIB provides a means of integrating members' joint actions towards a globally significant goal, in the name of an organisation with international standing. CIB Agenda 21 for Sustainable Construction provides a global context in which members place their national links and programmes, and gain standing by association with a global initiative.

Thirdly, the Secretariat of CIB, because of their unique overview of building research around the world, is able to alert members to significant developments and trends. They also offer a valuable means of publishing the outputs from CIB activities; even in the electronic age, there is a requirement for easily-referenced publications in printed form. And they facilitate the activities of Commissions in many other ways, most recently by organising Web-pages and bulletin boards.

Finally, air flights may be cheap but time remains costly. Time spent at an international meeting has to be well spent and the Board and Programme Committee place great stress on the quality of CIB's activities. Each must have a clear purpose and must meet members' requirements.

New Challenges - New Demands

So CIB continues to have a role, even in the Internet age. The ready access that it offers to the significant developments in building research, and the breadth and quality of its activities, cannot be emulated merely by electronic means. But the Board and Programme Committee are not complacent. CIB has to evolve because its members face new challenges and place new demands. The 'Pro-active Approach' is the latest initiative.

We want always to know how CIB can best serve you so that we use your subscriptions in the ways that best meet your requirements.

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