

## EDITORIAL

# FROM WORLD WIDE COVERAGE TO GLOBAL IMPACT

by



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CIB is a wonderful opportunity to meet people from around the world and discuss issues of common interest. Most of us have sufficiently esoteric areas of specialism that this is a very real benefit! In addition hearing about the different national contexts can rapidly shake superficial assumptions and widen our scope of understanding. For example low-tech, labour-intensive approaches can be highly appropriate in some countries where creating employment is a major social need, but are the reverse of what is striven for in many others. More obviously, discussions with Eastern European members highlighted that for them Building Control and Planning legislation are the principal means of achieving quality in construction. This is rarely acknowledged by quality management researchers whose focus is on the company.

So CIB can help its members keep up-to-date and it can broaden the mind! Generally this is through symposium meetings. These are very valuable, but is this enough? There seem to be two additional linked areas that exhibit significant latent potential. The first is collaborative, project orientated, activities between symposia and the second is the production of influential reports. Without joint activities between meetings it is unlikely that reports of sufficient depth and focus will be achievable. A good recent example of success along these lines is the Agenda 21 on Sustainable Construction publication that emerged out of a core group encouraged and supported by the CIB and linked to a series of themed events including the World Congress in Gävle last year.

Membership of CIB is, of course, voluntary and so engaging in joint activities must be attractive so that individuals are motivated to, at least, take part and, at best, take a lead in a group. Time is always precious and so collaboration needs to be made as easy as possible. Having the web is making a significant difference. In addition CIB has a commitment to publish members' outputs, subject to demonstrable editorial judgement and control within the project group.

Currently the conference paper type of book is a valuable resource, but it is hardly agenda-setting. This is where carefully crafted, not necessarily long, but convincingly argued strategic reports, research agendas and speculations should be contributing. Such outputs would be vital to Government funders in choosing their research priorities, they would influence the direction of individual researchers and, repeated over time, they could be used as a way of showing the advancing base-line in the full range of research areas covered by CIB.

Reports like these, with influence and status would be worth contributing to, but the CIB community needs to really work together if this level of impact is to be achieved. There is currently a reassessment

of the landscape covered by all of the CIB Commissions and Task Groups. Out of this some generic areas are emerging which could create a focus for concerted collaborative efforts. These could well receive support from the CIB's proactive (investment) approach.

For construction research to come of age the state of the art in key areas needs to be agreed, consensual paradigms generated and rapid progress made on clearly identified, high priority issues. These issues cannot be parochial. Construction research is there to help construction do what it does better, but also to stimulate it to do things differently, where the industry is currently ineffective. Construction can be ineffective when it loses sight of its role as a key change agent for the built environment, which itself is a key enabler for society in pursuit of its aims.

The CIB has long been an organisation with world-wide coverage; it now needs to start operating with global impact.

**Peter Barrett**

