

W055 - Building Economics and W065 - Organisation & Management of Construction Joint Triennial Symposium

With the participation of:

- W092 - Procurement Systems
- TG29 - Construction in Developing Countries
- TG31 - Macro-Economic Data for the Construction Industry
- TG35 - Innovation Systems in Construction

Customer Satisfaction: A Focus for Research and Practice in Construction

By all accounts the W055 and W065 Joint Triennial Symposium held with the participation of W092, W099, TG29, TG31 and TG35 more than lived up to its theme of Customer Satisfaction: A focus for research and practice in construction. In fact this was confirmed by a survey undertaken near the end.

With four different Working Commissions and three Task Groups associated with it to varying degrees an impressive array of expertise could be brought to bear on the subject matter under discussion. The results have been given permanent form in Proceedings on CD Rom (see [here](#) for ordering). (Some of these Groups held their own meetings there and an account is given elsewhere.)

The central role in planning and organising this event was taken by Bob Hindle at the University of Cape Town and he and his team of colleagues saw their long time efforts more than justly rewarded.

He has written up a report on the Symposium which does highlight the notable variety on offer to participants - from the social as well as the scientific sides.

He also mentions those aspects which made this event somewhat special, even among the heavy weight programme which CIB puts on.

A Report by R.D. Hindle

During September 1999 one hundred and sixty delegates, from thirty five countries, attended this week-long Symposium in Cape Town. A number of features made this Symposium different; the number of special interest groups that came together to address a single theme, the fact that a research agenda resulted from the Proceedings, that Proceedings were published in CD Rom format, the number of African countries that were represented, and a topic that seemed to offer a common linkage between construction industry problems in both developing and developed countries.

A Moving Experience

Another unusual feature was the number of accompanying persons who came to see South Africa with their partners. All were able to join-in at a number of well attended events, which began with a welcoming function, held at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, where old friendships were renewed and new ones made inside the bowels of a huge aquarium. The event was shared and witnessed by a variety of large fish, including barracuda and ragged-toothed sharks which peered down upon the proceedings, doubtless wondering why these land mammals did not think to jump into the tanks instead of just pouring litres of liquid into their bodies! On day two, a cultural tour saw the delegates undergoing

an historical tour of urban housing developments, unique because they were 'shaped' by apartheid policies. The group was invited into a township community by the residents who showed them around and discussed aspects of their daily life. On the way back to the conference hotels, sundowners and snacks were enjoyed on the shores of Table Bay. As the sun set behind the mountains, the party exchanged impressions and all agreed that it had been a most moving experience, one not to be forgotten, despite unfriendly weather conditions. The symposium dinner was held at a restaurant on an old wine estate. After drinks in the manor house in the company of a cheetah, delegates were entertained by a top South African musical group consisting of drums, marimbas and dancing girls, and, of course, a few lucky persons were invited to join in! (Sorry, no photographs.)

Comprehensive and Productive

But the serious side of the Symposium was also a great success. Each day began with a plenary session in which ten keynote speakers addressed the main theme or a particular sub-theme. Following this, 120 papers were presented in sub-theme parallel sessions over three and a half days with a half day for various Commission meetings (reports appear elsewhere) and the fifth day used to 'workshop' issues that were seen to be important to the achievement of customer satisfaction. Three workshop groups benefited from a lively exchange of ideas which resulted in the identification of a number of future research 'thrusters'.

The award of a 'best-paper' was another aspect which created interest, particularly when the award was made at the symposium dinner. The Referees and Raporteurs had short-listed five papers and were unable to decide between two of them and so they both received best paper award:

- M. Bresnen and N. Marshall of Warwick Business School for their paper "Achieving Customer Satisfaction? Client-contractor collaboration in the UK construction industry"
- H.M. Galha, University of Reading, for her paper "A Perceptual Appraisal of Design Quality"



A strong injection of local flavour spiced up the official Symposium dinner.

In choosing the 'theme' for the symposium the organisers acknowledged two major forces of change that are impacting upon the construction process. They are, 'customer demands' and advances made in 'management theory and practice', particularly marketing. The selection of keynote speakers was based

upon their expertise as presenters in a given topic area, and to be representative of the delegate mix. They were used to define a range of potential customer groups, to discuss what their particular demands may be and to raise critical questions about them and the industry's approach to them. The choice of keynote speakers is often controversial and in this instance many thought that there was too much emphasis on British issues and British speakers but two key factors influenced this:

- The greatest number of papers were presented by British academics (35%; Second largest at 12% were Australians and so an Australian Keynote speaker was chosen. Another hailed from Singapore and the balance were from the host country.)
- British attempts at construction industry development seem to be leading towards the creation of 'customer satisfaction' and this was juxtaposed with similar initiatives being undertaken in South Africa where different strategies have evolved.

Significantly, the content of most papers and the results of a survey of delegates showed that most were in agreement that the traditional construction process does not offer customer satisfaction and that major change is necessary, if meaningful progress is to be made towards the achievement of customer satisfaction through construction.

Towards the end of the event a survey was undertaken which revealed that the organisers had achieved their objectives in a manner that had generated a high degree of customer satisfaction. - The event was a great success!

Bob Hindle

A Balancing Act



Peter Barrett

During the closing session W065 Coordinator Prof. Peter Barrett took on the tricky task of summarising some of the conclusions relating to the concept of Customer Satisfaction. Balancing the complex interests and issues involved called for a juggler's skills.

SPECIAL NOTE

Global Research Agenda

The final day of the Symposium featured three parallel discussion sessions whose aim was to prepare

aspects of a Global Research Agenda on Customer Satisfaction in Construction. The results from those sessions and from the subsequent work of a small group of editors under the leadership of Peter Lansley are expected to be available for publication in the next issue of CIB Information.

