



## CIB NEWS ARTICLE

International Council for Research and Innovation  
in Building and Construction

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August 2010

### Around the Task Groups and Working Commissions

#### TG76 - Recognising Innovation in Construction

### TG76 Website - Debate Report

by

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#### Recognising Innovation

Recognising Innovation is the name of CIB's Task Group TG76, which is coordinated by Carl Abbott (University of Salford, UK) and Professor Andy Dainty (Loughborough University, UK). The Task Group was launched in Dubrovnik in September 2009, held a well attended debate at the CIB World Congress on the motion that 'Construction is a low innovation sector'. The debate was followed by the TG76 business meeting, which has set out a full programme of work for the next two years. More details of the aims of the Task Group, the debate and its future activities are given below.

#### Background to Task Group

TG76 has its origins in a common interest in innovation from its two coordinators who bring very different experiences and perspectives on innovation. The common ground for Carl and Andy's perspectives lies in their shared belief that existing models, metrics and proxies are inadequate for either recognising the nature of innovation within the industry, or in acting as a theoretical framework for understanding it.

The Task Group was launched in Dubrovnik in September 2009. The starting point was an assertion that there was an urgent need for investment in and exploitation of prioritised innovation activities that are informed by a detailed picture of the scale, scope and impact of innovation. At present, much of the innovation within construction is not recognised as such, and so is not reflected in traditional indicators such as investments in formal research and development or patents awarded. However, it is this unrecognised innovation which, the co-ordinators believe, has the greatest impact on the real practice and performance of these sectors and which lies at the heart of performance improvement within the sector. By exploring new perspectives on innovation, and by

combining multiple viewpoints within a broad exploratory framework, a much more robust understanding of innovation would emerge. The overall aims of the Task Group are therefore:

- to bring together international perspectives on innovation in the built environment from socio-technical and socio-economic perspectives.
- to develop context sensitive ways of recognising and measuring innovation.
- to make an explicit contribution to the CIB Revaluing Construction agenda by further understanding the 'soft' and 'hard' impacts of the built environment.
- to develop a proposal for a new Working Commission which integrates the innovation agenda across the portfolio of CIB Working Commissions and Task Groups.

Realising these aims requires the Task Group to bring together the experience and expertise of researchers and practitioners who would not have otherwise interacted with each other and to enable these groups to develop, share and disseminate appropriate research methodologies, insights from practice and theoretical perspectives which reveal the nature of innovation in construction at firm, sector and national levels. It is hoped that through these activities TG76 can encourage new collaborative, multi-disciplinary research across the international community.

#### TG76 Innovation Debate: 'Construction is a Low Innovation Sector'

As there was a comparatively short period between the Task Group Launch and the World Congress it was decided that rather than try to have a conventional paper session a debate around a key issue would best bring researchers together as the first step in progressing the TG agenda. Although TG76 is closely associated with the work of W065 and its related task groups, its remit clearly spans many other working

commissions and Task Groups. Hence, the CIB World Congress provided an ideal opportunity to bring together an eclectic mix of perspectives on innovation in construction and its measurement from across the CIB constituencies.



The TG76 debate and discussion was attended by over 70 delegates, this despite the packed programme and large number of competing sessions and meetings. This suggests a latent demand for a Task Group, which explores these issues.

**The Emerging TG76 Position**

The themes emerging from the positions and ensuing debate have helped to frame an agenda for the Task Group, which is broad enough to incorporate the multiplicity of perspectives, which emerged throughout the afternoon. The foundation for this emerging position is the broad consensus that assertions of construction being a 'low innovation' sector are flawed, and based on a weak evidence base. It would seem appropriate that TG76 questions this assertion, particularly as official statistics fail to recognize the true extent and nature of innovation in the sector and how it plays out within and across organizations. The debate highlighted the gap between current theoretical understanding and measures of innovation and the reality of innovation as it is enacted in practice. Indeed, assertions of construction being a low innovation sector appear symptomatic of a poor understanding of construction organizations and the operating environment within which they are located.

Reconceptualising the nature of innovation in the sector would have significant implications for future research and practice. Combining different theoretical perspectives on innovation research and measurement would provide a fuller recognition of the innovation that is largely absent from existing debates. It would highlight the importance of understanding the situated nature of innovation, and would provide a context-sensitive picture of its scale, scope and impact.

The event brought together international perspectives to debate the motion that 'Construction is a Low Innovation Sector.' Following a brief introduction by the co-ordinators, invited speakers had 5 minutes to provide their differing perspectives on this issue in order to stimulate the debate which was then opened to the floor. The speakers were chosen to reflect differing international, theoretical and practical perspectives. Each of the presentations can be viewed at the TG website of [www.recognisinginnovation.org](http://www.recognisinginnovation.org).

**Recorded Speakers**

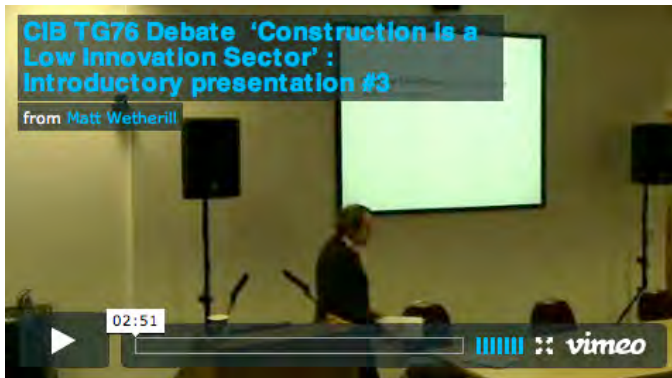
First speaker was: Dr.ir.ing. Wilco Tjihuis. Wilco is co-founder and board member of the holding company NTGroep ([www.ntgroep.com](http://www.ntgroep.com)) where he is responsible for strategy, business and development. Wilco is Joint Coordinator of CIB Working Commission W112 on Culture in Construction.



Second speaker was: Professor Paolo Tombesi. Paolo is Chair of Construction, in the Faculty of Architecture Building & Planning at the University of Melbourne.



Third speaker was: Professor Chris Woods: Chris is a visiting Professor at Salford University and the R&D Director at Wates Construction



A fresh research agenda is required to provide the necessary foundation for understanding the true extent and nature of innovation in construction. However, this framework must be flexible enough to take into account multiple and parallel perspectives on innovation, the levels alluded to in the debate and its measurement and its management. Further, it should enable the complex and interconnected ways within which innovation happens in practice to be better understood.

The coordinators will use this emerging position to frame the ongoing work of the TG.

### Follow on Activity

TG76 is aligned with Working Commission W065 (Management & Organisation in Construction). The next conference of this Working Commission is June 2011 in the Netherlands. TG76 will be having a special paper track at this conference entitled 'Perspectives on Innovation'. We would welcome contributions to this track, which relate to the core themes covered by the TG. The best papers from the conference will be included in a special edition of the Journal of Construction Innovation to be edited by Carl and Andrew. A selection will also be invited to be developed into chapters for a new book on innovation, which will form the capstone for the TG's activities. The book, to be published in 2012 will bring together the best work from the TG around the emerging innovation shaped by the TG membership.

Another activity planned for W065 is a joint debate session held in conjunction with TG78 (Informality and emergence in construction) on deconstructing paradoxes in construction. Given the multifarious and contested nature of innovation and its conceptualisation this provides the opportunity to debate how these are dealt with when seeking to encourage innovative practices. We are also working

with TG71 (Research and innovation transfer) to explore the synergies between our respective agendas. See also a separate News article with a Call for Papers for a special issue of the CIB Encouraged Journal "Construction Innovation" ([here](#)).

### The TG76 Website and Blog

The coordinators have received considerable correspondence since the debate from participants who wanted to share their thoughts and perspectives on innovation within the sector. In order to extend the debate, and to continue to refine the scope of the TG we have set up a website and Blog. The website ([www.recognisinginnovation.org](http://www.recognisinginnovation.org)) contains podcasts of the debate positions, the aims and objectives of the TG, news and events linked to the TG and comment and opinion from its members.

We would encourage members of the TG, and those interested in contributing to the debate, to post their ideas and contributions and to respond to the discussion threads, which have already emerged. We hope that this will eventually provide the research community with an enduring resource of innovation perspectives, which can help to inform ongoing debates around how we capture and learn from innovative practices within the industry.

### Additional Information

For more information and to become a member of TG76 contact Carl Abbott ([c.abbott@salford.ac.uk](mailto:c.abbott@salford.ac.uk)) or Andy Dainty ([A.R.J.Dainty@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:A.R.J.Dainty@lboro.ac.uk))



You can find more information on the activities of CIB TG76 at [www.cibworld.nl](http://www.cibworld.nl) -Databases-select "Go to Database" - in the shown search engine: type TG76 in the field "Commission number".