



INNOVATION & SMEs PROGRAMME

CONSTRINNONET

PROJECT

FINAL REPORT: ANNEX 7

(Project Deliverable D3-2)

Final International Seminar

JULY 2004

Contract Number:	IPS - 2000 - 00002
Project Acronym:	CONSTRINNONET
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INNOVATION & SMEs PROGRAMME

CONSTRINNONET Project “Promoting Innovation in Construction Industry SMEs”

Work Package 3 Report – Deliverable D3-2 REPORT ON THE FINAL INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

1. Introduction

The closing CONSTRINNONET International Seminar took place on 17 and 18 May 2004 at the CUBE Building (Centre for the Understanding of the Built Environment) in Manchester, United Kingdom.

Two organisation meetings were organised in preparation of the event - the first on 2 September 2003 in Brussels, the second on 26 January 2004 in Manchester. At these meetings, it was decided to organise the final event in two days, with one day focusing on presentations from the CONSTRINNONET project and interesting representatives of the construction sector and innovation support. The second day would then focus more on the future after the CONSTRINNONET project and would discuss possibilities for a setting up a new (European) project on construction innovation.

2. Audience

All CONSTRINNONET partners distributed invitations for the Seminar to their local network of construction professionals. A first invitation to potential participants was launched in February 2004 with an electronic mailing (see Annex). In the beginning of May 2004, a reminder mail was sent to the partner's contacts, including the invitation flyer of the Seminar (see Annex). Further promotion of the Seminar was made online, through the Centre for Construction Innovation – CCI (<http://www.ccinw.com>).

In total, the two-day seminar was attended by 25 participants from 7 European Member States. A copy of the participants list can be found in Annex to this report.

3. Review on the course of the seminar

A copy of the programme of the seminar, as well as the presentations given during both days, can be found in the Annex to this report, which is presented on the CD attached.

Monday 17 May 2004

Mr. Ian Cooper from Eclipse Research Consultants acted as the chairman of the seminar.

The seminar started with an interesting presentation by **Mr. Dimitris Skalkos** from the University of Ionnina in Greece. He outlined the different dimensions of innovation, i.e. the European (or global) dimension and the company dimension. With regard to the European dimension, Mr. Skalkos highlighted the current situation using European statistics. Furthermore, he explained the strategies for the future on innovation that have been formulated for the European Union. From the company perspective, the focus was on innovation management techniques and a methodological approach on how to measure and stimulate innovation in small and even very small (< 10 employees) companies.

After this, **Mr. Vesa Peltonen**, representative of the E-CORE (European Construction Research) Network, presented the E-CORE activities with regard to the development of a strategy for the future of European construction research. First, he introduced the E-CORE network, the partnership, the objectives and the activities. Then Mr. Peltonen continued with explaining the work on the E-CORE strategy. The strategy aims at identifying research

priorities through which the construction industry will be able to contribute to the high-level European objectives which were set out at the Lisbon and Gothenburg summits, such as a knowledge-based economy, a sustainable development and environment, a high quality of life for all, improved employment, international competitiveness and guaranteed safety at work and at home.

Mrs. Katrien Putzeys from the Belgian Building Research Institute, completed the morning session with a presentation on the background and objectives of the CONSTRINNONET project. She started with a general description of construction as the economically most important industry in Europe, both in turnover and employment. She also demonstrated the SME character of the industry. Mrs. Putzeys then continued with an explanation of the term 'innovation'. To illustrate this, she showed a number of high-tech innovations from the construction sector and other industries. This led to a summary of the CONSTRINNONET objectives and activities: the was to investigate the mechanisms behind these successful innovations and to promote these mechanisms in order to stimulate the sector to innovate more and better. The most interesting mechanisms have been tested by the partners in regional pilot actions.

After the lunch break, **Mr. Ivor Richards**, from Richards, Moorehead & Laing, presented the experiences of a small consultancy firm in the construction sector with regard to the implementation of innovation. First, he described the difficulties the firm has known as a result of the continuous traditional way of working. Then, Mr. Richards emphasised the change in mentality in the firm, which proved to be crucial for the survival of the company. A more innovative approach to the business activities was implemented and since then, the company has been growing steadily.

Subsequently, a number of regional innovation support initiatives taking place across Europe were presented by **Mr. James Dick** from the Business Enterprise Services in Europe. He started with an overview of the regional innovation financial support mechanisms in Europe, i.e. Innovative Actions 2001/06, RIS-RITTS, RIS-NAC, FP6 and INTERREG IIIC, and 4 existing key networks: IRE – Innovating Regions in Europe Network, IRC – Innovation Relay Centres Network, EBN - European BIC Network, EIC – Euro Info Centres. This was followed by some more information on the RIS-RITTS programme. Finally, Mr. Dick described his observations of the construction industry (little innovation!) and how the sector could start to turn this around through networking.

The last presentation of the day was given by **Mrs. Leena Sarvaranta** from VTT. In her presentation, Mrs. Sarvaranta quickly reminded the participants about the general thinking that had led to the establishment of the CONSTRINNONET project, i.e. little innovation in an economically very important sector. Then, she described the learning process which took place throughout the project, for example the need for different strategies at different interaction levels. Finally she made some recommendations - on the one hand directly towards the service providers, and on the other hand towards policy makers at the European level. These recommendations should lead to more and better innovation activities in the construction sector.

The presentations were followed by a discussion session on all of the topics which were treated during the day. All participants were also asked to write down a key message to the project team as well as a recommended action for the most significant stakeholder concerned

with construction innovation. A summary of the discussions and these messages can be found in Annex to this report.

The day was concluded with a reception at the Manchester Town Hall.

Tuesday 18 May 2004

The second day of the seminar was aimed at discussing the possibilities for setting up a follow-up project after the end of CONSTRINNONET. A full report on the second day, including a participants list, is annexed to this report.

Mr. Miguel Angel Garcia prepared a presentation sketching the aim of such a future project and the existing funding opportunities in Europe.

He launched the idea for setting up a Construction innovation & technology network at EU level entitled: "European Construction innovation& technology network. A technology observatory and a frame for supporting services for the construction industry at EU level." The following aspects were addressed:

- A preface, based on some CONSTRINNONET ideas
- Description of the idea
- Objectives of the project
- Proposal of a Structure of a potential network
- Strategy& approach to be taken into account for this project
- Potential partners and their roles

A description of some potential financial sources from the EU was made, including programmes, conditions and deadlines.

The programmes and instruments were identified according to their relevance for the network's objectives:

- FP6 (CA, ETI,..)
- INTERREG IIIB SUDOE and IIIC
- Other instruments for Regional support...(EUREKA Umbrella,...)

The ETI instrument was identified as a tool for the presentation of a proposal but nowadays there isn't opened a call to submit a proposal.

The INTERREG programme was identified to be interesting but a concurrence with public bodies and institutions in the partnership is needed.

The most convenient instrument was considered to be INTERREG IIIC, which deadline closes on 31 October 2004, covering regions all around the EU.

4. Evaluation of the seminar

The participants in the seminar were asked to fill out a short evaluation form with questions about their appreciation of the seminar. A copy of the evaluation form can be found in Annex to this report. 14 completed evaluation forms were received, which corresponds with more than 50% of the participants. The responses can therefore reflect the overall appreciation of the event.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the background of the participants. It appears that the larger part of the audience were representatives from education and research. Although the aim was also to involve as much as possible the construction sector directly, only a small part of the participants came from the industry.

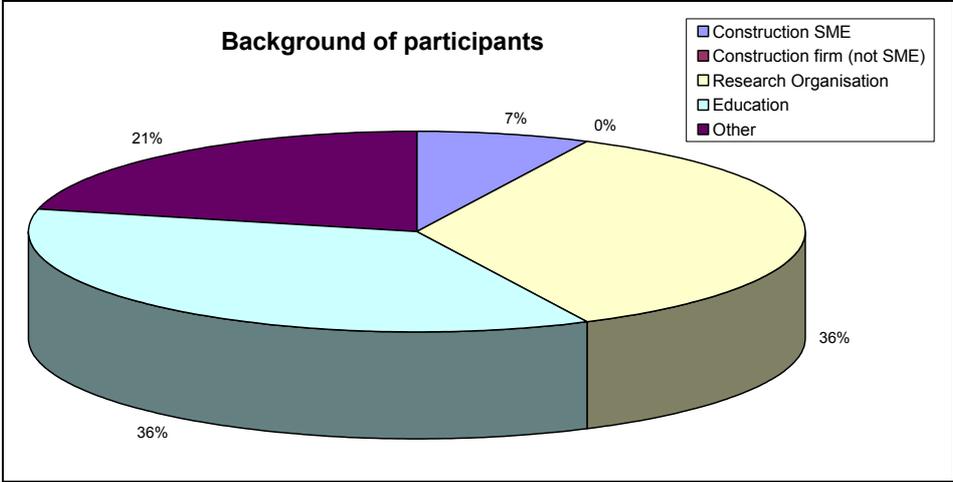


Figure 1: Background of participants

From figure 2, we can conclude that a personal contact with a CONSTRINNONET partner was the most important channel through which participants were invited for the seminar. This clearly illustrates the importance of setting up networking activities, as this is the best way to make contacts with possibilities for future collaboration. Also the online invitation appeared to be quite successful, as 21% of the participants registered after seeing the website announcement.

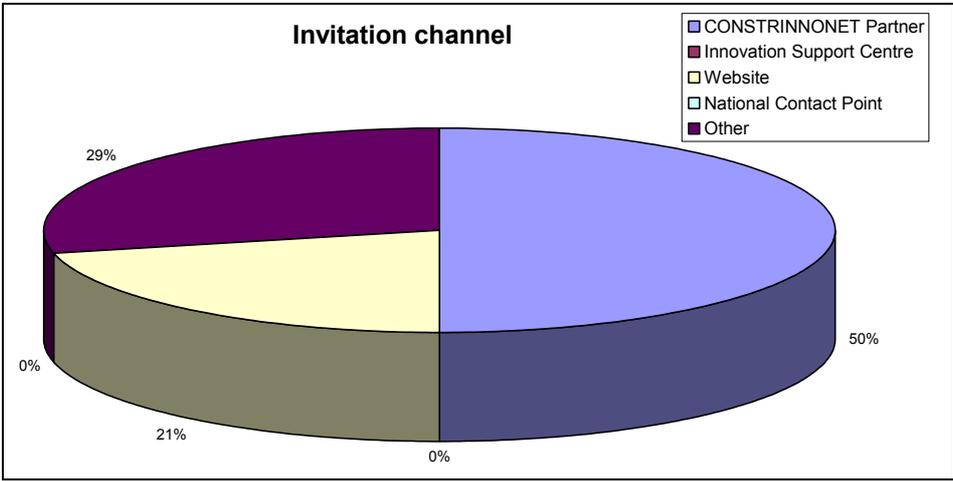


Figure 2: Channel through which participants were invited

The other questions in the evaluation form were inquiring about the appreciation of the participants for the seminar. Figures 3 and 4 show that the seminar structure, with presentations on the first day and discussions about the future on the second day, and the practical organisation was highly appreciated. Indeed, also the average overall score for the appreciation of the seminar was very high, i.e. 85/100.

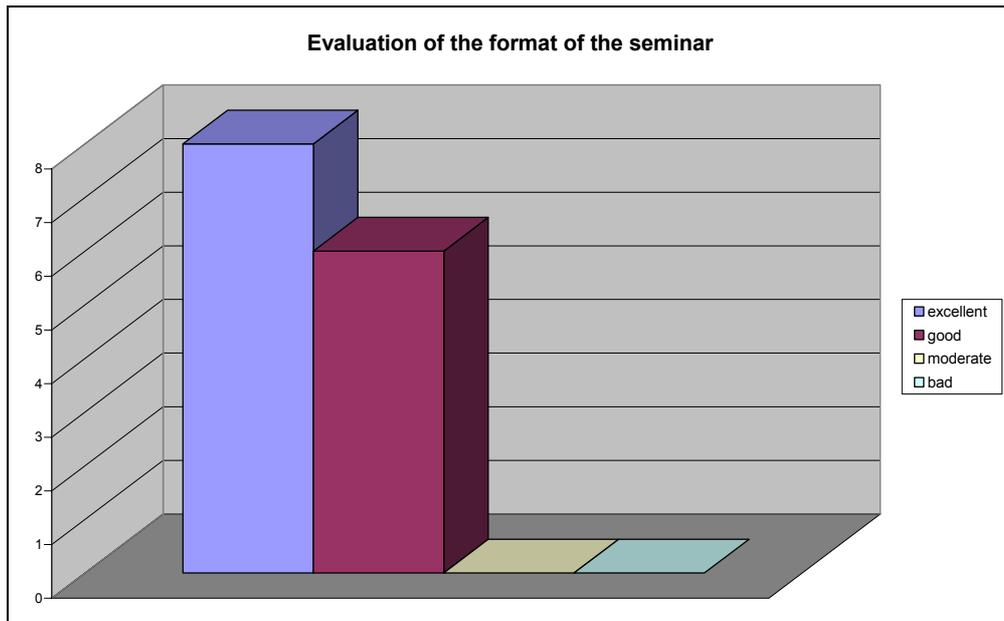


Figure 3: Evaluation of the structure of the seminar

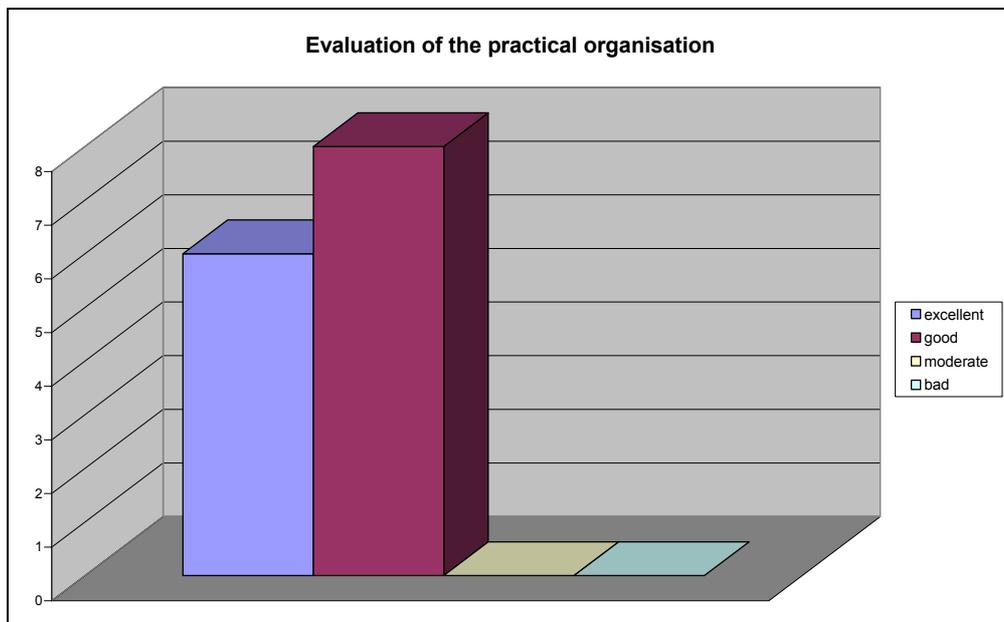


Figure 4: Evaluation of the practical organisation

In the third question, the participants were asked to give their view on the most significant evolutions in a number of aspects relating to the construction sector:

- New needs of users and clients
- New policies / legal requirements affecting the sector
- New technology or processes
- Way the sector operates / is organised
- Ways to support innovation in construction SMEs

The responses highlighted the importance of a better understanding of the customers' needs and, related to this, predicted a growing importance of accessibility and adaptability of buildings. Other important factors will be the implementation of environmental aspects into legislation and the uptake of IT technological developments in the construction process.

Finally, with regard to innovation, the participants stressed on the importance of easy-access information channels for construction companies.

5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the final International CONSTRINNONET Seminar in May 2004 was successful. Although the original target of 50 to 100 participants was not reached, the event has given the CONSTRINNONET project a worthy closing. All participants had a very good appreciation of both seminar and the activities of the project in general.

The seminar demonstrated once more that networking activities in Europe can contribute to the overall aim of the CONSTRINNONET project, which was to find better and easier ways for SMEs to innovate and to get (financial) support for these activities. Through networking, information and experiences can be shared, which leads to win-win situation for all parties involved.

The discussions on the second day of the seminar also showed that there is interest in setting up a new project to continue the activities that were started by the CONSTRINNONET project. It remains to be investigated which approach should be best followed, but it is clear that the efforts made will continue in the future.