

BCR

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Issue 1

Building Control Report

Value of Building Control

THE VALUE OF BUILDING CONTROL

1. The Consortium of European Building Control (CEBC) provides a forum where those responsible for the content of Building Regulations in European countries, together with those who carry out technical assessments and try to ensure compliance, can meet and exchange views on matters of mutual interest. It generally holds two meetings each year to which all members are invited. At the end of 2011, there were 22 countries in membership, including Israel, together with an observer from the USA.
2. In recent years, the value of the building control system in a number of countries seems to have been increasingly questioned, with some Member States pursuing a deregulatory agenda. The Consortium therefore decided to undertake an analysis of the perceived value of building control. This analysis took the form of an in-depth debate at the meeting of the Consortium held in Paris in October 2011, at which the following 16 countries were represented: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel; Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Scotland, and Sweden. Participants were divided into five groups, with rapporteurs from Austria, Germany, Croatia, Norway and England. This report is based on the responses provided by the rapporteurs, and the points made in the subsequent general debate.
3. The following eight questions were addressed:-
 - Q1 - Does building control in your country assist in reducing building defects and enhancing building quality, and what hard evidence do you have of the reductions and enhancements made?
 - Q2 - Is building control seen as providing consumer protection, and if so can the effects of this be quantified?
 - Q3 - Your building control system provides measures of public protection covering both health and safety. Can you provide examples of how

these measures benefit the public, and please give quantitative evidence of the value of these benefits?

- Q4 - Paying for building control provides value for developers and investors in protecting against future problems. Can you estimate how much value these people get for every Euro they pay to the building control provider or suggest ways in which such information might be gathered?
- Q5 - Building upon the recent work on sustainability undertaken for the European Commission under the Lead Market Initiative, in what ways does your building control system incorporate “green issues”? Can the benefits of these be quantified? What is understood by the term “green issues” in your country?
- Q6 - Are you aware of any studies undertaken in your country on the relative merits of building control v. insurance v. licensing of contractors?
- Q7 - Does building control in your country have any role in ensuring that the common European market is functioning (for example, checking to see whether CE marked products are incorporated in construction works)? Do you think that this should be a building control issue?
- Q8 - What is the ranking of building control contributions to public policies in your country (for example, first “health and safety”, second “energy efficiency”, third “consumer protection)?

4. The paragraphs below summarise the answers given.

Reducing building defects and enhancing building quality

- 5. All countries were agreed that these were among the principle objectives of building control systems. However, there is little hard evidence to demonstrate how effective these systems are in delivering these aims.
- 6. The results of building control activities are often only visible only after some disaster (earthquake, fire etc.) when the relative performance of different buildings can be compared. Buildings built to modern Building Regulations are

often seen to perform better than older ones or ones built in breach of the Regulations.

7. In some countries there have been attempts to collect relevant information. For example in England and Wales there have been recent studies made of the number of interventions made by building control professionals in checking plans and carrying out inspections on site. Some of these interventions indicate the defects that would have occurred had there not been an intervention. In Hungary, there are results of random inspections made on certain buildings. In Poland the state agency has some data on severe safety defects.
8. Most countries accepted that it would be valuable to do further work on trying to demonstrate quantitatively the benefits of building control systems. **The Consortium already has in hand a study of building defects. It might wish to consider further what else might be done, and whether it is possible to develop common methodology across Europe.**

Providing consumer protection

9. Although consumer protection is rarely stated as an objective of building control in European countries, the concensus of Consortium members was that this is increasingly seen as an important role for building control systems. Examples include energy efficiency, sound insulation and the adaptability of dwellings for lifetime living, including for disabled living.
10. However, there was a general feeling that we do not do enough to promote building control to the general public, and consumers are often ignorant of the protection which is being provided. Both regulators and enforcers in member countries should do more in this regard. **The Consortium might wish to consider whether there is a need for some initiative at European level, perhaps involving the Commission.**

Providing public protection

11. All countries agreed that a principal objective of building control systems is to protect the public as well as the occupiers of buildings. In recent years, countries

have been particularly concerned about structural stability, with a growing number of building collapses due at least in part to the more severe winters being experienced (eg in Finland, Israel and Norway). Other examples of protecting the public are through providing adequate means of escape in case of fire, and ensuring adequate indoor air quality.

12. However, once again there is little quantitative evidence of the value of providing public protection. **The Consortium might wish to consider whether a common methodology for evaluation can be developed.**

The value of building control for developers and investors

13. The view of most participants in this exercise is that building control is seen by these parties as an unavoidable cost in undertaking construction projects. There is little evidence of valuation being undertaken, although in one country it has been estimated that for every Euro spent on building control five Euros are saved in reducing building defects and avoiding later remedial works.

Incorporation of “Green Issues”

14. In recent years, green issues have become a key priority for building control systems in most European countries. These have so far been limited to energy efficiency in most countries, but in some, other countries sustainability issues are now addressed in the Regulations, for example water efficiency in domestic properties in England and Wales. There is an expectation that more issues will be addressed in subsequent years.

Building Control v. Insurance v. Licensing

15. Member countries were not aware of any comprehensive studies of this nature. Some countries adopt elements of more than one of these alternative systems, generally some Building Regulations backed by insurance-driven warranties or

latent defects insurance for certain types of building. The need for these dual systems is currently being addressed in some of these countries especially where public and private sectors are competing in very competitive business environments. Some participants felt that in the future the only way investors will have the confidence to fund projects and protect their investment and financial exposure is through requiring insurance backed guarantees

The functioning of the Common Market

16. The monitoring of compliance with European standards on construction products is supported by member countries, but it is not generally undertaken by building control but rather by another central or local government agency such as trading standards. It is felt that this should remain the case or else the necessary resources devoted to building control would be lessened.

The ranking of building control contributions

- 1 - Health and Safety
- 2 - Energy Efficiency
- 3 - Consumer Protection.

