

## **Employment practices in new organisational forms for the well-being of the European Construction Industry**

*Date/Time:* Wednesday 10 December 2008

*Location:* HRM Suite, Room M215, University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS

We are pleased to announce a joint Association of Researchers in Construction Management (ARCOM) and European Institute of Construction Labour Research (CLR) Research Workshop on Employment Practices. Supported by ARCOM, as well as CLR, the British Council and Platform Bèta Techniek, this workshop seeks to bring together researchers from both the UK and the Netherlands to debate and discuss on employment practices in new organisational forms in labour-intensive industries for the benefit of European Construction Industry. Limited funding is available to fund travel, especially for Dutch researchers working (or are simply interested) in this area.

Europe is currently at the forefront of dynamic change. For example, EU expansion brings about immense opportunities deriving from a growing and vibrant economic market. However, this is also matched with the challenges of dealing with the influences of *inter alia* global competition (esp. from the BRIC nations<sup>1</sup>) and the need for sustainable working practices in view of climate change and effects of global warming. At the same time, political and corporate supporters of the free movement of workers (Cremers and Donders, 2004) consider the flexible labour market to be extremely beneficial for the economy, whilst there is the danger that this is at the expense of the worker (Ruhs, 2006). Concomitantly, corporate organisations all across the globe are also going through changing forms. The increasing trend of contracting-out and practices of outsourcing have resulted in many firms becoming what is known as “hollowed-out” organisations (Castells, 2002). This means that many firms no longer undertake the task of production, but merely manage the process of production.

These developments inevitably transform employment practices across Europe, especially in labour-intensive industries. Take the European construction sector, for example, which contributed 10% of Europe’s GDP with a turnover of 1 trillion euros in 2006 (FIEC 2007). Increasing mobility of workers across national and regional boundaries has given rise to the ‘Polish’ builder phenomenon in the UK (Mandelson, 2006). The employment of Polish workers has temporarily plugged the skills shortage problem faced in UK construction. However, this in turn presents challenges of managing worker health and safety and poses possible problems with finding substitution if they leave. Furthermore, it does little to resolve the construction sector’s endemic vocational training problem. More generally, perpetuation of sub-contracting and the phenomenon of having extended supply chains in construction have resulted in short-term economic benefits for firms on the one hand, but a lack of clarity in terms of employer liability for the welfare of workers on the other. Similar observations have recently been made on the equally mobile seasonal workers in across the European agricultural sector (Siecker, 2007).

Therefore, the objectives of the workshop are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> BRIC nations include Brazil, Russia, India and China

- There is an urgent need to critically examine employment practices given changing organisational forms and the contemporary issue of free movement of workers across the EU;
- More specifically, the workshop will highlight research that investigates the economic and social benefits and challenges of managing people across organisational and geographical boundaries;
- Workshop participants will be able to discuss the impacts of such practices on employment relations, worker welfare and skills training and development;
- Additionally, the workshop will provide a useful opportunity for participants to discuss methodological challenges in the field when collecting and making sense of the data on how people are managed in new organisational forms in labour intensive industries in Europe, and;
- Finally, there will also be a strong connection of this workshop to the policy arena, whether this relates to governmental or corporate policy.

### **References:**

- Castells, M. (2002) Internet and the network enterprise. Plenary address given to the *18th EGOS (European Group for Organizational Studies) Colloquium*, Barcelona, July 4.
- Cremers, J. and Donders, P. (Eds.) (2004) *The free movement of workers in the European Union*. Brussels: Reed Business Information.
- FIEC (European Construction Industry Federation (2007) *Construction Activity in Europe*, Brussels
- Mandelson, P. (2006) The Polish plumber and the Chinese textile worker: Europe's response to economic change. Speech presented to the Polish Enterprise Council. 2 June, Warsaw, Poland.
- Ruhs, M (2006) *Greasing the wheels of the flexible labour market: East European labour immigration in the UK*. WP 38, Oxford: COMPAS.
- Siecker, M. (2007) Opinion of the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment. Brussels: European Economic and Social Committee.

## Provisional Programme on Wednesday 10 December 2008

Time	Description	Speaker
1000 – 1015	Welcome and setting the scene	Paul W Chan Northumbria University
1015 – 1115	Theme 1: Government issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government policy affecting skills and vocational training in construction</li> <li>• Challenges in researching labour practices and relations in tracing architectural history of buildings in production</li> </ul>	Kate Ness University of Reading  Nicholas Beech Bartlett School of Architecture
1115 – 1145	<i>Coffee/tea on the run</i>	
1145 – 1245	Theme 2: Firm-level issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues and challenges with strategic human resourcing in construction</li> <li>• Inter-organisational communication dynamics: implications for the control and organisation of work</li> <li>• SME strategies in employee development</li> </ul>	Ani Raiden Nottingham Trent University  Chris Gorse Leeds Metropolitan University  Robert C Moehler Northumbria University
1245 – 1345	<i>Lunch</i>	
1345 – 1445	Theme 3: Worker issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers management in the boundary-less organisation</li> <li>• Low wage research programme</li> </ul>	Joseph Gaiva Kappia Loughborough University  Marc van der Meer University of Amsterdam
1445 – 1500	<i>Coffee/tea on the run</i>	
1500 – 1630	Future scenarios of employment practices in European Construction	All

## **Informal Post-Workshop Event on Thursday 11 December 2008**

Interested participants are also invited to continue the discussions developed on Day 1 to further explore potential collaborations in terms of joint publications and/or research proposals. It is hoped that participants will engage in a discussion of a number of issues, including (although not exhaustively):

- What are the challenges of employment practices under new organisational forms in Europe's labour-intensive industries that are currently under-researched?
- What are some of the future issues in relation to employment practices in Europe's labour-intensive industries?
- How can this group address some of the research gaps identified during the workshop?
- How can the group bring in relevant expertise from the extended networks of individual participants?
- What are some of the practical action points for the future that can be taken to sustain the relationships and interactions forged throughout the workshop?