



4TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON CRAFT AND SMES – STUTTGART APRIL 2007

GOOD PRACTICES: COOPERATION BETWEEN SMALL ENTERPRISES

DAVID CROFT – PRESIDENT OF EUROPEAN BUILDERS CONFEDERATION

One page summary

The European Builders Confederation EBC is a form of cooperation between small enterprises at the European level. Through its 18 member and partner organisations across Europe, EBC groups about 600 000 Crafts and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises of the construction sector.

Cooperation between small enterprises is the history and the future of crafts and SMEs and it comes in several forms.

1. Professional organisations

The first form of cooperation is the establishment of professional associations, uniting crafts and SMEs under one name, in order to provide political support, fundamental services, answers to problems and an important venue for the exchange of concerns, problems and views.

These associations aim at a double sided goal: political representation and services to members.

Depending on the national features, their history and their development, these organisations come in different forms and shapes, as branches of big umbrella associations, as independent organisations or as guilds associations of professionals and it is also according to this that they predominantly focus either on the political representation mission or on the services mission.

2. Business-oriented cooperation

Another type of cooperation between small enterprises is a business oriented one: some or many small enterprises that form a consortium or a cooperative with the goal of becoming bigger and obviously reach a critical mass in order to widen their competition possibilities. We have two relevant examples, from Italy and from France.

CIPEA is a building cooperative of 600 SMEs from all over Italy specialised in public procurement, project financing and facility management. This is a very innovative and successful approach for the creation of market opportunities normally closed to SMEs.

FFACB is a French federation regrouping 130 cooperatives on the national territory, which are composed of SMEs which average 2 or 3 employees. These groups specialised in the construction of single houses, with crafts of all sectors working together on the same construction site.

3. Subcontracting: cooperation or dependence?

Subcontracting is in some ways a form of cooperation as well. But the question is: is it really a form of cooperation, or is it more a form of dependence? It is a predominant practice indeed, but it is sometimes unregulated and bears negative effects on subcontractors. That is why, a deeper analysis and regulatory intervention by the Commission is needed in order to make it a resource for SMEs.

4. Conclusion

Taking inspiration from the slogan of the 50th Anniversary of the EU, which we recently celebrated, cooperation between crafts and SMEs must be driven by the concept of wanting to work TOGETHER.