

## Regnier Traveling Fellowship

### “Hidden Costs and Challenges for International Constructors”

Monthly Report: May 2007

Mary Evans

#### What have I been up to?

The month of May has absolutely flown! I arrived in Detmold, Germany on May 17 to meet with a construction management group from the University of Florida-Gainesville, headed by Dr. Jimmie Hinze. The group of ten students was paired with host students from the Fachhochschule, a German university of building construction. I was assigned to live with three German students in their flat along with a UF student. This living arrangement worked out well for everyone and provided great opportunities to discuss the differences in our programs of study as well as our cultures.

The day after my arrival, the group took a tour of some of the infrastructure in Detmold before heading off for a whirlwind tour around eastern Germany. The focus of this trip was not only to examine building construction but to experience German history and culture as well, so our first stop was the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, after which we continued on to Berlin.

Over the next couple of days, the group took guided tours throughout Berlin with a focus on building history. We were able to tour the construction sites of the O2 stadium and the Alexa Shopping Center. These tours proved to be valuable assets towards my research in a variety of ways which will be outlined below.

On our way out of Berlin, we spent a day in Potsdam to see the castles Schloss Sanssouci and the Schloss Cecilienhof before heading to Dessau. Dessau is the home of the Bauhaus Foundation for modern architecture and design. The Bauhaus style can be seen throughout Germany and was an important part of German history and culture. We were able to take a guided tour of the Bauhaus to learn about the attributes and goals of the design and construction of such structures, as well as the problems that developed over time.

The last part of our trip was spent in Dresden. Dresden is a great point of interest for construction professionals because before 1990, the downtown area, which now is a bustling city center, was a desolate, flat, World War II scarred city. During the past 17 years, it has been extensively rebuilt to what it looked like before the war, but tower cranes still hover all over the area. Here we took a tour of the famous Church of Our Lady and also the Opera House (just recently finished), and walked a construction site of the Royal Palace, slated to be finished by 2010. We ended our trip with a stop in Leipzig on our way back to Detmold.

During this tour, our days were so densely packed with activities that I have spent the last few days in Detmold writing reports on the construction sites, continuing to develop contacts, and performing interviews with the faculty here at the Fachhochschule. This trip was a very valuable asset to my studies and having a home base, while being immersed into a new culture, has been essential. I am very thankful for this opportunity. June will begin my time on my own and I now feel confident that my journey will be an interesting, productive, and exciting experience of a lifetime.

## Uncovering the Hidden Costs and Challenges in International Construction

### Dr. Jimmie Hinze

Professor Jimmie Hinze, from the University of Florida-Gainesville, has been a very valuable contact. He has headed the study abroad program for his students for nine years now. His familiarity with Germany, the culture, and most of all, both American and German construction practices, provided me with a good basis for my research. Beyond a one on one interview, throughout the trip he would point out certain attributes and ask our tour guides questions to assist me in my research topic. He also went over my list of interview questions and made some revisions and about ten additions.

### Dr. Michael Jablonski

Dr. Jablonski, a professor at the Fachhochschule, has taught many of the students who accompanied us on the tour. I was referred to Dr. Jablonski due to his extensive knowledge of construction procurement, contracts and owner-architect relationships, as well as construction means and methods.

### The O2 Stadium

The tour of the O2 stadium was given by Bill Mannarelli, the project manager from the Icon Venue Group. Mr. Mannarelli has a degree in architecture from the United States but is only licensed in Germany. He speaks German fluently and has provided me with the most information so far. After explaining to him my research topic, we walked the jobsite and he pointed out numerous differences between stateside construction and German construction. These differences covered numerous topics from the multi-tiering of subcontractor work and contracts, lack of general contractor self-perform work, preference of precast concrete, lack of union labor, and the use of mud slabs. I am currently in the process of setting up another meeting with him to discuss more topics in depth.



### The Alexa Shopping Center

The Alexa shopping center is privately funded by a Portuguese investor and, when finished in September, it will be a high rise shopping center providing retailers the opportunity to finish out their own space. During this tour, I was able to observe various differences from my intern experiences in the U.S. including the use of masonry instead of stud partition walls, and the differences in safety procedures and labor practices.

## The Royal Palace, Dresden

The stop in Dresden was a diamond in the rough. On my own, I probably would not have gone out of my way to visit Dresden, and I am very glad that the tour took me there. At first glance, the city looks like any other 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century city. It was only after we began with our city history tour that I realized that everything around me has been built in the last 17 years. The Royal Palace, projected to be finished in 2010, was an excellent example of the reconstruction of an historical building with no building plans or skeleton structure on which to base the design. I also learned that, in Saxony, they are proud that they employ Saxon workers almost exclusively. In this circumstance, 92% of the workforce were natives. This was starkly different from what I saw in Berlin and proved that the cultures in eastern German cities, devastated by the Soviets, are working hard to rebuild their economy. Although tower cranes throughout Dresden demonstrate the extensive construction activity, I would expect that an American or International contractor would find better prospects elsewhere.

## Experiencing the Culture

By merely visiting and touring the various towns, I was able to gain valuable insight into the German culture in construction applications. I have been here for just over two weeks and have observed two national holidays in which the cities are basically closed. Tower cranes are used for any type of construction, including residential. Virtually all windows open only from the top and are not equipped with screens. Construction is occurring throughout every inch of German cities, often right adjacent to historical structures and the daily activities of the general public. In addition to the limited space available bordering the construction sites, it appears to me that there are significant differences in safety regulations for workers and protection of the public.

The culture is based on minimalism. Expectations are different. For example, I have stayed in a four star hotel without an air conditioning system.

## What comes next?

Due to the numerous contacts I have developed in Germany, I have extended my stay. Over the next few weeks, I will work with Hensel Phelps on the American Embassy project, tour jobsites and visit with Hochtief and Senior Living, interview a representative from the main Contractors Federation in Germany, and interview the Managing Director from Terragon GmbH. Although all of these activities are scheduled for Berlin, I plan on taking a day or so to tour in Hamburg due to the extensive construction occurring there, and perhaps meet with Hochtief there as well. I plan on accomplishing all of this before I leave for Italy in the middle of June.

## Conclusion

The first couple of weeks were a challenge with jet lag and culture shock. From my experiences, I would recommend to next year's recipient to start their fellowship with a home base, like the Fachhochschule. I am comfortable now to continue my journey, and feel that I have already learned so much and there is much more to still discover. This is an experience of a lifetime and I feel lucky to be chosen to complete such an expedition.

