

Book review

Labour Conditions for Construction – Building Cities, Decent Work and the Role of Local Authorities

Roderick Lawrence and Edmundo Werna, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, UK, 2009, ISBN 978-1-405-18943-9, **£109-00, 312 pp.**

This guide promotes safe, healthy and non-exploitive working conditions for the construction industry. The book results from a project funded by the Geneva International Academic Network, with staff from the International Labour Office and the University of Geneva.

Having a number of contributing authors, it sets out to promote decent work in construction and does this by presenting and discussing both the challenges and potential of local authorities. There are a series of case studies which are combined with theory to offer recommendations for best practice.

Of 249 pages of text there are seven chapters in the guide covering 'conceptual and methodological issues', 'measuring decent work', 'local authorities and the construction industry', three case studies and 'conclusions and recommendations'. The case studies are drawn from Bulawayo, Dar-es-Salaam and Santo André.

It confirms there are numerous definitions of what is meant by decent work and one that seems to fit well is the converging focus of all its four strategic objectives: the promotion of rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue. The concept of decent work is thus broadly based on employment generation,

social security, rights in the workplace and social dialogue.

In one country, the research found quite concerning data on compliance with occupational health and safety. Interviews with workers revealed that the particular regulations were complied with on only a few of the sites. Only five of the eleven sites visited had a safety office, only three sites provided any training to the works and only two sites had health and safety representatives and/or committees. On one site no protective gear of any kind was in evidence. All of this is quite disturbing of course. In another case study those who worked in waste collection did so under precarious conditions and workers were exposed to serious health hazards.

It could easily be concluded that in developing countries in particular, much work remains to be done to promote decent work and could sadly still be viewed as being a goal. There is a need for improved dissemination at a local level – it is one thing to set policies but quite another to ensure they actually happen. There is a useful series of recommendations in the final chapter.

This book is well written, has a good balance of theory and case studies and offers some practical recommendations for achieving decent work. It will be of interest to managers and policy makers in construction, health and safety and labour relations of developing countries in particular. It will also be of interest to researchers and students in construction management.

Robert Gerrard