

**Ethics in the Built Environment (EiBE)**  
**A Common SOCRATES funded Intensive Project of 12 European Universities**

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**Abstract**

The SOCRATES Intensive Project *Ethics in the Built Environment (EiBE) - A Challenge for European Universities* brought together students and teaching staff of 15 European universities from South (Porto, Portugal; Valencia, Spain; Patras, Greece) to North (Tampere, Finland; Tallinn, Estonia; Kaunas, Lithuania; Halmstad, Sweden) and from West (Galway, Ireland; Wolverhampton, United Kingdom; Groningen, Netherlands; Cachan-Paris, France; Oldenburg, Germany) to East (Stettin, Poland; Prague, Czech Republic; Budapest, Hungary) and in the last year also from Moscow, Russia, and Changchun, China.

The three years programme offered a forum to discuss the different approaches to define “Ethics in the Built Environment” from both the teaching and learning sides and in connection with professional bodies. Its aim was to provide a sound platform of common understanding about ethics in this context and to work out a common module as part of the education of young civil and construction engineers at the involved universities. - SOCRATES is a powerful EU-programme that supports under the sub-name ERASMUS numerous co-operation programmes between European universities [1] [2].

At least there have been two backgrounds to establish this project: the student’s and the employed engineer’s view.

Students of the FH OOW who go to a foreign country and foreign students who come to Oldenburg did not only realize that there are different sociological and cultural conditions in the host countries and different teaching and studying conditions at the partner universities. Meanwhile this is European students’ common knowledge, which has been given to them by their predecessors. And so, it is well known by students of other universities, too, especially when coming from partner universities.

But what students of civil and construction engineering were – and still are stating in a growing amount and with sharper contours especially during their practical placements - is the other way of undergoing and solving the problems of daily work on the construction site and in the offices.

So, these are not technical aspect but the intercourse with partners and clients with respect to

- the co-operation with colleagues and the public,

- the liability in contracting and
- the thrilling field between technical possibilities and demands of the environment etc.

which caused disbelief or even uncertainty on the students side.

Young future civil/construction engineers and managers saw and still are seeing themselves in a situation on which they cannot react in a proper way because of their up to now only technically oriented education.

But also experienced civil/construction engineers, supervisors of building sites and building or project managers are envisaging above their normal technical requirements numerous demands of different culture, working moral, ethical values, environmental responsibility etc.

The mentioned forcing requirements will be overtaken individually depending on the personal status and behaviour. But not only in a uniting Europe with corresponding European wide working possibilities it is necessary to do the job apart from pure individual solutions but on a strong basis of commonly respected measures of higher education, practical experience, continuous professional development and, not at least, of professional conduct.

The herewith described Socrates Intensive Project “Ethics in the Built Environment (EiBE)” did not deal with the technical aspects of engineering education. But it came up with the idea of the “European Council of Civil Engineers (ECCE)” [5] in that way that the participating partner institutions shall form a catalogue of codes or contents of conducts according to a given frame at home, which shall be summarized during the IP summer courses into a common catalogue.

The idea behind this project, too, was that young civil/construction engineering students shall discuss this topic on a stage before employment and, thus, before being too much engaged in companies’ and employers’ strategies and - sometimes - economic and social restrictions. To get a better European aspect this project brought together about 50 students and lecturers from all together 15 different European and two international partner universities, their respective civil engineering departments, employed engineers of construction companies and members of engineering societies and the public.

It is obvious that the students had and still have different thoughts about ethical rules in their future job, that they have different understandings of words and their contents. So, it was necessary to collect the variety of understandings and to make up a common basic vocabulary. On this basis of common understanding the module “Ethics in the Built Environment” has been roughly formed or shaped during the first IP-meeting, which took place at FH OOW in Oldenburg in September 2001, and has got much sharper contours in the Prague 2002 and Porto 2003 meetings [3].

The set-up of the module and its content was based and orientated to the German VDI (Association of German Engineers) guidelines VDI 3780 [4] and to the Professional Code of Conduct of the European Council of Civil Engineers (ECCE) [5]. But a number of actual European and American (civil) engineering books about professional ethics have been used, too [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13].

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