

Construction in Switzerland: a brief summary

Swiss building projects

Traditionally Swiss building projects are designed by independent consultants appointed by the Client with construction carried out by individual trade contractors. In addition to design, the architect is normally responsible for general project management, producing tender documentation, contract management and site management.

There is no tradition of an independent cost consultant or quantity surveyor, but post graduate courses in construction economics have been introduced for architects and engineers. There is a limited number of independent cost consultants, who's employees are generally members of the Swiss Association for Construction Economics AEC (approximately 100 individual professional members.)

PBK AG, a small consultancy for Project Management, Quantity Surveying and Cost Planning has been extensively involved in cost planning developments as well as training and education.

Building regulations are covered by the legislation of the cantons, which differs between the many cantons and is subject to amendment at municipal level by the local authorities.

Building work is generally let on the basis of bills of approximate quantities (produced by the architects and engineers) and re-measured on site.

Alternative approaches used mainly on large or complex projects include the following:

- "General Planners" who act as one stop consultants offering all design services, usually as a joint venture between several disciplines under the leadership of the Architect or Project Manager
- "General Contractors" (Generalunternehmer) who commonly sub-contract most or all of the work and are responsible for contract management and site management. They are appointed on a cost plus or a lump sum basis and may be expected to finish the design as well as guarantee quality, programme and costs.
- Design and build contractors
- Lump sum contracts based on drawings and specifications
- Lump sum contracts based on elemental bill of quantities and often performance specifications

On non-public projects (i.e. those not subject to WTO/GATT regulations) it is not uncommon to negotiate with contractors after competitive bids have been received.

Swiss Standards

There are standard systems in use for cost planning, tender documentation and cost control. Documentation is generally available in German, French and Italian, with the cost classifications also in English.

A system of elemental cost planning was introduced some 20 years ago and is now gradually replacing traditional estimating techniques, which were based mainly on the volume of the building. The elemental classification is set out in Swiss standard SN.506.502, the Cost Classification by Elements (Elementkosten-gliederung EKG).

The contract administration during the construction stage is normally based on the Swiss standard SN.506.500, the Building Cost Classification (Baukostenplan BKP). This is based on the many trades, which are individually tendered and let (commonly leading to over 40 contracts, even on small projects).

Bills of quantities are generally based on the Standard Catalogue of Building descriptions (Normpositionen-Katalog NPK) published by CRB, the Swiss Research Centre for Rationalisation. The catalogue is very detailed and also forms the basis for standard price databases provided by various contractors trade associations to their members.

Standards for design and construction are produced by the Swiss Association of Engineer and Architects, SIA.

Health and safety regulations are on a federal basis and the responsibility of SUVA, the Swiss Accident Insurance Association. They are not subject to the EU regulations.