



## *Sustainable building – Nicolas Duin*

Nicolas I worked with the United Kingdom from about 2012, on a European project to promote eco-construction in Great Britain and Brittany. This experience was enriching, the work was straight-forward, and it was an opportunity to note the cultural differences that exist in the two places, on the organisation of work, and in more basic habits, in eating, for example. And in general it worked out well, as there are needs in common between Devon, Cornwall and Brittany. We have a geology in common, and so we have the same traditional building materials in all three places, for example the use of cob. We also have a similar climate, so are faced with the same needs in managing similar harsh weather conditions. So we have a number of things in common. There are also similar thermal standards, not the same but similar, in the two countries. All this made a collaboration easy to undertake.

Rob You, you talk about the similarities; you noticed also the differences in the way that work is carried out in the UK as opposed to France. Can you give us some examples of what you found different?

Nicolas For example, we, the French, we generally take more time over eating our lunch, and in the evenings we work late. Whereas our English friends like to eat a quick sandwich in ten minutes, and finish very early in the evening. It seems a bit stupid to notice that, but in fact these small differences can complicate things when you're working together. For a Frenchman, if he isn't offered a full meal at noon, it's almost an insult. The English on the other hand would see it as efficient. For a Frenchman, if you don't work late into the evening, there's a problem somewhere, you don't really want to finish the work. Whereas for an English worker, no, that's the way it is. It's quite funny but in spite of our common goals, in spite of Europe which tends to promote exchanges, there are still important cultural differences.

Rob Now recently, everyone is aware, we have had a very important referendum in the UK, which has voted to leave Europe. Do you think this could have an effect on the kind of international cooperation in your line of work?

Nicolas When we learned that the Brexit was going to happen, it made us question a lot of things, for several reasons. The LIBNAM project on which I worked in Devon and Cornwall ended in 2015, but other similar projects with the UK are still possible. However, with the Brexit result, and the UK leaving Europe, it's not certain the Europe will want to continue financing projects. Until 2020, they will, because a contract has already been signed with England, but after 2020, it's very likely that things will be different. Could England for example find itself in the same situation as Switzerland, in its relations with Europe? We have, for example, worked with the Swiss; they were allowed to take part, but they didn't have the same rights as all the other partners. Perhaps England will find itself in the same position as Switzerland. Another complication: for all the

projects that we set up, there has to be the approval of the English authorities, and we've realised that for all the new projects, the public authorities have become very demanding, if not more and more demanding. This means that many projects between France and the UK cannot come to fruition because the English authorities block them. Not the partners on the ground, who are always keen, but the authorities block them, by making the criteria so difficult to achieve that nothing can happen. What I became aware of at the CESER conference in Rennes recently (the regional council organised debate on the Brexit issue), is that the UK would be able to recover some of the funds that were not spent on the project. It's perhaps a bit politically incorrect what I'm saying! But this means that the English authorities could be encouraged to be very strict in their criteria, not only for financial reasons, but also for philosophical reasons, because of the Brexit result, and the wish to work less together. On the French side, there's a desire to work together, among businesses like ours, but it isn't going to be easy. Anyhow, we feel confident that things will work out until 2020, but after that, it's in doubt. And it affects us here, because Brittany doesn't have any other countries with a shared border. European rules suggest that if we can no longer work with the UK, we may have to work with Ireland, Iceland, Spain; countries which, apart from Ireland, aren't so easily accessible. So this referendum result puts a question mark over France, but more particularly over Brittany.

Rob I was going to ask you about the conference in Rennes recently that you attended. You were able to talk about your work with regard to this. Did you have other impressions from other parts of industry, from other aspects of life in Brittany?

Nicolas I had the impression that everyone was in a state of shock, you know. People were shocked. Lots of questions; few people expected the result, I had the impression that the state of alert was high. Because for Brittany, you know, it's not without an impact. For the workforce, for different projects, for people in the international arena, the UK was **the** prime collaborator. So I felt there was a great deal of worry. It's true that Europe has allowed free movement of people, freedom to live where one wishes. And now that's been brought into question. We had all grown used to living together, wherever we wanted, in this European space. And so, at a stroke, all that we saw as normal has been brought into question. I don't think there will be many benefits from that decision; we're looking for them, in any case, but we're finding them difficult to locate. On the ground, here in Brittany, it's hard to find anything positive in the area of collaboration, in any case.

Rob Nicholas Le Duin, of Constructys, thank you very much indeed for your analysis of the situation. Thank you

Nicolas Thank you.

Rob. Nicolas Le Duin's project (known as LIBNAM, Low Impact Building using Natural Materials) involving English and Breton eco-housing schemes can be explored further by going to the case studies on the LIBNAM website: [www.libnam.eu](http://www.libnam.eu)



