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Stian Ervik, project engineer

Armed with knowledge

The largest independent research organisation in Scandinavia has a lot in common with the Norwegian building sector: the series of Building Research reports, for example.

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"I had never been involved in building a turf roof before, but it wasn't a problem. An Internet search, and I had access to the principles involved," says project engineer Stian Ervik.

As a rule, Ervik does his engineering at his drawing board in his Leangen office in Trondheim. This is where, for example, he prepares working drawings when customers of Nordbohus Systembygg AS wish to make changes in the home designs they have just bought. He designs detached houses or entire housing schemes. For the time being, however, he has decided to swing a hammer himself, building cabins in the Oppdøl mountains.

"I like to take part in the practical aspects of my trade; to be outside. In any case, it is good to see that what I am doing actually turns into something," says Ervik.

On his office shelves stand rows of folders of professional literature and project descriptions: "Building humidity", "Insulating against outdoor noise", and so on. But the book that he uses the most is not on the shelf. It is digital, and it is the Building Research report series.

Calling this publication a textbook is perhaps rather modest: it is quite simply a digital building encyclopaedia. Stian Ervik got to know it when he was still a student, for SINTEF Building Research, which is responsible for the series, has published a special training edition of the work for Norway's coming generations of building professionals. Ervik has continued to use it since he graduated.

"We use the Building Research series regularly here, particularly when we are building something that we are not so familiar with. We can find everything here from how a regulation plan should be drawn up to descriptions of advanced roofing structures."

The last time that the project engineer needed to look up something in the series was when he had to document that sufficient daylight was entering the project he was working on.

"The Building Research series offers us useful guidance about how we can calculate things like this, so that sort of thing can be fixed as well," says Ervik.

The solutions that are described in the series are known as "pre-accepted" solutions. This means that it has been documented that they work properly. Another aspect is that much emphasis has been placed on good communication, which has made the series popular.

"At present, we have more than 5000 subscribers, including joiners, builders, building managers, consultants; you name it. This is research dissemination in practice," says Kim Robert Lisø in SINTEF Building Research.

Lisø is a chief scientist, and he believes that the series has helped to form Norwegian building practices and raise the quality of Norwegian housing. He is quite right: the Building Research reports series is the SINTEF Group's biggest project ever, and its main objective since day one has been to disseminate research results.

The story of the series started in 1949, when the Royal Norwegian Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (NTNF) put forward a proposal to encourage building research in Norway. The intention was that the results of Norwegian building research should be brought into practical use by as many people as possible.

"Few other research institutes have managed to live up to their aims as well as SINTEF Building Research," says Lisø forthrightly.

And the story is by no means finished. SINTEF Building Research still publishes new or revised recommendations eight times a year, all of them based on research and experience. In the light of climate change, financial and energy crises, the reports may well be more important than ever. So SINTEF Building Research will need to continue to keep building engineer Stian Ervik up-to-date in the future as well.