



DESIGNING AN INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE COMPANIES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS A REGION- BUILDING PROCESS

***THE EXAMPLE OF SWEDISH AND FINNISH TOURISM COMPANIES
COLLABORATING IN EUROCITY***

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Abstract

The present paper discusses a possible design of a measurement instrument, which can be used for studying the attitudes towards a region-building process among companies – active actors in international collaboration. The paper offers a five-dimensional theoretical framework as a basis for instrument design. The framework consists of five cognitive constructs – namely trust in the counterpart, domains for common reputation building, perception of a brand name/ logotype, knowledge about counterparts' preferences and degree of establishment of informational flows – which are said to affect the process of attitudes' formation among the actors in a region-building process. The study uses the example of Eurocity and tourism companies located in Eurocity on both Swedish and Finnish sides and involved into collaborative relationships across the border. The result of the paper is the development of the attitude-measuring questionnaire, which can also be used as an interview guide for in-depth investigations of companies' attitudes. The authors believe that the developed questionnaire can be used as a measurement tool in political surveys for determining the companies' attitudes and perception of the effectiveness of the present collaborative relationships across the border and for determining the present and future challenges in a region-building process.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. FRAMEWORK FOR INSTRUMENT DESIGN: ATTITUDE CONSTRUCTS.....	2
2.1 Levels of trust in the counterpart.....	2
2.2 Domains for the common reputation building: specified tasks, resources, capabilities and activities.....	2
2.3 Agreed name/logotype for collaborative incentives.....	3
2.4 Knowledge about one’s own preferences.....	3
2.5 Informational flows.....	3
3. EUROCITY – THE UNITED CITY PROJECT.....	4
3.1 Historical aspects.....	4
3.2 Communication and collaboration patterns.....	4
3.3. Transportation node.....	5
3.4 Tourism centre.....	5
4. ATTITUDE-MEASURING INSTRUMENT: QUESTIONNAIRE/ INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ATTITUDE SURVEYS.....	7
5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATION OF THE ATTITUDE-MEASURING INSTRUMENT	
REFERENCES.....	8

APPENDIX I “Tourism Enterprises in Eurocity”

1. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration, where a net of more than two organisations collaborate, is an accepted fact for businesses of late (Varamäki and Vesalainen, 2003; Murto-Koivisto et al., 1996). Maintaining a strong collaborative group at a local level is a way to stay competitive. Attitudes have an essential role as a prerequisite to any collaboration. In order for such an attempt to be successful there has to be the minimum levels of trust in the counterpart; specified tasks/ resources/ capabilities/ activities as domains for the common reputation building; an agreed name/logotype for collaborative incentives; clear knowledge about ones own preferences; and, finally, well-established informational flows between the partners (Tirole, 1996; Pesämaa, 2004; Fomburn and Shanley, 1990; Rao, 1999).

Eurocity, the project of unification of two twin-cities Haparanda and Torneå across the Finnish and Swedish border, has attracted much of attention as a recent example of international collaboration. It is a region-building process initiated across two languages, two different countries, two different time-zones, two different political and monetary systems, etc., which represents a good example of complementary development in order to overcome natural obstacles to cooperative relationships and mutual growth.

The present paper offers five-dimensional theoretical framework describing the prerequisites for attitudes formation among the actors in a region-building process. The paper explores these prerequisites – namely five attitude constructs, i.e. trust in the counterpart, domains for common reputation building, perception of a brand name/ logotype, knowledge about counterparts' preferences and degree of establishment of informational flows – with a purpose to develop a possible instrument to measure attitudes of companies, involved in international collaborative relationships, towards region-building process. The paper takes an example of Eurocity as a region-building process and proposes the questionnaire for studying the attitudes of Swedish and Finnish tourism companies, collaborating across the border, towards the development of Eurocity.

In the frame of this research purpose the study formulates five research questions:

1. What is the role of trust between the counterparts in the international collaboration process?
2. How are the domains of a common reputation building, namely tasks, resources, capabilities, and activities, perceived by the counterparts in the international collaboration process?
3. How much of the temporary name of Eurocity as logotype is established as a mental domain for external/ internal to the collaboration process people?
4. How clear is the knowledge about the counterparts' preferences, roles and obligations in the process of building the common reputation of Eurocity?
5. How well established are informational flows between the Swedish and Finnish counterparts in the Eurocity project?

The text of the paper is divided into four sections. Following the introduction part the theoretical framework for designing of the attitude-measuring instrument is presented. This section describes five constructs which are important for formation of the attitudes towards a region-building process. Next section presents some historical and economic aspects of Eurocity development. Finally, section four describes the instrument for measuring attitudes of companies towards a region-building process.

2. FRAMEWORK FOR INSTRUMENT DESIGN: ATTITUDE CONSTRUCTS

The following section describes the theoretical framework of the study. The framework consists of five attitude constructs (see Figure 1), which play an important role in forming the attitudes of the actors in a region-building process.

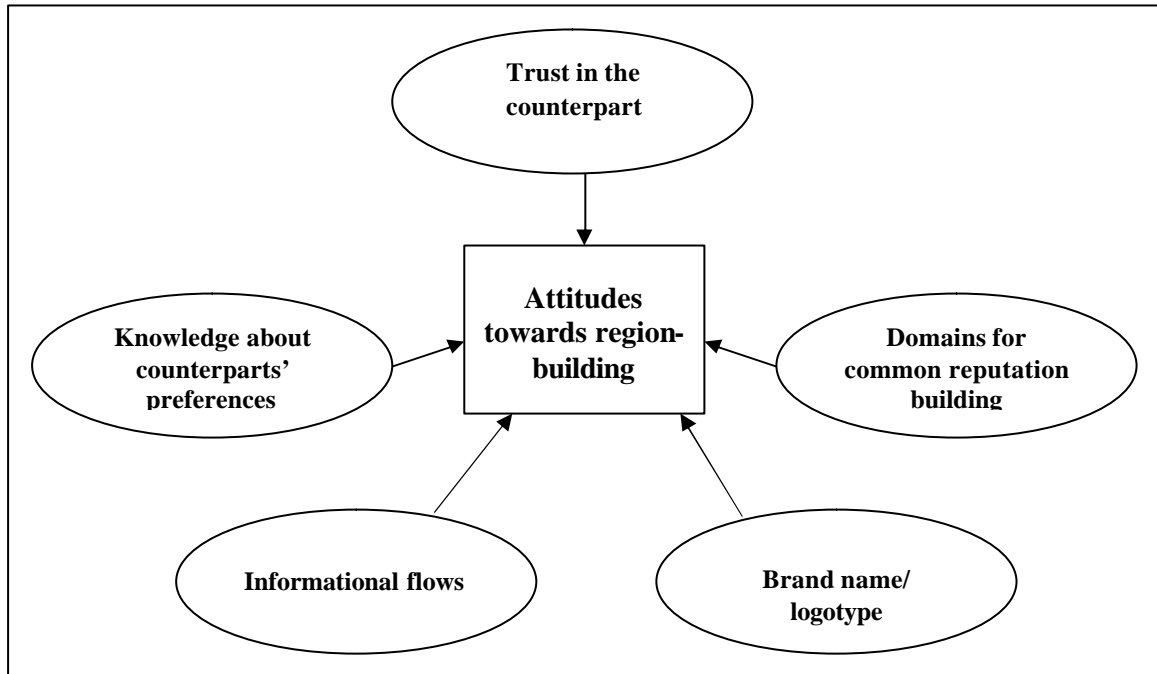


Figure 1. Attitude constructs in a process of region-building

2.1 Levels of trust in the counterpart

Trust plays a major role in establishing long-term business relations. The long term business relation also favours from trustful relations. According to Jones and Wicks (2000), trust may play the role of risk-downsizing factor and, thus, be the key in development of long-term relations. Trust as a central element of fruitful business relations goes basically back to the natural axioms of sharing the same values and norms. The companies may come to having the same values and norms towards business, and hence sharing a more expected behaviour (Tirole, 1996).

2.2 Domains for the common reputation building: specified tasks, resources, capabilities and activities.

Main domains for the common reputation building are specified tasks, shared resources, capabilities and activities of the counterparts in the collaboration process (Fomburn and Shanley, 1990). Resources as a major unit of analysis deserve a domain in a common reputation building. The exchange of tangible as well as intangible resources plays major role in establishing a favourable reputation. Also, the awareness of the tasks, counterparts' capabilities and activities in the collaboration process contributes to the common reputation building. Perceptions of the counterparts' capabilities as well as one's own seems to harshly influence the chances of success in collaborative relationships (Tirole, 1996).

2.3 Agreed name/logotype for collaborative incentives

The role of a shared name is essential in region-building process. The shared name may logically facilitate an easy communication internally in the group, but also facilitate a more clear communication to externals. Fomburn and Sahley (1990) found that “*informational bedrock*” is significant in buyer strategies to select and evaluate different alternatives. They found that focused rather than diversified attitudes seems to enhance the chances of communicating the company’s attitudes clearly to customers (Ibid.). The attitudes that come out with a shared name have a bigger chance to unite the group internally and to facilitate a targeted and clear message to externals. A clear message can also enhance chances of maintaining and strengthening the common name, e.g., Eurocity.

2.4 Knowledge about one’s own preferences

Knowledge about counterparts’ own preferences is an essential factor in every exchange process, such as e.g., collaborative relationships. A good understanding of one’s own preferences as well as one’s role in relationship building process and obligation towards maintaining of a common reputation is a necessary basis for profitable and prolonged collaborative relationships since it creates a positive attitude towards a counterpart. A transparency of knowledge about counterparts’ preferences and goals allows to enhance trust in the relationships and, therefore, facilitates a common reputation building process.

2.5 Informational flows

Haparanda and Torneå serve as a unique example in communication matters. It is hard to find any equivalent examples that intend to formally integrate two communities strongly with so many language- and cultural aspects apparent. Communication disconnect could be easily traced by semantic problems, where the lack of understanding is due to e.g., the wrong usage of words, misunderstanding of gesticulation, wrong application, etc. In this sense, Haparanda and Torneå with different formal governmental grounds, different languages, different time-zones and different inherent cultures may enhance the chances of an interesting case study of development of the attitudes towards region-building process. Northern Sweden, according to Lundgren (2000), suffers from “wrong attitudes” towards institutional building. Kirchkamp (2000) posits that complexity in itself fosters collaboration. In case of Eurocity the two municipalities can possibly benefit in an informational sense already in the short run, since they independently represent a sparse region but a denser spot together. This reduces the risk of failure rate due to the boosted competition, and hence supports the increase of legitimacy and the collaboration building (Rao, 1994).

In the abstract sense communication captures both tangible (equipment, applications) and intangible resources (routines, language, culture), which both assist the process of a clear communication building. Both tangible and intangible resources may influence whether one will successfully come out and share information. Physical share of informational bodies relies on the legitimacy building (Rao, 1994), which in turn relies on long-term oriented efforts to understand and trust one another (Fomburn and Shanley, 1990). Logically, a poor established communication may thwart effort, since it is essential to clearly state the routes to the agreed understanding in reputation building. A poor communication, thus, decreases the possibilities of receiving legitimacy from a third person, especially if the disconnect between the partners in an exchange process signals mutual misunderstandings. Well established informational flows

facilitate communication and increase the chances of communicating the common reputation more clearly.

3. EUROCITY – THE UNITED CITY PROJECT

3.1 Historical aspects

Torneå, the oldest town in Northern Scandinavia, received its charter in 1621. But its strategic position as a gateway into Lapland has bequeathed its history. Torneå was ruled at various times by Russian tsars and Swedish kings, becoming part of independent Finland when it was created in 1917. Torneå and Haparanda – as the Swedish town is now called – on the two country's land border near the Arctic Circle, have launched a project to become a united city again, almost 200 years after a peace treaty between Sweden and Russia divided the town of Torneå. These twin towns in Finland and Sweden want to build a border-free business and shopping district in no-man's land to serve more than 30,000 residents [2; 3]. Today, the common name for the reunited city of Haparanda and Torneå is Eurocity¹, and the towns share:

- Vision and community planning,
- A cooperation organisation,
- The labour market,
- Educational facilities, and
- Technical services [2].

3.2 Communication and collaboration patterns

Historically, the border between Sweden and Finland has been called as world's the most peaceful one. The cooperation across the national border is often seen as a pre-model for the EU. The two cities has a great rang of cooperation activities, such as for example reindeer works. The cities also share rescue services and sport premises, have a common telephone and postal system; and there is a plan to form a new common centre for both cities (Antikainen et al., 2001).

Nowadays cooperation between the towns of Haparanda-Torneå, which started in the 60s, works extremely well and serves as an exemplar throughout the EU. In the past, residents of the two towns, many of which have to travel to work across the border, have complained about delays caused by border checks [3; 4]. “But after both Finland and Sweden joined the Schengen agreement – allowing free movement for EU nationals – passport controls were scrapped. ...Local residents – who speak both Swedish and Finnish – say they are already living in a united city, as the twin towns share a secondary school, a sport arena and a water treatment plant. There are rumours that officials in Haparanda even decided to accept the euro as legal tender alongside the krona after Finland joined the single currency earlier this year, although Sweden is not a member of the eurozone” [3].

Collaboration patterns between Haparanda and Torneå are extensive and the concrete results include cooperation on use of resources and on future investments. Moreover, Eurocity has a strategically important geographical location in the cooperation across the northern national border, facilitating and enhancing exchanges between North Scandinavia and the Barents Region. [2].

¹ No name has been chosen for the reunited city yet, but the name "Eurocity" has been used for the project's publicity [BBC]

3.3. Transportation node

An advantageous transportation net of Eurocity insures its position and role in the economic and cultural exchange across borders. "The E4 trunk road has its easternmost point in Sweden in Haparanda, while trunk road 99 continues northwards, along the border. Here the railway links with the Finnish and the East European railway networks. A gauge converter allows rail transports across the border without trans-shipment. There is also a station serving passenger rail traffic. The ports in Torneå (Röyttä) and Kemi handle large quantities of cargo, mostly for export. The Customs station sees the passage of over 5 million vehicles and about 16 million persons annually. All overland traffic converges here, mainly using the E4. There are ample transport resources for passenger traffic by coach and for goods traffic by truck. The coach service "Norrlandskusten" nowadays terminates in Haparanda. The E4 runs from Lisbon to Helsinki, and Haparanda - Torneå is an important stopover on that route. ... The construction of the Bothnia Line is under way. The Norrbothnia Line has been moved up on the agenda in the government's long-term infrastructure plans. This will make Haparanda an important node for future goods transports between Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. Haparanda's nearest airport is only 15 minutes away. It is situated in Finnish Kemi and has several daily flights to Helsinki. Kallax Airport in Luleå is 130 kilometres away. Haparanda Municipality is lobbying intensively for a direct route from Kemi to Stockholm" [2].

Recently the "On The Border" project (På Gränsen – Rajalla) has received much attention both in and outside Sweden and Finland. It envisages building a main street to link the two towns and re-routing local buses to the single centre. Swedish and Finnish customs will be working in the same building [2; 3].

3.4 Tourism centre

The city of Haparanda-Torneå lies in Gulf of Bothnia, in the middle of "Bottenviksbågen", which consists of the net of the biggest cities in northern Sweden and Finland. The lateral link Barents Road is 1,500 kilometres long and goes from Bodø in Norway through Haparanda to Murmansk. The long-term historic cooperation and the recent opening of borders has contributed to the unique multicultural nature of the region and opened the doors to tourist and business projects [3; 4].

Eurocity region offers a broad spectrum of the arts, events and associations of the two countries and provides a rich selection of leisure-time activities for even the most fastidious. The interesting examples of local mixed culture are presented by e.g., Aines Art Museum and the provincial museum. In Kukkola, the cultural environment includes the fishery museum, where one can learn about unique fishing methods. Moreover, annual events include the International Jazz and Blues Festival, the Folk Music Festival Gränsspelet and the Whitefish Festival in Kukkola [2].

4. ATTITUDE-MEASURING INSTRUMENT: QUESTIONNAIRE/ INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ATTITUDE SURVEYS

This section presents a measurement instrument for studying the attitudes towards region-building process among companies. Using the example of the Eurocity, the paper offers a possible design of a questionnaire/ interview guide for attitude surveys among companies involved in the collaborative relationships affected by the region-building process.

Name and position of the interviewee/ respondent

1. Company's general facts

- ✓ Year of establishment
- ✓ Number of employees
- ✓ Company's internationalisation (export activities, partner alliance across the border)
- ✓ Country of location

2. Company's attitude towards Eurocity

- ✓ Do you perceive the Eurocity project as a positive or a negative one? Why?
- ✓ How does the image of Eurocity influence the company's business? Is it positive, negative, or no influence, why?
- ✓ Do you perceive any changes in business since the establishment of Eurocity? If yes, are they positive or negative? In what way?

3. Questions on the attitude constructs

3.1 The role of trust in collaborative relationships

- ✓ Do you perceive shared values to be an important dimension of a collaborative relationship? (scaled question from less important to very important)
- ✓ Do you believe expected behaviour is essential to assess risk involved in your relations with partners across the border? (scaled question from less important to very important)
- ✓ Will you on the basis of your perceived trust, investigate more efforts to current relation
- ✓ Does the development of Eurocity influence the perceived amount of trust in the relationships? Did it become better? Do your trust your partners more now than before Eurocity, or without any changes?

3.2. The role of the perceived resource domain for this kind of collaboration: tasks/ resources/ capabilities/ activities

- ✓ What is your perception of a role of the common tasks, resources, capabilities and activities in the collaboration process? Why do you perceive them as important, unimportant ones? What in your opinion is the most important domain?

3.3 The name Eurocity as an established mental domain

- ✓ Do you perceive the name Eurocity as an adequate for representing the united city of Haparanda-Torneå?
- ✓ What things do you think of when you hear "Eurocity"? What associations does the name "Eurocity" bring?
- ✓ Do you think the name "Eurocity" may appear to external to the region people as an established mental domain for a united city of Haparanda-Torneå?

3.4 The clearness of the knowledge about counterparts' own preferences, role and obligation in building collaborative relationships across borders

- ✓ How clear is the knowledge about your partners across the border's preferences, role

and obligation towards building the collaborative relationships?

- ✓ Do you perceive this knowledge as clear or insufficient?
- ✓ Did the amount of your knowledge about partners' preferences, role and obligation in building collaborative relationships change with the introduction of Eurocity project? If yes, how (more/less knowledge)?

3.5 How well established the informational flows between the international counterparts are

- ✓ Do you perceive the information flows across the border to be well working?
- ✓ Does the information flow between the Swedish and Finnish part go freely without any problems?
- ✓ Did you have problems with communication across the border? Do you have them now, after Eurocity has been launched?
- ✓ Do you perceive that the necessary information is spread effectively?
- ✓ Do you feel like something must be improved in informational flows between the Swedish and Finnish sides?

5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATION OF THE DEVELOPED ATTITUDE-MEASURING INSTRUMENT

The presented questionnaire can be used as a measurement tool in political surveys for determining the companies' attitudes and perceptions of the effectiveness of the present collaborative relationships across the border as well as for determining the present and future challenges in a region-building process.

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[4] <http://www.provinciabotheniensis.org/elinkoikswe.htm>

APPENDIX I “Tourism Enterprises in Eurocity”

Company's Name	Mobile	Telephone	Contact Person
Bosmina skärgårdsturer & stugor	070-5527636	0922-13395	Staffan Svanberg
Haparanda Stadshotell		0922-614 90	Susanne Wallin
Harjugården Turist & Konferens		0922-320 26	Birgit Niva
Butiken på Landet		0922-320 15	Pia Kankaanranta
Kukkolaforsen Turist & Konferens AB		0922-310 00	Svante Spo, Margit, Niina
Långforsens konferens & rekreation		0922-520 08	Gun-Britt Granbom
STF Vandrarhem		0922-611 71	Tarja Myllymäki
Matkakoski Fiskecamp		070-5396392	Stig och Alf Waara
Nivagården		0922-320 00	Birgit Niva Lahti
Norrskensljus		0922-13688	Katja Tikkala
Palogården		0922-601 77, 60	Björn Ekholm
Revonsaari camping		0922-60007	Kveta Berggård
Resandehem		0922-120 68	Raimo Mäntynen
Seskarö Camping		0922-201 50, 20244	Anders Borg
Sverigefinska Folkhögskolan		0922-688 00	Ragni Huhta
Tapanis Buss		0922-129 55	Inger Olovsson
Turer med Häst och släde		0922-500 44, 07	Tage Eklund
Älvagård		0922-601 33	Ulf Hansson
Österbergs Buss och Taxi		0922-240 25	Elisabeth & Ulf
Tornion Kaupunginhotell		35801643311	Jorma Sankala
Camping Tornio	040-5490066	00358-016-445945	Sirkka Hyry
Matkakosken Lohestus ja Seikkailukeskus	040-5511283	00358-016-470093	Risto Mämmioja
Lomarautio Ky	00358-016-441805	00358-016-441805	Veikko Rautio
Kesähotelli Joentalo		00358-016-2119200	Marja Leena Dunder
Matkakoti Heta		00358-016-480897	Helvi Hakomäki
Safaris unlimited		00358-016-253 405	Sinikka Niskanen
Septentrionalia Oy		00358-016-481655	Tuula Saaritie
Kukkolan Myllynpirtti		00358-016-472 044	Kimmo Auno
Artic Ice Road Production		00358-016-431 296	Vesa Vallo
Esko Kivilompolo		00358-040-531 93 53	Esko Kivilompolo
Sassin Letto		00358-016-449 879	
Juhani Leutola		00358-016-430 875	
Smeds Kulta ja Hopea Galeria		00358-016-430 875	Jorma Smeds
Green Zone Golf		00358-016-431 711	Paul Henriksson
Viihdekeskus Siltakartano		00358-016-430 360	Reijo Angeria
Ylimäen maatila		00358-016-473 697	Kristiina ja Martti Ylimä
Postelli		00358-016-449 882	Paula Salminen
Arctichrome Production Oy		00358-016-446 448	Eero Hyrkäs
Tmi Puuterä J. Halonen		00358-016-441 131	Jari Halonen
Veljekset Salmela Oy		00358-016-446 666	Jorma Winter
Ylimäen Liikenne Ky		00358-016-470 071	Juhani Ylimäki
E Jussila Ky		00358-016-473 175	Erkki Jussila
Tilausliikenne Pekka Jussila		00358-016-473 296	Pekka Jussila