

THESIS

Evgenia Amey 2010

IMAGE STUDY OF LAPIN LIITTO



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Thesis

IMAGE STUDY OF LAPIN LIITTO

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The following thesis is an empirical study on the image of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland) among its stakeholders, other important regional organizations and students of Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences. The goal of the thesis is to get a clear picture of what the mentioned parties think of Lapin Liitto and an organization, how they grade its activities and if they see it as a reliable partner.

The Internet research was conducted separately for the organizations and students, gathering both quantitative and qualitative information on the level of familiarity with Lapin Liitto, opinions on the activities and general impression about the council.

The results of the research demonstrates that Lapin Liitto has in general neutral or good reputation among the organizations and students, seen as an important regional actor responsible for strategy building, regional development projects and lobbying the interests of the region. The activities of Lapin Liitto were generally graded as more than satisfactory and the council was seen on the average level comparing to other regional councils, funding organizations and authorities.

The thesis is not aiming at providing the solutions for the improvement of the image, instead it presents the gathered information on the existing image of Lapin Liitto. However, the responses given can provide some ideas for the improvement of public image of the Council, such as being more open to public and cooperating with population and small businesses in Lapland.

Key words: Lapin Liitto, Regional Council of Lapland, image study, image study of public sector organizations, reputation of public sector organizations

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1 INTRODUCTION

During my advanced practical training I worked for Finnbarents, where I had a chance to get some knowledge on the regional development projects. That experience, in a way, encouraged me to contact Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland) on the topic of thesis project and they suggested me the project to work on – the image study of Lapin Liitto.

Within the thesis project I will conduct a survey among Lapin Liitto's stakeholders and other important regional actors to find out their opinion on the Council in general and its main activities.

The theoretical part of the thesis concentrates on the image in general, corporate image and image of organizations in the public sector, with the information gathered from books and business related publications. The theory on the research methods used is presented together with the research findings.

With this thesis project I do not aim to provide the solutions for improving the image of Lapin Liitto. Instead, the goal of the thesis is to provide a clear picture of what Lapin Liitto's stakeholders as well as other important regional organizations, businesses and residents of Lapland think of Lapin Liitto as an organization and as a partner and what the general perception of the Council by the mentioned parties is.

The representatives of Lapin Liitto whom I contacted during the thesis project are Maiju Hyry, Liaison Manager, whom I contacted by email, and Satu Luiro, Tourism Coordinator, with whom I had an in-depth interview in the beginning of the thesis project.

2 PRESENTATION OF LAPIN LIITTO AND ITS ACTIVITIES

Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland) is a regional organization guided by the municipalities, with its main areas of work being regional development (including social, economical, cultural, educational, environmental and healthcare-related issues) and EU-funding related development, presenting the interests of the region, land use and landscape design, statistics publishing, rescue activities and international cooperation. (Luiro2010.)

International cooperation includes implementation and managing the EU programmes, working in the Barents Regional Council, membership in Arctic Council, participating in Northern Periphery cooperation, Barents region cooperation. (Luiro2010.)

Lapin Liitto's board of directors is build up of municipalities representatives and Lapin Liitto itself is owned by the municipalities (Lapin Liitto 2010a).

With one of the Lapin Liitto's tasks being the strategy building and implementing the regional development project, following the strategies, Lapin Liitto is going to implement tourism related projects starting the beginning of 2011. Among those projects is developing the new brand for Lapland to find a new way to market tourism products in Lapland and to make the region an attractive place to live and work, to study in and to travel to. As a background to it, Lapin Liitto needs to know how its stakeholders, other important regional actors see Lapin Liitto now, how they evaluate its activities and if they consider Lapin Liitto to be a reliable partner. The Council was also interested in what kind of image the companies and residents of Lapland have about it. For my thesis I was suggested to make a research on the image of Lapin Liitto to find out what kind of perception of Lapin Liitto have its stakeholders, regional organizations, businesses and residents of Lapland. (Luiro 2010.)

Within the thesis project I conducted a survey for Lapin Liitto's stakeholders and other important organizations (including regional authorities, other regional councils, regional development and tourism organizations, funding organizations and educational institutions) and businesses. I also made a

separate survey for individuals – RAMK students, who present the youth living in Lapland, to discover what they know about Lapin Liitto and its role in regional development.

Furthermore, I will make an overview of some strategies prepared by Lapin Liitto in recent years. Due to my studies in Degree Programme in Tourism I will concentrate mostly on the tourism strategy.

Lapin Liitto has prepared the following strategies for the regional development: Lapland energy strategy, Lapland welfare strategy, Lapland climate strategy, Lapland broadband strategy, Lapland tourism strategy, creative industries strategy and youth strategy. Within the bounds of international cooperation Lapin Liitto support EU programmes such as Northern Finland ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) Programme, Mainland Finland's ESF (European Science Foundation) Programme, Province Cooperative Group, Interreg IV A North, Kolarctic ENPI CBC and Northern Periphery. (Lapin Liitto 2010a.)

Below I briefly described the tourism strategies prepared by Lapin Liitto for the tourism development in Lapland for the years 2007 –2010 and 2011 – 2014 (the draft of the latest strategy was presented to me by Satu Luiro). The tourism strategy of Lapland for the years 2007 –2010 based on the revised previous strategy (2003 –2006), which proved to be successful and showed positive results. The 2007 –2010 strategy, in accordance with the previous one, keeps the tourism development focused on the tourism centers, while the regions are now divided into four categories according to the stages of their development. The four categories are strong areas (Levi, Ylläs, Saariselkä, Rovaniemi), medium-strong areas (Pyhä-Luosto, Salla), developing areas (Suomu, Enontekiö-Kilpisjärvi) and other tourism areas. Among the most important points in the 2007 –2010 strategy is the continued growth on the international markets – major target markets being the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Russia – for which the increased accessibility of the region is required. At the same time stronger sales and marketing activities are to ensure the year-round demand for the Lappish tourist products. The strategy recognizes the need for the new e-

commerce methods, targeting on international markets, as well as the need for reliable research data on the recent tourism trends and development, changing markets and customer behavior. In addition, the strategy (2007 – 2010) emphasizes sustainable tourism development, quality and safety issues in tourism and states the core values of the strategy being authenticity, customer satisfaction and high quality, innovativeness, safety and respect for nature. (Lapin Liitto 2007.)

The tourism strategy 2011–2014 describes the challenges that tourism sector in Lapland experiences in recent years, including the decrease of tourism (especially international) since 2008 as a result of the economic crisis and the problems with accessibility (flight connection), caused by forces of nature (volcano eruption in Iceland). Among the new trends, which will influence the future tourism development, mentioned in the strategy are the new opportunities offered by the Internet (which influenced the customer behavior a lot in recent years), increased environmental awareness of the customers and new groups of customers for whom the new products can be developed (niche markets, lifestyle-related customer groups). The keywords for tourism vision were presented as Lapland (=authenticity, safety, exoticism), purity (=nature, space, being undiluted), life force (=personality, luxury, priceless, activities) and closeness (=accessibility at all levels). As the main international markets stays the same (United Kingdom, Germany, France, Netherlands and Russia), new target markets are presented by Southern and Eastern European countries. To become more known in those markets the strategy states the need for the research on global trends and changing customer behavior, as well as developing of the e-marketing strategy. (Lapin Liitto 2010b.)

3 CONCEPT OF IMAGE

3.1 Image in General and Image in Business Environment

There are many definitions of the word “image”, for example in Merriam-Webster Dictionary it is presented in general to be “a reproduction or imitation of the form of a person or thing” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2010). At the same time, more exact and more related to my work definition can be also found on the website – “a mental picture or impression of something: a mental conception held in common by members of a group and symbolic of a basic attitude and orientation” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2010).

In the business environment the image of the company (or corporate image) is formed in the people’s mind on the basis of company’s performance and behavior as well as the communication (Doorley – Garcia 2007, 4), in other word the company’s image reflects people’s perceptions on the company based on what they know about it (Harconi 1996, 7).

In today’s competitive world the companies strive to become known by inserting the good image of themselves into potential customer’s mind, but to achieve it the message the companies send must be bright and easy to remember, correspond to customer’s interior demands and be appealing to customer’s feelings (Lv 2008, 18).

After the company’s message is delivered to customer through available marketing channels, what stays in the customer’s mind is mostly based on visual/audible information received and that is why company’s logo and slogan, content of the advertisement should create a strong and professional impression and to match the further tools of communication from website to business cards. However the image goes further than the message created by the company, it is also the corporate culture and corporate responsibility, the way the company treats its customers, business partners, public and media, it is also independent media coverage and word of mouth that form people’s opinion about the company. (Klein 2006.)

It should be understood that corporate image is composed not only of what the customers think about company and its products, but instead it is formed of many images that all company's audiences have about it. Those audiences or interest groups are more often referred to as stakeholders, to which belong for example customers, employees, shareholders, partners, suppliers and governmental organizations. By the term "stakeholders" are meant both groups and individuals which are influencing or influenced by the company, create support or have some actual or potential interest in the company. Different stakeholders groups will require different approach and the ones having the longest relationship with the company with the organization would be the ones whose opinion will be of bigger importance.

The way the stakeholders see the company would influence the future cooperation and is likely to add to company's existing reputation. (Luoma-aho 2008, 446-449.)

Positive image can add to the actual worth of the business (Doorley-Garcia 2007, 4) while negative image shows the poor perception of it by people, in this case the attributes that create negativity should be changed to change the image (Ross-Wooldridge-Brown-Minsky 2004).

3.2 Image and Public Sector Organizations

In search for the previous studies on the images of the organizations in public sector I noticed that image and reputation related theory is mostly available in the content of business environment and much less literature is present for the public sector organizations. At the same time it is better understood now that interest groups and individuals close to the public sector organizations must be taken into consideration.

The image or reputation of the organization can be said to be the sum of attitudes which are formed by the stakeholders about the organization and which create an operating environment. It must be noticed that forming an image or reputation for the public sector organization is different than that for the businesses. Talking about businesses, in most cases it is about image –

reference to the impression, while for the public sector organization the closer term would be “reputation” – sum of the previous deeds, stories told and characteristics such as credibility, reliability and responsibility.

Reputation is based on the individual assessments by the stakeholders, it is important to point out that the assessments are more reliable when the cooperation and contact has been carried out for longer time in contrast to the assessments based on the word of mouth or the information got from the media. The good reputation would mean that the organization has clearly declared its values and followed them, had good records of the previous deeds and was able to meet the needs of the stakeholders. On one hand, good reputation can add to the stability, profit (in some cases) and employee loyalty. On the other hand, it holds a promise of good behavior in the future and is hard to maintain by constantly supporting it by successful practices. It is discussed that neutral reputation could be a better choice for public sector organizations since it does not require constant maintenance and lowers the possibility of getting criticism. Another thing to consider is that the reputation of the public sector organization can be influenced by the sector reputation. Sector reputation depends on many factors such as country of origin, socio-economical and political climate, performance of social institutions and the quality of public services. (Luoma-aho 2008, 447 –451.)

One of related studies I came across with is research paper “Sector Reputation and Public Organizations” by Vilma Luoma-aho from the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The paper discusses the issues related to the reputation of public sector organizations and sector reputation and presents the results of quantitative research of the stakeholder assessment of twelve organizations from Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The aim of the research was to measure the reputation of the public sector organizations in Finland. Among the stakeholders were the employees of the organizations, customers, decision-makers and companies with which the organizations had cooperation. The questionnaire providing statements to grade and open-ended questions was presented to 2540 stakeholders with whom the organizations often cooperated. The results of the research showed that the reputation of the public sector organizations was in general

neutral, also with high level of trust. The author considers that the research paper would be useful to public officials and managers to provide better development of the sector and more efficient cooperation with the stakeholders. (Luoma-aho 2008, 451-453.)

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Research Methods

By the method of data collection, research can be classified as qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative research gathers the data which can be expressed numerically and can be analyzed with the help of statistical analyzing programmes (Crowther – Lancaster 2009, 75-76). This method of data collection can be notified by its structured tools that enable easy and fast marking of replies by the respondents and allow more convenient analyze of the results, the possible data collection tools being for example questionnaires, tests and structured personal interviews (Kivirinta 2008).

The questionnaire is among the most often used data collection tools, and making a questionnaire requires skills and knowledge to ensure that the necessary data is collected. There is a number of issues to consider when preparing a questionnaire such as content and logical order of questions, choice of words (to ensure that the respondents understand the questions and answers options in the same way as author mean it), types of questions; range, scope and structure of the questions as well as the methods of administering and returning the questionnaires. (Crowther–Lancaster 2009, 151 –153.)

On the other hand, qualitative research gathers descriptive data, which cannot be expressed in the form of numbers. By the means of, for example, group discussions and in-depth interviews the respondents have a chance to express themselves more freely than they can do through the ready-made questionnaires. This kind of data collection methods often provides good solutions for management, since unexpected and useful answers can be given by the respondents and that can initiate new ideas on the improvement. At the same time the data gathered by the qualitative methods proves to be harder to analyze than the one gathered by the quantitative method. (Kivirinta 2008.)

Having presented both methods of data collection we can make a notice on their main differences. While quantitative method is considered to be outcome oriented, more reliable, clearly presenting facts and causes, the qualitative method on the other hand is discovery and process oriented, descriptive and in a way less controlled, presenting the descriptive, real and rich data. The quantitative data can be more easily analyzed with the help of standard statistical techniques, while qualitative data requires more for the analyzing part however often present some extra information got from the respondents. (Crowther–Lancaster 2009, 75 –76.)

The thesis project is an empirical study aiming to find out the perception of Lapin Liitto by its stakeholders, other important regional organizations and individuals. In order to gather the assessments I have conducted the corporate image survey by the means of questionnaire published on Webropol, the online survey software available on the website w3.webropol.com/ allowing easy creating of online surveys and contacting the respondents, collecting and analyzing of data.

I prepared two separate questionnaires – one meant for stakeholders and other organizations, the other for the individuals living in Lapland, particularly the students of Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences. Both questionnaires were available for the respondents in Finnish and English. The questionnaires are to be found in Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. The cover letters are to be found as Appendices 5 and 6.

The questionnaire for the stakeholders and organizations consisted of eleven questions, where in the first two questions the respondents were asked to specify their type of organization and their location. The third question asked if they are familiar with Lapin Liitto as an organization and with its operations. In case the answer to that question was “no” (“not familiar”) the respondents were to continue with the last question. For those who answered “yes” (“familiar”) the questions 4, 5 and 6 asked if they had or were having any cooperation with Lapin Liitto (and in which fields) and if yes how they would grade the cooperation. In the question 7 the respondents were to grade the activities of Lapin Liitto from 1 (“poor”) to 5 (“excellent”), while in question 8

they were asked how they saw Lapin Liitto comparing to other regional councils, funding organizations or regional authorities. In the last questions (9, 10 and 11) the respondents were asked about their general image of Lapin Liitto and their suggestions on the improvement of the services and were to evaluate Lapin Liitto's website (<http://www.lapinliitto.fi/fi>) and the website lappi.fi. Lappi.fi is a Lapland portal developed with Lapin Liitto and providing the informational services about the province, as well as about living, education, entrepreneurship and tourism in Lapland. The website was opened in 2009 and is being updated to present more full and up-to-date information.

The questionnaire for students contained nine questions with the first one (1) being to specify the respondent's country of origin (it was expected that Finnish students have a bigger chance to know more about organization than students from the other countries). Further questions partly followed the questionnaire for the stakeholders and organizations, with the questions asking about students' awareness of the Lapin Liitto, about the ways they got the information about the organization and their search criteria for Lapin Liitto's services, it also included grading Lapin Liitto's activities, comparing it to other regional councils, funding organizations and authorities, asking for general image and suggestions on service improvements and evaluating the website. The questionnaire for the stakeholders and organizations was to take 5-8 min to fill in while questionnaire for students was to take 3-5 min.

It is clear that while using the ready-made questionnaire I applied the quantitative method of data collection with one and multiple answer option questions and grading by scale. However, the last three questions in each questionnaire gave no answer option, instead suggested to write the respondent's opinion in the given space. By including the open-ended question questions I tried to encourage the respondents to give their opinion more freely.

The research sampling was pre-defined by Lapin Liitto with the target groups being regional authorities, other regional councils, regional development organizations, regional tourism organizations, enterprises and enterprise associations (tourism and consulting companies as well as other big

companies in Lapland), funding organizations and educational institutions in Lapland. The cover letter with the link to the survey has been sent to 500 organizations and companies.

As for the survey for individuals, I was suggested to target RAMK students which would present a good example of young people living in Lapland.

I have contacted the stakeholders and other organizations and companies by email (in both Finnish and English) asking them to fill in the questionnaire. I also have used RAMK mailing list to contact all RAMK students (in both Finnish and English) to ask for assistance for my thesis by giving their answers.

There is also a number of risks connected with the research results. With the questionnaire being built in a way so it is easy to answer and understand the questions, I think the open-ended questions might not encourage all the respondents to give the detailed answers, or any answers at all, since it is more time consuming than clicking on the ready choice alternative.

The risk concerning the results of the research is that the reputation would be presented based on the stakeholders' and other organizations' as well as individuals' assessment and it might not reflect the reality completely.

Another risk is timing, the questionnaires will be available to fill in for three weeks and not all the organizations might want or have time to answer. Also, while contacting the organizations, I often sent an email on the general email address, so forwarding it to the right person to answer may also take time in the organization. Generally for this kind of surveys the response rate of 40% is considered sufficient (Luoma-aho 2008, 452), however I have defined before the research started that around 50 responses from the companies and organizations would be enough as well as around 100 responses from students.

4.2 Research Findings

The questionnaire was available on Webropol for three weeks. By the end of this time fifty responses from organizations and companies and one hundred

fifty responses from students were received. The results were analyzed with the help of the Webropol analyzing tools and Microsoft Office Excel.

First will be introduced the findings of the research among organizations and companies. A majority of the respondent organizations were enterprises or business associations, followed by municipalities and those specifying themselves as “other” organizations (Figure 1).

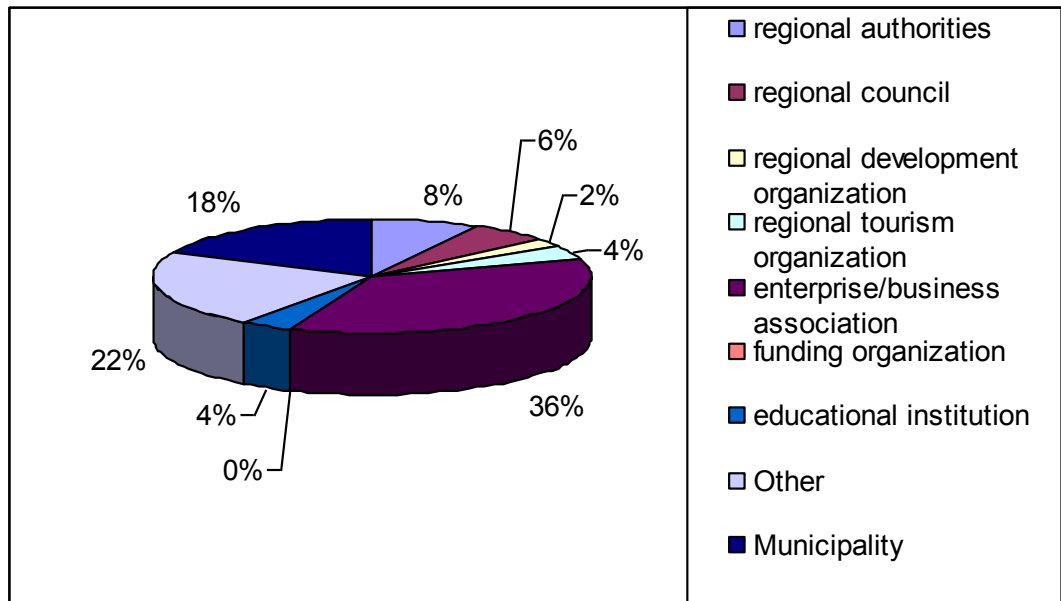


Figure 1. Type of Organization Responding to the Survey

Figure 2 presents the respondents organizations by their location, with 54% of the respondents being from Lapland and 46% from other regions of Finland.

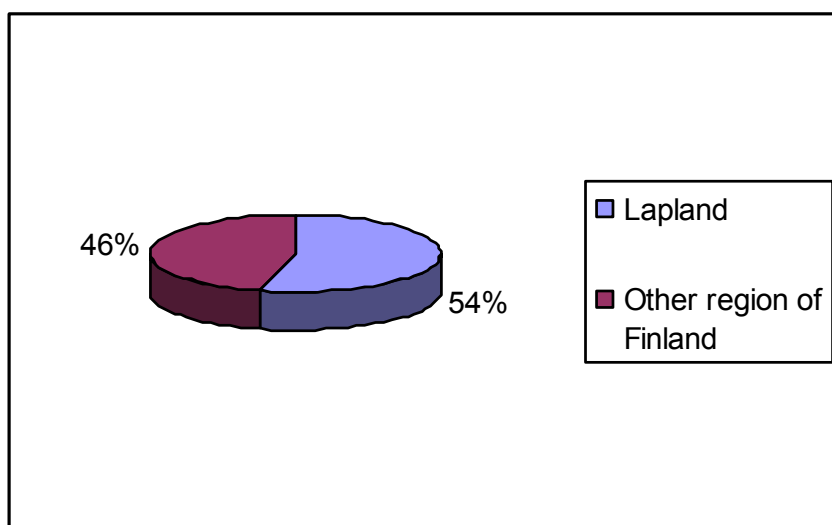


Figure 2. Location of the Organization Responding to the Survey

As Figure 3 shows, 64% of the respondent organizations are familiar with Lapin Liitto and its activities.

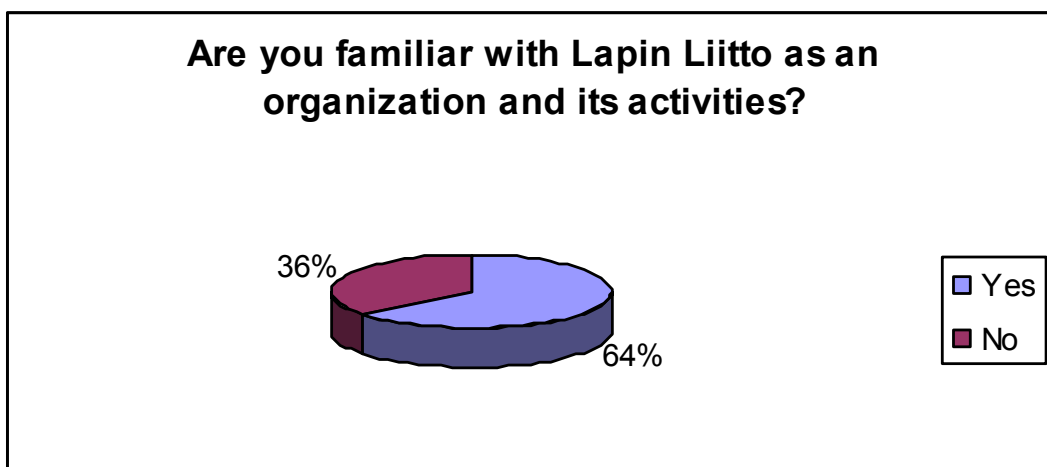


Figure 3. Percent of the Organizations being familiar with Lapin Liitto and with its Operations

Of those organizations familiar with Lapin Liitto 75% had or are having the cooperation with it (Figure 4).

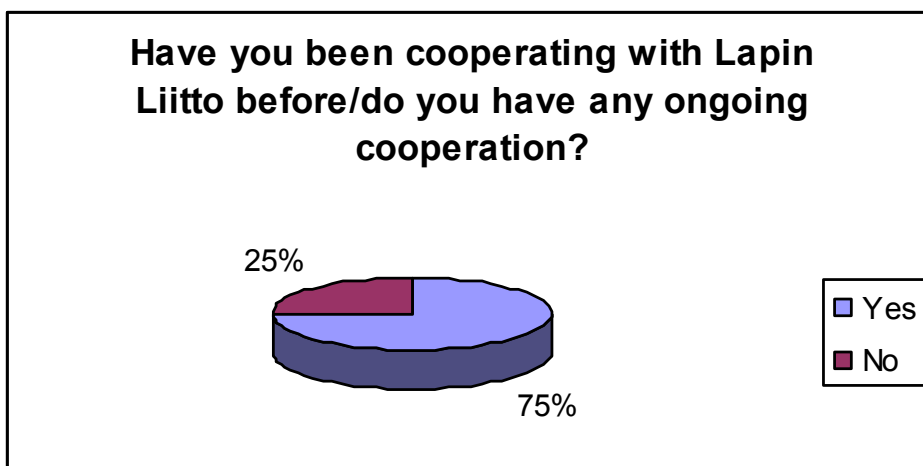


Figure 4. Percent of the Organizations which had or are having the Cooperation with Lapin Liitto

The categories in which the organizations had or are having the cooperation with Lapin Liitto are presented in the Figure 5, with most common being regional development projects and international cooperation.

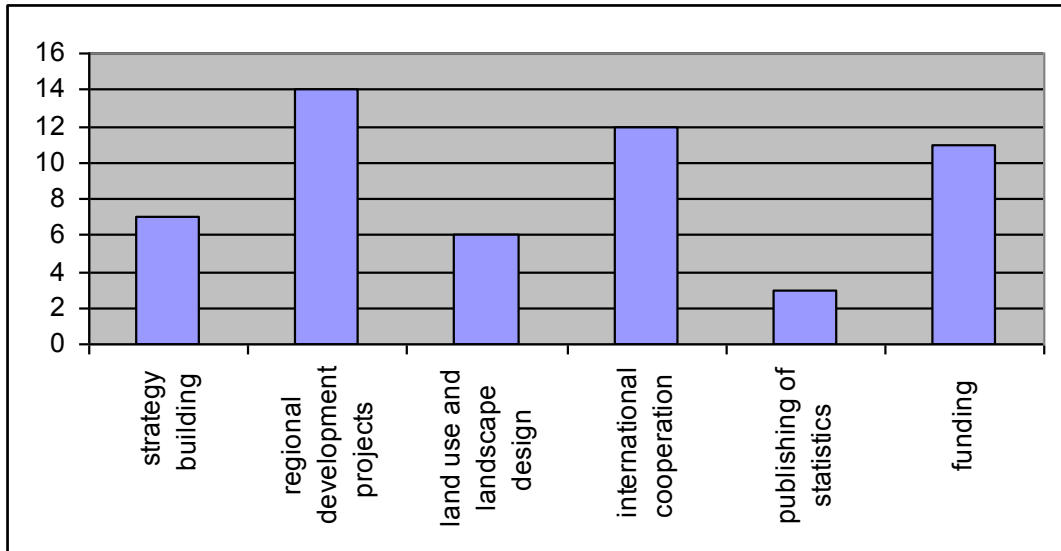


Figure 5. Categories in which the Organizations had or are having the Cooperation with Lapin Liitto

Figure 6 demonstrates the grade the organizations have given to their cooperation with Lapin Liitto, with most common grade being 4 (“good”).

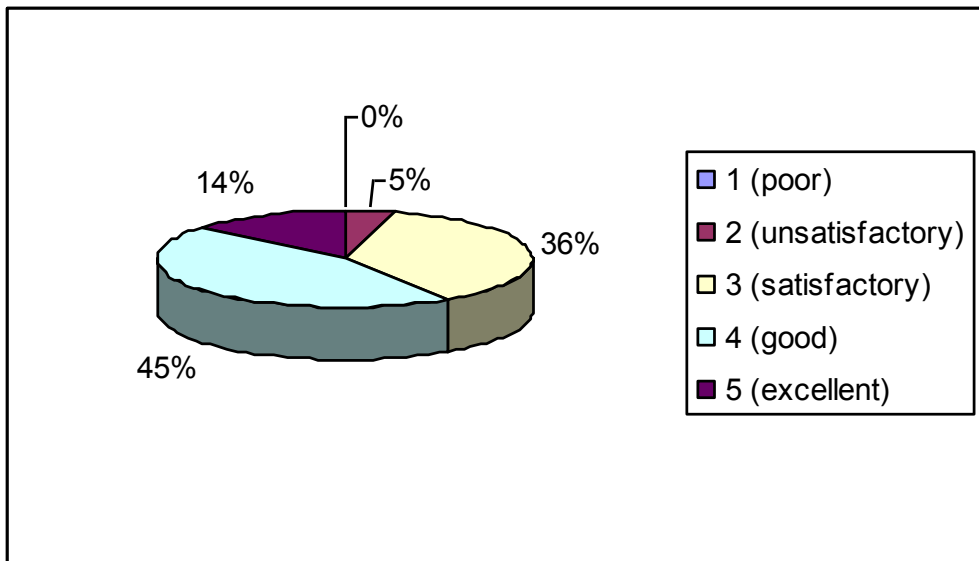


Figure 6. Organizations’ Grade for their Cooperation with Lapin Liitto

Figure 7 presents the grades given to the activities of Lapin Liitto, with the most common grades being 3 (“satisfactory”) or 4 (“good”).

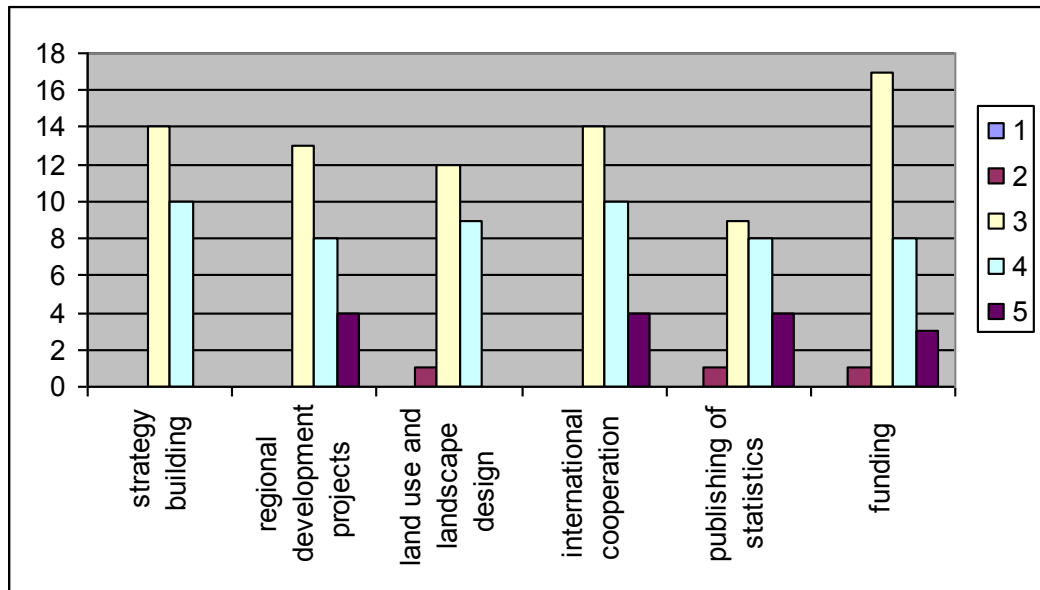


Figure 7. Organizations' Grade for the Activities of Lapin Liitto

The majority of the organizations find Lapin Liitto on the average comparing it to other regional councils, funding organizations or other authorities (72%) and other (28%) find it better then the majority (Figure 8).

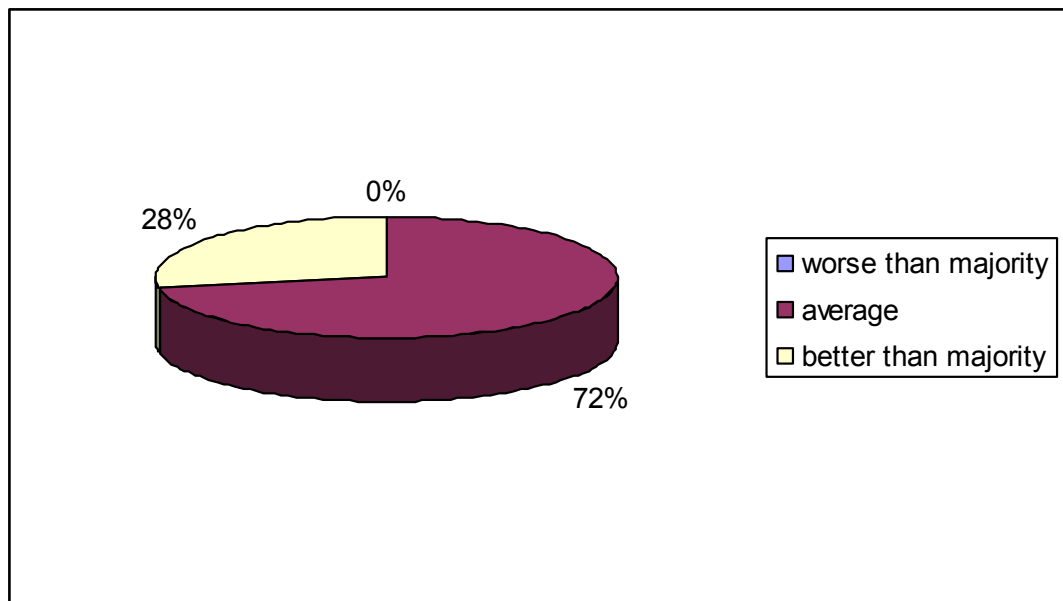


Figure 8. Organizations' Comparison of Lapin Liitto with other Regional Councils/Funding Organizations/other Authorities

Not all the organizations gave the answers to the open-ended questions (9, 10 and 11), however the summary of the responses given will be presented below.

Concerning the image of Lapin Liitto the majority of the organizations responded that in their opinion Lapin Liitto is an active regional player, good at lobbying the interests of Lapland and a strong force in tourism development and regional development projects in general. Some noted that Lapin Liitto is open for the cooperation and find its work efficient and important for the region, at the same time majority related to it as a public organization with neutral reputation. Few respondents mentioned instead that the council concentrates too much on lobbying, shows more interest in Rovaniemi region than for example Kemi-Tornio region and other parts of Lapland, it was also noted that some projects implemented can have bad impact on environment in Lapland.

The organizations have given some advices on how Lapin Liitto can improve its services, suggesting being more open to the cooperation and doing more publicity, such as informing other regional actors and public of what is going on and why certain decisions were made. It was mentioned that the council does not have enough human resources and is need in of more professionals, especially young professionals as project leaders.

The webpages www.lapinliitto.fi and www.lappi.fi got generally good responses. Lapin Liitto's website, according to the majority of the respondents, is informative and easy to use, containing all the necessary information and having a clear layout however lacks pages in other languages than Finnish and might need a little more professional approach in website design. Lappi.fi was said to be informative and easy to use as well, however somewhat similar to other Lapland related webpages.

Figure 9 presents the student respondents by the country of origin. The majority (94%) of the respondents are from Finland.

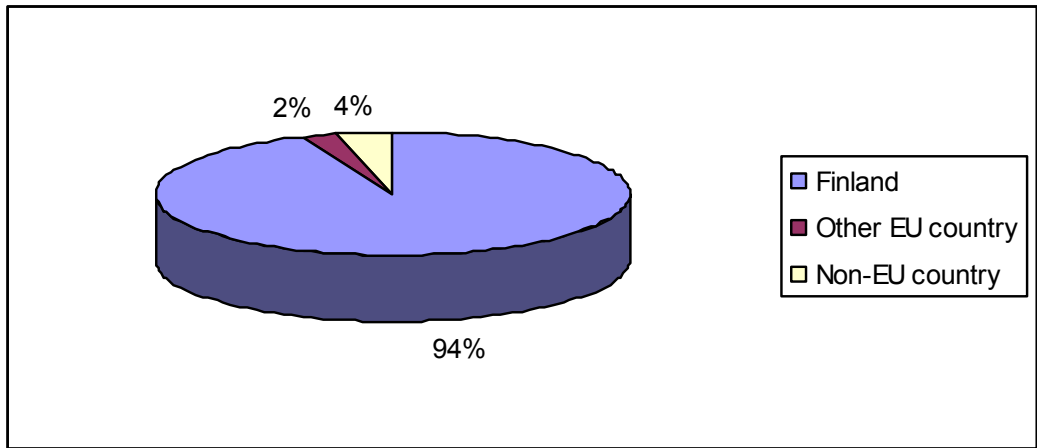


Figure 9. Student Respondents by Country of Origin

Among the student respondents 68% are not familiar with Lapin Liitto (Figure 10).

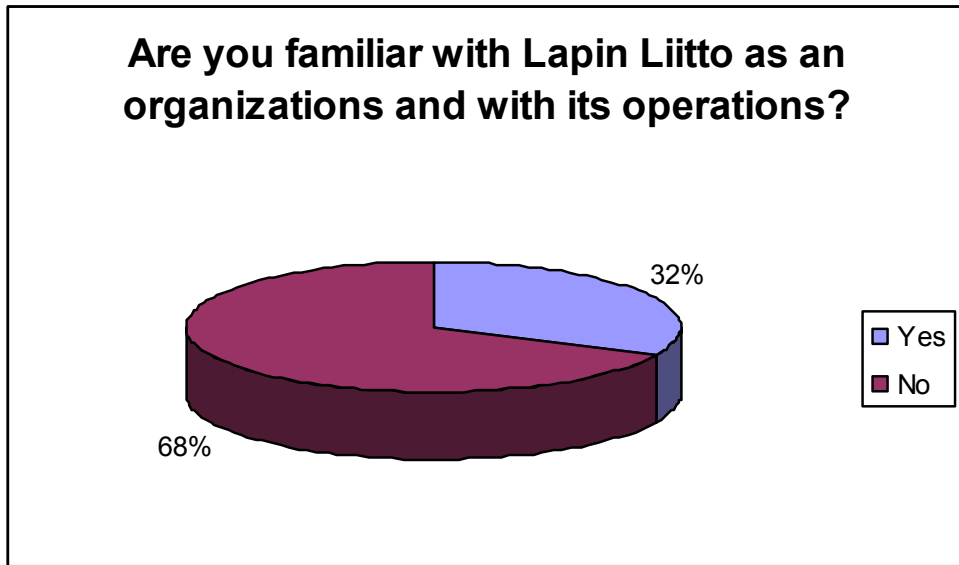


Figure 10. Percent of the Student Respondents being familiar with Lapin Liitto and with its Operations

Among those students who are familiar with lapin Liitto the majority acquired the information about it from the Internet either from the newspapers (Figure 11).

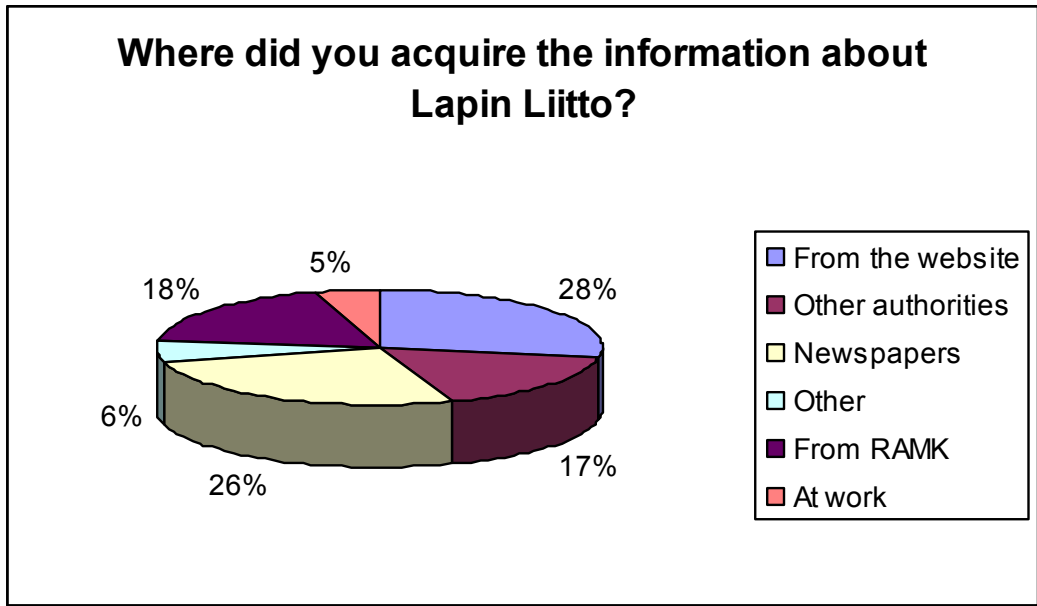


Figure 11. Sources of Information Acquisition about Lapin Liitto according to Student Respondents

Most of the information student respondents acquired about Lapin Liitto’s services was about regional development projects or concerned the statistics (Figure 12).

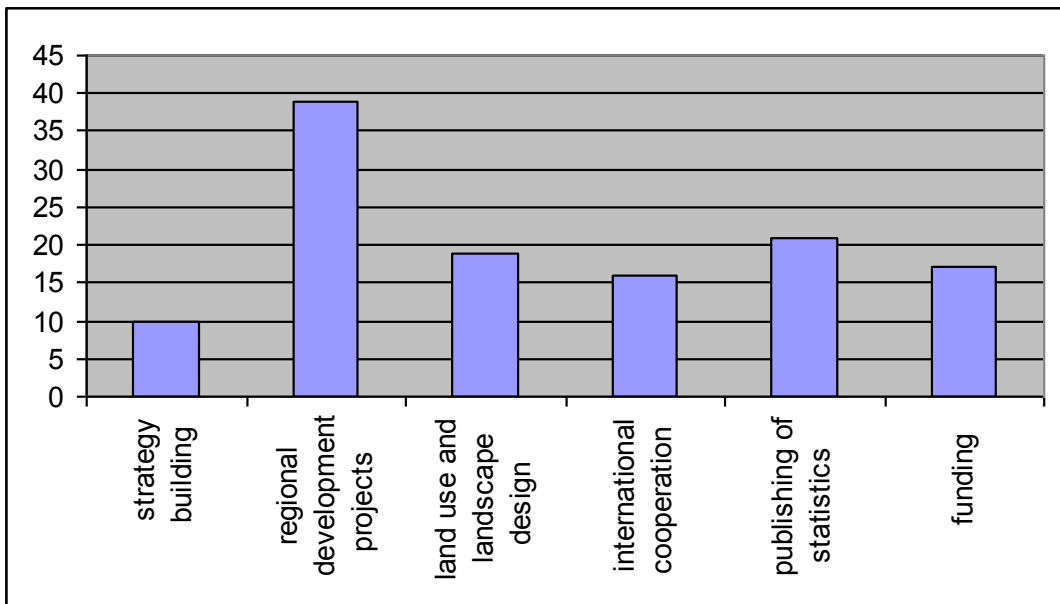


Figure 12. Information Acquired about Lapin Liitto’s Services according to Student Respondents

According to Figure 13, the most common grade given by the student respondents to Lapin Liitto’s activities is 3 (“satisfactory”) or 4 (“good”).

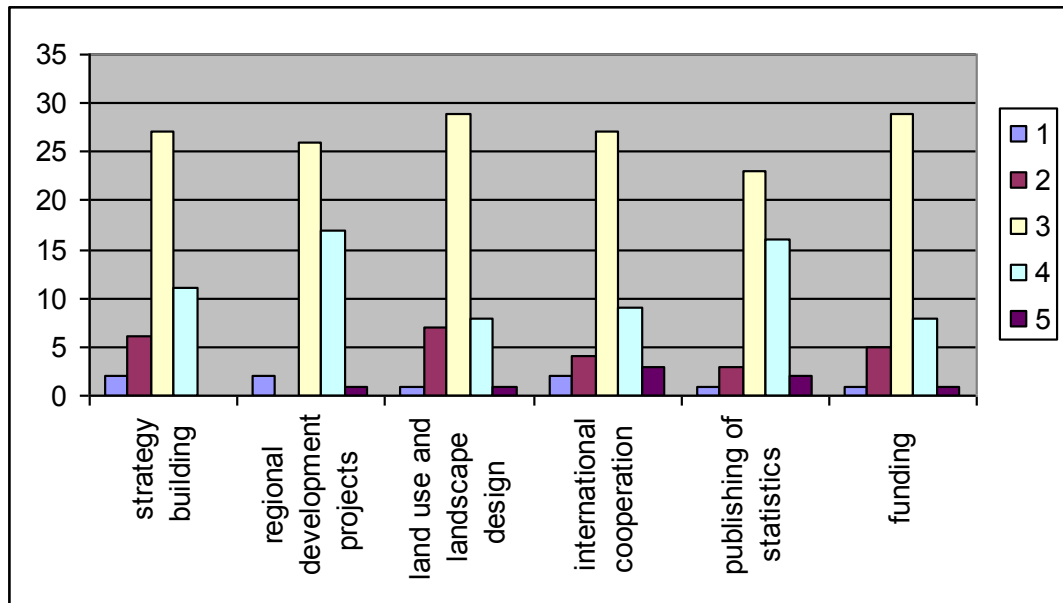


Figure 13. Student Respondents' Grade for the Activities of Lapin Liitto

Majority of the students (86%) find Lapin Liitto on average comparing to other regional councils, funding organizations or other authorities (Figure 14).

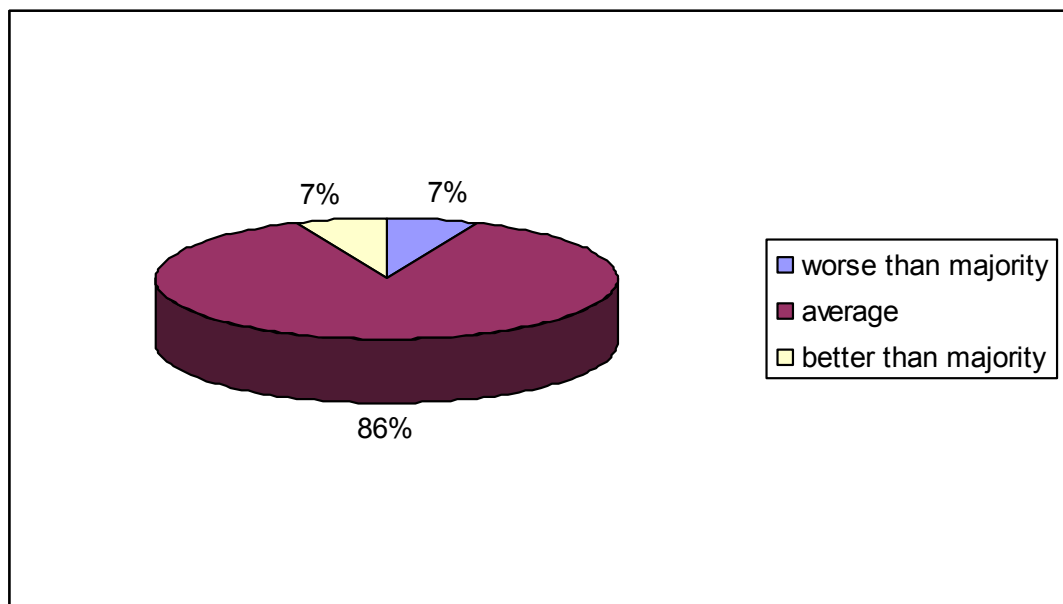


Figure 14. Student Respondents' Comparison of Lapin Liitto with other Regional Councils/Funding Organizations/other Authorities

A majority of the student respondents gave their opinions in open-ended questions, showing that they are interested in and well informed about the regional matters. The image of Lapin Liitto held by student respondents can in general be described as good or neutral, with the majority suggesting that it is an important regional actor, especially in development and lobbying, implementing the important regional projects. Some noted that the

organization is well managed and structured and has a positive internal environment and effective external cooperation, also good and responsible about statistics publishing. Others, however, mention that the activities of Lapin Liitto are not always connected to everyday realities of life in the region and that strategy building and projects implemented have room for improvement. More publicity and cooperation with population is also recommended, especially in the field of land use and planning.

As for improving of the services, the student respondents suggest more cooperation with regional small companies and schools as well as more publicity and being closer to public and customers and being interactive.

The comments on the websites are partly same as those given by the organizations, the majority of the opinions expressed state that both websites are generally good, informative, easy to use and find necessary information, well organized. However, some respondents suggest that Lapin Liitto's webpages are better to be available in other languages than Finnish and that website design should be more professional. As for www.lappi.fi some suggested that the website is not original, overloaded with unnecessary information and more information can be found on other Lapland related websites. Comments have been given about putting more useful information on www.lappi.fi such as open vacancies in Lapland and more detailed information for residents of Lapland.

To summarize the results I can say that Lapin Liitto is a rather well-known organization, both in Lapland and outside of it and it is seen as an important regional organization by both organizations and student respondents.

Most of the organizations taken part in the survey are from Lapland and the majority of those either had or are having the cooperation with Lapin Liitto. The main fields of cooperation are regional development projects, international cooperation and funding and the average grade given to the cooperation with Lapin Liitto is 3,7 out of 5.

The majority of students showed not to be familiar with Lapin Liitto and its activities. It can be explained that though living and studying in Lapland,

some students are from other parts of Finland. The information about Lapin Liitto was mostly acquired from the Internet or media and students proved to be especially interested in regional development projects and statistics publishing when acquiring the information.

Table 1 presents the average grades given by the organizations and student respondents to Lapin Liitto's activities, the grade system is from 1 to 5. The organizations have given the higher grades, with the total average being 3,5 while the total average grade given by students is 3,2.

Table 1. The Average Grades given by Organizations and Student Respondents to Lapin Liitto's Activities

	Average grade given by organizations	Average grade given by students
Strategy building	3,4	3
Regional development projects	3,6	3,3
Land use and landscape design	3,4	3
International cooperation	3,5	3,2
Publishing of statistics	3,5	3,3
Funding	3,4	3,1

Comparing Lapin Liitto to other regional councils, funding organizations or other authorities 72% of the organizations said it is on average (the rest 28% said it is better than majority) while 86% of students suggested that it is on average, with other 7% grading it as better and equal 7% as worse than the majority.

Both organizations and students see Lapin Liitto as an active regional player, which main tasks are seen as lobbying the interests of the region, strategy building and implementing regional development projects. Apart from a few relatively negative responses, the Council is seen as a public organization with neutral or good reputation both among the organization and students.

There are suggestion for Lapin Liitto to be more open to cooperation, also with small businesses and educational institutions, being more open for public and interacting with the population. The website of the Council is generally found to be informative and easy to use, containing all the necessary information, however suggested to be improved in design and language options.

CONCLUSION

Having all the results summarized, I came to the conclusion that the thesis has reached the stated goal to a picture of image of Lapin Liitto among its stakeholders, other organizations and individuals.

I have studied the concept of image from the books, articles and research papers. I must note that most of the corporate image related literature is aimed for businesses and not all the issues can be applied to public sector organizations. However, the research papers by Finnish author Vilma Luoma-aho have been of much help in defining the special features for image in public sector.

In general the reputation of Lapin Liitto can be said to be neutral and even good, which is a satisfying result for a public sector organization (Luoma-aho 2008, 447-451). The activities of Lapin Liitto were generally graded as more than satisfactory and the Council was said to be on the average level comparing to other regional councils, funding organizations and authorities. The council is seen as an important regional actor responsible for strategy building, regional development projects and lobbying the interests of the region.

The sample is considered to be enough to draw the conclusions, however, I admit that more responses from the organizations would be more sufficient. However, due to the tight schedule the number of the responses from the organizations is limited to fifty. The number of responses from students is considered sufficient and the respondents provided a lot of constructed and useful feedback, which also shows their interest in the subject. I consider the response rate enough to present the picture.

Apart from the limited timing for the answers, I took time to contact the commissioner company and organize a meeting with their representative, which is easy to understand due to the busy schedule of the organization.

The thesis is not aiming to provide the solutions for the improvement of the image, instead, it presents the gathered information on the existing image of Lapin Liitto. However, the responses given can provide some ideas for the improvement of public image of the Council, such as being more open to public and cooperating with population and small businesses in Lapland.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire for the organizations (in English).

Survey on the image of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland)

The following survey is designed as a part of image study of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland) for the thesis project. The goal of the research is to find out what Lapin Liitto's stakeholders and other important regional organizations think of Lapin Liitto, how do they evaluate it as a partner and if they find its work to be successful.

1. Please specify what kind of organization you represent

- regional authorities
- regional council
- regional development organization
- regional tourism organization
- enterprise/business association
- funding organization
- educational institution
- other

2. Please specify your location

- Lapland
- other regions of Finland

3. Are you familiar with Lapin Liitto as an organization and with its operations?

- yes
- no

If your answer for question 3 is "no", please continue with question 11. If your answer is "yes", please continue with questions below.

4. Have you been cooperating with Lapin Liitto before/do you have any ongoing cooperation?

- yes

- no

If your answer for question 4 is “no”, continue with question 7. If your answer is “yes”, please continue with questions below.

5. What of the following categories have your cooperation with Lapin Liitto included? Select one or more

strategy building

regional development projects

land use and landscape design

international cooperation

publishing of statistics

funding

6. How would you grade your cooperation with Lapin Liitto using the scale 1 to 5 (with 1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent”):

1 2 3 4 5

7. Please specify how successful, in your opinion, the work of Lapin Liitto has been until 2010. Grade the activities of Lapin Liitto in the following areas from 1 to 5 (with 1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent”):

strategy building	1	2	3	4	5
regional development projects	1	2	3	4	5
land use and landscape design	1	2	3	4	5
international cooperation	1	2	3	4	5
publishing of statistics	1	2	3	4	5
funding	1	2	3	4	5

8. How do you see Lapin Liitto comparing to other regional councils/funding organizations/regional authorities?

- worse than majority
- average
- better than majority

9. What is your general image of Lapin Liitto?

Please use the space below

10. In your opinion, how Lapin Liitto could improve its services?

Please use the space below

11. What is your opinion about the webpages www.lapinliitto.fi and www.lappi.fi?

Please use the space below

Thank you!

Appendix 2. Questionnaire for the organizations (in Finnish).

Lapin Liiton imago-tutkimus

Seuraava tutkimus on suunniteltu osana Lapin Liiton imago-tutkimusta lopputyötä varten. Tutkimuksen päämääränä on löytää Lapin Liiton osakkeidenhaltijoiden ja muiden tärkeiden osapuolten mielikuva Lapin Liitosta, miten ne arvioivat Lapin Liittoa yhteistyökumppanina ja ovatko he tyytyväisiä Lapin Liiton työhön.

1. Tarkentakaa minkä tyyppinen organisaation olette

- Alueviranomaiset
- Maakuntaliitto
- Alueellisen Kehityksen Organisaatio
- Alueellisen Matkailun Järjestö
- Yritys/Liiketoiminta Assosiaatiokomitea
- Rahoitusyhdistys
- Oppilaitos
- Joku muu

2. Olkaa hyvä ja tarkentakaa olinpaikkanne

- Lappi
- Suomen muu lääni

3. Oletko tietoinen Lapin Liitosta organisaationa ja sen toiminnasta?

- Kyllä
- En

Jos vastasit kysymykseen 3. "Ei, olkaa hyvä ja jatkakaa kysymykseen 11.

Jos vastasitte "Kyllä", olkaa hyvä ja jatkakaa allaolevilla kysymyksillä.

4. Oletteko olleet yhteistyössä Lapin Liiton kanssa ennen/Onko teillä mitään vireillä olevaa yhteistyötä?

- Kyllä
- Ei

Jos vastasitte kysymykseen 4. "Ei", olkaa hyvä ja jatkakaa kysymykseen 7.

Jos vastasitte "Kyllä", jatkakaa allaolevilla kysymyksillä.

5. Mitä seuraavista kategorioista on yhteistyönne Lapin Liiton kanssa sisältänyt? Valitkaa yksi tai enemmän

Strategian Rakentaminen

Alueelliset Kehitysprojektit

Maa-alueiden käyttö ja maisemasuunnittelu

Kansainvälinen yhteistyö

Tilastojen julkistaminen

Rahoitus

6. Miten arvioisitte yhteistyönne Lapin Liiton kanssa yhdestä (1) viiteen (5) (1 Heikkoa ja 5 Onnistunutta)

1 2 3 4 5

7. Tarkentakaa kuinka onnistunutta mielestänne Lapin Liiton työ on ollut vuoteen 2010 mennessä. Arvioikaa Lapin Liiton toimintaa seuraavissa sarakkeissa yhdestä (1) viiteen (5) (1 Heikkoa ja 5 Onnistunutta):

Strategian Rakentaminen	1	2	3	4	5
Alueelliset Kehitysprojektit	1	2	3	4	5
Maa-alueiden käyttö ja maisemasuunnittelu	1	2	3	4	5
Kansainvälinen yhteistyö	1	2	3	4	5
Tilastojen julkistaminen	1	2	3	4	5
Rahoitus	1	2	3	4	5

8. Miten näette Lapin Liiton verrattaessa muihin maakuntaliittoihin/rahoitusjärjestöihin/alueviranomaisiin?

- Huonompana kuin suurin osa maakuntaliittoista
- Keskiverta
- Parempana kuin suurin osa maakuntaliittoista

Jos teillä on mitään kommentteja, olkaa hyvä ja käytäkää allaolevaa tilaa kirjoittamiseen

9. Mikä on yleinen näkemyksenne Lapin Liitosta?

Olkaa hyvä ja kirjoittakaa allaolevaan tyhjään tilaan

10. Miten Lapin Liitto voisi mielestänne parantaa palvelujaan?

Olkaa hyvä ja kirjoittakaa allaolevaan tyhjään tilaan

11. Mikä on mielepiteenne seuraavista nettisivuista: www.lapinliitto.fi ja www.lappi.fi?

Olkaa hyvä ja kirjoittakaa allaolevaan tyhjään tilaan

Kiitos!

Appendix 3. Questionnaire for the students (in English).

Survey on the image of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland)

The following survey is designed as a part of image study of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland) for the thesis project. The goal of the research is to find out what the residents of Lapland think of Lapin Liitto and if they find its work to be successful.

1. Please specify your country of origin

- Finland
- other EU country
- non-EU country

2. Are you familiar with Lapin Liitto as an organization and with its operations?

- yes
- no

If your answer for question 2 is “no”, please continue with question 9. If your answer is “yes”, please continue with questions below.

3. Where did acquire information about Lapin Liitto?

- From the website
- Other authorities
- Newspapers
- Other (please specify)

4. What kind of information have you acquired on Lapin Liitto's services? Please select one or more from the following categories.

strategy building

regional development projects

land use and landscape design

international cooperation

publishing of statistics

funding

5. Please specify how successful, in your opinion, the work of Lapin Liitto has been until 2010. Grade the activities of Lapin Liitto in the following areas from 1 to 5 (with 1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent”):

strategy building	1	2	3	4	5
regional development projects	1	2	3	4	5
land use and landscape design	1	2	3	4	5
international cooperation	1	2	3	4	5
publishing of statistics	1	2	3	4	5
funding	1	2	3	4	5

6. How do you see Lapin Liitto comparing to other regional councils/funding organizations/other authorities?

- worse than majority of regional councils
- average
- better than majority of regional councils

If you have any comments, please use the space below

7. What is your general image of Lapin Liitto?

Please use the space below

8. In your opinion, how Lapin Liitto could improve its services?

Please use the space below

9. What is your opinion about the webpages www.lapinliitto.fi and www.lappi.fi?

Please use the space below

Thank you!

Lapin Liiton imago-tutkimus

Seuraava tutkimus on suunniteltu osana Lapin Liiton imago-tutkimusta lopputyötä varten. Tutkimuksen päämääränä on löytää Lapin Liiton osakkeidenhaltijoiden ja muiden tärkeiden osapuolten mielikuva Lapin Liitosta, miten ne arvioivat Lapin Liittoa yhteistyökumppanina ja ovatko he tyytyväisiä Lapin Liiton työhön.

1. Tarkentaisitteko alkuperäismaanne

- Suomi
- Joku muu EU-maa
- EU:n ulkopuolinen maa

2. Oletko tietoinen Lapin Liitosta organisaationa ja sen toiminnasta?

- Kyllä
- En

Jos vastasitte kysymykseen 2. "Ei", olkaa hyvä ja jatkakaa kysymykseen 9.
Jos vastasitte "Kyllä", jatkakaa allaolevilla kysymyksillä.

3. Mistä saitte tietää Lapin Liitosta?

Nettisivulta

Muilta viranomaisilta

Sanomalehdissä

Muu (tarkentakaa)

4. Millaista tietoa olette saaneet Lapin Liiton palveluista? Olkaa hyvä ja valitkaa yksi tai useampi seuraavista kategorioista.

Strategian Rakentaminen

Alueelliset Kehitysprojektit

Maa-alueiden käyttö ja maisemasuunnittelu

Kansainvälinen yhteistyö

Tilastojen julkistaminen

Rahoitus

5. Tarkentakaa kuinka onnistunutta mielestänne Lapin Liiton työ on ollut vuoteen 2010 mennessä. Arvioikaa Lapin Liiton toimintaa seuraavissa sarakkeissa yhdestä (1) viiteen (5) (1 Heikkoa ja 5 Onnistunutta):

Strategian Rakentaminen	1	2	3	4	5
Alueelliset Kehitysprojektit	1	2	3	4	5
Maa-alueiden käyttö ja maisemasuunnittelu	1	2	3	4	5
Kansainvälinen yhteistyö	1	2	3	4	5
Tilastojen julkistaminen	1	2	3	4	5
Rahoitus	1	2	3	4	5

6. Miten näette Lapin Liiton verrattaessa muihin maakuntaliittoihin/rahoitusjärjestöihin/alueviranomaisiin?

- Huonompana kuin suurin osa maakuntaliitosta
- Keskiverto
- Parempana kuin suurin osa maakuntaliitosta

Jos teillä on mitään kommentteja, olkaa hyvä ja käyttäkää allaolevaa tilaa kirjoittamiseen

7. Mikä on yleinen näkemyksenne Lapin Liitosta?

Olkaa hyvä ja kirjoittakaa allaolevaan tyhjään tilaan

8. Miten Lapin Liitto voisi mielestänne parantaa palvelujaan?

Olkaa hyvä ja kirjoittakaa allaolevaan tyhjään tilaan

9. Mikä on mielipiteenne seuraavista nettisivuista: www.lapinliitto.fi ja www.lappi.fi?

Olkaa hyvä ja kirjoittakaa allaolevaan tyhjään tilaan

Kiitos!

Appendix 5. Cover letter for organizations.

Survey for stakeholders/Tutkimus Osakkeenhaltijoille

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am studying in RAMK (Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences) and currently writing my thesis on the image of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland). Within the thesis process I conduct the research on what Lapin Liitto's stakeholders and other important organizations think of Lapin Liitto and how they evaluate its work.

I would be very grateful if you can fill in the questionnaire on your perception of Lapin Liitto. The questionnaire is available in Finnish <http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=489244&cid=15035595> and in English <http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=483576&cid=62804295> The survey should take 5-8 min.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Evgenia Amey
Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences
evgenia.amey@edu.ramk.fi
+358 449698970
Rovaniemi, FINLAND

Arvoisa Herra/Rouva,

Opiskelen RAMK:ssa (Rovaniemen Ammattikorkeakoulu) ja työskentelen parhaillaan lopputyöni parissa, joka käsittelee Lapin Liiton imagea. Lopputyötäni varten suoritan tutkimusta Lapin Liiton osakkeenhaltijoiden ja muiden tärkeiden organisaatioiden näkemyksestä Lapin Liitosta ja miten he arvioivat sen työtä.

Olisin erittäin kiitollinen jos voisitte täyttää kyselyn oman näkemyksenne Lapin Liitosta mukaan. Kysely on saatavilla suomeksi <http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=489244&cid=15035595> ja englanniksi <http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=483576&cid=62804295>. Kyselyn pitäisi kestää noin 5-8minuuttia.

Kiitos yhteistyöstänne.

Kiittäen,

Evgenia Amey
Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences
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+358 449698970
Rovaniemi, FINLAND

Survey for students/Tutkimus Opiskelijoille

Hi everyone,

I'm writing my thesis on the image of Lapin Liitto (Regional Council of Lapland), for that I conduct the survey on what RAMK students know about Lapin Liitto and its activities.

Please fill in the questionnaire either in Finnish

<http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=489245&cid=15028371> or in English

<http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=488856&cid=18304455> The survey will take 2-5 min.

Thank you.

Best regards,

Evgenia Amey.

Hei kaikki,

Kirjoitan lopputyötäni Lapin Liiton imago-tutkimuksesta ja suoritan sitä varten kyselyn RAMK:n oppilaiden näkemyksestä Lapin Liitosta ja sen toiminnoista.

Olkaa hyvä ja täyttäkää kysely joko suomeksi

<http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=489245&cid=15028371> tai englanniksi

<http://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=488856&cid=18304455>. Kysely kestää

noin 2-5min.

Kiitos.

Terveisin,

Evgenia Amey.