

Summary

Pekka Aula & Kimmo Vehkalahti & Topiantti Äikäs (2007): City reputation: A study of the structure of the reputation of cities and of factors influencing it. Acta No. 193. Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Helsinki.

This study examined the structure of the reputation of nine Finnish cities and factors influencing it. The goal was to clarify concepts and research methods used in urban and municipal research. The cities studied were Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Kuopio, Lahti, Lappeenranta, Oulu, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa. These were chosen as they are the main cities of large city regions. These city regions have participated in the construction of national city politics in the early 2000's.

The research material was based on answers from almost 1 400 Finns of working age collected through an Internet panel arranged by Taloustutkimus Oy in November – December 2005. The method used was quota sampling. People assessed the cities by responding to questions and statements about the image of the cities. They did not assess their current city of residence.

City reputation research focuses on fundamental questions about cities' attractiveness. The basic idea is that a good reputation increases the attraction of a city, and thus its competitiveness and future prospects. As regards the research setting, the study belongs both to interdisciplinary urban and regional research and to the communication field. Particularly in the research tradition of urban and regional research the current reputation discussion is a fairly new phenomenon. Instead of focusing on reputation based on existing conceptions and experiences of a city, studies have primarily concentrated on the development of images, and on how these may deliberately be altered. These studies have been strongly characterised by clarification and "construction" of the image of a locality. Therefore, research into the reputation of cities offers a novel perspective and concepts deepening the practices of modern research.

This study shows that there are six core factors influencing the reputation of a city. On the basis of the material these dimensions are in order of importance (1) public image, (2) services, (3) responsibility, (4) environment, (5) leadership, and (6) innovativity. In addition to assessing the general reputation, the study ranked the cities in all these areas. Based on the research material larger cities may be divided into three categories. The research group named these using symbolic terms from broader urban

discourse and from the world of sports. Thus it identified the “big cities”, a “creative class” and a “third division” of image.

In addition to a structural analysis and reputational ranking the research material lent itself to an examination of the establishment of a particular relationship to a city. This relationship perspective is new in Finnish urban and regional research, and a similar examination has not been conducted earlier. A relationship is formed in the interaction between conceptions and experiences of a city. This setting makes it possible to assess the reputation management of cities as well as the efficiency of the marketing and the development prospects of cities.

In the report each city is also discussed individually. During the work the research group thoroughly analysed how the cities could develop their reputation management and marketing. Research into the reputation of cities makes it possible to take an analytical look behind the surface structure of more traditional city and regional marketing and advertising. This is an advantage of this research setting in comparison with traditional marketing perspectives. Also, the study shows that the roots of reputation thrive in the real actions of cities, *i.e.* the reputation of cities is also established in the interaction between activities and the experiences and conceptions of these activities.