Proximity and Learning in Internationalisation
Small Swedish IT firms in India
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Abstract
The four IT service firms of this thesis set out to interact and collaborate between their offices in Sweden and in India, some more intensely and frequently than others. In the process of their internationalisation, these small service firms find ways, or go through a process of learning how to collaborate in an international setting. The qualitative exploration of the process of learning is inspired by ‘communities of practice’, and in this thesis the focus is on ways in which individuals of firms through social participation learn to collaborate across distance, and develop a common way of working together in an international setting. This includes making use of technological objects as well as individuals acting as brokers bridging distance, and it is played out in physical as well as social proximity. This thesis aims at continuing the vibrant discussion in economic geography where proximity is seen as more than ‘being there’ in a physical sense. In this discussion, the understanding of proximity is related to social aspects and can be seen as a metaphor of closeness. Hence, more emphasis is put on the role and experiences, including intention and sense of passion, of individuals. In this thesis, this experience of closeness is empirically explored through a longitudinal study in Sweden and in India. This includes trying to operationalise social proximity by exploring the experience of social proximity amongst the individuals of the case firms. More precisely, social proximity is conceptualised as individuals experiencing ‘shared social familiarity’. This thesis combines a discussion on proximities with literature on processes of learning. This is in order to present a more thorough understanding of how social proximity can develop over time and, furthermore, in what way social proximity matters for service firms working in an international setting.

Keywords: Internationalisation, proximity, learning, communities of practice, India, Sweden, ICT, service, IT, small firms.

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