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# Vanguard projects as relay races: A historical case study on the building of Eurocan pulp and paper mill, 1965–1970

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research recognises the strategic role of vanguard projects in providing their initiators with avenues for entering new markets or gaining mastery over innovative technologies. This study makes a contribution to this research by focusing on the extent to which vanguard projects are under control and serve the interests of their principal initiators and the other actors involved. Simultaneously, the present study contributes to project management research by applying historical case study methodology on Eurocan, a vanguard project that a major Finnish forest industry firm Enso established in the mid-1960s in the wilderness of British Columbia, Canada. Our historical analysis encourages regarding vanguard projects as relay races in which several actors participate, largely in unanticipated ways. This is especially because the initiation of vanguard projects appears to be characterised by both the heterogeneity of the actors involved, a wide variety of actions taken by these actors to increase their centrality in the project organisation as well as abrupt changes among them and their relative importance over the project lifecycle. Together these characteristics make vanguard projects particularly prone to influence from external actors and events.

## 1. Introduction

Firms occasionally establish projects that are immensely challenging with respect to the firms' size or previous experience. Such projects of entrepreneurial nature are often referred to as 'first-of-their-kind' or 'vanguard' projects (e.g. Frederiksen & Davies, 2008; Tillement, Garcias, Minguet & Duboc, 2019); these projects represent deliberate and strategic efforts by firms to move away from their previous core business activities and venture forth into new markets or technologies. In addition to influencing the futures of their initiators, vanguard projects may be ground-breaking from the perspective of groups of firms or even entire industries. For example, Delbridge and Edwards (2008) discussed how the shipping industry substantively changed following the launch of the ocean liner Queen Elizabeth 2 and the superyacht Tiawana. The construction of the Florence Duomo – the largest brick dome ever built – during the 15th century serves as a further example. The building of the huge dome required the development of new kinds of lifting engines that were later used and improved in consequent engineering projects (Kozak-Holland & Procter, 2014).

Vanguard projects are no exception to other projects in the sense that the earliest phases of their lifecycle, i.e. the project front-end, are critically important for their outcomes (Edkins, Gerald, Morris & Smith, 2013; Williams, Vo, Samset & Edkins, 2019). Consequently, the ability

of the project to create value depends largely on the ability of its initiator to initiate and direct the formation of a network of complementary actors that are motivated to share information and resources when specifying the central elements of the project's scope (Matinheikki, Artto, Peltokorpi & Rajala, 2016). During the front-end phase, diverse business and non-business actors, each guided by their idiosyncratic objectives, seek to influence the relevant decision-making processes (Williams & Samset, 2010). However, from the perspective of the project initiator, which is typically limited in its resources (Pinto & Winch, 2016), distinguishing actors that are crucial from those that are less relevant, as well as devising strategies for interacting with them, represent tremendous and still largely unsolved challenges (Aaltonen, Ahola & Artto, 2017; Olander, 2007). The front-end phase is also characterised by an exceptionally high level of ambiguity, emerging particularly from the iteratively evolving objectives of the project and the motives of various actors involved in its initiation, making it a challenging target for empirical inquiry (e.g. Garud, Tuertscher & Van de Ven, 2013; Jones & Massa, 2013). This ambiguity also partly explains why in previous research, the early phases of the project lifecycle have received less attention than the later phases, such as implementation (Artto, Ahola & Vartiainen, 2016; David, Sine & Haveman, 2013; Hellgren & Stjernberg, 1995). Therefore, it is not at all surprising that we do not yet fully comprehend how firms initiate vanguard projects, nor do we ade-

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quately understand the roles that other actors may play during the initiation process. In addition to increasing our understanding of the salient characteristics of vanguard projects and how they are initiated, further exploration of these phenomena has the potential to support practitioners in their corresponding efforts. Knowledge potentially resulting from empirical research on the topic includes answers to questions such as which kinds of project stakeholders are involved in the initiation process and when and how they get involved with it.

To extend the current understanding of vanguard projects in general and their early phases in particular, the present study joins the gradually strengthening stream of project research that draws on institutional organisation theory (e.g. [Dille & Söderlund, 2011](#); [Dille, Söderlund & Clegg, 2018](#); [Söderlund & Sydow, 2019](#)). Although many (e.g. [Engwall, 2003](#); [Söderlund, 2004](#)) have criticised project research for concentrating excessively on the present, those adopting an institutional theory lens posit that projects in general and vanguard projects or megaprojects in particular are influenced by the past actions, prevailing norms and expected futures of the institutional environments in which they are initiated and implemented ([Biesenthal, Clegg, Mahalingam & Sankaran, 2018](#); [Matinheikki, Aaltonen & Walker, 2019](#); [Morris & Geraldi, 2011](#)). Consequently, as institutional environments may either constrain or encourage innovation ([Greenwood & Hinings, 1996](#); [Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007](#)), approaching vanguard projects from this angle makes us more sensitive to how the distinctive norms and rules prevailing in this environment influence the emergence and unfolding of these projects. As a start, the extraordinary novelty inherent in vanguard projects produces a legitimacy threshold ([Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002](#)) that their initiators need to exceed. Vanguard projects are also highly susceptible to various coercive pressures. For example, we might recognise that the actions of a firm that is the first to invest in a new technology or expand into a new market may be actively resisted by its peers that have failed to initiate a corresponding measure ([Midler & Beaume, 2010](#)). The institutional perspective also makes us sensitive to the mimetic responses ([Haveman, 1993](#)) that even promising – although not yet fully accomplished – vanguard projects may provoke amongst those who operate in the same line of business. Taken together, such aspects encourage studying vanguard projects and their institutional environments in a bi-directional setting in which both elements may continuously influence each other ([Beckert, 1999](#); [Lamberg, Laurila & Nokelainen, 2017](#); [Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010](#)).

Methodologically speaking, the present study extends the previous conceptual understanding of the emergence of vanguard projects by analysing a historical case of Eurocan, a pulp and paper mill that a Finnish firm Enso-Gutzeit (henceforth, Enso) built in British Columbia between 1965 and 1970. Eurocan exemplifies a vanguard project largely because in the Finnish forest industry at the time, the establishment of production facilities typically took place on the home continent (or even country) of the respective firms. Initiating a project to build a new production facility overseas on the West Coast of Canada when Enso had neither prior production experience nor industrial collaborators outside Europe was a highly risky course of action, which, however, promised to yield significant financial gains for the company. For our study, Eurocan offers a fertile viewpoint from which to examine vanguard projects because both the initial idea for it and its further progress from the original investment decision to its eventual establishment were greatly influenced by stakeholders external to the focal project, such as the local government, firms and entrepreneurs with which Enso had not been previously involved. Based on a historical case study drawing on a diverse array of archival documents, interviews and public sources, we contribute to the ongoing discussion on vanguard projects (e.g. [Frederiksen & Davies, 2008](#); [Tillement et al., 2019](#)) showing that despite appearing to have purposefully initiated and accomplished a vanguard project on its own, in many ways, Enso was provoked and constrained by other

actors. Although this group of ‘other actors’ was a unique combination of stakeholders related in different ways and to different degrees with the forest industry in general and Enso in particular, this group significantly contributed to the Eurocan project. Moreover, several actors involved during the front-end phase of the project chose, for their own particular reasons, to exit the project coalition as the project proceeded to later stages in its lifecycle. More generally, the current study emphasises the possibility that firms carrying out vanguard projects may, in fact, be tools that others use to promote their own idiosyncratic interests. Consequently, by ignoring the contribution of these other stakeholders, we can only reach a partial understanding of why and how vanguard projects emerge and are accomplished.

Our main theoretical implications are formulated in form of three propositions that are presented to the reader in the discussion section where they can be weighed against relevant literature a part of which we could only identify after the conducted empirical analyses. The propositions encapsulate our key findings on the front-end of vanguard projects into three: substantial heterogeneity of the involved actors and their objectives, continuous modifications in centralities of actors involved in pivotal decision-making processes, and frequent changes to the constellation of actors involved in the project. In addition, because our study also makes a methodological contribution to project management research we have allocated a sub-section of our discussion to these issues. This contribution includes both the clear differentiation between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ perspectives in historical project research and the underlining some of the benefits resulting from combining different types of (e.g. public and private) archival data.

## 2. Theoretical background

Within the literature on project organising and institutional organisation theory, we identified two domains highly relevant to our study. The first domain concerns the actors that may participate in vanguard projects throughout their lifecycles. Research on integrated systems has concentrated on firms providing bespoke turnkey solutions, such as telecommunication networks and automation systems, and has shown how such firms occasionally initiate vanguard projects ([Brady & Davies, 2004](#)). More specifically, [Frederiksen and Davies \(2008\)](#) showed how this happens as systems integrators either reactively respond to the needs of a specific client or proactively develop the new technologies and capabilities required, hence allowing the firm to serve new clients and possibly enter new markets. However, vanguard projects are not exclusive to technology suppliers, as process industry firms also establish vanguard projects to renew their production operations ([Artto & Turkulainen, 2018](#)). Research adopting a stakeholder management perspective has highlighted the diversity of actors that may be relevant during the front-end phase of a project. These actors include contractors, operators, cities and provinces, citizen groups, investors, municipal actors and even ministries ([Aaltonen et al., 2017](#); [Aaltonen, Kujala, Havela & Savage, 2015](#); [Di Maddaloni & Davis, 2018](#); [Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020](#); [Martinsuo, Vuorinen & Killen, 2019](#)). Furthermore, some actors contribute primarily towards the market transactions necessary during the project whilst others contribute primarily by offering knowledge to it ([Liu, van Marrewijk, Houwing & Hertogh, 2019](#)). Powerful individuals are often crucial during the project front-end as well ([Sapolsky, 1972](#)). In particular, Morris’s Management of Projects (MoP) framework emphasised the central role of a sponsor for providing resources to the project and being responsible for its success at a business or institutional level ([Morris, 1994](#)). Following this logic, [Zwikael and Meredith \(2019\)](#) identified and discussed several practices used by senior managers to support the initiation of projects. These practices include, for example, development of the business case for the project, investment logic maps and benefit distribution metrics.

Studies concentrating on inter-organisational collaboration in project-based industries have also highlighted the role of powerful and influential individuals in the establishment of vanguard projects (Ferriani, Cattani & Baden-Fuller, 2009; Schwab & Miner, 2008). As a combination of these aspects, Manning (2010) argued that successful inter-organisational projects typically comprise a balanced mix of actors previously known to the initiator along with newcomer actors possessing complementary and often scarcely available capabilities. Possibly because of their explorative nature (Brady & Davies, 2004), vanguard projects might also involve actors that are financially indirectly dependent on them. An example of financially indirect dependence is the involvement of Greenpeace in a wind farm project led by a UK energy company (Frederiksen & Davies, 2008). Based on studies adopting an institutional theory lens, we might expect vanguard projects to also involve actors such as consumer groups (Ansari & Phillips, 2011), watchdog agencies (Rao, 1998), political parties (Tukiainen & Granqvist, 2016), accreditation organisations (Durand & McGuire, 2005) and shareholder activists (Davis & Thompson, 1994).

The second research domain particularly relevant to the present study concerns the processes through which vanguard projects are set in motion. These processes deserve more attention merely because the awareness of the diverse array of potential initiators of and contributors to the project front-end tells us little about how their various interests and actions are materialised (Garud, Gehman & Kumaraswamy, 2011). Although at this point the high-level decisions concerning the project scope are already largely made (Lessard & Miller, 2013; Williams et al., 2019), there is much leeway for several potential paths along which they may be advanced (e.g. Criscuolo, Salter & Ter Wal, 2014). Moreover, during this process often characterised by multiple distinct stages (Edkins et al., 2013), stakeholders and their interests gradually become visible (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2010). The overall message from several studies is that major innovative projects arise in conducive contexts characterised by close inter-organisational ties and an open sharing of information, resources and ideas across organisational boundaries (Boland, Lyytinen & Yoo, 2007; Davies & Hobday, 2005; Midler & Beaume, 2010; Lenfle and Söderlund, 2019). A notable body of empirical work concentrating on the project front-end from a stakeholder management perspective discusses the use of practices directed at aligning the interests of stakeholders involved in the process or 'inducing favourable stakeholder movement' (Aaltonen et al., 2015). Such practices include front-end workshops (Burger, White & Yearworth, 2019), shared information repositories (Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020), argument mapping (Metcalfe & Sastrowardoyo, 2013), value co-creation sessions (Liu et al., 2019), use of power and interest matrixes (Olander & Landin, 2005) and the establishment of joint inter-organisational coordination bodies (Matinheikki et al., 2016).

It has been argued that the overall approach for engaging stakeholders during the project front-end should be flexible instead of rigid to support emergent and open-ended interaction and spark active opposition from them (Aaltonen et al., 2015). Additionally, the MoP framework emphasises the importance of actively interacting with the project's external environment, including the local community, as well as relevant political actors (Morris, 1994). In this line of thinking, careful consideration of the attitudes of actors potentially influenced by the project is important. Institutionally-oriented studies complement this line of research by underlining that in these contexts, actors who wish to obtain benefits or avoid loss (Biesenthal et al., 2018; Compagni, Mele & Ravasi, 2015; Kennedy & Fiss, 2009; Matinheikki et al., 2019) form a fresh understanding and interpretive frames that make their innovative activities appear appropriate (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Navis & Glynn, 2010). This line of thinking aligns with Midler and Beaume (2010), who argued that vanguard projects necessitate not only breaking against prevailing design rules and business recipes but also altering project management tools and methodologies. In addition, the project initiator may purposefully choose to exclude other actors opposing the project or to transfer the ownership of the project to further increase its viability

(Tukiainen & Granqvist, 2016). Methods used by initiators are likely to be highly context specific. For example, research-driven vanguard projects (Lenfle, 2016; Loch, De Meyer & Pich, 2006; Tillement et al., 2019) may require replacing a traditional overriding planning and control-orientated mindset with a more agile one (Macheridis, 2009).

Despite its potentially high relevance for an increased understanding of the emergence of vanguard projects, the extant literature has paid little attention to how the roles of the actors involved in them might change over time. In fact, institutional theorists traditionally presume that certain actors remain dominant throughout their progress (Garud, Jain & Kumaraswamy, 2002; Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003). By contrast, and in alignment with Hellgren and Stjernberg (1995), we posit that such dominance is likely characteristic of individual project phases rather than entire projects. This assumption would justify considering vanguard projects as some sort of relay race, which could also explain at least a part of their unexpected outcomes. Previous studies on the verge of this idea include Schwab and Miner (2008) who showed how the control of inter-organisational projects in the pre-WW2 movie industry in the U.S. lay with neither their original initiators nor other involved actors but somewhere between these two extremes. Similarly, Lindgren and Packendorff's (2002) notion of 'interactive entrepreneurship' refers to the continuous, gradual interaction among multiple individuals during vanguard projects. The ideas produced in this type of interaction are especially critical for new openings in emerging industries (David et al., 2013). Analogously, we may presume that the actors responsible for vanguard projects exceeding existing industry boundaries are especially dependent on both the fluency of their mutual interaction and external support.

More generally, the concept of a relay race has been used in several areas of management research. In micro-level studies, it has been used to refer to the systematic way with which organisations select successors to their current heads (e.g. Minichilli, Nordqvist, Corbetta & Amore, 2014). Although such a perspective is not readily applicable to projects, it has been noted (Pentland, Recker & Wyner, 2017) that the potential of the relay race concept is not so much in which actor has the most power and responsibilities at each time, but rather in whether these new consecutively responsible actors have different interests and ways of operating. Consequently, we may expect more alterations in the course of projects whenever the previously dominant actor is replaced with another that has different backgrounds and competences. An example of the latter case would be the situation in which a major industrial firm takes the formal responsibility of a project initially outlined by a small local entrepreneur. However, although the fluent handoff between the actors taking part is also considered essential in project management literature (e.g. Trojanowska & Dostatni, 2017), its potentially even substantial unanticipated effects on the progress of projects are seldom acknowledged. Studies coming close to such a stance include Bakker, Knobens, De Vries and Oerlemans (2011), who showed how the network connections play a central role in defining when individual actors obtain an opportunity to participate in the project. Matinheikki et al. (2016) also discussed how specific actions carried out by the initiator may influence the structural, relational and cognitive characteristics of the entire network of involved actors. For example, the initiator's actions may in various ways enhance the development of trust-based relationships between involved actors and facilitate the sharing of fine-grained information during the project.

Previous research acknowledges the diversity of the actors involved in vanguard projects and the largely unanticipated firm and industry-level outcomes that may result from this diversity (Boland et al., 2007; Frederiksen & Davies, 2008; Jones & Massa, 2013; Plowman et al., 2007). However, we still know relatively little about how the different types of actors and actor involvement contribute to the course and processual unfolding of these projects. In particular, we lack a deeper understanding of how and in which circumstances those principally responsible for vanguard projects may be influenced by their partners and various other actors and in which ways these different actors may con-

tribute to the front-end phase. Notably, even research that acknowledges the various roles played by the different actors over the course of projects has largely bypassed the possibilities of the twists and turns that result from various handoffs during these relay races to the eventual project outcomes. Therefore, we formulate our two-part research question in the following manner: *What kinds of interactions characterise the front-end of vanguard projects, and how might different actors contribute to their progress?*

### 3. Method

Methodologically speaking, the present study represents historical project management research that has recently become more common (e.g. Daniel & Daniel, 2019; Morris, 1994; Söderlund & Lenfle, 2013; Van den Ende & Marrewijk, 2019). This stream of studies not only pays attention to the temporal and relational embeddedness of projects (Engwall, 2003; Sydow & Braun, 2018) but also uses this understanding of how these projects unfold to inform other areas of project research (Lenfle, 2014). In management research more generally, historical case studies are typically justified by a need to establish, extend and refine the conceptual understanding of the respective phenomenon (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Kieser, 1994). However, instead of one, there are several types of historical management research (Maclean, Harvey & Clegg, 2016; Rowlinson, Hassard & Decker, 2014), which calls for a more elaborate definition of how the research is applied each time. As a response, and in the spirit of the history to theory approach (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014), we focus on a single inter-organisational event. Hence, as history serves us evidence to develop and extend the previous theoretical understanding of the emergence of vanguard projects, we focus on the events and interests that materialised in Eurocan. To justify our attention to this specific project, we consider Eurocan in many ways a revelatory (Tsoukas, 1989) and an exemplary (Siggelkow, 2007) case of how individual companies representing a specific industry end up initiating something that neither they nor their competitors have previously accomplished. The Eurocan project took place in extreme circumstances (cf. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27) in several ways. First, at the time, Eurocan represented a notable departure from the established operational conventions of the Finnish forest industry. Whereas individual firms had previously procured wood and refined it into paper and pulp in Finland prior to exporting it, all these activities were now being moved abroad.<sup>1</sup> Second, although several of Enso's peers were – either individually or with their domestic allies – planning respective actions, none of these actions compared with Eurocan. This was particularly because Enso was the main partner in a foreign joint venture that was on the cusp of building an entirely new production site overseas. Thus, there was no local industrial collaborator in the proposed area, which was geographically extremely distant, and no Finnish forest industry firm had previous experience of the area. Third, by initiating Eurocan, Enso was showing its courage in taking up an industrial opportunity that a major local forest industry firm, MacMillan Bloedel, had turned down.<sup>2</sup> Fourth, the eventful process that preceded the formal investment decision offers an exceptional opportunity to extend the overall understanding of the emergence of vanguard projects (cf. Lenfle & Loch, 2010), not least because Enso held onto this opportunity to expand despite three of the original six partners pulling out, one after another. The Eurocan pro-

<sup>1</sup> Although Enso knew the American continent as an exporter of paper and pulp and it had already acquired the Roermond paper mill from Holland in 1963, these experiences were neither extraordinary among Finnish forest industry firms nor of significant help in the Eurocan project.

<sup>2</sup> Since the early 1950s, large amounts of publicly owned forests in British Columbia were granted for industrial use under specified terms. The Tree Farm License (TFL) was a measure with which the province offered particular actors the rights to the wood resources in a defined area for a period of 21 years under a predefined price. In 1965, after MacMillan Bloedel withdrew from the Kitimat TFL, it was the last area still available for use under these terms.

duction facility was eventually completed more than five years after the initial decision in late 1970.

The second reason for selecting Eurocan as the empirical object of our historical case study arises from the rich empirical material that we have been able to collect on it (cf. Siggelkow, 2007). In addition to obtaining corporate archival material and published studies and biographies, we have also benefited from access to recorded interviews of individual managers who were originally involved with the Eurocan project. In the collection of this dataset (see Table 1 below), we proceeded in a stepwise manner. In the first stage, we inspected the volumes of the Finnish forest industry's flagship journal, entitled *Paper and Timber*, which convinced us of the uniqueness of Eurocan with respect to its main initiator and the industry. In the second stage, to answer the research question then formulated, we began collecting data from Enso's archives. The focus was on Eurocan in the sense that whenever we found it mentioned in the minutes of the board of directors or the corporate advisory board, we recorded what had been decided and on what grounds and copied the respective attached material. Decisions on Eurocan were typically based on briefs whose number between 1965 and 1970, for example, exceeded 20. These briefs enabled us to follow the concrete measures and managerial interpretations pertaining to Eurocan over time. For example, we could recognise how and why Enso became interested in the project in the first place and what roles the other actors played in this and later stages. We supplemented this perspective by the archived Eurocan-related management correspondence that we also collected.

Although our analysis focused specifically on Enso, we could also make inferences of the interpretations and interests of the other actors involved in Eurocan. For example, our archival data included the plans that Enso's foreign competitors had prepared for the Kitimat TFL. Moreover, we perused various responses that Enso obtained from different consulting houses and competitors regarding the expansion of the activities related to the forest industry in British Columbia in general and the Kitimat area in particular. These sources, along with the Finnish media coverage of the Eurocan project, significantly extended the array of aspects typically covered in formal decision-making documents. This is partially because Enso was a state-owned firm whose major investments abroad were the subject of substantial criticism and scrutiny that was largely absent, for example, in the corporate minutes of meetings. Moreover, the internal archival material also became gradually more reflective and diversified as Enso's experiences of the Eurocan project built up. In addition to the archival material, we had access to four previously conducted interviews in which three of Enso's managers who had been closely involved with Eurocan presented their views on the project long after it had been finished.<sup>3</sup>

Our intensive analysis of the wide array of archival sources (cf. Lenfle, 2014; Rowlinson & Hassard, 2013) intended to enable as rich as possible an understanding of both the unfolding of Eurocan and the role of the various actors involved. Our analysis of Eurocan-related historical data largely conforms to stylised narrative organisational history (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Therefore, after having all necessary information on the contextual background of Eurocan, we first wrote a narrative of its emergence in the form of a chain of logically and chronologically related events (included as Appendix A) organised into a coherent plot. In order to develop a detailed understanding on the patterns of action amongst the involved firms and individuals, we paid particular attention to any indication of abrupt changes influencing stakeholder dynamics in our data, such as public announcements made by firms to participate in (or abandon) the Eurocan project. An example of such an event is Skeena Group's decision to withdraw from Eurocan as a re-

<sup>3</sup> Two of these interviews (CEO Halle, December 22, 1987 and January 18, 1988; and Mauri Skogster, March 23, 2006) were transcribed, and one (Kurt Ignatius, February 23, 2006) was a three-page memo containing the notes of an interview.

**Table 1**  
Data sources.

Data type	Source and details
<i>Enso archival material</i>	Internal memos on Eurocan (42 items, 208 pages) Eurocan-related correspondence (31 items, 58 pages) Enso and Eurocan-related feasibility studies and surveys (14 items, 297 pages) Applications for the Kitimat TFL (3 items, 106 pages) News coverage of Eurocan (81 items)
<i>In-depth interviews</i>	4 interviews with 3 informants: CEO Pentti Halle (twice) and managers Kurt Ignatius and Mauri Skogster (altogether, 134 pages of transcribed text)
<i>Corporate and industry histories</i> (See <a href="#">Appendix C</a> )	9 corporate histories of Enso or its different units 13 corporate histories of Enso's Finnish competitors 9 histories of the Finnish forest industry
<i>Other material</i>	65 Articles from Paper and Timber (Volumes 1960–1975)

**Table 2**  
Main actors involved with the Eurocan project.

Finnish firms	Main objective in the project	Main ways of operation
Enso	Increasing production capacity based on new low-cost raw material	Expanding operations both in Europe and North America with the help of previous contacts with Finnish partners and by establishing new contacts abroad
Kymi	Continuing foreign expansion with other Finnish forest industry firms	Participating in the project in a form in line with its concurrent joint venture with Finnish Kaukas Corporation in Germany
Myllykoski	Foreign expansion with other Finnish forest industry firms	Participating in the project without other corresponding activities
Tampella	Continuing foreign expansion and other collaboration with Enso and opening new prospects for machine deliveries	Participating in the project that was initiated simultaneously with the concurrent Pineville project with Enso
<b>North American firms</b>		
Alcan	Getting more activity to the region where it already operated	Having ordered a preliminary study on building a paper and pulp mill to Kitimat
Crown Zellerbach	Expansion of its Canadian operations and blocking the entry of Europeans to the area	Applying for the Kitimat TFL with special attention to the type of local wood resources
MacMillan Bloedel	No specific interests after having seceded from the Kitimat TFL that it had been granted	None
Skeena Group	Expansion of the group members' previous sawmill operations in the area	Accepting to become a partner in the Eurocan project following the recommendation of Governor Williston
<b>Individuals</b>		
Ben Ginter	Initiating a new business activity that promoted his ongoing construction business and contacts with the local government	Presenting himself as a necessary condition for the Finnish partners to obtain the Kitimat TFL
Pentti Halle	Enabling corporate expansion and renewal through a major new venture	Proactive response to a new opportunity exploiting a wide array of new and previous contacts both in Finland and abroad
Johann Nykopp	Continuing corporate expansion to the North American market	Supporting Enso's initiative in line with their previous collaboration
Mauri Skogster	The successful completion of the project	Balancing between the requirements of individual project partners
Ray Williston	Promotion of forestry use in Kitimat area with as wide an array of firms as possible	Presenting the Kitimat TFL in the best possible light to Enso and its partners

sult of disagreements with the latter's CEO Ben Ginter in early August 1965 (see [Appendix A](#) for more details and further examples of identified abrupt changes). To write the case narrative, we used the evidence collected from all the aforementioned sources and created a timeline through which Eurocan had unfolded. Thereafter, mostly with the help of archival evidence, we identified the motives of each actor to take part in Eurocan in the first place and the role they had played in the individual events. [Table 2](#) below summarises the identified actors, their interests in Eurocan and their primary logics of operation. Our analysis of the actors revealed a high degree of heterogeneity as they include several Finnish firms out of which most produce paper but some also equipment used in this production, a number of North American firms with distinct characteristics and interests as well as multiple powerful individuals representing both the public as well as the private sector. Naturally, our understanding of the interests and activities of others than Enso was incomplete; however, in our view, it was sufficient to reveal the most essential social dynamics involved, which was important because we focused mainly on the extent to and ways in which the

project was originally initiated and subsequently controlled by Enso and its management or other actors.

Thereafter, in the spirit of [Langley's \(1999\)](#) temporal bracketing strategy, we produced a periodisation based on analytically meaningful distinctions between the events at the earlier and later phases of the Eurocan process. In this periodisation, we focused on the key issues that made Enso originally amenable to this vanguard project and examined how other actors used these issues to inspire Enso to form a convincing group of collaborators to obtain an opportunity and, eventually, materialise it. This examination was done to further differentiate the types of actors involved, the roles they played and the interests that they attempted to promote at different points over the project lifecycle. Our analysis further revealed that there were considerable differences regarding the centrality of observed actors in pivotal decision-making processes. As there were both actors such as Enso that were involved in major business decisions concerning Eurocan throughout its course as well as actors such as governor Ray Williston that only played an important role until the Kitimat TFL decision in October 1965, we proceeded to evaluate the centrality of each involved actor over time. We based

our assessment of actor centrality primarily on events reported in both [Appendix A](#) and [Table 2](#) below as well as further details related to these developments in our raw empirical data.

#### 4. The unfolding of Eurocan project as a relay race between various actors

##### 4.1. Enso's gradually strengthening receptivity to new openings

As noted in the method section, our analysis of the Eurocan project centres on the early phases of its emergence. In the analysis of these phases, we are especially sensitive to which actors were in dominant positions at each time and the sequence through which the baton was subsequently handed over from one actor to another. From this starting point, it is natural to begin with how the formal initiator of this vanguard project, Enso, became principally susceptible to such a challenging endeavour. We identify three reasons. First, at that time, Enso Corporation had run out of growth opportunities in its home country where it had operated since the late 19th century. Put bluntly, as with many of its domestic competitors, the company suffered from a lack of wood supply in Finland, which had resulted from the previous significant expansion of this industry. Although Enso obtained one-fifth of its wood from its own forests, it was heavily dependent on Finnish private forest owners, many of whom sold wood only when market prices were high. Because the same dependence on external wood resources also applied to most of Enso's domestic competitors, a significant expansion of production in Finland was infeasible. In addition, because of limited availability and the high price of wood, the production of Enso's least valued-added products became unprofitable, threatening respective customer relationships.

Second, Enso was a financially stable firm that benefited from tight collaborative relationships with its domestic competitors. To begin with, as a state-owned and largest industrial company in Finland, Enso had always enjoyed relatively large leeway in its operations, as long as it could show that they were in no clear contradiction with those of the Finnish nation. Moreover, because Enso was state-owned, it had less difficulty obtaining funding from banks and even from institutional and private investors when compared with most family-owned or publicly listed companies. In any case, from the 1950s onwards, this leeway was further increased as the Finnish state loosened its tight foreign currency regulations used to protect the national economy ([Jensen-Eriksen, 2007](#)). Along with the establishment of the European Economic Community and European Free Trade Agreements in the early 1960s, the increasingly free flow of foreign capital further encouraged Finnish companies to consider investments abroad, especially in Europe ([Järvinen, Ojala, Melander & Lamberg, 2012](#)). These activities were also partially motivated to serve as a response to the increasing expansion of North American companies in the same region, of which their Finnish peers were well aware.<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously, Enso benefited from the mutually coordinated organisational bodies and operational practices that the Finnish forest industry firms had built for their foreign operations. As a member of the joint marketing and sales associations Finncell and Finnppap, Enso joined the more general industry-level convention of independent operations within its home country and collaboration abroad ([Ahvenainen, 1992](#)). As a slight exception to this pattern, Enso was also a partner in the domestic Sunila pulp mill and while it had a minor machinery works of its own, the company also had close collaborative relationships with other Finnish machinery suppliers.

Third, much like most Finnish industrial companies at the time, Enso was managed autocratically by its CEO, Pentti Halle, who was expected to have a major say in developing the company ([Denoual, Hirvensalo, Junnelius & Sonkin, 1977](#)). In addition, Halle was an engineer who, prior

<sup>4</sup> This awareness is indicated, for example, in the industry tribune *Paper and Timber* (August 1963, p. 389).

to his appointment in 1962, had accumulated diverse management experience, including several mill construction projects at Enso's different production sites in Finland. This way he had also achieved the support of Urho Kekkonen, the President of Finland, who greatly appreciated industrial expansion in the different parts of the country. CEO Halle had also been educated in the U.S. and had negotiated with American companies on individual paper machine deliveries to Finland since the late 1940s; thus, he was familiar with the North American continent.<sup>5</sup> In addition to being the CEO, Halle was the chairman of Enso's board of directors, which, in most cases, unanimously supported his proposals. Should the board of directors decide on something, the corporate supervisory board, which consisted mainly of politicians, had little opportunity to challenge the decisions based on technical or business concerns.

When combined, these three reasons made Enso quite susceptible to ambitious new foreign openings. CEO Halle expressed this susceptibility, or even urge, in a subsequent interview: 'We [Enso] just had to enter these [foreign] market areas'. However, as long as there was no bait, the company could not gulp it.

##### 4.2. An abrupt tempting offer from a previously unknown party

The initiative towards the Eurocan project in spring 1965 was quite undeniably in the hands of the North Americans who influenced Enso and its Finnish peers both indirectly and directly.<sup>6</sup> With respect to the indirect influence, Canadian politicians marketed the vast wood resources on both coasts of their country. Because of this marketing, Enso's management was aware of its Finnish competitor, United Paper Mills (UPM), negotiating over the opportunities in Newfoundland. With respect to the direct influence, Bodcaw, an American oil company, contacted Enso and Tampella to exploit its forests for industrial purposes in Louisiana. Although this only implied a minority share for the Finnish partners, their apt and principally positive response to this external initiative indicated their potential interest in additional activities on the North American continent.

It was in this situation when the actors from the British Columbia approached Enso with their offer for industrial expansion in this area, which had for a long time been advertised by Ray Williston, the Minister of Lands, Forests and Water Resources. With his colleagues, he promoted the province by referring to the new mills that had already been built there by Canadian, American and European forest industry firms ([Wood, 1966](#)). Together, they produced an unbroken chorus to eliminate all potential suspicions against investments in the area.<sup>7</sup> Williston also named the mills already in operation and those under preparation in his province, the latter including joint ventures by Feldmühle from Germany, Reedpack from Britain and SCA from Sweden. The message for the Finnish firms was thus that their foreign competitors had already decided to take advantage of these local opportunities and that many more would follow in the future.<sup>8</sup>

However, a much more concrete step was still needed from the Canadian side before they could expect the Finnish firms to move forward.

<sup>5</sup> For example, as Halle recalled afterwards in an interview (Jan 18, 1988): '1939 was an extremely strong experience for me. I had to spend four-and-a-half months here in Canada and the pulp mills of the [U.S.] Southern states. I obtained many friendship contacts that lasted throughout my entire life'.

<sup>6</sup> The events that gradually turned into the Eurocan project being initiated and accomplished were numerous. Therefore, the analysis from this point onwards only mentions the main aspects of these and the more detailed information is given in [Appendix A](#).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Ralph Loffmark was reported to have stated in a public speech in November 1965 that the warnings of overproduction were unfounded ([Wood, 1966](#), p. 1). A similar reassuring and encouraging message for further investments was also sent by the British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority in April 1965.

<sup>8</sup> Williston also boasted having 'applications for six new pulp mills in his drawer' (Frank Walden, *Sun Business*, early 1965).

This step happened when MacMillan Bloedel Corporation decided to secede the Tree Farm Licence (TFL) in Kitimat. TFL was an arrangement with which the Province gave the license holder full logging rights for a specified area for 21 years under pre-defined terms. When compared with the prices in Finland, the wood cost would be minimal, but obtaining TFL required the building of an entirely new production site in the area. However, the critical condition for expansion, i.e. wood resources, was up for grabs. Further, Canadian administrators considered Enso, as well as any Finnish company, principally suitable candidate to replace MacMillan Bloedel. Most important, in addition to preventing U.S. companies from obtaining significant foothold in the area, Minister Williston insisted that local actors be involved with the project formed around the Kitimat TFL.

As such, it was no surprise that such local actors also appeared. An aluminium company Alcan, which also operated in Kitimat, benefited from increasing activities in the same community.<sup>9</sup> However, at this stage, Alcan had no major role because it was taken by Ben Ginter, a local entrepreneur and self-made man who had previously been involved in construction and brewing businesses. For him, collaboration with prominent forest industry firms also offered new contracts and maintained contacts with the British Columbia government. Together with the Skeena Group, which with its sawmill operations had even more organic contacts with all companies involved with logging in the area, Ginter met the principal demands provided by Minister Williston. In other words, these companies excluding Alcan formed the group of actors that actively offered the Kitimat TFL to Enso management and presented the potential project in the utmost positive light.

Therefore, the few months after contact was established between the Canadian group and Enso were quite eventful and included several initiatives from both sides. Enso's management found the information on inexpensive wood resources and local support coming with the Kitimat TFL of utmost interest because it offered a concrete and viable solution to the company's raw material shortage and a potential opportunity for foreign expansion. The enthusiasm is expressed by CEO Halle's subsequent interpretation that '[in that situation] we had to act immediately'. However, Halle appears to neglect that the local actors had just lost one prominent company which had already promised to accomplish a corresponding project and that they were now hastily seeking a replacement for this loss. The same enthusiasm also overpowered the fact that Enso was offered and had taken the largest share of ownership in the new company, Eurocan, which had been founded to apply for the Kitimat TFL. Although there soon were both Canadian and Finnish partners aboard, without Enso's activity, such a demanding project would not have been possible. As Enso manager Mauri Skogster later described the overall nature of the emerging project: 'It cannot be denied that it [Eurocan] was an extremely challenging investment, especially if we keep in mind Finland at that time and the management resources that [Finnish] companies offered for the founding of such industrial operations abroad'.

#### 4.3. Enso's determined urge to move forward with the prospective project

After Eurocan was founded as a company and a project to build a new industrial site in British Columbia, Enso and its collaborators faced their first challenge to formulate an attractive enough proposal for the public hearing three months later. To enable these rapid steps, following their persuasion by the Canadians to join Eurocan, Enso's management had to then persuade its Finnish partners. This persuasion was at least partly alleviated by the fact that all Finnish forest industry firms had heard the overall positive message about the opportunities in Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Alcan had already ordered a preliminary feasibility study on the pulp and newsprint mill in early 1962, and it strongly supported the applications at the public hearing in August 1965, particularly emphasising that it would like to see the mill construction begin as soon as possible.

Of the individual companies, Tampella was the easiest to persuade because its CEO, Johan Nykopp, was the former Finnish ambassador to the U.S., who was now directing his company towards new foreign markets. While the joint minor partnership with Enso in Louisiana offered Tampella its first opportunity to supply forest industry machinery to North America, taking part in Eurocan provided similar prospects along with opportunities to expand its paper and pulp production in the same continent. For both Kymi and Myllykoski, being a part of Eurocan appeared generally appealing largely because they, along with other Finnish forest industry firms, were also pondering the availability of raw material and the increasing prices of wood in Finland (Jensen-Eriksen, 2007, p. 267). While the 'leap' across the Atlantic Ocean might have looked too radical or hazardous a manoeuvre for either of them individually, joining Eurocan with several others alleviated this risk. More generally, an investment in Eurocan implied that its Finnish partners no longer intended to import wood to Finland but instead planned to refine this wood into wood-based products abroad.

Even though the Finnish companies involved with Eurocan knew each other well before this project, they were now entering intensive collaboration with some completely new faces, and the key person, Ben Ginter, had no previous experience in the forest industry. It was difficult to understand why he was appointed as the first CEO of Eurocan except for his various connections in British Columbia, including the one with Minister Williston who would eventually decide upon the Kitimat TFL.<sup>10</sup> The value of this connection was further enhanced after Eurocan partners became aware that a competing application for the same license was going to be submitted by a U.S. company Crown Zellerbach. Consequently, this connection convinced the Finnish partners to believe that the Eurocan proposal needed to be as attractive as possible in which aim Ginter appeared helpful, despite being a politically controversial person<sup>11</sup> with whom Canadian industrial companies were not readily interested in collaborating.

As the deadline for submitting the TFL proposal became closer, the Eurocan partners inferred that promising an early start date for the construction of the mill would prove to be the proposal's most critical aspect. Therefore, whereas Crown Zellerbach promised to start the construction of its mill in 1970, Eurocan promised to have its mill already running by that time. Consequently, however, the risks of not eventually meeting this objective rose accordingly. Nevertheless, an even stronger indication of the Eurocan partners' urge to win the race over the Kitimat TFL was that they replaced the originally intended end product (i.e. newsprint) with the same (i.e. kraftliner) as that of Crown Zellerbach.<sup>12</sup> Despite this product's apparent suitability for local wood supply and respective promise for the most extensive use of the local forests, the modification implied compromising Enso's earlier objective of enabling its domestic units' move into more value-added paper grades. Nonetheless, the Eurocan partners – especially Enso's CEO Halle – remained unconditionally committed to the project, as Halle's subsequent interview statement indicates: 'When we heard that Crown Zellerbach would propose sulphate pulp mill [with kraftliner], we were forced to change our own proposal because with the previous one consisting of groundwood and newsprint mills we just would not get the [Kitimat] TFL'.

Therefore, despite having both Canadian and Finnish partners involved, Enso took the main salesman's role in the Eurocan project before the public hearing for the Kitimat TFL. This role was also indicated in the final application, which emphasised the long history and established position of Enso and its Finnish partners in the business. More-

<sup>10</sup> Only a little earlier, Ginter had failed to obtain a partnership in a resembling venture, which did not appear to discourage him at all. His long-term vision in the forest industry was also described in *Kansan Tahto* on October 8, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> However, the potential impact of Skeena Group's withdrawal was cross-checked beforehand (CEO Halle's correspondence, August 6, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> The credibility of Crown Zellerbach's choice of end product was increased by their application to the Kitimat TFL in 1964; in that proposal, they had found the quality of the local wood to be insufficient for newsprint production.

over, the application stressed that instead of threatening the interests of the local forest industry companies, the proposed mill would open up new markets for products manufactured based on local forest resources. The application also announced that more detailed planning of the mill would begin immediately after a positive decision and that the mill would be running four years thereafter. Eurocan's application also explicitly stated that the mill could expand to the originally planned newsprint production in the future should more wood resources become available from adjacent areas. To continue to support its application, all Finnish partner company CEOs were present at the public hearing and the impression of their commitment to the project was further enhanced by Eurocan-related press conferences and a reception for the key persons of Kitimat and Vancouver before the event.<sup>13</sup> Overall, these measures expressed the three months' rush with which Enso and its collaborators prepared this vanguard project whose accomplishment would take at least four years. As Kurt Ignatius expressed in a later interview, 'the [Eurocan] decision was done hastily as at last there appeared to be a chance to obtain more wood'.

#### 4.4. The rocky road to finalise the project

It took less than one and a half months for Minister Williston to decide to grant the Kitimat TFL to Eurocan, which made major news in Finland. In less than half a year's determined effort, Enso and its Canadian and Finnish partners now had a major foreign investment opportunity in their hands. Naturally, even during this short period, first the Canadian and only thereafter the Finnish actors had needed to struggle the most to promote the emerging project. However, realising this opportunity during the following years still required substantial effort on two fronts. The first effort concerned maintaining the commitment of all partners because from this point on, Eurocan would imply substantial financial investments at an increasing speed. In manager Skogster's words, 'obtaining funding for the project was still on a knife's edge'. In addition to the demands of the international financiers, this was partly because at that point all partners were not equally committed to the project. However, a more substantial obstacle against proceeding with Eurocan arose from within Enso because, despite supporting Halle in all his initiatives, the company board of directors now opposed Eurocan. In a way, this opposition indicated that as the project was now becoming true and the main responsibility of it was increasingly in Enso's hands, many of the company top managers were not interested in it. This opposition enforced Halle to turn towards Enso's supervisory board to obtain support.<sup>14</sup> However, this was not enough to ensure the overall acceptance of Eurocan because Enso was a state-owned company whose new openings needed to be justified at the level of national politics. Although it was not yet known that Eurocan would eventually turn into the largest foreign investment ever from Finland, its apparently large scale and the fact that Enso now had new overseas activities in Louisiana and British Columbia in the pipeline at the same time sparked intense political debate. The left-wing parties criticised the state-owned company for exporting substantial amounts of capital away from the home country. In the case of Eurocan, this critique was accelerated by the fact that the project implied foreign expansion in an area located extremely distant from its main production sites and facilities.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Ahvenainen (1992, p. 561).

<sup>14</sup> See Ahvenainen (1992, p. 554). In a subsequent interview (January 18, 1988), Halle emphasised that the opposition from the board of directors was related more to him than the project itself. In his view, a few board members tried to use it as an excuse to compel him to resign.

<sup>15</sup> To eliminate these concerns, Enso's Chairman Waris pointed to the corresponding investment plans that its major Finnish competitor UPM was still preparing for Newfoundland with Rauma-Repola, Nokia and Kajaani. However, this venture was later cancelled because of UPM's failure to persuade the mentioned firms behind the project (Nordberg, 1998, p. 223), indicating to Enso that this would be a critical aspect in Eurocan as well.

The second front concerned more concrete – but nonetheless critical – issues that also needed to be tackled. First, to avoid a further increase in the previous ownership stakes of the current partners in Eurocan, a new partner to replace the earlier withdrawn Skeena Group was needed. The intention was to find a major North American industrial partner to further facilitate the project. As such, Enso negotiated the matter with several U.S. and Canadian companies that could bring significant local support to the project. However, the negotiations were unsuccessful largely because the project scope was already fixed. Most importantly, the prospective partners were wary of joining Eurocan for only a 10% partnership share when their expectations were closer to 50%.<sup>16</sup> In addition, they also disliked Ginter who, along with Williston, objected to a substantial role being given to any potential new industrial partners. Hence, Enso managers gradually learned that their present partners and supporters who had enabled Eurocan to obtain the Kitimat TFL at the outset mostly defined the players the company could collaborate with in its completion. This also explains why the Finnish partners continued to move forward on their own, even though most of their other operations were almost 5000 miles away from Kitimat.

Second, the technical planning of the Eurocan facilities turned out to be much more demanding than expected. After the final location of the new mill had been decided, its technical layout was modified, and the production capacities of its various units were increased several times.<sup>17</sup> These modifications were largely made because the original plans did not predict a sufficiently high profitability for the mill to convince the potential foreign financiers, who also required independent feasibility studies that would have proved the eventual success of the project. In addition to delays in the respective planning and construction work, these modifications almost doubled the original project budget. One positive aspect, however, was that the local government continued to support Eurocan and granted the additional logging rights needed to meet the increased production capacities.

Third, well before the Eurocan project was completed, minor disagreements between the Finnish partners and Ginter had turned into major quarrels, with the latter eventually initiating legal proceedings.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the major project Enso originally formed in response to a sudden opportunity with several local and Finnish collaborators had become a project that Enso handled as more or less its own, with the two remaining Finnish partners, Kymi and Tampella, as Myllykoski had already dropped out. Although the holding company arrangement that was formed soon thereafter made it easier for the Finnish firms to arrange Eurocan's ownership relations in line with their own needs, it further complicated finding new partners, not to mention a buyer for the entire company. This complication was partially because the prospective new owner of Eurocan could not guarantee to continue to hold on to the Kitimat TFL that secured the necessary wood supply. In any case, after starting its operations, the Eurocan mill continued to operate for almost four decades until 2009, when its owner at that time, West Fraser, decided to shut it down.

#### 4.5. Epilogue

According to our analysis, the story of Eurocan began in the early 1960s with Canadian politicians internationally advertising the vast untapped forest resources of British Columbia to pulp and paper compa-

<sup>16</sup> This was the case, for example, with Owens-Illinois for which Eurocan appeared as an opportunity to enter the disposal paper products business. However, an internal memo dated October 18, 1966, concerning the financing of Eurocan encouraged the taking of a calculated risk even before a new partner had been found because of its overall attractiveness.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed descriptions of these changes can be found, for example, from an internal memo dated February 26, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> The Province, November 19, 1969. Disagreements between Eurocan and Ginter were also discussed in the transcript of the interview of Karl-Erik Ekholm (May 22, 1970).



**Table 3**

Changes in the involved actors' main objectives across the early developmental phases of the Eurocan project.

Actor	Main objectives for involvement or withdrawal			
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
<b>Enso</b>	Finding new ways to expand previous operations	Eventual end to the long-term lack of wood	Success in the competition over logging rights in Kitimat	Personalised commitment to an honourable outcome
<b>Ben Ginter</b>	–	Extension of previous local business activities and governmental prestige	An opportunity to head a major industrial endeavour in a familiar setting	Lack of reasons to hold on to a costly effort preventing other activities
<b>Kymi</b>	–	Belonging to the same industrial alliance with Enso	Expanding previous production with new wood resources	Keeping the commitments to the remaining domestic partners
<b>Tampella</b>	–	Simultaneous joint expansive activities and belonging to the same industrial alliance with Enso	Turning into a prominent machine supplier in North America	Keeping the commitments to the remaining domestic partners
<b>Myllykoski</b>	–	Belonging to the same industrial alliance with Enso	Expanding the production of its previous main product with new wood resources	Little reason to hold on to an increasingly costly project with a less attractive end product
<b>Skeena Group</b>	–	Extension of previous local sawmilling operations	–	–
<b>US paper companies</b>	–	–	–	Participating in a promising project, but on their own terms

nies around the world. Information about business opportunities overseas also reached Enso, a Finnish paper company with its current operations situated thousands of miles from Canada, but that was desperately in need of cost-effective sources of additional wood. Combined with the availability of complementary partners, financial means and a CEO that was not risk adverse, this need resulted – following the twists and turns discussed above – in the establishment of a paper and pulp mill in Canada that was opened in 1970. As Table 3 below indicates, the four early phases of the emergence of the Eurocan examined above clearly differed from each other with respect to the actors involved and the objectives that involvement in the project served for them during each phase. The changes in these objectives then also largely explain why these actors aimed at or remained in a central or a peripheral position in the project or eventually withdrew from it.

In order to further clarify these actor-related dynamics, Fig. 1 below illustrates how the centrality of actors involved in Eurocan evolved over time, linking them to important project milestone events discussed in the case narrative. On the one hand, the figure signals that the three Finnish firms situated in the middle, Enso, Kymi and Tampella, remained both central and committed to the project from the early front-end of the project all the way until the mill was in operation. On the other hand, we see that several other actors that played a significant role in the establishment of the project, such as the Skeena Group and Myllykoski relatively soon came to realise that Eurocan no longer served their interests and, consequently, withdrew from the project as indicated by the rather sudden decreases of actor centralities (1965 for Skeena Group and 1966 for Myllykoski). Fig. 1 also indicates how the centrality of Ben Ginter first increased during 1965 when, after having been interested in industrial activities in the area, he started to head the project. Later, Ginter's centrality significantly decreased in 1968 after which he neither headed nor had a significant ownership stake in Eurocan. In addition to actors that were formally a part of the project, the figure highlights how in 1966 and 1967 there were also actors, specifically U.S.-based paper companies, that negotiated with central Eurocan actors concerning possible participation following the Kitimat TFL decision; however, as no satisfactory agreement was reached, even their peripheral position in the project shortly ended.

## 5. Discussion

The current study increased the understanding of the emergence of vanguard projects as processes involving multiple heterogeneous actors

and largely unanticipated sequences and eventual outcomes. The historical perspective adopted in the current study suggests that instead of systematically formulated intentions of firms and powerful individuals, vanguard projects can emerge from a sequential interplay between several actors, each guided by their own idiosyncratic interests. Further, although this interplay may materialise in different forms, the principal initiators of vanguard projects remain particularly dependent on at least some other actors at different phases of the project. Consequently, our study describes vanguard projects as relay races, where different actors advance – and even lead – the project in turn. We close the paper by outlining its two main theoretical contributions. First, we extend the previous understanding of how vanguard projects emerge and proceed. Second, we join and contribute to previous project management studies that have also applied historical case study methodology.

### 5.1. Vanguard projects as relay races between heterogeneous actors

Contributing to the research on the early phases of the project lifecycle (Arto et al., 2016; David et al., 2013; Hellgren & Stjernberg, 1995), our study highlights the diversity of both the actors involved and the ways in which they contribute during the course of a vanguard project. While earlier research emphasises the role of resourceful systems' integrator firms as the principal initiators of vanguard projects (Brady & Davies, 2004; Frederiksen & Davies, 2008), our focal firm, Enso, was a paper manufacturer that initiated Eurocan to expand its production operations abroad. Instead of reactively responding to market pressure, Enso was proactively exploring opportunities for increasing its presence in the international marketplace. This observation is consistent with the explorative character associated with vanguard projects (cf. Frederiksen & Davies, 2008; Schüßler, Wessel & Gersch, 2012; Tillement et al., 2019). Our findings further underline the need to step out of the previously dominant generic actor typologies and extend the potential initiators of vanguard projects from those who are formally responsible for them to those who, in pursuit of their idiosyncratic objectives, sketch and advertise them at the outset and support them throughout their course. The Eurocan project looks like an attractive offer that Enso first almost blindly fell for; thereafter, Enso gradually and stubbornly accomplished its objective with the help of a diverse set of other actors, including entrepreneurs, politicians and industrial organisations. Similarly to as discussed by Aaltonen and Kujala (2010), the idiosyncratic interests of other involved actors became gradually visible to Enso through continuous dialogue and interaction. In this light, a vanguard project re-

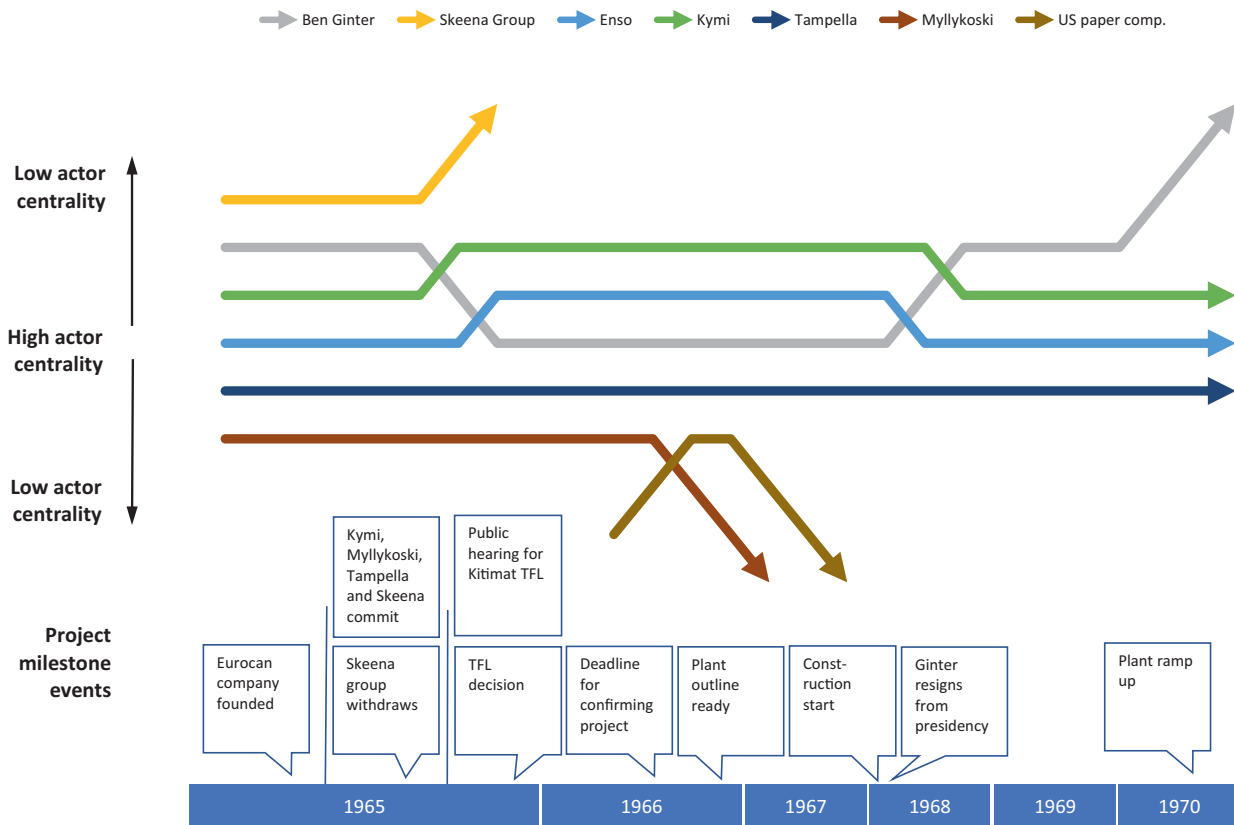


Fig. 1. Involvement and centrality of actors in Eurocan across the project lifecycle.

sembles a meeting of minds of those who are primarily susceptible to breaking the prevailing industrial traditions and of those who are capable of formulating ideas that enable a break away from path-dependent trajectories (Aaltonen et al., 2017; Sydow, Schreyögg & Koch, 2009). Specifically, the central role of Enso’s CEO, Pentti Halle, throughout the Eurocan project resonates strongly with earlier research that has stressed the strategic role of importance of individual entrepreneurs and project champions in project organising (Ferriani et al., 2009; Gattiker & Carter, 2010; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2002; Morris, 1994; Schwab & Miner, 2008). However, our analysis extends the previous studies by underlining that even such powerful entrepreneurs face the constant need to strike a balance between the various and partly contradictory objectives of the heterogeneous actors involved with vanguard projects, especially at their early phases. For example, in addition to the slight differences between Enso and its Finnish partner companies, both Canadian partners had quite distinctive objectives for their involvement with the Eurocan project. Accordingly, we propose the following:

**Proposition 1.** *The front-end of a vanguard project is characterised by extreme levels of heterogeneity regarding involved actors and their objectives.*

The current study sheds further light on the alternating and complementary roles that actors may play throughout the lifecycle of a vanguard project. Although any new opening requires at least one ‘motivated insider’ to start (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), the present study shows that this motivated insider may repeatedly change as the project moves forward in its lifecycle. In the observed case, the role of Ben Ginter, the Canadian-based entrepreneur, was particularly illustrative; in 1965, Enso and other Finnish partners let him to head Eurocan largely due to his ties in the local business environment. However, despite also having an own equity share in Eurocan, Ginter soon lost interest in the project, indicated as early as 1966 in his willingness to no longer head the project. Then in 1968 when the mill construction started, he no longer found common ground for collaboration with the Finnish partners which eventually had to take over his ownership stake. The

Finnish firm Myllykoski serves as another example of actor changes: even though this firm had been involved in the project from its earliest moments with a sizable equity share, as a result of the changes in the targeted end product, the firm chose to withdraw from Eurocan already in 1966. These observations suggest that in vanguard projects, even the central actor’s opportunities to manage the group of the involved partners may be more limited than in other projects (e.g. Tukiainen & Granqvist, 2016). This is in part because, as the project moves forward, participating actors’ ability to influence other actors is partly based on the former’s importance in the ongoing project phase. Although the same effect has been observed across successive projects (Schwab & Miner, 2008), here we highlight a resembling phenomenon within vanguard projects.

In alignment with Hellgren and Stjernberg’s (1995) separation of the project into a distinct planning and distinct implementation phase, each characterised by a different set of actors, and with Edkins et al. (2013) characterisation of the project front-end as a process involving multiple distinct stages, our findings support a view of the complementary and dynamic roles of the actors involved in project lifecycle phases. For example, early on, various foreign and domestic peers and stakeholders encouraged Enso to establish ambitious overseas ventures before and at the time of its initial decision about Eurocan. Although Enso had to decide over the project, these other actors such as Ben Ginter and Governor Williston also had a major impact on this decision and the successive need that it then caused for Enso to persuade its Finnish peers to join the project. Consequently, we propose the following:

**Proposition 2.** *New actors may join a vanguard project and participating actors may choose to withdraw from it throughout the entire project lifecycle.*

Regarding the establishment of vanguard projects, earlier research has stressed the importance of the context; that is, vanguard projects are likely to emerge in business environments characterised by strong inter-organisational ties and the open sharing of ideas and resources across organisational boundaries (Boland et al., 2007; Davies & Hobday, 2005;

Midler & Beaume, 2010; Lenfle and Söderlund, 2019). Contrasting the importance of existing ties, the evidence presented above shows that Enso's management could not have initiated or accomplished Eurocan without the initiatives of actors to whom it had no previous connections. For example, without the initial contact from Canadian diplomats who got in touch with Enso and its domestic competitors, the company might never have heard about the business opportunities in British Columbia. Thus, our findings imply that the business environment in question needs to be seductively presented to the potential executors of vanguard projects. In this vein, [Matinheikki et al. \(2016\)](#) discussed how actions of the project initiator may shape the surrounding network of actors around it, including the formation of new relational ties and consequent changes in actor centralities. The previous literature on institutional theory has also found that explorative ventures may be initiated or catalysed by geographically or otherwise distant or coincidentally related actors (e.g. [Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016](#); [Lounsbury, 2007](#)). However, in contrast with these prior studies, we found that even stakeholders relatively distant from the industry in question, such as a governor of a province in a faraway country, may attract a prominent actor to break away from the traditions of itself and its peers (cf. [Midler & Beaume, 2010](#)). By keeping attention on these aspects (e.g. the price of wood) that most blindingly contrasted with the circumstances in which the Enso and its Finnish partners operated in their home country, the local actors encouraged the Finns to enter a business environment that the latter otherwise knew little about.

We observed that the actor occupying the most central position in a vanguard project may be influenced by its peers' similar and concurrent activities. For example, we mentioned the expansive projects that Enso's Finnish, German and Swedish competitors were involved with at the time when Eurocan was set underway. This finding extends previous work which underlines that innovation typically requires both feasible ideas and tangible resources that a single actor does not possess ([Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006](#)). Furthermore, we showed that Enso seized, accomplished and maintained Eurocan despite several successive setbacks in the project's different phases largely because of its collaborative ties to the other actors involved. These included Ben Ginter, who headed Eurocan for a number of years, before later first distancing himself from a central position and finally from any involvement in the project after it had become evident that the scope of the project and objectives of other involved actors no longer adequately aligned with Ginter's own objectives. This finding conflicts with those institutionalist studies (e.g. [Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009](#); [Garud et al., 2002](#)), which expect the fate of new openings to lie in the hands of a single powerful actor. Although our findings cannot eliminate the possibility of such a supreme and self-sufficient project entrepreneur, they provide substantial reason to consider vanguard projects as the results of interplay of multiple actors, interests and situational contingencies ([David et al., 2013](#); [Delbridge & Edwards, 2008](#); [Tillement et al., 2019](#)). Thus, we propose the following:

**Proposition 3a.** *Actors involved in a vanguard project are susceptible to engage in efforts to increase or decrease their centrality in it.*

**Proposition 3b.** *Centrality of actors involved in a vanguard project is susceptible to influence from external actors and events.*

## 5.2. Towards the extended use of historical case studies in project management research

Our study extends historical research in project organising (e.g. [Daniel & Daniel, 2019](#); [Hughes, 2013](#); [Lenfle & Loch, 2010](#); [Van den Ende & Marrewijk, 2019](#)) by underlining the value of combining different types of archival data. Both [Dreyfus and Rabinow \(1983\)](#) and [Söderlund and Lenfle \(2013\)](#) have warned project scholars of the two classic pitfalls of historical research: presentism and finalism. Although no all-encompassing solutions are available for these challenges, explicitly justifying methodological choices is always appropriate. Indeed,

although historical organisation and management research is characterised by a clear distinction between 'micro' and 'macro' perspectives (e.g. [Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014](#)), this is much less the case with historical studies in project organising research. By looking at recent historical studies on projects (e.g. [Hughes, 2013](#); [Lenfle & Loch, 2010](#); [Marshall & Bresnen, 2013](#)), we can observe that the adopted level or levels of analysis may remain implicit. Consequently, it is not always fully clear whether the findings of these studies apply to individual firms, the project organisations involving multiple firms or larger communities repeatedly carrying out projects in the institutional environment in question. We hope that our study can act as a step towards more clearly explicated levels of analysis in the future.

The historical approach applied in the present study relies on both public and private archival material as its primary data source, which was supplemented and validated with material from secondary sources. Although these secondary sources typically include autobiographies and corporate and industry histories, there may also be opportunities for retrospective interviews of key individuals. In the present study, the historical approach especially aimed at reaching as accurate as possible an understanding of the role that each actor played in the emergence and accomplishment of the Eurocan project in the contemporary institutional environment of that time. As a result, for example, we found how strongly Enso relied on other companies and local actors' ideas and support throughout the project duration to the extent that the whole process intermittently appeared more externally than internally driven. Most essentially, these kinds of insights required a systematic review of Enso's archives, which revealed the impulses that the company managers obtained from previous plans for the project by its competitors, as well as from other actors' suggestions and encouragement on the one hand and warnings and discouragement on the other.

Our reliance on archives internal to a single firm complements much of the historical project literature that mostly relies on diverse archival materials, such as documentaries ([Kozak-Holland & Procter, 2014](#); [Van den Ende & Marrewijk, 2019](#)), newspaper articles ([Daniel & Daniel, 2019](#)), corporate project narratives or reports (e.g. [Lenfle, 2014](#); [Marshall & Bresnen, 2013](#); [Söderlund & Tell, 2009](#); [Winch, 2013](#)) and scientific articles (e.g. [Kwak, Walewski, Sleeper & Sadatsafavi, 2014](#)). A characteristic of much historical project research is its heavy reliance on secondary sources produced by external 'middlemen'. Without denying the value of these sources, we can say that they leave room for research based on the empirical material at least largely produced by the actors involved with the projects in question. Although it is often difficult to obtain access to such material, gaining this material is worthwhile because of the potentially novel and accurate insights that it may yield. In project management research, [Lenfle's \(2016\)](#) study on the Sidewinder missile draws extensively on the project head, McLean, and is an excellent recent example of this. In the present study, access to project documents and the other sources enabled the identification of individual aspirations and more collectively shared objectives over the course of a vanguard project in a historically and institutionally specified context. These documents also permitted at least a partial differentiation of the impact of individuals from that of collective actors, such as companies (cf. [Battilana & Dorado, 2010](#), p. 1435; [Suddaby, 2010](#), p. 17). However, we need to keep in mind that even internal documents, such as minutes of meetings or their attachments, are not without bias because they have been prepared for particular purposes. Thus, multifaceted archival and public sources should be used as much as possible to do justice to the complicated nature of project management and other organisational processes.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study on the building of Eurocan pulp and paper mill makes two contributions to project management research. First, it suggests that the principal initiators of vanguard projects have only limited control over these projects throughout their course. This is because

the initiation of vanguard projects tends to unfold like a relay race in which various actors participate according to their idiosyncratic interests. This heterogeneity of the actors involved and abrupt changes among them and their centrality in relevant decision-making processes over the project lifecycle makes these projects particularly prone to influence from external actors and events. Second, our study provides one exemplar of how historical case studies can be systematically applied in project management research. Here this especially implies relying on both public and private archival material as our primary data source, which was supplemented and validated with material from secondary sources.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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### Appendix A. A chronology of events related to the Eurocan project

Time	Event	Implication to the project progress
Spring 1965	Enso and Tampella join Bodcaw as minority (20%) partners of Pineville Kraft in Louisiana	Strengthens the collaborative tie between Enso and Tampella corporations
Spring 1965	A group of Canadian politicians and business representatives visited Finland to advertise the forest resources of Newfoundland	Increases the Finnish companies' awareness of the Canadian business opportunities
April 1965	(Enso CEO Halle hears about) MacMillan Bloedel's withdrawal of the Kitimat TFL	Opens Enso management a prospect of potential expansion in British Columbia
May 1965	First connection between Enso management and Ben Ginter followed by an immediate indication of a shared interest to apply for the Kitimat TFL	Establishes a necessary liaison for proceeding towards the project
May 1965	CEO Halle personally informs Klaus Waris of the Kitimat TFL	Guarantees formal support for the project preparation
12 May 1965	CEO Halle signs a letter of intent on behalf of all Sunila partners with the Skeena Group regarding the establishment of a pulp mill	Expresses Enso's initial interest in the project and establishes the first local contacts to promote it
18 May 1965	The founding of Eurocan Pulp & Paper Co. Ltd. with Enso and Ginter as its original partners	Establishment of a legal entity eligible for applying for the Kitimat TFL
May 1965	Finnish Kymi, Myllykoski and Tampella Corporations with the local Skeena Group join the project alliance	Increases the overall credibility and local acceptability of the group of actors involved
24 May 1965	Enso board of director proposes to the Corporate Advisory Board that Eurocan would be founded and corresponding financial measures would be granted	The main partner Enso management reaches a formal internal agreement upon the project
28 May 1965	Enso Corporate Board (ECB) accepts Eurocan project pending that the necessary funding will be acquired from abroad and that the machinery used in the new mill will be produced in Finland	Formal acceptance for the project reached at Enso with two relatively significant preconditions
Summer 1965	Ben Ginter arranges Minister Williston's visit to Finland	Strengthens the connections between Williston and the Finnish Eurocan partner companies
Early August 1965	Skeena Group withdraws from Eurocan as a result of disagreements with Ben Ginter	Weakens the local involvement with the project
23 August 1965	Eurocan general meeting	Project company partners gather formally prior to the public hearing
27 August 1965	Public hearing for the Kitimat TFL with the CEOs of Enso and all other Finnish Eurocan partner companies present	Eurocan (and its newly emerged competitor Crown Zellerbach) completes the necessary procedure required for granting the TFL
7 October 1965	Kitimat TFL granted to Eurocan	Guarantees Eurocan the necessary wood resources, but simultaneously forces it to prepare and present detailed mill construction plans within a year
29 January 1966	Eero Riihikallio mentions Ben Ginter's potential thoughts of bowing out of the Eurocan project to CEO Halle	Enso management recognises the potential loss of the only remaining Canadian partner from the project
April 1966	Two members of Enso board of directors resign after disagreements over the company's foreign expansion projects	Removes internal opposition from Enso management over the Eurocan project
7 October 1966	Deadline for confirming the project to the British Columbia Government	Compels the Eurocan partners to come up with finalised project plans
14 October 1966	Enso ECB supports company management's intentions to acquire a new foreign partner to carry the financial burden caused by Eurocan	Encourages Enso management for further partnership negotiations with Canadian and U.S. companies
1966–1967	Eurocan mill capacity is increased by 30%	Provides more suitable financial prospects, but also much more preparation for the project
August 1966	Ben Ginter openly expresses his willingness to resign from the position as the Eurocan CEO	Reminds the Finnish partners of their dependence on Ginter and compels them to persuade him to continue
November–December 1966	Enso negotiates with the North American companies Owens Illinois, Prince George Pulp and Paper and Weyerhaeuser of the latter's potential partnership stake in Eurocan without a result	Shows the Finnish partners that they can only accomplish the project on their own
Late 1966	Myllykoski withdraws from the project	Compels the other Finnish partners to increase their ownership stakes accordingly

(Continued on next page)

Time	Event	Implication to the project progress
April 1967	Technical planning by H.A. Simons (International) Consulting Engineers completed	Enables the start of the construction of the mill production site
Spring 1967	J.F. Slaney & Co finishes its report on the wood harvesting investments	Enables the start of the building of wood transporting infrastructure
July 1967	Market research by Stanford Research Institute is completed; Kidder, Peabody & Co. and Richardson Securities finishes its report on project funding needs with the help of an expert statement by Coverdale & Colpitts Consulting Engineers	Enables application for project funding
July 1967	Mill area clearing works and construction of forest roads begin	Enables the forthcoming mill groundworks
August 1967	Prudential Insurance and three other insurance companies reach an agreement over funding the Eurocan project	Enables mill operations after its construction would be finished
February 1968	Sandwell Consulting Engineers selected as the main planner of the new mill	Enables proceeding with the machinery orders and related operations
April 1968	Consortium led by The First National Bank of New York provides immediate funding for the project	Enables starting of the mill construction works
May 1968	Groundwork construction for the mill begins	Starts the final technical completion stage of the project
Spring 1968	Ben Ginter resigns from Eurocan presidency and substantially decreases his ownership stake in the company (from 15% to 3%); the Finnish partners raise their stakes accordingly	Project turns practically into a Finnish foreign venture
October 1968	The original profitability calculations prove to be optimistic and, as a result, the planned paper production output is further increased by 18% with almost doubled sawn timber output	Increases planning work and somewhat delays future machinery installations because, instead of one larger paper machine, the mill is converted to operate with two smaller ones
Spring 1969	Mill construction contract signed	Finalises the technical characteristics of the mill
December 1969	Installation of the sawmill and paper production lines start	The final mill construction stage begins
Early 1970	The start-up of the sawmill and installation of the other machinery	Initial production and construction operations continue simultaneously
September–October 1970	Start-ups of the paper machines 1 and 2	Gives the Eurocan partners the first indications of the actual capacity of the new mill
Fall 1970	Ben Ginter withdraws from Eurocan ownership	Eurocan becomes literally fully owned by Enso and its Finnish partners Kymi and Tampella
December 1970	Eurocan project completed	Project ends with two months delay, but with doubled costs and significantly changed end product, mill technical lay-out and ownership structure

## Appendix B. Actors mentioned in the study in alphabetical order

Actor	Overall description
Alcan	Canadian Aluminium company operating in the Kitimat area
Bodcaw	An U.S. oil company that had offered its forests in Louisiana to Enso and Tampella for industrial use
Crown Zellerbach	A major U.S. forest industry firm operating also in British Columbia
Karl-Erik Ekholm	CEO of Kymi until 1965 and member of the board from 1965 to 1975
Enso	A major state-owned Finnish forest industry firm
Feldmühle	A major German forest industry firm operating also in British Columbia
Ben Ginter	A self-made business entrepreneur mostly involved with construction and brewing businesses in British Columbia
Pentti Halle	CEO of Enso from 1962 to 1973
Kurt Ignatius	Enso marketing director from 1962 to 1970
Kajaani	A minor privately-owned Finnish forest industry firm
Kymi	A major privately-owned Finnish forest industry firm
Ralph Loffmark	British Columbia's Minister of Trade and Commerce in the mid-1960s
MacMillan Bloedel	A major Canadian forest industry firm
Myllykoski	A minor family-owned Finnish forest industry firm
Nokia	A major Finnish industrial conglomerate with some forest industry operations
Johann Nykopp	CEO of Tampella from 1962 to 1972
Owens-Illinois	A major U.S. glass manufacturing company
Rauma-Repola	A major Finnish firm involved in both forest and machine works industries
Reedpack	A British paper and packaging firm
Eero Riihikallio	Enso forest manager
Skeena Group	A group of sawmills operating in the Kitimat area
SCA from Sweden	A major Swedish forest industry firm
Mauri Skogster	An Enso engineer and Eurocan general manager from 1966 to 1970 and its head thereafter
Tampella	A major Finnish privately-owned firm involved with both forest and machine works industries
United Paper Mills (UPM)	A major Finnish privately-owned forest industry firm
West Fraser	A major Canadian forest industry firm
Klaus Waris	Governor of the Bank of Finland from 1957 to 1967 and the Chairman of Enso Corporate Advisory Board at the time of Eurocan decision
Ray Williston	Minister of British Columbia Lands and Forests from 1956 to 1972

### Appendix C. List of corporate and industry histories collected for the study

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