

"Everything produced by public service should be released under the most liberal Creative Commons license", media advisor Joakim Jardenberg writes after Sweden's public television and Reuters failed to agree on transmission rights from the royal wedding.



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There is a possibility that there is truth in what Swedish state television SVT's CEO Eva Hamilton says, that "no other media company" had a disagreeing view on how SVT handled the sale of transmission rights from the Crown princess' wedding. But I have. And I am footing the bill by way of the compulsory radio and TV fee. It is high time to share all the works produced by our public service media companies under an open license. It is time for public service to live up to its name - to extend a service to the public. And to do that in a contemporary way.

On Saturday June 19 - 2010, Her Royal Highness, Crown Princess Victoria got married. Regardless of people's opinions on monarchy or the PR value of such an event, the interest was enormous, an estimated 700 foreign reporters were on site, and Germany among other countries broadcasted live from the ceremony.

Swedish public service television SVT had exclusive rights on the wedding coverage (host media), no harm in that. The Royal Court decides and it is reasonable to give the assignment to the national network. It prevents commercial interests to restrict the public's access to the wedding. Yet, this is exactly what happened. There has been an ongoing battle between SVT and Reuters since a week prior to the wedding. The interesting thing isn't who's right or wrong in the argument. What is interesting is the conditions that should apply to our common heritage.

In a parallel world, besides SVT and Reuters, there's a whole different development taking place. It's about the insight in what free and shared culture means to society. For democracy as well as the commercial opportunities it creates. The Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) has earlier reported about the Norwegian equivalent of the SMHI making a huge profit in releasing its weather data, and in many parts of the world the access to open data is high up on

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the political agenda. The same development is seen in the creative communities.

Creative Commons is such a community. It was founded 2001 by Lawrence Lessig, an American Law Professor with a merit list thicker than the Greek national debt. The aim is to offer an alternative to the narrow framework of the traditional copyright. In a simple and legible language, a number of licences are defined which let the creator decide in what way his/her work is to be used and by whom. I have, for example, CC-BY on everything I create.

That means that all my texts, lyrics, pictures and films are free for anyone to republish, modify and even make money from. All I want in return is to be listed as the creator, that credit is given to me. In total, the number of listed creations with this license has risen to an estimated 180 million 2008, and since then the growth has been enormous. Today at Flickr, there are over 150,000 pictures of Stockholm with an open license. More and more memorial institutions world wide are using Creative Commons.

Most people agree that the concept of free culture is a nice idea, but just as many within the media business are concerned about revenue. Within the open licensing movements solutions to these problems have been defined; understandably there are still some worries when you are dependant on selling rights for food. The point is that these problems do not apply to SVT. Sales of rights are less than 2 percent of the total income for the Swedish public service.

SVT is a professional company and produces world class television. There is no doubt that such an organisation costs money and that they need their revenue. They get that revenue through the Swedish tv-fee, [TV-avgiften], that despite its name is shared with SR, The Swedish Radio, and UR, Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company. The lion's share of it (3.7 billion SEK 2009) however goes to SVT. A figure difficult to put in context, but it is said to be about twice the turnover of the commercial tv network TV4, including its niche channels. It should be clear to everyone that SVT hardly is in lack of money.

Therefore I regard it self-evident that SVT should stop arguing about pocket-change for selling material that has already been paid for, by us. Rather, everything produced by public service should be released under the most liberal Creative Commons license. Let everyone, both consumers and companies embed, remix and redistribute the productions. This will improve distribution penetration, enhance creativity and create an engagement that thoroughly will make public service into a public concern.

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A modernized attitude and an open license will ensure that we democratically and economically get the most out of the license fee that we Swedes pay every month. If the managers of our public service companies don't open up the licensing, our politicians should do it for them. Who should I vote for in the upcoming Swedish election this autumn to make this happen?

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