

Exploiting the Potential of Municipal Data in Sweden

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Swedish government agencies keep registers and other information resources of high quality in electronic form. These information resources are being re-used. There is an information industry in Sweden, built on re-use of public sector information. However, re-use is almost exclusively limited to information from national agencies, despite the fact that there is an enormous potential in re-use of municipal (local and regional) information.

Local and regional municipalities collect information in their own areas of responsibility, e.g. zoning, education, child care, health care, public transportation, and municipal road administration. They also collect statistical information about citizens and businesses. During our work with the implementation of the PSI-Directive in Sweden, we tried to find good examples of re-use of municipal information. This was even more important since a survey made by the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce indicated that knowledge of the PSI-Directive was very low among municipalities. We also assumed that re-users would be interested in the potential for re-use of municipal information.

To our surprise, we found very few such examples. With the help of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions we managed to find some examples of re-use of geographical information. During the formal consultation procedure of the draft PSI-law, some more examples emerged. All of these examples of re-use were in the area of geographical information. As for re-use of other information, we found no examples at all of re-use. Neither did we receive any examples of potential re-use.

It may not be surprising that the municipalities themselves had difficulties seeing the potential for re-use. Even more surprising was the weak interest from the re-user community. Commercial re-users are addressing to a nation wide clientele. Local information is of lesser interest, since the potential clients are fewer. This seems like a rational argument. In other member states, however, municipal and regional information is being re-used commercially and non-commercially, for instance in the UK and Italy. I suspect that the lack of interest on the part of the established, industrial size, re-users at least in part is a consequence of lack of creativity.

Municipal information may therefore provide an opportunity for smaller companies and new entrepreneurs to enter the market for PSI. New entrepreneurs may not be able to compete with established market actors in the market for mass information such as business information. But they can certainly compete with the “old dragons” when it comes to creativity and exploitation of new opportunities. I would be surprised if in a few years, Sweden does not have a number of new services, provided by small companies or single entrepreneurs and based on municipal information.