A CLASH OF IDEALS
The Introduction of Televised Information in Sweden, 1969–1972

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In 1969, a government report concluded that there was a need for closer contact between the citizens and Swedish government agencies. Television, at this time still considered a new medium, was highlighted in the report as a valuable form of mass communication with great yet unfulfilled promise as a disseminator of government information. A heated debate about the role and function of government information ensued, not least within the public service broadcaster Sveriges Radio. While much research has been devoted to the Swedish public service model, little is known about Swedish television’s function as a communication tool for government authorities. The article shows that the discursive struggles surrounding Swedish government agencies’ use of television centered on three main issues: public service broadcasting’s independence, the dangers related to one-way mass communication, and the shape and aesthetics of government information. By shedding light on the introduction of the program Anslagstavlan, this article contributes to a previously forsaken media history of televised information.

KEYWORDS Television; public relations; advertisements; broadcasting history; public service broadcasting

During the 1950s and 1960s, rapid societal changes reshaped modern Sweden with increased urbanization, a growing economic internationalization, and a general expansion of the public sector. In this context, there was a perceived need not only for closer contact between citizens and government agencies, but also for more government information about citizens’ rights and responsibilities. To this regard, the Swedish government official report Expanded Government Information (1969) represents an important milestone as an advocate for a modernized and more active form of government information. Television, at this time still considered a new medium, was particularly highlighted in the report as a valuable form of mass communication with great yet unfulfilled promise as a disseminator of government information. However, the reports’ ‘progressive’ ideas were not unilaterally accepted, but it sparked a heated public debate about the role and function of government information, not least internally within the public service broadcaster Sveriges Radio (SR) where critics viewed the idea of expanded government information as a threat to public service broadcasters’ independence. This article returns to the animated debates when Sveriges television (SVT) began airing the government information program Anslagstavlan [The Pinboard]. Starting in 1972, Anslagstavlan comprised of short informational spots on topics such as taxes, health care and public insurance. Though
often part of larger information campaigns, the televised government information stood out, making the program well-known amongst generations of Swedish audiences. The format proved remarkably stable and it is still broadcast, both on linear television and online, five decades after its introduction.

Within film and media studies, the past decade has seen a growing interest in the broad spectrum of audiovisual media that were produced with a specific purpose in mind such as to inform, to educate or to sell.4 A number of recent film historical works deal with ‘useful cinema’ from a Swedish horizon, underlining that state authorities, government agencies and state-owned enterprises often acted as commissioners of such works.5 However, televised government information spots—what in the US context is usually labeled public service announcements and in the UK context public information films—remain an under-researched phenomenon. Along with trailers and commercials, television scholar John Ellis notes, public service announcements constitute ‘interstitials’, which is ‘a whole class of television output’ that carries messages, builds anticipation and delay, and interlaces with other programs.6 While some research exists on producers of televised government information spots, focusing on influential organizations and institutions such as non-profit The Advertising Council (1942–) in the US and the Central Office of Information in the UK (1946–2011),7 less emphasis has been placed on this particular type of state interference in the Scandinavian media system.8 Notably, the perceived need for an expanded government information was not limited to Sweden, but dedicated programs with short government information spots also circulated elsewhere in Europe, such as in Denmark (OBS—Oplysning til Borgerne om Samfundet) and the Netherlands (Postbus 51) during the 1970s.9

The purpose of this article is two-fold: first, the aim is to make an empirically grounded contribution on the debates about the introduction of Anslagstavlan, a feature that despite its controversial function as a communication tool for government authorities has not been the object of historical scrutiny; second, taking my cue from cultural historical media research and media archaeology on residual program formats, this article endeavors to highlight the connections between government public relations and broadcasting culture, an interdisciplinary perspective that previously has been largely overlooked by strategic communication scholars. By focusing on the strategies of historical agents in the production and circulation of government information, this study aims to identify and explain the ways in which information problems were framed, which media effects were considered important and what vocabulary was used to describe practices. This raises the following central research questions: How did television journalists, government agencies, and PR-bureaus envision the appeal and effect of televised information? What discursive struggles emerged over the definition and framing of televised information? Empirically, this study draws on historical-archival research at the Document Archive at the Swedish Radio Administration, focusing particularly on the papers of the Working Committee for Government Information, a special organizational body dedicated to government information within SR. In doing so, I make use of sources such as internal policy documents, meeting protocols and in-house correspondences. Moreover, to gauge the public debate about televised government information, I have performed searches in the National Library of Sweden’s archive of digitized newspapers.
A Forsaken Media History of Televised Information

Sweden has been described as a pioneer in the development of information policy, implementing laws regarding the freedom of the press and the freedom to access government documents as early as 1766, something which was considered radical at the time. Implementing laws regarding the freedom of the press and the freedom to access government documents as early as 1766, something which was considered radical at the time. From the introduction of the People’s Home in the late 1920s and onwards, the Swedish welfare state increased in size and likewise did the government agencies’ information activities. The state did not only govern what type of information citizens could take part of through censorship laws, but it also disseminated and promoted information deemed useful for the population. Historians such as Yvonne Hirdman have demonstrated that the welfare state showed a distinct ambition to explain and demonstrate the importance of certain virtues, and that the social engineering of the time also included efforts to control the private life of individuals and families. In this context, the media emerged as a means of soft power, with an ability to influence and affect peoples’ views.

During the late 1960s, the term *samhällsinformation* became a buzzword among politicians, policy-makers and researchers. The concept is difficult to translate because it could refer both to information in general (akin to public information) and to information specifically from government agencies. This article focuses on the latter category. As Fredrik Norén has shown, the government appointed the Commission on Government Information (1967–1971) with the explicit ambition to map existing needs for government information and the most efficient ways of providing such information. This fueled the public debate where discussions concentrated on the ways in which government agencies should provide citizens with information on rights and responsibilities through media campaigns. Whereas the commission placed great emphasis on mass communication—in which television played a crucial role alongside other media forms such as newspaper advertisements, brochures and billboards—vocal critics of the commission such as economic psychologist Kjell Nowak and sociologist Jan Ekecrantz—both foundational figures within the emerging Swedish media and communication studies field—criticized this top-down mode of information and instead argued for the need of two-way communication. Thus, the government report *Expanded Government Information* did not only have institutional consequences, leading to the establishment of the Board of Public Information (1971–1981), but it also sparked an intensive debate about the definition of government information and its role in society.

Even through the commission’s directives about the need for an increased and more active government information was part of the motivation for the expansion from one to two television channels, Swedish television historians have placed surprisingly little emphasis on how SR as an institution responded to the information debate. In her book about Swedish factual television (e.g. news and documentaries) between 1955 and 1995, Ulla B. Abrahamsson shortly describes the genesis of the program *Anslagstavlan*, but does not address the discursive struggles about government information in-depth. Meanwhile, in the influential book *Mirror, Investigate, Interpret*, Monika Djerf-Pierre and Lennart Weibull outline the history of Swedish radio and television journalism and describe the late 1960s and the early 1970s as a period shaped by the rise of investigative journalism. The authors do note that the topic of government information became a contentious issue and that the journalistic ideals of the time were at odds...
with the political demands for advanced government information. However, the clashes between different stakeholders within SR remain unexplored. Thus, by studying the public service broadcaster’s increasingly important role in the dissemination of government information, this article will fill a knowledge gap in previous media and communication scholarship.

The history of Swedish information policy has primarily been approached by two strands of scholars: first, researchers working on strategic communication, crisis communication and government public relations; secondly, researchers within the burgeoning field of cultural historical media research. Much emphasis within the first category of scholarship tends to be placed on contemporary issues, for instance related to practical public relations. While much international research on public relations tend to focus on commercial and industrial life, particularly in American contexts, scholars such as Larsåke Larsson and Hanna Kjellgren have productively explored the history of Swedish information activities and focused on the specific problems related to communication in a small welfare state. However, scholars within this tradition often place primary emphasis on institutional and organizational issues, rarely putting media (or conceptual debates about media) at the forefront.

Meanwhile, within the field of cultural historical media research, scholars have investigated the material underpinnings of knowledge circulation, highlighting the key role of media and communication systems in the formation of information policies in a Swedish context. In the 1970s, competing visions about concepts like ‘mass media’, ‘communication’ and ‘information’ gave rise to vibrant, overlapping debates about information flows, media ownership concentration, and the relationship between media and the individual. In recent years, Swedish information policy has been discussed in relation to the emergence of media studies, the public debate surrounding government reports, and the collaboration between government agencies and cultural workers. This strand of scholarship indicates the importance of tracing the development of ideas, definitions and interpretations of the concept of information in different contexts. Meanwhile, as Andreas Fickers and Anne-Katrin Weber argue, television constitutes one of the ‘winners’ in media history, yet its history is riddled with ‘less reviewed or even unknown objects, images and practices’. Drawing on cultural historical media research, this article maps a forsaken media history of televised information, while prioritizing an interconnected and entangled perspective on the relation between government public relations and instructive broadcasting.

In the analysis, particular focus is placed on the discursive struggles between television journalists, government agencies, and PR-bureaus over the definition and framing of televised information. Thomas Hanitzsch and Tim Vos describe journalism as a ‘discursive institution’ with constant struggles over how its role in society should be interpreted. In this case, the discursive struggle occurred over the introduction of televised government information between those who thought that television and mass communication had a potentially important role to play in government information and those who perceived this as a threat to public service broadcasting’s independence and as a problematic practice. In the following, emphasis placed on three main themes in the internal debate about televised information: first, public service broadcasting’s independence and the risk of increased government influence; second, the dangers related to one-way top-down
mass communication and the conflicting visions about how to navigate around this problem; and lastly, the shape of government information and the contrast between objective information and modern advertising methods.

**A Growing Need for Information: A Threat to SR’s Independence?**

During the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the issue of government information was on top the agenda at SR. A central theme in the internal debate was public service broad-castings’ independence vis-à-vis the government. For example, the topic was brought to the fore in the government report *The Future of Radio and Television in Sweden* (1965:20), which discussed SR’s responsibility to adhere to requests from public institutions and government agencies to use radio and television to broadcast information to the public. However, at that time, the report concluded that there were many reasons to stick to a strict rationing of ‘direct public service’:

- The amount of requests that would be made if the company adopted a generous policy could be expected to be very numerous. A significant amount of the programming hours in relation to news segments and other suitable occasions would need to be mobilized. The audience would surely be irritated by the accumulation of official messages. Lastly, and this is the most important point, Sveriges Radio would risk a position one must avoid at all cost, that is appearing as the official spokesman of the government authorities.

From a legal point-of-view, the regulations were not entirely clear. On the one hand, the Radio Law noted that SR should ‘broadcast messages from government agencies to the public upon request’. On the other hand, SR’s independence was stressed, noting that ‘Every programming company decides alone what shall be included in the organized broadcasts’. This regulatory gray zone sparked an internal debate within SR.

Whereas *The Future of Radio and Television in Sweden* (1965:20) argued for strict rationing, the directives for *Radio in Development*, which was commissioned in 1969, noted that the experts shall ‘treat issues surrounding a systematic expansion’ of programs in service of the citizens. The first internal investigation about SR’s responsibilities to inform the public focused particularly on consumer information. In late October 1969, approximately one month prior to the so-called channel split (*kanalklyvningen*) and TV2’s introduction, the Head of Radio formed an internal working group, Prorikon (from the concept *programpolitiska riktlinjer*), whose task it was to establish guidelines for consumer information. The final report stresses SR’s independence, yet acknowledges the need for new forms of consumer information. An internal referral about the report, however, points out several potential problems with an expanded consumer information, such as the risk that government agencies and institutions would direct pressure toward SR to broadcast ‘tailored information and education’. As Sophie Elsässer observes, it is obvious that the Prorikon report stresses SR’s independence in an effort to dissuade pressure from government authorities.

Less than a year later, in August 1970, another working group, Saminform (from the word *samhällsinformation*), was formed dedicated specifically to the topic of government information on Swedish radio and television. While some group members recognized the importance for the public to acquire information from government agencies, others
focused on the future of public service media and the potential threat to its independence. A recurring criticism pointed out that SR already provided a ‘public service’ through its news coverage and in its regular programming, making the production of spots with government information superfluous. In this sense, journalistic ideals were at odds with the political demands for more government information. The working group proposed two opposing courses of action. The first option was more pragmatic and suggested that SR should take a proactive lead in this question. By forming an organization within SR dedicated to government information, SR would have a greater chance at guarding the key principles of the company, and ensure that the programming policies on objectivity and unbiasedness were safeguarded. The second option, drawing on the critical voices within the company, was to ‘categorically take a clear stand against the idea of commissioned government information, with the motivation that Sveriges Radio on principle cannot approve of the idea’.

During the autumn of 1970, Saminform developed a document with proposed guidelines for government information and circulated it within the company. The internal referral round highlights strong disagreement between different departments with many contradictory suggestions. Some commenters were positive. For example, Rolf Lundgren, Head of the Educational Programming Unit, preferred the first course of action and argued for ‘swift action’ and the establishment of an internal organization responsible for commissioned government information. Per-Martin Hamberg, representing the news desk, had prior experience working with government information on Swedish television in relation to the massive information campaign surrounding the transition from left-hand traffic to right-hand traffic in 1967. During a two-year period, the Swedish Commission on Right-Hand Traffic commissioned SR to produce special radio and television programs on traffic security, as well as educational programs for children. Drawing on this, Hemberg expressed a positive view on government information: ‘within the traffic group, we were able to provide a richly varied yet powerful informative programs that did not only fulfill their propaganda task but also constituted popular programs as such’. Although certain issues can arise, Hemberg noted, no-one perceived this as a threat to public service broadcasting independence.

Others voiced strong criticism. TV1’s Peder Alsterlind, a seasoned news-producer, warned that ‘commissioned information incorporated in the regular programming could easily be interpreted polemically’. Moreover, Alsterlind contended, a commissioner should never be able to influence the content or form of SR’s programs, adding that it is not entirely sure whether or not televised government information is in line with the Radio Law: ‘Could a biased portrayal of a government agencies’ valuable reforms be considered a commercial enterprise?’ Furthermore, Alsterlind drew different conclusions from his work with traffic information and contrarily argued:

The best way to support traffic security is not through short-sighted accounts of the Swedish Transport Safety Agency’s latest campaigns … the best way to support traffic security is to monitor and critically investigate all factors related to traffic security such as car construction, road quality, drivers’ education and so on. Factors that should not be neglected even if they are not traditionally part of what is included in the concept traffic propaganda.
Again, the value of the core journalistic principle of news value, rather than government agencies’ information needs, was underlined. Alsterlind concluded that the plans to allow commissioned government information should be abandoned.

For the critics, SR’s engagement in the massive communication effort prior to the shift from left-hand traffic to right-hand traffic served as a cautionary tale. Another executive, Nils-Petter Lindskog from the Head Office, argued along the lines of Alsterlind that ‘the “right-hand-traffic” model should not be repeated. Let it remain a one-time engagement.’ Moreover, Head of Radio Nils-Olof Franzén was profoundly critical, noting that ‘the vision behind the arrangement with commissioned government information strikes me as very obtrusive’. Further, Franzén argued that such a practice conflicted with SR’s independence and the journalistic ideals: ‘I think it is wrong to let political parties or government agencies commission singular programs or tv series ... One should not have to suspect that programs have been produced to conduct propaganda.’ Instead, Franzén proposed that the government agencies themselves should start their own radio and television channels dedicated solely to government information. Notably, the executives Hemberg, Alsterlind and Franzén each use the concept ‘propaganda’ differently. Whereas Hemberg and Alsterlind discuss traffic propaganda in a neutral tone, something which was common in the contemporary Swedish discourse, Franzén uses it to highlight potentially manipulative intentions.

These discursive struggles show that there was a lot more at stake in this debate than previous research has shown. Erik Pakarinen, who headed the Saminform group, collated the different opinions and noted that there is a ‘natural and accepted opposition between journalists’ and government agencies’ ambitions’ in certain stages of the news cycle. However, in an attempt to tone down the opposition between journalistic ideals and government information, Pakarinen also noted that government agencies often have a need to inform citizens about issues that no longer have news value. In the end, SR chose the first course of action, establishing The Working Committee for Government Information and assigning them the task of shaping the rules surrounding televised government information.

‘The Days of Major Information Campaigns Are Gone’

Another key debate focused on mass communication and ideas about its potentially powerful or limited effect. Notably, during the 1960s, television reached large audiences in Sweden, and television set saturation grew from 800,000 in 1960 to 2,400,000 by the end of the decade (in a country of 8 million). On the one hand, the government report *Expanded Government Information* highlighted the potentially powerful effects of government information. With regard to television, the report highlights three key strengths of the medium: first, the potential impact of television; second, the way that television captures the attention of the viewers; and lastly, its ability to spark debate. In contrast to brochures, letters and other forms of print advertisement, television was deemed to have a higher ‘attention value’ (uppmärksamhetsvärde), an argument which historically has occurred frequently in discussions about public relations, advertising and the moving image. In particular, the report singles out the H-day campaign as a ‘mass communication effort of a scale previously never seen in our country’, wherein mass media
played a pivotal role. On the other hand, in the public debate, critical voices from academia, such as Kjell Nowak and Jan Ekecrantz, disapproved of one-way information models where the receiver was given a passive role, a perspective which arguably dominated the communication efforts of government authorities in previous decades. Propo-

ponents of a two-way model of communication questioned the purpose and effect of mass communication, raising questions about citizens’ ability to respond to the provided information.

This public and academic debate also informed the discussion within SR with critics of the proposed guidelines highlighting the dangers related to one-way, top-down mass communication as opposed to two-way flows of communication. For one thing, television bureaucrats kept a close eye at the academic debate and the critical literature produced within this context. For example, the Working Committee for Government Information’s archive includes multiple copies of Ekecrantz pamphlet ‘Om makt och information’, published by the independent filmmaker cooperative Föreningen Filmcentrum. Ekecrantz would later develop the pamphlet into the influential book *The Power and the Information* (1975), which has since been re-issued several times. In his comment on the referrals, Pakarinen acknowledged the risk that televised information could be interpreted as top-down information: ‘This could lead to a development, which means that government agencies single-handedly control government information or that information might become partial—or at least be perceived to support government sanctioned politics. In extreme cases, demands for increased government agency influence could lead to a clash with the Radio Law.’ Further, drawing on the trending concept of two-way communication, Pakarinen stressed that the citizens’ ability to take part in the democratic process and shaping the development of society should be seen as an integral part of modern government information.

To eliminate the risk of biased top-down information, a need of a strict set of rules was identified within the company. For example, Ivar Ivre, Head of PUB, the Section of Audience Research at Sveriges Radio, posed the question in which specific cases government agencies should be denied the right to deliver ‘their information’. Ivre’s suggestion was to limit the televised information to ‘objective’ and ‘factual’ reports, for example on the consequences of a recent reform. Yet, government agencies should never be allowed to ‘inform’ about their views in current, undecided politically sensitive matters, such as ‘Almstriden’ (The Elm War), which took place when the Stockholm city council and the government ordered the removal of a group of elm trees to make way for a subway entrance and shopping mall, causing major protests. While critical theorists like Ekecrantz and others were skeptical about the notion of ‘objective’ and ‘factual’ government information, the internal debate within the public service broadcaster shows that precautions were taken to avoid Swedish television becoming a mouthpiece of one-sided government information. Moreover, the debate highlights that the television bureaucrats and representatives of the audience division PUB were not merely technocrats, but that they also engaged with the thoughts of vocal critics within the public and academic debate. This further underlines the heterogeneity that Mats Hyvönen, Pelle Snickars and Per Vesterlund argue was characteristic for the pre-history of media and communication studies in Sweden.
The utopian visions surrounding televisions’ potential attention value were also called into question. This can be exemplified by the internal debate on the calls for the public service broadcaster to expand its engagement in information campaigns about the Third World. During the late 1960s, Sweden committed to the one percent target, with the expressed goal of giving one percent of the GDP as foreign aid to developing countries. A central task for the new government agency, SIDA (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), was to provide information about foreign aid and raise awareness about developing countries, primarily targeting a domestic audience. In a written report, Gunnar Hallingberg, a commissioner on the board of Sveriges Radio, called for greater participation from the public service broadcaster in such campaigns and argued that ‘information task could be said to be unique and therefore demands special attention’. In his dismissive response, journalist KG Svensson drew on audience research conducted internally within the SR when he questioned the efficacy of mass communication campaigns:

broadcasting media cannot form opinions even if they try. Rather, information seems to confirm previously held opinions … Judging from audience figures, it seems well proven that audiences avoid content they do not want to hear about … the people who are interested in these problems would acquire information regardless of SR. The days of major information campaigns are gone.

Other commentators questioned the possibility of producing ‘pure information’ in political matters. The discursive struggles within SR further indicate that this was a transitional period where confidence in massive, top-down information campaigns faltered, not least among journalists.

In this sense, the demands for an expanded government information did not sit well with the journalists at SR. Whereas some perceived the risk of turning SR into a government mouthpiece as an existential threat, others reacted to the naive view on the effect of mass communication and the lack of a two-way flow of information. At the same time, SR did not deem it possible to resist the political and societal forces which promoted government information in numerous government reports and in the public debate. In order to establish boundaries for televised government information, effectively limiting the engagement of the public service broadcaster in the dissemination of government information, SR created Anslagstavlan in 1972. Strict rules surrounded the program: only government agencies were allowed to commission spots, the information had to be objective and unbiased, and SR retained power over the final cut. Also, the government agency had to cover all costs involved. Despite these limitations, as the next section will show, government agencies were positive toward the role of televised information, and invested prestige in this in the forthcoming years.

Public Relations and Televised Information

Journalists and television bureaucrats worked hard to establish firm boundaries of televised information and to limit SR’s engagement in this field. Meanwhile, government agencies had high ambitions and approached Anslagstavlan with the explicit aim to make government information stylistically and narratively attractive—all in order to capture
peoples’ attention. In this way, Anslagstavlan set out to provide both information and entertainment. The ensuing discursive struggles centered not only on questions regarding what sort of information should be included and excluded, but also on the mode of address.

During the 1960s, government information was often labeled underdeveloped, outdated and boring.\(^7\) Attempting to investigate different modes of communication, the report *Expanded Government Information* highlighted modern mass communication as a key to make government information more attractive.\(^7\) For example, Anders Bauer, a prominent ‘information expert’ who was consulted in *Expanded Public Information*, argued in this vein:

> Those who aid people with tooth paste, soft drinks, cigarettes and holidays in Mallorca have adapted to the preconditions of a mass communication society. Through the spoken word, images and other technical media, they get the message across—better than those messages deserve … Government information should, like tooth paste, be sold through the methods of the mass communication society.\(^7\)

Swedish government agencies used a wide range of media to disseminate government information—from billboards to comic books, from brochures to text advertisements in newspapers. The televised information on *Anslagstavlan*, however, added a new dimension to the government agencies’ communication plans.

In the 1970s, an increasing number of government agencies established information offices or public relations departments, a trend which was also notable internationally.\(^7\) Drawing on interviews with PR-officials, Larsåke Larsson has observed that the government agencies information offices did most creative work themselves and that ‘consultants were an almost unknown phenomenon’ within the public sector.\(^7\) While this might have been the case when it comes to the production of brochures and newspaper advertisements, this does not hold true when it comes to the production of audiovisual communication. Such competencies did simply not exist in-house at government agencies at this point in time. In fact, large PR-bureaux such as ABC annonsbyrå, Svea annonsbyrå and Gumaelius, as well as smaller film production companies such as Selektiv film, were commonly assigned to produce the segments for *Anslagstavlan* during the early 1970s.

Meanwhile, the rules that SR adopted for the broadcasting of *Anslagstavlan* reveal a skepticism toward the idea of public relations, stating that ‘information of PR-character shall not be accepted’ and that the government agency, not the PR-bureau, should handle all communication with the public service broadcaster.\(^7\) While most aesthetic and narrative decisions were made in collaboration between the commissioning government agencies and the PR-bureaux, the Working Committee for Government Information had the final say about the TV spots. During the introduction of *Anslagstavlan*, this sparked disagreements about the mode of address in televised information. An illustrative example is state-monopoly liquor vender Systembolaget’s marketing campaign ‘Spola kröken’, which featured celebrities such as the Swedish national ice hockey team and the singer Cornelis Vreeswijk encouraging the Swedish people to drink with moderation. A celebrity, in this case the drummer and actor Janne ‘Loffe’ Carlsson, also featured in the six 90-second spots that Systembolaget commissioned from the advertisement agency Attlaxeras. The humorous, light-hearted films center on fast-pace dialogue between two
middle-aged men who playfully throw insults at one another about the counterparts’ alcohol consumption habits. However, when submitted for broadcasting on television, the Working Committee for Government Information rejected the spots with reference to the message, which was found to be unclear, and the use of curse-words. Rune Hermansson, the Head of Systembolaget, was outraged and sent a critical letter to SR describing the spots as ‘socially useful propaganda’ on a topic where the need of further information campaigns was great. Moreover, in the press, Hermansson said that the films were ‘too controversial’ for television and he labeled SR ‘cowards’. Meanwhile, SR defended its stance publicly, and there were internal speculations about whether Hermansson’s anger was a result of the spots’ hefty price tag. This example shows that the definition of what constituted ‘objective’ and ‘factual’ information indeed was not clear-cut, and that government-owned Systembolaget and the PR-bureaus that produced the spots pushed the boundaries of modern advertisement more than SR was comfortable with.

Concurrent with Anslagstavlan gaining cultural influence Swedish government agencies and their information offices invested more resources toward advertising. Especially during the 1970s and 1980s, economic historian Erik Lakomaa observes, advertising became ‘an integral part of public sector activities, and government agencies and municipalities became major buyers of media and advertising services’. SR likely underestimated the efforts and investments that government agencies would vest in the television spots on Anslagstavlan: the producing PR-bureaus relied on fast-cut editing and the attraction of moving images, celebrities were recruited, and a humorous mode of address was developed. As media scholar Einar Korpus observes, Anslagstavlan was the closest thing to television advertisements that the Swedish media landscape offered at this time. Many of the spots aired during the forthcoming decades were far from the objective and strictly factual format that the television officials first envisioned.

Conclusions

This article shines light on the discursive struggles surrounding Swedish government agencies use of television to address citizens during the late 1960s and early 1970s. While government information was a rapidly advancing field, the development clashed with the journalistic ideals within the public service broadcaster. The differences of opinion centered on three main issues. First of all, the expanding government information was perceived a threat to SR’s independence, and the company wanted to avoid appearing as an official spokesman of the government authorities. Moreover, government agencies’ demands for airtime was met with criticism from journalists who underlined news coverage and regular educational and information programming as a key public information service much more effective than informational spots produced directly by the agencies. Meanwhile, political pressure was strong, and the SR administration decided to cave in and offer a limited, regulated opportunity for televised information.

Secondly, in the report Expanded Government Information, the far-reaching potential of government information through mass communication was underlined, something which many television officials questioned. Within SR, as well as in the public debate,
critics highlighted the pitfalls of one-way, top-down information as opposed to two-way flows of communication. For example, television officials, informed by audience research, called the television medium’s attention value into question and some even proclaimed that the era of big campaigns was over. Despite such criticism, this would turn out to be far from the case. During the 1970s, government agencies launched many influential media campaigns such as the National Board of Health and Welfare’s health campaigns, the Energy Saving Committee’s campaigns during the Oil Crisis, and the Swedish Social Insurance Agency’s campaign for progressive parental policy. Meanwhile, during the 1980s and 1990s, major campaigns were launched against narcotics and alcohol abuse, as well as information campaigns about the AIDS crisis. However, the critics of one-way information did point to a significant, emerging trend in government information, where mass communication was increasingly supplemented by other media (in a broad sense of the word) such as public meetings, question boxes and study circles, all in an effort to stimulate two-way flows of communication and long-term civic engagement.

A third controversy concerned the mode of address in government information. On the one hand, critical voices within SR managed to limit the role of the public service broadcaster in information campaigns, establishing the program Anslagstavlan with firm rules about the content and mode of address. On the other hand, the commissioning government agencies and the producing PR-bureaus attempted to make the spots attractive to the general public, relying on modern advertisement techniques such as celebrity advertising and a humorous mode of address. The case of Systembolaget’s information campaign on moderate drinking illustrates that journalists and government agencies had profoundly different views on public relations as a field.

In Sweden today, downsizing, layoffs and job reductions has resulted in a decrease of journalists with information agents and communicators far outnumbering them. While public service broadcasting remains independent, the skeptical journalists at SR did accurately perceive this development as a potential threat to their field. Even though television was not a new medium in the 1970s, government agencies saw great potential in audiovisual communication and modern public relations. The debates surrounding the introduction of Anslagstavlan—focusing on rules and regulations, tone and mode of address, press ethics and moral—is mirrored in contemporary discussions on government agencies’ communication in social media, including recent controversial examples such as governments reaching out to influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic and the self-representation of the Swedish police on Instagram. In this sense, it seems that government agencies’ ambitions to inform the public in new ways often sparks controversy.

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Notes

1. Schön, *En modern svensk*, 334–41.
2. Several government reports had previously identified a growing need for information in society, e.g. SOU 1949:31 *Social upplysning*; SOU 1964:4 *Effektivare konsumentupplysning*; SOU 1964:54 *Konsumentupplysning i televisionen*; SOU 1967:5 *Statlig publicering*. For more on the report *Expanded Government Information*, see also Norén, “Deliberation.”
3. SOU 1969:48 *Vidgad samhällsinformation*, 52–6.
4. Vonderau and Hediger, *Films that Work*; Acland and Wasson, *Useful Cinema*.
5. Cf. Stjernholm, Gösta Werner; Wickman, *Filmen i försvarets tjänst*; Erik Florin Persson, *Filmen i stadens tjänst*.
6. Ellis, “Interstitials,” 65.
7. Griffith, “The Selling of America”; Wildy, “From the Mol to the Col.”
8. Harvard and Stadius, “A Communicative Perspective.”
9. In the Netherlands, government information spots were introduced during the 1960s under the name TITAN (*Televisie Informatie Ten Algemeenen Nutte*), but became increasingly part of the public consciousness during the 1970s under the name Postbus 51, see van der Noort, “The Evaluation of Government Campaigns.” The Danish format was directly inspired by *Anslagstavlan*, see Brink Lund, “Offentlig kommunikation.”
10. Gram, “Pliktleveranser,” 48.
11. Kjellgren, *Statens som informatör*, 38.
12. Hirdman, *Att lägga livet till rätta*.
13. Norén and Stjernholm, *Efterkrigstidens samhällskontakter*.
14. Norén, “Deliberation,” 150.
15. Ibid., 154.
16. Ibid., 155–8.
17. SOU 1965:20 *Radions och televisionens framtid i Sverige*, 421–6.
18. Abrahamsson, *I allmänhetens tjänst*, 193–4.
19. Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, *Spegla, granska*, 244–63.
20. Ibid., 210–11.
21. Watson, *Perspectives on Public Relations*.
22. Larsson, *Upplysning och propaganda*, 47–92; Kjellgren, *Statens som informatör*.
23. Czaïka, Nordin and Snickars, *Information som problem*; Hyvönen, Snickars, and Vesterlund, *Massmedieproblem*.
24. Hyvönen, Snickars and Vesterlund, *Massmedieproblem*.
25. Norén, “Deliberation.”
26. Diurlin and Norén, “Cultural Policy.”
27. Fickers and Weber, “Towards an Archaeology,” 3.
28. Hanitzsch and Vos, “Journalistic Roles.”
29. SOU 1965:20 *Radions och televisionens framtid i Sverige*.
30. SOU 1965:20, 422.
31. SFS 1966:755 §7.
32. SFS 1966:755 §5.
33. SOU 1973:8, 70.
34. Abrahamsson, *I allmänhetens tjänst*, 188.
35. Prorikon, “Konsumentprogram i radio och teve. Yttrande och förslag avgivna av arbetsgruppen för programpolitiska riktlinjer för konsumentupplysande program i radio och teve,” Sveriges Radio’s Document Archive, CK PS/PRS Handlingar rörande samhällsinformation (henceforth SRDA) F2:1.

36. Erik Pakarinen, “Synpunkter på konsumentupplysning i radio och tv,” 18 May 1971, SRDA F2:1.

37. Elsässer, Att skapa en konsument, 253.

38. Erik Pakarinen, “Utredning om eventuellt betald samhällsinformation i Sveriges Radio,” 1971, SRDA F2:1.

39. Pakarinen, “Utredning om,” 14.

40. Ibid., 13.

41. Rolf Lundgren, “Remissvar den 29/4 1971,” 29 April 1971, SRDA F2:1.

42. Fredrik Norén, ”H-Day 1967.”

43. K-E Lundevarl, ”Instruktion för meddelanden i radio och tv,” 30 September 1970, SRDA F2:1.

44. Per-Martin Hamberg, “Remissvar den 7/5 1971,” 7 May 1971, SRDA F2:1.

45. Peder Alsterlind, ”Principyttrande från TV1 angående utredning om eventuellt betald samhällsinformation i Sveriges Radio,” 3 May 1971, SRDA F2:1.

46. Alsterlind, ”Principyttrande.”

47. Ibid., 3.

48. Galtung and Ruge, ”The Structure of Foreign News.”

49. Nils-Petter Lindskog, “Remissvar från Direktionssekreterare CK,” 19 October 1972, SRDA F2:1.

50. Nils-Olof Franzén, ”Remiss ang. Saminform,” 2 May 1971, SRDA F2:1.

51. Franzén, ”Remiss.”

52. Norén and Stjernholm, Efterkrigstidens samhällskontakter, 20–21.

53. Erik Pakarinen, ”Reviderat PM om särskild samhällsinformation,” 23 September 1971, SRDA F2:1.

54. Furhammar, Med TV i verkligheten.

55. SOU 1969:48, 51–2.

56. See for example Florin, de Klerk and Vonderau, Films that Sell; Mats Björkin, ”Technologies of Organizational Learning,” 304–7.

57. SOU 1969:48, 48.

58. Norén, ”Deliberation,” 157–8.

59. Norén and Stjernholm, Efterkrigstidens samhällskontakter, 9–33.

60. Ekecrantz, ”Om makt och information,” 3–13.

61. Erik Pakarinen, ”Reviderat PM.”

62. Ibid.

63. Ivar Ivre (PUB), ”Synpunkter på särskild samhällsinformation,” 3 January 1972, SRDA F2:1.

64. Arrhenius, ”Preservation and Protest.”

65. Ekecrantz, ”Om makt,” 9.

66. Hyvönen, Snickars, and Vesterlund, ”The Formation of.”

67. Åkerlund, Public Diplomacy, 77–8.

68. Diurlin, ”Att vidmakthålla,” 324–7.

69. Gunnar Hallingberg, ”Information om EEC och U-landsfrågorna i Sveriges Radio,” 6 June 1971, SRDA F2:1.
70. K.G. Svensson, “Remissvar,” 12 August 1971, SRDA F2:1.
71. Norén, “Deliberation,” 154.
72. SOU 1969:48 *Vidgad samhällsinformation*, 43.
73. Bauer, “Information = påverkan.”
74. Larsson, *Upplysning och propaganda*, 77; Maartens, “From Propaganda to ‘Information’: Reforming.”
75. Larsson, *Upplysning och propaganda*, 94–5.
76. Erik Pakarinen, “Opartiskhet och saklighet i särskilda serviceprogram,” 7 February 1972, SRDA F2:1.
77. “TV vägrar visa systemets reklamfilm ‘Spola kröken’,” *Aftonbladet* 16 April 1972.
78. Letter from Rune Hermansson to Sveriges Radio, 19 April 1972, SRDA F2:2.
79. “Systemchefen angriper TV: Ni är för fega!” *Arbetet* 16 April 1972; “Spola kröken’ kontroversiell för radio-TV,” *Svenska Dagbladet* 16 April 1972.
80. Letter from Bengt Bedrup to Otto Nordenskiöld (Head of Sveriges Radio), 21 April 1972, SRDA F2:2.
81. Lakomaa, “Customer of Last,” 479.
82. Korpus, *Reklamiska*, 35–6.
83. SOU 2016:80 *En gränsöverskridande mediepolitik*, 190.

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