IT as a People’s Movement—
People’s Movements and IT

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About Me

• 19 years of Erlang
• Grew up in Athletics
  - (Father was an Olympic coach, among other things)
• 13 years of choir singing
People’s Movements

- A.k.a. Popular Movements or Social Movements
- Initially, people rising against injustice
- Most literature deals with
  - Organized protest groups (e.g. ATTAC)
  - Extensions of the Welfare State (e.g. unions)
- “Non-profit charitable organizations”
  - Ideell förening in Swedish
  - Ideelle Verein in German...

My focus
Trouble with naming

• No direct correspondence in English
• In Britain
  - “Non-profit, unincorporated members’ clubs”?
• In the U.S.
  - “Non-profit, charitable organization” (NCO)
  - 501(c)(7)...
• In Sweden, “förening” implies all the above
• Let’s just call them clubs
Vikings and their clubs

• 90% of the Swedish population belonged to at least one club in the year 2000

• **Sveriges Riksidrottsförbund** has 3 million members in 22,000 clubs (*population: 9 million*)
  - (Ca 600,000 people sing in choirs...)

• **Norges Idrettsforbund** has 2 million members in 12,000 clubs (*population: 5 million*)

• **Danmarks Idræts-Forbund** has 1.6 million members in 10,600 clubs (*population: 5.5 million*)
Why is this important

- Demonstrates the power of non-profit volunteer organizations, since ca 1850
- Swedish Sports clubs receive ca 2.7 BSEK/year
  - Estimated cost, if all “staff” would be paid: 20 BSEK/year (ref: youth recreation leader salary)
  - 5000 salaried employees for 3 million members
  - WC Athletics 1993 alone: 700 MSEK profit
- Benefits to society include health, crime prevention, and culture (hard to quantify)
Troubling Trends

• 7% decline in club involvement in the last decade
• (At least in Athletics:)
  - Increasing interest among kids
  - Decreasing interest/time among adults
• At the same time
  - Increasing child obesity & stress-related disease
  - Increasing alarm about lack of exercise
• Slippery slope of complex society...
How are they run?

- Practically all clubs have a democratic charter (most federations mandate it)
  - No membership restrictions
  - General Assembly elects the Council
  - Rules for transparency (proofing and publishing minutes, etc.)

- 90% of the population gets democratic training in their spare time...
Shift in perspective

- Fewer people show experience from “democratic” work in clubs

- OTOH, young people work differently
  - Fewer meetings
  - More on-line interaction

- Old-style democracy vs Internet age
  - Representative rule vs social web
  - Process vs (rough consensus and results)
OSS-Style Democracy

- Open Source exposes the force of Web-scale mindshare
- "Meritocracy"—you earn the right to influence
  - This is also mostly true in clubs
- No imposed structure, but structure emerges
  - Largely true also for clubs
- Best effort—often excellent
  - Few control structures (not always good)
Clubs and IT

- Sports clubs have a shared web CMS framework
  (Bought from a commercial vendor)
- Clubs and federations often buy bespoke software and services
- Often need to pay for custom adaptions
My own IT & Sports story

- Ran admin for District Championships in 1986
  - SW reused a few times in following years
  - DBASE running from a 720K floppy...
- Many years as speaker, admin, starter, photo finish operator, etc.
- Open Source programmer since, um... 1998
- Tried convincing the Athletics community to embrace Open Source in 2003
CyberAthletics 2003

- Real-time results & stats service for Athletics
- Rather than buy expensive software
  - Mandate that it’s released as Open Source

- WLAN suitable for a stadium
- GPRS/3G an alternative or complement
- Spectator gets the same kind of information as if he/she were at home in front of the TV
- The athlete can go home at night and view the current statistics online
- Lots of possible new features
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“Consortium” members

- Ericsson (& SICS)
  - U. Wiger, J. Armstrong, B. Däcker
- KTH
  - Prof. Björn Pehrson
- Swedish Sports Federation
  - Erik Wiger, Martin Eriksson (PhD)
  - ...
The basic idea

• Maintaining Open Source software is no more expensive than buying bespoke SW
  ...and buying updates in the coming years
• You can pay for development even when the product is free
• The sports clubs have lots of good programmers
  Yours truly, Martin Eriksson, Staffan Strand, and many others
  who would love to combine their passions
Meager success

• Swedish Athletics Federation was out of money
• Didn’t really see the point (then...)
• Now they have started to take interest
  - but the “consortium” was disbanded long ago
  - Open Source idea still not quite “sold”
• Swiss Athletics Federation was more successful
In summary

- Passion-driven organizations are wildly productive (we knew that)
- Traditional club activity is slowly crumbling as people become increasingly busy
  - Given 10x higher cost-point for “conventional” operations, this may be very bad news
- Clubs need to adapt to the Web generation
- Open Source and clubs have much in common
- Lots of fun opportunities