

BY MARJA MAKAROW

Sharing to survive

Some weeks ago I experienced my first 'taxi' ride in a stranger's private car. As I was leaving a restaurant in Geneva, I asked the waiter to call me a cab. When the car arrived, I hesitated because it had no taxi sign. Then I discovered that it was an Uber cab.

Another example of the sharing economy is Airbnb, a hugely popular service through which you can rent someone's home as accommodation. My son who lives in Cambridge, UK, with his family uses Airbnb whenever he visits Helsinki.

But what about immaterial property – what sort of intangible assets are there to be shared? Data, of course. Open data in digital format was born when Tim Berners-Lee, who later invented the World Wide Web, wrote the first web address starting with "http."

Access to public data resources has been on the Finnish governmental agenda for years. In 2014 this saw the launch of a nationwide open data catalogue. So far, data such as maps, corporate tax documents, and weather reports are freely available.

A great example of sharing data with citizens is offered by Helsinki Region Infoshare, or HRI in short, the open data service of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. HRI acts as a clearing house for data produced by cities, municipalities, and various organisations. It receives, quality controls, stores, and provides data through an on-line service to municipal staff, citizens, researchers, and enterprises. You can freely access and use hundreds of data sets such as information on 10,000 social and

health service points, building sites, land reserves, and the population of the metropolitan region.

Open data enhances democracy and citizen participation. In 2013 HRI was awarded the European Prize for Innovation for furthering transparency of public administration and open governance.

Openness is also crucial for science. Access to data enables rapid validation of new research results and their use for the benefit of society. The need for open data access is exemplified by the Zika virus in Latin America. A vaccine is urgently

needed as the virus can cause brain damage in foetuses. To combat the outbreak, the global scientific community committed to sharing their find-

ings as soon as they are quality-assured, before publication in scientific journals. Consequently, a vaccine against the Zika virus is entering clinical trials in record time.

Is sharing a modern invention? Not at all, sharing of information, experience, and feelings has been a key enabler for humankind to prosper. Until some 30,000 years ago, *Homo neanderthaliensis* co-existed with our ancestor *Homo sapiens*, but the Neanderthals subsequently disappeared. Researchers believe that *Homo sapiens* conquered the Neanderthals because of their superior communication skills and ability to share information, anticipation, beliefs, and even gossip. This promoted the formation of larger and stronger communities. Today, through social media, *Homo sapiens* remain reliant on the sharing of information – now across the entire planet. ●

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