

COULD WEB GURUS HOLD THE KEY TO SHIPPING'S FUTURE?



Ulla Tanpaninen of the City of Helsinki's cross-border transport projects.
Photo: ADAM CORBETT

INNOVATIVE FINNISH PROJECT WANTS TO FIND OUT WHAT OUTSIDERS WOULD MAKE OF SHIPPING DATA

Adam Corbett **London**

SHIPPING HAS ONLY TOUCHED the surface of using the increasing amounts of data swirling around the industry, according to one technology enthusiast who wants it to open its doors and allow outside Internet experts access to its information.

Ulla Tanpaninen has had a career in shipping logistics with Finn Lines and Finnish port development and now she is in charge of the City of Helsinki's cross-border transport projects.

She is running a joint government industry maritime cluster project in Finland to get shipping to make better use of its data.

The Merit project has been set up to develop intelligent maritime systems and is set to culminate at Helsinki's annual Slush 2016 conference in November, a gathering aimed at promoting Internet start-ups and intended to encourage innovation in Internet technology.

The idea is that, at Slush 2016, participating companies in Merit — including the likes of Aker Arctic, Wartsila, Eniram, ESL Shipping, Napa and Helsinki Shipyard — will open data to some of the country's best young minds to see what they can make of it in what is termed a "hackathon".

Helsinki would appear to be the right place for the

project because of the strong information technology (IT) cluster that has its roots in technology and communications company Nokia.

Many question if it is realistic to think that shipping — with its reputation of being one of the most closed and conservative of industries — will be prepared to open its doors?

But Tanpaninen thinks there needs to be a change in attitude if shipping does not want to be left behind others industries.

"If you think about it, some of the best apps are developed by outsiders who see better ways of doing things," she said.

Tanpaninen points to Tallinnk Silja's "hack the ship" project last year, where "hackers" were invited to use ship data to create a better experience for customers as a way forward.

In a similar way, Wartsila ran a Marine Mastermind competition to try to develop a "game-changing start-up" in the maritime business.

Tanpaninen believes shipping needs to shift from what she describes as "closed loop" innovation models to "open loop" ones.

"Traditional closed-innovation systems are not capable of competing with new open-innovation ecosystems, where professionals of various disciplines come together to solve problems of one industry," she

said. "Future innovations in [the] maritime industry will be influenced by car manufacturing, air traffic operations and shopping centres to name but a few."

She believes shipping may be lagging behind other industries because much of it takes place at sea and over long-distance voyages — but that it is starting to change with the advent of communications and satellite technology.

Performance monitoring and remote machinery monitoring have shown the way forward in terms of using shipping data. But it is just the tip of the iceberg compared to the applications that have the potential to revolutionise the business.

That could range from improving fleet co-ordination and routing scheduling, right across to more service areas such as broking and agencies.

"Basically, if you look at the ship as a big database, then there is a lot you can do with that," she said.

Other giants of digitalisation and internet consumerism are already moving into shipping to bring fresh ideas and change the nature of the business and she warns that traditionalists will get left behind those with a more open mind.

She notes that Amazon China has now registered itself as an ocean freight-logistics provider.

"In other words, Amazon quietly builds its own shipping company," she said.

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