



## Living On The Edge: The Stewardship

Over the centuries, nation states all over Europe have developed or acquired control of assets of all kinds. Although their nature and function varies, the overarching logic behind their development and acquisition is generally to enable the provision of public services. In recent decades this model has become overstretched: states have found themselves struggling to find the resources to keep those assets manned so that provision of such services could continue, and had to retreat from many non-core services. Consequently, many such assets lie unused; some are beginning to deteriorate. They are extremely varied in nature; many are buildings, gardens, parks. Others are utilities (networks) or even digital assets (data).

In an effort to correct for this situation, some public assets have been turned over to the private sector. This move has had mixed results: while some financial advantages for the states have indeed materialized, at least in the short term, many privatization programmes have suffered from unintended consequences – exhibit A being the creation of a powerful oligarch caste in Russia in a very short time. The general consensus seems to be that it might be interesting to explore new avenues.

*Communities* have been singled out as candidates for taking care of some public assets, in particular those that can be used to provide services to the community itself. In at least one European country, the UK, **community owned/managed assets** have become an important policy issue. For example, plans are emerging that could result in up to 500 public libraries being turned over to local communities, together with seed funding, allowing each local community to find a sustainable operation model for its library or see it die. [Locality](#), alone, has received over 8,500 enquiries from communities that are keen to acquire, develop and/or manage land and buildings over the past 2 years.

The Edgeryders community has accumulated significant experience in this area. Many of us have been experimenting with ways to communally manage diverse assets including: spaces like the unMonastery, digital mesh networks, geographic databases or software projects as public or common goods, oriented towards the community's well being. There is now evidence available to indicate that communities can indeed provide stewardship, re-using assets, exapting them for new uses, and preserving their functionality and beauty over time. However, issues of fairness arise around any reallocation of right-to-access that are not completely solved, and this makes policy making in this area potentially controversial.

We would like to convene a European gathering on the theme of transformational **community stewardship**. We believe the ability to come together to take care of assets in an unstable context is a key skill for surviving and thriving in the future. The gathering is meant as a locus to

exchange information and practical knowledge on how we can put the stock of underutilized public assets to a better use. We are already in deep conversation with many people and groups working on this matter – from key policy advisors in the UK, to cooperative consultancies in Spain, to hackers and squatters in Poland and intentional communities in Ireland and Greece

We think of this gathering as an event of the Living On The Edge series: a four-day conference that gathers about 100-200 people from all over Europe.

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## Discussion in comments and below this header

### Complicated additional bit from Vinay

critical question that comes up in managing assets moving from govt-owned to not is “fair.”

consider open data for Transport for London’s routes / bus locations. Two models of “fair” exist.

1> data is made available under open licenses at no cost, or

2> data is sold to the highest bidder/s and that fee used to offset the cost of running the Tube

1> is “fair” because anybody can download the data for free

-- but in practice, only 60 people will, and they’re a technical elite

-- plus somebody might monetize the hell out of this dataset, at no benefit to the taxpayer

2> is “fair” because all users of the service benefit from lower operating costs

-- but you can’t see the data your government is paying to create

one approach that would fix this interplay is non-commercial licensing: the dataset is free as long as you don’t make any money from what you do with it. but does anybody do that for data?

finally: extend the analogy to physical buildings. What do we see then?

I raise this because there’s real game here - these issues are easy to get to (they occur all over the place) and rhetoric around them is very, very weak in most cases. There’s a market gap!

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