

## Transforming Ownership in Times of Overlapping Crises

University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University

**Thursday, 5 October 2023**  
09:00 – 18:00 CEST

**Friday, 6 October 2023**  
09:30 – 16:30 CEST

**Location:**

Pension Homeland,  
Gebouw 006, Kattenburgerstraat 5,  
1018 JA Amsterdam,  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

[Registration](#)

**Organised by:**

Marija Bartl – University of Amsterdam  
Rutger Claassen – Utrecht University

[Marija Bartl](#) is a professor of Transnational Private Law at the University of Amsterdam. She is currently the Principal Investigator of [N-EXTLAW](#), a project sponsored by the European Research Council (ERC) on the legal design of non-extractive economic practices.

[Rutger Claassen](#) is a professor of Political Philosophy and Economic Ethics at Utrecht University. He is currently the Principal Investigator of [CORPORATOCRACY](#), a project sponsored by the European Research Council (ERC) on the social/political power and responsibilities of business corporations.



## **General Theme: Transforming Ownership in Times of Overlapping Crisis**

Sixty years ago, Garrett Hardin famously argued that the overuse of common resources due to freeriding would lead to a 'tragedy of the commons'. Private property regimes became economists' standard recipe to address these fears. Decades later, we find ourselves faced with the downsides of this approach. There is almost no planetary boundary we are yet to cross while making use of our property rights, all the while failing to secure anything close to a decent standard of living for large swathes of the world's population. In this workshop, we hypothesise that the current malaise of environmental degradation and rampant inequality cannot be overcome merely by ever-tighter state regulation of private property holdings. Rather, there is a further need to *transform ownership structures themselves*. Experiments at the margins of our current economic systems are already moving in this direction. We've chosen to explore the ownership question from three different starting points that are rarely brought together: the transformation of business corporations 'from profit to purpose', with stewardship and non-profit companies as examples; worker ownership and economic democracy; public ownership and other non-standard forms of ownership. By bringing together these usually separate conversations, we hope to better reflect on the transformative possibilities behind the institution of ownership.

### **Panels**

#### **Panel 1: Not-for-Profit Enterprises**

This first panel discusses not-for-profit enterprises as an alternative ownership model to for-profit enterprises with shareholders. It will explore various forms of not-for-profit enterprise, and their potential to put profits in service of a clearly defined purpose. Moreover, it addresses potential challenges faced by the not-for-profit model, like attracting finance. Although the European Commission recognises that limits to profit distributions are important for social enterprises, it is yet to explicitly consider the potential of the not-for-profit model for enterprises. This panel aims to do so from the perspective of practitioners and academics.

#### **Panel 2: Steward-Owned Enterprises**

The second panel will build further on the first one, by exploring a related ownership model that places profits in service of the long-term goals of an enterprise, namely steward ownership. The essence of steward ownership is to separate decision-making power from profit rights, and to put profits in service of purpose. This will eliminate the incentives for profit maximisation, so that the enterprise can focus itself fully on its purpose. Start-up social enterprises increasingly see the potential in this transformative model of ownership. However, there are still open questions around steward ownership. These include how to design steward ownership structures, what space there is for profit extraction, and how to mainstream the model? This panel aims to shed some light on these questions in a discussion with practitioners and academics.



### **Panel 3: Back to public ownership**

The third panel will explore public ownership of land, housing, water and energy. Privatisation of public land drives inequality. At the same time, extractive, profit-driven land-use policies threaten our long-term food supply. Housing is a basic right, but it's commodification results in displacement, higher costs for the poor, gentrification, and homelessness. The privatisation of water has driven up prices, while conflict over water use is a source of major international tension. Energy extraction, ownership and use are the main drivers of climate change. These problems have deep roots in the exclusionary and undemocratic structure of ownership, which incentivises a few to profit from the loss of the many. One solution to these problems is to return back to public ownership over these resources. This panel will explore the opportunities and challenges of public ownership and provide ideas for policymakers.

### **Panel 4: Worker Ownership**

The fourth panel will discuss the potential of promoting worker ownership models in the transformation of firms' organisational and legal structures, as well as the challenges of doing so. It will explore whether there should be a nexus between worker participation and worker ownership, and in what ways transforming the ownership structure in favour of workers plays an essential role in steering firms' activities in a socially desirable direction. We will also scrutinise what legal, economic, and cultural obstacles stand in the way of institutionalising various worker ownership models.

### **Panel 5: Innovative Forms of Ownership**

The fifth panel will explore alternatives to mainstream private ownership on the one hand and public ownership (panel 3) on the other. It will do so by considering innovative forms of ownership in the context of land, housing, water and energy. This panel will consider the range, logic, and feasibility of these more radical innovations in relation to the ownership and governance of these fundamental resources of our life. Practitioners of these innovative forms of ownership will provide us with insights on the opportunities and challenges they pose, complemented by academic insights on these opportunities and challenges, and on how to mainstream them with the help of policy intervention.



### **Panel 6: Worker Participation**

In contrast with panel 4, this panel starts by considering workers within the framework of separation of ownership and control. Given this separation, the final panel will ask whether radical change in the way we currently organise economic activity is (also) possible through increased worker involvement in the governance of firms' assets. Could such progressive reforms materialise without necessarily transforming the ownership structure of firms, be it corporations, partnerships, or sole proprietorships? Moreover, to what extent can increased worker governance and participation as a stand-alone measure induce meaningful change in our socio-economic landscape? The panel will address the potential and challenges of different forms of worker participation in order to provide input for policymakers to support worker participation.

### **Conference Output**

The results will be published in a White Paper that will be offered to the European Commission.

## Programme

Thursday, 5 October 2023

### Day 1

European Time Zone:  
(CEST)

09:00 – 09:15

Welcome Address

**Marija Bartl** (University of Amsterdam)  
**Rutger Claassen** (Utrecht University)

09:15 – 11:00

Panel 1: Not-for-Profit Enterprises

Chair: **Nena van der Horst** (University of Amsterdam)

Speakers:

**Jennifer Hinton** (Lund University)  
**Melanie Rieback** (Radically Open Security)  
**Rasmus Kristian Feldthusen** (Copenhagen University)

11:00 – 11:15

Coffee/Tea Break

11:15 – 13:00

Panel 2: Steward-Owned Enterprises

Chair: **Gijsbert Koren** (We Are Stewards)

Speakers:

**Anne Sanders** (University of Bielefeld)  
**Maike Kauffmann** (Purpose Foundation)  
**Bart van Breukelen** (TBI Holdings BV)

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 – 15:45

Panel 3: Back to Public Ownership

Chair: **Björn Hoops** (University of Groningen,  
University of Turin)

Speakers:

**Daniel Chavez** (Transnational Institute)  
**Ralf Hoffrogge** (Ruhr Universität Bochum)  
**Vedran Horvat** (Institute for Political Ecology)

15:45 – 16:00	Coffee/Tea Break
16:00 – 18:00	<p>Panel 4: Worker Ownership</p> <p>Chair: <b>Jeroen Veldman</b> (Nyenrode Business University)</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <p><b>Iñigo González Ricoy</b> (University of Barcelona)</p> <p><b>Tej Gonza</b> (Institute for Economic Democracy Slovenia)</p> <p><b>Dylan Paauwe</b> (De Vrije Markt)</p> <p><b>Peter Kosin</b> (INEA)</p>



## Friday, 6 October 2023

### Day 2

European Time Zone: (CEST)	
09:30 – 10:00	Welcome & Coffee/Tea
10:00 – 12:00	<p>Panel 5: Innovative Forms of Ownership</p> <p>Chair: <b>Deborah Tappi</b> (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences)</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <p><b>Bertram Lomfeld</b> (Free University of Berlin)</p> <p><b>Sophie Bloemen</b> (Commons Network)</p> <p><b>Jasper Klapwijk</b> (Independent)</p> <p><b>Martin Schuurman</b> (Tonify Exchange)</p>
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch Break
13:00 – 14:30	<p>Panel 6: Worker Participation</p> <p>Chair: <b>Alessandra Arcuri</b> (Erasmus University Rotterdam)</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <p><b>Lisa Herzog</b> (University of Groningen)</p> <p><b>Sara Lafuente Hernández</b> (European Trade Union Institute)</p>
14:30 – 14:45	Coffee/Tea Break



14:45 – 16:00

Roundtable: Transforming Ownership

Participants:

**René Repasi** (Member of European Parliament)

**Gijsbert Koren** (We Are Stewards)

**Björn Hoops** (University of Groningen)

**Jeroen Veldman** (Nyenrode Business University)

**Alessandra Arcuri** (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

**Deborah Tappi** (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences)

16:00 – 16:30

Closing Remarks

