

AI Is Rewriting the Rules. Who Controls the Outcome?

OPEN SOURCE, DPGS & THE FIGHT FOR DIGITAL INDEPENDENCE

LOCATION

FWD50 Virtual

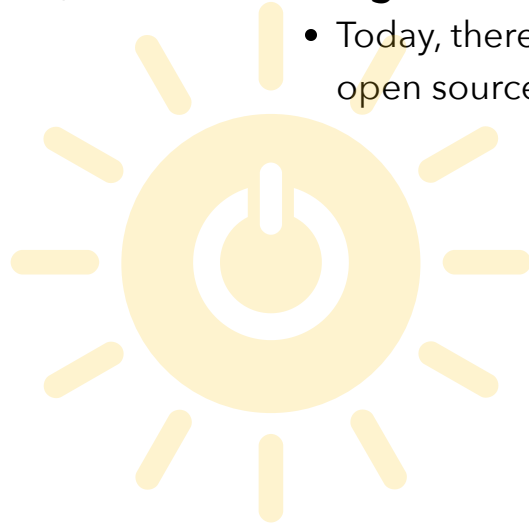
SPEAKERS

Mike Gifford (CivicActions)

Digital Transformation Is Hard

The last 30 years of digital are now legacy

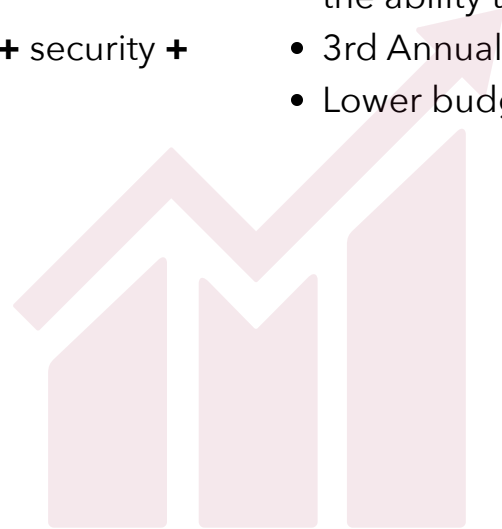
- Proprietary software was important
- It helped organize both people & technology
- Sadly, it became entrenched, restrictive & proprietary
- Open source now **powers most modern software**
- Europe is correctly calling open source **digital infrastructure**
- Today, there are **solid, reliable, secure** open source alternatives



Building the Digital Commons

Rupture is driving people to build strategic autonomy

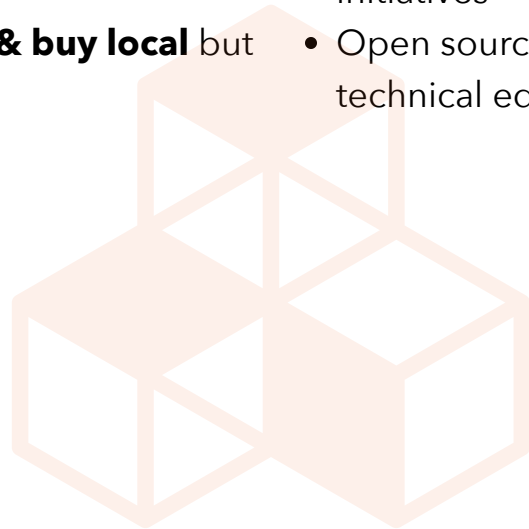
- **Digital Public Goods (DPG)** / Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)
- Tied to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- Open source / standards + security + privacy + documentation
- Digital is driving all governments
- Code is a **national security** matter
- Digital independence is now defined the ability to choose
- 3rd Annual UN Open Source Week
- Lower budgets & **bigger needs**



Proof of Concept: Europe's Shift

Europe is truly leading the way

- **Digital independence** is possible
- **Europe** is quickly proving this
- We can choose to do more than **accommodate & hope**
- Governments can **build & buy local** but contribute globally
- The strongest alternative to America-first is **global collaboration**
- DPGs & DPIs help **focus** global initiatives
- Open source investments become technical equity



Most Governments are Digital Tenants

Why proprietary software has become a sovereignty risk

Performative Sovereignty

- Data residency is **meaningless**
- Corporate pledges are **sales-talk**
- SaaS models have become another form of **vendor lock-in**

The Harsh Reality

- **Dependency:** Limited audit-ability
- **Laws:** Parent company's laws win
- **Framing:** We are Digital Colonies

You must be able to inspect, improve & distribute, to control digital.



AI: The Sovereignty Fork

Two paths for the future of state power

Algorithmic Clientelism

- **Consolidated:** Total control by hegemonies
- **Surrender of Authority:** State dependancy on corporate End-user license agreements
- **Monoculture:** One-size-fits-all values and logic

Participatory Stewardship

- **Distributed:** Governed by community ecosystems
- **Active Authority:** Governments able to co-design, fork, and fix the code they run
- **Diverse:** Models localized to jurisdictions

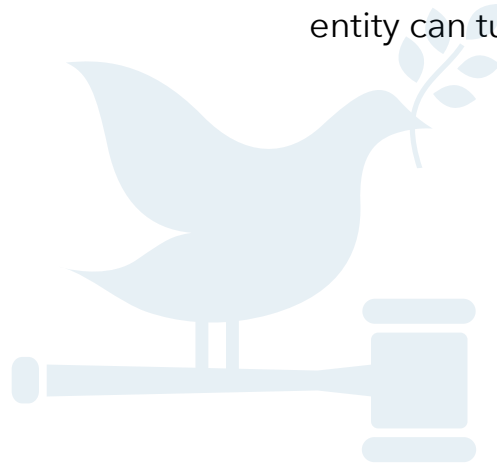


AI investment must shift from replacing human labor to augmenting national autonomy.

The Middle Power Strategy

Participatory Sovereignty Through DPGs

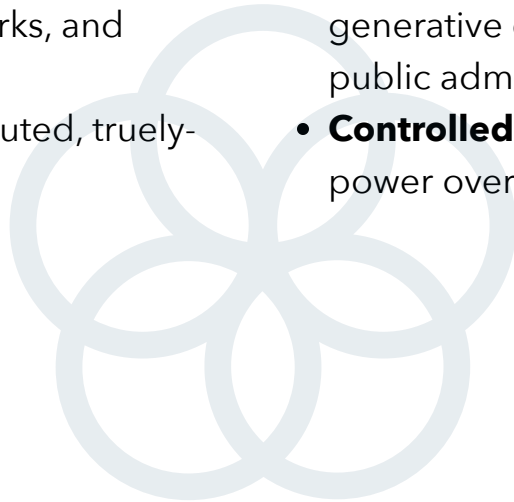
- Independence is already an illusion, but we can have **choice**
- Middle powers gain leverage through **shared code**
- Mature DPGs become **collective insurance**
- **Interoperability:** Building on global, open DPI building blocks
- **GovStack:** Building a roadmap for the future / not passive consumers
- **Independence:** Ensuring no external entity can turn off government services



Sovereign SLMs: "Weights as Law"

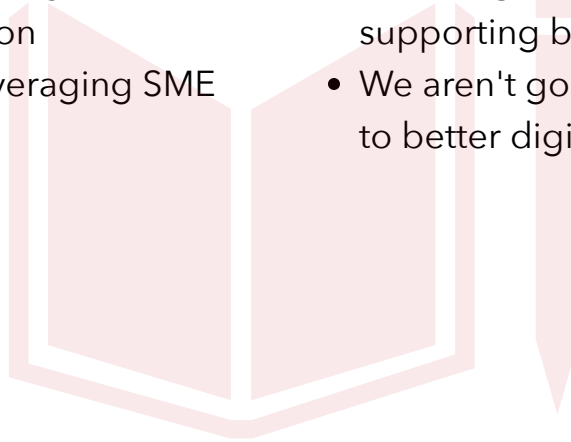
Deploying open government AI safely

- **Local Deployment:** Running models on sovereign, domestic, renewable compute
- **Context-Aware:** Trained strictly on *our* laws, regulatory frameworks, and cultural context
- **Regulated:** Small, distributed, truly-open LLMs
- **Open Weights:** If the weights and training data aren't inspectable, governance is a black box
- **Predictable Outcomes:** Trading generative chaos for deterministic public administration
- **Controlled Costs & Versions:** Keeping power over critical system



Procurement as Industrial Policy

Feeding the Ecosystem, Not the Hegemons

- **Public Money, Public Code:** If we pay for it, it should be public
 - **Modular Contracting:** Breakup with corporate lock-in
 - **Shift Incentives:** Encourage responsible collaboration
 - **Local Ecosystems :** Leveraging SME innovation
 - open source / open standards is now **critical infrastructure**
 - Currently most **governments aren't contributing**
 - **Sovereign Tech Agencies** are supporting better governance
 - We aren't going to **vibe-code** our way to better digital government
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The FWD50 Call to Action

From Tenants to Architects

- **Audit Your Stack:** What can you inspect?
- **Prioritize DPGs:** When buying software or services, investigate if a DPG exists
- **Find the Others:** Are there other agencies with similar needs?
- **Collaborate Globally:** Governments must start to collaborate more

The future will be controlled by those that best steward digital infrastructure.



Questions?

THANKS FOR FOLLOWING ALONG. HERE IS HOW TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING.

WEBSITE

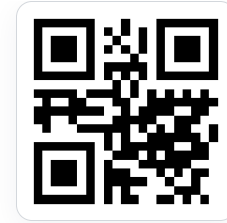
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