

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

Building Common Ground Across Europe

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Hosted by Pascal Smet, Member of the Committee of the Regions of the EU
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VERBATIM

CLTs: A Tried and Tested Model Gaining Ground in Europe

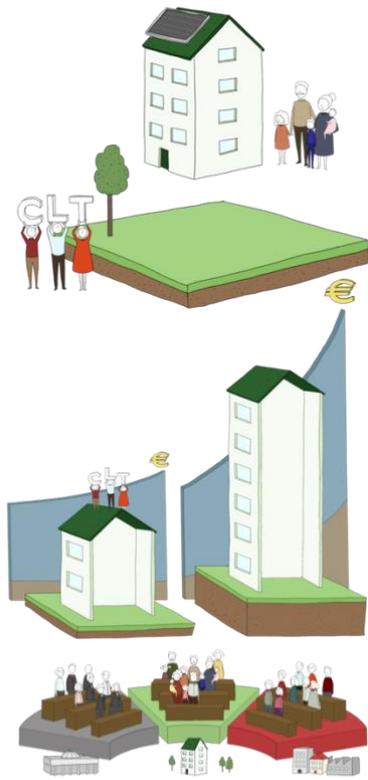
Geert de Pauw, CLT Brussels Coordinator



"Now I finally feel safe. No more fear of being evicted from my home by the landlord, no more fear of having to look for a new apartment again, and find that the rents have raised once again since the last time I looked for a home, and discover that many landlords still do not want to rent to someone with an Arab name or to a family with more than two children".

For Driss, one of the people who was able to move into their new CLT home in the Brussels municipality of Molenbeek earlier this year, moving into a CLT home was nothing less than a relief. But Driss not only received a new home from some charitable organisation. For seven years, he has volunteered as a passionate representative of the residents on the board of CLT Brussels, and he is one of the driving forces behind a monthly flea market organised by the residents of this new project to bring more life into their neighbourhood. The Community Land Trust model not only makes it possible to make affordable housing permanently available to people on low incomes. It also offers these people the opportunity to build wealth as owners of their homes. It offers them a platform to play an active role in building a more equitable city and liveable and cohesive neighbourhoods. One might wonder why it took so long for such a fruitful model to conquer Europe.

Before going in to the development of Community Land Trusts in Europe, for those who never heard about this new model of land tenure, I'd like to explain in a few words what CLTs actually are. We do not have time here to explain in detail how it works, so I'll sum



up the most important elements. Community Land Trusts come in many forms and sizes, but most of them have a number of characteristics in common:

- They take land out of the speculative market in order to manage it in the interests of the community.
- On that land, they develop affordable housing and other assets that the community needs.
- The homes are not only affordable for the first buyers, they stay affordable for generations to come. In order to guarantee this permanent affordability, CLT's often separate ownership of the land from ownership of the building, by means of long-term lease contracts with anti-speculative conditions, which ensure that the buildings may only be sold with limited added value.
- The local community takes a central position in CLT's governance and in the development and management of the buildings.
- CLTs see themselves as the stewards of the land they own, and plan and manage it from a long-term perspective.

Here in Brussels, we first heard about Community Land Trusts a little over ten years ago. At that time, the model was still completely unknown outside the Anglo-Saxon world. Our great examples were the CLTs in American cities. Slowly, the model also began to take root in England and Wales, at that time mainly in rural areas, thanks to the efforts of the CLT Network. Around the same time, community activists in London were running an inspiring campaign to transform part of the Olympic village into a CLT.



In Brussels, around 2008 the housing crisis began to claim more and more victims, and we believed there was an urgent need for new ideas to provide a sustainable response to that crisis. The American and British examples inspired us to start campaigning in Brussels for the creation of a CLT. Dozens of associations and hundreds of families looking for housing joined the initiative. Soon we also received the support of established institutions such as the Housing Fund and financial support of the Brussels-Capital Region. This enabled us to launch the first two pilot projects at the end of 2012.



We soon came into contact with other people with similar ideas, all over Europe. We heard that the City of Lille was looking for a sustainable way to give families with a modest income the chance to become owners of a home in the city centre. We met community workers from Ghent who wanted to start a Community Land Trust. Gradually, also interest from the academic world began

to grow and references to this innovative model began to appear here and there in the footnotes of policy documents. International and European organisations such as FMDV and Housing Europe started pointing out to CLTs as an interesting new instrument for urban housing policy.

From this mix of bottom-up initiatives, governments interested in innovative answers to the housing crisis and committed academics, who all were looking for a new form of tenure and operational models that could respond to today's urban challenges, the SHICC project was born. SHICC stands for Sustainable Housing and Inclusive and Cohesive Communities. Thanks to a



European grant under the Interreg North West Europe program, these partners have been able to work together over the past three years to promote the CLT model in Europe. We had the opportunity to help four pilot projects in Ghent, Lille, London and Brussels take their first steps so that they could set an example for other cities, with the National CLT Network of England and Wales as support organisations. Recently, new partners from Amsterdam, Berlin, Scotland and Ireland came on board. We were able to develop an informal network between all those involved in starting CLT's all over Europe. We offered young initiatives the opportunity to use vouchers to pay experts to resolve legal, organisational and financial issues. We organised peer-to-peer exchanges where more experienced initiatives shared their learnings with people who just started to look into the model. We looked for financial strategies to support the further development of CLTs in Europe. And finally, and this is what today's conference will be mainly about, we studied [how Europe could support this young movement](#) in the development of the model.



The results of the project have exceeded our wildest expectations. In recent years, CLTs in Europe have evolved from a little-known novelty into a formula that is well known within the housing and urban development sector. Many are looking at it with expectation as a model that will be able to tackle land speculation and the financialisation of the housing market, that responds to

concerns about the ecological transition, and that can be at the heart of a circular, local and social economy.

Throughout Europe, the first urban CLT housing projects are emerging, residents and civil society are organising themselves to set up new CLTs, and governments are supporting the development of Community Land Trusts through adapted legislation, subsidies and the provision of land; The number of urban CLTs in North-West Europe has grown from hardly a dozen at the start of the project to almost 200 today.

Organisations involved in the SHICC project are now sitting around the table with major financial institutions to see how they can help us further develop our activities, thus opening exciting perspectives for further [growth of the movement](#).

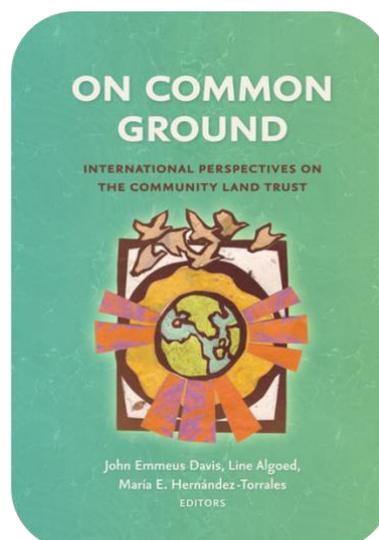
Another important objective of the project was to advocate for a favourable policy environment at a European level. When we started the project, housing was hardly on the EU agenda. The attention for housing issues has increased enormously in recent years. The fact that housing is now high on the European policy agenda is, of course, not the merit of the SHICC project. Unfortunately, it's the result of the ever-increasing housing problems in European cities. However, this new interest is a real opportunity to put the CLT model forward as a valuable tool, complementing more traditional social housing and cooperative models. CLT's can also meet other current EU priorities, such as inclusive urban development, social cohesion and fight against climate change. To do so, we have to continue establishing new partnerships with other players. Now that we have gained sufficient experience and expertise, we can strengthen our cooperation with the wider social, public and cooperative housing sector, enter into fruitful partnerships, learn from them to enable further growth, and perhaps also try to influence the more established housing actors to adopt some of our ideas.

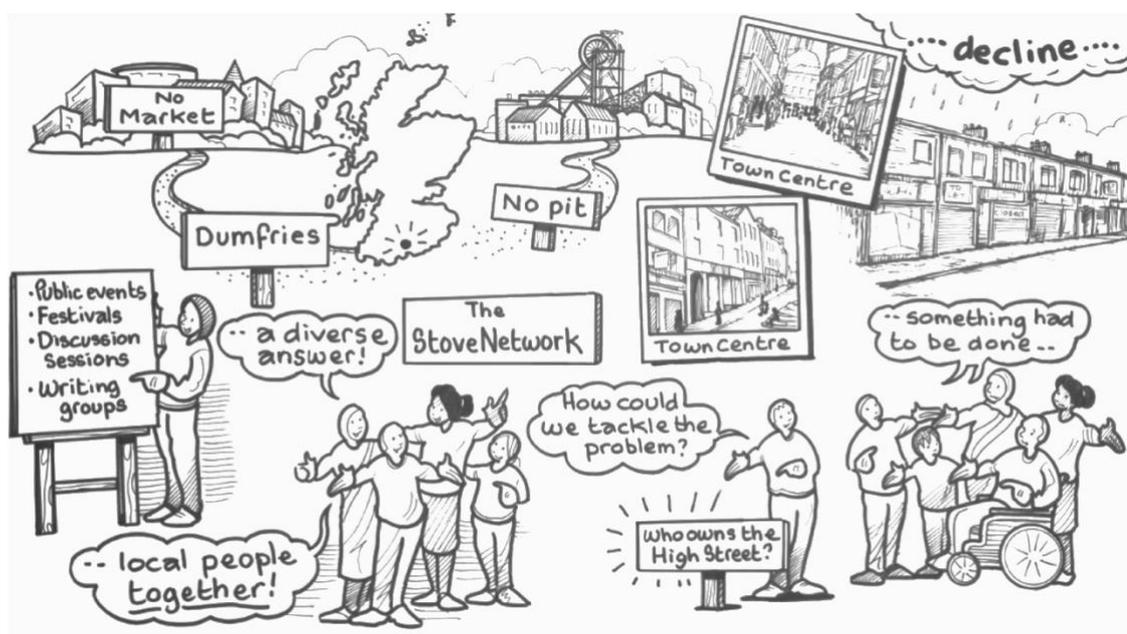


Not only in Europe, recognition for Community Land Trusts is growing. The CLT model is internationally acknowledged as a successful collaborative and anti-speculative model that helps promote cohesive neighbourhoods. It has been recognised as a best practice in the UN's New Urban Agenda, the EU's Urban Agenda, and in the most recent Cities for Adequate Housing Declaration, which Amanda Fléty will come back to later.

Indeed, what is happening in Europe is part of a global movement. Originally, we planned to organise a major international Community Land Trust conference in Brussels, in June this year. At that conference we wanted to launch the book "[On Common Ground](#)", which traces the growth and diversification of the international community land trust movement.

Not only CLT's from all over Europe were invited, we also wanted to bring practitioners from North, Central and South America, Africa and Asia to Brussels for a first truly international CLT conference. Corona put a stop to these plans. Nevertheless, it remains an exciting feeling for us to be part of a growing international movement. A movement which, through very concrete actions that fundamentally improve the daily lives of ordinary people, also denounces major themes, such as the perverse role that real estate speculation plays in the growing inequality in our cities.





We are today at a turning point, where hundreds of CLT projects in Europe have emerged and enabled to prove the case for the model across the continent. While this dynamism has led to significant innovations related to housing affordability, inclusiveness, and social diversity, implementation challenges remain, and certain legal and financial limitations prevent the model from thriving. The number of homes developed to date are a drop in the ocean, compared to the magnitude of the housing problem in many cities and countries. This movement will only be able to have a weighty and lasting impact if it becomes easier to set up CLTs and to develop permanently affordable homes. If every new organization and every new project is a marathon, impeded by countless hurdles, exhaustion will quickly set in.



It therefore is necessary to take a step further to obtain better recognition and political support at the European level in order to scale up the model.

In this context, we invite the European Commission and the European Investment Bank to reinforce their support for the development of CLT as part of a broader rights-based approach to affordable housing and the Cohesion policy.

Further growth not only depends from EU support, it will only be possible if European cooperation is continued and strengthened. Interesting building blocks are being developed in different cities, regions, and countries, which others will be able to use. For example, the success of CLT supporters in France, where the national government was persuaded to enact legislation authorizing *Organismes de Foncier Solidaire*, the French version of a CLT, and to create a new type of long-term ground lease, can inspire CLT activists in other countries.





The fruitful cooperation that has developed in Brussels between a citizens' initiative and the government can serve as another example for citizens and cities that want to launch a CLT. Examples of successful community campaigns to get access to land in the UK can inspire groups on the mainland. Scholarly research, model contracts, and case studies of CLTs that are already in operation can be used to inform and to inspire new CLTs.

It is too soon to say whether this young movement will succeed in playing a substantial role in addressing the housing crisis in European cities. But a foundation has been laid and a significant start has been made. In Europe, the prospects look good for further growth and greater impact by CLTs in the coming years.



What is a CLT?

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are non-profit, democratic, community-led organisations. Their counterpart in France are the Organismes de Foncier Solidaire (OFS). CLT's and OFS develop and manage homes for affordable to low- and medium- income households, as well as other assets contributing to thriving local communities. They act as long-term stewards of these assets, ensuring they remain permanently affordable. This is achieved through mechanisms that ensure that any additional value generated is retained within the CLT.

What is the SHICC project?

The SHICC (Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities) project aims to develop, support and disseminate the CLT and OFS model in Europe. The SHICC programme is structured around three main themes: Firstly, recognition of the legitimacy of the model, the establishment of a financial and legislative environment conducive to the establishment and expansion of CLT/OFS, and capacity building for existing and emerging CLT/OFS. This is a €3.8m European Interreg programme, carried out over a four-year period (2017-2021) by the City of Lille (France); the National CLT Network (UK); the CLT of London, Brussels and Ghent; and the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV, France). Recently new partners joined the project in order to maximise its impacts throughout the final year of implementation: And the People (Netherlands), Self-Organised Architecture (SOA, Ireland), the Institute for Creative Sustainability (id22, Germany) and the, Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust (DGSCHT, UK).

Visit the SHICC Website: [Here](#)

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Organisers: SHICC project partners



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