

Interreg North-West Europe SHICC

European Regional Development Fund

CASE STUDY: SELF ORGANISED ARCHITECTURE (SOA Research CLG)

Self Organised
Architecture



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1 – Introduction & context

Key information:

- Name: SOA Research CLG (Self Organised Architecture)
- Location: Dublin
- Geographic area served: Ireland
- Establishment: 2017, incorporated as a not-for-profit CLG in 2018
- Workforce: 4 voluntary / part-time directors
- Members: 7 members

Description of the housing market in Ireland:

In Ireland, by far the predominant mode of housing tenure is individual home ownership. Renting is generally expensive, insecure and often characterised by poor quality accommodation. The orientation of public policy has in recent years been determined by the parameters of the market and focusses largely on addressing lack of supply and the high cost of development, especially in urban centres. There is an implicit reliance on developer-led approaches to address issues such as supply, reflected in the fact that in 2018, design and spatial standards were adjusted to make large-scale, high-density apartment developments more attractive for investors. On the other hand, there are over 500 Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) that currently develop housing for social rental that might in the near future include affordable housing, regulation allowing. The procurement of social and affordable housing is generally centrally driven and local authorities have limited power to procure housing without approval from government.

The human aspect of the housing market (a real homelessness crisis, for example) is often obscured by a national discourse around ‘delivery’ of units – usually on ‘greenfield’ sites – rather than on quality or how housing can address present and future needs. Although there are signs of change, the result of recent policy in the built environment is a tendency towards lower-quality housing for a relatively limited demographic. Sprawl at the edge of towns is coupled with increasing vacancy and dereliction in urban inner cores, with a corresponding reduction in the quality of public life.

In order to streamline the provision of state and private land for affordable housing, a Land Development Agency (LDA) was created in 2018. The LDA and a number of local authorities have shown interest in supporting CLTs, but generally speaking, there remain many questions as to the role CLTs might play in national policy, exacerbated by a lack of clarity around recognition, legal and technical issues. State aid is another area where clarification or reassurance is required where state land is conveyed to CLTs.

Despite undoubted and increasing official interest, there is to date limited urgency in the traditional main political parties at a government level to explore the potential of community led housing models for supplementing national affordable housing policy.

In the Irish context, private and institutional entities may offer a realistic alternative to the state as possible sources of land for CLTs.

As in other European cities, land and property prices in Dublin and other Irish cities have risen enormously – fuelled, in part, by property speculation and land banking. Conversely, many rural areas are suffering from depopulation. In 2010 the Carnegie Trust, in association with other stakeholders, published the Manifesto for Rural Development proposing the Community Land Trust (CLT) model as a vehicle for sustainable rural regeneration. Inspired by this, the Irish Regenerative Land Trust (iRLT) is currently developing a pilot CLT. Its intention is to focus on food production with housing to be added at a later date as the CLT becomes established. Thus it may be that the CLT has a three-fold application in Ireland: as a rural vehicle for agricultural and ecological regeneration; as a community structure for rural towns and villages; and as a vehicle for urban renewal with perpetually affordable housing and/or social infrastructure in cities.

SOA's Plans

A broad aim of SOA Research CLG (Self Organised Architecture) is to re-orientate the discourse and public mindset towards authentic qualitative, rather than merely quantitative, possibilities and show how these might be achieved, in particular through self-organised and community led development. The SOA goal, which includes working with nascent CLTs such as iRLT, is to promote the possibilities for participatory, non-speculative, affordable and democratic housing creation and to prove that such processes have the potential to foster positive social transformation.

SOA is currently focussed on both assessing the CLT models from various European countries to work in the context of Ireland and increasing the knowledge and acceptance of this model with the general public as well as with policymakers at every level of government. SOA is also exploring the types of financial models for community led housing in general and CLTs in particular within the Irish landscape, where opportunities for ethical banking and other resources to fund such projects are much less developed than elsewhere in Europe.

SOA is currently working on three main projects:

- A year-long, multi-stakeholder project to roadmap a viable community led Housing (CLH) sector in Ireland (from January 2020). SOA Research is coordinating this project in cooperation with CLH groups, policymakers and stakeholders from the area of finance, law and relevant professions to roadmap detailed strategies to enable affordable and inclusive CLH, with an emphasis on cooperative approaches. The aim of the project is to clarify what is possible under current policy and what might need to change in the areas of land, finance and facilitation.
- Co-developing the governance and financial structure for a CLT and community led housing in Limerick City as part of the Living Georgian City Programme. In parallel with emerging private Community Land Trusts, Limerick City is exploring whether the CLT can be a vehicle for, firstly, driving the regeneration of the historic core of the city and in reversing a trend of dereliction and vacancy and, secondly, facilitating community led and

affordable housing. “The Living Georgian City (LGC) Programme is an historic city centre revitalisation process which is being piloted in Limerick’s Georgian Neighbourhood with a view to replication elsewhere ... it is an innovation programme testing out new models of living in Ireland and new ways of engaging with citizens on the design and use of their shared spaces.”¹ SOA Research in collaboration with a firm of UK Consultants is supporting Limerick in the development of governance and financial structures for a potential pilot CLT.

- SOA is also participating as a partner in Interreg North-West Europe’s Sustainable Housing for Inclusive Cohesive Cities (SHICC) project. In order to prove the concept, the principal aim of SOA’s involvement will be to coordinate work with SOA’s other projects to:
 - develop mechanisms for the establishment of Community Land Trusts that are transparent and understood by communities and local/state authorities,
 - cooperate with Local and State Authorities and CLH groups in the establishment of one or more pilot projects and
 - if necessary, prioritise the development of CLTs on private land with private resources.

Additionally, SOA will:

- be a nexus/coordinator for information exchange and expertise between nascent Irish CLTs, Irish stakeholders and their counterparts in the SHICC programme and beyond,
- provide support and information to local CLTs in the identification of needs and co-creation of solutions and
- provide information and expertise to policymakers.

SOA will work with stakeholders to address policy challenges for CLTs in Ireland including:

- Land and Affordability Question
- Recognition
- Proving Demand
- Proving Need and Applicability

There is a broad range of community and voluntary initiatives past and present that are in urban and rural communities, and SOA would like to situate the Community Land Trust model and community led housing within this tradition of community involvement. SOA is also looking forward to working with organisations such as Clann Credo (Community Financing) to broaden its networks and increase the recognition and understanding of Community Land Trusts across Ireland.

¹ <https://www.igs.ie/>

Images from a SOA multi-stakeholder conference.



2 – Assets

As it works mainly in the area of policy development, advocacy and engagement, SOA does not hold specific assets (SOA Research is not a CLT).

3 – Legal & financial framework

SOA Research CLG (Self Organised Architecture) is a company limited by guarantee and is a not-for-profit organisation.

4 – Affordability mechanism

See SOA's Plans, above.

5 – Governance

SOA currently has seven members with four part-time / voluntary directors who draw on community networks for events.