

Urban Maestro

New governance strategies
for Urban Design

Community Land Trust Brussels

providing affordable qualitative
housing (BE)

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INTRODUCTION

A Community Land Trust is an organisation whose mission is to acquire real estate assets and to protect and develop them on behalf of local communities and for the common good. While the majority of CLTs are mostly concerned with the production of affordable housing, productive activities can also be organised as part of CLT projects as a system allowing for the reduction of the costs of said real estate assets.

The Community Land Trust of Brussels was the first to be established in continental Europe. One of its peculiarities, when compared to other forms of CLT worldwide, is the importance of the participatory approach and associated design process that is at the core of the realisation and sustainability of the projects. Such an approach is crucial to the success of the model on numerous levels: from strengthening the sense of community of the involved inhabitants and local organisations, to making them responsible for the proper maintenance of the buildings and their living environment. While homeownership per se increases the chances of emancipation of the concerned individuals and households, the participatory and generative approach that lies at the core of the CLTB's modus operandi enhances the capabilities of the involved inhabitants and communities while fueling inclusive dynamics and social cohesion. As a result, the social justice and overall quality of life of the neighbourhoods and of the cities where the projects are realised are substantially increased.

1. BACKGROUND CONDITIONS

Despite being the region with highest GDP, Brussels¹ is the Belgian region with the highest concentration of poverty with 1/3rd of the population earning less than 60% of the average national salary.² Wealth polarisation is increasing and has been made even more visible by spatial segregation. In a city where renting an apartment means investing 40 to 60 % of one's salary, low income households are almost obliged to move to wherever living and housing costs are lowest, especially in the *croissant pauvre*, an area situated between the canal and the north-north west of the agglomeration and which mostly concerns the municipalities of Molenbeek, Anderlecht and Schaerbeek. Very often this means adapting to a housing supply that is inadequate in numerous respects: houses are often unsafe and very small,

¹ What is known as Brussels is in fact an agglomeration of 19 municipalities forming the Brussels Capital Region. The BCR is surrounded by the Region of Flanders.

² Source: [Risque de pauvreté ou d'exclusion sociale | Statbel \(fgov.be\)](#)

especially for the numerous families that tend to concentrate in these areas. On the other hand, social housing is far from being a solution: only 8% of the housing supply is social housing and 44.000 households are on the waiting list, with half of the population fulfilling the income requirements to have access to social housing. For many households—numerous families, precarious and fragile individuals, immigrants—to buy a house would be cheaper than the overall cost of renting a house throughout their lives. Additionally, becoming homeowners would reduce their precariousness both on a material and a psychological level and would thereby increase the chances of their emancipation, not to mention the social cohesion this would produce in those neighbourhoods where the inhabitants would have the chance to finally settle, thus creating those links and interconnections so crucial for social inclusion.³

The cherry on top is that the administrative borders of the Region of Brussels do not allow this agglomeration to expand: in other words, land in Brussels is extremely scarce and extremely precious. This does not impede the realisation of speculative projects, or the abandonment and neglect of many housing units that remain empty, until the owners are finally forced to sell them in order to avoid further loss of value and the progressive decay of the quality of life of the neighbourhoods where they are situated. Under these conditions, the right to housing stated in the twenty-third article of the Belgian constitution is far from being fulfilled.

In an attempt to provide an answer to the long lasting housing question, throughout the last four decades a number of local and community-based organisations and other actors, beyond merely protest and activist groups, combined their solutions, innovations and expertise, until they finally had the chance to discover the Community Land Trust model, and to learn more directly about it by visiting the CLT of Burlington, Vermont, in the United States. Upon their return in Europe, a platform of local organisations supporting the creation of a CLT in Brussels was established and a feasibility study was financed by the Brussels Region to verify the existence of the conditions required for the sustainability of the model. By the end of 2012, the Community Land Trust of Brussels was created and by 2013, the Region officially recognised the organisation with two prototype projects undergoing realisation.

³ Granovetter, M. (1973). The Strength Of Weak Ties. American Journal of Sociology 78, 1360-80.

2. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE

2.1. Holding land in trust for the common good

The CLTB has a dual juridical structure that is comprised of a non-profit association and a Foundation of Public Utility. Its purpose is to acquire real estate assets and protect them for the common good. The FPU acquires and manages land and buildings, while the association develops them and guides the prospective inhabitants and other users throughout the entire process leading to the realisation of their projects: from the first informative sessions to the support provided to the community projects initiated by the inhabitants. Furthermore, stewardship is a pillar at the core of the CLTB *modus operandi*, as the inheritance of the spirit that compelled the first intentional communities to experiment with alternative ways of managing land and property and communitarian forms of living, during the times of Henry George and Ebenezer Howard.

The CLT model allows the realisation of a large variety of projects, from housing to productive activities, while potentially addressing a diverse public, not necessarily only those with a low income, although originally CLTs were created with the purpose of supporting underprivileged and excluded communities.⁴ In the specific case of the CLTB, the organisation explicitly decided to realise mainly housing projects for low income households, although more recently new collaborations are allowing them to further experiment with the capacities of the model in relation to other activities. Given that the Region mostly funds the organisation and the projects, the choice of dedicating most of the effort to the realisation of affordable housing allows the resources received from the public authority, together with those of donors and other sources, to be given back to the community. To operate for the common good however is not only about such a redistributive mechanism. The peculiar characteristic of CLTs and what allows them to maintain the affordability of their housing units in perpetuity, protecting them from speculation, is the separation of the ownership of the land from the ownership of the housing units or of any other built asset on that land. As such, the Trust is the owner of the land, while the inhabitants and other users are the owners of the built assets. The land cannot be sold, which means the homes will be cheaper because the cost of the land is not included—in fact, households and other owners can only sell the walls of their homes and buildings, so to speak, adjusted only in order to take into account the physiological

⁴ Davis, J.E. ed., 2010, *The Community Land Trust Reader*, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

increase of living costs. More precisely, the resale price (RP) of a new housing unit is defined using the following formula:

$$RP = IC + (Inv-Am) + 25\% PV + FCLTB$$

To the initial cost (IC) paid by a household to buy a housing unit, the net value of investment (as the difference between the initial investment and subsequent amortisation, Inv-Am), 25% of the plus value (as the difference between the market value of the housing unit at the moment of the first purchase and at the moment of the resale, including land cost) and the operating expenses of the CLTB Foundation (calculated as 6% of the PV) have to be added. The operating expenses have to be paid by the household to the FUP. In other words, the first owner gains around the 25% of the plus value, while for the new household the price will be around the initial cost of the housing unit increased by 31% of the PV (25% +6%). The remaining 69% is retained by the FUP being related to the increase of land value, as the cost of land being excluded from the sale and resale acts. On the other hand, inhabitants acquire a 50 years of surface rights (droit de superficie) by paying 10 Euros per month to the FUP, which is the owner of the land, given that it holds the land in trust, on behalf on the community.

By excluding the cost of land from any transactions, (a) speculative dynamics are thus avoided, (b) homes are cheaper than on the private market, and (c) their affordability can be preserved in perpetuity. For each CLTB project, the land is held in trust by the FUP, with the common areas and infrastructure (such as stairs, corridors, meeting rooms, gardens, etc.) co-owned by the households while the housing units are privately owned. As such this is clearly a quite mixed ownership condition, compared for example to cooperatives, where in general the households and individuals involved are shareholders of a collectively owned, all-inclusive property.

2.2. Governance of the CLTB

The non-profit association “Community Land Trust – Brussels” is in charge of the daily management of the real estate assets owned by the Foundation. It also hires staff responsible for the installation and follow-up of the housing projects as well as for supporting the household buyers and the movement’s activities.

The General Assembly takes the most important decisions and elects the non-profit association’s directors. It has a tripartite structure that assures an equal distribution

of decision-making power. For example, the one-third of “Residents” is elected by the occupants of an accommodation or premises on a CLTB plot of land, with each category having a seat dedicated to the candidates awaiting housing, which is appointed by them. The “Civil Society” third is elected by the active members who do not benefit from CLTB housing or premises. Lastly, the government of the Brussels-Capital Region designates the remaining one third of “Public Authorities”. The CLTB is committed to ensuring that the interests of all of its development actors are represented within its Board of Directors as well—therefore, the board is also comprised of residents, locals and members of civil society alongside the representatives of public authorities. Furthermore, it is one of the General Assembly’s tasks to suggest those candidates that will represent the community in the future, alongside existing inhabitants and the civil society, in the board of the Foundation of Public Utility, while the Region elects its own representatives to the board.

2.3. Funding and allied financial mechanisms

The Region mostly funds the Community Land Trust of Brussels, but additional funding is collected every year thanks to donations and partnerships built into the framework of larger projects and collaborations at the national, European and international levels. In addition, for every project, initiative, or community project initiated by the inhabitants, and for any specific task set out to be accomplished by the organisation, the CLTB seeks out the appropriate calls and available opportunities from the range of regional initiatives and policy frameworks. Amongst others, *Contrats de Quartier*⁵ (Neighbourhood contracts), for example, often foster the ideal conditions to acquire land at a low cost or to realise facilities, such a community garden or a kindergarten. Established in 1993, *Contrats de Quartier* are urban renewal and regeneration interventions that address the issues of specific areas of the city. Defined as agreements amongst the Region, the municipality and the local community, they are realised within a limited amount of time and a given budget. Among the priorities, these actions aim at increasing the social cohesion and improving the quality of life of a neighbourhood by making possible the realisation of new social housing, renovations and the creation of local facilities. Given that they typically concern the oldest areas of the city where the urban fabric tends to be crowded and housing conditions are often unhealthy, *Contrats de Quartier* are also meant to attract developers and further investment into these areas. For this reason, land and buildings can be acquired at a very low cost or through

⁵ [Contrats de quartiers durables](#)

emphyteutic leases⁶ and the housing units thus realised will have to address mostly low-income households.

Finally yet importantly, the inhabitants contribute to the realisation of these projects by purchasing their housing units. In most cases, a loan is necessary in order to provide the required amount of money. While households are free to choose any credit or financing institution, low-cost loans are made available by the *Fonds du Logement*,⁷ a public utility cooperative operating in the framework of the Regional policies and with the support of the Region in order to support the housing related expenses of low and middle-income households. With an interest rate of around 3%, the FdL⁸ is an invaluable partner in the realisation of CLTB projects by making loans accessible to low income households, which would otherwise be mostly impossible with other credit institutions or banks.

2.4. Building homes, building communities: the role of the design process

The households that are interested in becoming owners of their homes through a CLT project are asked to become members of the CLTB. Defined in the Code du Logement as an actor at present, the CLTB prioritizes low-income households; however, this does not impede any other individual from becoming a member of the CLTB and of its large community. The threshold for having access to homeownership is the same established by the Region for having access to social housing, which means that potentially half of the population of the Brussels Capital Region could have access to CLTB's housing units. Within that threshold, four different categories of income have been defined by the CLTB and approved by the Region, as the prices of the housing units will reflect the diversity of incomes of the households—the lower the income, the lower the price. Each project is in fact a unique combination in terms of household compositions and income groups, with as much equally distributed as possible among the four aforementioned categories. While it is not possible to provide the details of the calculation in this paper, it could be said that for each project, the CLTB establishes a programme that determines the revenue category for each apartment. The sum of the prices of all housing units should make the project financially viable, by matching the capacity of inhabitants to pay the cost of their housing units and the hypothetical conditions defined by the Fonds du Logement.

⁶ Generally speaking, in an emphyteutic lease, the owner leases land or property to the lessee for a period of up to 99 years. Unlike a conventional lease, the lessee agrees, over the period of the lease, to add construction or improvements to the property so as to increase the value at the end of the lease *

period. The lessee often benefits from such an arrangement by getting a reduced rent — the big drawback, however, is the property and all of its improvements revert to the lessor at the end of the emphyteutic lease period.

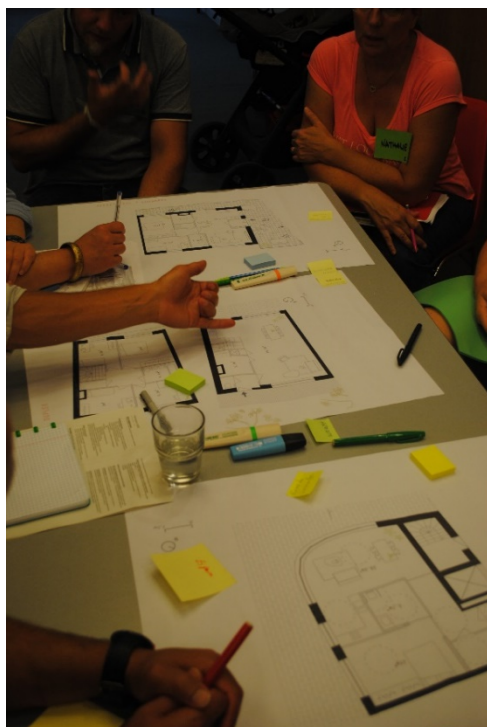
⁷ [Fonds du Logement | Prêt hypothécaire bruxelles](#)

⁸ [Fonds du Logement | Prêt hypothécaire bruxelles](#)

Number of bedrooms	Household categories			
	A	B	C	D
Studio	133.342 €	115.836 €	98.329 €	80.823 €
1	150.346 €	132.124 €	113.901 €	95.679 €
2	193.207 €	169.865 €	146.522 €	123.180 €
3	238.426 €	210.322 €	182.217 €	154.113 €
4	270.519 €	239.240 €	207.960 €	176.681€
5	334.704 €	297.075 €	259.447 €	221-818 €

A table with the maximum prices of housing units per category (data 2020).

By becoming members of the CLTB, the future households are enrolled in a waiting list. As soon as the availability of some land or of an empty building allows to realize a new project, a participatory design process starts, with the purpose of defining the architectural programme of the building. For the interested inhabitants, a series of meetings and *ateliers* or Archi Labs are dedicated to defining the architectural programme of the project while introducing topics such as the energetic sustainability of the housing units and the proper maintenance of the living environment. Guided by the CLTB's architects, the inhabitants learn how to read an architectural plan and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of exemplary projects, in terms of spatial organisation, architectural and technical solutions, while preparing to design their future homes and to identify the spatial requirements of both their apartments and the common spaces. By learning about the spatial qualities of the building that will be renovated or of the site where a new building will be realized, they come to terms with concrete aspects such as the number of squares meters actually available, special adaptation for disabled individuals, the accessibility of an interior courtyard, the dimensions of corridors or the presence of shared terraces. Additionally, given the importance the relationship with the neighbourhood has for the success of the model, the inhabitants are also guided to discover their future neighbourhood and to imagine how the project could contribute to its liveliness. All these elements are jointly discussed and negotiated, in order to fulfill everybody's needs and rights. In this way, individual projects and expectations are redefined within a larger collective endeavor. If community land trust projects are bundles of rights by definition –given their tripartite governance structure- they are also bundles of uses. Or, in other words, the bundle of rights implied in the governance of the CLT can only be fulfilled by a well-balanced bundle of uses. This requires proper spatial choices, in terms of squares meters, but also the morphology of apartments and of the common spaces.



The outcome of such an orchestration of needs and spatial possibilities is a *Cahier des charges*, a booklet describing the architectural programme and the needs expressed by the potential future inhabitants and neighbours. Because the projects are publicly funded, a public call for projects has to be launched. The proposals have to take into account the recommendations of the *cahie des charges* and need to be revised and evaluated by a special committee, including candidate owners, residents of other CLTB's projects, neighbours, and local community-based organisations. Criteria and tools of evaluation are each time validated by the committee. The selected project must fulfill the budget requirements and the architectural specifications of the *cahier des charges*.

As soon as the project and architectural studio are identified, the *Comité d'Attribution* selects the households that will inhabit the project, by matching their position in the waiting list and their needs –for example in terms of the number of bedrooms- with the architectural programme and the income diversity characterising each project. Each household is free to accept or refuse the housing unit proposed by the *Comité d'Attribution*, without losing its priority on the waiting list. Subsequently, a dedicated workshop allows the selected inhabitants to directly interact with the architects in order to further adjust the project to their needs. Sitting around a colourful table, while drinking coffee, inhabitants share their specific dreams and expectations about their future homes and about the spaces of their cohabitation. The community of inhabitants and users of every single project literally starts to take shape during those meetings.



The inhabitants and a CLTB's architect during an Archi Lab meeting. Ph: CLTB

It is only at the end of these iterations that the project can be officially submitted to obtain the building permits. In parallel with the unfolding of the construction works, households are asked to participate in other project-specific meetings, dedicated to envisioning, organizing, and structuring their common life project and the proper maintenance of their apartments and living environment.

2.5. Responsibilisation

The participatory process of design allows not only to realise everybody's desires but also to become aware of and share responsibilities so that the apartments and common and semi-public spaces could be properly maintained. For many inhabitants, their CLTB home is the first they own after having moved many times, searching for more healthy and adequate housing conditions. To become homeowners is the occasion to settle, to live in the same house and in the same neighbourhood probably for a long time, fueling the sense of belonging of concerned

individuals and families no less than the social cohesion of an entire city. Therefore, for many, this will also be the occasion to learn about the proper use and maintenance of the heating system in a passive energy building or, for example, to organise for better managing the garbage. The participatory process organised during the construction works and dedicated to the selected group of inhabitants allows them to agree on the use of common spaces, their accessibility, and mode of maintenance. For that purpose households are suggested to create a common pot that will allow paying for the maintenance costs of the common spaces and infrastructures.



The courtyard of Le Nid project. Rendering: LOW A

In the perspective of organising the cohabitation and distributing responsibilities, space matters. In addition to common infrastructures, CLTB projects are usually characterised by the presence of shared, semi-public spaces, such as interior courtyards and multifunctional spaces, conceived for the inhabitants but also the neighbourhoods and the local organisations. These polyvalent spaces are key for the liveliness of the projects, for giving the possibility to the newcomers to meet their neighbours and create new relationships, thus fueling a sense of community and the emergence of spontaneous forms of collaboration and reciprocities. This reinforces the community and improves the urban commonwealth that require clear agreements and appropriate spatial conditions. Amongst others, the design and the morphological choices concerning the built structures, the open spaces and the surrounding neighbourhood are crucial for the distribution of tasks and the orchestrations of all different activities in different moments of the day and the week.

It is, in fact, during the Archi Lab meetings that the inhabitants discuss the accessibility to their courtyard and its management. To establish a community garden means to allow neighbours to access it at different occasions and timing. Similarly, a co-working space would result in an interweaving of semi-private and public dimension. This programme should match safety requirements and the actual capacities and willingness of inhabitants to assume the tasks required for maintaining the good quality of their living environments. A successful project is not only a project that fulfills the desires and needs of its occupants but is also a project that contributes to the good life of its neighbourhood. This is only possible and sustainable in the long term when its inhabitants and users are capable of taking care of it under the appropriate spatial conditions.

3. KEY INNOVATIONS

In the landscape of European policy and practices regarding the creation of affordable and social housing, the CLT model, and in particular the Belgian variation in Brussels, is innovative on numerous levels as explained in the following paragraphs.

Affordability in perpetuity. The land tenure system implemented by the model allows the affordability of the built assets to be maintained in the end. As explained in paragraph 2, this is due to the combination of two elements: the separation of the ownership of land from the ownership of the built assets and the tripartite form of governance that impedes any exclusive decision concerning the real estate assets and the functioning of the CLT.

Home ownership for low-income households. The idea is that this may contribute to at least a reduction of the precarity that stems from the inaccessibility and scarcity of the housing offers, which forces households to move very often or to adapt to unhealthy and inadequate housing conditions. By becoming homeowners, low-income households have the chance to increase their stability and to save their money by investing it in the purchase of their homes. In addition, this limited capital can be inherited by their children, thus also increasing their chances of emancipation. As the economist Thomas Piketty once observed,⁹ in times of scarce

⁹ Piketty, T. (2013), *Le Capital au XXI^e siècle*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris

or absent economic growth, the possibility of relying on limited capital can truly make the difference in terms of social mobility.

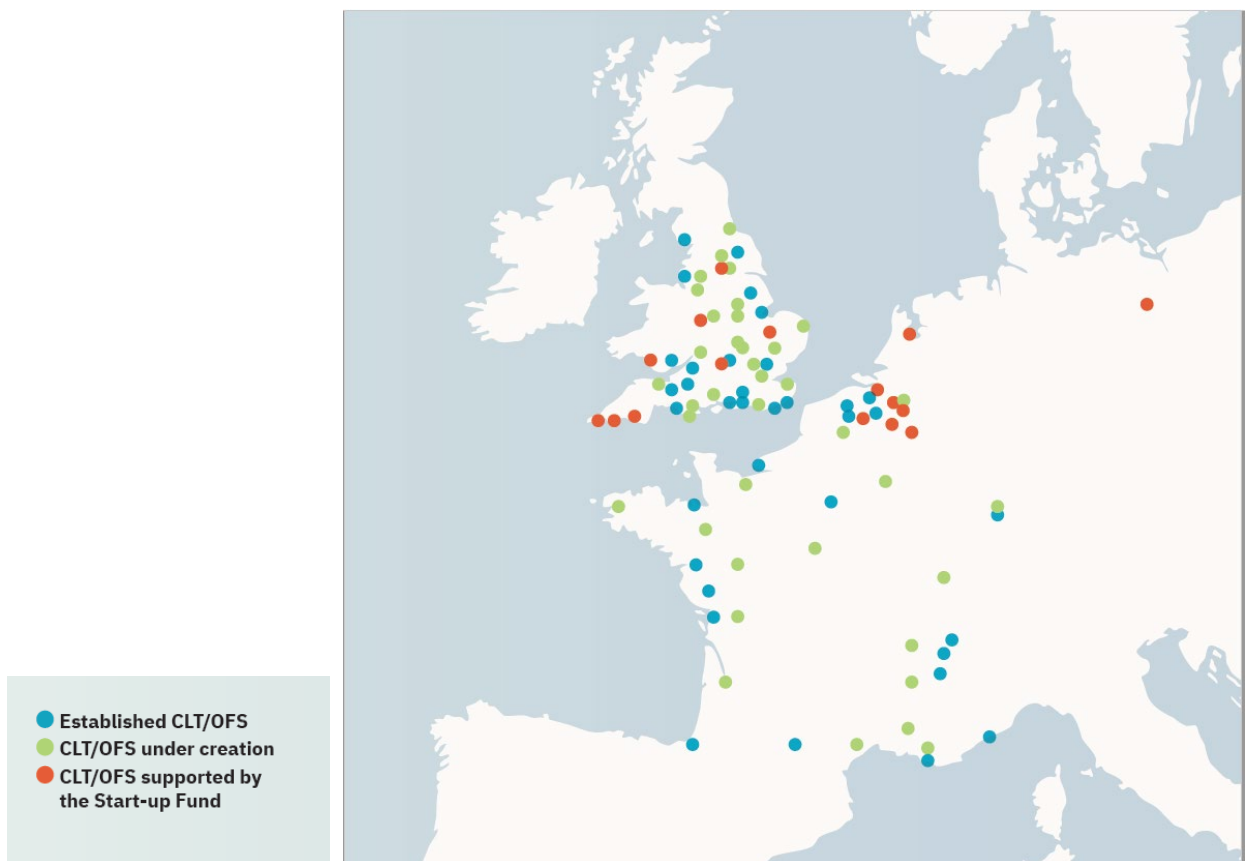
A participatory design process for the realisation of affordable housing. The participatory approach to the realisation of affordable housing is innovative by definition. Traditionally, the vast majority of affordable and social housing was in fact realised according to a principle of standardisation that was intended to provide an answer to the housing question and provide homes to the greatest number possible. Despite the emancipatory intention, such an approach proved in fact to be a failure for a number of reasons. Amongst others, the incapacity of the public authority to properly maintain the buildings and, related to that, the de-responsibilisation of the inhabitants.

Quality of the living environment and value preservation. The overall quality of life and of the living environment of CLTB projects are the result of two factors. The first is the capacity of each project to actively engage in the life of the neighbourhood where they are realised, for example by organising activities that may involve local associations and inhabitants, such as a community garden; or by providing spaces specifically conceived to host the activities of a given local association. In many cases, the relationship with the local community starts being established even before the realisation of a given project, during the temporary occupation phase which may precede the beginning of the construction and/or renovation works. The second factor is the capacity of the inhabitants to properly maintain and take care of their living environments. For this reason, the participatory process of design characterising the CLTB's *modus operandi* is crucial; among other purposes, it aims at increasing the responsabilisation of the inhabitants by making them more aware and by informing about the proper way of maintaining their homes and the living environment. In this way, the value of the built assets is maintained and the investments of everyone involved—the inhabitants, the CLT as the developer of the projects and the public administration—are protected.

A reinterpretation of the redistributive role of the public. By being embedded in the tripartite governance model of the CLT, a public authority has the chance to re-define and experiment with their role. Its traditional distributive capacity and role are in particular redefined in the direction of a safer and more just scheme—*safer* because the value of the financial and real estate assets devoted to the realisation of the CLT's projects are protected from neglect and abandonment given the engagement of the inhabitants who are responsible for taking care of their homes. What are being distributed are not only financial resources but also responsibilities, which is seemingly more just because within the Trust the public is only one of the three parties involved in the decision-making processes. Amongst others, this avoids any unmotivated disposal of real estate assets, eventually for the benefit of all

concerned communities. The sale of public property, far from fulfilling the general interest, over the years has only diminished the economic capacities of States and public administrations.

Application in other countries. Although based on the past theories underpinning the “Garden City” movement, the Community Land Trust model was implemented in the US and it is there that the first projects were realised. The first Community Land Trust, *New Communities*, was established in 1969. Decade after decade, the model has been gradually improved, although every single project represents a quite unique assemblage of actors, forms of funding, urban conditions and architectural solutions. Today, there are 277 CLTs in the US and 255 in the UK, while in Europe the Community Land Trust of Brussels was the first to be implemented. However, from the beginning part of the energies of the team have been also dedicated to the cultivation of new partnerships at the local as well as European levels. The direct and indirect campaigns, the numerous awards and recognitions, but most importantly the efficacy of the model in addressing the housing question with a holistic and traversal approach have abundantly helped to heighten its adoption and as such many CLTs are currently being established across Europe.



CLTs across European countries and United Kingdom. Map: SHICC Interreg project

A generative approach to social cohesion. Stewardship and the common good lie at the core of the CLTB's modus operandi and can be found expressed in any of the organisation's undertakings: from the general assemblies to the intensive participatory design processes projects; from the informative sessions to the support and guidance provided to the inhabitants, even after their projects have been realised. Through a very diverse range of activities, the CLTB provides endless opportunities for encounters and cross-fertilisation, for inhabitants and for community-based organisations. As a result, numerous community projects have been created, initiated by the very inhabitants and developed with the help of the CLTB and of other local organisations. Independently from their specific content, these projects are highly emancipatory, giving the possibility to those involved to prove and further develop their entrepreneurial capacities. While fulfilling the relevant needs of the communities they address, these projects increase the chances of recognition and emancipation of the participants. The consequence of such a generative capacity of the CLTB and of each single CLTB project is an overall increase of inclusive dynamics and social cohesion: not only in the neighbourhoods where the projects have been realised, but more pervasively, as a result of a growing number of individuals and communities whose capabilities are enhanced.

4. EXAMPLES OF IMPLEMENTATION

At present, the CLTB is completing several projects in the Brussels Region¹⁰, which differ significantly in terms of their number of households and involved actors. Three projects are already inhabited, representing a total of 48 housing units, inhabited by a highly diverse range of households in terms of both income and composition: from large families to single mothers, and from disabled individuals to pensioners. For many of them, becoming homeowners represents a point of arrival following a long quest that has been aimed at finding some semblance of stability alongside healthy and just living conditions.

The first CLTB project to be inhabited was l'Ecluse, which was inaugurated in 2013. In this case, the CLTB simply became the new owner of the building while the housing units had been ready to be inhabited since the beginning. For this reason, the move-in of the inhabitants went quite smoothly. Nevertheless, the CLTB took care of supporting them in the process of learning about the co-ownership model,

¹⁰ A constantly updated map of the projects can be found here
Housing.projects-cltb.be

about living together and the proper maintenance of their housing units and common spaces.

In September 2020, two prototype projects have been inaugurated: Le Nid, a renovation project for seven households in Anderlecht and Arc-en-Ciel, a newly realised project in Molenbeek for 32 households. Both cases allowed for experimenting quite intensively with two variations of the participatory approach and design process of the CLTB. While in both cases, the inhabitants were involved in several workshops and meetings as part of the design process, with these two projects experimenting with two different formulas in terms of contracting authority (*maitrise d'ouvrage*). In the case of Le Nid, this consisted of establishing a civil society entity, with the inhabitants ultimately being responsible for carrying out the real estate project until the end of the renovation works and the creation of the co-ownership. The inhabitants and the CLTB were thus jointly clients and owners and they shared the responsibility of supervising the construction works. While this implied certain heavy responsibilities, through such a process the inhabitants ultimately had the chance to learn and become aware of the complexities, both material and procedural, hiding behind the realisation of new housing units in the BCR. The CLTB team, however, realised that a similar approach is too demanding and not very sustainable for numerous households that do not have the possibility to engage so intensively. The case of Arc-en-Ciel, is therefore much softer and more approachable for many households, given that the role of the client was attributed to the Fonds du Logement that took care of developing the project, while the inhabitants were simply regularly informed about the progression of the works. As soon as they were ready, the Fonds du Logement sold the turnkey apartments to the households. Arc-en-Ciel in fact provided the blueprint for the current procedure.

Both cases proved the relevance of the spatial choices, and the pre-existing morphological conditions in the case of Le Nid, to be quite effective in predisposing a rich interweaving of users and communities, thus serving the needs of both the inhabitants and the neighbours and contributing to the overall quality of life for the common good. Following the specific indications of the cahiers de recommandations, in both projects the interior courtyards, the community gardens, and the community's multifunctional spaces have been designed and planned for a regulated accessibility, thus allowing them to host a variety of activities, while respecting the actual capacities of the inhabitants to take care of them and their need for safety. The apartments have been designed to respond to the specific needs of households and the presence of physically impaired people among them substantially contributed to the design of adapted housing units. The variety of spaces allowing casual and daily interactions between the inhabitants is intended to provide the conditions required for living together, while fuelling daily reciprocities and exchanges.



Rendering of the project CALICO, proposed by Bruxelles Logement.

In terms of concept, partnership, funding mechanisms and approach to social cohesion matters, the CALICO project, which will be completed by September 2021, can be considered another prototype. Centred on the concept of care, this project aims at realising a supportive living environment and at promoting well-being and care as attributes of the daily living. Partially funded by European funds, in the framework of the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) programme, this project addresses the housing needs of fragile and fragile individuals, dealing with ageing related issues or special moments in their lives, such as the moment of giving birth or the moment of death, or of gender and migration issues. Therefore, the building realises the architectural programmes of three different partners: Pass-ages, Angela D and the CLTB, each of them managing a specific part of the building. This project will provide 34 housing units, a semi-public garden and collective spaces for the inhabitants and the neighbourhoods, a birthing centre, and a retirement home.

5. CHALLENGES, BARRIERS, AND MAIN ISSUES

Land scarcity. If land is a scarce resource, in the BCR it is even scarcer due to the administrative limitations, which impede any further expansion of the Brussels' agglomeration. Additionally, in most of the cases, the available plots within the Region are not very large, not to mention that land tends to be highly expensive, especially in some part of the Region. Therefore, the realisation of new projects is challenging, in particular as far as large-scale projects are concerned. While the acquisition of new land at the borders of the Region could perhaps increase the manoeuvring space for many actors, programmes and planning needs,¹¹ the CLTB could in fact provide an ideal land tenure model allowing the prevention of speculation and the realisation of ecologically sustainable scenarios.

Intensity of the participatory process. Engaging the prospective inhabitants in the intensive participatory process required for the realisation of every project can be challenging. The appropriate timing and duration of this phase is crucial and needs to be accurately established in relation to the unfolding of other tasks and phases, so that downtime and the related loss of enthusiasm could be substantially reduced. In addition, the organisation and intensity of the design process should take into account the actual availability of the inhabitants, given that the CLTB team is

¹¹ <https://www.lecho.be/economie-politique/belgique/bruxelles/bruxelles-veut-acheter-des-terres-agricoles-pour-nourrir-sa-population/10267051.html>

constantly evaluating and adapting the timing and procedures of the design process to the specific conditions of each single project and their inhabitants, although unexpected events and blockages may arise at any time. As a result of this constant monitoring process, in comparison to the first pilot projects, the length of the participatory process has been considerably reduced. Additionally, a group of members and prospective inhabitants are trained on basic architectural and technical aspects in order to proactively support the team during the early phases of the design process by collaborating on the learning activities. Furthermore, in order to preserve the participatory approach while taking into account the actual availability of the households, the participatory process has been divided into two different moments. A first phase aims at dealing with the architectural choices and precedes the call for projects; a second phase is devoted to better understanding technological issues related to the maintenance of the apartments and other cohabitation-related matters, and will unfold during the realisation of the construction or renovation works. In this way, the completion of the project and the activities preparing the inhabitants to their cohabitation should end approximately at the same time, thus avoiding the decline of enthusiasm and any increasing downtime.

Upscaling while maintaining an effective participatory approach. The participatory approach of the CLTB involves the inhabitants, local organisations and the dedicated CLTB team in a quite intensive process. While being crucial to the responsabilisation of the inhabitants and for creating a greater sense of community as explained in the previous paragraphs, it could prove challenging to maintain the same quality and intensity in the case of large scale projects. At the very least, this would imply the involvement of additional team members in order for the workshops and support activities to be properly and effectively organised. While at present this does not seem to be an urgent concern, given the aforementioned limitations concerning a physical upscaling of the projects, the consolidation and training of a dedicated group of inhabitants and members may provide a valuable support, while contributing to the empowerment and feeling of recognition of those involved.



The courtyard of the project Arc-en-Ciel. Ph: Tim Van de Velde

6. IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

To conclude, there are a few considerations of the impact of these projects, given that only a few CLTB projects have recently been completed. Therefore, at this time, it is only possible to suggest at which levels it would be interesting and relevant to evaluate their impact and effectiveness.

The first is the empowerment of the individuals and communities involved in the realisation of these projects. Their stability, sense of security, and sense of belonging gained from finally having the opportunity have their own homes is presumably something that can be measured in terms of well-being and capabilities concerning not only the parents, but also their children. More specifically related to the participatory design process that characterises the CLTB, the second would concern the capacity of the inhabitants to properly manage their living environments in the medium-to-long term, thus maintaining the quality of their living environments and preserving their value, for the benefit of all involved parties, also in relation to their responsabilisation, and their autonomy, specifically in terms of assistance provided by the CLTB team once the project has been completed.

The third, strictly related to the second as has previously been explained, is the capacity of these projects to imbue effectively a new life into the neighbourhoods where they have been realised. Given the densely interwoven fabric of relationships each project should be able to establish with a neighbourhood and its inhabitants and with local community-based associations, in the future it would be helpful to develop certain appropriate indicators allowing to grasp the actual impact of the CLTB's projects, in terms of their quality of life, social cohesion and environmental awareness.

Given the holistic approach of CLTs and the CLTB in particular, it will also be interesting to evaluate the impact of these projects regarding their capacity to implement and contribute to the development of economic and ecologic models focusing on circularity and a human-centred approach to development, such as the Donut economy, Community Wealth Building and other forms of New Municipalism, which are currently being experimented with in a growing number of cities.

Finally, a relevant level of impact of the CLTB and CLT projects is that of the transformative movement they fuel, influencing policies, land tenure systems and design approaches. The scale of the projects at present is still small and the number of housing units provided by the CLTs is still very limited: a drop in the ocean, as many pointed out. However, on the other hand, the growing number of CLTs and other similar land tenure models, of studies and initiatives focusing on the dissemination of the model and its variations, seem to suggest that interest in the model is growing exponentially. This is a movement able to have an impact on mentalities and on the possibility to envision a radically different future. What could seem out of reach today could then perhaps be realized in a not so distant future, under different cultural conditions and political frameworks.

KEY ONLINE RESOURCES

<https://cltb.be/en/>

<https://youtu.be/HIJ9uhduSBI>

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URBAN MAESTRO

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www.urbanmaestro.org

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