

ON COMMON GROUND

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON
THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST



John Emmeus Davis, Line Algoed,
María E. Hernández-Torrales

EDITORS

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the Community Land Trust



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6.

From Model to Movement

The Growth of Community Land Trusts in the United States



John Emmeus Davis

Countries that have experienced robust growth in the number of community land trusts have followed different trajectories in seeding and cultivating this unusual form of tenure. Just as the model itself has often been adjusted to accommodate a country's politics, customs, and laws, so too have the strategies for promoting the model been tailored to fit whatever opportunities for political acceptance and financial support may present themselves. No country can serve as a precise template for another, therefore, in saying how to turn this unique approach to affordable housing and community development into a national movement. Nevertheless, by telling our stories about what worked well (and what did not) in our own countries, we add to the pool of strategic ideas from which everyone may draw. When it comes to movement building, nationally and internationally, CLT practitioners are doing what we have always done: learning together and learning as we go. We are all walking each other home.

In the United States, it all started with New Communities Inc. There were many precursors, both in the USA and in other countries, but this organization is generally credited with having been the "first" community land trust. An outgrowth of the southern Civil Rights Movement, New Communities was established in 1969 by African-American activists who had led the struggle for voting rights and racial equality in Albany, Georgia. They had come to believe that one of the keys to securing political and economic independence for their people was for them to own land. But individual ownership was out of reach for most African-Americans in the Deep South and too easily lost if they managed to acquire a farm, a plot of land, or a house in town. By contrast, the ownership of land by a not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization seemed a more secure form of tenure. This community-owned land could be combined with individual ownership of newly built houses, offering low-income people an opportunity to become homeowners. Community-owned land could also provide a platform for the cooperative organization

of farming and other enterprises, offering low-income people a shot at economic prosperity. “Community land trust” was the name given to this ingenious hybrid, which contemplated a mix of tenures occurring under the guidance and stewardship of a nonprofit landowner, acting on behalf of its chosen community.¹

The story of New Communities was featured in the first two books to describe the unique combination of ownership, organization, and operation that made up a CLT.² These seminal texts, published in 1972 and 1982, inspired a new crop of rural and urban CLTs that sprang up in the 1970s and 1980s. The model then started spreading across the United States. By the mid-1990s, there were over a hundred CLTs. Ten years later, there were nearly two hundred. Today, the number is approaching three hundred nongovernmental organizations in forty-seven states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia that either call themselves a community land trust or contain enough organizational and operational features of a CLT to be considered one.³

The Community Land Trust Handbook, which appeared in 1982, had spoken grandly of a “CLT movement.” In truth, less than a dozen CLTs existed at the time. And only a few closely resembled the “classic” model described in that book. What was wishful thinking in the early 1980s, however, was on its way to becoming a reality by the turn of the century. How did that happen? How did a hothouse flower with an unusual mix of characteristics become firmly rooted and widely dispersed across the American landscape? There were numerous causes. Some were serendipitous, a matter of robust seeds falling upon fertile ground at an opportune time. Others were intentional, the result of dedicated practitioners working separately and cooperatively to prepare the ground and to nourish the growth of these seedlings. Among the many causes of the model’s proliferation in the USA, five had the most impact:

1. A standardized message was developed and disseminated that defined what it meant to *be* a CLT and to *behave* like one;
2. A cadre of pioneering practitioners championed CLTs in their own communities, while sharing what they had learned with their peers in other parts of the country;
3. A handful of high-performing CLTs showed that stewardship works, providing a proof of concept for the model as a whole in both delivering and sustaining homeownership for the missing middle;
4. The policy environment for permanently affordable housing changed for the better, especially at the municipal level, making money available for projects and operations of local CLTs; and
5. The model itself was repeatedly reinvented and reinvigorated, “keeping the edges hot.”

These factors and actors were instrumental in taking a fragile hybrid that had been pioneered on a remote farm in southwest Georgia and turning it into a hardy, field-tested perennial with an urban and suburban appeal far beyond its original habitat. They helped the number of CLTs to grow and the size of their holdings to expand. They provided the impetus and foundation for a model to become a movement.

MESSAGE: DEVELOPING A COMMON CONCEPTION OF THE CLT

The early growth of community land trusts was a consequence, in part, of an intentional strategy of developing a coherent and consistent narrative about how a CLT was structured, who it served, and what it could do. The principal architect behind this effort to create a common understanding of the CLT was the Institute for Community Economics (ICE).⁴ Although other organizations eventually eclipsed ICE, for several decades the Institute played the leading role in refining and publicizing the CLT. In 1972, the Institute's small staff authored *The Community Land Trust: A Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America* and, in 1982, the Institute assembled the twelve-person team who produced *The Community Land Trust Handbook*. Three years later, the Institute introduced the CLT to a wider audience through *Common Ground*, a narrated slideshow featuring the Community Land Cooperative of Cincinnati, the first urban CLT. In 1998, ICE commissioned a video entitled *Homes and Hands: Community Land Trusts in Action*, profiling CLTs in Durham, North Carolina; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Burlington, Vermont.

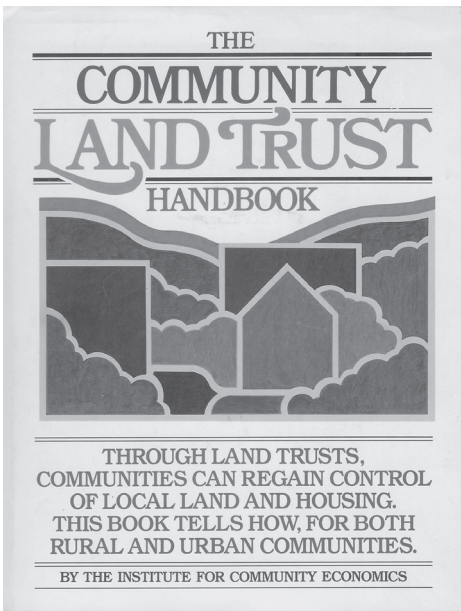


Fig. 6.1. Cover of the 1982 Handbook, published by Rodale Press.

Pitched to a general audience, the descriptions, images, and stories presented in these publications and productions had a purpose that was simultaneously educational and rhetorical. They instructed people in the distinctive way that property was owned by a CLT, the distinctive way that a CLT was organized, and the distinctive way that a CLT was operated to preserve the affordability, quality, and security of housing and other buildings, a cluster of features that became known as the “classic” CLT. This standardized description of the model’s unique treatment of ownership, organization, and operation helped to differentiate *community* land trusts from the *conservation* land trusts that had begun to proliferate in the 1980s. It also helped to distinguish the CLT from older models of

private, nonmarket housing like limited equity cooperatives. Intended to persuade as much as to inform, these materials were designed to convince an audience of the model's practicality and worth and to encourage activists to give this "new model of land tenure" a try.

Equally essential to the creation of a clear, consistent — and persuasive — conception of the CLT were the efforts made by ICE to produce technical materials for groups of professionals that CLTs would need if they were to gain a foothold in the American landscape: *lawyers* who would help to create a framework for incorporating CLTs, for leasing out a CLT's land, and for restricting the use and resale of CLT homes; *bankers* who would be asked to finance CLT homes; and *public officials* who would be asked to subsidize a CLT's projects. Teams of professionals and practitioners were periodically recruited by ICE to produce "model" documents and technical guides for establishing a CLT. These materials were collected in *The Community Land Trust Legal Manual*, published in 1991. A second edition was published in 2002. A third edition, entitled *The Community Land Trust Technical Manual*, made numerous revisions to the "model" ground lease and added half-a-dozen chapters pertaining to the operation of CLTs. It was published in 2011.

Another factor that proved pivotal in developing a common conception of the model was a definition of "community land trusts" that was added to national legislation in 1992. CLT practitioners pushed for this addition in order to gain access to federal funding, but they also wanted to ensure that the way in which their model was defined in federal law was consistent with the way that CLTs had been defining themselves. They asked then-Congressman Bernie Sanders, whose mayoral administration had seeded the Burlington Community Land Trust when he earlier led Vermont's largest city, to insert their hand-crafted definition of a community land trust into the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992. Sanders shepherded this amendment through Congress, seeing it signed into law without modification.⁵

None of these efforts made every CLT look and act alike. But activists, professionals, public officials, and private lenders inside and outside of the fledgling movement were steadily provided with a sharper picture of how a CLT was structured, how it differed from other models of tenure, and how its projects might best be funded and financed. Just as importantly, they were given a common vocabulary for exchanging information about a relatively unfamiliar model of housing and community development that was still very much a work-in-progress.

CHAMPIONS: CULTIVATING AND CONNECTING CLT PRACTITIONERS

The second factor spurring the growth of community land trusts in the United States was the rise of a scattered cadre of fervent advocates in the 1980s and 1990s who stepped forward to promote, to plan, and to establish CLTs in their own communities. The pioneers who started dozens of CLTs in the 1980s and 1990s were, in many respects, making it

up as they went along. They designed resale formulas, arranged mortgages, sold homes, and adopted policies and procedures for a form of tenure with virtually no track record. They were supported in their efforts by the Institute for Community Economics, whose

They learned by doing.
And they learned from
one another.

itinerant lecturers and trainers planted the seeds for new CLTs and whose publications provided essential tools.⁶ But the Institute's most important contribution during this period of early growth was to create opportunities for local CLT practitioners to share

their stories about what worked well — and what did not. They learned by doing. And they learned from one another.

Some of their communication was indirect. CLT activists gleaned information about each other's programs and procedures by reading *Community Economics*, a newsletter published and distributed by ICE from 1983 to 1996. In an average year, two or three issues were mailed out to hundreds (and later thousands) of people across the United States, many of whom were at an early stage of planning, organizing, or operating a CLT. The stated purpose of this publication was to "strengthen the connections between the theory and practice of community economics." More importantly, the publication strengthened the connections among far-flung CLTs, helping local practitioners to learn from the successes and mistakes of their peers.

Peer-to-peer learning among CLT practitioners happened directly at national conferences convened every year or two by ICE.⁷ The first conference was held in 1987 in an African-American church in Atlanta, a fitting venue since the country's first CLT had been organized in Georgia by veterans of the Civil Rights Movement.⁸ One of those veterans, John Lewis, who had attended one of the first planning sessions for New Communities Inc. in 1968, was the keynote speaker. He reminded participants at the Atlanta conference of the CLT's roots, while applauding how far the model had come.

The main business of that conference, like all that followed, was the exchange of stories, ideas, and technical information among people who were trying to get organizations and projects off the ground. Everyone had something essential to learn and, because the model was so new, anyone with more than a year of CLT experience had something valuable to teach. Nobody was an "expert," so everybody was. Eventually, a pool of professional CLT consultants arose, but they were never a substitute for CLT practitioners on the ground, swapping information with one another. The real experts remained those who were governing or running CLTs day to day. Keeping them connected was an essential ingredient in the movement's growth.

PERFORMANCE: REINVENTING HOMEOWNERSHIP FOR THE "MISSING MIDDLE"

As CLTs began to spread in the 1980s from lightly populated areas that were primarily rural in character to more densely settled cities, suburbs, and towns, the organizers of



Fig. 6.2. John Lewis, National CLT Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, 1987.

new CLTs frequently found themselves in a crowded organizational landscape. The organizations they were hoping to establish had to vie with existing NGOs for governmental funding, private donations, and local members. In a competitive environment, advocates for a new CLT were forced to address such existential questions as: How are you different? What population will you serve that is not already being served by another NGO? What can a CLT do better than anybody else?

The most common answer from CLTs during the 30-year growth spurt between 1970 and 2000 was homeownership; more specifically, homeownership for families who earned *too little* to buy a house or condominium, but *too much* to qualify for publicly subsidized rental housing. This was a population that became known in some policy circles as the “missing middle.”

CLTs promised to serve the missing middle in a way that other developers did not. CLTs provided newly built or newly rehabilitated housing that low-income and moderate-income families could afford to buy, similar to what was being done through many other first-time homeownership programs supported with public subsidies and operated by nonprofit organizations. Unlike the majority of these other programs, however, community land trusts stood behind their owner-occupied homes — and their newly minted homeowners — long *after* the housing was developed and sold. Committed to the sustainability of the homeownership opportunities they had worked so hard to create, CLTs used their ownership of the underlying land and a long-term ground lease to preserve the housing’s affordability, to keep the housing in good repair, and to intervene, if necessary, to prevent foreclosures. This trio of responsibilities came to be known among CLTs as the “three faces of stewardship.”

A specialized niche of *sustainable* homeownership allowed CLTs to differentiate themselves from other nonprofit housing developers in a dense urban ecology. It was a political gauntlet that CLTs threw at the feet of public officials and other NGOs, who celebrated ribbon cuttings for new homeowners, but cared little about whether those homes

remained affordable and whether new homeowners *remained* in their homes many years down the road. CLTs challenged this short-sighted approach. As ICE's executive director, Chuck Matthei, declared at the first National CLT Conference in Atlanta in 1987:

No program, public or private, is a true or adequate response to the housing crisis if it does not address the issue of long-term affordability. It's time to draw the line politically. This is a practical challenge that confronts policy makers; it's the practical challenge that confronts community activists; and, happily, it is a practical challenge that the community land trust model has an ability to meet.

The key question, of course, was *does it work?* Local practitioners who were selling CLT homes echoed the claims of national advocates, who had been saying for years that the model functioned in a counter-cyclical fashion; that is, CLTs were effective in pre-

serving affordability when markets were hot and were equally effective in preventing deferred maintenance and reducing foreclosures when markets turned cold.⁹ There was anecdotal evidence giving credence to both, but quantitative data was needed if skeptics were to be persuaded that CLTs could actually do what they promised to do.

Beginning in 2003, a series of data-based evaluations began to appear that closely examined the performance of the resale-restricted, owner-occupied housing held by CLTs.¹⁰ They looked at whether the stewardship regime at the center of this unfamiliar form of tenure actually delivered better outcomes for the people being boosted into homeownership. The most pressing concerns were the following:

- Do community land trusts *preserve affordability* for lower-income households who are hoping to buy CLT homes in the future, while also allowing households who later choose to sell their CLT homes an opportunity to *build wealth*; and
- Do CLTs *enhance the security* of lower-income homeowners, reducing the incidence of mortgage foreclosure, while *allowing mobility* for any homeowners who may choose eventually to leave the CLT?

These studies answered in the affirmative, providing hard evidence that a CLT's specialized focus on the post-purchase stewardship of owner-occupied housing did, in fact,

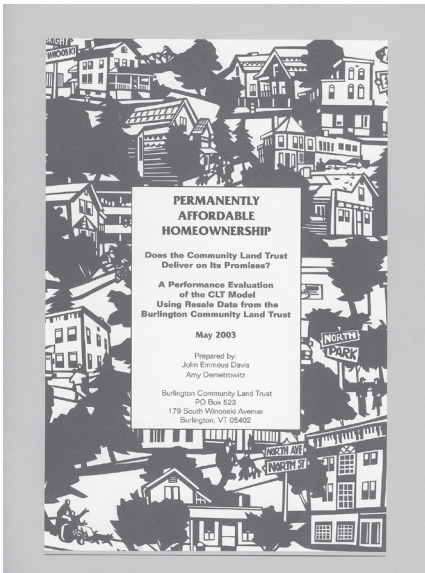


Fig. 6.3. First quantitative, longitudinal evaluation of a CLT's performance, 2003.

enable CLTs to deliver on their promises. That was true when hot markets threatened affordability. It was also true when cold markets threatened security of tenure. Even during the mortgage meltdown of the Great Recession beginning in 2008, CLT homeowners experienced fewer defaults and fewer foreclosures, by a wide margin, when compared to the dismal performance of conventional, market-rate homes. The success of CLTs in sustaining homeownership for the missing middle, during good economic times and bad, helped the model's visibility and popularity to rise.

POLICY: MUNICIPAL SUPPORT FOR PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Despite mounting evidence of the model's counter-cyclical success, most public officials were slow to amend policies and programs that had long allowed subsidized homes to leak into the market on a regular basis. Only in cities where local officials actually *cared* about the lasting affordability, quality, and security of the housing they had helped to create were CLTs able to gain access to the governmental resources they needed to assemble a sizable portfolio of resale-restricted housing.

These were not priority concerns in most cities. Most housing policy in the United States, then and now, had been to use public dollars and public powers to subsidize the *production* of affordably priced housing, with little regard for its *preservation*. This deeply entrenched public policy began slowly to change in the 1980s, with cities leading the way. The election to the presidency of Ronald Reagan forced municipal officials to step up as federal officials stepped back. Under Reagan, the federal government beat a hasty retreat from the field of affordable housing, repudiating a commitment to a "decent home and suitable living environment for every American family" that had been endorsed by both national parties since the Housing Act of 1949. Cutbacks in federal funding resulted in less affordably priced housing getting constructed or subsidized. Older housing in lower-income areas deteriorated, as government grants for neighborhood revitalization disappeared and as private capital for mortgages and home improvements were withheld from areas that had long been redlined by private lenders. Homelessness, largely invisible since the Great Depression, reappeared with a vengeance. At the same time, short-term affordability controls began expiring on thousands of units of publicly subsidized, privately owned rental housing that had been built decades before under a variety of federal programs.

This was also a period when the price of owner-occupied housing began a steep and sustained thirty-year climb, even as household incomes stagnated for the bottom three quintiles of the population and as mortgage interest rates rose to historic heights. A new phrase entered the lexicon of housing policy in the 1980s, the "affordability gap." This referred to the widening chasm between housing prices and household incomes.

With the federal government doing less for affordable housing, cities were forced to

Permanent affordability began to look less like a radical proposition and more like a prudent course of action.

do more. Attempting to replace some of the federal monies they had lost, many cities raised new funds from local sources, depositing them into dedicated accounts called “housing trust funds.” They made wider use of regulatory measures like inclusionary zon-

ing and density bonuses, forcing private developers to set aside affordably priced units within larger, market-rate residential projects. They also exerted greater control over the disbursement of the federal monies that remained, a consequence of the Reagan Administration’s policy of “devolving” authority to lower levels of government. Because of devolution, many of these federal funds now flowed through the hands of municipal officials.¹¹

As municipalities began expending more of their own financial and political capital to subsidize affordable housing for lower-income renters and homeowners, the preservation of that investment became a higher priority. Permanent affordability began to look less like a radical proposition and more like a prudent course of action; a policy more fiscally responsible and politically defensible than continuing to allow public subsidies and private affordability to leak away. Municipal officials became increasingly receptive to the arguments being made by CLT practitioners, among others, that the public’s investment should not be lost, nor should the affordably priced homes resulting from that investment. Particularly in cities with hot real estate markets, where rents and house prices were soaring, the demonstrated success of CLTs in preserving affordability was the kind of fiscally prudent program that even a conservative mayor or city councilor could support.

This precipitated a slow, seismic shift in municipal policy. Instead of allowing homeownership subsidies to be pocketed by homeowners when reselling their assisted homes, some municipalities began looking for ways to lock those subsidies in place. Instead of allowing the affordability of publicly assisted homes to lapse, these municipalities began looking for ways to make affordability last. As municipal officials sought to plug holes in the leaky bucket created by previous policies and programs, CLTs found an increasingly receptive audience and, on occasion, they became a favored recipient of municipal largess.¹²

HYBRID VIGOR: KEEPING THE EDGES HOT

A coherent message; a widening cadre of inter-connected champions; a record of success in delivering and sustaining homeownership for the “missing middle;” and an improving policy environment, prioritizing permanent affordability: all were critical to the growth of community land trusts in the United States during the period between the seeding of New Communities Inc. and the early years of the New Millennium. The number of CLTs rose higher. The size of CLT portfolios got bigger.

One additional factor figured prominently in the growth of CLTs: the creativity of

practitioners in *mixing* the model with other forms of tenure and *applying* the model in novel ways. By doing so, practitioners expanded the boundaries of the CLT, enhancing its productivity and adaptability. This process of restless reinvention is what a colleague once dubbed “keeping the edges hot.”

It might also be called “hybrid vigor.” What is widely known in the United States as the “classic CLT” was created by selecting favorable characteristics of ownership, organization, and operation from different strands of social change and combining them to form a new breed of land tenure. This is analogous to what is regularly done in horticulture when two or more species with different characteristics are combined to create a new plant variety that is more productive and resilient, across a wider range of habitats and conditions — a desirable result that plant breeders call “hybrid vigor.”

In the case of the CLT, hybridization produced a versatile model that could thrive not only in rural areas and small towns where it was first introduced, but also in inner-city neighborhoods and suburban enclaves. The “classic” model that gained a foothold in a number of American cities in the 1980s was hardly an end to hybridization, however. The process has continued to the present day: blending the CLT with other tenures; grafting the CLT onto other organizational structures; and applying the CLT in new ways. The salubrious result has been an increase in the model’s productivity and adaptability.

For example, although many CLTs in the United States still focus on expanding and sustaining homeownership opportunities for the missing middle, the populations they serve have become more diverse. So have their real estate portfolios. The types and tenures of housing that are today being developed on community-owned land are more varied than the detached, owner-occupied houses that were once a CLT’s main line of business. CLTs are now engaged in the development and stewardship of limited-equity condominiums and cooperatives, multi-unit rental housing, manufactured housing in resident-managed mobile home parks, and transitional housing and temporary shelters for the homeless. CLT landholdings are being increasingly used for non-residential projects as well, including community gardens, commercial greenhouses, urban farms, neighborhood parks, social enterprises, social service facilities, and multi-story, mixed-use buildings with retail or office space on the ground floor and residential space in the stories above. In rural areas, some CLTs have expanded their focus beyond the development of affordable housing to include the preservation of farmland, forests, wetlands, and open space.¹³

Not only is there more mixing of tenures and uses, there is more mixing of organizations as well. Although many CLTs in the United States are still being started from scratch, forming a brand new nonprofit corporation, the path to organizing a CLT has become more diverse. In localities that already possess an established nonprofit infrastructure for the development of affordable housing, it has become increasingly common for key features of the “classic CLT” to be grafted onto an existing community development corporation, Habitat for Humanity affiliate, or even an agency or department of

local government. In these instances, community-owned land, long-term ground leasing, and permanent controls over the affordability of residential and commercial buildings are operationalized as an internal program or corporate subsidiary of another entity that

Mixing the CLT with other tenures and other organizations has sometimes deleted or diluted characteristics that make the model unique.

was doing business long before the idea of creating a CLT came along.

When CLTs are combined with other models of tenure or when a CLT program is grafted onto an existing nonprofit, adjustments are often made to the democratically elected, three-part board of the

“classic” CLT. In some cases, the composition of a CLT’s membership or governance has been reconfigured to allow local governments or other nonprofits to appoint their own representatives, serving alongside the residents representing a place-based community. Some CLTs have dispensed with a membership altogether. Notably, in cases where a municipal government has taken the lead in establishing a CLT — or in cities where the main function of the CLT is serving as the steward of affordable housing created through a municipal mandate or municipal money — city officials have sometimes been reluctant to relinquish control over the organization. This can result in a CLT board where leaseholders and their neighbors are no longer a majority.

Hybridization has added vigor. It has brought more lands and buildings into CLT portfolios. It has garnered more support for CLTs. It has helped the model to spread into places and spaces where CLTs were previously unknown. But hybridization has also brought challenges. The process of mixing the CLT with other tenures and other organizations has sometimes deleted or diluted characteristics that make the model unique, changing what it essentially means to be a CLT and to behave like one. Three challenges loom the largest in this regard:

- ***Keeping the “C” in CLT:*** Will there still be a place for community in the organizational structure of the CLT? Or will the heightened influence of municipal governments and the increasing number of CLT programs that are placed under the corporate umbrella of other NGOs reduce the active voice of local residents in guiding and governing the CLT?
- ***Keeping the “L” in CLT:*** Will land still matter? Or will a narrowing focus on affordable housing, in general, and owner-occupied housing, in particular, cause CLTs to ignore other uses of land or to abandon ground leasing altogether in favor of selling their land and employing mechanisms like deed covenants to preserve affordability?¹⁴
- ***Keeping the “T” in CLT:*** Will the CLT still hold real estate in trust for disadvantaged populations, preserving a “preferential option for the poor” in making lands available,

keeping homes affordable, and protecting security of tenure for low-income families and individuals — or will the Gandhian legacy of “trusteeship” be lost in a scramble to broaden the model’s middle-class appeal?¹⁵

Beyond the challenge of keeping each of these components intact, there is the stiffer challenge of keeping *community*, *land*, and *trust* together. Each component of the “classic” CLT is a worthy innovation in its own right, representing a marked improvement over the way that land is typically owned, used, and conveyed; a marked improvement over the way that nonprofit organizations are typically structured; and a marked improvement over the way that housing and other land-based assets are typically operated. But the capacity of a CLT to transform a place of residence comes less from the *reinvention* of ownership, organization, and operation and more from the synergy created by their *combination*. Will these components continue to work in concert, each enhancing the effectiveness of the others? Or will CLT practitioners yield to the temptation to remove key components in the name of simplification, hoping to make the model easier to “sell” to public funders, private bankers, or reluctant homebuyers?¹⁶

BACK TO THE FUTURE: REAFFIRMING VALUES, RENEWING VOWS

A contest for the soul of the community land trust is contained within these clusters of questions. How they are answered will determine whether the CLT of tomorrow continues to resemble the model that arose in the United States nearly fifty years ago. It could go either way. It is not predestined that CLTs of the future will be dramatically different than today. People who have spent a lifetime advocating for community-led development on community-owned land are a stubborn lot. They will not be easily persuaded to abandon features that have grounded and energized the model in the past. Plus, not all of the changes and challenges currently swirling around the CLT compel it away from what it has been. Some coax it back, returning the model to its roots.

The recent revival of interest in the CLT among grassroots organizers working in communities of color is a case in point, especially in neighborhoods where lower-income households predominate. These are places that are the most susceptible to gentrification and displacement. Their vulnerability is particularly high when these neighborhoods are proximate to an expanding downtown or situated beside a river, lake, or ocean. During good economic times, people of color get pushed aside as lands rise in value and become coveted by investors (and politicians) for conversion to a “higher use.” These areas also get hit the hardest when economic times are bad and foreclosures rise or when natural disasters like wildfires or hurricanes depopulate large swaths of land for luxury redevelopment.¹⁷

The boom-and-bust depredations inflicted upon communities of color have created a broadening constituency for a model of tenure that has proven its effectiveness in sustaining homeownership opportunities for lower-income households of all races. Stewardship works, at both ends of the business cycle. That makes the CLT a prime candidate for consideration by community leaders who are looking for a bulwark against displacement, protecting against market forces and public policies that threaten the loss of minority-owned lands and the removal of people, spaces, and enterprises that have historically defined a neighborhood's racial or ethnic identity.

Ironically, at the same time as interest in the model was increasing within communities of color, harkening back to earlier era of the struggle for racial justice, there was a rising generation of practitioners who were mostly unaware of the CLT's origins. They certainly understood how a CLT's approach to homeownership differed from more conventional forms of housing. They were just as dedicated as their predecessors had been to using the CLT to improve the lives of lower-income families and, in many respects, they were more skillful in doing so. But these younger practitioners were many years removed from the Civil Rights Movement that had spawned the modern-day CLT. They were less likely to see themselves as part of a larger movement for social change, even where a majority of people in the places they served were members of a racial or ethnic minority.

This was symptomatic of a larger problem. The model was on its way to becoming a movement by the first decade of the New Millennium, but the values and vows that had provided the underpinnings of the CLT were beginning to wobble. An increasing number of organizers, practitioners, and public officials understood *how* to deliver a CLT's services, but the *why* had begun to fade from memory. Fewer people were familiar with the original rationale for reinventing and combining ownership, organization, and operation in precisely this way.

The CLT movement, in this regard, was no different than any other. Social movements of every stripe, if they are to endure, must stay rooted in the bedrock principles on which they were founded, giving motivation and momentum to the people who are drawn to them. Simultaneously, a movement must stay open to new recruits and new ideas, taking wing on an influx of fresh energy. The early growth of CLTs was grounded and buoyed by both. Drawing on social innovations and experiments in land reform from other countries and inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the CLT had sturdy roots. It soon found its wings as well, when a feisty generation of community activists seized upon a model pioneered in rural America and applied it in novel ways in urban and suburban neighborhoods throughout the country.

But values are precarious and easily lost as a movement's origins become more distant. Likewise, edges become less permeable as a newly created organization consolidates its niche in a competitive environment and seeks to institutionalize practices that brought it earlier success. Instead of the open borders of a movement, barriers to entry gradually

CLT leaders were not spared this movement-versus-industry dilemma, but they tried to thread the needle, embracing the best attributes of both.

arise, becoming higher over time. Instead of the hydra-headed energy of a movement, where thought leaders and inventive practitioners appear unpredictably on the periphery or arise unexpectedly within the ranks, there develops a leadership cadre that becomes increasingly stable, hierarchical, and self-perpetuating over time.¹⁸

Whenever that occurs in the natural life cycle of a social movement, its leaders are faced with a difficult choice. They must decide whether to dampen the passions and trappings of a movement, adopting standards and structures that make their organizations and networks behave more like an industry, or act intentionally to preserve the precarious values and permeable edges that gave birth to their movement and infused it with the vitality of youth.

CLT leaders in the United States were not spared this movement-versus-industry dilemma, but they tried to thread the needle, embracing the best attributes of both. They believed it was possible for members of their national network to incorporate characteristics and standards of a more formal organization without losing the aspirational, inclusive vitality that had made CLTs a movement. Conversely, they believed it was possible for local CLTs — and for the movement as a whole — to preserve the precious, precarious values at the heart of the CLT, while keeping the edges of their organizations permeable to new ideas and new entrants.

The National CLT Network embarked on a series of key interventions that sought to walk this tightrope. The first was the National CLT Academy, established in 2006. The Academy was concerned with the nuts and bolts of making CLTs work better by documenting and teaching “best practices” in the organization and operation of CLTs. Through the courses it developed and the documents it published,¹⁹ the Academy promoted the sort of standardization and professionalization characteristic of an “industry.” At the same time, the Academy attempted to inculcate the values of a “movement,” articulating a clear rationale for the CLT and playing a role of messaging similar to the role once played by the Institute for Community Economics. Through its courses and publications, the Academy tried to remind practitioners of where the model had come from and why it was configured in such an unconventional way.²⁰

Two years after launching the Academy, the National CLT Network established the Heritage Lands Initiative, a program dedicated to supporting CLT development in communities of color.²¹ Here too there was a focus on improving the standard of practice, accompanied by an emphasis on familiarizing present-day practitioners with values and pioneers from the CLT’s past. Out of this Initiative came two film projects: *Streets of Dreams: Development without Displacement in Communities of Color*; and *Arc of Justice: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of a Beloved Community*.²² Both documentaries were graphic

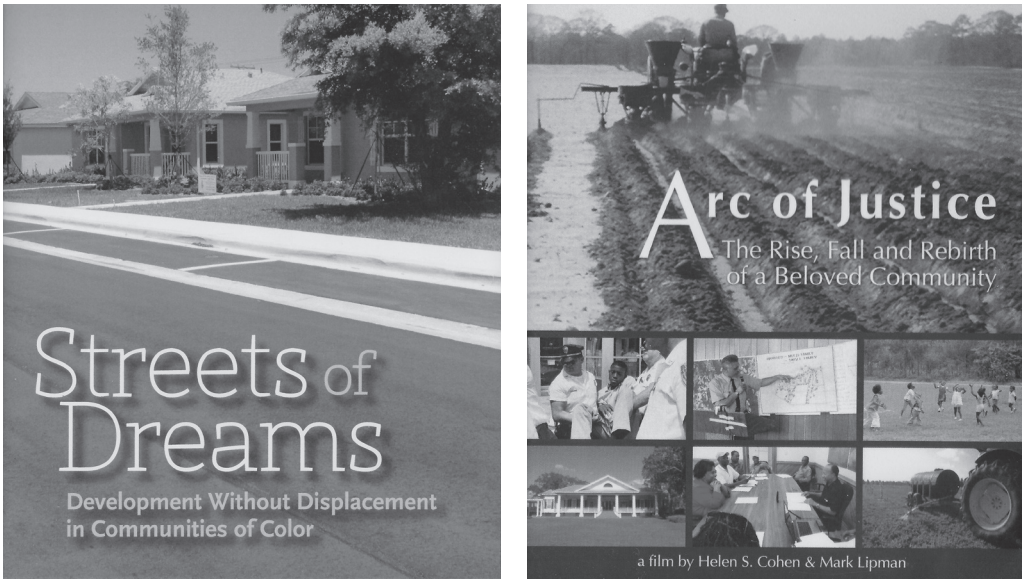


Fig. 6.4. Two films from Open Studio Productions, exploring origins and applications of the CLT in communities of color.

reminders that the model's origins were not to be found in the lofty theories of academics, but in the moral struggle of African-Americans for social justice.

There was a virtuous cycle here. Mounting interest in CLTs among communities of color spurred the Network and its members to do more to address their concerns. Conversely, the trainings, publications, and films produced by the National CLT Academy and the Heritage Lands Initiative helped to legitimize the CLT in the eyes of activists, organizers, and prospective homebuyers who were living and working within these minority communities.

It is too soon to predict how this dynamic might affect the ways in which CLTs are being structured, accepted, and applied — or what its effect might be on meeting the latest challenges to the model's integrity. What can be said, at this point, is that the growing interest in the model among communities of color — and the increasing commitment by many of the movement's leaders to an agenda of diversity, equity, and inclusion — is showing signs of reinvigorating values that gave rise to the first CLT fifty years ago. It is opening up the present-day CLT movement in the United States to new people and new possibilities.

In sum, at the same time that internal changes and external pressures are pushing the CLT toward becoming something different than it once was, there are old constituencies and new energies that are pulling it back toward the vision and values of the model's pioneers. The CLT, as both a model and a movement, remains a work in progress. Experimentation helped it to grow. Adaptation helped it to spread. It continues to evolve. A long time coming, the CLT still has a long way to go.

Notes

1. More information on ideas and experiments that gave rise to the CLT can be found in “Origins and Evolution of the Community Land Trust in the United States.” Pp. 3–47 in J.E. Davis (ed.) *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010); and in “Les Philosophes de Terrain et Les Pionniers.” Pp. 19–44 in *Manuel d’antispeculation immobiliere* (Montreal, Quebec: Les Editions Ecosociete, 2014).
2. International Independence Institute, *The Community Land Trust: A Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America* (Cambridge MA: Center for Community Economic Development, 1972). Institute for Community Economics, *The Community Land Trust Handbook* (Emmaus PA: Rodale Press, 1982).
3. A directory and interactive map of all CLTs in the United States is maintained by the Center for CLT Innovation (www.cltweb.org).
4. Founded by Ralph Borsodi in 1967 as the International Independence Institute, the organization changed its name to the Institute for Community Economics soon after publication of the 1972 book.
5. Early in 1992, Congressman Sanders invited the first director of the Burlington Community Land Trust, Tim McKenzie, to testify before a congressional subcommittee. McKenzie’s well-received testimony caused Sanders to see that an opening might exist for federal legislation supportive of the CLT model. Asked by Sanders for suggestions, McKenzie brought John Davis into the conversation. McKenzie and Davis urged Sanders to propose a statutory definition of the CLT that would make it easier for CLTs to receive federal funding. Sanders agreed. A one-page definition of the “community land trust” was drafted by McKenzie and Davis and sent off to Sanders’ office. Their definition was inserted by Sanders into the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992.
6. The first generation of peripatetic proselytizers were Ralph Borsodi, Mildred Loomis, and Arthur Morgan. They were advocates for leased-land communities long before the founding of New Communities Inc. and remained active into the 1960s. But Morgan was 92 by the time New Communities was up and running; Borsodi was 84; Loomis was 70. Their days of hitting the road to talk about land trusts were coming to an end. Plus, the message and model had evolved. The CLT that emerged from the crucible of the southern Civil Rights Movement and from a redesign engineered by ICE was different than the land trusts of previous years. In the 1970s, the Institute fielded a new generation of lecturers and trainers: Bob Swann, Erick Hansch, Shimon Gottshalk, and Terry Molnar. During the 1980s, Chuck Matthei was ICE’s best known and most widely travelled advocate for the CLT.
7. The first national conferences were convened by ICE. In 2006, the National CLT Network took over responsibility for organizing them and continued to do so after merging with the Cornerstone Partnership in 2016 and changing its name to Grounded Solutions Network.

8. An earlier conference had been hosted by ICE at Voluntown, Connecticut in 1983, but it was hardly a “national” CLT conference since only a few CLTs existed at the time. This was more a gathering of community organizers and housing professionals who were interested in starting a CLT. The 1987 conference in Atlanta was always considered by ICE to have been the “first” national CLT conference.
9. J.E. Davis, “Homes That Last: The Case for Counter-Cyclical Stewardship.” Pp. 562–570 in *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010).
10. John Emmeus Davis and Amy Demetrowitz, *Permanently Affordable Homeownership: Does the Community Land Trust Deliver on Its Promises?* (Burlington VT: Burlington Community Land Trust, 2003); John Emmeus Davis and Alice Stokes, *Lands in Trust, Homes That Last* (Burlington VT: Champlain Housing Trust, 2010); Emily Thaden, *Outperforming the Market: Making Sense of the Low Rates of Delinquencies and Foreclosures in Community Land Trusts* (Portland OR: National CLT Network, 2010); Kenneth Temkin, Brett Theodos, and David Price, *Balancing Affordability and Opportunity: An Evaluation of Affordable Homeownership Programs with Long-term Affordability Controls* (Washington DC: The Urban Institute, 2010); and Emily Thaden, *Stable Homeownership in a Turbulent Economy: Delinquencies and Foreclosures Remain Low in Community Land Trusts* (Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2011). See, more recently, Ruoniu Wang, Claire Cahen, Arthur Acolin, and Rebecca J. Walter, *Tracking Growth and Evaluating Performance of Shared Equity Homeownership Programs During Housing Market Fluctuations* (Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, April 2019).
11. John Emmeus Davis, “Between Devolution and the Deep Blue Sea: What’s a City or State to Do?” Pp. 364–398 in Rachel G. Bratt, Michael E. Stone, and Chester Hartman (eds.), *A Right to Housing* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 2006).
12. A more detailed discussion of this policy shift toward the preservation of publicly subsidized housing, at least at the local level, can be found in John Emmeus Davis and Rick Jacobus, *The City-CLT Partnership: Municipal Support for Community Land Trusts* (Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2008).
13. See Kirby White, *Preserving Farms for Farmers* (Turners Falls, MA: Equity Trust, 2009). A few CLTs like the one in Athens, Georgia straddle the line between urban and rural, developing affordable housing in the city and conserving farmland, forests, and open space in the countryside. The Athens Land Trust also operates a weekly farmers market (<https://athenslandtrust.org>).
14. This was one of Bob Swann’s abiding concerns: “Creating perpetually affordable housing is a good idea. The only thing is that there is a danger of losing track of the land itself.” See the interview with Bob Swann conducted by Kirby White in *Community Economics* (Number 25, 1992), Pp. 3–5. Reprinted in J.E. Davis (ed.), *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010).

15. The “preferential option for the poor” was a principle of Catholic social teaching articulated in liberation theology and championed by many Christian democratic parties in Latin America at the end of the 20th Century. That principle, combined with Gandhi’s concept of “trusteeship,” influenced the thinking, teaching, and practice of many CLT advocates during the 1970s and 1980s.
16. A detailed argument against the model’s dismemberment can be found in J.E. Davis, “Better Together: The Challenging, Transformative Complexity of Community, Land and Trust,” Chapter 26 in the current volume. A less temperate commentary, berating the tendency to remove components of the model that seem “too difficult,” can be found in: J.E. Davis, “Ground Leasing Without Tears,” *Shelterforce Weekly* (February 4, 2014).
17. When the mortgage crisis rolled across the USA during the Great Recession, the brunt of that economic disaster was borne by African–Americans and Latinos. They lost their homes to foreclosure in disproportionate numbers relative to the rest of the population. When hurricanes ripped through New Orleans, Houston, and Puerto Rico, a new breed of “disaster capitalists” saw opportunities to buy up valuable land at bargain prices.
18. Previous commentaries on this dilemma can be found in J.E. Davis, “Precarious Values and Permeable Edges in Community Development,” *Shelterforce Weekly* (January 10, 2013); and in “Is Community Development an Industry — or a Movement?” *Shelterforce Weekly* (September 17, 2014).
19. *The Community Land Trust Technical Manual*, commissioned, researched, and published by the Academy in 2011, is the best example of these publications.
20. Outside of the classroom, two other spin-offs from the National CLT Academy further extolled the CLT’s history. In 2010, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy published *The Community Land Trust Reader*. That volume included an introductory essay laying out the origins and evolution the CLT in the United States, along with essays, interviews, and speeches documenting the theory and values behind the CLT. A few years later, two of the Academy’s founders, Greg Rosenberg and John Emmeus Davis, created *Roots & Branches*, a digital archive of CLT history (<http://www.clroots.org>).
21. The CLT Academy and the Heritage Lands Initiative were chartered programs of the National CLT Network, each with its own advisory board. They were absorbed into the committee structure of the Network in 2012. Two years later, the CLT Network merged with the Cornerstone Partnership and changed its name to Grounded Solutions Network.
22. *Streets of Dreams* was produced by Helen Cohen and Mark Lipman (New Day Films, 2010). *Arc of Justice* was produced by Helen Cohen, Mark Lipman, and John Emmeus Davis (New Day Films, 2016). For the latter film, a website was also created to provide additional information about events, people, and organizations featured in this documentary (<http://www.arcofjusticefilm.com>).