

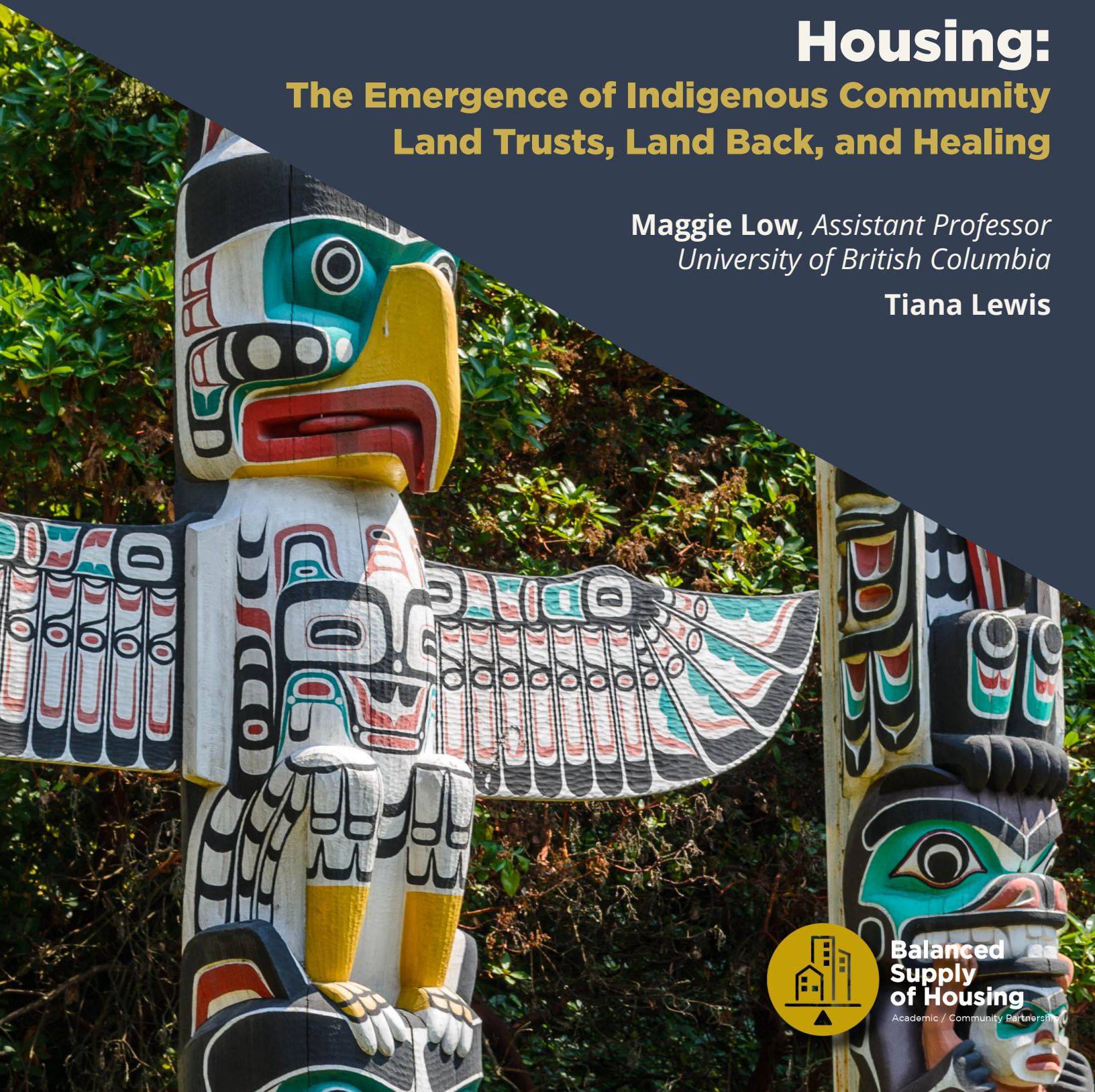


**Canadian
Network of
Community
Land Trusts**

More Than Just Affordable Housing: The Emergence of Indigenous Community Land Trusts, Land Back, and Healing

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**Balanced
Supply
of Housing**

Academic / Community Partnership

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to: 1) illuminate the innovations of and challenges for Indigenous community land trusts (ICLTs) in Canada and 2) articulate ways community land trusts (CLTs) can foster better working relationships with Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and organizations. This report focuses on the emerging characteristics and innovations of ICLT's in Canada to highlight the strength-based approaches of Indigenous People, Nations and organizations. The report findings are crucial for institutions – Canadian government agencies, academic, non-profits, etc. – that are advancing equitable housing solutions, Indigenous well-being, and land justice efforts going forward. This report aims to share knowledge through the voices and wisdom of Indigenous and non-Indigenous CLT practitioners from three Canadian provinces. The findings are by no means exhaustive and are meant to help build the foundation for community-engaged research about CLTs over the next five to ten years. This report is intended for a wide audience, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous CLT practitioners, researchers, and others with the ability to support the CLT sector.

"It's an exciting time!" As an interviewee deeply engaged in housing and CLT work explains, "there's a lot of agenda setting, tone setting, and excitement around the idea of scaling community land trusts" (P5).

Part 1 elaborates on the way ICLTs:

- support local First Nations members living in urban centres
- offer more than just affordable housing for local First Nation members and urban Indigenous diaspora; they offer spaces of stewardship and healing
- enact Indigenous planning and city building

Part 2 focuses on how CLTs can support the flourishing of ICLTs, including:

- enacting community building to support healing and connectedness
- recognizing the land as a relative
- educating to demystify CLT operations and garnering community support for land back

Research Aims and Questions

Indigenous Peoples in Canada are, and always have been, working towards solutions that work best for their Nations, people, and communities. Similarly, CLTs have continuously advanced justice and equity goals through collective ownership of land. Today, CLT and housing practitioners are beginning to unpack the role CLTs can play in repairing the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism in Canada. While CLTs operate for community benefit, they also operate on lands stolen from Indigenous Peoples. **The research questions guiding this report are:**

- How are ICLTs emerging in Canada? What are the main innovations and challenges of implementation?
- How can CLTs support the development and growth of ICLTs and build better relationships with Indigenous Peoples?
- What tensions and opportunities arise from CLT models that support Indigenous governance and decolonial practices?

Research Process

To explore these questions, the authors worked in collaboration with the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT) and the Balanced Supply of Housing Node at UBC. The authors received initial direction to investigate the role of CLTs and ICLTs in the context of reconciliation and decolonization in Canada. To do this, semi-structured interviews (n=6) were conducted with Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners working in or adjacent to developing CLTs in three Canadian provinces. Interviews were conducted in the summer of 2023, and a focus group was held with CLT and housing practitioners in Vancouver, British Columbia in November 2023. Interview transcripts and meeting notes were analyzed by the authors and coded for recurring themes (e.g. housing, land, healing, decolonization, etc.). Using these recurring themes, an extensive literature review, and personal experience, the authors answer each of the research questions above. Unlike a traditional research report or article, the authors rely heavily on direct quotes from the interviews and focus group members and on relevant presentations to provide richness to the evolving nature of ICLTs in Canada. Further research to document and support CLTs is highly encouraged.

Introduction

What Are Community Land Trusts in Canada?

This report uses the 2023 CLT census definition of community land trust: **a community-governed organization, or program of an existing organization, that owns land to be used for community benefit** (Trana et al., 2023). The definition of an ICLT is emergent and currently understood by the authors **as incorporated or unincorporated CLTs led by and intended to serve primarily (but not always exclusively) Indigenous Peoples, communities and organizations**. Both CLTs and ICLTs are committed to the long-term stewardship and permanent affordability of land, housing, and other assets that contribute to thriving communities. CLTs are unique because they are democratically governed by the communities they serve (Thompson, 2020). This means people who will be most affected by choices about housing and land use make those decisions together. These core principles are implemented in different ways according to local aspirations and conditions (Crabtree et al., 2012). The 2023 Census of Community Land Trusts in Canada reported that there has been a significant increase of CLT models across the country in the last decade. As of May 2023, there were 41 CLT organizations, 9,995 CLT-owned homes, and 2,546 CLT members in Canada (Trana, et al., 2023).

CLTs are adaptable to different contexts and member needs, including the growth of urban community land trusts (Bunce 2020). For example, CLTs offer an option for permanent affordable housing for lower income households and communities of colour (Engelsman et al., 2018; Lowe 2022). More recently, CLTs are a response to the pressures of speculative real estate markets. To illustrate in Vancouver, BC, the creation of the Downtown Eastside Community Land Trust (DTES CLT) is motivated by the desire and need to protect existing housing units from being bought for development and converted to market housing at much higher prices, effectively displacing the current tenants. As a member of the DTES CLT explains:

*The most viable option on the table was a community land trust so that [residents] wouldn't be subject to an owner selling or redeveloping. If the community had ownership of the land, then **that was really the only sustainable way to protect affordable housing in the neighbourhood** (P6).*

In general, CLTs differ from private property regimes because they operate under a collective or common ownership model (Crabtree et al., 2012). Unlike traditional private ownership models that often lead to exploitation and neglect of land for profit, CLTs operate on the principle that land should be preserved and used in ways that benefit the community at large, both now and in the future (Thompson, 2020). With the need and support for CLTs growing across Canada, it's important to emphasize the larger vision and purpose of CLTs, particularly related to land (Bunce and Aslam, 2016).

As one interviewee conveys, CLTs have, “the ability to scale and generate a portfolio of decommodifying land in any given area (P5).” This speaks to the fact that CLTs are not just a single project at a time and, if adequately funded, have the potential to acquire land at the scale and pace of the speculative real estate market:

*...rental housing, naturally occurring, affordable rental housing is just being scooped up and speculated and invested on. **We need something that can match that scale and that pace... that’s when I think of land trusts acquiring those same assets that the REITs [Real Estate Investment Trusts] are after. It’s not the only thing we need to do, but it’s a critical element (P5).***

The interviewee above is suggesting decommodification of land must happen first, followed by perpetual affordable housing as a benefit.

Crucially, the concept of land stewardship is central to CLTs. This means more than just owning land; it means being responsible for its care and future. Such principles resonate strongly with Indigenous knowledges, and ways of being and doing practiced for thousands of years on the lands currently known as Canada. In the last decade, Indigenous governments, organizations, and individuals have begun leveraging the CLT framework to support their housing, governance and well-being goals. In turn, CLTs and ICLTs are learning much from each other as Indigenous and Indigenous-led CLTs are emerging in urban and rural areas across Canada.



Context

Land and Land Stewardship in Canada

Land is a complex term in the context of settler colonialism. Patrick Wolfe articulates a theory called the “logic of elimination” which defines settler colonialism as an ongoing structure of power that systematically erases Indigenous Peoples from the land (through genocide, assimilation, and other violent means) and replaces them with settlers from different places (Wolfe, 2006). A key method of achieving this dispossession is through physical displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and homes. Indigenous Peoples were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands to make way for new settlements, agricultural development, and resource extraction (Kepkiewicz et al., 2019). This displacement was not only physical but also cultural, as it almost severed the deep connections Indigenous Peoples had with their land, disrupting their traditional practices, spirituality, and social structures. Indigenous people were violently removed from their lands and intentionally excluded from participating in the new legal and economic systems imposed on their lands. This dispossession and exclusion continues today. Settler colonialism is not a past event, but rather a process and set of systemic structures that exist today that seek to maintain the settler state and its legitimacy (Wolfe, 2006; Corntassel, 2021).

*Ask some of those questions, like, “why not? **Why can’t we give the land back?**” Indigenous people went from managing and controlling 100% of the land in Canada for 10,000 years, and we did great...and now we have 0.3% of the land in Canada. **Canada is the second largest country in the world,** [with] a tiny relative population of barely 40 million people, has probably more land per person than any other country in the world. And cannot and **will not even consider giving more than 0.3% of the land back to Indigenous People (P6).***

Several Indigenous scholars argue land is at the root of any issue involving Indigenous and settler people in Canada (Atleo and Boron, 2022). Settler understandings of land have been primarily shaped by the idea that land is a commodity to be bought, sold, and exploited. In contrast, Indigenous understandings of land are holistic, spiritually grounded, and deeply intertwined with the natural world, emphasizing the importance of relationships, reciprocity, and a lifelong commitment to learning, teaching, and personal growth (Simpson, 2014). Perhaps the most destructive legal mechanism introduced by settler colonialism is the concept of private property and property regimes (Kepkiewicz et al., 2019). The introduction of private property regimes, where land is owned and controlled by individuals or entities, starkly contrasted with many Indigenous notions of communal and custodial relationships with the land. Legal frameworks pertaining to private property criminalized traditional practices of Indigenous Peoples, such as nomadic lifestyles, food systems, and communal land use, effectively legitimizing their dispossession and marginalization.

The CLT model, which is rooted in the principles of communal land ownership and stewardship, offers a framework for Indigenous communities and organizations to navigate the complexities of land rights and stewardship. Using the CLT model, Indigenous communities can assert greater control over their lands, safeguarding them against external developmental pressures by ensuring they are used in ways that align with traditional values and contemporary needs. As the interviewees share below, Indigenous and Indigenous-led CLTs are emerging as a compelling model for addressing the unique land use and housing needs of Indigenous communities and organizations in Canada. It is these insights we turn to next.



Findings

PART 1

Indigenous Community Land Trusts in Canada: What Are They in This Moment?

CLT models are not necessarily a 'slam dunk' for reconceptualizing land in a way that aligns with Indigenous worldviews, however, interviewees reveal insights on ICLTs emerging as a strong starting point. ICLTs have different mandates depending on their scale, location, and potential constituents and members. Many CLTs and ICLTs outside of Canada (including in the US and New Zealand) focus on land reclamation (e.g. native species and reclaiming medicines), while others have an additional mandate to support language and culture revitalization. In an urban context, ICLTs can support Indigenous people finding safe, affordable housing (Gibbons, 2016; Manning et al., 2023), and they are a way to protect and reclaim burial sites and belongings. Our findings suggest ICLTs are emerging with ambitious visions for housing, stewardship, healing, and decolonial practice.

What Are the Main Ideas and Innovations?

Indigenous Community Land Trusts Supporting Local First Nations Members Living in Urban Centres

A particularly important aspect of ICLTs is their presence - or intention to be - in urban centres in Canada. For the housing practitioner below, a CLT model is not just a way to pursue housing, it serves a broader purpose of land back actions in urban contexts:

*A [land trust] very quickly became a bigger idea around **how could local First Nations and other communities be collaborating on an urban presence** with a land trust that could look at land back in urban contexts... not just to look at land for housing but also for **cultural significance and for its environmental conservation significance** (P2).*

CLTs have the potential to address the challenges faced by a growing number of Indigenous people living in urban centres.¹ There are many reasons why Indigenous people may live in urban areas in cities is their potential to support First Nation community members living off reserve. An interviewee explains how the potential for land reclamation in urban environments enables a sense of belonging when community members from a local First Nation move to an urban area:

*We came across some really cool examples of land reclamation that have happened in highly urbanized areas like Los Angeles and what land reclamation has looked like over there and **what it could mean for communities to have a gathering place where they can conduct ceremony, where they can grow food, and that can be accessible to community membership** (P2).*

Another interviewee explained how many First Nations communities in Northern Ontario (including their reserve lands and territories) are constantly encroached on by resource and urban development.² Several First Nations' reserves and territories are adjacent to municipal-owned lands and are negatively impacted by land use decisions made by colonial governments. While Canadian municipalities have responsibilities to uphold Indigenous rights, most municipalities continue to struggle to work with Indigenous Peoples in many areas of policy (Heritz, 2018; Asher, 2023). Another recent study suggests municipal planners have been (and continue to be) unaware or uninterested in local Indigenous communities or unsure of how to build a relationship with Indigenous Peoples living within municipal boundaries or adjacent areas (Pysklywec et al., 2022). A practitioner living in Northern Ontario discusses how a CLT model could be an opportunity for municipalities to work with the Indigenous Nation(s) on whose territory the municipality sits. For example, a CLT can be an alternative to a First Nation purchasing land back.

*A lot of **communities are facing pressure from all sides...**[from] lands owned by municipal property or [with] zoning bylaws. It's very interesting to see how municipalities could get rid of tax burdens **like under-used properties that could be allocated towards more cost-effective housing that is owned by the Nation.** Rather than [the Nation] having to buy up actual properties the traditional way through purchasing and all this other stuff. It just lessens the burden on communities to have to buy property, as well as [helps] municipalities go under the banner of reconciliation (P1).*

These insights reveal ICLTs represent a long-term act of reconciliation because the process of implementing a CLT creates space for relationship building between municipal governments and local First Nations.

1 There were 1.8 million Indigenous people (including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) living in Canada in 2021. In that same year, 801,045 Indigenous people were living in large urban centres (Statistic Canada, 2021).

2 Despite a First Nation having an active land claim, Canadian governments (often referred to as "the Crown") are not legally required to halt on-going development projects (i.e. forestry, mining) and initiatives in the claim area.

Indigenous Community Land Trusts Offer More Than Just Affordable Housing for Local First Nation Members and Urban Indigenous Diaspora

A key offering of an Indigenous CLT is their ability to serve individuals, particularly Indigenous women, with secure safe and stable housing for the long-term. This is called security of tenure³, which is the idea that renters *should* have legal protections against forced evictions, harassment, and other threats to their tenancies. As an interviewee explains one of the biggest challenges for women who wish to rent, own, or build their new home is security of tenure:

*Security of tenure is a huge thing, right? Like you can technically build a tiny house anywhere but if you get kicked off [the land], you're left with nothing. **One of the biggest promises of a project like a land trust is the security of tenure in perpetuity (P2).***

However, practitioners believe ICLTs are more than a way to provide perpetual, affordable housing for urban Indigenous people. **Indigenous CLTs are spaces of stewardship and land-based healing.** A practitioner explains the intention of the Calgary Urban Indigenous Community Land Trust is to promote **healing** through the housing spectrum:

*I think about how in my community here in Calgary, how many Indigenous people actually own their own home. **They are very little.** I wanted to see that housing isn't just about throwing people into permanent supportive housing. But as Indigenous people, [for] those of us doing well, we can afford market rentals or buy our homes. But there's so many of us still struggling on the healing path that **just putting people into housing programs or subsidized housing isn't the answer.** We need more ways to be more expansive, to give people opportunities and empower them to do better and to achieve better for themselves. And **housing is part of that capacity of feeling good about who you are (P4).***

³ For a detailed explanation of security of tenure in the Canadian context, please see Security of Tenure in Canada; Summary Report, commissioned by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Summary%20Report-Security%20of%20Tenure%20in%20Canada.pdf>

The Calgary Urban Indigenous CLT proposal also articulates the importance of having different levels of supports and resources embedded within affordability housing options of the CLT. For example, their CLT intends to direct resources towards individuals continuing to heal from intergenerational trauma – often dealing with addiction and mental health - and experiencing housing instability. The intended outcome is, as individuals continue on their healing path and get stronger, they can transition to another space within the CLT that offers affordable rental options. Taking this a step further, residents will then have an opportunity to buy into affordable home ownership. An interviewee concisely explained this healing-centred approach by saying:

*We need supports in line that [will] provide that stability, but also to build up more from a healing-centred approach. Where you're not just giving a house to people **but you're helping them along the way to regain that connection to themselves as an Indigenous person**, but also re-sparking that connection to culture and building out your community from there (P4).*

The 'connection to culture' mentioned in the above quote speaks to how **healing extends beyond housing to the land**. Through conversations with Elders, an important aspect of this CLT is not just the proposed buildings and infrastructure on the land, but also reclaiming the spirit of the land itself. As an interviewee explained, the intent is to find different parcels of land throughout the city and design the physical structures (e.g. housing) in a way that reclaims the land from an Indigenous perspective:

*Like, an oil company can go in and reclaim the land and revive some of the things that were taken away through this toxic process of collecting oil from the land. But what's missing, and from an Indigenous perspective, is **the spirit of the land hasn't been replaced**. Those are the kinds of conversations that we're having with the Elders that have really driven a different perspective than what we intended to when we first started the project. But I think it's super valuable in that we changed our perspective from 'what is the design of the housing to look like on community land trust' to **what does the land look like and how do the buildings and the communities [fit] around it?** (P4).*

The emphasis on the housing being more than just houses. Instead, housing as part of a larger vision of healing and land stewardship is powerful and speaks to the ambition and drive of Indigenous Peoples to advance their well-being and governance.

Indigenous Community Land Trusts Supporting Indigenous Planning and City Building

Indigenous Peoples rightfully claim urban spaces as their home and expect to play a meaningful role in the planning of their cities (Nejad et al., 2019; Tomiak et al., 2019). Indigenous Peoples have responded to the dominant forms of urban planning by enacting their own planning practices that remain accountable to Indigenous communities and not settler structures (Matugna, 2013). Following from this, both authors reflected on how CLTs are a way for Indigenous Peoples to reclaim space in urban areas for themselves.

*And in terms of knowing what you can help with, I don't really know yet because again we're building it out. We didn't want to model it after any other community land trust. **We wanted to give it the opportunity to grow and develop upon itself** so it can be in essence a true indigenous model (P4).*

Importantly, CLTs are a way for Indigenous Peoples to not only see themselves represented in cities, but to demonstrate Indigenous Peoples as 'city builders' with their own set of knowledge, skills, and training equal to (if not more adequate than) city planners. ICLTs hold the potential to transform the city, not just for urban Indigenous people, but for all residents.



What Are the Main Challenges for Indigenous Community Land Trusts?

Land Trusts Are a New Option to an Already Complex Land Base

CLTs meant to support Indigenous governance and well-being goals are relatively new in Canada. A challenge for ICLT practitioners is educating community members (either living on reserve or in urban areas) and Indigenous governments of their purpose and relevance to their Nation. This challenge is exacerbated by the complicated and overlapping jurisdictions already existing over Canada's land base. A practitioner advocating for an urban ICLT explains below the difficulties with trying to introduce yet another land tenure system to lands covered by treaties. This is not to say this challenge cannot be overcome, but it is one that is currently taking up a lot of time, energy, and resources.

*...[we] are doing a lot of education and promotion about what exactly is a land trust, and it's been one of the biggest barriers to overcome. **People really don't understand the usefulness or relevancy of it and the different types of land trusts available.** We've had to do a lot of outreach to get community support from that perspective, because especially on First Nations territories, the right to land and title varies depending on what treaty lands you're on, where you are located geographically, and **it creates a lot of confusion and complexity to an already complex system** (P4).*

It can be difficult to convince Indigenous leaders and band councils of the benefits of this model without successful examples of land trusts in Indigenous contexts.

I think a lot of people are afraid of taking risks and validly so because you don't when it comes to things like land titles and land ownership and who owns [the land] and who's going to govern it. Those are all really big questions that people have challenges around understanding if it's going to be beneficial for them (P2).

One interviewee highlighted the mistrust First Nations governments can have when entities and organizations from outside a First Nation (e.g. non-profits) ask to engage or collaborate on projects and initiatives tied to land and governance (P1). Further, First Nations communities and governments continue to work hard every day to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism (e.g. housing, employment, infrastructure, language revitalization, etc.), rendering the development and operation of a CLT another task to undertake with limited financial and human resources.

As explained below, for a First Nation in Northern Ontario, interest in an ICLT from community members and leadership is growing, albeit slowly:

*I think **people are keen to hear the messaging** and will attend the feasts and seem well on it, but because there is such a workload on communities already to just deal with whatever's happening... it's been slow as molasses. **Even if we've gotten positive responses, it's still very, very slow** (P1).*

Overcoming these barriers requires sincere, time-consuming efforts to build trust, emphasizing listening, learning, and fundamentally aligning CLT operations with principles that respect Indigenous sovereignty and rights.

In response to the challenges noted above, a First Nation and Indigenous organization in Northern Ontario have embarked on a pilot project to help garner support for a CLT model among leadership and community members. One interviewee explained their First Nation had recently acquired a property from the adjacent municipality and it is being converted into a common space for community members to use as they wish. The interviewee explains the pilot project as a physical way to show the value of a CLT:

*We're hoping that through **doing a physical pilot and demonstrating the value physically** and showing 'hey, you know, this is a possibility. **We can all have this shared property and utilize it however we want.**' That would be the pull that we're really looking for (P1).*



Yet, Indigenous and Indigenous-led organizations are continuing to do the hard work of promoting the concept of a CLT:

***It's been harder than we thought.** Like, honestly, we were like, 'Oh this is a great idea!' You would think people would just jump right in. But no, it's very difficult (P1).*

One Indigenous non-profit has pivoted to pitch the idea of developing a CLT as an arm of their organization, with open membership to the urban Indigenous community, women, and gender diverse people to join. But as an interviewee from the non-profit highlights, often the “regular challenges of working within an organizational environment where [you] don't have consistency in carrying it out” (P2) can slow things down. Here the interviewee also speaks to the importance of **relationship building and time** when developing a land trust:

*I feel like...you need to have somebody that's **consistently building relationships** and working on the inside and **talking to people all the time**. You can establish [the entity] over a day. It's the relationship building that has to be very consistent, and I think that's where the challenge is in terms of capacity, right? Like when you try to do things in a meaningful way, in a good way, walking alongside other people. **You have to give it the time that it's going to need to do this kind of work and sometimes doing it through a nonprofit that has project-based staff, that could be very difficult (P2).***

Importantly, it is not only ICLTs focusing on a healing centred approach. An urban CLT in Vancouver - with a governance model that reflects commitment from multiple organizations - is also aiming to “reject the standard colonial model of housing where every person gets a box and then they close the door, which is practically a metaphor for coffins” (P6). This practitioner wants to develop a model that “rejects aloneness and embraces togetherness and connection, not only to each other, but to the land, to the building, to the city, to everything” (P6). In this way, by emphasizing connection, this CLT is addressing loneliness, another fast-growing mental health challenge for all people.

PART 2

How Do CLTs Work Towards Decolonizing their Practices?

*Well, get used to asking some questions of yourself like: **how colonized is this?** what I'm doing here right now? And am I advancing colonization?
Can I do less of that? (P6).*

A challenging reality for CLTs and CLT supporting organizations is they must contend with the legacies of Canada's settler colonial history and embrace their role in decolonization work. This challenge is amplified because decolonization means different things to different people. In the seminal piece, *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, Tuck and Yang (2012) point out that settler colonialism and its decolonization implicate and unsettle everyone, arguing that decolonization is about the return of land and Indigenous life. By making decolonization about anything else, including ongoing efforts related to education reform, it encourages "settler moves to innocence" that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity. Other scholars and practitioners take a more pragmatic approach to decolonization, conceptualizing it as the processes of undoing colonial practices and transforming existing institutions. Author and practitioner, Bob Joseph, explains acts of decolonization restore Indigenous worldviews, restore culture and languages, and replace Western interpretations of history with Indigenous perspectives of history (Joseph, 2017). Decolonization is about shifting the way Indigenous Peoples view themselves and the way non-Indigenous people view Indigenous people. While agreeing that the central work of decolonization is the return of land, the authors' guiding principle, at least for now, is that decolonization work is for everyone and enacting it is crucial. That said, decolonization work will look different for non-Indigenous peoples than it does for Indigenous Peoples.

How are CLTs Enacting Decolonial Practice?

CLTs can and must take substantive action to decolonizing their organizational structures and governance models. This work will be difficult and a long-term process. The how of decolonizing is emerging, and CLTs have much to learn from one another. The DTES CLT in Vancouver shared helpful insights about the approaches they use to enact decolonization, namely drawing on what 'connectedness' means from an Indigenous perspective and emphasizing community-building in response to intergenerational trauma stemming from (amongst others) Indian residential schools and the creation of the reserve system. To address the trauma of colonization, success lies in understanding that the land is an ancestor and a relative.

We needed a different model, which was [a] decolonizing model of community-building. And the idea that, well to us [as Indigenous Peoples], the idea that everyone is separate, everyone is an individual, everyone is alone, that doesn't make sense to us. **We know we are part of the land. We are part of our community. We are part of this earth** (P6).

In reference to the meaning of community-building above, enacting decolonizing means, first, recognizing the tools of colonization (e.g. the English language) and understanding how they work. This is followed by “taking those tools and using them against colonization. If that means CLTs and coming up with a different model of ownership and relationship to the land then so be it” (P6).

To work towards community building that fit the definitions of decolonization, DTES CLT organizers reflected on their governance model and agreed that “problems created by colonization cannot be solved by solutions developed out of colonized ways of being and thinking” (P6). A practitioner at the DTES CLT explains that the idea of connectedness was intentionally embedded in the beginnings of this CLT:

*...that began several conversations and [garnered] **commitment from multiple diverse organizations**. So, it was Indigenous, it was non-Indigenous. It was a blend of the Japanese-Canadian community. People preserving housing, people fighting evictions, people battling overdose, preventing overdose, multiple food security groups. [We] could all agree that we needed to mobilize and find solutions and propose solutions to problems that were created by colonization (P6).*

The practitioner goes on to make a clear distinction between Indigenous worldviews, and what they call non-Indigenous worldviews. Here, an Indigenous practitioner emphasizes a key difference between the worldviews is the concept of being alone. They explain:

*And for ours [Indigenous worldview], you're never alone. I may be the only human in 1,000 miles, but man, I got the mountain. I got the river. I got the animals, the trees, everything. And what a difference it makes. **[Indigenous worldviews] gives you access to all the power, all the healing, all the medicine. Colonization separates you from everything**. So, if we can help people remember that sense of connection to everything, it's almost magic, that it relieves so much of that other stuff, those anxieties, those fears, those sadnesses, the grief, the depression, and **so much more becomes possible** (P6).*

In other words, the DTES CLT views the CLT model as nimble enough to operate with aspects of an Indigenous worldview and in ways that will make the CLT fairer, more balanced, and healing. In their words:

*[We] identified the roots of people's behaviour as **disconnection**. Disconnection from land, from community, from family, from self. And so, it's **reestablishing all those connections that makes people healthier and stronger and happier**. If we can do that, and it's true, the more connected people are, the healthier and happier and stronger they are, and then **we can work more effectively together to protect housing**, maintain housing. Once the tenants understand that they have what's called agency...then they can take care of the place themselves, and they will. **And they will take care of each other.***

Here, collaboration between many groups can foster mutual understanding and support for broader social justice goals, serving as a bridge between different communities.

How Do CLTs Support the Flourishing of ICLTs?

*I think of the Indigenous approach, and if I was to try and boil it into two words, it's **listen and help**. So, listen to everything: the land, the water, ancestors, everything with all those senses, and then help. But not just help yourself, **help everything**. You have to help the balance so that everything is better (P6).*

Efforts from CLT practitioners, residents and advocates are underway to support the growth of ICLTs. These efforts are hopeful and focus on relationship and trust, which will take time and resources. A CLT practitioner explains the concept of a CLT is “often white people, white-led organizations talking about acquiring land and obtaining a larger land base. I think it can easily slip into a very colonial mindset” (P5). This practitioner also clearly highlights the tensions when CLTs claim to be stewards of land:

*...where it's like community land trusts are models of collective land stewardship but **there's a tension where when we're on stolen land and Indigenous Peoples have been stewards since land immemorial**. So, who are this new group to now be like 'we're the stewards' (P5).*

At the same time, the process of developing and implementing a CLT is a potential pathway for settler-led organizations to work differently with Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and organizations by establishing relationships early on in the process. The CNCLT exemplifies these efforts:

*I'm trying to plant the seeds now and do the networking and talk to people and make introductions and relationship-build because I don't want the network to develop where it's a board of 10 people and there's 'the Indigenous chair'. **We need to come together in an actual meaningful way because land is central to the question** (P5).*

A clear challenge linked to relationship building is capacity and resources. This includes a CLT's capacity to engage with and build working relationships with Indigenous organizations and the local First Nations on whose land their CLT is situated, and the capacity of Indigenous CLTs organizations to engage with CLTs. An interviewee reveals that determining what Indigenous-serving organization to partner with can be challenging because of decades of colonial policy and mistrust:

*...[organizations] are **inundated with requests constantly** to consult on every single freaking thing, and we're just this tiny neighbourhood organization right...it just doesn't feel appropriate for us to be a random group of people in a neighbourhood to be approaching Nations formally (P3).*

The sentiment below highlights that CLTs and ICLTs work within well-designed colonial structures, making efforts to decolonize practices and processes more pressing. For example:

*Aboriginal Family and Child Services have a massive building but 1,000 layers of bureaucracy to get one form processed for one resident. They almost don't feel like [Indigenous organizations] in the way that people want to talk about them. **Those are colonial bureaucratic systems that interface with Indigenous life and actually the majority are a hindrance to our work in the most practical everyday sense (P3).***

The CNCLT is very intentional about their approach to supporting and advancing the scalability of ICLTs across the country. Specifically, the CNCLT supports knowledge mobilization, facilitates connections, and provides technical support to settler-led and ICLTs. For example, during the development of the CNCLT's strategic plan, an intentional choice was made not to include a separate pillar for social justice and reconciliation, but instead to ensure these concepts are integrated meaningfully into each pillar. For example, research partnerships involving Indigenous communities and/or organizations need to be led, where possible, by Indigenous people.

The CNCLT is also educating settler-led members on the ways they can support Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and CLTs by **going beyond land acknowledgements**.

*We **commit to supporting Indigenous-led community land trusts** through various means, whether it's technical support, doing research projects... Another element is committing to educating our settler-led members and really encouraging them with concrete examples of things they can do and encouraging them to **go beyond land acknowledgement (P5).***



The Toronto Chinatown Community Land Trust is working on two active and notable projects: 1) including land acknowledgements in different languages, and 2) archival work to demonstrate historic (and present day) relationship building and solidarity between Indigenous residents and Chinatown residents:

*there is the development of a **new Chinatown land acknowledgement**. There hasn't been one done in a multilingual context, since the 40s. And so, [this] is their own translation project for educating our members and community, and then there is archival history, trying to showcase instances of **solidarity between Indigenous residents of Chinatown and then the founding community members** that form Chinatown (P3).*

CLTs can take on the role of educator and teach residents, governance boards, partnering organizations, adjacent neighbourhoods, and others about Indigenous histories in Canada, reconciliation, and meanings of decolonization and land justice. This lessens the burden on Indigenous members of the CLT and practitioners who often take on these educator roles:

*One big mandate that we felt needed to exist in Chinatown was that we needed to... **take the emotional labor away from other people and to deal with our own community**. So, educating the Chinatown community themselves about why they should be supportive of the land back movement, why they should hear about it is a lot of the focus of the educational resources and membership engagement that we want to do (P3).*

Settler-led and Indigenous CLTs continue to do an enormous amount of meaningful work (e.g. equity policies and reconciliation efforts), however this work is not necessarily decolonization work in practice. For example, having a land acknowledgment, murals, medicine gardens, translation projects, and offering services in Indigenous languages are all worth spending time and resources on, but do not go far enough. As an interviewee explains, there is a lot CLTs could do in terms of equity policies, including:

- allocating 20% of housing units to Indigenous tenancy applications
- signing tenant access/referral agreements with Indigenous housing supportive service organizations/agencies
- mandating a percentage of board seats be representatives from local Indigenous groups and Nations
- observing local culturally significant dates and festivals for scheduling, payments, and operations
- including cashback/donations/voluntary property taxes into budgets as assumed overhead

The interview data suggests CLT practitioners agree on the potential for CLTs to work in better working relationships with Indigenous Peoples and with the land. CLTs and ICLTs can and do share many of the same values and vision. For instance, land stewardship in the context of a CLT in Toronto can be understood as the “ability to host” and “the ability for new life to emerge” (P3). By this the interviewee is speaking to the potential for the “literal stewardship and health of land and plants and living beings on that space” (P3). In this context, stewardship also means the implementation of flexible and adaptable policies, services, and mutual aid structures. For example, the Chinatown CLT had the capacity to welcome an entire wave of refugees and change its dominant languages. Interestingly, this interviewee also emphasises the practical meaning of land stewardship by relating CLTs to ‘playing the game’ of real estate. They explain CLTs can be both visionary *and* practical:

*We have a real estate problem so [we need] a **real estate solution** to fix it. Community land trusts are not a dreamscape. They're not this incredible transcendent thing in and of itself. It's just a **strategy that exists in the now and here because I'm getting evicted.** And both of those are so true (P3).*



Yet, powerful and aspirational examples of allyship are also found in the US context, such as efforts of a community organization supporting the Sogorea Te' Land Trust in Lisjan (Ohlone) in the San Francisco Bay Area (Manning et al., 2023). A practitioner explains below, more than just an educational campaign, sincere efforts for supporting **land back** are highly regarded:

*We had heard from talking to organizers in San Francisco at the Sogorea Te' Land Trust - that's their Indigenous land trust project **which is explicitly a land bank project** - and they have a coalition called the Jewish Oakland Residents for the Sogorea Te' Land Trust and they're solely in charge of **advocating [within] their own community to voluntarily pay property taxes towards Sogorea Te' instead of the City of San Francisco.** And so that's a **real, monetary, tangible, land back, supportive initiative** and...if we can identify organizers [who] are explicitly trying to buy property, that would be pretty cool. If we could replicate that up here or spread the idea.*

Larger questions remain: are CLTs a path for Indigenous Peoples to take back their land? Can CLTs be used to abolish the concept and practice of private property? If the assumption is private property is an absolute, then at best CLTs offer a more ethical, community-based model to distribute the benefits of land ownership. Similarly, Indigenous CLTs are a way for Nations and the Indigenous urban diaspora to gain autonomy over their housing, healing, and governance. If, however, the goal is decolonization – meaning the dismantling of private property - CLTs would not need to exist, and different forms of land stewardship could take place. For several interviewees and housing scholars, the larger work and question is to target the existence of private property.

I just don't think CLTs are it. I don't think that if our core goal is decolonization, and we agree on that, CLTs are one blip in the middle of like a big unlocking, which is resisting the existence of the private property system in the first place (P3).



Conclusion

*The [DTES CLT] has **hope in each other** and the ideas. The more we talk to people and share the vision, **the more people are absolutely on [our] side and say, 'whatever you need'** (P6).*

CLTs have emerged as a compelling model for addressing the unique land use and housing needs of Indigenous communities, organizations, and the urban Indigenous diaspora in Canada. Indigenous practitioners are keen to use the classic CLT model as a foundation from which to build ICLTs focused on healing-centred approaches to housing and land stewardship. There are several ways in which the ethos and practice of CLTs align with Indigenous perspectives, including being generational:

*Community land trusts are something to be thought of **generationally**, they're something that grows slow often...so that **stewardship develops over time** and looks differently over time (P5).*

Indigenous and Indigenous-led organizations know their strengths and the types of supports and resources they will need, especially in establishing a CLT. Continuing to nurture connections and foster a network of CLT and housing practitioners is crucial. As this CLT practitioner recognizes, **this work will be slow but transformational:**

*It feels like a lot of the housing sector is in the issues definition, it's like 'here is a new report...and it says there's a housing crisis.' ... [CLT] work I find more solutions-oriented. At the same time, let's not rush to any solution, let's still do the slow work where it's needed. But I find it exciting, and in the grand scheme of things, if it does take several years to build a strong governance model, **but your organization is going to steward lands for generation after generation, then it's worth it, you know** (P5).*

At this moment, CLTs “are one of the most accessible, high potential structures to invite a gradual and critical mass of transformation beyond the colonial property system (P3).” ICLTs offer more than affordable housing; they foster a living model that reinforces community connections and collective well-being, challenging the individualistic living models perpetuated by colonial systems. Developing trust, building relationships, and recognizing the slowness of the work are of utmost importance.

With the emergence of ICLTs in Canada (and beyond) it behooves the research community to support the growth of ICLTs and CLTs for the benefit of all. Potential future research questions include:

- How do ICLTs enact ethics of relationality and reciprocity between and among diverse peoples beginning to recognize their responsibilities in/to Indigenous lands?
- How do settler-led CLTs enact land back? Are CLT initiatives better thought of as anti-colonial projects within colonial, capitalist systems?
- How do we address the Residential Tenancy Act from an Indigenous lens?
- How are CLTs a unique offering of transformative strategies/non-reformist anti-colonial strategies?
- What does collective governance look like for an ICLT to thrive?

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