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Challenging gentrification:
Community struggle in CLT H-Buurt, Amsterdam

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Abstract

In recent years, community land trusts (CLT) have emerged globally as strategies for community-based development, collective land stewardship and affordable housing provision in contexts undergoing pressures related to gentrification. Offering an alternative approach to land ownership based on the idea that land is a public rather than a private good, CLTs function as a steward for affordable housing and other community amenities in perpetuity, on behalf of — and even in favour of — communities. We explore the impact of CLTs on pressures related to gentrification, and specifically on displacement, drawing on the case of H-Buurt in south-east Amsterdam. Viewing this case through ideas on the urban commons and the right to the city, we establish a framework of CLTs-as-commons to understand the impacts of community-based alternatives on gentrification. The article contributes to theoretical debates on CLTs in the context of the commons, drawing empirical insights from the case of Amsterdam. Contributing to limited work on the impact of CLTs under gentrification, we suggest that, while not a universal solution to tackle such challenges, this approach may be effective for those gaining access to housing, or for those living in communities supported by community amenities.

Keywords
Community land trusts, gentrification, right to the city, urban commons, housing

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Introduction

Over the past decades, community land trusts (CLT) have emerged as strategies for community-based development, collective land stewardship and affordable housing provision, especially in contexts undergoing pressure sparked by gentrification (Bunce, 2018; Choi et al., 2018). These alternative community-based forms of housing provision attempt to mitigate gentrification-related challenges. As a form of community control over land considered a commons, these strategies are part of a broader movement towards local autonomy and collective ownership for social reproduction (DeFilippis, 2004). Functioning as a non-profit organisation holding titles to plots of land for the community to provide affordable housing or community amenities, CLTs offer an alternative approach to land ownership, organisation and operational activities, distinguishing them from other forms of ownership or housing provision (Davis, 2010). This approach emerged in the United States during the late 1960s, later expanding globally to foster community participation to produce, preserve and manage affordable housing (Moore & McKee, 2012). These arrangements generally involve the following three components: *self-organisation*, represented by the word 'community'; *shared ownership*, represented by the word 'land'; and the *management of property*, represented by the word 'trust' (Davis, 2020).

CLTs are based on the notion that land is a public asset rather than a private good. Through this principle, a community—often through a non-profit organisation—owns and leases land to individual residents, typically acquired through purchase or donation; land is provided through a long-term ground lease to residents owning their homes. CLTs establish restrictions on resale prices of units to guarantee affordability, also serving as long-term stewards of the land. Their membership often follows an open governance model, meaning that anyone can apply as a member if they live within the service area, ranging from neighbourhoods to regions or cities. The board of the organisation is often elected by community members, while seats on the board are divided among those representing residents of the land and residents in the service area, and public representatives.

Globally, many of these community-based strategies have been used in diverse ways to tackle broader challenges, like those related to gentrification. A key phenomenon shaping contemporary cities (Lees et al., 2016), gentrification is often framed as an urban strategy (Smith, 2002) leading to class transformation and the creation of affluent space (Doucet, 2014). While such processes vary widely, they often revolve around neighbourhood change, whereby affluent people move into a neighbourhood previously inhabited by those with lower incomes (Atkinson, 2014). The concept was first coined to refer to the influx of the 'gentry' into London, whereby the arrival of affluent residents caused housing prices to rise, leading to displacement (Glass, [1964]2010). Debates on gentrification are often polarized, focusing on supply- or demand-side approaches. For those advocating supply-side theories, gentrification is an outcome of capitalism, emerging from flows of capital championed by developers, landlords and investors (Smith, 1987). Likewise, demand-side theorists posit that gentrification results from the relocation of professional and upper middle-class homeowners into city neighbourhoods, and the demographic factors as causes for capital rather than flows of capital. For Ley (1980), a change in demand drives gentrification through

shifts of post-industrial cities, including towards a service economy, and from large associations to governments, altering housing demand. Within this view, pioneers first move into a neighbourhood laying the foundation for gentrification. Later, other groups also move in, leading to growing populations experiencing insecurity about their neighbourhood, housing, and community (Atkinson, 2004; Blasius et al., 2016; Marcuse, 2015).

Given these diverse debates about gentrification, it has been perceived as highly complex, without a unified theory (Beauregard, 1986). Thus, Knieriem (2023, p. 4) suggests that gentrification is a moving target, meaning it is "always on the move." Some authors note the positive effects resulting from gentrification, including supporting renovation or upgraded dwellings (Rose, 1984), or retreating from disinvestment of inner-city neighbourhoods (Freeman, 2005). However, considerable literature on gentrification focuses on its negative effects related to the displacement of the working class by the upper-middle classes, and relocation as a negative outcome of this process. One of the main negative effects associated with gentrification relates to displacement, as gentrification often compels long-standing residents and businesses to move (Angotti, 2012; Lees et al., 2008). Likewise, with the influx of investment from neighbourhood change, the potential for community destruction is also at issue (Betancur, 2011). In this article, our focus in broader gentrification debates is on displacement and displacement pressure. The literature suggests different reasons sparking gentrification, including being led by urban policy to create a mixed group (Hochstenbach, 2017), being driven by the commercial environment (Zukin, 2008), or as a demand for housing by affluent groups (Boterman & van Gent, 2014).

As a strategy to preserve long-term affordable housing and community building in neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification pressure, CLTs aim to remove housing—and therefore land—from the market. These plots are taken out of the market in perpetuity, meaning they stay within the community. Choi et al. (2018) suggest that these benefits can help mitigate the negative effects of gentrification—like displacement—by ensuring a lasting stock of high-quality, affordable housing remains in place, even when new investments create market-driven increases in real estate value. More specifically, Choi et al. (2018) specify three benefits of CLTs seen to mitigate the negative effects of gentrification. These include: to preserve affordable housing by removing houses and land from the market; to improve neighbourhood stability, such as by increasing length of residency, preventing displacement of low-income households, maintaining units' conditions by ensuring secure tenure, or avoiding speculative investment from areas undergoing gentrification pressures; and to contribute to building community amenities. In this way, CLTs are viewed as buffering the adverse effects of gentrification. Yet rather than a cure-all, Bunce (2018) suggests that community-based alternatives to housing provision and land ownership may challenge local gentrification processes and promote community self-determination. Drawing on Slater's (2009, p. 307) argument that critical work on gentrification "must *bring social justice back in* to research on the housing question", Bunce (2018) suggests this as an opening to integrate community-based alternatives challenging gentrification. This call for further research on community alternatives and the modest results thus far, combined with a widespread expansion of the number of CLTs globally (Davis, 2020; Lowe et al., 2022) suggest the need

for further research on their impacts in different contexts. Therefore, in this article, we contribute to research on the impact of CLTs on gentrification pressures, and its effects on displacement pressure.

We explore the case of a CLT in the neighbourhood of H-Buurt in Amsterdam Zuidoost, a gentrifying area in the city's south-east. Given promising results in other places, the CLT model is considered a possible solution for the H-Buurt community, even contributing to challenging the Dutch housing crisis (And The People/CLT Bijlmer, 2020; Burgers & Pijl, 2022). While CLTs have been explored in different contexts globally, H-Buurt is the first Dutch community to use this concept for housing provision. Within Amsterdam's highly regulated housing market, there has been little research on the effects of CLTs, making this a unique opportunity to investigate. We view this case through ideas on the urban commons and the right to the city to understand the impact of community-based alternatives on the negative effects of gentrification. We employ the concept of the urban commons, seeking to counter the commodification of rights like housing, together with ideas on the right to the city proposed by Lefebvre (1991) as a right to the appropriation of space (Foster, 2019). In such contexts, communities aim to gain control of their own housing and urban development processes. We suggest that such practices mirror the principles of the right to the city as a vision going beyond capitalism, where urban space is managed by city users themselves (Lefebvre, 1991). To identify the impact of the CLT, we establish what we term a CLTs-as-commons framework, characterising the impact of urban commons on the urban fabric, and distinguish three types of impacts: (1) *resilience*; (2) *incorporation*; and (3) *transformation and resistance* (Caciagli & Milan, 2021).

This article is a qualitative exploration of the impact of CLTs on the effects of gentrification, drawing on the case of Amsterdam. We answer the following research question: What impact do CLTs have on the challenges arising from gentrification? Data collection included 11 semi-structured interviews between May and November 2022, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. This included 5 interviews with local stakeholders from the case of CLT H-Buurt, including those working in the H-Buurt community and the CLT, employees from the municipality of Amsterdam, and stakeholders from And The People (ATP), an organisation supporting the CLT. Alongside these interviews on the case of H-Buurt, we conducted 6 key expert interviews with international experts from CLTs in other contexts as a means to make accurate statements about the progress of the Amsterdam case. Given that no other case in the Netherlands existed when this research began, cases from the global context were also incorporated. Alongside these interviews, we also conducted document analysis of relevant policy documents, giving insight into the development and reach of the CLT as a strategy in tackling gentrification in the case of Amsterdam. We identified documents using keywords related to CLTs (eg. community-building, participation, affordability, sustainable/circular development, and collaborative city-making), and additional material recommended by interviewees, such as a whitepaper written by those involved in the CLT and municipal policy documents on the city's general vision. The interviews and documents were analysed through thematic analysis (Bryman, 2016). In our analysis, we explored community building, finance, governance of the CLT, its

history and relationships, and its impact related to gentrification and displacement pressure based on three impact categories: resilience; incorporation; and transformation and resistance (Caciagli & Milan, 2021).

The remainder of this article is as follows. In the next section, we discuss our theoretical grounding on the right to the city through its link with the notion of the urban commons, thus building a framework on CLTs-as-commons. Setting the context for this research, in the following section we discuss the Amsterdam housing market. Thereafter, we explore the case of CLT H-Buurt, including the interaction between the actors involved, its governance and challenges, and how such impediments affect its success. In the conclusion, we reflect on the broader impacts of CLTs in terms of gentrification.

From the right to the city to the urban commons

Around the world, alternative forms of housing provision and community-based approaches to the challenges of gentrification have proliferated in recent decades to resist dominant forms of consumption through housing de-commodification (Moore & McKee, 2012; Patterson & Dunn, 2009). In such cases, communities effectively take charge of their housing options, and consequently, urban development processes. As discussed above, CLTs are seen to mitigate the negative effects of gentrification by: (1) preserving affordable housing; (2) improving neighbourhood stability; and (3) contributing to building community amenities (Choi et al. 2018). In taking charge of urban development, these practices mirror the principles of the right to the city proposed by Henri Lefebvre (1991) as a vision of a city beyond the state and capitalist system, whereby urban space is managed by the users through a process of *autogestion*, or self-management. While others also use the term *autogestion*, Lefebvre referred to collective decisions managed by people themselves (Purcell, 2014).[1] He critiqued the dominance of economic exchange in cities at the cost of social interactions and everyday life. Lefebvre conceived of the right to the city as a revolution, moving away from the capitalist system. Given the revolutionary nature of this transformation and deeply spatial understanding of such changes, the idea placed urban space at the centre of this vision by appropriating space in the city.

In this conception, the right to the city is a right to the appropriation of urban space, comprising the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy and use urban space. As Lefebvre (1991, p. 54) noted, "a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realised its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses." In such a view, the right to the city aims to create a city serving its residents over investment capital, offering "a radical alternative that directly challenges and rethinks the current structure of both capitalism and liberal-democratic citizenship" (Purcell, 2002, p. 100). As Harvey (2008) suggests, a key element is the increased commodification of basic rights, such as housing.

[1] The literal translation of *autogestion* in English is 'self-management.' In French, it more accurately refers to factory workers taking control of the means of production, managing production themselves (Brenner & Elden, 2009).

Harvey (2008) refers to surplus capital, defined as profit that one has after entrepreneurial activities. Surplus value must be invested in a stable means for it not to depreciate. As Harvey (2008) notes, such forms of surplus get invested in forms of urbanisation that do not serve the majority of people, viewing it as a spatial manifestation of capitalism.

Following Lefebvre's writing on the right to the city in the late 1960s, the idea has been interpreted in numerous ways (Harvey, 2008; Marcuse, 2014; Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2014) and practical experiments at the level of urban policy (Friendly, 2013; Iveson 2013). While Lefebvre's original writings were rather arcane, what emerged was "a set of aphorisms and a key set of concepts that had immediate popular resonance" as possibilities for social change (Mitchell, 2003, p. 17). Given this lack of clarity, Marcuse (2014) suggests multiple readings, making sense of the often contradictory meanings attached to the idea. Within this approach, a subversive reading on the right to the city is useful to understand both the strategic importance of the right to the city's radical intent and its practical realities (Marcuse, 2014). In this subversive reading, its radical intention is maintained without diminishing the strategic power of the idea and everyday reality of those disadvantaged by capitalism. The key is that this reading is transformative, hinting at the utopian meaning of the right to the city in Lefebvre's writings, while achieving immediate, concrete goals through a political outlook, as Granberg and Glover (2021) suggest, using the idea in relation to climate justice. Employing this interpretation, different groups are represented, while the theoretical interpretation of the case is pluralistic. This suggests that the goal underlying transformative changes embodied by a subversive reading of the right to the city requires moving beyond utopian aspirations to provide changes on-the-ground.

As one way towards Marcuse's (2014) subversive reading of the right to the city, the appropriation of space is a tool to counter forms of commodification, suggesting a direct connection between the right to the city and the urban commons. As Foster (2019, p. 170) explains, both ideas "endeavour to reclaim democratic (and collective) control over decisions about how the city develops and to promote greater access of urban space and resources for urban inhabitants, particularly the more vulnerable and marginalized." Here, we employ the idea of the urban commons, as the commodification of basic rights such as housing can be countered in this way. Despite emerging in relation to common pool resources (Ostrom, 1990), more recently, the commons has taken on new meaning within urban contexts, with relevance for collective property-based frameworks challenging the commodification of urban space. The idea of governing the commons thus embodies the principle of community responsibility and decision-making. This concept can be identified as *autogestion*, where a community manages its affairs based on principles of governing the commons.

CLTs-as-Commons

Building on the ideas discussed above, the idea of the right to the city as an appropriation of space is the principle most visible in practices of CLTs. By appropriating space through the establishment of a CLT, de-commodification can be exercised. This means that CLTs can be perceived as forms of commons (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2018; Bunce,

2016; Thompson, 2015). As Foster and Iaione (2016) note, by transferring formerly private land to a CLT, the property would remain affordable for low-income households, allowing residents to self-manage the land as an urban common. As Bezdek (2021) suggests, only some instances function as a commons when they are self-governing. This requires building the commons through stewardship practices to construct 'a knowledge commons,' including commons members' capacity for the self-management necessary to steward the land over time (Bezdek, 2021). Alongside self-governance, this requires rules for transgenerational resource preservation by non-resident neighbours and supportive stakeholders in commons' management. Thus, if CLTs are able to establish affordable housing in neighbourhoods, they can act as bulwarks against gentrification and low-income resident displacement, moderating negative effects of gentrification by increasing affordability, improving neighbourhood stability, and building community amenities (Choi et al., 2018).

As such debates imply, ideas on the commons have considerable relevance for the material dimension of the right to the city. As Maringanti (2011) explains, the right to the city can be materialised by asserting a right to the commons. To understand what we mean here by CLTs-as-commons, we build on a framework by Caciagli and Milan (2021), suggesting a theoretical nesting for CLTs as an urban commons resulting by exercising the right to the city (see Figure 1).[2] The functioning of this framework emphasises the plurality of urban commons arrangements, consisting of four types of urban commons and resulting in three different types of impacts. These types are based on two variables. The first is the *relationship between the commons and the surrounding environment,* represented on the horizontal axis. On the left side of this spectrum is a pre-existing common that becomes accessible to the surrounding environment and community, which may occur through occupation or the appropriation of space (types A and C). On the right side, the spectrum contains an urban commons created by the community, such as through grassroots initiatives (types B and D). The second variable entails the *relationship between the urban commons and institutions*, represented on the vertical axis. The top of the spectrum contains commons characterised as top-down processes, whereby institutions are the initiators, calling on communities to establish the commons. The lower part of the framework contains bottom-up relationships, whereby communities approach institutions to gain support to establish the commons.

Based on these four types, three impacts of urban commons can be distinguished, including: (1) *resilience*; (2) *incorporation*; and (3) *transformation and resistance*, proposed by Caciagli and Milan (2021). First, *resilience* occurs when an urban commons provides basic services no longer provided by the state, filling a gap left by the absence of local policy without challenging broader paradigms. Under this approach, filling such voids may lead to politicisation and resistance to the commodification of urban life by questioning market forces dominant in cities (Camps-Calvet et al., 2015).

[2] The idea of CLTs-as-Commons builds on work by Bezdek (2021).

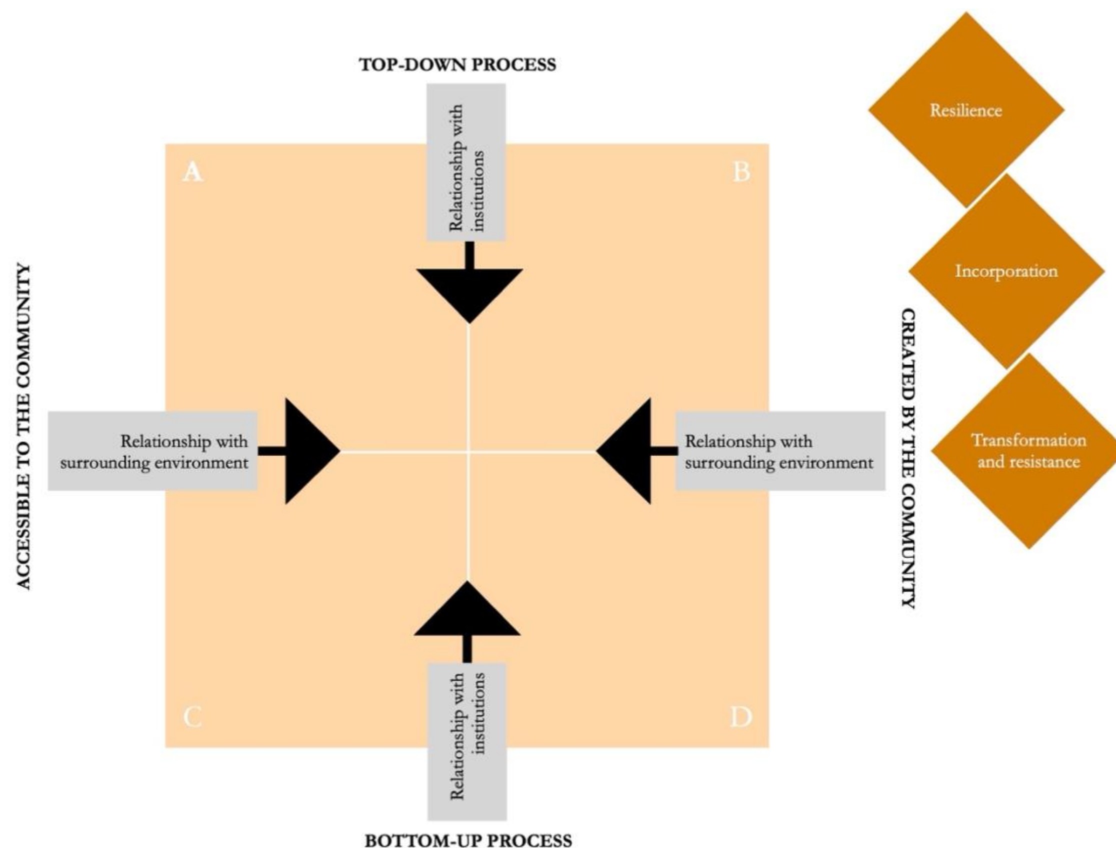


Figure 1
Four types of urban commons.
Source: Authors, based on Caciagli & Milan, 2021.

Second, urban commons may even be *incorporated* into transformation processes like gentrification, where they are then repurposed for other goals. This means that urban commons can be instrumentalized to attract higher-income groups, boost the real estate market, and ultimately even fuel gentrification. This can occur when alternative cultures are "appropriated by the market to construct hipster-fashioned neighbourhoods and to convert what would have been perceived as urban decay into a fashionable and attractive environment for the typical gentrifiers" (Caciagli & Milan, 2021, p. 405). In effect, this incorporation of the urban commons ultimately becomes used by the model of urban development they originally opposed.

Finally, urban commons may have a *transformative* impact if they take on the form of "bulwarks against gentrification and commodification processes" (Caciagli & Milan, 2021, p. 406). Here, urban commons function as an alternative form of urban development prioritising social interactions over profit; it is an ongoing process, which requires resistance to be continually reaffirmed. With this framework of CLTs-as-commons in mind, in the next section we discuss the context of the Amsterdam housing market, before exploring the case of H-Buurt.

The Amsterdam housing market

Amsterdam has experienced considerable gentrification since the 1980s, with major effects on central neighbourhoods (Boterman & Van Gent, 2014; Musterd, 2014; Savini et al., 2016; van der Veer & Kornatowski, 2023), including the sale of social housing in favour of home ownership and unregulated rental housing markets. Historically, the Dutch housing market has been viewed as highly regulated due to its relatively large share of social housing (Hochstenbach & Ronald, 2020; Kadi & Ronald, 2014).

Historically, affordable housing needs in the Netherlands were largely dealt with by social housing corporations (van Kempen & Priemus, 2002). A shift to the promotion of home ownership (Aalbers, 2004; Ronald & Dol, 2011) put housing corporations in a more precarious situation, while the social housing stock declined and housing prices rose considerably. In Amsterdam since around 1990, an increased demand for housing for urban professionals engendered a need for a less regulated market (Hochstenbach & Ronald, 2020). This rising demand led to increased housing prices and owner occupancy at the expense of affordable housing. Moreover, the promotion of homeownership opened the door for the private rental sector, while buying-to-let was promoted as a fruitful investment, increasing rental prices in the non-social sector (Aalbers et al., 2020). As Savini et al. (2016) suggest, housing corporations adapted to the privatisation of Amsterdam's housing market, taking an entrepreneurial governance approach, whereby many social housing buildings were sold to provide housing corporations with funds to build new housing. This context may help to explain why CLT H-Buurt was the first in the Netherlands, making it plausible to assume that local actors never had to resort to setting up such alternatives until more recently. Following the development of CLT H-Buurt, efforts have been made in other neighbourhoods in the Netherlands to set up similar initiatives.

In the Zuidoost area, many urban renewal initiatives have occurred since 1990, aiming to increase owner occupancy at the expense of social housing (Hellman & Wassenberg, 2004; van der Veer & Kornatowski, 2023). Remarkably, this did not immediately lead to gentrification pressure, unlike in the city centre and surrounding areas, possibly due to Zuidoost's largely negative stigma (Savini et al., 2016). Additionally, and not specific to Zuidoost, the 2008 recession resulted in new priorities and declining subsidies for housing corporations, which in combination with an increased tax on social housing, made the position of the social housing sector more precarious (Ronald & Dol, 2011; Van Gent, 2013). These trends accelerated further due to a municipal policy aiming to sell off social housing, investment in public spaces, and a push for social mix policies. Due to increasing rentals in the private sector, the municipality set out to make its housing stock more inclusive. In recent years, countering Amsterdam's decades of housing-related problems has remained challenging (Savini et al., 2016; Van Gent, 2013). By 2023, with house prices at a record high, the share of social housing declined to an all-time low of 39.5%, from 50% in 2007 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024).

Here, displacement pressure is connected to declining social housing, albeit in an indirect way (Marcuse, 1985). These indirect forms of displacement are what Marcuse (1985) calls exclusionary displacement and displacement pressure. Exclusionary displacement refers to residents being unable to access housing because it has been gentrified or abandoned, which prevents another low-income household "from living where it would otherwise have lived" (Marcuse, 1985, p. 206). Likewise, displacement pressure occurs through neighbourhood transformations, such as to commerce, restaurants and other services, catering to new high-income groups: "Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather than wait for the inevitable; nonetheless they are displaced" (Marcuse, 1985, p. 207). While residents are not directly evicted from their homes, housing corporations are increasingly selling off part of their stock in highly valued areas, which are subsequently rented in the private market. As a result, the share of Amsterdam residents compelled to look for housing elsewhere has increased (Aalbers et al., 2020). This form of indirect, exclusionary displacement (Van Gent, 2013) reflects an inability of low-income residents to find housing in gentrified neighbourhoods due to changing housing-market conditions, especially housing market liberalisation and social housing sales.

In this context, we focus on the experience of the H-Buurt neighbourhood in the south-east area of Amsterdam known as Zuidoost, recently selected for large-scale housing developments to attract residents (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020) and experiencing pressure due to gentrification (Savini et al., 2016). Located in the Bijlmer area, Zuidoost is a residential neighbourhood, comprising high-rise buildings dating from the late 1960s. Originally designed as a futuristic city reflecting Le Corbusier's design principles, Zuidoost is characterised by tall buildings with green spaces in between and a strict separation of uses. According to its planners, Zuidoost formed the ideal city. However, those targeted for this area moved to towns outside Amsterdam in search of greater calm, and Zuidoost was left with those undergoing multiple socio-economic challenges (Hellman & Wassenberg, 2004). Consequently, the area experienced considerable socio-economic problems. Efforts to improve Zuidoost's liveability date to 1972, resulting in demolishing high-rise buildings and renovating remaining ones (van der Veer & Kornatowski, 2023).

More recently, part of Zuidoost became home to a community of residents experiencing gentrification threats, and some began advocating for development to improve liveability. As the community suggests, development "cannot take place at the expense of the affordability and availability of housing for the residents that call the Bijlmer home" (And The People/CLT Bijlmer, 2020). The construction of a large development is planned for Zuidoost, which will lead to growing numbers of new residents (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020). According to interviewees, there is already clear evidence of displacement pressure in Zuidoost. As housing prices continue to rise, many residents can no longer afford home ownership, thus excluding them from the private housing market. The same goes for the private rental market, where prices are at a record high. Simultaneously, the availability of social housing is declining despite increasing demand, further limiting affordable options. It is in this context that residents in H-Buurt established a CLT, involving the broader community in neighbourhood development. From this position, the CLT represents local

community interests, currently in the process of obtaining the land to build the CLT housing (also referred to as the housing co-op). The aim is to develop affordable housing for the local community and to establish community amenities. In the following sections, we explore the experience of CLT H-Buurt as a model of housing provision in the context of gentrification pressure.

Gaining a foothold: The establishment of CLT H-Buurt in Amsterdam

The establishment of the CLT in 2018 originated directly from local community residents in H-Buurt, yet it was supported by the Maranatha Community Transformation Center (MCTC). Often referred to as a church, MCTC serves many community needs beyond religious ones. Besides the self-evident services offered by churches like spiritual guidance and community building, MCTC offers legal counselling and financial advice to empower the H-Buurt community. Despite these efforts, community members struggle in their social and economic advancement. According to the pastor of MCTC, high living costs, lack of affordable housing, and an absence of physical community amenities to accommodate H-Buurt residents are key challenges. A steady decline of social housing led many Zuidoost residents—and specifically H-Buurt—to seek alternatives to solve their housing needs. While some moved away, others accepted the struggle to find adequate housing in the neighbourhood. The search for adequate housing is an ongoing challenge, including driving some into homeless shelters, as a community representative explains:

> A lot of them need shelter in some organisations that the government has set up...where you have a three bedroom apartment with three families, and you share a common space like a living room. I think a lot of people are not into this. I cannot imagine when you have two grown up children, one girl and one boy, and you put them inside the same room with their parents (Interview 10/8/2022).

It was in this context that the CLT emerged as an alternative to counter the difficulties of the housing market and lack of community amenities in H-Buurt, inspired by the success of CLTs elsewhere. Both the MCTC pastor and community representative had observed the effects of development in Zuidoost on the community. Worried that the community was not a relevant actor on development questions, the pastor suggests that the approach used by the CLT could help to ensure the community's involvement in neighbourhood development.

Due to the community's lack of spatial planning experience, in addition to MCTC, it has also been supported by a social innovation consultancy called And The People (ATP), which focuses on creating regenerative living environments, with experience fostering spatial development. Aside from ATP's support, the CLT is also backed by Stichting WOON!, an organisation advising renters on affordable housing issues. Stichting WOON! has organised training sessions for future CLT residents on managing communal buildings. Such support originated from an ongoing relationship between the CLT and municipality of Amsterdam, highlighting the CLT's fit within Amsterdam's broader policy goals. As the city's 2050 vision statement notes, space will be dedicated to housing, cooperatives and collective self-management. Moreover,

> Making room for collective self-management in the city not only means making room for local networks and cooperatives, we also make room for democratic renewal and social innovation, with more joint forms of public value creation in the district and the neighbourhood (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021, p. 250).

Financially, the CLT is supported by Oranje Fonds, a foundation supporting initiatives promoting social involvement, and by Stichting Doen, a fund from two major Dutch lotteries aimed at an environmental, social and creative society.[3] This level of financial support is important for the CLT, helping it to reach a higher level of organisation. Despite these vital funds for the development of such initiatives, it is important to consider that communities like Zuidoost often lack resources and social capital to create self-sustaining processes from within. As a result, merely injecting funds into communities may be insufficient in the long-term. Yet both Oranje Fonds and Stichting Doen finance training programs to help the community to empower itself to foster future communal projects. This form of 'ABCD training' is carried out by LSA, an overarching organisation focused on community cohesion, aiming to create community amenities by helping neighbourhoods defend local interests.

Ultimately, while the goal is to build housing as part of the CLT, it is difficult to determine when the houses will be finished, which depend on the municipality to supply the land. While the municipality established a tender for the plot of land, this has been repeatedly postponed (CLT H-Buurt, 2024; Community Land Trust Nederland, 2024), suggesting the somewhat tenuous nature of this process. However, in comparison to the development of CLTs elsewhere, the experience of CLT H-Buurt is perhaps not exceptional. Indeed, a scholar at the Burlington Associates for community development explains this difficult process: "we had to build power. We had to show up at City Hall and in City Council meetings and pound the table and have a show of power in order to get the government to provide land, to provide money so that we could do our deals" (Interview 29/6/2022). As a result, acquiring land and adequate funding is one of the biggest challenges for most CLTs.

The CLT's configuration

Overall, five principles guide CLT operations: affordability for current residents of CLT homes; future affordability; connectedness with the neighbourhood through permanent resident control of spatial development; stimulating self-sufficiency; and combining development with circularity (And The People/CLT Bijlmer, 2020). Figure 2 illustrates the governance of CLT H-Buurt, including three key parts: the CLT neighbourhood association; the housing co-op; and CLT Bijlmer. First, through its focus on activities beneficial to H-Buurt residents, the CLT functions broadly as a neighbourhood organisation, including initiatives going beyond what is traditionally considered housing. For example, the pastor refers to a handyman helping residents with maintenance on their apartments. Through a CLT platform, the handyman was able to connect with those needing help with maintenance. Second, a key component is the housing co-op, which has not been finalised due to the delay

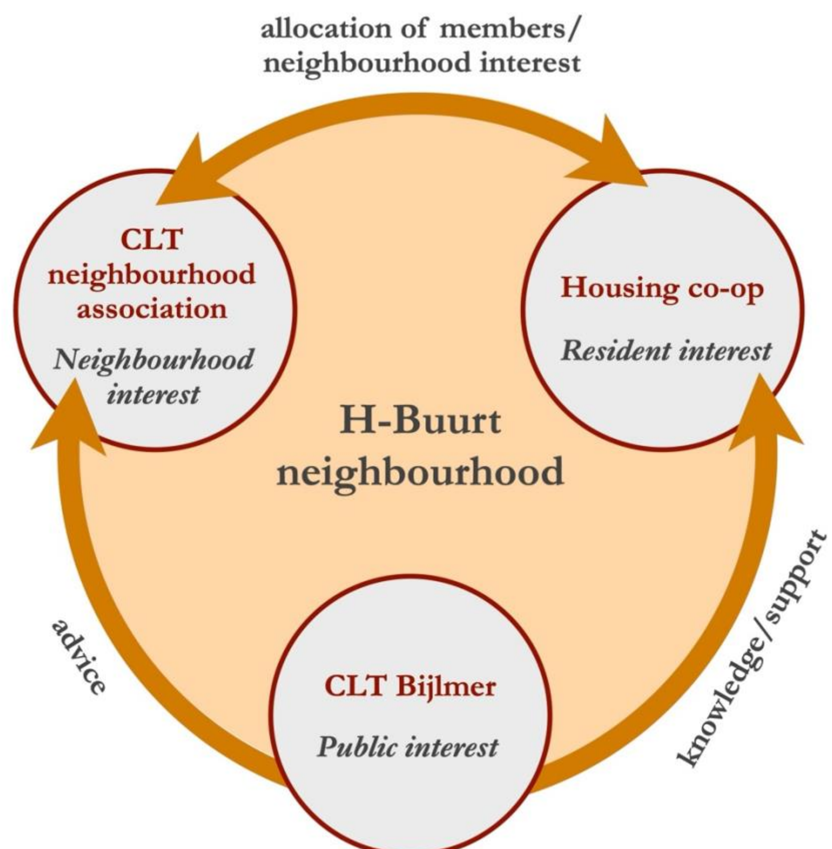
[3] According to Dutch legislation, private lotteries have to give up 40% of their profits to charities. For state-lotteries, this percentage is 20% (Wouters & Klein, 2023).

in securing the land. After joining the CLT, members can apply to be part of the future housing co-op. Following its establishment in 2018, CLT H-Buurt instituted guidelines through a democratic process to ensure housing co-op members are directly connected to the neighbourhood—like having a local job, doing volunteer work, or raising children. Finally, lawyers, municipal representatives, and community members are unified under CLT Bijlmer, an entity dedicated to supporting neighbourhoods in the broader Bijlmer area in achieving similar objectives by consolidating their collective expertise.

The board of the CLT includes both those aspiring to live in CLT housing and those from the neighbourhood, serving to balance both groups' interests. Indeed, the board only includes local H-Buurt residents. Unlike other CLTs where the board usually includes experts or political party representatives, in H-Buurt, experts are only involved through ATP. Still, interviewees suggest that experts are seen as key actors in decision-making, yet that this role could change as the CLT evolves. At the same time, as a scholar involved in the Caño Martin Peña CLT in Puerto Rico suggests, CLTs tend to be the most successful when the community is in charge of them: "The most successful CLTs are those where the community is really in charge… Not just allowed to give an opinion on a Saturday afternoon, but constantly leading the project" (Interview 31/5/2022).

Following a call for increased community involvement from other neighbourhood organisations, the municipality set up a *testing ground* (or proeftuin) for neighbourhood

Figure 2
H-Buurt governance.
Source: Authors.



platform rights to support neighbourhood organisations.[4] Through this *testing ground*, the municipality, neighbourhood organisations and citizen initiatives explored how to achieve more effective and sustainable collaboration between the municipality and its citizens. In 2022, CLT H-Buurt was selected as one of nine neighbourhood organisations in the *testing ground*. Under this scheme, the *testing ground* specified three experimental goals: the municipality gives financial support to the CLT, while independent support from experts should lead to a third goal: a better position at the table in dealing with the municipality.

Challenges and opportunities

The CLT board and experts supporting it are relatively positive about the relationship with the municipality. As the pastor suggests, the municipality views the CLT as a pioneer. He notes that: "the first CLT in the Netherlands is in Amsterdam", adding that, "from the beginning, they [the municipality] were very open" (Interview 14/7/2022). Thus, while the CLT members criticise the municipality's housing policy, they note that the relationship between the CLT and the municipality is relatively positive. In that sense, the first two goals of the *testing ground*—independent and financial support—have been partly accomplished, while achieving a better 'position' at the table has not yet occurred. The civil servant involved in the *testing ground* explains that, "we have not yet achieved [a better position], so in fact, what they perhaps most hoped and expected with the *testing ground* has not actually become better" (Interview 17/11/2022). Therefore, a challenge for the relationship between the municipality and CLT relates to a key goal of the *testing ground*: a better position of neighbourhood organisations in the municipality. Interviewees from the municipality and the CLT explain that better positioning for a neighbourhood organisation within the municipality is difficult to achieve. One reason for this poor position relates to the CLT's representation by ATP in dealing with the municipality. As one expert from ATP explains, their role is to voice community concerns, but given their knowledge of spatial development, these are much sharper than the municipality usually receives from citizens, resulting in frustration from the municipality's project team. As the ATP expert explains, "because we have more knowledge about such developments [than citizens], answers to our questions are more difficult to provide and the project team has to tread lightly in their communication" (Interview 25/8/2022).

Another challenge is a disconnect between the way decision-making is done in the municipality and the *testing ground*'s goals to fully involve neighbourhood organisations from the beginning, which could lead to a better position at the table and a stronger voice in plan making. When the *testing ground* began in 2020, it gave municipal project teams and departments a new set of experimental goals: financial and independent support from experts, aiming for a better position at the table. These experimental goals coexist uneasily with the old governance style typical of large municipalities like Amsterdam, which often do not engage in the same way. As the municipal employee in charge of neighbourhood

[4] A *testing ground*, used in Dutch government contexts, is an environment in which innovative policy ideas are tested and developed.

platform rights explains, "it is the point I think we are trying to make with the neighbourhood platform rights, so you will probably have a better result, a more sustainable result, if you have a little more time at the beginning to design it together" (Interview 17/11/2022). While the *testing ground* aims to offer more legitimacy to neighbourhood organisations like the CLT, these conflicting goals result in distrust and scepticism among day-to-day operations in the municipality and struggles to achieve the *testing ground*'s goals.

Still, the municipality has a positive outlook on the CLT, its development and role in the area. A bottom-up initiative like the CLT fits with the municipalities' broader goal to increase democratisation (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021); in this context, the CLT is viewed as a vessel for community empowerment. As suggested by an area broker for the municipality and the main contact for H-Buurt within the municipality, the establishment of a CLT is an opportunity to change the relationship between the government and the people. He notes that:

> What you now see throughout the Netherlands is a lack of trust in government. By creating more ownership in the neighbourhood itself, you also have more responsibility for what goes well and for what doesn't in a neighbourhood. This offers more shared ownership and means that you work together towards the same goals (Interview 25/11/2022).

Yet Zuidoost is seen by the municipality as an area with a vulnerable community that is difficult to deal with regarding development, and where people have more serious concerns beyond redevelopment. As the area broker suggests:

> The situation in Zuidoost is of such a nature in the sense of poverty, vulnerability, etc. that this part of Amsterdam needs a multi-year plan or program, especially regarding strengthening those who are vulnerable residents of Zuidoost, reducing poverty, improving the situation of youth (Interview 25/11/2022).

In this context, the CLT is an opportunity for the municipality to co-create policies with residents. On this point, CLT members also view the municipality's role in this process positively, suggesting that the opportunity to be involved through the testing ground is one way to become a legitimate actor in development.

While becoming a key actor through the *testing ground* is one opportunity for the CLT to create community influence, such effects are difficult to achieve. This mirrors challenges of CLTs elsewhere, resulting in little real impact in communities. In some cases, however, impacts have been possible. In Burlington, Vermont, which won a 2008 World Habitat Award, the mayor advocated for the CLT, which is one reason the CLT was able to acquire land (Davis et al., 2020). Yet as CLTs operate at a different scale from gentrification processes, this model cannot solve all related problems. In H-Buurt, the greatest impact would result from people moving into the planned CLT housing. For these residents, displacement pressure would be alleviated by gaining access to housing through the CLT, as a community representative of the CLT suggests. He notes that, "Those who are already involved in the CLT are excited about it, and they are at peace that finally there is hope for the common man, that they can have a roof and not be threatened [by rent increases]"

(Interview 10/8/2022). Likewise, concerns about affording housing in the long-term could also be alleviated, as rates for homes would be fixed rather than changing yearly, something which could only be possible for a few people. At the time of writing, 34 apartments are planned, and 40 families have already applied for housing in the CLT. This growing demand suggests the considerable need and potential of alternative housing strategies such as CLTs.

Still, other goals go beyond providing housing for those in need, including creating community amenities like a communal kitchen and self-service laundry facilities, allowing residents to save on living costs. The CLT aims to be a stepping stone for initiatives supporting the H-Buurt community, like the handyman discussed above. As a result, the CLT could make a difference in the lives of those living in CLT housing but would also benefit the broader community through the creation of other amenities. Thus, while the CLT project in H-Buurt cannot mitigate the broader gentrification process in Amsterdam overall, the local impact could be considerable, such as through communal amenities supporting the broader neighbourhood. Likewise, the impact of the CLT goes even beyond Zuidoost. As a municipal employee involved in the *testing ground* suggests, the CLT questions Amsterdam's broader housing system, suggesting that initiatives like CLT H-Buurt are about the creation of a just city (Fainstein, 2010) within gentrification contexts. As the municipal employee explains, "So indeed, who does the city belong to? It is about those questions" (Interview 17/11/2022). Likewise, efforts to create a CLT might even spark development elsewhere in the city, as a representative from Walterton and Elgin Community Homes in London explains: "Once we saw with St. Clements that even just having one example meant other boroughs were curious, they started coming around and seeing how they could do it" (Interview 22/7/2022). Ultimately, these efforts to challenge the status quo of Amsterdam's housing system amidst a gentrification context provide potential to achieve concrete results.

CLT H-Buurt: From resilience to transformative governance

In this section, we explore CLT H-Buurt based on the impact categories of the CLTs-as-commons framework (see Figure 1). We explore the relationship of the urban commons with its surrounding environment and local institutions, and its role in space and society. Understanding this case as an urban common requires focusing on its emergence, which can occur either as a pre-existing urban common which becomes accessible to the community, or the community can create its own common. In CLT H-Buurt, no pre-existing commons was available to the community as the CLT originated directly from the community. In the framework, we locate CLT H-Buurt on the right side of Figure 1. This is further supported by the community's self-organising character through its inclusion in training sessions to develop and defend local interests. Regarding the relationship between the urban common and institutions, our analysis indicates a bottom-up process led by the local community. In CLT H-Buurt, the community approached the municipality with the idea of creating a CLT, which was then embraced by the municipality through the *testing ground*. Yet it was the community that initially established the urban common. This places the CLT in the bottom of the framework, suggesting its bottom-up nature.

As we suggest above, the CLTs-as-commons framework goes beyond the emergence of the common. This includes the impacts generated by an urban common, ranging from *resilience* (providing basic services not provided by the state), to *incorporation* (repurposing commons for other means), and to *transformation and resistance* (resisting commodification processes). In this case, incorporation can be ruled out, as there is no sign that CLT H-Buurt was appropriated by gentrifiers, or that it functions as a pull factor for tourism and gentrification. However, our analysis suggests that it is difficult to determine whether the impact should be described as resilience or transformation. What is revealed by CLT H-Buurt's emergence and development is best described as resilience, with a possibility to become transformative in the future. Currently, the CLT aims to provide basic amenities not provided by the state, including affordable housing and community amenities in line with the resilience category. Yet this impact is also characterised by articulating forms of resistance against the commodification of urban life, falling into the transformation category. Such resistance is articulated by establishing a CLT in a context of considerable gentrification pressure. The community views this resistance as an initiative that counters the increased financialisation of Amsterdam's built environment, as Savini et al. (2016) describe. Yet the CLT's impact is not characterised by challenging the status quo through resource allocation, nor can such a common question the contemporary urban development model, which is required to consider the CLT as achieving transformation in this sense. As Caciagli and Milan (2021) suggest, challenging the broader paradigm of resource allocation and form of urban development could be achieved through transformation. In CLT H-Buurt, confronting the allocation of resources occurs somewhat, as the CLT is taken up in municipal policy through the *testing ground*, ensuring its funding is allocated in the coming years. Yet this is only done through the *testing ground*, rather than through a long-term structural income stream. Still, one could argue that the contemporary model of urban development is challenged by the CLT, offering an alternative in which values over financial ones are prioritised.

Ultimately, for the impact of a commons to be characterised as truly transformative, it should function "as bulwarks against gentrification and commodification processes" (Caciagli & Milan, 2021, p. 406). As we explore above, the CLT is not yet fully operational, and it is not yet clear whether it will be capable of challenging gentrification or housing financialisation more broadly. However, another important element regarding transformation is that a commons should offer an alternative urban development model centred on socialisation and communal needs. While this is not actively sought in H-Buurt, it is a principle arising through the presence and non-profit activities within the commons. In CLT H-Buurt, an alternative form of development centred on socialisation is offered through development based on community needs. This is not only shown through housing, but also through the CLT's efforts in offering community amenities. Thus, while transformation is only partly achieved by offering an alternative form of development, it does not yet function as a bulwark against gentrification. Our results therefore suggest that the impact of CLT H-Buurt is only partly in line with transformation.

Conclusion

In this article, we explore the case of CLT H-Buurt in terms of its impacts on the challenges arising through gentrification. Using a CLTs-as-commons framework, we explore the experience of H-Buurt in Amsterdam to establish an alternative to the financialised housing system and problems experienced by the community due to gentrification, aiming to provide affordable housing, improve neighbourhood stability, and build community amenities (Choi et al., 2018). As the first Dutch CLT, it is unlike models used elsewhere. A pioneer in the Netherlands, the CLT heavily relies on its relationship with the municipal government for legitimation and funding. The municipality of Amsterdam has been relatively accommodating, taking the CLT up in its policy as a neighbourhood platform through the *testing ground* to explore the possibility of giving neighbourhood organisations funding, independent support, and a better position within the municipality. The first two of these three goals have been realised, as we suggest above. However, the latter goal has not yet been accomplished due to a clash of governance approaches, such as the relationship with ATP.

We suggest that CLTs mirror the principles of the right to the city proposed by Lefebvre (1991) as a vision beyond capitalism. Our discussion illustrates the appropriation of space in the city, reflected by right to the city debates as people dissatisfied with the status quo take action to contribute to a system that better works for them. As we show, the H-Buurt community is doing this according to their means. By reclaiming collective control over decisions regarding urban space, we use the urban commons to understand how housing commodification can be countered. The CLT does this through efforts toward the long-term preservation of the H-Buurt community in withstanding gentrification processes. The group excluded from the housing market includes those not able to find affordable housing or experiencing displacement pressure due to gentrification through indirect forms (Marcuse, 1985). This need suggests an urgent goal of CLTs—providing affordable housing—to achieve immediate, concrete goals following a subversive reading of the right to the city (Marcuse, 2014). Thus, the CLT could serve both to appropriate space in the city and provide affordable housing as a concrete measure, if housing within the CLT is ultimately accomplished in the future. Therefore, displacement could be prevented for those who are eventually able to move into CLT housing.

Ultimately, the biggest impact on the community will be most noticeable for those who eventually get to live in CLT housing—if this is achieved in the future. For these residents, displacement pressure could be avoided by achieving affordable housing in perpetuity through the CLT. Admittedly, this remains a future goal for the CLT, as achieving access to the land is still uncertain. At the same time, this case showcases the need for CLTs to be seen as legitimate actors in urban development, and as a step towards making a difference in countering gentrification. Thus, for those unable to gain access to CLT housing, other impacts are more tangible. As we show in this article, CLT H-Buurt aims to provide community amenities, like a communal kitchen, meeting spaces and communal laundry facilities. These services are important impacts of the CLT, helping to ease the financial difficulties experienced by the community. These community amenities could also play a significant role in maintaining the community in the long-term. Our findings in H-Buurt

suggest that one of the effects on gentrification suggested by Choi et al. (2018)—building community amenities—has been more strongly achieved thus far. Moreover, our findings extend limited work on the impact of CLTs in the context of gentrification. Despite timid steps towards resisting commodification processes, we show that the CLT's impact falls between *resilience* and *transformation and resistance*. While it falls most clearly into the resilience category, the future possibility of becoming truly transformative—in the sense shown by our framework of CLTs-as-commons—provides an avenue to extend such work.

Regardless of what the future impact of these efforts in H-Buurt might be, the residents are striving to make a positive impact in their community. Despite uncertainty about the future, large-scale developments are planned in the Bijlmer area, and securing a plot of land there, thus far, has proved challenging. Indeed, the possibility of acquiring the land needed to develop housing is difficult to assess, as the area continues undergoing gentrification processes already advancing far enough that acquiring land is difficult. The struggle for community control—explored by the case of CLT H-Buurt—while not yet achieved, provides some hope that the possibility for alternatives to traditional ownership structures could be possible, and even that such models provide evidence of CLTs as legitimate actors in urban development processes.

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