From Co-ops to Community Land Trusts: Tracing the Historical Evolution and Policy Mobilities of Collaborative Housing Movements

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the historical development of two different collaborative housing models: Liverpool’s housing co-operative movement of the 1970s, when public tenants successfully struggled for collective dweller control in designing, developing and managing their own housing; and, today, Liverpool’s nascent urban community land trust (CLT) movement. The genesis and institutionalization of each is analysed through mobile urbanism, policy mobilities and planning histories perspectives. Both Liverpool’s co-ops and CLTs are shown to have been mobilized through ideas adapted from elsewhere, mutating upon exposure to contextual factors embedded in place. Contemporary CLT campaigns can be traced back to various sources: CLT experiments by professional or arms-length state agencies; and previous periods of collaborative housing activism, notably the 1970s co-ops. The article situates these movements within a collaborative housing conceptual framework and draws out the implications of these genealogical findings for the further development of collaborative housing.

Introduction

Housing is the battlefield of our time and the house is its monument.

(Slogan of Homebaked Community Land Trust, Liverpool)

If housing is the battlefield of our time, then the community land trust (CLT) model is an increasingly popular weapon wielded in the counteroffensive against neoliberal financialization, social exclusions, affordability crises, state-led demolition-and-rebuild and other incursions on our “housing commons” (Hodkinson 2012). CLTs are a form of collaborative housing established and governed voluntarily by communities to develop and manage homes but also other assets of community value, such as social enterprise, food growing or cultural activities, for long-term community benefit (NCLTN 2018). They take property off the market and make it permanently affordable by setting rents based on average local incomes rather than market value.

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These and other qualities distinguish the CLT model within a broader field of what has been described, in Anglo-American contexts, as “community-led housing” and, in continental Europe, as “collaborative housing”. Whilst existing research has tended to explore the CLT model through the former lens, or that of “self-help housing” (DeFilippis and North 2004; Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern 2016; Hodkinson 2012; Moore and McKee 2012; Thompson 2015), this article seeks to situate it within conceptual themes pertinent to the collaborative housing movement (Czischke 2018; Lang and Stoeger 2018). Collaborative housing is perhaps the most recent term to describe related housing movements, variously prefixed by: “community-led”, “participative”, “resident-led”, “co-operative” and “mutual”, as well as “co-housing” (Tummers 2016). Uniting these movements is a common concern with user participation; reciprocal relationships; mutual aid and solidarity; and crowd financing and collective management (Czischke 2018). Such collaborative models aim to provide affordable housing by taking land out of the market to be democratically governed by and for local residents; recycling surpluses locally for long-term community and/or user benefit (Conaty and Large 2013; Hodkinson 2012). Collaborative housing is rooted in a variety of traditions informing different national contexts: the commons in the UK (Hodkinson 2012); co-housing in Scandinavia (Tummers 2016); mutualist and co-operative traditions in Germany and Denmark; with more contemporary take-up in other countries such as France and Belgium (Czischke 2018). “Community-led” housing has gained most currency in the Anglophone world; whilst in Europe a consensus is emerging around “collaborative housing”. The latter concept has a number of benefits over its cousins: it helps conceptualize these models as distinctively collaborative not just inwardly, among direct beneficiaries themselves – as community-led or co-housing suggests – but also outwardly, with external stakeholders, such as state agencies, established housing associations, funders and architectural and planning professionals (Czischke 2018).

Of all collaborative models, CLTs appear to embody this dual aspect of collaboration most fully. Whilst some collaborative models – such as co-housing and co-operatives – tend to look inwards, encouraging collaboration between their resident-members, CLTs are turned outwards to wider stakeholders (Thompson 2015). This is reflected in the classic CLT model’s tripartite governance structure, in which resident-members, local community and wider expert-stakeholders have equal representation on the democratically elected governing board (Davis 2010; Meehan 2014). It is also reflected in their unique design principle that, where legally possible, the ownership of land is separated from that of any improvements upon it, such as buildings, which are leased by the landowning Trust to various groups, which can include co-ops and other collaborative housing organizations. In institutional contexts where this is not possible, the shared principle is one of using whatever legal tools are appropriate to balance the rights and responsibilities of residents with those of broader interests.

This sets CLTs apart from other forms of collaborative housing as potentially higher-order “stewards” of land for the benefit of the wider community and not just immediate resident-members. Co-operatives, by contrast, are designed to work for the benefit of their members alone. In the UK, whilst there is a legal definition for CLTs, there is no specific legal form. CLTs can take a variety of forms, such as a Company Limited by Guarantee, a Community Interest Company (CIC) or a Community Benefit Society (BenCom). However, this must make provision for a statutory “asset lock” to ensure
that CLT-owned land and assets can only be bought, sold or developed for the explicit
benefit of the community and that, in the event of dissolution, assets cannot be
distributed to members but must transfer to another asset-locked entity, which thereby
holds assets “in trust”, on behalf of the community, both present and future. This is a
legal protection that co-operatives lack.

CLTs have thus been characterized as emerging forms of “meso-scale governance”
capable of hosting a variety of socioeconomic functions (Williams and Pierce 2017). As
stewards of land and emerging governance actors, CLTs must negotiate with a variety
of other stakeholders – from large housing associations and developers to local authori-
ties – inculcating, therefore, a culture of collaboration across a wide range of parties,
both within and without. CLTs have long taken root in the UK but so too are growing in
other European countries, such as France and Belgium, particularly Brussels (Moore and
McKee 2012). This makes for an interesting model to dissect in the context of collabora-
tive housing in Europe.

CLTs are being mobilized, and critically evaluated, as radical campaigns for the (re)
appropriation of our “housing commons” (Conaty and Large 2013; Hodkinson 2012;
Thompson 2015); yet they have also found support right across the political spectrum,
not least in Conservative Party policy: Boris Johnson’s 2008 manifesto for his successful
Mayor of London campaign included the promise of “creating a network of CLTs across
London” (Johnson 2008: 13). Such flexibility to adapt to diverse contexts, institutional
applications and political perspectives suggests potential to gain traction in the present
conjuncture. Although their role in the provision of affordable housing nationally remains
marginal – with under 300 CLTs in total in England and Wales and under 1,000 homes built
to date – the sector is expanding rapidly, having grown six-fold in the last six years, with
5,800 homes planned for development in the next few years (NCLTN 2018). This is impress-
ive growth for a young alternative model used to address bespoke housing problems and
suggests its potential to eventually become a more mainstream tenure. The more estab-
lished co-op housing sector, by contrast, had by 2012 over 600 co-ops in England alone and
an estimated total number of over 45,000 dwellings across the UK (Housing Europe 2012).
This likewise remains marginal in the broader national housing context – under 0.2% of total
housing stock – especially in comparison with European counterparts, such as Germany,
Spain, Belgium, Austria and Sweden, where in 2012 co-ops represented, respectively, 5%,
6%, 7%, 8% and 17% of total national stock. The British collaborative housing movement
remains a particularly marginal tenure in the European context.

Through an historical case study narrative,¹ this article does two things. First, it
compares two periods of collaborative housing development in Liverpool – the 1970s
coop movement and the contemporary CLT experiments. I show how both embody the
defining aspect of collaborative housing – “the arrangement where a group of people
co-produce their own housing in full or part in collaboration with established providers”
(my italics) (Czischke 2018: 7) – distinguishing it from other, more community-led or
inward-facing communal types. Liverpool’s co-op movement in particular can be seen as
a precursor to the multi-stakeholder co-produced nature of contemporary collaborative
housing initiatives. This was as much a product of state funding, legislative support and
professional expertise as it was resident involvement and community initiative and,
therefore, can be seen as a collaborative form of public housing as opposed to a
collaborative movement outside the state.
Second, I draw on “policy mobilities” and “mobile urbanism” literatures from urban geography to understand Liverpool’s urban CLT movement as an assemblage of locally and globally sourced components, discourses, practices, materials and actors (see: McCann and Ward 2011; Peck 2011; Peck and Theodore 2012; Cook, Ward, and Ward 2015; Temenos and Baker 2015). These approaches aim to “study through” chains, connections and networks of relations; to “follow the policy” and actively travel “with” transfer agents as they move between places; to map in real time the “complex web of experimentation–emulation–evolution” (Peck and Theodore 2012: 22). A common charge against these approaches is their tendency towards “presentism”: fetishizing the new, the present and the active flow of ideas, rather than their historical genesis or place-embedded development over time (Cook, Ward, and Ward 2015). In order to study the evolution of the CLT model in Liverpool, therefore, I complement a “mobile urbanism” with a “planning histories” approach (Harris and Moore 2013; Huxley 2013) to incorporate a genealogical method to track the historical precedents and development of ideas, practices and institutional formations to their present assemblage as CLT campaigns. This involves a “critical historicization” (Huxley 2013) of the CLT idea.

Another, related concern is that the urban policy mobility literature tends to focus on processes of mobilization and assemblage in a fast-policy market of neoliberal programmes – for instance, the Creative Class discourse and Business Improvement District model (K. Ward 2007) – with scant attention paid to ideas mobilized by urban social movements but for some recent moves in this direction (Cook, Ward, and Ward 2015; Temenos 2015). It is as if travelling ideas within policy circles and those circulated by activists operate according to two entirely different logics – one associated with globalized capital flows and the other with embedded place-based histories. The complex interweaving of globally mobile ideas with historical “place effects” to produce new assemblages of policy models and urban social movements is currently understudied within both the collaborative housing and urban policy mobilities literatures. I hope to show in the following that these two circuits are more entangled and interdependent than the latter suggests. I explore how Liverpool’s most successful CLT projects, Homebaked and Granby Four Streets, were constructed not only from ideas flowing from elsewhere – through myriad connections with other movements, ideas and policy networks around the world, particularly the USA where CLTs originated – but also through institutional memory and resources embedded in place, through traces of social practices developed during earlier phases of collective housing activism, notably Liverpool’s 1970s housing co-operative movement. However, I also show how CLTs first took root through top-down professionalized policy transfer, via a housing association knowledge transfer partnership (KTP). In this way, collaborative housing movements are best seen as an ambiguous mix of the two, driven by policymakers and activists in equal, and overlapping, measure.

**Liverpool’s co-operative revolution**

In the late 1970s, Liverpool produced the one of the largest working class movements in co-operative housing in British, if not European, history – rivalling a contemporaneous movement in London (Birchall 1991). The democratic moment that spawned the movement soon faded, and political changes coupled with deeper shifts in urban governance.
arrested their further development, but the movement nonetheless left a legacy of some 50 co-ops still functioning today. It provided a vision of how public housing could be managed more collaboratively, and inspired the development three decades later of CLT campaigns in some of the very same neighbourhoods.

In 1974, the “anarchist planner” Colin Ward (1974) published Tenants Take Over, a manifesto for “collective dweller control” which influenced community-led campaigns for co-ops in Liverpool’s dense inner-city terraced neighbourhoods, as he explains here:

The book had a salutary effect in Liverpool during a brief period when the Liberals controlled the city’s housing policy. It inspired several instances...of newly-built housing where the tenants of old slum houses were enabled to find a site, and commission an architect to design their own new housing...The proudest moment of my housing advocacy was when the Weller Street Coop chairman, Billy Floyd, introduced me at a meeting by waving a tattered copy of Tenants Take Over and saying: “Here’s the man who wrote the Old Testament...But we built the New Jerusalem!” (Ward and Goodway 2003: 74-5)

The “New Jerusalem” here refers to the Weller Street Housing Co-operative, the pioneering new-build co-op established in 1977, which in turn ignited what some have dubbed Liverpool’s “Co-op Spring” (Ospina 1987) or “new-build cooperative revolution” (CDS 1994: 7). This constituted an extraordinary break with the past: from Liverpool’s working class residents being housed by the council – without any control over the type, design or location of their home – to gaining, for the first time, a real sense of control and ownership. Ward’s thinking was informed by the so-called “barefoot” or “anarchist architect” John FC Turner (1977) and his framework for “user autonomy” in self-help housing. Ward frequently quotes what he calls “Turner’s First Law of Housing”:

> When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contributions in the design, construction, or management of their housing, both this process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being... (Turner and Fichter 1972: 241)

In turn, Turner had developed these ideas through his action-research observations of self-build housing – autoconstruction – in South America, particularly Peru. In this way, ideas and methods first innovated in the Global South found their way to the Global North via key conduits and agents of transfer, Turner and Ward.

However, these global origins in anarchist action-research and popular movements were tempered by the necessary involvement of the state. In the same year that Ward published Tenants Take Over, a key piece of legislation was passed creating the politico-legal conditions for the massive expansion of the British co-operative housing movement – and its transformation into an alternative sector of public housing. The 1974 Housing Act created an unprecedentedly generous funding regime for housing associations, offering 100% capital costs and ongoing maintenance grants, and a system of “fair rents” set according to need (Birchall 1988). This elevated housing associations alongside municipal councils as primary providers of public housing; inaugurating the state incorporation, and later privatization, of the voluntary housing movement. Through the influence of influential co-operative advocates within the then Labour Government, co-ops were also included in this regime of “fair rents”; becoming affordable to those on low incomes for the first time (Birchall 1991). What has been described as the “official launch” of the housing co-operative movement “after nearly 150 years of
private experiment” (Hook 1977: 1215) resulted in the rapid growth of co-ops nationwide; a quarter in Liverpool.

Some commentators characterized this as the beginning of a new paradigm in public housing: “public sector housing 2.0” (Interview with author) or “phase 2” (Wates 1982). It was seen as the birth of the “third sector”, but one distinct from the large-scale housing association sector we see today:

There’s a possibility here of public housing mark II. Instead of the state or the ‘Corpy’ [council] being in charge and doing a miserable job, why can’t people who don’t have educational qualifications, don’t have often much of an employment, don’t have the money – why can’t they nonetheless be in charge of running their own estates? (Interview with author)

What’s happening now, in Liverpool, is that a new form of public sector housing is being developed...new-build co-ops [...] And it’s going to be...a major, possibly dominant, form of public housing in the twentieth century. (Interview with Paul Lusk in McDonald 1986: 208)

This radical new model – the “Weller Way” (McDonald 1986) – was being positioned as a new form, a redefinition, of public housing, as opposed to a collaborative alternative. Under this model, the group of residents forming a co-op would work closely with co-op development officers – employed by a secondary organization, originally Co-operative Development Services (CDS) in Liverpool – to secure funding from the state and then design, build, own and manage new co-op homes which were simultaneously treated as public housing. This “hub and spoke” model of secondary infrastructure support was inherited from an earlier wave of co-op housing called “co-ownership societies”.

In his “hidden history” of housing co-ops, Birchall (1988, 1991) traces the development of the British 1970s housing co-op movement back to the “co-ownership societies” emerging around 1960 as registered Industrial and Provident Societies but marketed more as a stepping stone towards homeownership. This was the result of successive policy transfer: the idea for co-ownership societies was originally imported from Scandinavia, which had in turn imported earlier co-operative ideas from Britain (Clapham and Kintrea 1987). In 1965, leading political figures in the co-operative movement helped found the Co-ownership Development Society, a secondary service organization along the lines of the Scandinavian model, in which a “mother” or secondary society helps establish many independent “daughter” or primary co-ownership societies. Despite ultimately proving unviable, these failed experiments in co-ownership laid the political and institutional foundations for the next wave of co-operative housing – in particular the “mother-daughter” model for co-op development practised by the leading Liverpool agency CDS.

The co-op development process co-produced by CDS and the Weller Streets involved intensive collaboration between co-op members and professionals, as outlined in detail in Figure 1. This places the 1970s co-ops in an unusual position within the collaborative housing field – at both ends of the spectrum of user involvement simultaneously. Whilst residents drove the process and initiated it through campaigning – a high level of user involvement characterized in the literature as “entrepreneurial exit” (Czischke 2017: 8) – at the same time, their housing was very much co-produced with architectural and co-op development professionals and incorporated into state regulation and funding regimes. The co-ops were both self-organized/managed and highly mediated through collaboration with state and professional institutions.
Following the largest movement of new-build co-op development in the country, Liverpool experienced several decades of relative inactivity in collaborative housing activism. Partly this was due to peculiar local political circumstances – a Trotskyist “Militant” Tendency gained control of the locally governing Labour Party from 1983 to ’87 and effectively “municipalized” all co-ops in development. Subsequently, neoliberal policy reforms, notably the 1988 Housing Act, ended the generous funding regime inaugurated by the 1974 Act and marketized and professionalized the housing association sector – forced to borrow capital on private markets to finance development – thereby disbarring co-ops from further development.

As the co-op movement was mobilized and then prematurely halted, Liverpool was going through extreme urban-economic restructuring, suffering massive industrial decline, population loss, capital flight, unemployment and deprivation. By the twenty-first century, the conditions that motivated the development of the co-ops – poor public housing provoking tenants to campaign for co-op alternatives – were largely ameliorated by the transfer of council stock to arguably more effective housing associations. New housing problems emerged reflecting Liverpool’s economic problems: “hard to let” properties, empty homes, neighbourhood abandonment and dereliction. The Council lobbied for a government-funded programme of demolition-and-rebuild, the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder initiative, which targeted areas worst affected by “housing market failure” (Allen 2008; Webb 2010). Amidst much controversy over demolitions, remaining residents in some inner-city areas fought back, establishing CLTs as legal entities to protect their homes and provide an alternative form of community-led regeneration. Whilst these campaigns were from the outset politically oppositional and community-driven, they became increasingly collaborative in nature as they positioned themselves as legitimate vehicles for ownership and management of public assets. At the same time, housing associations and consultancies were beginning to experiment with CLTs as means by which to manage HMR redevelopment processes in

1) Tenants of the Council located in ‘slum clearance areas’ self-organise into cooperatives as a means of being rehoused without being displaced;
2) a secondary organisation such as CDS helps identify a site, acquire land, and apply for funding from the council or Housing Corporation (central government agency regulating housing);
3) the secondary works closely with co-op residents on education and training in a range of essential skills and knowledge, such as the planning process, interviewing, chairing meetings, accounting;
4) the secondary advises the co-op on suitable local firms and contractors, and co-op residents select a shortlist of competing agencies and personally interview them;
5) co-op residents select their preferred secondary organisation, aside from CDS, as their development agency to build, manage and advise on the project, as well as choosing their preferred architect;
6) residents work closely with their chosen architect to design a scheme according to community preferences through tenant participation;
7) the final design reflects local needs but must meet Housing Corporation regulations to be eligible for funding, with tenants paying ‘fair rents’.

Figure 1. The co-op development process co-produced by CDS and the Weller Streets.
more sensitive ways. The next section explores the genesis and entanglement of these two sources of CLT experimentation in Liverpool.

**The genesis of Liverpool’s CLTs**

CLTs stand in a long line of “trusts”, distinct from co-operative models, as the institutional incarnation of the commons and its protection against enclosure (Hodkinson 2012). Prototypical trusts emerged from anti-enclosure revolts in the early modern period, most famously the popular uprisings of the Levellers and the Diggers in England; later elaborated by advocates such as Henry George, John Ruskin, William Morris and Ebenezer Howard. Today, British CLT advocates see such early experiments as embryonic forms of modern CLTs (CFS 2007; Conaty and Large 2013). In the USA, this influenced the development of the contemporary CLT movement, later imported (back) to Britain, other countries in Europe and around the world, with growing international application in France, Canada, Belgium, Australia and Kenya, amongst others (Moore and McKee 2012).

CLTs were imported to the UK in the 1990s from the US, where it was first innovated in the 1960s civil rights movement to address black exclusion from property ownership, particularly in the southern states. Davis (2010) and Meehan (2014) provide detailed historical accounts of how the American CLT model evolved from the original principles of “trusterty”, “trusteeship” and “stewardship” of land – held in trust for others, in contradistinction to “ownership” – through their iterative application to new problem contexts. These ideas found their expression in the largest CLT today, the city-wide municipal housing programme in Burlington, Vermont, crucially supported by Bernie Sanders when he was City Mayor; and in inner-city community campaigns in the 1990s, Cooper Square in New York and Dudley Street in Boston, where CLTs began to be used for neighbourhood regeneration rather than just community control of affordable housing (Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern 2016).

The British CLT model was initially used to resolve rural affordability crises, especially in south-west England, but they soon piqued the interests of urban activists, who mobilized the model from rural to urban contexts and from core to periphery, from land markets too hot to those too cold (Moore 2014). Two cities in particular, London and Liverpool – divergent extremes of uneven urban development – now lead the way in British CLT experimentation, applying the model as an innovative solution to respective problems: unaffordable housing arising from financial speculation and gentrification in the overheated capital; urban blight and heavy-handed state redevelopment programmes in Liverpool.

In London, the CLT model has been explored by public–private regeneration partnerships, particularly ex-New Deal for Communities (NDC) organizations like the Shoreditch Trust, as “legacy vehicles” to manage assets for enduring community control and benefit long after these programmes ended (Saulter, Masterman, and Eagar 2008). Tenants’ associations have utilized CLTs to challenge the large-scale stock transfer, privatization and state-led redevelopment of social housing estates: unsuccessfully at the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle in London (DeFilippis and North 2004), and most recently by West Kensington and Gibbs Green Community Homes, pioneering the application of the Right to Transfer to “buy back” two estates being compulsorily purchased for redevelopment as luxury flats by an international conglomerate (NCLTN 2018).
However, the CLT idea soon travelled to very different contexts: northern cities suffering from urban decline, deprivation, empty homes, and what was identified as “housing market failure” where the local state pursued large-scale interventions to kick-start property markets and revalorize deprived areas. Nine northern English cities lobbied for and secured government funding of HMR in 2003, of which Liverpool was one of the leading Pathfinders (Allen 2008; Webb 2010). Just as HMR was being formulated, the potential of the CLT model for regeneration of declining neighbourhoods caught the attention of various agencies and regeneration partnerships. As NDC partnerships were decommissioned, regeneration professionals were searching for ways to sustain the gains made once the funding dried up, such as Shoreditch NDC’s scoping study for a “Community Equity Trust” (Saulter, Masterman, and Eagar 2008). A UK-specific model was first formulated by Community Finance Solutions (CFS) at Salford University but this was designed primarily for rural locations to address housing affordability (CFS 2007). A Manchester-based sustainable urbanism consultancy, URBED, began experimenting with ways to adapt the CLT model to the northern urban context. URBED consultants were trying to apply the model to work as an alternative delivery model for HMR Pathfinder regeneration. In their masterplan for the Werneth-Freehold HMR area commissioned by Oldham Local Strategic Partnership in Greater Manchester, URBED first introduced the notion of a CLT as a viable vehicle for refurbishment rather than demolition-and-rebuild within HMR Pathfinders (URBED 2004). This alternative route to HMR regeneration was then incorporated as a potential option in a CLT practitioner’s guide published by CFS (2007).

The CLT idea was fast becoming fashionable as an option to be considered by HMR partnerships looking for new ideas. A Liverpool HMR manager recalls how, when she worked for Salford Council (part of Greater Manchester), the HMR team explored the CLT model as a serious option—“a way of trying to leverage some more money into that area” as an alternative to the planned Private Finance Initiative bid that “was really hard to make stack up financially” (interview with author). The plan was included as a case study in another CFS (2008) guide on urban CLTs, but ultimately never taken forward. Yet such scoping studies created a “buzz” around the concept and laid preliminary groundwork for seeing CLTs delivered as state-led regeneration vehicles. The same HMR manager explains how her experience with the Salford project and exposure to URBED proposals helped seed the CLT idea in Liverpool. She put Liverpool Council officers in touch with the consultancy who would be invited to pitch the CLT idea in Kensington, an inner-city area of Liverpool targeted by HMR demolition. This independent regeneration consultancy worked with the ex-NDC Kensington Regeneration partnership on exploring the prospects for a CLT succession vehicle—as had been tested out in Shoreditch, London. With an initial council-funded budget of £10,000, the consultancy ran a series of workshops, focus groups and presentations with the community about the theory behind a CLT, receiving a generally warm reception from participating residents. The initial proposal presented as a report (Housing Consultancy Ltd 2008) to the board of Kensington Regeneration was for Kensington CLT to take over assets in an area delineated by the NDC boundaries, with a total of 21 sites or properties identified, including an estimated 180 new homes to be built on land already cleared by HMR. Ultimately, however, the proposal failed due to withdrawal of council support—fearing losing control of key assets and potential revenue sources—as well as that of prominent
residents and leading activists, mostly homeowners. They feared losing control of the CLT upon realizing that other tenure groupings would far outnumber them and therefore dominate democratic proceedings of CLT governance. If this had been successful, it would have positioned CLTs in a very intimate relationship with the state – just as the 1974 Housing Act had done so for the co-ops.

The full deployment of the CLT model as a policy tool in HMR areas never came to fruition, certainly not in Liverpool, where various factors – the abstract design of HMR, political incentive structures and local politics – left little room for experimentation with alternative models (Thompson 2017). The CLT model was nonetheless mobilized by anti-HMR campaigners in various areas across the city, and to varying degrees of success, as an institutional tool to protect their housing from demolition through community ownership and as a vehicle for a more democratic, community-led and socially-empowering form of neighbourhood rehabilitation. Thus the CLT model tended towards grass-roots anti-demolition campaigns over more formal policy approaches to the problem of empty homes. There are three different examples of this in Liverpool: one failed campaign, Little Klondyke, and two successful ones, Granby Four Streets, which has been explored in depth elsewhere (Thompson 2015, 2017), and Homebaked, whose origins I explore in more detail below.

**Homebaked: brick by brick, loaf by loaf, we build ourselves**

Just like their counterparts in Granby, Homebaked activists are using the CLT model as a platform to innovate a participatory, embedded and holistic approach to local economic development in Anfield, a particularly distressed inner-city neighbourhood targeted for large-scale demolition by HMR, Liverpool Football Club stadium expansion, and Council-led regeneration plans. Over years of negotiations with the Council to acquire a terraced row for redevelopment as affordable homes and a revitalized high street of community businesses, Homebaked CLT has become a social hub for Anfield, employing many local residents in its co-operative bakery; providing space for therapeutic and sharing activities around baking, cooking and growing; running various skills courses; subsidizing wholesome food for people in poverty; and acting as a meeting place and socioeconomic anchor.

Homebaked began as a participatory arts project funded by Liverpool Biennial 2010 called 2Up2Down, an explicitly radical politically motivated project that took public arts funding and pursued something more akin to participatory-action-research aiming for radical redistribution of power to traditionally marginalized communities. This was led by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, part of a network of artists, activists and researchers linked together through a non-profit co-operative organization called Cohabitation Strategies (CohStra 2018). CohStra (2018) “seeks to assist municipalities, provinces, regions, non-profit, cultural, neighbourhood and community organisations that wish to generate socially just and environmentally responsible urban projects by designing and developing diverse socio-spatial strategies”, and was founded in response to the 2008 global financial crash in Rotterdam, where Jeanne lives and does most of her work.

Homebaked gained momentum towards becoming a CLT through a participatory design process involving 40 young people from the area, gradually expanding to include local adults affected by HMR who co-produced neighbourhood designs to express their housing needs and desires (Moore 2014). Their slogan at this juncture was: “Housing is
the battlefield of our time and the house is its monument” (Van and Jurgensen 2014: 3). The process was facilitated by a young architect from URBED, the consultancy that first experimented with the urban CLT idea for HMR Pathfinders (Heaslip, Sampson, and Crompton 2012). The architect adapted URBED’s “Building for Change” modelling toolkit, a participatory technique used for residents to remodel their neighbourhoods – a contemporary equivalent of the “Planning for Real” exercises used to co-design housing in Liverpool’s 1970s new-build co-op movement (McDonald 1986). There is thus a direct lineage from the design democracy infusing the 1970s co-ops through URBED’s contemporary CLT experimentalism to the social engagement of Homebaked. As well as an historical link there is a socio-spatial connection, with the other side of inner-city Liverpool, where the URBED architect is also a co-op member and activist campaigning for Granby Four Streets CLT.

2Up2Down aimed to find a terraced block for residents to redesign as community-controlled affordable housing; eventually becoming grounded in the neighbourhood in 2011 when they took over the lease of a newly vacant bakery which then became a base for design meetings (Heaslip, Sampson, and Crompton 2012). Symbolically the bakery is a cornerstone of the community, and 2Up2Down has capitalized on this cultural history to renew the bakery as a community anchor. With a temporary lease, they set about rehabilitating the bakery and selling bread again to locals, establishing the bakery as a co-op and renaming it “Homebaked”, with the slogan: “brick by brick, loaf by loaf, we build ourselves”. Residents and art-activists had already been discussing different organizational forms for incorporating the project as a legal entity. It was eventually decided, after “a steep learning curve...trying to find out about alternative models of co-owning and managing land and houses”, that the CLT model was best suited “because it allows genuine community ownership of the organisation” (Van and Jurgensen 2014: 4). By “genuine community ownership” was meant the capacity of the CLT model to enable land and assets to be held in trust for the local community, through a board of trustees who would remain accountable through democratic elections to a membership open to the wider community and not just direct tenants or residents. By incorporating an asset lock, too, the CLT model appeared to have several advantages over co-operative legal forms.

Homebaked CLT was thus born as the umbrella body within which Homebaked co-op bakery sits. It was established in 2012 as a CIC – the legal form for social enterprises created by the Companies Act 2006. However, in recent discussions, the board have been exploring the option of reconstituting the CLT as a Community Benefit Society (BenCom). This is a relatively new legal form established by the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, which superseded existing co-operative legislation such that the traditional Industrial and Provident Societies were replaced by two new types of co-op: BenComs and “bona fide co-operatives”. Homebaked are considering this legal change as the BenCom form enables community shares to be offered, which would generate a new revenue source as well as create opportunities for members to have a greater stake in its future, whilst also maintaining an asset lock, which is not provided for bona fide co-ops.

Homebaked CLT has recently completed its first affordable homes – a four-bedroom shared flat for young people above the bakery – with plans to rehabilitate the entire terraced row. When asked about their choice of the CLT model, participants cite its suitability in the new policy and regulatory landscape created by the 2011 Localism Act as well as emerging social investment opportunities. But digging deeper, it is clear that
the connections between members of Homebaked and those of Liverpool’s other successful CLT project in Granby, as well as with the ideas being tested out by URBED, were just as important. Moreover, we can trace how the CLT idea found its way to Homebaked via an earlier CLT experiment conducted in Anfield by a housing association.

**Knowledge transfer from America to Anfield**

Prior to grassroots experimentation the idea first took root in Liverpool as through more formal state-led proposals: as a potential succession vehicle for an NDC Partnership in Kensington, as discussed above, and a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with a housing association in Anfield. Like Kensington and Granby, Anfield had been relatively prosperous in the early twentieth century, but from the late 1970s began to suffer from the knock-on effects of decline of the docks, with a weakening local economy, falling population, and rising housing vacancies and dilapidation. By the turn of the millennium, 60% of the ward was within the most deprived 10% of areas in the country. After years of successive regeneration partnerships between the Council, housing associations and community groups, including HMR Pathfinder, paralleled by a series of plans for the redevelopment of Liverpool FC’s stadium – an alternative plan was being developed by Arena Housing, which since 1999 had been Anfield’s largest housing association. At an early stage of the planning process with local residents, Arena floated an idea of seeding some of their housing stock as a kind of “community endowment”, over which a resident-led subsidiary of Arena would have overall control, including use of revenues for community benefits and capacity-building (Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern 2016).

Arena’s interest in finding ways of utilizing assets for self-sustaining community benefit led to its application for a KTP with the University of Liverpool Management School (Bevington, 2008). In 2006, the KTP successfully secured funding for an Associate, a dedicated worker based in both partner organizations to explore solutions with local tenants. A study tour to the USA was organized in 2007, to learn about the more established American CLT model and bring back ideas for transfer to the Liverpool context. This was attended by 11 eleven delegates from Arena Housing, tenant associations and universities, including a researcher from Salford University’s CFS. A key event was the 2007 National CLT Network’s Annual Conference in Minneapolis, which included site visits to local CLTs. The findings of the tour were disseminated to the wider community as a report (Bevington, 2008: 3), seeking to “form part of the narrative of the story of Anfield and Breckfield which began in 1999 and is among other things the story of a quest for social justice in regeneration”. The aims of the tour were “fact-finding” about the American CLT experience; “exploring transferability”, to understand the technicalities of transferring between national contexts; and “generating momentum”, cultivating enthusiasm among local residents and creating community-led visions.

Despite the study tour capturing the imaginations of some delegates, this unusual experiment in collaborative housing development ultimately failed. According to critical assessments published by some of the researchers involved in the study visit – notably Engelsman and Southern (2010; Engelsman et al., 2016) – this failure is attributed to the top-down nature of the project, too constrained by formal processes and organizational agendas to find its “soul” in the community. The driving seat of the project had been filled...
by Arena from the beginning; their motivations were to develop a prototype housing management scheme that would reduce organizational operating costs and eventually enable the community to manage stock in self-financing ways. The KTP Associate was then contracted to "sell" the idea to the community through extensive consultation, as a mutually beneficial proposal with many potential gains for both parties.

This reflects a similar process experienced by residents involved in the Kensington CLT proposal. The consultancy was likewise attempting to "sell" the idea locally and arranged a visit to a national CLT conference organized by CFS in London in 2008, for resident-members of the Kensington Regeneration board. According to the consultant commissioned by the council, the delegation thought they were going to "meet 50 or 100 other residents in similar situations, so they could exchange notes", but came away daunted by the technical language or, in the consultant's words, "quite freaked out by the industrial size of the intelligentsia...a negative experience, which definitely gave us an unexpected headwind" (interview with author).

Just like Kensington, tenants in Anfield were initially keen on the idea of community control of assets and generation of revenues for community use; but appetite was less than expected. Independent of the council, HMR and Arena, the KTP Associate’s role was to bring these interests together for the co-construction of knowledge in CLT innovation. However, the council, though willing to negotiate over the possibility, was ultimately reluctant to be associated with the project, whilst Arena Housing was internally divided over the benefits of shedding properties to community ownership. Through this process, some residents became fatigued and alienated by years of seemingly purposeless and overtly bureaucratic consultation. Housing officials became more interested in the CLT idea as a way to cut costs and produce efficiencies in their organization rather than for radical redistribution of land and power, keeping residents at arms-length in decision-making, regarding them “mainly as a means to secure resources, for their own organisational agendas” (Engelsman et al., 2016: 20). As a result, the community became increasingly reticent to get involved in what some saw as a managerial operation. This case highlights the limits of professionalized, top-down, state-led approaches to collaborative housing that are focused on “exploring new ways to deploy capital more efficiently”, to “prevent further degradation of an asset base” (Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern 2016).

However, participating professionals from Arena report a different story: that it was generally supported by community leaders and eventually folded only due to difficulties in securing the necessary state funding for a large-scale CLT scheme (interview with author). Moreover, the KTP is recognized as having “opened up new opportunities for political agitation” (Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern 2016) and establishing vital connections and new networks of knowledge transfer between successful CLT initiatives in the US – such as Dudley Street in Boston and Cooper Square in New York – and the emerging CLT campaigns in Liverpool. An Arena Housing professional – one of the study tour delegates and leading proponents of Arena’s CLT proposal – reportedly presented his findings to some of the Homebaked activists early on in their campaign, thereby helping seed the CLT idea (interview, with author). He has also been a key source of professional support and advice for Homebaked over the years, offering up his housing association’s resources and expertise for use by less knowledgeable activists, who attest to the critical importance of such professional help (interviews with author). Liverpool University academics became key conduits between the KTP study and Granby Four
Streets: the seed of the CLT idea grew through a meeting with a Granby activist wanting to know more about this unfamiliar American model (interview with author). In these various ways, the KTP project left traces in local collective memory for successful uptake of the CLT idea several years later.

Concluding discussion

The ad hoc flows of diffusion and mobilization of the CLT model from the US to Liverpool, and between more professionalized state-funded organizations and urban social movements, suggests a highly contingent, fluid, ephemeral and interwoven process of policy mobility – playing out through dialectical interactions with local traditions, cultural practices and political contingencies. I have attempted to trace these flows and relations as the CLT idea travelled from American to British contexts, before being mobilized in Liverpool. Despite its radical origins in commons discourses, civil rights activism and land redistribution, I have sought to show how the CLT model first landed in Liverpool via policy experiments conducted by professionalized agencies. A complex process of policy transfusion, and its intermingling with grassroots activism, lies behind how travelling ideas in collaborative housing get embedded in particular places.

An implication for policy mobilities research is the importance of conferences and study tours in the dissemination of the CLT idea. These are highlighted in the literature as key examples of “convergence spaces”: fleeting, ephemeral convening of interactions across scales which “acts to create a mooring point within an assemblage”, be that of trans-local social movements, professional policy circles, or varying combinations of both (Temenos 2015: 6). Without the Arena action-research study tour to the American CLT Conference – bearing all the hallmarks of “policy tourism” (Cook, Ward, and Ward 2015) – CLTs may never have transpired in Liverpool. But convergence spaces are not always constructively movement-building. Part of what turned Kensington residents off the CLT idea was their alienating experience of a conference dominated by the professional “intelligentsia” – suggesting travelling ideas in the worlds of community-based activism and fast policy are, despite apparently blurring lines, still sometimes sharply demarcated.

Interestingly for CLT movement-building, there are no examples of successful projects to date, in Liverpool at least, driven from above by professional consultants or policymakers; only those campaigns with deep grassroots support and energy from the outset have so far succeeded. This suggests that for the CLT model to gain traction it requires more than just the consent of the community for which it is intended to benefit: that they be the driving force in making it happen, if not its initiators. Part of the problem in Kensington was the distorted relationship between communities and officials, which other collaborative housing movements – notably the 1970s co-ops – have shown can be far closer, co-productive and mutually beneficial, even if at times fractious (McDonald 1986).

This has implications for contemporary collaborative housing increasingly defined by multi-actor stakeholder relationships and cross-boundary working (Czischke 2018; Lang and Stoeger 2018). Homebaked are indeed now working in complex hybrid management arrangements with multiple stakeholders – with the council, who are currently freeholders of the land, in negotiating CLT acquisition; with various housing associations who provide training for construction apprenticeships and professional advice on
allocations and rental management; with various other professionals – surveyors, architect, lawyers – some of whom sit on the CLT board; with private funders, government funding agencies and philanthropic trusts; and with a variety of secondary support organizations, such as the National CLT Network. Nonetheless, Homebaked only ever emerged through a relatively grounded, bottom-up process of participatory arts-led regeneration, in which the community were in control and able to channel their aspirations for housing in ways that more instrumental state-led projects failed to do.

Liverpool’s earlier housing co-op activism highlights the vital importance for the rapid flourishing of collaborative housing of a dedicated support infrastructure of secondary development agencies and state funding. The co-op movement grew quickly by very close working relationships between residents and ideologically committed co-op development workers, who developed innovative educational and participatory techniques. But there was a price to pay for the high levels of state support: the council retained at least 50% nominations rights for allocating co-op homes to their waiting list, to reflect state funding 100% costs, which meant that co-operators had to accept residents from outside their community. This positions the Liverpool co-ops at the other end of the collaborative housing spectrum from other co-operative and co-housing initiatives, which enable greater levels of self-selection and self-management (Tummers 2016). Moreover, the co-ops were less geared than co-housing towards shared spaces, with residents enjoying the benefits of private homes and perhaps a community centre or playground, but no co-dining or other shared activities beyond regular management meetings. The co-ops had to meet stringent design regulations imposed by the highly bureaucratic regime of the Housing Corporation. This meant that co-ops tended to “self-procure”, as opposed to self-build or self-manage, their housing. As alternative registered providers of public housing, the Liverpool co-ops were, almost by definition, highly collaborative in nature – more emphasis was placed than in other forms of collaborative housing on external stakeholder relationships over internal co-living.

These outcomes reflect Liverpool’s distinct historical-cultural context, but so too the co-op model itself. This determines the tenure structure of common ownership, and allows for the management of housing to be outsourced to an external agency rather than co-managed collectively as in the case of co-housing (Tummers 2016). In Liverpool, secondary “mother” organizations like CDS performed this role and still do to this day. However, in the early years, fuelled by the collective energy of the campaigns, many co-op groups were enthusiastic co-managers of their homes, but with time, residents experienced what they called the “post-development blues”, whereby the excitement and intensity of campaigns dissipated into exhaustion of collective energies and the more mundane realities of housing management, rent arrears and maintenance. Demotivation deepened as the original generation was replaced by the next, who lacked the collective memory or experience of political combat to spark an interest in furthering the co-operative movement. This highlights how the Liverpool co-ops – much like the CLTs – were motivated out of political reaction to external threat as opposed to more proactive desires for co-living.

The experience of Liverpool’s 1970s co-ops and contemporary CLTs suggests that collaborative housing begins through a more community-led approach of resistance to housing needs being left unmet by the market or state, as a more oppositional force, which then becomes increasingly collaborative over time, often through necessity, in the
multi-stakeholder process of developing housing in regulatory contexts. In both cases, residents worked closely from the outset with external professionals – CDS co-op development workers or Liverpool Biennial funders and artists – but this was forged for the explicit task of activating and empowering communities to drive the process forward themselves.

The way in which CLTs have evolved in Liverpool suggests an even more collaborative role than that performed or entailed by co-ops or collaborative housing in general. Homebaked CLT, for instance, is now becoming an important actor in local governance – a key partner in the Council’s regeneration plans for Anfield. The CLT not only aims to redevelop the terraced row on which the bakery sits as affordable housing but also as incubation space for other community businesses and start-up enterprises, as part of a vision for a regenerated high street. There are plans for various spin-outs as part of the Homebaked “family” – HomeFarm, an urban food growing initiative; HomeSquare, regenerated public space for cultural activities; and potentially HomeBrew, a craft brewery – to join Homebaked, the co-op bakery. Debate is afoot over potentially renaming Homebaked CLT as HomeTrust, partly to avoid confusion with the separate Homebaked bakery co-op, which currently leases space from the CLT, as well as to acknowledge the overarching stewardship role the CLT plays with respect to its multiple beneficiaries, leaseholders, partners and stakeholders. The democratic trust structure enables Homebaked, like other CLTs, to become what some scholars (Williams and Pierce 2017) have termed meso-scale governance “shims” – an emergent new scale or “wedge” between communities and formal local government, capable of providing a legitimate space of democratic decision-making owing to the common ownership and stewardship of land and assets. Such a role demands greater collaboration with both existing established governance bodies and wider populations.

A fascinating finding from this case study history is that earlier experimentation with co-ops played a pivotal part in the emergence of CLTs, laying the cultural sediments and political seeds to be reactivated when conditions were once again fertile. The idea for a new co-op in Granby, which evolved into the CLT campaign, was originally mooted by a local co-operator – a long-term resident of one of the early 1970s co-ops and son of a leading architect in the new-build co-ops. He then sought out advice for developing the CLT idea from a Liverpool academic on the Arena KTP study tour. Meanwhile, the original secondary co-op development organization in Liverpool, CDS, now North West Housing Services, provides pro bono professional advice and contractual support to Granby CLT and Homebaked have outsourced to them their rental and housing management processes.

There are also deeper historical layers deposited by travelling ideas infusing further “place effects” in creating a local culture conducive to experimentation with collaborative housing. Much of the co-operative fervour of the 1970s for “collective dweller control” can be traced to the self-help housing experiments of Peru, transferred to Liverpool via the work of John FC Turner and Colin Ward; and back further still to the influence on local community activism of a distinctive brand of anarcho-syndicalism, brought ashore to Liverpool by Spanish seafarers (Southern 2014). In these myriad ways, Liverpool’s CLT movement has evolved through creative collision of ideas from different places. This dual process of global diffusion and place-embedded mutation can be likened to a grounded policy mobilities process,
mobilized through interactions between policymakers and activists, where the CLT model is interchangeably treated as radical resistance or policy solution, reassembling in Liverpool, where it is exposed to local co-operative traditions to construct novel assemblages in Homebaked and Granby. Such complex intersections between globally mobile ideas and place-based histories suggest that we need an integrated approach to studying collaborative housing movements that combines aspects of both, on the one hand, policy mobilities and mobile urbanism, attuned to “following the policy” as it travels between places and, on the other, the more historicized, genealogical and place-based perspective of planning histories.

Note

1. My findings are drawn primarily from doctoral research undertaken between 2011 and 2015, involving historical documentary analysis, 50 in-depth semi-structured interviews with co-op development workers, community leaders, residents, council officers, councillors, housing association professionals and other stakeholders, as well as participant observation of contemporary CLT campaigns. This has been complemented by follow-up and ongoing research of Liverpool’s housing movements, voluntary work for Homebaked CLT and commissioned research for the National CLT Network. All data were coded manually using NVivo and conceptual themes were developed through a process of iterative feedback between theoretical frames and empirical observations. The historical narrative constructed in what follows is grounded in an inductive approach informed by critical-theoretical perspectives.

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