**Planning for Place: Place attachment and the founding of rural community land trusts**

**Abstract**

This paper explores the role of place attachment in motivating residents of rural communities to form community land trusts (CLTs). CLTs are non-profit community-led organisations formed and managed by volunteers. Their objectives typically relate to the provision of affordable housing. Using qualitative interview data collected from 8 CLTs in rural England, this paper highlights the ways in which their founding members mobilise place attachments to form CLTs, define and target beneficiaries, and acquire resources to facilitate affordable housing development. Founding members perceive CLT housing as a vehicle through which visions and attachments of place can be articulated, using restrictions on resales, lettings and use to enhance and maintain place attachments whilst challenging conventional logics of market housing provision. While CLT objectives are explicitly derived from a desire to maintain, protect and enhance social and functional bonds to place, strong emphases on place attachment in the planning and allocation of rural housing may deny housing opportunities to those without such attachments.

1.0 **Introduction**

It is well established that rural communities face significant housing challenges. Issues of limited rural housing supply, discrepancies between house prices and rural incomes, and the flight of young adults to larger settlements in search of improved housing opportunities are well rehearsed in the academic literature (Shucksmith, 1981; Satsangi et al, 2010). In response to rural housing crises, some communities have sought to become actively engaged in planning processes in order to facilitate new housing provision by participating in procedures of community consultation (Sturzaker, 2011), via creation and influence of planning policies that influence and facilitate development appropriate to local needs (Gallent et al, 2019), or through neighbourhood planning processes (Bradley, 2017). The focus of this paper is on the role of rural community land trusts (CLTs); a form of community-based housing organisation in rural England. Community land trusts are formed and managed by local volunteers, usually residents of a place-based community, and acquire land in order to develop new affordable housing for local people in housing need. They are part of a growth and resurgence of community-led housing initiatives reflected throughout the UK and globally (Moore and Mullins, 2018). CLTs have emerged in unique and particular contexts internationally. CLTs were initially forged in the Civil Rights era in the USA to advance land and property rights and have developed to tackle issues of gentrification and displacement (Engelsman et al, 2018). In rural Scotland, CLTs were not exclusively focused on housing provision, but rather on assuming community ownership of land in response to historic feudal land ownership. In England, the focus of rural CLTs been on the development and provision of affordable housing, rather than explicitly grounded in historic land ownership injustices such as in Scotland. Most studies of rural CLTs in England have explored their negotiation of strategic policy and resource frameworks (Paterson and Dunn, 2009; Moore, 2018). This paper departs from this policy orientation to consider the role of place attachment in motivating local volunteers to form and develop CLTs. Place attachment, which can take the form of attachments to social, physical or functional elements of place (Lewicka, 2011), is widely considered as an important motivator for civic action in quantitative studies and psychology literature but has been under-explored in qualitative research and community planning literature (Manzo and Perkins, 2006; Bradley, 2017). This is an important consideration in the context of CLTs, as those that establish rural CLTs are rarely, if ever, the eventual beneficiaries of the housing they provide. Why do local residents volunteer for CLTs? How does place attachment motivate their involvement and to what end?

This paper begins by outlining the literature on place attachment and community-led planning and participation, outlining the different ways in which place attachment is conceptualised and its role as a motivator for civic action. This is followed by an overview of the growth and development of rural community land trusts in England, situating this within a framework of policy development and a narrative that constructs CLTs as a vehicle through which place attachment is expressed. Section 4 discusses the qualitative methodology deployed to gather data for this paper, which is based on 8 case studies and 56 interviews with rural community land trust board members. In Section 5, empirical research is discussed in relation to themes of place attachment and motivation; place definition, attachment and housing allocations; and place attachment and resource acquisition. The findings contend that place attachment serves as an important motivation for those forming and developing CLTs due to the detrimental impacts that rural housing problems have on their local community. However, the desire to provide housing is contingent on that housing being allocated to those who share social and functional attachments to place with existing local residents. Local connection policies based on CLT understanding and definitions of place and community are used to ensure this, while place attachment is also mobilised to acquire resources from those who share CLT sentiments and objectives as to the importance of place attachment. In the conclusion, I argue that place attachment is an important influence on the founding and activity of CLTs. While this emphasis on place presents opportunities for CLTs to articulate different visions and understandings of the purpose of housing that challenge the logics of market provision focused on exchange values, there may also be potential for such an emphasis to exclude those that lack the social and functional attachments to place to which CLTs are beholden.

**2.0 Understanding place attachment**

Ideas of place attachment are regularly mobilised in rural and community planning initiatives. Place attachment can be defined as “the bonds between people and place based on affection (emotion, feeling), cognition (thought, knowledge, belief) and practice (action, behaviour)” (Gustafson, 2006: 19). Attachments to place are developed through the strength of the bonds people have with different social, physical and functional facets of place. Social aspects of place may include residential and familial relationships (Lewicka, 2011), family and generational networks and histories (Riley, 2009; Stockdale and Ferguson, 2020), or the frequency and breadth of social contacts and networks within a place (Gieling et al, 2017). Place attachment can also be generated and intensified through affections for the physical or environment characteristics of a place (Devine-Wright, 2009) or through functional use, such as reliance and dependence on the resources, labour markets or attributes of a place to support individual goals or activities (Lin and Lockwood, 2014; Gieling et al, 2017). Place attachment is therefore multi-faceted and can include attachments not only to physical settings but to the people, communities and lifestyles that exist within those settings.

The breadth and different forms of place attachment indicate that attachment is not necessarily experienced in a uniform manner by the residents of one (geographic) place. There are differences as to the strength of place attachment within and between local populations according to personal characteristics and there may be different reasons or mechanisms by which place attachment generates (van Veelen and Haggett, 2016). Rootedness to a community is commonly discussed as a predictor of place attachment, with some scholars equating length of residence with the strength of place attachment (Hay, 1998; Lewicka, 2005). Relph (1976) used concepts of ‘insideness’ and ‘outsideness’ to explain different degrees of attachment with and identification to a place, with ‘existential insideness’ deemed as the strongest degree generated by long residence and generational ties.

Savage’s (2010) work contrasted those with attachment based on nostalgia or long-term dwelling with those who choose their place of residence according to specific characteristics and identities. This process of elective belonging means that some residents may develop and perform selective forms of attachment pertaining to particular aspects of the residential environment that support their interests and identity, rather than a more general attachment to a village or place as a whole (Gieling et al, 2019). The distinction between short and long-term residency in communities has been used to explain different types and degrees of place attachment; for instance, Stedman (2006) suggested that second home owners in rural communities may have stronger attachments to environmental landscapes and physical qualities of communities, while more permanent residents exhibit stronger attachments to sense and meaning of community.

However, others have questioned the assumption that short-term residency cannot be equated with social attachments, offering evidence that ‘newcomers’ to rural communities consciously develop and hone social networks in order to connect with and become accepted within new communities (Haartsen and Stockdale, 2018). This work also highlights the overlaps between ideas of place attachment and concepts of community, which emphasise the associational ties, social bonding, and feelings of belonging amongst groups of people (Raymond et al, 2010; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). As per the social elements of place attachment, attachment to a place may also equate to, and strengthen or weaken accordingly, the level of attachment to those who live there and with whom a community is formed (Woldoff, 2002). While concepts of community are not always intrinsically tied to ideas of place and locale, thinking for instance about communities of interest or digital communities, in this instance and in this paper reference to community refers to a geographic community of place (Hargreaves, 2004). The following section addresses the relationship between these geographic communities of place and the influence place attachment has on their participation and involvement in local planning and action.

**2.1 Place attachment and participation**

Attachments to place are important considerations in understanding how and why communities participate in planning processes. Manzo and Perkins (2006) argue that the affective and emotional bonds that members of a community have towards places may provoke them to articulate and act upon this place meaning in trying to protect, improve, or influence their local communities; and that “an understanding of place attachments and meanings can provide lessons about what mobilizes people” (Manzo and Perkins, 2006: 347). Place attachment frames and influences the methods and direction of community action and planning activities. An increasing body of literature has begun to understand how different forms of place attachment act as a stimulus to participation and action, exploring what forms place attachment takes (i.e. what is it that people are attached to?) and how these serve as a motivation for local action.

While personal characteristics such as length of residency (and hence, in some scholars’ work, strength of attachment) has been associated with civic activity (Lewicka, 2005), distinctions between those rooted in communities by time and ‘newcomers’ are not always conclusive predictors of the relationship between place attachment and participation (Gieling et al, 2017). This is in part because many studies identify that place attachment can be selective towards particular aspects of a community, may be ambivalent or contingent on certain events, or arise through disruptive interventions and threats, suggesting a temporal aspect as and when specific disruptions arise and conclude (Devine-Wright, 2009; Manzo, 2014). Gieling et al (2019) found that selective forms of attachment, related to specific social, cultural or environmental aspects of a community, were stronger predictors of volunteering in rural communities than those with more generalised forms of attachments based on historical connections and residency. That citizens participate in community action based on their interests in and relation to specific amenities is also evidenced by Scannell and Gifford (2010b) who found that attachment to the natural environment, rather than more general civic attachments, was an instigator for pro-environmental behaviours. This suggests that in many cases rural communities of place engage in participative and influential civic behaviours according to specific areas of attachment and interest.

The role of place attachment as a motivator for community participation warrants further interrogation. With respect to planning in rural areas, place attachments have often been framed as protectionist behaviour and oppositional to development, often understood through the lens of ‘NIMBYism’. Recent work has nuanced that concept, arguing that opposition to development is a form of place-protective action, stimulated by disruptions to pre-existing attachments to place – for instance, attachments and value attributed to scenic landscapes – rather than as irrational or pejorative obstruction (Burningham, 2000; Devine-Wright, 2009). Research also shows that, rather than utilised in an oppositional sense, place attachments can act as motivators for civic, pro-development initiatives and that the mobilisation and presence of attachments by those embedded within a place can influence local acceptance of potentially disruptive changes to social and physical environments (van Veelen and Haggett, 2016; Bradley 2017). Bradley’s work highlights the ways in which neighbourhood planning initiatives frame and mobilise ideas of place attachment and place identities in the planning and delivery of new homes, asserting specific plans and policies for housing founded on and shaped by local visions of place, belonging, and consideration of how the distinctiveness of place and context can be retained.

There can, however, be multiple and competing visions of and attachments to place (van Veelen and Haggett, 2016), and places are intrinsically laden with power relations that can affect which visions are elevated and prioritised in planning processes. As Scott et al (2019: 356) note, rural residents “display great variety in terms of place attachment and their particular ambitions for rural planning and development.” Haartsen and Stockdale (2018) highlight that identifying *with* a place can also involve identifying *against* other types of places, and these contrasts can influence views as to the ways in which development should and should not occur. Visions of place and understanding of ‘community’, such as rural tranquillity and idylls, can be used to justify opposition to development and exclude ‘outsiders’ lacking the rootedness and ‘insideness’ to place (Sturzaker, 2010), while encouraging citizens and communities to articulate their meanings and attachments to place through participative efforts may inevitably privilege those with the power, capacity and resource to take advantage of such opportunities (Sturzaker and Shaw, 2015). Recent work by Stockdale and Ferguson (2020) has shown how place attachment acts as an advantage for young adults from farm families, who are able to resolve their housing disadvantage by mobilising embedded familial networks and relationships to access land for self-build housing, suggesting that ‘localness’ can be advantageous in the acquisition of resources and resolution of housing problems.

While some studies have identified that concerns for place attachment can be difficult to reconcile with the development priorities and influence held by city and national Governments and private developers (Alawadi, 2017; Bradley 2017), appeals to the ideas of place and civic attachment have been increasingly encouraged in the English policy context. Neighbourhood planning powers were introduced in the 2011 Localism Act, endowing communities with significant powers that allow them to “develop a shared vision for their area” (MHCLG, 2019: 10). The latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework in England, a set of principles that theoretically guide and influence planning decisions, encourages local planning authorities to “establish or maintain a strong sense of place” (MHCLG, 2019: 38). Place is critical in understanding not only how and why people react to proposed developments or disruptions, but increasingly how it serves as an impetus for the construction of alternative futures and articulations of place through new projects and developments that reflect localised attachments. These attachments involve bonds between people and place, taking the form of social attachments – shared relationships, networks, histories and affection for areas – and attachments to physical and functional aspects of place, including environmental amenities, resources, and labour markets. These attachments can act as a stimulus to participation and action in community-led planning, though with some limited exceptions, the role of place attachment is often framed as an explanation for reactions to disruptions, rather than as a motivator for pro-development actions and behaviours. In addition, the dynamic, contingent and contextual nature of place attachment within and between communities suggests that there may be variation in the way in which we understand place attachment as a motivator for community participation in planning.

The remainder of this paper explores the ways in which these different forms of place attachment motivate the formation of rural community land trusts and manifest in the individual voluntarism that underpins their growth and development. The following sections provids an overview of their emergence as a rural affordable housing provider and of research methods. The remainder of the paper then presents research findings that highlight the critical role and influence that place attachment has on the formation, resource acquisition and targeting of CLTs. These findings provide evidence that responds to Manzo and Perkins’ (2006: 348) call to understand how place attachment “can motivate residents to participate in their communities and work to improve and protect them.”

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**3.0 Place attachment in and through rural community land trusts**

Community land trusts (CLTs) are citizen-led place-based organisations formed and managed by residents of a local community (Moore and McKee, 2012). CLTs emerged through the American Civil Rights era, as a way of gaining and protecting land and property rights for African American communities and have since spread internationally, taking root in a diverse range of international contexts in the Global North and South (Mullins and Moore, 2018). While originally associated with land reform, CLTs in the 21st Century are strongly associated with ownership and protection of affordable housing, helping to tackle issues such as gentrification, displacement, neighbourhood regeneration, and housing affordability in urban and rural areas (Thompson, 2020). In England, rural CLTs are typically formed to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing and other community amenities. In this respect, they represent an extension of longstanding community engagement and participation in rural housing delivery, such as through the work of rural housing associations, but can be differentiated from previous community-led efforts on the basis of their ownership of resources (land and housing are typically owned by a community in perpetuity) and their governance (usually strongly based on management groups of local volunteers, local membership bases, and democratic decision-making). In this respect, rural CLTs perform a dual role as affordable housing provider on one hand, and as a vehicle through which communities can be influential in local housing planning and delivery on the other.

CLTs have emerged in the context of enduring challenges associated with rural housing affordability, planning policies perceived as limiting housing development, and trends of counter-urbanisation that contribute to rising land and housing costs. This has led to concern for the impacts on local people in rural areas, often understood as those with family links, social ties, and functional dependence on rural communities. Policy and practice initiatives in the early 2000s, along with the advent of the English Conservative Government’s localism agenda and concomitant initiatives such as neighbourhood planning, contributed to rising interest in the potential contribution of rural CLTs. Indeed, while CLTs are an urban and rural phenomenon, thus far the literature has largely focused on their use and potential in urban areas, even though the genesis of the CLT movement in England was in rural locations, where the majority of completed CLT housing developments can be found. Precise data on the number of CLTs is unavailable, though the National CLT Network estimate there to be several hundred around the country with the majority of the estimated 1,000 completed homes located in rural areas (National CLT Network, 2020).

CLTs seem to imply a continuation and formalisation of other forms of community empowerment in rural housing provision through the creation and sustainment of a new housing organisation and provider. CLTs are typically formed and managed by volunteers in rural communities, though may strike partnerships with professional organisations such as housing associations or specialist technical organisations to advance their housing developments. They sit on a continuum of other forms of community empowerment in the planning of rural housing, such as participation in the planning process (Sturzaker, 2011) and influence on the tenure and allocation of homes through policy (Gallent et al, 2019). However, there has been limited study of the role of rural CLTs. Research has largely focused on policy barriers and the ways in which their ambitions are reconciled within strategic policy and resource frameworks (Paterson and Dunn, 2009; Moore, 2018). There has to date been little investigation of the motivations that sit behind the formation of CLTs, the ways in which volunteers and participants in CLTs articulate a “local sense of belonging” (Jarvis, 2015), and the ways in which they may act upon the place attachments and visions of local people through collective, place-based ownership of land and buildings. Cahen et al’s (2020) study of CLTs in the United States argues that, as asset-owning organisations, they are able to “care for place, land and communities” and that their emphasis on affordable housing and challenge to private speculation tackles place-based crises, nurtures supportive community ties through tackling issues of displacement, and taps into local networks that can enhance residential environments.

Rural CLTs have received significant political support in England and may act as a counterweight to high second home ownership in some rural communities and as a solution to problems of rural housing supply and affordability. Political arguments in their favour lie not just in their potential purpose as a technical solution to challenges of planning and housing supply, but of their relationship to and emphasis on place, community, and attachment. Rory Stewart, a Government Minister in the early 2010s and architect of several reforms and policies in this period that sought to devolve power to local communities, was particularly supportive of rural CLTs, arguing that:

“These are projects in which communities have a competitive advantage over the state because local knowledge matters in those projects. It is very important to live in a place in order to produce a really good plan for that place. The people who live there know about the place and care about it. They come up with creative solutions, street by street, on where to place a school, on how much housing to allow and on who will live in the affordable houses and where they will be located.”

This highlights the intrinsic relationship that CLTs are thought to have towards place. They are perceived to form on the basis of existing place-based ties and are able to harness these attachments to improve their local communities. However, there has been little investigation as to how place attachments inform and influence the founding, development, and outcomes of CLTs. This is particularly key given the different social, physical and functional facets of place attachment that can serve as a motivator for community planning participation. This paper aims to fill this research gap, presenting evidence that explains how different forms of place attachments motivate the creation and founding of CLTs and the ways in which they inform CLT work and outputs.

**4.0 Methods**

This paper is based on a series of qualitative case studies conducted with eight rural CLTs. A total of 56 interviews were conducted across the case studies with members of the CLT board or management group and organisations that partnered, funded or supported CLTs. These participants were typically involved with the CLT’s foundation and development, assuming specific responsibilities for the setting and delivery of organisational objectives, negotiation of policy frameworks and inter-organisational relationships, and facilitating broader community engagement and participation. Interviews were structured around key themes of: a) Context, personal motivations, and reasons for community-led housing action – i.e. what issues did the CLT aim to respond to, including exploration of perceptions of the local housing context, existing housing provision, and housing allocations ; b) Ambitions and objectives for the CLT, including how these were identified and negotiated within and between the CLT and broader community; c) The ways in which resources such as land and finance were acquired to enable the CLT to pursue its goals; d) The logic and rationales for the siting and allocation of homes provided by the CLT, and ways in which the ability to influence siting and allocations distinguishes CLTs from other forms of rural housing provision; and e) Reflections on future ambitions, objectives, and involvement in the CLT. All CLTs were based in rural villages spread across different parts of the North and South of England. While the case studies cover a broad geography, the housing issues and context of each village were similar. Each were based in remote areas with populations typically below 1000, where there had been little recent new housing development, where the majority of homes are owner-occupied, and where there were stark and large discrepancies between high house prices and low incomes, leading to the exclusion of low-income households, many of whom were perceived as having a social or functional dependence on the area. The social, economic and housing context in each case study echoed Gallent and Scott’s (2019) concern for the survival of rural economies and communities without enhanced housing access and affordability. The housing developments undertaken by CLTs were typically around 6-10 housing units in size, though one scheme was as high as 20 homes, and the majority of homes delivered through CLTs were for sub-market rents. Allocation criteria usually involved assessments of housing need (e.g., economic and current housing circumstance), as well as assessment of a prospective resident’s connection (or attachment) to the local community. While forms of community housing are often associated with self-build schemes, where the residents of homes and communities participate in the actual construction of the schemes, the vast majority of CLT homes were developed and built through partnerships with housing associations and professional construction organisations (see Moore, 2018 for further exploration of such partnerships).

Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and an iterative, inductive analytical process was taken. It is through this process that place attachment emerged as a predominant theme and explanatory factor for participant involvement in CLTs, the ways in which they were able to acquire key resources to develop, and the allocation and targeting of their homes. An advantage of the qualitative and inductive approach to this research and analysis is its foregrounding of the subjective views, experiences and perspectives of participants, complementing many of the quantitative studies that explore the scope and prevalence of place attachment. The design and analysis of this study has also enabled exploration not just of the ways in which place attachment is conceived by CLT volunteers and acts as a motivator, but also of how this fundamentally influences the targeting of their work through the allocation of affordable homes – in essence, exploring not just whether place attachment is evident, but the form it takes and the ways in which it has a significant effect on the work and outcomes of civic initiative.

5.0 **Research findings**

**5.1 Place attachment as a motivator for CLT formation**

It is well established that many rural communities in England are affected by problems of housing supply and affordability, as well as changes to industries and economies, that can result in problems of housing access, affordability and exclusion of younger and/or lower-income households (Hoolachan et al, 2017; Gallent and Scott, 2019). These issues were of common concern to CLT volunteers in this study. One interviewee commented that their village had become “ridiculously expensive; it’s become a sought-after area so people on lower incomes find it very difficult to find accommodation.” (CLT Interview, South West). This concern was echoed in other case studies; many volunteers were motivated to form and participate in CLTs due to the detrimental impacts that rural housing affordability and supply were perceived to have on the local community. While securely housed herself, one interviewee explained the need for a CLT in her community with reference to the future sustainability of amenities and vibrancy of the local community, arguing that more affordable housing was essential to enhance the diversity of the local population: “you’ve got to think about the sustainability of the parish you are living in and think about the future” (CLT Interview, North West). This cognition of local housing problems combined with affection for their place of residence was echoed by others who perceived problems of speculative housing development and second home residency as being inappropriate and unsuitable for the housing needs of the local community. This was referenced by a CLT board member in relation to a survey of the local population:

“It was quite evident that the majority of the village didn’t want any more market housing. They didn’t see a need for it. They didn’t want any more second homes to develop because that’s what is likely to happen; people from London buy a second home. Nice people but, you know, it’s not what we want. But it was identified that we definitely needed affordable housing.” (CLT Interview, South West)

Participants spoke not just of the ‘technical’ issues of homes being too expensive or there being insufficient supply, but of the direct impacts this had on members of their community. Motivations were often explained with reference to the experiences of family members or friends:

“There was a huge problem with affordable housing. I suppose that was the main reason why most of us in the group actually got involved, simply because there was no way for our family to stay if they wanted to live in the village because there was just nothing there. Certainly it was why I got involved.” (CLT Interview, North West)

It should be noted that, as discussed below, planning and funding constraints mean that CLT volunteers are not able to simply build housing to be allocated to family members, but the personal experience of those within social or familial networks was particularly motivating for those that formed and developed CLTs. This motivation was evident in other CLTs, where interviewees drew on their ties and relationships with people within the community to explain their involvement with the CLT:

“I really wanted to see it work and that’s why I put my name forward. I wanted to see those houses built because I know some of the youngsters who kept asking me about them, ‘What’s going to happen?’ I know they’re desperate. In fact, one family’s not going to have any children until they can move, and that’s why I did it basically” (CLT Interview, South West)

This was echoed by another volunteer in the same CLT, who explained her objective as providing the opportunity for “people who grew up in this village, who have strong connections to the village, to be able to stay here, reenhance the community, reinforce the community and reinforce the community spirit” (CLT Interview, South West). CLTs regularly appealed to notions of community and both the individual motivations of board members and the objectives of the organisation were regularly expressed through this lens. CLTs and the housing they developed was seen as key to the maintenance of community bonds. Words such as ‘spirit’, ‘character’, and ‘ethos’ were regularly used to describe the local community and the aspects of place that the CLT was perceived to contribute to. In this way, CLTs were focused not only on the technical provision of affordable housing and a cognitive understanding of housing affordability and need, but in ensuring CLT provision helped to enhance and maintain existing social attachments between residents and to place:

“We have young people, especially indigenous young people, who will really struggle to stay in this village without these houses. And they want stay and should be able to stay. Without them, the unique nature of the village would be changed fundamentally, it would become a middle-class commuter area or a sort of retirement area. I think it’s crucial to the long-term survival of the village and maintaining the ethos of the village.” (CLT Interview, South West)

When probed as to how this ethos was felt and reflected in the community, the CLT volunteer spoke of deep-rooted social bonds and intergenerational interactions between community members:

“You can go in the pub and you’ll see old Maurice there, he’ll be chatting to somebody aged 40, aged 20, and they’ll be talking about ‘oh do you remember when so and so lived here, and so lived there; that kind of deeply embedded history is here. It’s absolutely essential that the character of the village is maintained in that way. They’re sort of folk memories if you like.” (CLT Interview, South West).

The motivations for forming a CLT were therefore clearly grounded in a desire to maintain and preserve a sense of place expressed through the affective bonds and social ties of community members. The aim was not simply to provide more affordable housing, but to do so in a way that enhanced and intensified social attachments to place based on shared relationships, generational networks, and embedded histories. Those involved with CLTs possessed strong attachment to these social aspects of place, with their perception of local housing problems grounded in feelings of affection for and solidarity with those who shared attachments to place and through their cognition of the impact that housing problems were having on the tangible aspects of their communities (e.g., impact on local services) and the intangible (the ‘spirit’ and ‘character’ of their villages). There was therefore both a cognitive dimension and an affective dimension to their participation in community-led initiatives, motivated both by their identification of and with disruptions and threats to place, and their emotional connection with and sense of community.

The attachments to place underpinning these motivations also suggested that residents of CLT homes needed to be *of* place, not just *in* place. It was important for CLT volunteers that the beneficiaries of their voluntarism held local connections and shared attachments and meanings of place. Thus, there was not simply support for housing and positive attitudes in favour of development, but rather a desire to facilitate the delivery of housing for a localised, identifiable community who shared affection for and attachments to place. The following section discusses how CLTs achieve this through the prioritisation of homes for those who are able to demonstrate community or functional attachments to place.

**5.2 Place attachment and the allocation and planning of housing**

The use of local connections in housing allocations is enshrined in English rural housing policy, specifically through the use of rural exception sites. These are sites of land within or adjacent to rural communities where planning permission can only be granted if developments are for affordable housing and allocation is usually restricted to those with connections to the local community. The majority of CLTs in this study, though not all, built on exception sites. This means that policy enabled them to apply local connection policies to the homes they built, obliging prospective residents to demonstrate connection to place in additional to conventional housing need criteria such as income and housing circumstance. Unlike other forms of community-led and collaborative housing provision, such as co-housing, those involved in forming and developing CLTs were not the beneficiaries of the housing that was built, and formal allocation criteria was drawn up through negotiation between CLTs, their local authorities, and in some instances partnering housing associations. Prospective residents were required to exhibit a form of place attachment in order to be allocated a property or self-build plot, such as a familial relationship with other residents in the geographic area, long-term residency (often at least 3-5 years residing in the community, usually in an unsuitable housing circumstance), or functional attachment to the community through employment:

“We set up criteria where they [prospective tenants] must live or work within the area or have a family connection. We set clauses on the self-build properties that they cannot be second homes, holiday lets or rented out to other people. They must live in them themselves, which we felt was important for the sustainability of the community. We didn’t want people to think “this is a cheap plot, it’s a money-making scheme, I’m just going to build and then rent out” (CLT Interview, North West)

It was felt by volunteers that setting allocation criteria in this way would help ensure that new housing development would contribute to the sense of place and attachments to village life felt by existing residents, whilst ensuring that new residents would contribute to the maintenance of either the social attachments to place (such as continuation and intensification of kinship networks and community relations) and/or the physical attachments to place experienced by existing residents, such as contributing to the use and survival of local amenities or services. Interviewees in all eight case studies regularly expressed similar sentiments as to the prioritisation of those with local or functional attachments to place in housing allocations and, as the quotation above illustrates, were adamant that housing should be kept affordable in perpetuity. Interviewees were committed to ensuring the use value of housing was prioritised above its exchange value and felt this was best achieved through restrictions on resales or rents, as well as allocation to those with attachments to place. Indeed, the ability to achieve this served as a motivating factor, echoing previous studies that have found that communities are more amenable to housing development if homes are restricted to those with a local connection through planning policies (Yarwood, 2002; Sturzaker, 2011). This is an important nuance that underpins and motivates rural CLTs. Volunteers were motivated to form and develop CLTs on their own initiative on the understanding that allocation and occupancy criteria could be applied to ensure that new developments enhanced rather than diminished the affective bonds, social ties, and shared sense of place felt by existing residents. Without this influence over allocations, it is unlikely those involved would have been motivated to form and manage CLTs. The place-based nature of the CLT organisational structure, with its emphasis on democratic, community-controlled governance structures, appealed to volunteers.

While local connection is often interpreted to mean a connection to a specific village, there were instances were CLTs, in negotiation with their local planning authorities, devised allocation criteria which reflected a geography of place and community that differed from administrative boundaries. One interviewee described this as having “the liberty to redefine, geographically, what the community might amount to” (CLT Interview, South West), and discussed the inclusion of some neighbouring parishes in their housing allocation criteria on the basis of shared facilities and exclusion of others. This ‘imagined’ community (Anderson, 1983) differed from formal administrative boundaries and allocation policies reflected “what we regard as the community” and included “those who had always thought of themselves as part of the village, but weren’t there officially” (CLT Interview, South West) such as neighbouring hamlets. This highlights the ways in which CLTs sought to articulate a different vision and understanding of housing as a resource that reflected a sense of community and place, rather than as a resource to be speculatively bought and sold or allocated by distant authorities.

CLTs were therefore mobilised as a vehicle through which people’s sense and meaning of place and community could be reflected in housing allocation policies. Housing is prioritised for those who hold and share place attachments. Yet, it should be noted that CLT housing development was not motivated and informed only by attachments to localised, identifiable communities of people and place, but also by a desire to balance the need for new homes with concerns for rural character and environment. For some, as articulated in the preceding analysis, the character of a village was expressed through the affective bonds and ties between residents, but for others it also related to ensuring development that was ‘in keeping’ with the local environment, By forming a CLT, villages were able to more strongly influence the siting and scale of homes than through developments led by other project sponsors, something that was felt important. Motivations for participating in CLTs were not restricted to a desire to enhance social and communal attachments to place but extended to a concern for natural landscapes to which people were attached. One volunteer caveated his desire to see new homes with concern for ‘sustainable’ growth: ““I wanted to see the new houses in the village. A village has to progress, not too fast, but it has to keep growing to sustain itself, as long as it’s not intrusive and spoiling” (CLT Interview, South West). This view was shared by an ‘incomer’ to a village, someone whom had demonstrated Savage’s (2010) concept of elective belonging by moving to the community due to its characteristics and identity:

“I’m not one for covering everything in aspic and leaving it exactly as it is, you know, things change and move, but, yes, actually protecting the environment that makes the village work [was a key motivator]. I mean, I explained to you at the start [of the interview] my attitude to this village and why we chose to live here, that it’s got everything a village needs to be really successful, and that includes the indigenous tribe.”

This echoes Bradley’s findings (2017) that community groups can mobilise specific visions and identities of place that people are attached to. These attachments may take the form of interpersonal relations, perceived by CLT volunteers as integral to community life and as a motivator for establishing new housing initiatives and allocation criteria, or they may also take the form of attachments to the physical landscape and environment of villages. This echoes Devine Wright’s (2009) conception of place attachment as a form of place-protective action. Housing development is often opposed on the grounds of its detrimental effect on the natural and physical environment of rural communities, but in this instance these attachments to natural and physical landscapes were mobilised to enhance rather disrupt place attachments.

This analysis shows the ways in which CLTs mobilise particular emotions and senses of place to define a geography for their area of beneficiary, and the ways in which place is defined through both social and functional attachments and with reference to the physical landscape. This dual focus reflects Alwadi’s (2017: 2976) view that “place attachment conceptualises people’s emotional attachments not only to physical settings, but also to the people and lifestyles that those settings support.” CLT volunteers are motivated by the attachments that they have to place, which crucially should not be understood solely as attachment to place in its physical form, but to those who possess social, familial, and functional attachments to communities. The community control offered by the legal basis of CLTs and opportunity to influence housing allocations through local planning policy further motivated the participation of board members and fostered the ability of CLTs to enhance and maintain attachments to community and place. As the following section argues, the articulation of these attachments through a CLT can have a fundamental influence on their ability to acquire resources and progress development.

**5.3 Place attachment and resource acquisition**

Acquiring resources to progress their development is a fundamental challenge for many CLTs. CLTs are formed by volunteers without financial or physical resources, and must raise capital through public subsidies or bank loans to purchase land and construct housing. There is also often a need to raise funds to pay for technical assistance and support, such as legal advice and architectural design.

While the majority of CLTs funded their housing development through public subsidies for affordable housing, there were some specific instances where CLTs were able to mobilise their place attachments in order to acquire key resources. One CLT was bequeathed land by a deceased local resident who was keen that such assets should be used for community benefit. Another CLT was able to purchase land for a nominal rate due to the benevolence of a local landowner who shared the CLT’s vision of and attachment to place. The landowner was persuaded to release the land for housing to the CLT at such a low rate precisely because of the CLT’s attachment to place and commitment to meeting the housing needs of those with local and functional attachments. Commenting on the relationship with the local landowner, one CLT volunteer explained the importance of this local connection:

“He was very keen that his workers should live locally, that the community should be self-generating and that it shouldn’t be sold to incomers. And he made the plot of land available for a penny.” (CLT Interview, South West)

Shared attachments to place and commitments to the community helped to unlock land for development that would not have been made available to other housing providers thought to lack the affective bonds and embedded networks within the community. However, it should be noted that CLTs were regularly dependent on resources and support from those outside the community. Thus, CLT development did not and could not progress within tight place-based boundaries, but also through linkages with external actors and partners, echoing Rex and Foxton’s (2020) observation that being ‘locally-rooted’ does not necessarily mean relying solely on local resources. Previous studies have found that such partners are essential for CLTs to successfully develop housing (Moore, 2018). These actors and partners were often located either through personal networks or selected according to perceptions of whether partners would conflict with the remit and ethos of the CLT. In one instance, a CLT utilised the personal networks of a local resident to access pro bono legal support from a solicitor in the neighbouring urban centre that employed people with links to the village. The Chair of the CLT (South West) explained that they chose the legal firm “because they’re local” and described the local connections held by their contact at the organisation: “The person that’s been allocated to us is very good. His mother lives in this village. He is local and knows the village, so his input, pro bono work, is way over the top of what would normally be expected.” In this instance, it was important to the CLT that the case worker *knew* the village, which would ensure that advice and guidance would be given in the context of an understanding of the CLT’s objectives. Furthermore, the CLT’s place-based nature was able to tap into the place attachments of the case worker in order to unlock resources that are critical to the feasibility of a voluntary organisation.

This support was especially important as specialist knowledge and expertise related to the planning, design and delivery of housing are regularly cited as barriers to the formation and implementation of CLTs (Aird, 2009). Rural CLTs often mitigate this through partnerships with housing associations who may assume responsibility for some specialist and technical tasks on a contractual basis. However, rural CLTs were selective in their approach to partnering with housing associations and were wary of entering into agreements with housing associations who didn’t share similar understandings of what constituted appropriate rural housing development. One CLT board member spoke of some housing associations having a “completely different mindset, providing for a completely different type of person, and a different design”. In the different case study areas, some CLTs were conscious of ‘specialist’ rural housing associations who were well known for community engagement and sensitivity in the planning, siting and design of new homes in rural communities. One such housing association was selected on the basis of “the number of rural developments they’re involved in and the differences in the architecture of the properties. We saw a company that built homes that fit an area.” Agreements with housing associations were only entered into on the basis that partnerships were based on shared understandings of the character and physical landscape of place, and that CLTs would desire houses to look a certain way and be allocated to particular groups based on their attachments to place and motivations for getting involved. Partnering housing associations were often those who had histories of supporting community activism in housing provision, such as smaller charitable, community-based housing associations differentiated from associations deemed as larger or more commercially minded.

Attachments to and understandings of place are therefore important to the acquisition of resources for CLTs. The social ties and affective bonds shared by people of the same community can help to unlock land for development, while the care for place shown by CLTs both helps to acquire land and support from local professionals and influences the partnerships and agreements they enter into. Place attachments are not only mobilised as a motivator for CLTs to form and develop, but as a way in which resources can be claimed and negotiated to progress the core objectives regarding the planning, design and allocation of housing in ways that are sensitive to their understandings of place.

**6.0 Discussion and conclusions**

This paper has explored the ways in which place attachment motivates community participation in planning and, more specifically, mobilises residents of rural communities to form and develop community-based housing organisations such as CLTs. In doing so, it aims to provide an understanding of the ways in which place attachments inform and shape rural community action. Literature on the links between place attachment and volunteering has shown that participation in civic action is often premised on attachments to specific amenities or facets of place. The research presented in this paper develops this literature, highlighting that volunteering and participation in CLTs is driven not only by attachments to the physical aspects of place, such as the design and location of housing, or the provision of specific amenities such as affordable housing, but also by attachments to particular people and communities. The opportunity to develop, provide and protect housing for residents with local and/or functional attachments to the local community motivated the formation of CLTs. Place attachment therefore serves as an important motivator for establishing rural community-led housing projects and frames and influences the methods and direction of the community action and planning that occurs.

Place attachment is also a decisive factor in understanding how rural housing problems can be overcome. By setting objectives that reflected care and concern for place and residents attached to that place, CLTs were able to acquire and mobilise important resources that are key to the development and delivery of housing initiatives, further highlighting that scope for participation and influence is important to community acceptance of and participation in rural housing development. The acquisition of land from benevolent landowners shows how place attachment can influence rural housing development opportunities, echoing the findings of Stockdale and Ferguson (2020) who highlight the ways in which kinship networks can support access to land for self-build housing in farming communities, suggesting that rural housing development can be relational and contingent in different contexts.

CLTs appeal to rural communities due to their ability to endow residents with influence and control over the planning and allocation of housing. Those involved with forming and developing CLTs are, in negotiation with local planning authorities and partners, able to devise housing allocation criteria that reflect particular constructions of and attachments to place. This may include revised geographies of benefit that resonate more clearly with the lived experience of place than administrative boundaries, and emphasises local views that affordable housing in rural communities should be prioritised for those who share social and functional attachments to place, in addition to economic assessments of housing need. It is well evidenced that allocation criteria that prioritises local connections can affect acceptance of rural housing development (Gallent and Robinson, 2011). The commitment to providing housing for those with local connections shown by CLTs in this study can be understood as a way of elevating the importance of place attachment in housing allocations. This served as a fundamental motivation for many and the objectives of CLTs were explicitly derived from the emotional connections to people and place held by volunteers and their desires to maintain, protect and enhance social and functional attachments to place. This echoes Flint’s (2015) observation that concepts of identity, emotion and belonging have become increasingly resonant in the provision and allocation of affordable housing, often assuming primacy or importance alongside ‘rational’ calculations of housing need. While this reflects the sense and construction of place experienced by local residents, the terminology of the ‘local’ and a selection of residents based on prior place attachments inevitably holds the potential to exclude those who lack historical or strong connections and attachments to place (Laurie, 2011). This holds important implications for the ways in which we understand and define housing need, and the grounds by which people are allocated or denied housing.

While beyond the scope of this paper, the ways in which these allocations are rationalised, negotiated and justified within and between CLTs and their strategic partners would be an interesting line of enquiry. Further studies may explore the ways in which these place attachments are negotiated and constructed within housing allocations and the ways in which criteria is decided upon and prioritised. CLTs in this study reported no shortage of interest in their affordable housing developments. Social and functional attachments to place appear to provide residents who share these attachments with a competitive advantage in accessing rural housing provision through CLTs and appear significant to the acquisition of resources for CLTs in some contexts.

This study also highlights the importance of place attachment in rural community development. It can serve as a stimulus to much-needed rural community development projects and acts as a motivator for citizen participation in planning. Cognitive and affective dimensions of place attachment stimulate participation in community-led initiatives. Participation is often attributed to social capital or individual attributes of power, resource, capacity and ability. While not diminishing the importance of these, attention to the attachments to place, and the social, natural, physical and functional dimensions of these attachments, provide a useful frame for understanding citizen responses to and participation in civic initiative. Furthermore, the findings in this paper highlight that place attachment does not necessarily operate according to fixed administrative boundaries, and is instead dynamic, contingent and contextual according to a local sense of place and imagined geography. This is shown by the ways in which CLTs sought to define housing allocation criteria in line with their sense of geography and identification with different localities, which did not always reflect administrative definitions of place. How neighbourhood-focused policies interact with the dynamic, contingent and contextual nature of place attachment, account for its overlap with administrative definitions of place, and whether place attachment is accordingly fostered or denied is worthy of further enquiry. That said, this paper has highlighted one specific policy intervention – the rural exception site policy – which supports the generation or intensification of place attachments through prioritisation of local connections in housing allocations. Yet, this prioritisation may inadvertently lead to the denial of housing opportunities for those that lack the required social or functional attachments to place. While place attachment, often spoken about as a positive, unifying concept, does act as a stimulus to civic action, its importance in defining the ambitions of projects and use in allocating resources could theoretically limit the participation or opportunities of those that do not share these attachments.

As asset-owning, community-based housing organisations, CLTs have the potential to act as influential actors in rural communities. By providing affordable housing with specific restrictions on resales, lettings and use, CLTs can be understood as a challenge to the practices of conventional, often speculative housing provision. They elevate use value over exchange value and develop housing as a resource for the promotion of place identity, attachment and community rather than for the extraction of economic value , placing rural housing within other forms of commuity-based economy and asset ownership (Van Veelen and Eadson, 2020). Their success in developing homes suggest that place attachments and identities are important and decisive factors in rural housing provision. The contribution of this paper is to show how such attachments are mobilised by volunteers and activists in local communities. These attachments provide both the motivation for CLTs to form and the rationales and principles by which their decisions over housing provision are taken. The agency and initiative that underpins CLTs represents an extension of community participation in planning often expressed through formalised and institutionalised routes such as local government structures or particular planning exercises. As organisations that claim land and assets for a defined community, CLTs provide a vehicle through which place attachments and identities are expressed and maintained.

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