Community Land Trusts: A Radical or Reformist Response to The Housing Question Today?

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Abstract
Community Land Trusts (CLTs) can be a focal point of community organization in defence of neighbourhood space and in seeking to push back against powerful developers. Simultaneously, we also see CLTs that represent a reformist desire for self-help and petite bourgeois claims on home ownership. Through a study of three working class neighbourhoods, one each in Manhattan and Boston and the other in Liverpool, UK, we see evidence of radical agitation, reformist politicization and technocratic authority over the deployment of resources and the management of land and housing. The CLT is shown as a means by which communities become politicized, operating as a site of resistance to what Harvey would refer to as
'surplus absorption' through inner urban transformation. Yet, if as Engels suggests, the abolition of the capitalist mode of production is the only way to address inequality driven by private property rights and developer interests, he may also have argued that, while CLTs begin as radical instruments, their impact on the housing question will always remain reformist in character.

Introduction

The three articles that constitute Engels’ *The Housing Question* (1872-3/1935) address two apparently different perspectives that, in their conclusions, seem to propose very similar solutions. For both the petite bourgeois, represented by Proudhon himself and the German Proudhonist, Herr Mülberger and the bourgeois anarchist Dr Sax, the solution to poor housing conditions and to shortages was the individual ownership of land and property. How this could be achieved would be through regulation of the financial system, fiscal incentives around land ownership or greater emphasis on mutualism, although, importantly, each kept the debate away from the main cause of poor housing, the conflict between capital and labour as Engels would retort. There are other parallels that might be drawn between contemporary housing problems and those of the nineteenth century that we draw on in this article. We examine what might be considered as radical and reformist responses to the contemporary housing question through the emergence of the Community Land Trust movement where we see homeownership and self-help housing appealing, if for different reasons.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) have emerged as vehicles for both affordable housing and for sustainable neighbourhoods. They have been presented at one and the same time as a radical challenge to urban developers, a progressive community response to absentee landlords, for example in the west of Scotland, and as a bulwark against rural house price inflation (Moore, 2014). Our perspective is slightly different, looking in turn at three urban communities in the (so called) advanced industrial nations in Cooper Square, Lower East Side Manhattan, Dudley Street in South Boston, Massachusetts and Anfield in North Liverpool in the UK. What is of interest here is how aspects dealt with in *The Housing Question* by Engels have remained pertinent to the studies we have undertaken in these three communities. In two of our case studies, we can identify radical politics centred upon a challenge by community organizers against private capital and the state in an effort to secure land. In the third, we see the heavy hand of the state and its apparatus operating in a technocratic and hierarchical manner. However, we also see adherence to self-help, social ownership and individual home ownership in much the way advocated by Proudhon and his allies and identified latterly by commentators such as Turner (1978), Goetz and Sidney (1996), Stone (2006) and Hodkinson (2012). The three cases provide us with an opportunity to reflect on how CLTs may offer a radical or reformist response to the housing question today.
On The Housing Question

Engels’ articles were in response to two alternative solutions to the problem of poor housing conditions in the industrialising cities of continental Europe in the nineteenth century. Drawing on his earlier work on Manchester (1845/1973) he was perhaps most particularly concerned to counter the tendency to see industrialization and urbanization as a problem. Regardless of their critiques of capitalism, Marx and Engels always argued that it was a progressive force and to reduce the question of housing to problems of urbanization would be to negate the question of class conflict. Liberating workers from the land was to liberate them from ‘the usurer, the lawyer and the bailiff’ (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 53). The provision of financial or fiscal instruments to enable workers to purchase land and homes would curb their industrial strength and, ultimately, revolutionary potential:

Dr. Sax seems to assume that man is essentially a peasant, otherwise he would not ascribe to the workers of our big cities a longing for property in land, a longing which no one else has discovered. For our workers in the big cities freedom of movement is the first condition of their existence, and landownership could only be a hindrance to them. Give them their own houses, chain them once again to the soil and you break their power of resistance to the wage cutting of the factory owners. (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 50)

Engels was firm in his view that individual ownership of property and land would counter emancipation that could be brought through social revolution while petite bourgeois visions of land ownership remained an idyll in which the autonomous peasant provides for himself and his family (and it is always ‘him’ and ‘his’). In his response to Proudhon and the latter’s concern with the economic disorder wrought by the French Revolution of 1789 and his subsequent emphasis on organizing for mutualism by providing finance for securing land and property, Engels dismisses Proudhon’s attempt to turn back time to before the emergence of the industrial proletariat:

It is precisely modern large-scale industry, which has turned the worker, formerly chained to the land, into a completely propertyless proletarian, liberated from all traditional fetters and free as a bird; it is precisely this economic revolution which has created the sole conditions under which the exploitation of the working class in its final form, in the capitalist mode of production, can be overthrown. And now comes this tearful Proudhonist and bewails the driving of the workers from hearth and home as though it were a great retrogression instead of being the very first condition for their intellectual emancipation. (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 29)

Engels is clear that the housing crisis, that is rising costs, problems of availability and declining standards, is ever present for the working class. It appears as a topic for discussion only when it also becomes a problem for the bourgeoisie, either
because of prices and availability or because the ‘diseases’ of the slums begin to infect the bourgeoisie, a parallel that we can also see very clearly today with the Ebola crisis and particularly in the developing world (see other contributions to this special issue). This crisis was most acute in cities as the processes of industrialization and urbanization generated demand for land in inner city areas. Harvey drew direct parallels between Manchester, Paris and Berlin in the mid and late nineteenth century as observed by Engels and the dynamics evident in the development, redevelopment and gentrification of modern cities:

A process of displacement and what I call ‘accumulation by dispossession’ lie at the core of urbanization under capitalism. It is the mirror-image of capital absorption through urban redevelopment, and is giving rise to numerous conflicts over the capture of valuable land from low-income populations that may have lived there for many years. (Harvey, 2008, 34)

And during Engels’ time, whether in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Berlin or Vienna, this accumulation of land by dispossession was a Bonapartist vision, referred to as ‘Haussmann’ (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 74), driving the clearance of slums for development meaning the decanting of working class occupants only for poor housing conditions to reappear elsewhere.

It is here where we can open up further the question of land that became a focus not only for Proudhon and Dr. Sax but later, following in their footsteps, for Henry George who has come to be regarded as an important contributor to the contemporary principles of CLTs (Davis, 2014). Yet Marx was clear that ownership of land is created entirely by the relations of production (Marx, 1867/1981) and Engels (1872-3/1935) was scathing of the misreading of the housing question by the Proudhonist Herr Mülberger who sees the tenant’s relation to the landlord in the same way as the waged worker to the capitalist. For Marx and Engels, the association between tenant and landlord is a commodity relationship and it is this definition of land and property as commodity that determines the question of housing transactions thereon in. The relationship between owner and tenant is not inherently exploitative, in that surplus value is not extracted from the tenant. Rather, the exchange is a transaction that ‘proceeds according to the economic laws which govern the sale of commodities in general and in particular the sale of the commodity, land property’ (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 25).

Henry George, writing at the end of the 19th Century, regarded housing, or more specifically land, in a somewhat different way. For George, the home is built on the land, produced by labour and is an important contributor to wealth creation. Land is a part of nature and exists irrespective of labour or, more broadly, of society. What differs with the perspective from George is his contention that the ownership of land forms the basis for the greatest antagonism in society and it is here that we find the cause of injustice, inequality and poverty (George,
George argued that it was the appropriation of land by the few from which all injustice flows and this condemns the working class to poverty. This appropriation is driven by the returns secured from investing in land, guided not towards utility but towards greater concentrations of wealth and economic inequity. Thus, for George, land as private property prevents its utilization and its maintenance for the common good. The remedy for George is a case of making land common property:

To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the laborer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership... the unequal ownership of land necessitates the unequal distribution of wealth. (George, 1879/1912, 194. Emphasis added.)

This is an important concept and relevant to the CLT movement as we examine below. George responds to the land question by advocating not the nationalization of land, but to assert a common right to land by taxing it – to appropriate land by taxation.

George, along with the Proudhonists and the bourgeois anarchist Dr Sax, appear to have provided a legacy on which the self-help movement, including CLTs, can advance conceptually and in practice. We might turn to Harvey (2014) to remind us that Engels’ argument about the commodification of land and property remains today equally relevant:

The concept of ‘land’ now includes, of course, all the infrastructures and human modifications accumulated from past times... as well as recent investments not yet amortised. The potential stranglehold of the rentier and the landed interest on economic activity is now an even greater threat, particularly as it is backed today by the power of financial institutions that revel in the returns to be had from escalating rents and land and property prices. (Harvey, 2014, 76-77)

This debate is not entirely polemical, however. While house price excess, those booms and busts, may be typical of how the commodification of land and property has developed, so too are the responses from community based self-help initiatives, including CLTs.

For Engels, transferring ownership to the worker would simply pass on the burden of maintenance and replacement. Nor, in an industrial and urban context, is this practicable in the way proposed by the Proudhonists, for whom ownership is also associated with other idyllic visions of self-sufficiency and small-scale enterprise. Engels’ response to Dr Sax, who quickly accepts that ownership is not feasible in urban areas, discusses the alternatives proposed: self-help or state assistance. Self-help was a reference to the extension of the UK model of Building Societies and other forms of mutual organisation intended to assist in purchasing property, either individually or collectively. Here we see the ideals that underpin
self-help and ownership, including stewardship, independence and autonomy, sometimes elevated to grand political theory of a conservative (Belloc, 1912/1977, 1936/2009) or radical (Ward, 1983, 1996) nature. Engels quickly dismisses these as petit bourgeois and not fundamentally addressing the problems that confront the working class. State assistance, that is the regulation of buildings and rents, was ineffective in practice too and the state would continually represent the interests of capital. Therefore it was idealist to expect regulation of the behaviour of individual capitalists in the interests of the workers. The state, he observed, managed housing and land in the interests of capital.

The question now is to what extent these principle concepts can be used to categorize responses to the housing question in contemporary times, in the advanced nations. They echo through cooperative and shared ownership movements, around ideas of commoning, environmental activism and, indeed, in the discourse of economic recovery post financial crisis.

*The Housing Question Today*

Much has changed in both the US and the UK since Engels wrote. The emergence of state sponsored housing has proven to be hugely significant, although the dominance of the interests of private owners, the building trade and of capital has remained constant even in public and social housing policies (Fraser et al., 2012; Galster, 2008). However, one fundamental has remained unchanged. It is the value of land that drives the housing market and not, for example, the value of the buildings on the land and it is here that we see the relevance of *The Housing Question* today. The debates around affordability and access to housing markets remain driven by our understanding of the commodification of land and property. Indeed, Castells in his early years (1977) and Poulantzas (1978) loosely maintained the Marxist view by suggesting that changes in the form of state involvement in the housing market have continued to serve the interests of capital and the markets rather than those of the working classes.

While we see the liberal tradition of encouraging home ownership in the interwar years, it is in the post-war period when perceptions of public sector housing peak and trough. They moved from optimism and grand urban plans in the 1950s and 1960s, to ‘sink estates’, ‘residual housing’ and exclusion before the end of the Twentieth Century. It was little wonder that it became caught in alternative critiques from both Left and Right (Murie, 2012; Taylor, 1998; Turner, 1978). This was particularly so in the UK where some commentators felt that municipal socialism was likely to produce ‘second-class citizenry’ through standardized large tower blocks and council estates rather than decent housing for ordinary people (Pahl, 1984, 322). Allocation policies attracted criticism (Jacobs, 1985) while, for others, public housing was the prime example of the failings of planning and of the welfare state more generally, impoverishing communities and the very idea of community (Ward, 1996). In the US, it was the supply of housing for owner-occupation for the white working class in the post-war period that marked it as
different to the UK. In both countries, however, the pressures on housing production have ultimately encouraged private market solutions, though with some elements of state support and subsidy to deliver affordability. There is also a reinvigorated sense that the institutions of the state could protect citizens from the vagaries of an unfettered housing market (drawing on the work of Polanyi for example, see Peck 2012, Watson, 2009) although by default or design, in the UK and US, it has become increasingly difficult for the state to carry this through.

In the context of declining investment and a growing critique of social provision has emerged varieties of mutualism, self-build and tenant-led approaches to housing. This has shaped an ongoing movement (cf. Temkin et al, 2013; Ward, 1996; Moore and McKee, 2012) that can be traced back to the debate between Engels and the Proudhonists and onwards towards the work of CLTs today. Indeed, the practice and principles of CLTs can be explained by using its own terminology.

The ‘Community’ Element

First there is the community element. Davis (2014) regards the work of American pacifist Bob Swann, influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and by the Civil Rights movement in post-war US, as critical in explaining how the membership of the CLT should incorporate non CLT residents, CLT residents and representatives of the public interest. This tripartite balance of interests would be designed to draw in people from the wider community to coalesce in search of desired goals, making CLTs prime vehicles to enable struggle over resources, particularly land. These community principles are consistent with the reformist philosophies of the liberal left in the US and UK articulated throughout the Twentieth Century and while they manifest in very real objectives around affordable housing, often there is a broader mission in the CLT centred on core community principles, such as democratic control of neighbourhood assets and empowerment through participation (Gray and Galande, 2011). As we see below, this can lead the CLT towards (usually passive) confrontation with both capital and the state, something that Davis (2014) sees as an important outcome of the organizing principles of the CLT movement. So once established, CLTs are vehicles through which communities continue to mobilize for desired goals and resources. They become a way of ‘empowering the disadvantaged’ (Davis, 2014, 55) and, partly for this reason, their growth in the US became noticeable from the 1970s onwards as the state began to actively seek partners from the self-help traditions. CLTs are a reason for communities to mobilize and involvement by local residents has become central to their function.

The ‘Land’ Element

Communal ownership of land has been a contentious issue for many years. Removing land and the homes built on them from the open market is a way in which the CLT seeks to create stability (and diversity) within communities. Land acquisition, and then growth through more acquisitions, is the second element of
the CLT, situating the movement firmly in line with reformers such as Henry George. In practice, this means that the initial injection of capital, the public subsidy or philanthropic imbursement, becomes a very important component in how the CLT seeks to acquire land (Davis, 2014; West, 2011). And when ownership of land is separated from ownership of the property on the land, affirmed through localized democratic CLT rules, this protects affordability for present and, importantly, future residents. A defining principle, therefore, becomes the attempt to de-commoditize land through CLT practices. As Davis explains, land is never resold, but is:

...removed permanently from the market, owned and managed on behalf of a place-based community, present and future. (2014, 5)

Land is a shared resource from the perception of the CLT activist. It is used for the common good in much the way George (1879/1912) advocated providing opportunities to a wider range of potential residents at below market rent or homeownership opportunities for people who cannot afford open market prices. By seeking to ‘buck the market’ and locking in the original subsidy in the land in perpetuity, and committing not to resell, the community has the basis for a stable and sustainable future. The CLT is able to ring fence the land and property to ensure speculators are prevented from seizing control of land and assets held under its own auspices.

The ‘Trust’ Element

Essential to the trust element is the notion of value. In this regard, Turner’s views on value can be translated into practice by asking what the CLT is versus what it does. The perspective on land tends towards de-commoditization similar to the idea of ‘use value’ when used as a verb providing the basis for the CLT as an arena for activity, ‘a political as well as a physical, economic and social activity’ (Turner, 1978, 1138). In practice this refers to decentralized self-governance, acting as a source of empowerment for those involved in the movement (Hodkinson, 2012). This rejection of the commoditized value to the assets garnered by the CLT is never straightforward and is at the heart of the trust required for stewardship of land and housing in perpetuity. This can place the CLT in continuous opposition to the open market, to gentrification and, if necessary, to the state. In contradiction however, it also exposes a potential downside to the CLT, described by Stein as the ‘dialectic of value’ (2010: 220) as the challenge to the market restricts the individual ability to gain equity through ownership, to see the home in a commoditized way.

The persuasive nature of the argument for equity is shown in the work of Bastagli and Hills (2013) who evidence huge increases in household wealth drawn from home ownership in the UK. The main benefactors (relatively speaking) are the owner occupying middle classes. Time does not allow a more thorough analysis of their work here, although it is highly relevant to recognize how the CLT
maintains the security of the homeowner and the tenant by resisting speculative land and housing investment practices. Thus, in formalizing the trust element through the legal and organizational structures of the CLT, land has to be difficult to sell on the open market, now and at some future date, for profit. At this point, when a resident ‘buys’ a CLT home, they agree to forfeit a share of any increase in value in order to keep house prices permanently affordable. In effect, this level of individual engagement in the market is relinquished and the community trusted to provide greater local control over land to facilitate the local community having a greater say in decisions over land. This trust, this stewardship, will protect the interests of low-income households, protect the quality of housing maintenance and, as recent experience has shown, help to prevent foreclosure (see for example Thaden, 2012). The individual sacrifices growth potential in financial assets by pledging to a shared community resource.

These three elements today lie at the base of a ‘contest for the soul of the community land trust’ (Davis, 2014, 55) and will continue to do so as the movement grows. For Hodkinson (2012), the British CLT falls short in its promise to provide accessible provision and fails in its potential to provide an anti-capitalist alternative to what Harvey (2014) sees as the stranglehold over land and property. The UK CLT movement has a tendency to attract petite bourgeois activities (Hodkinson, 2012) and can provide the basis for the further privatization and marketization of housing. In his critique of the CLT movement in the UK, Hodkinson refers back to the concept advocated by Turner (1978) concerning housing as an activity and draws on the work of Massimo De Angelis (De Angelis, 2007, 2014, who in turn draws on his own activism and those such as South American activist Gustavo Esteva, see Esteva, 2014) to argue for a ‘housing commons’ that, while potentially encompassing the CLT ‘soul’, is certainly not exclusive to it (Hodkinson, 2012, 436).

Hodkinson recognizes the shift away from the more orthodox Marxist position in arguing for a housing commons although he maintains the argument for the politicization of housing struggle, just as Turner (1978) did. He sees within this the potential for broad church social activism that incorporates a range of housing collectives, squatters and democratic management of housing that would provide ‘a critical mass of diverse strategic and tactical interventions’ (Hodkinson, 2012, 441). This, he argues, would enable protection of community facilities, re-energize housing campaigns, ‘force periodic concessions from state and capital’ (ibid.) and bring into play the productive capacities of other forms of community assets, such as cooperative food growers and community schools. Yet, as we see below, this is exactly what the CLTs in two of our cases have been able to do. In this regard, Hodkinson excludes the potential emergence of CLTs in low-income communities in the UK that may have different characteristics from those in more affluent rural villages (see Moore, 2014 for this comparison). Hodkinson’s work was too early, for instance, to see the efforts of East London CLT on the Mile End Road in East London and the Granby 4 Streets CLT in South Liverpool that involves community
organizing and resistance to local authority neglect and over reliance on private investment (see also Moore, 2014). So he ends up occupying a similar space to Turner (1978), who was critiqued by Burgess (1978) for his Proudhonist tendencies. Even so, Hodkinson forms part of a contemporary perspective on land and housing that can help us to look critically at our three cases and consider the radical, reformist and technocratic components of community struggles around housing provision, before returning to Engels’ analysis to place them in a broader schema.

Technocrats, Reformists and Agitators: Three Case Studies

The three cases we present briefly here are part of a broader piece of research on CLTs and their relevance to an inner-urban setting in the UK (see Engelsman and Southern, 2010). The UK case study draws upon a four-year period of overt participant observation by one of the authors in a Housing Association. Building on the research of the other authors, he worked in the organization and was integral to plans for the development of a CLT alongside community representatives, housing managers and neighbourhood officers. Visits involving the authors took place to CLTs where they were emerging elsewhere in the UK and already in situ in the US. The two US cases are built on the basis of qualitative interviews, including meetings with activists, organizing officials, home owners, local politicians and visits to CLT offices and properties. Visits to Cooper Square have taken place in 2007, 2010, 2012 and 2013. Visits to Dudley Street have taken place in 2007, 2010 and 2013.

Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool

Anfield and Breckfield, situated in North Liverpool, provide a case to illustrate the paternalism and authority of technocratic action over and above the politicization of housing-led renewal. As the authors have noted elsewhere (Engelsman and Southern, 2010), the local understanding of the neighbourhood and, therefore, what they believed to be essential to their own lives, remained secondary to the technocrats perspective of ‘knowledge that favours generalisable positivist knowledge over specific local knowledge’ (Curry, 2012, 353). What the domination of technocratic knowledge (and therefore practice) does is to restrict, in covert and overt ways, community involvement and action and resists any attempts to politicize community matters (Esteva, 2014).

Anfield and Breckfield are two inner city wards that have suffered from the industrial and maritime decline of the city of Liverpool and its regional hinterland (Meegan, 2003; Merseyside Socialist Research Group, 1980; Southern, 2014a). The area to the north of the city has long been dominated by the physical presence of the local professional football club, Liverpool FC. Internationally renown, the club is hosted in a neighbourhood now deemed, according to the government’s Indices of Multiple Deprivation, as ‘deprived’ (Southern, 2014b). Once a sought after neighbourhood, it offers older but robust Victorian municipal housing and
newer interwar private housing for a newly affluent working class. Yet, in recent decades, as the city lost population affecting its tax base and employment levels (Parkinson, 1985), vacancies increased, while the local retail offer has fallen into decline. Increasing crime and anti-social behaviour added to the local community’s growing disenchantment with the abilities of the local state to provide a basic level of services.

This led to residents organizing two local community forums, Anfield Breckside Community Council (ABCC) and Breckfield North Everton Neighbourhood Council (BNENC). This was also a response to the way UK government operated a selective level of support for local communities and how this area was overlooked in favour of greater levels of public and private investment for development in the south of the city. The community groups, with the City Council and football club, worked collaboratively to produce, in 2002, *The community’s report on the regeneration of Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool*. The plan, although intending to recreate the stability of the neighbourhood, advocated the demolition of almost two thousand homes and was divided into seven phases covering approximately fifteen years. The community plan led to a formal assessment and, in 2005, the area was officially declared a Renewal Area and the Anfield Breckfield Partnership Forum established with two important sub-groups: the Housing and Physical Regeneration Group, overseeing the physical delivery of the regeneration project; and the Neighbourhood Management Group, overseeing the day-to-day running of the area through the regeneration process.

At this time, the Housing Association, now the single largest landlord in the area, suggested that there could be ways to use their asset base as a resource for the regeneration of the area. They were considering, for example, community-based or community-led housing development and management that would be formed as a subsidiary of the main Housing Association, with greater levels of resident involvement. This, they argued, would provide a basis for a sustainable community and would reduce the need for further Housing Association investment in future years. By 2003, the term ‘community endowment’ was being used to describe the Housing Association’s commitment to secure resources for the community. In 2006, the Housing Association had formally collaborated with the University of Liverpool to secure research funding that would appoint an Associate who would seek to develop an ideal model for a CLT initiative in Anfield and Breckfield (Engelsman and Southern, 2010). What was emerging is an example of how the state through a local arm, in this case the Housing Association, was exploring new ways to deploy capital more efficiently. The return on new investment would be to prevent the further degradation of an asset base and would open up new ways for private sector investment. While innovative, and consistent with the Marxist view of the state working on behalf of private capital, this also opened up new opportunities for political agitation.
Illustration 1: In Close Proximity to Anfield Stadium, 2013

For its part, the local community supported this initiative and had previously commissioned a legal paper exploring the possibility of some form of land trust in the area. Ideas emerged about how a CLT could own land. With assets such as property that would have a nominal yearly lease, this would allow for rental income to be recycled into the neighbourhood in ways determined by the community through some form of democratic organization. Significantly, however, the community did not have the asset base to drive the idea forward and were reliant on both the Housing Association and the local state, Liverpool City Council, to also recognize the merits of their ideas.

The idea of a CLT caused some controversy. Officials in the City Council were reluctant to be associated with the term ‘Community Land Trust’, although they were willing to negotiate on the possibility of some type of community
endowment. The Housing Association, which, during this time, had continued their programme of redevelopment using a private sector house builder, was divided internally as to the benefits of shedding properties that were costly to manage and maintain or of handing over revenue-generating property to community ownership. The developers only occasionally participated in meetings involving the local community and, while they had a strategic input into the neighbourhood regeneration plans, this tended to occur at meetings in the city centre, away from the community and with senior executives of the Housing Association and City Council. Liverpool FC, meanwhile, had laid out plans for a multi-million pound investment in a new stadium that would help regenerate the area, but they too had limited interaction with the local residents (Southern, 2014b). And even though there were active community members who were supportive of the CLT concept, their own resources were limited and they were illustrative of a community fatigued by the failures of local and national government to support local regeneration.

Resident meetings were often led by bureaucratic officials and they were run in a way that would marginalize the contributions from local people. While these meetings aimed to bring together the community and the major housing stakeholders, they were, in effect, a tool by which the representatives of the local state, the technocrats, were able to communicate their ideals for community-led housing and these were generally more operational than visionary or strategic. By using formal processes, including presentations, the professionals involved were able to control not only the resources involved in decision-making but the actual outputs of meetings. In this sense, technocrats are always able to protect the interests of their respective organization over and above the interests of the community in the way suggested by Burgess (1978). Ultimately, the collaboration to bring a CLT idea to fruition suffered because of this top-down approach to development despite adherence to much of the rhetoric associated with self-help housing. Failure to build a CLT may, on reflection, be associated with a lack of the three main ingredients set out by Davis (2014). Not only did the ‘soul’ of a potential CLT fail to manifest from the community, there was a difficulty in attempts to secure resources following the financial crisis in 2008 and there were elements in both the Housing Association and City Council that remained unconvinced of the merits of a CLT. Local residents were left with another initiative that could not be delivered prompting the view that the technocrats had, according to one local, lost touch with people whom they regarded mainly as a means to secure resources, for their own organizational agendas. This anxiety was an outcome of the acquiescence of the community in the face of the local state who were able to keep local people at arms length when it came to making decisions on how to deploy resources. Now, in an unrelated development, the ideas for a CLT have remained within the local community and have begun to manifest through other means (see Moore, 2014, 14-17; Southern, 2014b).
Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative, Boston

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) offers a different narrative about a similar theme, the struggle for governance of resources at a local level. DSNI was founded on local activism to build up its organization and, through the authority of eminent domain status, laid the basis for the CLT, Dudley Neighbors Inc. known as DNI (Gray and Galande, 2011). Land use, a dilapidated neighbourhood and development in other parts of Boston that had led to gentrification were reasons why the local community believed they should have more influence over what would happen in Dudley Street. Pre-World War II, this was a neighbourhood with a strong white Irish working class that in the postwar period was subject to the suburban white flight seen in many US cities. Coupled with public and private underinvestment in the housing stock and pressures on land value from the 1970s onwards, it led to incidents of arson by landlords who looked to extract insurance money and open up the land for redevelopment. This was a neighbourhood that was redlined, that suffered from the prejudiced decisions of financial institutions and was left with residual properties and low income households made up mainly of African Americans, Hispanics and Cape Verdeans (Medoff and Sklar, 1994).
In the 1980s, when DSNI was formed, there were 1,300 vacant plots of land that accounted for more than 20% of the neighbourhood. There was segregation, abandoned housing, rubbish-strewn plots of land and, the final straw, the deaths of children from those fires to nearby empty housing. This state of affairs, nothing short of violence against the community, was the catalyst for DSNI (for more on this see the video ‘Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street’ produced for DSNI in 1996). The power of organizing, described vividly by Medoff and Sklar (1994), attracted attention from the city media and, although initially the City Council turned their back on this, here was an inner urban community that had been active in the civil rights movement and who had experience of struggle. Their organizing culminated in the granting of eminent domain status, something that in the US provides an authority to claim, plan and develop derelict land, coordinated with the creation of a master plan that aimed to regenerate the neighbourhood. By drawing on a long experience of community activism DSNI sought to challenge the decline and neglect inflicted on their space by private landlords, the City authorities and state and federal authorities as well. They were able to claim the support of the Mayor of the time (Ray Flynn) and eminent domain followed, conferred by the Boston Development Authority in 1988. This meant DSNI were able to acquire the means to secure vacant land and to lease it to both private and not-for-profit developers who were commissioned to build affordable housing in the area. Yet, as Medoff and Sklar (1994) describe, and as shown in the video ‘Holding Ground’ the award of eminent domain status was opposed by some local residents who became concerned that a community group could seize land.

These concerns were countered by on the ground activism and, as DSNI built their reputation as a well organized community group, they were able to attract professional and political assistance that they felt added to their own credibility. The focus on the ‘Dudley Triangle’ provided a distinct boundary to the neighbourhood and was a basis for broad involvement. DNI has the three groups of CLT residents, broader residents in the Triangle and the public interest represented through their governance arrangements. In turn, DSNI drew on a variety of charity and public funding initiatives, such as from the Ford Foundation and from the City authority. They involved officers from the City Council and the national agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), who gave overt support to DSNI plans. As one local politician explained in an interview with the authors, the transition from abandoned properties and vacant lots full of rubbish into homes for local people has provided stability for residents and a financial base for families.¹

¹ In a 2013 survey carried out by DNI it was found that 12% of CLT households had income below the poverty line of $23,050 per annum for a household with four people. The survey also showed 50% intended to live in the CLT property for ten years or more and that 80% felt the CLT offered a more affordable housing solution. 46% said that living in a CLT home provided greater financial security.
Between 1994 and 2008, DNI were responsible for 207 homes being built, made up of 80 owner occupied, 50 rented and a further 77 which come under the jurisdiction of one of five housing cooperatives and all with a 99 year ground lease. The governance structures established by DSNI are based on principles to protect community assets and to ensure their ‘use value’ in the future. We were told that members of the cooperative were not able to purchase their properties and the intention was to maintain their rental status, at low affordable rents. In contrast, on a visit in 2007 to Dudley Street, we witnessed a protest by a single member of the CLT who wanted the ability to sell his owner occupied home and realize equity at market rates. Yet this was rebuffed by DNI who operate a small per annum increase in home equity through their legal arrangements that, pre Great Recession, looked inadequate against the rising price of housing, and in the years that followed afforded some protection to owner occupiers, tenants and to their own asset base. So we see in process those legal arrangements over land ownership and housing development, which have become a vital component to help legitimize the broader Dudley Street organizing. These are the tensions from the dialectic of value (Stein, 2010) where, on the one hand, the ability to enter an owner occupied home was opened up for people with a relatively low income base and, on the other, the temptations of realizing the whole equity from the property in this instance, overrides the commitment to the collective.

DNI have public space initiatives that provide urban agriculture opportunities and play areas, they provide retail and office space, training for young people and have become involved in the provision of education at a local school. Conscious of the continuing possibility of gentrification, being close to the centre of Boston, the leadership of DSNI believe the way they plan and organize will act as a buffer to development that acts against the interests of local residents. This is a community with rigorous organization, the ‘C’ in the CLT as Davis (2014) would argue. There is evidence here of a community that has confronted both capital and the state and stood up against processes of disinvestment. Unique in obtaining eminent domain status in the US, it was the organizing capabilities of local people with political support from City officials that proved to be decisive, enabling both affordable home ownership and affordable rented housing. However, this has been achieved by an organization that is reformist in character. Its struggle with the local state was about being given a voice as part of the political landscape, with the acquisition of land a means to an end that challenged the market, which in turn has led to the politicization of how space is governed, including that of a large number of homes.

**Cooper Square, Lower East Side, New York**

Cooper Square is the story of ‘how a multi-ethnic group with a large Latino membership acted forcefully against racial and economic exclusion’ (Angotti, 2008, 114). In the early part of the 20th Century, the mass industrialisation of the area led to trade union activity and the ‘One Big Union’, International Workers of
the World established its headquarters on East 4th Street, adjacent to the present home of Cooper Square Committee. It is easy to overstate the historic and syndicalist atmosphere of the Lower East Side, particularly given the wider range of activism over housing in New York where rent control has given rise to many tenant organisations (Barton, 1977), nevertheless in our visits to and discussions with those involved in Cooper Square we found activists often referring to the heritage of local community action in this part of Manhattan. Indeed one of the activists involved explained, during an interview with the authors, how in the earlier years of community organizing the FBI would monitor goings-on including calling at their home, would ask neighbours about their activities and searched through the households’ discarded rubbish, such was this individuals left-wing ideology and activities. Cooper Square and the Lower East Side in general consisted of many different populates and did not suffer the type of postwar transition and white flight seen in Harlem or in Dudley Street, for example. Now, both Harlem and the Lower East Side are under pressure from gentrification as the city land market booms.

It was in 1959 that the modern narrative of this case begins with the formation of the Cooper Square Community Development Committee (CSCDC). It was a response to the City Council plan for slum clearance advocated by Robert Moses, the urban planner, who wanted to build a major road through the district and pull down homes as part of his Urban Renewal Plan. In an interview with the authors, the only remaining activist from that period remembered that Moses had looked at the East Side, where tenants were housed in appalling conditions, walked the twenty minutes to Wall Street and came up with the idea that the neighbourhood could provide housing for the financial centre. A locally commissioned study at the time showed that 93% of local residents would not be able to afford the new housing contained within the Moses concept. After over one hundred meetings New York’s first community plan, the Cooper Square Alternate Plan (Marcuse, 1985; 1987), was released in 1961 by the activists of CSCDC. This plan not only received the praise of the City Planning Commission and, according to Angotti, focused on the ‘human values present in the existing neighbourhood, not property values’ (2008: 116). In our interviews, one community activist described the struggle at the time:

The neighbourhood was devastated. Anybody who could got out. Landlords torched their buildings so they could put up new shares. Tenants set fire to their apartments to get into public housing which in the US probably half is very low income housing. Nobody wanted to build, nobody wanted to buy. It was like a war zone. What we did is we organised the neighbourhood and we basically made vacant lots where the buildings used to be that had been torched, and the buildings that were still standing we organised a squatter movement to take them over and fix them. Then later on
neighbours started to revive themselves, we got money from the government to really do the renovation. (Interview with the authors)

The community group won adoption of its own plan in 1971. However, the struggle was long and it took until 1984 for the first homes to be dedicated and it was in 1991, with the election of David Dinkins as Mayor, that Cooper Square Committee set up a Mutual Housing Association to manage an asset base of some 303 properties. Tom Angotti, who has written widely (Angotti and Jagu, 2007, Angotti, 2008) and been involved in the Cooper Square development, explains how in the 1980s land and property prices in New York began to overheat and so the local state, the City authorities, wanted to sell more vacant land and they made a proposal to the Cooper Square group:

“The proposal – called a cross-subsidy plan – was for every unit of market-rate housing to be matched by a unit of low-income housing. The money the city would make from selling to private developers would presumably go to subsidizing new low-income housing. Cooper Square rejected the cross-subsidy plan because it depended on market development…” (Angotti, 2008, 121. Emphasis added.)

We can see in the Cooper Square experience that which was also evidence a few years later in Dudley Street. Arson becomes the (violent) tool of choice in conflict over land and housing. We also get a sense for the way in which the actions of the community are interpreted around the ideal of use value and with this come a rejection of land as a commodity. And as with Dudley Street, we find that the Cooper Square CLT set out arrangements over access to housing favouring lower income households, housing being made available for those who earn less than 50% of the area median income; while land and property is managed separately with the properties residing on land owned by the Cooper Square CLT, and the housing managed by the Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association. This protection for locals, a protection against the vagaries of the markets prejudiced upon income and ethnicity, occurs in the neighbourhood against the tide of Manhattan as global destination and merging as the ‘real estate capital of the world’.

2 A copy of the 1970 version of the Cooper Square plan can be found at: http://coopersquare.org/about-us/some-organizational-milestones
The most recent initiative for the Cooper Square CLT and MHA has focused on Seward Park, land that has been underdeveloped for over 40 years. The buildings at Seward Park were on land that was owned by the City and, while cooperative housing had previously existed on this land, there was disagreement about who should be allowed in the housing, precisely around matters concerning levels of income and ethnicity. The involvement of Cooper Square CLT and the MHA has meant some form of negotiation needed with the City to ensure homes are made available, with 50% affordable units and 50% market value units being offered (interview with authors). Whether or not this is a new reality for the Cooper Square activists it differs from the position they held earlier in rejecting the cross-subsidy ideas of the authorities. With this compromise a further 21 rehabilitated buildings in Seward Park will be added to the Cooper Square MHA, to complement their current management of twenty-five buildings containing three

Illustration 3: In and Around the Cooper Square Neighbourhood, 2013
hundred and ninety nine apartments, fourteen lofts, and twenty-four permanently affordable storefronts.

The Cooper Square case offers a narrative about a community seeking to protect its neighbourhood under pressure from the local state acting in the interests of capital. Their efforts to resist the intensity of private market land and property speculation is progressive in the sense that it challenges both capital and state and as Angotti emphasizes, in the Cooper Square story one of the most important aspects ‘is perpetual organizing and protest, particularly when the organizing and protest are tied to broader social and political movements’ (Angotti, 2008, 122).

This is an example, as Hodkinson (2012) advocates, of housing politicization. In comparison to the amount of housing available in Manhattan, the CLT offers only a small number of homes. Yet, with the principles of affordable ownership and regulation of maintenance and resale that are enforced by the management of the buildings and ownership of the land, this is more than a means of managing housing. This is as much a political statement based on radical organizing and agitation, particularly given the location of this community at the heart of global finance. However, their work is entirely consistent with the reformist positions held by the earlier advocates of land use, such as Henry George rather than those of Marx and Engels. And in summarizing our cases it is to these points we now turn in the final section of this article.

Concluding Discussion: The CLT in the Context of the Housing Question

The three cases that we have presented here show different types of engagement around access to land and housing by each community, the local state and, ever present in the background, capital. In each case, the struggle for land has delicately changed to become a struggle for housing access and, in some instances, incorporated anxiety over individual access to housing equity.

What became evident in the Anfield and Breckfield case was the authority of the state as implementation of the plans to renew neighbourhood housing was led by the Housing Association and City Council. Social and economic reforms that were hoped for by community representatives always remained secondary to the objectives of the technocrats that maintained control over the agenda for renewal. This may illustrate one type of response from public agencies to the housing question today, and also reinforces the critique made by Burgess (1978) about the inadequacy of calling upon the state to support localized self-help initiatives. Ideas to pursue a community endowment of some type were only ever received in lukewarm fashion by the community representatives and the CLT proposal from the Housing Association foundered at the earliest stages. There was little attempt to mobilize local residents around this idea and the concept of the CLT lacked the roots in the local community, supported mainly by some local professionals who worked in and around the intersection of local state, housing authorities and community. Indeed, one aspect of the resistance to the CLT was the unwillingness
by the community representatives or groups to take on the responsibility for its inception. While this was expressed as a lack of competence and capacity, another reading might see it as an unconscious resistance to becoming involved with ‘the usurer, the lawyer and the bailiff’ (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 53). Perhaps there was also suspicion, born of long experience of neglect, of an apparent offer to hand over power and control of problems that had proved intractable for many years.

In contrast, in the two case studies from the US, we find the CLT becoming an important part of community activism and resistance. Far from technocratic dominance, in both of these neighbourhoods we see a steadfast rebuttal of state plans. Not only does this represent a stand against capital, it brings into question the extent to which community practices accept or reject the commodification of housing and through querying use values in the manner Hodkinson (2012), Turner (1978) and indeed the Proudhonists would advocate, actually politicizes housing. In these two communities, conflict was evident. Dudley Street emerged from a community’s response to arson and violence, drawing upon the traditions and organizing experience of the civil rights movement. The concern by Davis (2014) over the struggle for the soul of the CLT is countered by DSNI being recognized as the legitimate representative of the local community, an organization that has gained political and financial support at the City, State and Federal levels. The organizing behind Cooper Square Committee, the CLT and MHA reflect in many ways the capability to agitate that has been part of the Lower East Side tradition. Cooper Square remains a working class neighbourhood and a destination for immigrant labour as a mixed ethnicity, low-income community. After fifty years, the organizers can point to some degree of success in the defence of space, particularly against gentrification and in response to the Haussmann of their day, the urban planner Robert Moses. But that struggle has almost always been against developers and against the City authorities. Gathering what professional allies they are able to in support, Cooper Square organizing remain as a challenge to the interests of capital in the Lower East Side.

If the technocrats were able to keep the residents in Anfield and Breckfield at arms length, by securing eminent domain powers DSNI became an arm of and ally to the local state in dealing with the housing question. Meanwhile, the recent developments in Seward Park show the limits to the type of struggle that can be progressed even when the politicization of housing takes place. In order to gain some ground, the Cooper Square CLT have had to comply with the demands made by City authorities to allow half of all housing development being made available at market rates. In each case, there has clearly been some degree of political consciousness raised as individuals become involved in conflict and struggle around resources deployed (or not as the case may be) in the neighbourhood. Cooper Square still demonstrates a radical edge and shows what might be achieved through decades of activism, and while DSNI might represent a reformist model incorporated into and recognized formally by the state, it retains a vigorous independence and defends its own space and agenda.
The debate between Engels and Proudhon, Mülberger and Sax was one that gave great essence to the conflict between capital and labour, or alternatively reduced that encounter as secondary to the struggle for access to land and housing. This contrast of principles resides today in the work of CLTs that as we have seen, on the one hand, have the potential to defend space and place and to be a vehicle for agitation against powerful developers and other forces in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, and visible in our cases, as Hodkinson noted, the CLT often works ‘within the confines and logic of private property and [is] not challenging the root causes of housing need’ (2012: 435). The dialectic of value associated with the CLT (Stein, 2010) may allow individuals to pursue the dream of petite bourgeois status through home ownership and we would expect Engels to be dismissive of this reformist type of self-help and critical of the petite bourgeois desire to own land and property. Equally, this perspective would consider the CLT as a response to the problems of local community renewal and regeneration, to urbanism, rather than a solution to the problems facing the working class community of the area.

Those in the Marxist tradition would be suspicious of any actions that looked like acting in the interests of the local state. Engels would have pointed out the limits to the radicalism of Cooper Square in much the same way that Harvey is dismissive of the ‘seemingly progressive’ (2008, 36) proposals to give property rights to squatters as a route out of poverty. Under such conditions market access to property and housing shortage is no accident. In fact, ‘it is a necessary institution and it can be abolished together with all its effects on health, etc., only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned’ (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 47).

To hold this line is to take the view that only the transformation of society offers the prospect of an end to the housing question. For Harvey (2008), it is true that the new property owners, still beset by chronic insecurity, will tend to buy and sell in a way that the rich do not and housing as a commodity will stand in contrast to the perception that its use value remains part of its social character (Barton, 1977). The latter is to consider how the levels of disinvestment, evident in Dudley Street and in Anfield and Breckfield, raise an opportunity for the creation of a ‘common housing movement’ (Hodkinson, 2012) and equally, to take control over the public space, daily activities, small business trade and social cooperation that make up the neighbourhood economy (Barton, 1977).

The alternative is to reject the commodification of land and property and to be concerned to gain greater control over the use of surpluses. It is not entirely ironic that the CLT ideal is anti-commodification of land and at the same time, accepting of the self-help Engels would deride. Engels, as so often, was not easily drawn on describing an alternative. In *The Housing Question*, he makes a second reference that sketches the outline of a different response:
As it is not our task to create utopian systems for the arrangement of the future society, it would be more than idle to go into the question here. But one thing is certain: there are already in existence sufficient buildings for dwellings in the big towns to remedy immediately any real ‘housing shortage’, given rational utilization of them. This can naturally only take place by the expropriation of the present owners and by quartering in their houses the homeless or those workers excessively overcrowded in their former houses. Immediately the proletariat has conquered political power such a measure dictated in the public interests will be just as easy to carry out as other expropriations and billetings are by the existing state. (Engels, 1872-3/1935, 36)

This might refer to a collective ownership of and, certainly, control over the distribution and allocation of housing. As a model that gives ownership of the land to the community in trust, CLTs are a vehicle, like cooperatives and other forms of mutual ownership that could offer a template for some future management of the housing question. In the current social order, in which the interests of capital dominate, this potential is readily accommodated and co-opted.

References


