

Community control in the housing commons

Durose, Catherine; Richardson, Liz; Rozenburg, Max; Ryan, Matt; Escobar , Oliver

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Community Control in the Housing Commons: A Conceptual Typology

RESEARCH ARTICLE

CATHERINE DUROSE 

LIZ RICHARDSON

MAX ROZENBURG

MATT RYAN

OLIVER ESCOBAR

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

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ABSTRACT

We advance theorizing on the governance of the commons through a configurative comparative analysis (CCA) of community control in the housing commons. We focus our analysis on community land trusts (CLTs), which are increasingly recognised as a potential governance mechanism for collective access to housing provision for low-income communities. Through systematic comparative analysis of CLTs in the US and UK, we extend the existing evidence base and develop a conceptual typology of community control in the housing commons. The typology suggests that whilst some social purposes for CLTs may align with notions of the commons – enrichment of community politics, conservation of community life, or creation of participatory governance – other CLTs focus on housing provision as a means of making a broader contribution to the social economy, or as an asset-lock to enable wider provision for affordable housing. By understanding this differentiation, we challenge the assumption that design principles or governance mechanisms are sufficient for or inherently offer a singly clear route to community control, and recognise that community control is achieved through different pathways informed by the multiple configurations of dynamics between different aspects of governance, as usefully illuminated by CCA. Our approach demonstrates the value to scholarship and activism on the commons of systematic comparative analysis in order to interrogate the expansion of the commons not only in practice but in spirit.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Catherine Durose

University of Birmingham, UK

c.durose@bham.ac.uk

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INTRODUCTION

In emphasising community control of resources, commoning offers an alternative to state capture or market speculation. While self-governing arrangements for common pool resources such as forests, pastures and water (Ostrom, 1990) have been the traditional focus of study; commons scholars have subsequently expanded to consider other types of resources including public goods, like knowledge, culture and the city (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Borch & Kornberger, 2015). Our focus on the commoning of private goods like housing, builds on an emerging body of research on the ‘housing commons’ (Larsen & Hansen, 2015, Nonini, 2017; Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2019), and responds to calls for an expansion of research on the governance of the commons to other types of resources (Stern et al., 2002, pp. 469).

Responding to capitalist encroachment and democratic recession, people worldwide are developing self-governance arrangements for community control of resources for community benefit. Whilst Elinor Ostrom’s seminal work proposed a series of design criteria (1990, pp. 96), as Hess (2008, pp. 38) has commented, ‘Ostrom’s design principles and the characteristics of long-enduring traditional commons do not necessarily apply to new commons’. Despite the growing popularity of commoning, we know little about the inner dynamics of achieving community control. In particular, how different aspects of governance, and institutional design choices have influenced community control of commoning.

Achieving community control (DeFilippis, 2003), understood as a ‘place-based population’s collective ownership and decision-making power over resources’ (Williams, 2018, p. 462), presents a pressing challenges to the housing commons. How, for example, do communities interact with external stakeholders, address hostile or indifferent environments, maintain inclusivity, and overcome the trade-off between viability and local need? To what extent do these challenges impede community control? And what does the way these challenges are addressed say about the nature of a particular housing commons? Our paper addresses these questions, using an innovative methodology to generate comparative insights, into how the challenge of community control has been negotiated, and systematic analysis of how this has varied.

We focus our analysis of the housing commons on community land trusts (CLTs), which may be understood as part of a ‘wave’ of democratic innovations (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017) that seek to democratise politics, society and the economy (Brandson et al., 2016). CLTs are primarily focused on ownership of land, used in different ways for community benefit, such as community agriculture

(Rosenberg & Yuen, 2012). However, CLTs are increasingly recognised as a potential governance mechanism for collective access to housing provision for low-income communities (Midheme & Moulaert, 2013; Aernouts & Ryckewart, 2018). CLTs are thus perceived to offer a buffer against the negative impacts of gentrification on lower income neighbourhoods, an expression of the right to housing, and a means of deepening place-based democracy.

We focus on CLTs because they are becoming a manifestation of self-governance in the housing commons in both the UK and US. Studies of CLTs, however, often remain under-conceptualised, practice-led (Rowe et al., 2016), and over-reliant on single iconic or exemplar case studies (Richardson et al., 2019). Enabled by a common definition for CLTs, we used configurative comparative analysis (CCA) techniques to identify relevant attributes of cases making up the population of CLTs. We developed an original dataset extracted from published US and UK case studies. Applying a cross-case comparison enabled us to map variance in the propensity for community control within CLTs, and to document different types of CLTs. We used this analysis to inform a conceptual typology (Collier et al., 2012) of five types of CLTs with differing propensity for community control. The typology suggests that while some social purposes for CLTs may align with normative notions of commoning – enrichment of community politics; conservation of community life; creation of participatory governance – other CLTs focus on housing provision as a means of making a broader contribution to the social economy; or as an asset-lock to enable wider provision for affordable housing. Our analysis challenged an assumed and simple relationship between particular governance mechanisms and community control.

We make three key contributions in this paper. First, we respond to noted weaknesses in the existing evidence base by offering a systematic comparative analysis of the existing published case evidence about community control in the housing commons. Second, we provide a conceptual typology that advances the informal and unstructured theorisation of the governance of the housing commons, through type-construction grounded in secondary data analysis. Our analysis refines equifinality in understandings of elements of self-governance in the housing commons, and explores the multiple possible combinations of those elements. Third, we reinforce the idea that common property regimes can be applied beyond common pool resources to private goods like housing.

We first review contemporary debates on the commons, CLTs and their governance. We then identify from the existing literature potential conditions for configurative comparative analysis. Based on our analysis of 29 published

cases in the UK and US, we propose a conceptual typology of CLTs. We conclude that more attention is warranted into how communities can navigate the governance challenges of seeking community control of resources.

EXPANDING THE COMMONS

Initial theorising of the commons focused on common pool resources – such as forests or water – that are difficult or impossible to stop access to (they are non-excludable), but suffer from collective overuse (they are subtractable). Hardin (1968) focused on pasture overgrazing to demonstrate the ‘tragedy’ of the commons, where rivalry, free-riding and exploitation undermined the sustainability of common pool resources. These dilemmas of collective action foregrounded Ostrom’s response, where she addressed the arrangements that allow for self-governance – or community control – of the commons (1990).

Ostrom’s theory of collective action, where ‘a group of principals can organise themselves voluntarily to retain the residual of their own efforts’ (1990, pp. 25), focused on structuring ‘the social interactions of those using the commons in order to condition their ability to discuss, decide upon and monitor self-imposed constraints’ (Borch & Kornberger, 2015, pp. 4). These principles and relations represent institutional forms of community control, which Ostrom called ‘self-organised resource governance systems’ (1990, pp. 222). These systems attempt to sustain the shared resource by managing and regulating who controls the benefits of the asset and how.

Commentators often emphasise that commoning does not simply occur but instead ‘need[s] communities... willing to create, maintain, and protect’ such arrangements’ (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011, pp. 42–43). Ostrom’s principles powerfully demonstrate that commoning involves being ‘in common’ (Linebaugh, 2009), and having social relationships where a group of people share responsibility. However, existing literature is limited in its engagement with the internal dynamics of these self-governing arrangements, particularly how multiple configurations of relationships between sets of different complex governance elements are related to, or supportive of community control – a ‘place-based population’s collective ownership and decision-making power over resources’ (Williams, 2018, pp. 462). This paper offers a novel classification of factors affecting the effective functioning of different types of self-governing arrangements applied to a different types of resource.

As noted, commons theory has expanded to different kinds of resources, which vary in their subtractability; how one person’s use impacts on how others may use or benefit from the resource. For example, Ostrom’s later

work on the ‘knowledge commons’ (Hess & Ostrom, 2007), drew attention to ‘non-subtractable’ resources, where one person’s use does not reduce others’ benefits. In the case of the ‘urban commons’ – including resources such as public space and culture – greater usage may add to rather than subtract from the commons (Borch & Kornberger, 2015).

We join others in arguing for further theoretical expansion to include the application of self-governing arrangements to certain excludable resources, such as housing (Hess, 2008; Larsen & Hansen, 2015, Nonini, 2017; Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2019). Housing is subtractable, like the original common pool resources, but it is also excludable: it is possible to exclude individuals from access to housing. Therefore, the risks of over-use of the individual ‘resource unit’ can be seen to be low. Discussing the commons in relation to housing ‘may seem contradictory [...] because housing is more often associated with privacy and property than with sharing and collectivisation’ (Tummers & MacGregor, 2019, pp. 69).

However, if seen as a social asset, housing faces similar underlying problems in managing resources to generate maximum benefits for the majority, for example the threats of gentrification, disinvestment, demolition, displacement, scarcity, or lack of affordability, and other negative externalities (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011). Similarly to competition over land, these resource tensions over housing offer collective action problems, alongside other ‘commons-like problems’ (German, 2018, pp. 217), such as preserving a sense of community. Therefore, housing may warrant protection by common resource management arrangements. Some communities have decided to treat these excludable goods as a commons, pooling them into a common pot, such as a CLT. Similarly to what has been documented on other governance mechanisms (Huron, 2018), CLTs remove units from the speculative housing market. In addition to housing externalities, housing can be considered as part of the new commons (Pickerill, 2016, pp. 31) where the ‘resource unit’ itself has become a joint resource system. Examples include affordable housing that uses tenure arrangements to re-define housing as not solely privately-owned property, and also co-housing which re-defines the concept of ‘home’ away from a purely private space for an exclusive group of people (Tummers & MacGregor, 2019, pp. 67), by adding elements of shared and communal resources including social spaces, and facilities for collective forms of childcare, cleaning and cooking (op cit, pp. 69).

CLTs are increasingly being used as a governance mechanism for low-income housing provision and the management of the ‘housing commons’ (Midheme & Moulart, 2013; Aernouts & Ryckewart, 2018). Therefore they are the vanguard for theoretical expansion,

contributing to analysis both conceptually and in practice (Bunce, 2016). CLTs potentially offer an example of a common property regime that emphasises common land stewardship, ‘resisting traditional land speculations and development practices through the mitigation or halting of land value inflation’ (Bunce, 2016), and may also fulfill definitions of self-governing arrangements as: ‘social system[s] for the long-term stewardship of resources that preserves shared values and community identity’ (Bollier, 2014, pp. 175). The next section discusses the history of CLTs and their place within the housing commons.

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

Community or common ownership of land is a long-standing part of a global movement for a more just, democratic and sustainable future (Moulaert et al., 2005). CLTs provide a mechanism for the collective ownership and control of land by removing it from the speculative market. In the US, for example, the key feature is the permanent transfer of land from the market to a trust, typically controlled by a non-profit organisation for common benefit. In the UK, CLTs were legislated for in 2008,¹ and defined as an organisation controlled by its members that uses land and other assets in the interests of a community, and where local people can become members.

Established in the US since the late 1960s, CLTs have grown in number, spanning rural and urban settings, and widening their international reach (Davis et al., 2020). Conceived within the American Civil Rights movement, its discourse of community control was influential in developing the CLT model (Williams, 2018). The radical potential of CLTs is often positioned within a broader struggle for marginalised communities to realise control over their environment (DeFilippis, 2003). The history of the first CLT reflects this initial promise: New Communities Inc. was established in Georgia in 1969 to give black farmers the opportunity to control the land they farmed and lived upon (DeFilippis et al., 2018).

Appealing to both social movements and mainstream policy as a means of effecting social change (Moore & McKee, 2012), CLTs have gained momentum; and expanded in the US to over 260, while doubling in England and Wales since 2017 to over 300 (Davis et al., 2020). This expansion has been focused on housing in particular, and reflects the recognition of CLTs as ‘an innovative yet strenuous approach to facilitate collective access to affordable housing’ (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2013, p. 503), and as a model for low-income housing provision (Midheme & Moulaert, 2018).

This expansion has, however, thrown into relief the limits of community control. A perceived drift away from a focus on community control (Moore & McKee, 2012), has ignited the argument that ‘the soul’ of CLTs is now at risk (Davis, 2008, pp. 38; DeFilippis et al., 2018). There are concerns that the degree of community control, i.e. self-governance realised through CLTs, has been compromised in the pursuit of organisational sustainability (DeFilippis et al., 2018). For some commentators, community control now amounts to little more than a ‘symbolic message’ (Thaden & Lowe, 2016, pp. 611). The debate about community control is fundamentally about the degree to which governance arrangements in housing commons represent collective ownership and decision-making power over resources. The battle over the soul of CLTs is significant because it questions the degree to which meaningful commoning can be assumed to exist in some of these housing-orientated organisations (Bezdek, forthcoming). Our study thus interrogates further this ambiguous but crucial notion of community control (Williams, 2018) in the housing commons, through the example of CLTs focused on housing provision.

It is recognised that studies of the commons require starting from a position of optimism (Tummers & MacGregor, 2019, p. 63). In a rapidly developing field with a strong normative orientation, while hope enables social movement building, it is insufficient for understanding potential success factors. Our systematic and comparative analysis advances the conceptualisation of CLTs as a form of governance for the housing commons. This paper responds to calls for greater attention to ‘understanding the dynamics of resource management institutions’ (Stern et al., 2012, pp. 469), by mapping out different combinations of institutional designs ‘that [can] cope effectively with the attributes of a particular resource given the larger macro-political institutions, culture, and economic environment in which that resource is embedded’ (Dietz et al., 2002, pp. 25). In the next section, we outline our configurative comparative analysis of CLTs.

METHODOLOGY

Our approach is rooted in case-based methodologies, and the application of configurative comparative analysis (CCA) (Byrne & Ragin, 2009; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). CCA refers to analytical approaches focused on types of cases as configurations of key attributes which make up a distinct whole. CCA provides a robust set of procedures for investigating social phenomena systematically, often drawing on the logic of set-theory (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Set theory is the branch of mathematics that

studies collections of objects. Configurational approaches see cases as complex systems and allow for equifinality, i.e. multiple causation. Although varying in aims and outputs, configurative approaches feature transparent recording of most or all of the following; (i) relatively precise definitions of conditions of interest to achieve conceptual clarity about what counts as an instance, (ii) retrieving and coding of information to identify presence or absence of conditions for each case, (iii) improving conceptual robustness by iterating back and forth between theory and evidence to scope key concepts and conditions relevant to the population of cases; (iv) logical comparison across cases to identify which hypothetically possible combinations of presence/absence of key conditions (logically possible cases) are also cases existing in the real world as evidenced by the data, (v) iterative analysis of these different logical types to interpret the theoretical implications of agreement of attributes across empirical cases. Ryan (2016) has argued that because of its ability to map theoretical assumptions and data in a transparent way, CCA can be particularly useful for understanding social phenomena that appear novel, and interrogating emerging conceptualisations more systematically.

Building on earlier applications to democratic innovations (Ryan, 2016), and recent multi-dimensional research to understand ‘success’ in the commons (Barnett et al., 2020), we used CCA to develop systematic insights into a typology of the different configurations of multiple conditions for self-governance, i.e. community control in CLTs in practice. This approach provides an improved evidence base by offering groundwork drawing on analysis of existing published cases to develop explanatory theories for the key features of CLTs and to theorise community control in the housing commons.

We performed three analytical tasks. First, using existing theoretical literature and secondary data, we identified potential conditions whose presence or absence might be hypothesised to contribute to the operation of a resource management system applied to excludable resources, specifically housing-oriented CLTs. Second, we collated an original dataset extracted from existing US and UK case studies of CLTs. The potential conditions were then applied to the data; and the dataset was coded for the presence or absence of conditions within each secondary case. Third, we derived a conceptual typology of conditions relating to community control in CLTs drawing on our systematic and comparative analysis of these secondary cases. We defined the properties of CLTs, allowing us to understand the relevance of these conditions, how they may combine in different ways, and the propensity of different types of CLTs for community control. We now describe the identification of conditions, and application of conditions to data in more detail.

IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL CONDITIONS

Our analysis first identified potential conditions for the operation of CLTs as resource management systems for housing. Mapping a ‘property space’ (Lazarsfeld, 1937; Ragin, 2000) of conditions initially involves generating a collection of potential key attributes to characterise the elements of a set of objects. We asked what are the potential attributes that would plausibly affect CLT’s ability to achieve community control within a resource management system? Mapping these attributes is part of the definitional and conceptual groundwork needed for future causal analysis.

As shown in [Table 1](#), we drew on various sources to identify the potential conditions, including academic and ‘grey’ literature, as well as publicly available examples. The sources included existing case evidence alongside more theoretically-driven material outlining possible conditions. The initial range of possible explanatory conditions was broad; this is what Lazarsfeld (1937) called ‘substruction’; the construction of a large number of possible variables. We then followed with ‘reduction’ (Elman, 2009) to narrow the property space to a smaller number of conditions with the most explanatory potential, and that could be assessed through evidence from secondary sources. The potential conditions to be tested resulted from an abductive approach that moved recursively between theory and empirical context provided by those published cases.

We identified eight potentially explanatory conditions, summarised in [Table 1](#), which could be used to understand variance across CLTs. The conditions are grouped into four categories: organisational governance; wider mobilization and engagement; portfolio; and, support and capacity. These conditions could, in combination, reveal different logical types, (i.e. sets of CLTs with the same combination of features).

In effect, the construction of the conditions was our ‘hypothesis building’ phase, where it was unclear whether, to what extent, and in which direction each condition may point. The role of each condition in the successful governance of the housing commons is contested in the literature, as summarised in [Table 1](#). Our approach sought to acknowledge potential trade-offs between conditions (Barnett et al., 2020; Westerink et al., 2020). By transparently mapping out the properties of existing cases, and understanding how and which cases group, we can provide a better grounding for a conceptual typology.

APPLYING CONDITIONS TO PUBLISHED CASE STUDY DATA

We applied these conditions to data on CLTs to understand which of all the possible combinations of the hypothesized conditions existed in the data. We collated an original

CONDITION	DESCRIPTION
Organisational governance (GOV)	
1 The CLT is independent (IND)	This condition refers to the effective operation of formal mechanisms enabling the CLT to determine the extent of the property rights related to their shared resource. To satisfy the condition, the rule-making rights of community members must be respected by outside authorities, and the CLT has the ability to determine what the rights to the resource are, who has those rights and how they can be used. Independence also implies accountability and formal systems for monitoring behaviour, aligning with principles of effective governing in the commons (Ostrom, 1990).
2 Seat(s) on the CLT's board have been reserved for external stakeholder(s) (RS)	Across CLTs, a tripartite governance model is prominent though not ubiquitous, where influence through the CLT's board is divided between: CLT residents and members; representatives from the wider community unconnected to the CLT; and external stakeholders, whose primary occupation is separate. Some US studies challenge this route to securing community control (Lowe & Thaden, 2015); describing the tripartite governance structure as 'merely necessary but not sufficient' (DeFilippis et al., 2018, pp. 759). Variance within governance models included not reserving seats for external stakeholders.
Wider mobilisation and engagement (COMM)	
3 At its inception, the CLT was supported by an active civil society (CS)	As CLTs expand in number and under conditions of urgency, such as housing shortage or gentrification, active support from civil society may be absent. CLTs may instead rely upon a core group of committed volunteers or be kick-started by an external interest, such as a housing association, local government or private organisation (Moore & McKee, 2012).
4 The CLT sustains community engagement (SCE)	This condition relates to the CLT's contribution to local civic life through sustained engagement with the wider community (those individuals or organised groups who are not residents or members of the CLT, but who have a vested interest, for example by living locally). Participation and inclusion have been identified as success conditions for institutional governance arrangements for managing the commons (Barnett et al., 2020). For CLTs whose inception was not supported by an active civil society, such engagement may only be fostered over the longer-term. Equally, sustaining such engagement 'may be hard to guarantee' (Midheme & Moulart, 2013, pp. 73).
Portfolio (PORT)	
5 The CLT has expanded its portfolio (EP)	This condition considers the expansion of the CLT's portfolio of resources beyond those present at inception; for example, through additional housing units. Despite a growing tendency towards expansion, the understanding of CLTs as empowering a specific place-based community, remains influential (Williams, 2018). Expansion of a CLT may indicate a changing scale rather than a changing mission, but some commentators argue that expansion to 'out run' gentrification or ensure organisational survival, can reduce a CLTs ability to represent place-based populations, undermining community control (DeFilippis et al., 2018).
6 The CLT has diversified its revenue stream (DP)	This condition considers the diversification of the CLT's portfolio beyond its initial focus; for example, into other commercial ventures. Diversification can indicate alignment with community control, for example showing responsiveness to community demand; but such logics may also mitigate against community control and sustainability.
Support and professional capacity (EXT)	
7 The CLT received significant external support (ES)	The value of external support, such as political influence, technical advice and financing, to acquiring properties over the long-term, has been long-acknowledged (Williams, 2018). Yet, partnering with local government, housing associations or other agencies can also dilute the foundational intentions of securing community control, and potentially disconnect CLTs from the communities they seek to empower (DeFilippis et al., 2018).
8 The CLT directly employs professional capacity (PC)	Whilst CLTs rely on volunteering, the complex nature of purchasing and developing land, and managing assets, has meant that professional capacity is also recognised as enabling CLTs to survive and retain community control (Moore & McKee, 2012). This condition focuses on the CLT's capacity to employ people whose primary occupation is stewardship of the CLT. Some CLTs are merging or partnering with established bodies such as housing associations ¹ to access this professional capacity (Moore and Northcott, 2010; Moore & McKee, 2012). Yet the professionalisation of the CLT is claimed to present a trade-off with community control (DeFilippis et al., 2018, Westerink et al., 2020), and introduces the risk of capture by larger voluntary organisations or local government that may crowd out more radical propositions for the CLT (Robinson, 2020).

Table 1 Summary and description of potential conditions.¹ Non-profit organisations that manage and rent housing to people often on low incomes or with particular needs.

dataset, developed from existing US and UK case studies using existing published evidence on CLTs identified through a scoping literature review.

To be included in the datasets, evidence had to meet the following criteria: include original qualitative empirical material about a case study/studies of CLTs; be academically peer reviewed, and/or published through a reputable outlet, and/or have been externally evaluated; be within the data range, 1990 to 2019; and published in English. Subsequently, to be eligible for inclusion, the case must meet the scoping condition as a legally defined CLT,² and to be involved in the provision of housing, and located in the UK or US. This geographical focus permits some control over legal and cultural variance, but also acknowledges the prior knowledge of variance, or at least claimed variance, within those contexts. The date range acknowledges the recent proliferation of CLTs in the UK, but also includes longer-standing US cases. Finally, the case had to be supported by more than one source.

DATA SOURCES, CASES, AND CODING

The scoping review employed the following search terms: ‘Community Land Trust*’; ‘Community Trust*’;

‘Land Trust*’; ‘Housing Trust*’; ‘Mutual Housing’. We also searched a number of databases to extend the reach of our search: ProQuest Research Library; Library Articles Search; Discovered; Scopus; DuckDuckGo Search Engine. We collated a dataset of 29 cases that met eligibility criteria. We triangulated the existing peer-reviewed and externally evaluated evidence base with additional documentation, such as grey literature, websites, and newsletters. Appendix 1 details the sources underpinning each case, and Appendix 2 describes all cases. The cases were then coded for the presence (1) or absence (0) of the eight conditions. Appendix 3 sets out the technical detail of the coding process, specifically the criteria for coding the presence and absence of each condition, and coder reliability.

FINDINGS

Our findings are drawn from coding the 29 cases. [Table 2](#), known in CCA as a ‘truth table’ displays the coding of each case according to our eight conditions. The cases are then grouped into rows, where each row represents what is

LOGICAL TYPE #	GOV		COMM		PORT		EXT		CASE	N
	1. IND	2. RS	3. CS	4. SCE	5. EP	6. DP	7. ES	8. PC		
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	Anchorage	1
2	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	Athens	1
3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	Cashes Green	1
4	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	Champlain, Foundation East, Rondo	3
5	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	Chicago	1
6	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	Christow, Corry Valley, Powerstock & District, Upper Culm	4
7	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	City of Lakes, London, San Francisco	3
8	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	Cooper Square	1
9	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	Cornwall	1
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Dudley Street, Granby Four Streets, Homebaked	3
11	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Durham	1
12	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	Holy Island	1
13	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	Lopez	1
14	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	Lyvennet, Norton-sub-Hamdon	2
15	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	Northern California, Thistle	2
16	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	Proud Ground	1
17	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	Queen Camel	1
18	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	Toller Porcorum	1

Table 2 ‘Truth table’ of community land trusts (CLTs) by ‘logical types’.

termed in CCA as a distinct ‘logical type’, ie. a set of CLTs where cases have the same combinations of conditions. [Table 2](#) demonstrates that the 29 cases fell into 18 logical types. This means that there are a number of CLTs that were, for the purposes of this analysis, of an identical type based on the eight conditions. As there were 256 possible logical types, our findings show some limits to diversity among existing published cases, whilst also demonstrating that in the data, CLTs took many forms.

A CONCEPTUAL TYPOLOGY OF COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

In the following analysis, aided by familiarity with cases, we combine sets of logical types. This allows further conceptual interpretation and abstraction, while retaining the logical types as the fundamental logical elements of any conceptual typology. Our conceptual typology extracts five different types of CLTs that shared particular characteristics: urban activist; hyper-local; partnered; social enterprise; and asset-lock. A typology setting out key characteristics of these different types of CLTs is presented in [Table 3](#), each type is then discussed.

Type 1: Urban activist CLT (eg. Rows 7, 8, and 10 in Table 2)

Type 1 CLTs may have had collective access to affordable housing at their core, but crucially as part of a wider community politics. They were anchored in grassroots activism, which helped to sustain an ethos of independence and community engagement, indicating greater propensity towards community control. Despite being grounded in community politics, this type of CLT also suggests that external support, professional capacity, diversification and expansion, do not necessarily prevent community control.

For example, Cooper Square (Row 8, [Table 2](#)) was assessed as independent, with no board seats reserved for external stakeholders; it had support from an active civil society and sustained community engagement; it had expanded but not diversified; and was conceived without external support, but had since employed professional capacity. Cooper Square was established after fighting against forced displacement over a decades-long period. Local authorities did not support founding the CLT, and thus Cooper Square is considered the product of the ‘longest-lasting community planning effort’ (Angotti, 2011, pp. 114): ‘fifty fuckin’ years’ long (Engelsman et al. 2018, pp. 114). Cooper Square has expanded since its inception in 1991, managing 377 residential units and 24 commercial units, evidencing its need for professional capacity. This, however, did not detract from understanding Cooper Square as an example of the quintessential ‘soul’ of CLTs: emerging from and remaining grounded in community politics, and fiercely independent.

Two further logical types of CLTs align with the urban activist notion (Rows 7 and 10). There are three urban CLTs – two from the UK (Granby Four Streets and Homebaked) and one from the US (Dudley Street) – which also emerged through extensive grassroots-organising. Granby Four Streets in Liverpool developed from a resident-led anti-demolition and guerrilla gardening campaign. Homebaked, based in the same city, is a bakery, community hub and cultural space. It emerged from an artist-led participatory design process that encouraged residents’ ideas for redeveloping empty housing in a neighbourhood of acute housing need. Dudley Street, which was much older than the UK CLTs, was the product of resident mobilisation around issues of arson, disinvestment, displacement, and illegal dumping. These three CLTs were in a logical type that fulfilled all conditions (Row 10): they were assessed as: being independent; they had a reserved seat on the board for (an) external stakeholder(s); they had been supported at inception by an active civil society and then sustained community engagement; they had expanded and diversified; been supported at inception by existing power; and employed professional capacity. In addition a further logical type, representing three CLTs – City of Lakes, London, San Francisco (Row 7) – also emerged from extensive community organising, were rooted in sustained community mobilisation, and positioned in response to similar housing issues.

However, our analysis revealed important nuance. The CLTs in Rows 7 and 10 also benefitted from external support in establishing themselves. For example, Homebaked was initiated as part of the Liverpool Biennale; London received Mayoral backing; Dudley Street was supported by the Boston Redevelopment Authority; and City of Lakes, emerged from collaboration between three Minneapolis community-based organisations and corporate partners. All included external stakeholders on their board, employed professional capacity, and had expanded, with some also diversifying their portfolios. These CLTs therefore suggest that community control came about through a more complex and wide-ranging set of conditions than those demonstrated in Cooper Square.

Type 2: Hyper-local rural CLTs (Eg. Rows 6, 13, 17, and 18 in Table 2)

Type 2 CLTs had some similarities with Type 1 CLTs, notably: their independence, the absence of reserved seats for external stakeholders on their board, and being anchored to the local communities they serve through sustained engagement. Some were kick-started by external support or a few committed residents or volunteers, but this had not undermined their propensity for community control. However, they differed from Type 1 CLTs in their rural

TYPE	HOUSING PROVISION AS A MEANS TO	PROPENSITY FOR COMMUNITY CONTROL	ORGANISATIONAL GOVERNANCE	CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY	EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION	EXTERNAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT
1 Urban activist	Enrich community politics	Greater	CLTs are independent, and may or may not have reserved board seats for external stakeholders	Civil society mobilised for inception. Community engagement is sustained.	CLTs do expand, but may or may not diversify.	CLTs may or may not receive external support at inception/employ professional capacity.
2 Hyper-local rural	Conserve community life	Greater	CLTs are independent, and do not have reserved board seats for external stakeholders	Civil society may or may not be mobilised for inception. Community engagement is sustained	CLTs may expand, but remain very small and highly local. Diversification where present is often to preserve core local infrastructure.	CLTs do receive external support at inception and do not employ professional capacity.
3 Partnered	Create participatory governance	Varied	CLTs may or may not be independent, and may or may not have reserved board seats for external stakeholders	Civil society may or may not be mobilised for inception. Community engagement may or may not be sustained.	CLTs do expand and diversify.	CLTs do receive external support at inception and may or may not employ professional capacity, which may be provided by the partner organisation.
4 Social enterprise	Contribute to the social economy	Lesser	CLTs are not independent, and do not have reserved board seats for external stakeholders	Civil society is not mobilised and community is not engaged.	CLTs at risk of over-expansion and diversification.	CLTs do receive external support at inception and employ professional capacity.
5 Asset-lock	Secure an asset-lock for wider provision of affordable housing	Lesser	CLTs are not independent, and do have reserved board seats for external stakeholders		CLTs do expand and diversify.	

Table 3 Conceptual typology of community land trusts.

location, and some fostered community engagement primarily after inception. Housing was central to their purpose, with all these CLTs founded to provide affordable housing for local communities being priced out of rural housing markets. Some CLTs had tailored their asset portfolio around preserving local community infrastructure, such as the local pub or post office.

This kind of CLT was typified by the cases of Christow, Corry Valley, Powerstock & District and Upper Culm (see Row 6), all located in rural South-West England. These small CLTs, steward between six and 12 housing units. These cases were all independent, with no board seats for external stakeholders; they received support from an active civil society; and have sustained community engagement; they had not expanded or diversified their portfolio; they did have external support at inception, but did not employ professional capacity.

Queen Camel (Row 17) in rural Somerset emerged similarly, with the parish council working with local residents to support an ageing population through development of affordable housing. It eventually expanded to 20 homes, and diversified to include the local pub and the former village school site. Queen Camel did not have wider engagement by civil society initially, but did foster community engagement over time.

Toller Porcurum (Row 18) in rural mid-Dorset was another Type 2 CLT, established after a resident bequeathed land to re-build the village post office. This CLT also managed of six rental homes on the same land. Like Queen Camel, Toller Porcurum was initiated without support by an active civil society, but developed community engagement over time. Lopez CLT (Row 13), on Lopez Island near Seattle, offered a US example of a Type 2 CLT.

TYPE 3: PARTNERED CLTS (EG. ROWS 11 AND 14 IN TABLE 2)

All Type 3 CLTs partnered with other local organisations, such as local government or housing associations. These CLTs retained a strong relationship with the founding community, but also illustrated the complexity of community control. For example, some of these CLTs remained independent, without necessarily retaining responsibility for the management of the CLT which may have been contracted out to the partner. Conversely, some lacked independence, but were enablers of community action and politics.

Lyvennet and Norton-sub-Handon (Row 14) fulfilled seven of the eight conditions, excepting professional capacity. Both these CLTs partnered with housing associations contracted for the day-to-day management of their housing portfolio, such as rent collections and tenant management. Durham was a logical type by itself, fulfilling

seven of the eight conditions, excepting independence (Row 11). Durham was founded by residents responding to rising house prices. However, the management of the CLT had effectively been passed to external stakeholders, with all the roles of formal power on the CLT's board³ occupied by representatives from local government and resident-allocated board seats going unfilled. The CLT did however maintain community engagement, through regular community meetings and newsletters, nurturing of new neighbourhood leaders and associations, support for opening a community youth centre, campaigns on neighbourhood crime, and its community garden, and education classes.

TYPE 4: SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CLTS (EG. ROW 15 IN TABLE 2)

Type 4 CLTs were notable for their sustained social purpose, but also the absence of independence or a connection with a specific community of place. Instead, the CLTs were used to establish housing provision as a form of trading good to generate resource for wider social benefit. These CLTs were unlikely to feature community control.

Two CLTs of this kind were Northern California and Thistle (Row 15). Both were not independent; did not have reserved board seats for external stakeholders; were not founded with support by civil society nor have they sustained community engagement; they had expanded and diversified; received external support at their inception; and did have professional capacity. Both were started by committed individuals with a social purpose in mind. Thistle was established to build homes for people with disabilities, and supported by the Center for People with Disabilities and the NeighbourWorks network. The group who established Northern California were supported by the Independence Institute, which promoted land reform ideas based on the Indian Gramdan movement. Both CLTs referred to themselves as a 'company' and may be characterised as social enterprises, applying commercial strategies for social benefit. However, both CLTs had experienced significant challenges in taking this more commercialised route. Thistle is notable for being one of the only CLTs planning to downsize their portfolio, and Northern California, bankrupted itself after a risky investment before recovering viability.

TYPE 5: ASSET-LOCK CLTS (EG. ROWS 4 AND 9 IN TABLE 2)

These CLTs were substantively different to other types. Here, the CLT model had been utilised, but without substantial involvement of community or wider civil society; as such, community control was not a feature. The CLT legal mechanism and associated housing and property

portfolio was employed to provide an asset-lock for other developing CLTs.

These CLTs were a logical type of cases which were not independent and had reserved board seats for external stakeholders; were not directly supported by civil society, nor had they sustained community engagement; they had both expanded their portfolio and diversified their revenue stream; and did receive external support at inception, and now had professional capacity. This set contained three CLTs: Foundation East, Rondo and Champlain Housing Trust (Row 4), all kick-started by public agencies. For example, Foundation East was formed by the East of England Development Agency. It was the umbrella CLT for that region, and supported other community-led efforts by providing a temporary asset-lock until their CLT had been formed. Foundation East provided expertise, funding and support, enabling other CLTs, but was not itself run by residents nor did it deal directly with them. Another CLT, Cornwall (Row 9), operated similarly, serving as an umbrella organisation for 16 locations that provided a mix of rental units and affordable homes, and had not diversified its portfolio. A different example, Champlain Housing Trust, emerged from a merger between the publicly-funded Burlington Land Trust and the Lake Champlain Housing Corporation. Its sheer size – the largest CLT in the US, comprising 2218 rental units, 530 homeownership units and 33 commercial spaces – also suggests difficulties in serving a particular place-based community.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis offers a data-driven theoretical contribution, calling for greater attention to the dynamics within the governance of the housing commons, in order to make community control meaningful. We have extended the existing evidence base, by applying a configurative comparative analysis to the factors in operation in CLTs. In doing so, we offer a systematic advance in theorizing the multiple combinations of conditions that shape self-governance of the new commons. Our work offers a substantive and methodological step-forward for typologising resource management institutions, specifically those of a new kind of commons, that of housing.

Our analysis focused on community land trusts (CLTs), which are increasingly used as a legal and practical mechanism to bring housing under community control. We have shown the rich diversity of CLTs in the dataset. Our understanding of individual cases, systematic comparisons across them, and iteration with existing theory allowed us combine the logical types produced through CCA to develop a conceptual typology identifying

five types of CLTs, with differing alignments to community control. Whilst some CLTs are a means to sustain and enrich community politics; conserve community life; or create participatory governance – others focus on housing provision as a means to making a broader contribution to the social economy; and an asset-lock for social and affordable housing.

Our typology shows that urban activist (Type 1) CLTs are the embodiment of radical community politics, an example being Cooper Square, where community control was achieved after half a century of struggle. Within the urban activist type, Granby 4 Streets and Homebaked in Liverpool were similarly inspiring, but their stories of grassroots activism also included external and professionalised support to realise their independence and propensity for community control. Other types, such as hyper-local rural (Type 2) CLTs, also embodied the sense of service and commitment to a specific place-based community, and demonstrated that CLTs could be founded without the involvement of wider civil society, and where community engagement could be developed over the longer-term. But there were also different ways of using the CLT model – such as social enterprise (Type 4) and asset-lock CLTs (Type 5) – which had a social purpose, but were not rooted in community politics. This complex yet parsimonious typology can be used as the basis for further explanatory and causal work.

Our findings reveal some of the challenges involved in initiating and sustaining governance of the housing commons. It seems clear that whilst self-governance and community control remained a primary concern for many CLTs, it was not the only issue determining the wider social value of CLTs. More broadly, by understanding this differentiation, we challenged the assumption that design principles or governance mechanisms are sufficient for or inherently offer a singly clear route to community control, but instead that community control is achieved through different pathways informed by multiple sets of dynamics between different aspects of governance, as usefully illuminated by CCA.

As in other fields that focus on social or political transformation, there is often a long inception stage when scholars and activists develop research-based advocacy narratives that celebrate or illustrate potential. This is understandable, to create space for new possibilities and attract attention to developments that the mainstream of a particular discipline may have crowded out. Such normative orientations whilst vital risks creating a bias towards successful, exemplary, and inspirational cases. Our study illuminates the value of systematic comparative analysis to refine the understanding of community control.

Our findings advance a research agenda on community control within the governance of the commons. Further primary research would help to refine our conditions for community control and allow for advanced CCA – such as fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis, and process tracing – to understand the causal mechanisms of community control. Such research would also allow further investigation of unexpected findings within our data, such as differences that may not have been apparent between CLTs in logical types, and explore how conditions may be productively combined, or which are mutually constitutive. Our analysis provides the groundwork for such further critical assessment of how far democratic innovations for community control, embody an expansion of commoning in spirit as well as practice.

NOTES

- 1 UK Housing and Regeneration Act.
- 2 That is, the case fulfilled all of the following criteria: the productive use of its assets is legally separated from the land and perpetually held in common; the productive use of the land is stewarded or managed by a defined community; and, the members of this community determine the generation, consumption and redistribution of the land's productive use through formalised and democratic decision-making.
- 3 President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendices.** Appendices 1–3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1093.s1>


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AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Catherine Durose  orcid.org/0000-0002-1712-9914
University of Birmingham, UK

Liz Richardson
University of Manchester, UK

Max Rozenburg
University of Edinburgh, UK

Matt Ryan
University of Southampton, UK

Oliver Escobar
University of Edinburgh, UK

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