ABSTRACT

How are Australia’s leading housing not-for-profit organisations embracing social enterprise and hybridity?

Progressively over the last decade, not-for-profit (third sector) organisations have become the preferred providers of social and affordable housing across Australia, emulating international trends over several decades. In response to favourable policy changes and market opportunities, traditional community housing organisations have developed new business models, expanded their scale of operation, introduced new housing development and financing functions and developed additional services to complement their traditional roles in tenancy management and community development.

The changing roles of housing third sector organisation have been conceptualised in terms of a social enterprise model – applying commercial strategies to achieve social outcomes - and in terms of hybridity – organisational decision making underpinned by a dynamic mix of market, public policy and civil society values and modus operandi.

This paper uses the results of in-depth study of 14 of Australia’s largest housing not-for-profits to show how hybridity and social enterprise work in practice and to consider some implications of the expansion of third sector delivery of housing services for the achievement of housing policy goals. Using a methodology designed to elicit an in-depth understanding of organisational decision-making and leadership, the findings offer an ‘insider’ perspective on how these organisations are responding to their opportunities and responsibilities as expanding providers of a range of affordable housing options. In conclusion the paper reflects on the usefulness of the concepts of social enterprise and hybridity for deepening our understanding of what leading community housing organisations in Australia are doing and why.