Entrenched Hybridity in Public Housing Agencies in the USA

Mai Thi Nguyen a, William M. Rohe a & Spencer Morris Cowan b

a Department of City and Regional Planning, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
b Center for Urban and Regional Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Available online: 11 May 2012

To cite this article: Mai Thi Nguyen, William M. Rohe & Spencer Morris Cowan (2012): Entrenched Hybridity in Public Housing Agencies in the USA, Housing Studies, DOI:10.1080/02673037.2012.677998

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2012.677998

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Entrenched Hybridity in Public Housing Agencies in the USA

MAI THI NGUYEN*, WILLIAM M. ROHE* & SPENCER MORRIS COWAN**

*Department of City and Regional Planning, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA, **Center for Urban and Regional Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

ABSTRACT In this paper, we build on the extant literature on housing social enterprises and hybrid models of public housing delivery. We trace the evolution of US housing policy toward greater hybridity, focusing on three dimensions of hybridity. Drawing from a case study of the Charlotte Housing Authority in North Carolina, we showcase two housing programs, HOPE VI and Moving to Work, in order to highlight current innovations in the provision of housing for low-income populations and the entrenched hybridity that is evident. Using this information, we address two main questions: (1) how do local public housing agencies collaborate with the Federal government, private developers, and non-profit service providers to fund, construct, and manage affordable rental housing? and (2) what are the benefits and challenges of hybrid models of affordable rental housing delivery within the US context?

KEY WORDS: Social housing, housing affordability, housing supply, hybridity, public housing agencies, social enterprise

Introduction

First built in 1930s, the development of public housing in the USA was a close collaboration between Federal and local governments. While the Federal government provided the construction funding, local government authorities owned, operated, and managed public housing with the mission of providing safe, decent, and sanitary living environments for selected families. With the exception of contracting out design and construction duties to private architects and developers, the provision of public housing was purely a public endeavor.

Over time, the public housing program moved away from being a purely public to a hybrid endeavor—one that involves the public, private, and non-profit sectors and increasing inter- and intra-organizational complexity. This process of increasing hybridization was accelerated in the early 1990s due to two fundamental shifts. The first relates to increasing decentralization of authority over the provision of public housing,
resulting in local public housing agencies having greater flexibility in how they fund, construct, and manage public housing. As a result, hybrid approaches can be found in every stage of affordable housing delivery. Furthermore, decentralization has enabled local public housing agencies to craft context-specific policies and practices that may result in greater efficiency and higher-quality delivery of housing and housing-related support services. But it also poses some dilemmas, such as whether demolishing conventional public housing and replacing it with lower-density, mixed-income affordable housing developments serves fewer poor and vulnerable households.

A second shift relates to the reconceptualization of public housing from merely bricks and mortar, to a high-quality living environment with amenities and support services. Due to a dilapidated public housing stock and plaguing problems with persistent and intergenerational poverty, recent efforts by policy-makers have focused on breaking the cycle of poverty by providing service rich housing in scattered-site, lower-density, mixed-income, and mixed-use neighborhoods. Both of these shifts are often attributed to neoliberal views about the public provision of services (Drier & Atlas, 1996; Hackworth, 2005).

In this paper, we provide a brief history of the transformation of US housing programs toward greater intra-organizational, inter-organizational, and programmatic hybridity, with particular emphasis on the programs operated by local public housing agencies. We draw from a case study of the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) in North Carolina to provide concrete examples of these three dimensions of hybridity. We showcase two housing programs implemented by the CHA, HOPE VI and Moving to Work (MTW), in order to highlight current innovations in the provision of housing for low-income populations and the entrenched hybridity that is evident. Using this information, we address two main questions: (1) how do local public housing agencies collaborate with the Federal government, private developers and non-profit service providers to fund, construct, and manage affordable rental housing? and (2) what are the benefits and challenges of hybrid models of affordable rental housing delivery within the US context?

Social Enterprise, Hybridity, and the Delivery of Affordable Rental Housing

To provide a clearer understanding of our case study, we define ‘social enterprise’ and ‘hybridity’ as they relate to the provision of affordable rental housing in the USA. In the broadest sense, social enterprises in the USA are organizations that engage in market-oriented economic activities while providing goods and services that serve a social mission (Czischke et al., 2010; Defourny, 2009). Social enterprises apply principles of commercial markets to achieve greater efficiency, efficacy, and innovation in supplying public goods and social services (Kerlin, 2006, 2010).

In the USA, housing social enterprises can take on a variety of different organizational structures. Within the public sector, local housing providers have engaged in social entrepreneurial activities by creating for-profit and non-profit subsidiaries. This allows them to draw from a larger pool of resources within the public, private, and non-profit sectors, take greater risks in their market-oriented activities, and have more flexibility. Private-sector entities also engage in supplying affordable housing, taking advantage of government incentives, such as the low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC), which provide yearly tax write-offs for those who invest in approved affordable housing developments, which can make constructing, managing, and investing in affordable
There are also a growing number of private non-profit housing organizations that fund, construct, and manage affordable housing. These organizations typically receive funding from the state, philanthropic organizations, or donations and employ business strategies to fill the gaps between the demand for affordable housing and what government entities can provide.

Given that social enterprises are present in the public, private, and non-profit sectors and have a variety of ways in which they can structure their organization and management, housing social enterprises in the USA exemplify dimensions of ‘hybridity’. Billis (2010) identifies three distinct sectors: public, private and third (or non-profit), which are distinguished by the following core elements: (1) ownership, (2) governance, (3) operational priorities, (4) human resources, and (5) other resources (such as financial). Hybrid zones emerge when there is some interaction between the three sectors. According to Billis (2010), there are nine possible hybrid zones (see p. 57 for a diagram).

In our case study, for example, the CHA falls within the public–private–third hybrid zone (or zone 2 in Billis, 2010), which has roots in the public sector, but currently operates under a hybrid model. Considering its hybrid governance structure, the CHA is governed by a Board of Commissioners that is appointed by local elected officials. One of the board members must be a tenant currently residing in a unit owned by the CHA. The CHA has created a wholly-owned, non-profit subsidiary which, in turn, has created a wholly owned for-profit subsidiary. Both the non-profit and for-profit subsidiaries are governed by CHA’s Board of Commissioners, but they have different operational priorities. Both the CHA and its non-profit subsidiary pursue the social priorities specified in their corporate charters, such as providing housing for low-income households. The for-profit subsidiary, however, can seek to maximize profits. That different operational priority makes the for-profit subsidiary more attractive as a general partner to other for-profit investors in a development project than a non-profit or governmental entity. Operating within these hybrid zones creates a ‘blurring’ of boundaries between ideal-typical organizations or sectors (Czischke et al., 2010).

Much of what has been discussed thus far in terms of hybridity can be considered institutional hybridity (Czischke et al., 2010), which relates to the hybrid structure within a single organization. For the purposes of our study, we refer to this dimension of hybridity as intra-organizational hybridity. We contrast this with another dimension of hybridity, which we refer to as inter-organizational hybridity, defined as the collaboration of hybrid organizations having roots in different sectors (public, private, and non-profit) to achieve a social mission. For example, inter-organizational hybridity in funding an affordable housing development would be when the hybrid local government agencies, private entities, and non-profit organization all collaborate and contribute funds to the development of an affordable housing development. We note that the key here is not simply collaboration across the various sectors, which has been studied extensively in fields such as public administration, but rather that mixed public, private, and non-profit organizations are working together to provide goods and services.

A third dimension of hybridity concerns the scope of services or goods provided, such as housing that includes social and support services. Others have referred to this as ‘behavioral variables’ (Crossan & Van Til, 2009). Housing social enterprises often achieve this form of hybridity by partnering with other organizations from different sectors. The partner organizations provide the additional services to their clients including: financial literacy courses, mentorship, workforce training, adult education, transportation,
substance abuse rehabilitation, healthcare, and childcare. The result is that tenants living in affordable housing receive a host of goods, services, and amenities beyond the physical structure of housing. We refer to this dimension of hybridity as programmatic hybridity.

A final consideration is the changing nature of hybridity over time. Organizations may change their hybrid forms over time, decreasing or increasing their level of hybridity and, thereby also shifting across different zones of hybridity (Billis, 2010). Distinctions are made between shallow and entrenched hybridity in the third sector, where shallow hybridity starts to occur when third sector organizations initially start to adopt hybrid elements, such as hiring paid staff. Hybridity within these organizations become entrenched when the entire operation requires the hybrid model in order to function, as a result of becoming dependent on funding or services from a combination of sectors. Sometimes, organizations become entrenched ‘organically’ or through some evolutionary process and other times, they are ‘enacted’ or start out as entrenched hybrid organizations (Billis, 2010).

The Hybridization of Public Housing in the USA

The first large-scale public housing program in the USA was developed after the passage of the 1937 US Housing Act, also referred to as the Warner Steagall Act. The Act established the United States Housing Authority, a Federal agency that would be responsible for lending money and contracting with local public housing agencies to clear slums and build quality housing for the poor. The original Act made clear that the role of the Federal government was to enable state and local authorities to own and construct public housing by providing sufficient financing. The 1937 Housing Act stated,

‘It is the policy of the United States to promote the general welfare of the Nation by employing its funds and credit, as provided in this Act, to assist the several States and their political subdivisions to remedy the unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions and the acute shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of lower income and, consistent with the objectives of this Act, to vest in local public housing agencies the maximum amount of responsibility in the administration of their housing programs’ Sec. 2. [42 U.S.C. 1437] (http://www.hud.gov).

Thus, conventional public housing was decidedly un-hybrid. It was initially a public endeavor involving Federal, state, and local governments. Because the Act required that state or local authorities be responsible for owning, building, and maintaining public housing, state and local governments established a multitude of local public housing agencies. The public housing program was also narrowly focused on producing subsidized housing units with limited attention to the social needs and aspirations of the residents.7

Twenty years after the passage of the Act, 840 local public housing agencies had been created by 1109 local jurisdictions in the country (Fisher, 1959).8 The expansion of the public housing program continued for several more decades until President Richard Nixon placed a moratorium on new public housing construction in 1973 due to concerns over the expense of the program (Hackworth, 2005). This marked the beginning of an era of funding cuts and increasing decentralization of authority over public housing. This transition has been largely attributed to neoliberal views that promote greater individual
autonomy, reliance on market mechanism, and less state intervention in the delivery of goods and services (Drier & Atlas, 1996; Hackworth, 2005).

Today, there are roughly 3300 local public housing agencies that have approximately 1.2 million housing units in their portfolio (http://www.hud.gov). Due to substantial cutbacks in Federal funds for housing and the adoption of neoliberal housing policies, many local public housing agencies have turned to social entrepreneurs to maintain their existing housing and, at least in some cases, add additional units. Varying forms of hybrid organizations have taken shape among local public housing agencies in the USA, yet, unlike Britain and some other European countries, there has been little discussion about how this hybridity emerged over time or its various dimensions. There has been some work on hybridity within the non-profit sector in the USA, particularly relating to how the LIHTC has altered the governance, institutional organization, and mission of non-profit housing organizations, but little attention has been paid to housing authorities (e.g. see Smith, 2003, 2008, 2010).

The first widespread movement toward inter-organizational hybridity in public housing agencies in the USA came in 1974 with the introduction of the Section 8 Housing Allowance Program (later renamed the Housing Choice Voucher Program). Section 8 was intended to reduce both the cost of providing affordable housing and the concentration of poverty found in conventional public housing developments. It provides LHAs with funds to assist low-income families in renting privately owned housing units. As such, it is an example of inter-organizational hybridity in the delivery of affordable rental housing: The public and private sectors work together to provide affordable housing. Under the program, private landlords are provided with the difference between 30 per cent of tenant incomes and unit contract rents. As with the conventional public housing program, LHAs administer the program under a set of detailed federal guidelines covering the condition of the private-sector units, the amount of the subsidy provided, the incomes and other characteristics of program participants, and many other topics.

Another important program that facilitated the hybridization of the public housing program was the 1989 passage of the LIHTC program. Although it is not managed by LHAs, they have used it extensively in the development of mixed-income developments. The LIHTC program encouraged private interests to make equity investments in affordable rental housing in return for fairly generous tax credits, which reduced the federal taxes owed by the investor dollar for dollar. In return, the housing units developed under this program have to be rented at a rate affordable to households making less than 60 per cent of the local median income for a minimum of 15 years. This program has become the main source of new affordable rental housing in the USA (Schwartz, 2010).

In the 1980s, selected LHAs began to move toward intra-organizational and programmatic hybridity. The introduction of the Urban Redevelopment Demonstration, later renamed HOPE VI, contributed to increasing hybridization of public housing delivery. In reference to the HOPE VI program, Katz (2009) notes: ‘What started as an ambitious effort to revitalize the most distressed public housing has morphed into a full scale overhaul of the public housing program’ (p. 27).

The HOPE VI program was designed to address the severely distressed public housing developments in the country: developments that were in extremely poor physical condition, in impoverished neighborhoods, and that had a variety of social problems including high crime. The program provides LHAs with funding to redevelop distressed public housing developments into attractive, mixed-income housing developments.
The program's emphasis on providing mixed-income developments, coupled with the income restrictions as to who could reside in units funded by the conventional public housing program, required PHAs to partner with other private and non-profit housing providers. Rather than relying on the Federal government for all the funds needed to develop a project, the HOPE VI model required LHAs to attract private investment for the LIHTC and market-rate housing units in the new developments.

The additional demands created by mixed-income developments posed challenges for LHAs, as they were accustomed to administering Federal regulations, not engaging in entrepreneurial activities. As noted by Cisneros (2009),

‘PHAs [Public Housing Authorities]11 did not have the organizational structure and trained personnel to execute real estate transactions of the complexity required under the HOPE VI model. For HOPE VI to be a success, the authorities would have to retain the requisite talent, revamp their accounting systems, adopt less centralized organizational models, and learn the techniques of site management’ (p. 10).

In short, LHAs have had to develop skill sets similar to private real-estate developers.

The emphasis on creating mixed-income developments also meant the ownership of both the developments and the units built with public housing funding needed to be reconsidered. Traditionally, all public housing units were owned and operated by LHAs. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rules and regulations effectively prevented mixed-income communities. In 1994, however, HUD's General Council opined that there was nothing in the public housing enabling legislation that required public housing to be owned by LHAs, as long as private entities followed program regulations (Baron, 2009, p. 37). This enabled private firms to own and manage mixed-income communities that contained public housing units, with the LHAs providing the oversight to insure that the private entities comply with public housing rules and regulations.

The HOPE VI program also spurred programmatic hybridity by stressing the importance of providing both relocated and returning residents with services designed to support upward socioeconomic mobility. Traditionally, LHAs focused on the provision of housing while largely ignoring the social needs and aspirations of the residents. Providing tenants with employment related services—such as job preparedness, job training, and day care—was a very small part of what they did, if they did it at all. The provision of those services was seen as the responsibility of other community agencies.12 The HOPE VI program, however, required participating LHAs to develop and implement a Community Social Services plan and a portion of all HOPE VI funding is designated for that purpose. LHAs typically contract with local social service agencies to provide those services, thus, greatly expanding both inter-organizational and programmatic hybridity. As of 2011, 132 LHAs have participated in the HOPE VI program and have redeveloped 254 public housing developments with $6.1 billion in federal funding (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d).

The HOPE VI program has not been without its critics. Some have argued that the program has led to the displacement of 78,000 households, has disempowered residents, and has contributed to a shortage of affordable housing (Crowley, 2009). Others have criticized the program for being inefficient when compared with the additional number of residents that could have been housed if the funds had been transferred to the Section 8 Housing Voucher Program (Utt, 2009).
processes, the most challenged and needy tenants often do not qualify for residency, which raises concerns that HOPE VI projects are reducing the number of housing opportunities for the hard-to-house.

A second federal program that has enabled and encouraged hybridity in public housing is the MTW demonstration. MTW was authorized by Congress in 1996 to address criticisms that publicly assisted housing programs breed dependency, undermine participant work ethic, and trap participants in areas with limited employment and educational opportunities. The program affords selected LHAs the flexibility to design and test innovative approaches to providing decent, safe, and sanitary affordable housing. It allows LHAs to ‘block grant’ the funding they receive from the federal government. They can combine their federal funding for public housing operating subsidies, Section 8 vouchers (also known as Housing Choice vouchers),13 and capital budgets into a single, flexible account. Traditionally, those funds could only be used for their designated purposes. Participating housing authorities can also apply to HUD for exemptions from the federal rules that govern both the public housing and the Section 8 programs.

The LHAs approved to participate in the MTW program are expected to use this regulatory and financial flexibility to further three goals: (1) provide housing opportunities more efficiently; (2) increase the housing choices of low-income households; and/or (3) assist households in achieving self-sufficiency. The MTW program does, however, require participating LHAs to insure that at least 75 per cent of the families assisted are very low income, to assist substantially the same number of eligible families, and to provide housing for a comparable mix of family sizes as would have been served absent of the program. As of 2011, 35 LHAs have been approved to participate in the MTW program.

The MTW program has fostered all three dimensions of hybridity among the participating LHAs. First, in exempting them from many of the rules that have traditionally governed the public housing and the Section 8 programs, LHAs have much greater flexibility in determining how best to address local needs. In this sense, they can act more like private organizations, albeit they are still constrained by the need to mostly serve low-income households. The flexibility offered by the program allows LHAs to be entrepreneurial in identifying critical local needs and addressing them in innovative ways.

Second, the MTW program has fostered inter-organizational hybridity by allowing LHAs to partner with both for-profit and non-profit organizations in the provision of affordable housing. For example, MTW agencies can provide housing units or housing vouchers to other organizations, such as a mental health provider, to manage as service-enriched housing.

Third, the MTW program has fostered programmatic hybridity by establishing the goal of assisting residents achieve self-sufficiency. LHAs are urged to offer a wide range of employment-related services to their tenants. The flexible funding allowed under the program allows LHAs to shift funds from traditional line items like capital improvements to fund social service agencies.

As with the HOPE VI program, MTW has its critics. Some argue that it reduces the number of families receiving housing assistance, since most MTW authorities have used their financial flexibility to shift funding from their Section 8 Voucher programs to social services and administrative costs (Fischer, 2011). Others are concerned that allowing LHAs more flexibility in utilizing federal funds is a pretext for cutting the overall amount of funding provided to LHAs (Fisher & Sard, 2006). Critics also point out that MTW was
conceived and sold as a demonstration program, but it has not been implemented in a way that allows for rigorous cross-site evaluation (Lubell & Barron, 2007).

With the expansion of the Section 8 and LIHTC programs and the development of the Hope VI and MTW programs, a paramount shift had occurred in how publicly assisted housing was delivered by the late 1990s. Hybridity was now integral, as a passage in the 1998 amendment (in the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act) to the 1937 Housing Act illustrates:

“...our Nation should promote the goal of providing decent and affordable housing for all citizens through the efforts and encouragement of Federal, State, and local governments, and by the independent and collective actions of private citizens, organizations, and the private sector” (http://www.hud.gov).

Federal housing legislation now explicitly recognizes the view that public entities are not solely responsible or capable of providing sufficient levels of affordable housing.

The CHA: Hybridity Exemplified in Two Housing Programs

As of 2010, the city of Charlotte had a population of 731,000, making it the seventeenth largest city in the USA. Since the 1980s, Charlotte’s population has more than doubled and continues to be one of the fastest growing cities in the country despite the current national economic recession. Driving Charlotte’s growth and prosperity is the banking industry, which is second in size in the USA only to New York city. Due to rapid growth, the city has had to address housing problems that face households at different income levels, not just the very poor (University of North Carolina, Charlotte, Urban Institute, 2010). Faced with these housing challenges, the CHA’s mission has been broadened from developing and operating conventional public housing to leading, developing and executing community-wide strategies that meet the broad range of housing needs for families who cannot otherwise obtain conventional housing. In addition, according to their mission statement, the CHA works ‘to support and encourage families to move up and out of public housing and to integrate them into the economic mainstream’ (www.cha-nc.org). This exemplifies the prioritization of autonomy and self-sufficiency as goals for assisted housing tenants.

In order to adhere to the mission, the CHA, like other LHAs in the USA, has become increasingly entrepreneurial, operating more like a private business than public agency. Like private-sector entrepreneurs, the CHA identifies opportunities, such as partnering with a non-profit organization that provides housing and social services to the homeless, and it gathers and allocates resources in pursuit of those opportunities (Drucker, 1985). It also innovates and takes more risks such as providing escrow accounts for residents and implementing work requirements. Thus, the CHA has taken on central qualities of many private organizations.

As true of other local housing authorities around the country, the CHA is a government corporation. In comparison to a public agency, government corporations have greater autonomy from political pressure, and arguably less accountability to the public since they do not directly report to public officials. The CHA Board of Commissioners consists of two members directly appointed by the Mayor of Charlotte and five members appointed by the Charlotte City Council, one of which must be a resident of publicly assisted housing. As mentioned earlier, the CHA also operates a non-profit and a for-profit subsidiary, both
having different governance structures. Considering what Crossan & Van Til (2008) call ‘descriptor variables’, (e.g. baseline activities, legal structure, number of board and community members, and sources of funding) the CHA has become an entrenched hybrid organization. In other words, it could not continue its current operations and provide affordable rental housing as a pure public organization. Furthermore, the hybrid governance structure allows the CHA to prioritize different objectives, sometimes those that stand in conflict with one another, such as the trade-offs between autonomous governance and stakeholder involvement (Czischke, 2009; Czischke et al., 2010). Our case study of two housing programs, HOPE VI and MTW, will show how the CHA has become an entrenched hybrid organization and offers examples of intra-organizational, inter-organizational, and programmatic hybridity.

The Park at Oaklawn: A Hope VI Redevelopment Project

Prior to the 1965 Housing Act, public housing in the USA could legally be racially segregated. When the Fairview Homes development opened in 1941, it was Charlotte’s first public housing development for black residents. The development consisted of 410 family units in one- and two-story, barracks-style brick buildings and was located away from the city center. Over time, Fairview Homes deteriorated, and eventually the CHA determined that renovation of the obsolescent buildings would not be as cost-effective as demolishing them and building replacement units. Thus, in 1998 the CHA applied for and received a HOPE VI grant for $34,724,570 to demolish and replace Fairview Homes with a new development called the Park at Oaklawn.

The Park at Oaklawn project created mixed-income housing and diversified the clientele traditionally served by the CHA. The 410 family public housing units on the original site were replaced with 89 rental and 25 ownership units for family households and 83 units for seniors. Tenants in these units earn no more than 30 per cent of area median income, the target income level for conventional public housing. The redevelopment plan also included 89 rental and 46 ownership family housing units for households with incomes of up to 60 per cent of area median income, including 71 single-family and duplex units. The on-site redevelopment also included a 22,400 square foot community center as a place for residents to meet and access services. In addition to the on-site units, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership acquired seven off-site properties, adding 149 additional family and 192 senior public housing units, 344 family units and 26 senior units for households with incomes up to 60 per cent of area median income, and 304 market-rate units (see Table 1).

HOPE VI redevelopment projects, such as the Park at Oaklawn, are examples of what Billis (2010) might call ‘enacted’ intra-organizational hybridity. Compared with the older model of conventional public housing development, HOPE VI projects require a mixed-financing model. Therefore, the CHA played the role of financier and development partner in a complex, mixed-income development project, which included public housing, affordable housing, and market-rate units. This required that the CHA staff acquire different sets of skills and draw from the for-profit sector to create a new development model.

Although the CHA owned the redevelopment site, the development team exhibited the inter-organizational hybridity that is typical of HOPE VI projects. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, was the main developer, not the CHA. Crosland, a for-profit corporation, developed, built, and currently manages the rental apartments and homes. Saussy Burbank, another for-profit
corporation, built and sold the site’s single-family detached and duplex homes. The Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation, a public agency, constructed a new community center.

This HOPE VI project is fairly unusual in that, through the acquisition of off-site properties, the number of units available to traditional public housing households was increased, rather than decreased. Most HOPE VI projects have led to an overall decrease in the number of public housing units available (Crowley, 2009). Considering both on- and off-site units, however, the total number of rental units for family households fell from 410 to 238, while the number of units reserved for seniors rose to 275. Not only did the redevelopment reduce the number of rental units for family households, it also reduced the number of units suitable for larger households. Almost 10 per cent of the units in Fairview Homes were either 4- or 5-bedroom units; less than 2 per cent of the units provided by the HOPE VI redevelopment project were that large (see Table 2). The result is that the replacement housing serves a larger, higher income, and more diverse group of tenants, which corresponds with recent changes in the CHA’s mission of broadening the clientele base and providing additional community-wide amenities and services. However, this project reduces the number of very low-income and larger families served. It is unclear whether these reductions are due to concerns about the concentration of poverty in space or whether they are a product of this shift toward hybridity. CHA’s reliance on federal funding and private developer’s desire for future development contracts from the CHA (which are due to inter-organizational hybridity) create incentives for producing successful outcomes and having more very low-income and large families may threaten the success of a project and jeopardize future funding opportunities. Similarly, income mixing could be a response to addressing the negative consequences of concentrating poverty or evidence that the CHA is operating in a business-like fashion and making residents pay a higher percentage of unit costs, thereby reducing the CHA’s overall costs.

Table 1. Type of housing units, on- and off-site, Park at Oaklawn redevelopment plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subsidizeda</th>
<th>Affordableb</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-site units</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family rental</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total on-site units</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Off-site units</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total off-site units</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total family rental</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ownership</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total senior</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>1299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a Subsidized units are rented to households making equal to or less than 30 per cent of the area median income; b Affordable units are rented to households making equal to or less than 60 per cent of the area median income.

The on-site rental units are managed by Crosland, the private company that built the apartments. The off-site rental units are managed by several different private-sector property management companies. For example, S. L. Nusbaum & Company manages two of the larger off-site developments, each with 20 public housing rental units, 80 affordable rental units, and 92 market-rate rental units. Those complexes offer amenities including swimming pools, fitness centers, club houses, and computer/business centers, which appeal to private market tenants. The use of private-sector managers reflects the inter-organizational hybridity necessary to entice market-rate tenants to live in mixed-income developments. The CHA has experience managing purely public housing developments, but it does not have experience managing market-rate units.

The services provided at the on-site community center exemplify intra-organizational hybridity. The center is where local non-profit organizations currently provide services to residents. For example, Bethlehem Center, an affiliate of the United Methodist Church, offers day care and the Head Start program for young children, while the Anita Stroud Foundation, another non-profit, runs an after school program. By partnering with these two non-profits, CHA is able to expand the scope of services it can provide for its residents.

Funding for the Park at Oaklawn project came from a variety of public and private sources, illustrating the inter-organizational hybridity required by HOPE VI developments. The CHA contributed funds from the HOPE VI grant it received from the US Department of HUD and it issued tax-exempt bonds that were sold to private investors. CMHP contributed Section 202 funding from HUD for the senior housing. Wachovia Bank and other for-profit investors bought the tax credits and the tax-exempt bonds. The City of Charlotte provided infrastructure funding, while the Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department contributed additional funding for the new community center. The original $34.7 million HOPE VI grant leveraged an additional $95.7 million, over half of which was private-sector investment (see Table 3).

The use of tax credits requires a private-sector entity to own the properties, and so the legal titles are held by for-profit corporations set up by non-profit partners, such as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership. The tax-exempt bonds that the CHA issued were on behalf of the for-profit corporations that own the properties. While the legal structure and degree of control that the non-profit retains over the for-profit corporation may vary, in general, they will be sufficiently independent to insulate the non-profit from liability. In practice, the ownership structure is a hybrid mix. The owner is a for-profit

### Table 2. Family rental housing unit size, Fairview Homes and Park at Oaklawn, Charlotte, North Carolina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fairview Homes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Park at Oaklawn</strong></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>46</th>
<th>39</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>89</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-site</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Funding sources for the Park at Oaklawn HOPE VI redevelopment project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HOPE VI ($)</th>
<th>Tax credits ($)</th>
<th>City ($)</th>
<th>Section 202 ($)</th>
<th>Other HUD/AHP ($)</th>
<th>Bonds or mortgages ($)</th>
<th>Total ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-Site units</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental</td>
<td>6 195 159</td>
<td>8 077 617</td>
<td>577 200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14 849 976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>1 870 144</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>363 028</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 165 000</td>
<td>6 264 322</td>
<td>9 662 494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>229 918</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122 714</td>
<td>7 100 000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 452 632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total on-site</td>
<td>8 295 221</td>
<td>8 077 617</td>
<td>1 062 942</td>
<td>7 100 000</td>
<td>1 165 000</td>
<td>6 264 322</td>
<td>31 965 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-site</td>
<td>14 603 003</td>
<td>28 124 345</td>
<td>11 411 639</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 452 818</td>
<td>28 075 000</td>
<td>86 666 805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22 898 224a</td>
<td>36 201 962</td>
<td>12 474 581</td>
<td>7 100 000</td>
<td>5 617 818</td>
<td>34 339 322</td>
<td>118 631 907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: aThe total Hope VI grant received was 34.7 million but the amount shown here does not reflect funds spent on tenant relocation, demolition, site infrastructure, client services, or public housing authority administration.

corporation that was established and is controlled by the non-profit organization. The for-
profit corporation exists to help the non-profit organization serve its mission.

The CHA’s MTW Program

In 2007, the CHA received HUD approval to participate in the MTW program as described
earlier.16 CHA’s MTW program includes four major components: (1) rent reforms that
apply to all households; (2) work requirements that apply to all able-bodied, non-elderly
household heads; (3) support services to help households find and hold jobs; and (4)
additional housing units in mixed-income developments, including more units for people
with disabilities and special needs.

The CHA’s work requirement is designed to promote economic independence by
requiring all able-bodied, non-elderly residents to work an average of 30 h per week within
2 years of beginning the MTW program. Recognizing that many of its residents might
have barriers that prevent them from being hired, the CHA developed programs that relied
on greater inter- and intra-organizational hybridity. The CHA partnered with outside
types for resident services and it changed employee job descriptions and provided
training to assist them in adapting to the new model.

The CHA, for example, partnered with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to
conduct an assessment of barriers to employment for every resident and it used the results of
that assessment to target services—such as GED classes,17 job and life skills training, and
referrals to workforce development programs—to the residents that needed them to address
employment barriers. Case managers have been assigned to all residents subject to the work
requirement. Some of these case managers work directly for the CHA while others work for
non-profit or for-profit agencies. Case managers assist residents in establishing goals and
make referrals to local social service providers.18 The decision to contract out service
required CHA to change its own Client Services Division to focus more on contract
management and administration, rather than on the direct provision of services.

One of the CHA’s major MTW initiatives is to expand the number of supportive housing
units it provides. To do this, rather than assuming its traditional role as landlord, the CHA is
assuming the role of developer and financier and is partnering with outside organizations for
services. For example, CHA is providing gap financing to St. Peter’s Homes, a non-profit
serving the homeless, for the construction of McCreesh Place, a 64-unit single room
occupancy development, which will provide supportive housing for formerly homeless men
with disabilities. St. Peter’s Homes is developing the property and is part of a network of
referral agencies and service providers who work with the homeless. In addition to the gap
financing, CHA is also providing rent subsidies for residents at McCreesh Place.

For another project, the CHA is using its non-profit subsidiary, Horizon Development
Properties, to acquire and redevelop the Hampton Creste development as a 213-unit
mixed-income project, including 60 units of public housing, 50–55 units of low-income
housing, and market-rate units. The public housing units will be targeted for the homeless,
and the Salvation Army and other local service providers will offer supportive services to
the residents of those units. The CHA’s contribution is being supplemented by additional
funding from the Critical Need Response Fund Task Force, a partnership among the Fund
for the Carolinas, the United Way of Central Carolinas, Mecklenburg Ministries, the Leon
Levine Foundation, and the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce.
As might be expected, Charlotte’s Moving Forward program has its critics. Of particular concern is the introduction of the work requirement during a period of unusually high unemployment in the city. Critics worry that the public housing residents, even with additional job readiness and training programs, will not be able to find employment and, therefore, will lose their housing subsidy (Charlotte Observer, 1/5/09).

The MTW program is designed to both encourage and enable LHAs to assist residents in improving their economic and social circumstances. The participating LHAs are expected to expand their business models from a narrow focus on being landlords and property managers to a broader focus on assisting residents to increase their incomes by providing support services, such as job training. At the same time, the LHAs are expected to diversify their portfolios by constructing and/or acquiring units in more affluent and opportunity-rich neighborhoods, thereby deconcentrating poverty. To make those changes, the LHAs are partnering with outside entities in the public, non-profit, and private sectors that offer the expanded scope of services and housing options required by MTW.

The Federal government established both HOPE VI and MTW to address obvious problems that had arisen with the older business model for providing public housing. That model used federal funding to build units, and had LHAs own and operate the housing, without additional services to assist residents. While the model may have been adequate to meet the needs of working families, the original target population, it proved inadequate for the poorer, minority population that came to inhabit public housing after World War II. HOPE VI and MTW encouraged inter-organizational hybridity to form partnerships, first to leverage private-sector financing and then to provide the full array of services needed by public housing residents. Those two programs also encouraged LHAs to become more internally and programmatically hybrid, doing more for their residents and becoming more business like in their relationships with their partners. Staff at LHAs learned to structure complex financial deals to develop new units, and to assemble collaborative groups of providers to offer holistic service packages.

Benefits and Challenges of Hybridity

Since the Housing Act of 1937, the delivery of public housing in the USA has evolved from a pure public to a hybrid model, involving more complex organizational structures, inter-organizational collaborations and, tenant support services targeted to improve overall well-being, not just housing conditions. This evolution toward hybridity has encouraged Local Housing Authorities to harness the power of markets and employ business techniques, while also enlisting the services of non-profits, volunteers, and faith-based organizations to provide high quality affordable rental housing and tenant services. While there are many benefits of hybridity, challenges also arise with this new model of affordable rental housing delivery.

One benefit of this shift toward hybridity is the ability to leverage funding for costly housing projects. The CHA was able to leverage an additional $95.7 million—half coming from the private sector—with a $34.7 million Hope VI grant from the Federal government to redevelop the Park at Oaklawn. Involving private and non-profit sector organizations has led to substantial benefits in terms of both funding and expertise. For example, City Dive, a faith-based non-profit organization donated $2.3 million in volunteer mentor services to residents of a HOPE VI redevelopment project in Charlotte. The challenge for providers of affordable rental housing is to develop the necessary skills and expertise
among staff members in order to apply for, coordinate, and leverage a substantial amount of funding from a variety of sources. After garnering the necessary funding, managing the funds appropriately and effectively requires experience. Ethical dilemmas may also arise in how to allocate money between various programs due to increased flexibility. Misuse of MTW funds by the Philadelphia Housing Authority, for instance, emphasizes the need for more oversight and monitoring by the Federal government and greater transparency and accountability by Local Housing Authorities as the process of affordable housing delivery becomes more decentralized and involves actors from a variety of different sectors (Office of Inspector General, 2004).

The privatization of the construction and management of affordable rental housing has certain advantages, but it may also pose challenges to the mission of providing housing to the poorest population. Public housing agencies often contract the design and development phase of an affordable rental housing project to private development companies that have experience with both market-rate and affordable housing development. Therefore, they are knowledgeable about working in the private as well as public housing market and apply the same architectural and design standards used in the private-market developments in their public housing developments. These experiences and skills are particularly beneficial in designing and developing mixed-income and mixed-use affordable housing projects, which are much more diverse in architectural style than historic, modernist public housing structures (Schwartz, 2010). LHAs can also contract with a number of private development companies to develop different types of housing (e.g. single-family detached, multi-family attached, or senior) within the same project in order to benefit from specialized development expertise.

Private property management firms have shown success in operating and maintaining more recently developed affordable rental housing by using the same standards in their affordable rental housing developments as their private market projects. Maintaining their reputation in the private real estate market and securing additional contracts with public housing agencies are the two reasons that motivate private management firms to adequately maintain their properties. Private management firms often have more restrictive criteria for tenant selection and have lower tolerance levels in regard to rule breaking that leads to evictions than management departments within LHAs. For example, Crosland, a private development company that manages a number of properties for the CHA, conducts criminal and background checks for adult residents and parents of minors must sign an affidavit that all their children do not have criminal records as part of the screening process.

The more restrictive screening and lower tolerance levels, however raise concern that the most troubled and needy residents are not being served under hybrid rental housing programs, such as Hope VI and MTW. These programs may be ‘creaming the crop’ in order for both private developers and public housing agencies to report successful outcomes. An additional concern with private development companies having primary responsibility for design, development, and management is whether they are responsive to the needs of tenants who will live in the housing developments, the public at-large, or public officials and whether they adhere to the mission of the public housing agency.

What has been perhaps one of the biggest transitions from conventional public housing to modern affordable housing programs, such as HOPE VI and MTW, is the quality and amount of social services provided to residents to improve their overall quality of life. Our case study of Charlotte indicates that case managers, social service providers, and
volunteers work closely with residents during the relocation process as they move out of conventional public housing while the new development is being built, during the construction, and afterwards, when some of the tenants return to the newly built structures. We still lack longitudinal data to know if residents of conventional public housing are able to achieve self-sufficiency due to the services they receive once they return to newly constructed HOPE VI projects or whether there are selection biases in the types of tenants that return. But what is evident is that there has been a fundamental shift in viewing housing as a means to provide both roots and wings—roots that allow affordable housing residents to settle comfortably into a home and neighborhood and wings that enable these residents to achieve socioeconomic mobility.

Discussion

Driven in large part by the neoliberal views shaping US public policy and cuts in Federal funding for public housing, hybridity in the delivery of affordable rental housing in the USA has become entrenched, both in federal housing programs and in many local public housing agencies. Our case study of the CHA illustrates how intra-organizational hybridity has allowed for more operational flexibility and funding resources due to different legal status designations of CHA subsidiaries. Inter-organizational hybridity has led to a more refined division of labor across organizations from the private, public, and non-profit sectors that allows for greater specialization and presumably efficiency in the delivery of affordable rental housing. Programmatic hybridity has allowed the CHA to contract with other organizations to provide a broad range of services designed to encourage and assist residents to strive for self-sufficiency.

The additional flexibility allowed to LHAs, under the newer hybrid programs, such as HOPE VI and MTW, has important potential benefits, including allowing creative solutions to housing lower-income households, permitting LHAs to customize their programs based on local conditions and priorities, and enabling a range of partnerships that have the potential to broaden the funding and organizational capacity needed to create new and better quality affordable housing. But this flexibility also comes with considerable risks, including shifting the focus away from the neediest families to more well-off ones as a means of ensuring financial solvency as HUD reduces funding for public housing programs (Devine et al., 1999; Fischer, 2011). The new flexibility also increases the likelihood of the inappropriate use of funds, as was recently seen in the Philadelphia Housing Authority.19 To guard against those risks, clear program goals and performance standards are needed, as is more careful program monitoring by federal officials. Moreover, as hybrid models of affordable housing delivery are increasingly adopted by LHAs around the country, carefully designed evaluations are needed to assess the full range of program impacts.

Notes

1 The original public housing program was designed to assist the ‘submerged middle class’, that is, two parent families where the breadwinner was out of work due to the depression. Single-parent families were not served by the program.

2 We use the term affordable rental housing to refer to housing occupied by households who pay an affordable rate based on their income level. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development considers a unit affordable if a household pays no more than 30 percent of their income on rent. We do
not use the term public housing because of the shift in the supply and management of affordable rental housing by non-public entities. We also do not use the term subsidized housing because there are subsidies or grants given to homeowners as well as renters. Therefore, affordable rental housing could be public or subsidized housing but this is not always the case.

It should be noted that there are other types of local public agencies that supply affordable housing. There are housing offices, divisions, or agencies that are housed within local governments. These entities are purely public agencies, therefore not social enterprises.

Started in 1986, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program is an indirect Federal subsidy to developers to assist in the financing of affordable rental housing development for low-income households. Developers who receive the tax credits can sell them to investors to raise capital (or equity) for their projects, which reduces the debt that the developer would have to borrow, and makes the investment less risky. Over a period of 10 years, investors receive a dollar-for-dollar credit against their Federal tax liability each year. For more details about the program, see http://www.hud.org.

In other countries around the world, the non-profit sector is typically referred to as the third sector. In the USA, the term non-profit is more commonly used and, therefore we have chosen to use this term.

Having a separate corporation as the general partner may also protect the parent corporation from liability. For example, if a development with the for-profit subsidiary as general partner failed and filed for bankruptcy, creditors would be repaid from the general partner’s assets and the limited partners’ assets to the extent they were invested in the development. Creditors should not be able to reach CHA’s other assets, those not invested in the failed development, to satisfy the development’s obligations.

In limited instances, other organizations provided on-site services, such as health and recreation activities (Fuerst, 2005).

Some local public housing agencies serve two or more jurisdictions.

There has been more attention recently to hybrid models of housing delivery in European countries, particularly England (Buckingham, 2010; Pawson & Mullins, 2010; Teasdale, 2010) and the Netherlands (Mullins, 2011). There have also been comparative studies that examine historical and contextual differences in shaping hybrid housing organizations (see Czischke, 2009; Kerlin, 2006, 2009, 2010; Mullins & Pawson, 2010).

An earlier example of hybridity in federal housing programs was the Section 236 rental assistance program under which HUD provided supply-side subsidies to the developers of affordable rental units in return for an agreement that the units developed be affordable to low-income households for a specified period of time, such as 15 or 20 years. We do not discuss that program in this paper since LHAs were not involved in administering that program.

Public Housing Authority is often used interchangeably with Local Housing Authority.

Before the HOPE VI program, HUD did provide limited funding for the Family Self-Sufficiency program but this program involved a small fraction of all public housing households.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program provides households with vouchers to rent housing in the private market provided that the unit meets quality standards and does not exceed the maximum allowable rents set by the local housing authority. The program was designed to provide a wider range of neighborhood choices to low-income households in order to promote poverty deconcentration. To find out more about the program, see http://www.hud.gov.

Head Start is an early childhood enrichment program serving disadvantaged children from birth to 3 years old.

Section 202 funding can be used by non-profit organizations to construct, rehabilitate or acquire units to serve as supportive housing for the elderly with incomes below 50 per cent of area median income. The funds can also be used for rent subsidies for the units.

While the nation-wide program is called ‘Moving to Work’, the CHA renamed its program, ‘Moving Forward’. We will call the program ‘Moving to Work’ to be consistent with programs in other jurisdictions nation-wide.

GED courses provide education on how to pass a GED exam, which would enable participants to obtain a degree equivalent to a high school diploma.

The service providers include Genesis Project 1, Lutheran Family Services, Melange Health Services, Symmetry Behavioral Health Solutions, and Children’s Home Society-Youth Homes Division.

The Philadelphia Housing Authority was selected to participate in the Move to Work program and over several years used its financial flexibility to move $300 million out of its Section 8 program and used it for employee gifts, social events and excessive and unnecessary improvements to both administrative
buildings and housing developments. The authority has been placed under administrative receivership and there are ongoing investigations (Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010).

References


