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“Rethinking co-operatives: From local to global and from the past to the future”

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Title of abstract:

Examining housing values through the lens of housing co-operatives

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Abstract : (max. 290 words)

The global housing affordability crisis that is increasingly impacting on middle to low-income households has governments searching for new solutions. In the Australian settler colonial context, housing policy and practice has prioritised the financial values of housing, resulting in a housing sector duopoly with two archetypal housing models; a) private ownership, in which the resident is a financialised investor with property rights, or b) private rental, where the resident household has (often limited) rights of occupation. A third and declining public housing option is highly residualised, persistently underfunded, and as a result, heavily over-subscribed while prone to being poorly maintained. Each of these archetypes aligns with different assumptions around social, personal, and financial value.

In recent years, Australian State governments have outsourced social housing development and management to a private non-profit sector of community housing. In four states (NSW, VIC, WA, SA) some community housing providers (CHPs) act as peak bodies for rental co-operatives that in some cases have existed (invisibly) for decades. These co-ops were initially established for low- to moderate-income residents, often either with a special purpose or for specific groups.

As member-based organisations responsible for various aspects of housing management, housing co-operatives challenge the archetypal narratives outlined above and provide a lens for re-examining housing values. This paper emerges from a new Australian Research Council funded project, *Articulating value in housing co-operatives*, that seeks to identify the values, benefits, and challenges of member-run housing co-operatives and the patterns of these across different types of affordable rental housing co-operatives in Australia. These include both co-operative member benefits and state values. It also explores whether or how the co-operative principles guide management and governance of rental co-operatives in Australia and addresses how these may enable more equitable housing systems.

Keywords: (max. 5)

Housing co-operatives, co-operative values, co-operative identity, social values, affordable housing

