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Network Power: Building the Capacity of the Nonprofit Housing Sector

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Abstract: Capacity building is much discussed but little understood. Traditional approaches to strengthening the performance and governance of nonprofit housing providers focus on the organisations themselves. Distilling the results of qualitative case study doctoral research on nine nonprofit housing providers in three city-regions in England, the United States and Australia, this paper positions the organisations as working within an increasingly networked, inter-connected milieu. Common threads appear across the three countries, despite different institutional backgrounds. Governments continue to intervene in the sector to build capacity through regulation and financing, though are moving away from hierarchical command and control approaches. Mergers, group structures and particularly partnership working are ways nonprofit housing providers can gain scale economies and strengthen their operations. Traditional and networked capacity building, and member service organisations are increasingly important in the three city regions. Using snowballing research techniques, these organisations are first identified, then categorised in a new typology. The paper builds an understanding of social housing capacity at a network as well as an organisational level, reinforcing network power as key to delivering a robust nonprofit social housing sector.

INTRODUCTION

The tectonic plates defining the role of state, market and civil society continually shift. In two generations the post-war modernist dream of a rational, controlling state has given way to a complex web of mixed provision. It is now not uncommon for nonprofit organisations to provide core social services, private companies to help fight wars and, in 2009, governments to run failed banks. Seismic activity has not escaped the social housing sector. Nonprofit housing organisations, once the Cinderella of housing provision, have finally come to the ball.

Subsidised low cost rental accommodation can be provided by the public, private or nonprofit sectors. Through the middle of the twentieth century and into the 1980s, public housing was the favoured policy in the three countries in this study - the US, Australia and England. This approach was supplemented by a number of nonprofit organisations, often catering for tenants with high or special needs, and in the US a scheme to support private landlords. The contemporary position is very different. New construction of housing by public authorities is rare. Most initiatives involve re-developing troubled housing estates through cross-sectoral partnerships and, especially in England, relinquishing public sector control through stock transfer. Increasingly nonprofit organisations are the new guardians of publicly subsidised housing, charged with developing, owning and managing low cost rental homes. The emerging sector operates at different scales and capabilities and covers a wide range of organisational types, from traditional charitable organisations and co-operatives, to commercialised social enterprises and semi-autonomous branches of government.

The realisation by governments that affordable housing supply is an important policy issue has led to higher capital funding for nonprofit providers, particularly in Australia and England. However, dollars do not build homes. This is why strengthening housing provider capacity is so important. Robust organisations, employing skilled staff and operating in a supportive networked environment should deliver more homes per unit of subsidy. In addition they have the potential to build community capacity by empowering tenants and working with partners towards neighbourhood renewal. This paper deepens understanding of capacity building, discovering both traditional and networked approaches. It discussed the role of actors and arenas, placing capacity building within frameworks emerging from research by the European Network of Housing Researcher's working group on 'social housing in Europe' (van Bortel et al., 2009). Finally, the paper identifies and categorises a group of emerging capacity support organisations rarely featuring in housing debates. These organisations not only assist networking, but are themselves increasingly run using network techniques.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data was collected as part of a cross-national doctoral research programme investigating nonprofit housing providers in three city regions in the US (the San Francisco Bay Area), Australia (metropolitan Melbourne) and England (Greater Manchester county). Country selection was necessarily pragmatic, based on accessibility to the researcher, use of English and having broadly similar housing systems. The research explored organisational issues facing providers, understanding their experiences within a particular city region (Gilmour, 2009, forthcoming-a). It placed these issues and organisational responses within the context of the particular regulatory, local housing market, subsidy and financial environment in which the providers operate. This method avoids many criticisms of comparative research as it does not make direct country comparisons, instead aiming for a 'better understanding of complex phenomena by having a wide and differentiated basis of evidence' (Oxley, 2001: p.104).

In each city region three medium-sized housing associations were selected on the basis they had characteristics more related to the market, to the state or to civil society (Table 1). This typology follows the hybrid organisation model of Evers and Laville (2004). Research by Brandsen et al. (2005: p.758) views 'hybridity as an inevitable and permanent characteristic' of nonprofit organisations, and there is increasing focus on the importance of hybrid organisations where nonprofits and the state are co-producing and delivering public services (Evers, 2005; Pestoff & Brandsen, 2008). Typologies such as this can be useful tools for classifying related items, particularly those existing in complex and fast changing environments. They can help correct misconceptions and organise knowledge by defining organisational field and sub-field boundaries (Tiryakian, 1968; Allmendinger, 2002).

Table 1: Case study organisations

Country	Name	Type	Est.	Stock	Comments
US	Bridge Housing	Market	1983	11,713	Largest provider in California
	Burbank Housing	State	1980	2,179	Regional, based in Santa Rosa
	East Bay Asian Local Dev. Corp.	Society	1975	921	Sub regional, based in Oakland
Australia	Community Housing Limited	Market	1993	963	Moving to be a national provider
	Port Phillip Housing Association	State	1985	535	Established by a local council
	Melbourne Affordable Housing	Society	1986	289	State-wide, growing by mergers
England	Irwell Valley Housing Association	Market	1975	7,212	Entrepreneurial, city-region based
	Trafford Housing Trust	State	2005	9,220	Single council area stock transfer
	Mosscare Housing	Society	1967	3,471	Ethnically diverse neighbourhoods
Sources:	Housing stock numbers from audited accounts and regulatory returns, Dec 2007 - March 2008.				

Fieldwork took place between October 2007 and December 2008, starting in the US, then continuing in Australia and finally England. The researcher was based for four months in San Francisco as a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and in England worked closely with academics from the universities of Manchester, Salford and Birmingham. Semi-structured interviews were held with 76 staff and directors of the selected nonprofit housing providers, and 87 other stakeholders such as public officials, financiers, consultants, academics, support organisations and trade associations. Many of the stakeholders were identified using snowball sampling, asking interviewees who else they would recommend contacting. Quotations in this paper have been kept anonymous to protect confidentiality. The interviews were supplemented by analysis of housing provider internal and public documentation, websites, research reports, government statistics and previous sector surveys.

UNDERSTANDING CAPACITY

During the last decade programmes were launched, staff sent on training courses and glossy brochures produced in an effort to build nonprofit housing provider capacity. Australia and England overhauled their regulatory system, in part to strengthen the sector to protect private investment. California passed propositions to help fund core association activities, and Australia introduced tax credits to expand a core group of growth nonprofit providers. England, and more recently Australia, saw 'merger mania' with providers amalgamating to achieve critical mass. This unprecedented level of activity in the nonprofit housing sector was launched without a serious questioning of what capacity is, where the shortfalls exist and how best to address the problem. Instead, policy appears to be based on a set of normative assumptions about the way nonprofits work, and how bringing further market disciplines and corporate governance structures could improve the effectiveness of individual organisations.

Stevens (2002) developed a model positioning nonprofit capacity as the capability of an organisation to achieve goals. This is close to the dictionary definition of capacity as 'the ability to produce' (OED, 2009) which is used in this paper. However, policy makers, nonprofit managers and researchers may all see the capacity of a particular housing provider differently, depending on their own world view. Capacity does not sit in isolation, as an objective fact, but is socially constructed by the observer. As a constructed term, how capacity is interpreted can both change over time and be different across countries. National differences may reflect deeply embedded power relationships or stem from the historical development of housing systems (Haworth et al., 2004). Therefore capacity needs to be interpreted within particular national and regional contexts, to try and avoid ethnocentric bias.

Social constructivists argue that language and discourse are important in mediating policy debate, framing the way that issues are problematised (Burr, 2003; Jacobs et al., 2004). The interview research method provided rich information on interpretations of capacity. The term capacity was most frequently used where there were constraints or challenges. People had concerns about a *lack* of capacity, rarely discussing issues of sufficient or excess capacity. Interviewee references to capacity normally referred to the capabilities of individual housing providers, what is termed in this paper *organisational capacity*. Seldom was comment made about the lack of capacity of other actors in the wider nonprofit housing field such as finance providers, regulators, consultants or training suppliers. A typical response from the interviews was that capacity was 'developing the organisation, reporting systems, identifying housing need, decision making, housing standards, accreditation. This is our organisational capacity, which is only very fledgling' (Executive, Community Housing Victoria, Australia).

For the networked environment in which nonprofit providers operate, an alternative approach is to consider the capacity of the sector as a whole rather than that of individual organisations In this paper this is termed *network capacity*. Depending on how the sector is conceptualised, different actors could be identified as relevant such as consultants, banks, trade bodies and community organisations. The rationale for developing a more inclusive list is that each actor contributes towards the sector's capacity. For example, if nonprofits need to borrow from banks to contribute towards funding new housing, banks needs to have capacity (funds to lend, confidence in the sector etc.). If there are few facilities for staff training in a region, organisations must train in-house, which may be less effective and interrupt program delivery. This broader definition of capacity, moving beyond the capacity of individual organisations, has become accepted by many non-government organisations. The UN moved away in the late 1980s from a focus on improving the functioning of individual institutions in poor countries as they were 'not seen as independent and isolated actors any longer but part of larger systems or networks. Capacity-building needed to become a much broader concept' (UNESCO, 2002: p.4). The OECD (2003) have adopted a similar approach to climate change.

From the case study interviews, the capacity of nonprofit providers is of greater concern in Australia than the US or England. This probably reflects both the smaller size of the sector, and the recent impetus to expand nonprofit housing production by increasing public investment. Building Australian capacity is seen by many nonprofits, by state housing departments and by trade associations as being a government responsibility through improved staff skills. By contrast to these state-based approaches, a handful of larger Australian housing profits are using their own endeavours to build capacity. For example, Community Housing Limited's strategy to achieve economies of scale is by expanding nationally and internationally, allowing recruitment of greater numbers of professional staff. They are also strengthening capacity by partnering with banks and property developers. Therefore there is a contrast in capacity discourse between smaller Australian providers focused on organisational capacity, and certain larger providers gaining strength through the social housing network.

In the US, capacity is discussed less often, and in a more narrow way, than Australia. Funding affordable housing projects through ring-fenced tax credit schemes leaves the ‘head office’ dependent on a steady flow of project developer fees from new projects. Delays in receiving these fees, a decrease in transaction numbers or cash-negative projects can leave shortfalls in funding for senior staff salaries, training and organisation development. Community Housing Development Organisations serving higher need tenants often receive grants from local jurisdictions, but most general housing nonprofits do not. Therefore US capacity building depends on support from foundations, or intermediaries supported by foundations such as the LISC and Enterprise (Table 5). These foundations play a similar funding role for US housing nonprofits as state housing authorities in Australia. Few organisations have independent income: in the Bay Area, Bridge Housing generate regular developer fees and commercial income. However, even for Bridge, capacity has only reached critical mass recently: ‘I think that one of the things we’ve done in the last ten years is to create that income, to shore-up that institutional capacity’ (Executive, Bridge Housing). The same interviewee noted that despite Bridge having sufficient development capacity, this was not true for property management.

During English case study interviews, mention of capacity constraints was uncommon. This was particularly true with the narrower definition of organisational capacity, relating to a nonprofit provider’s skills, staffing and procedures. One explanation is that since 1974 most English nonprofits have been well funded, professionally managed and achieved critical mass. However, several English interviewees mentioned improving the capacity (skills) of tenant board members, and the need for organisations to be proactive in building community capacity. This discourse originates from Labour government policies promoting social cohesion. For example a 2005 plan stated ‘effective community engagement depends on opportunities for, and capacity within, local communities to become involved in decisions that affect them’ (ODPM, 2005: p.20). As the term ‘capacity’ is socially constructed, capacity discourse is influenced by important network actors, for example the national government in England, philanthropic foundations in the US and state housing authorities in Australia.

Haworth et al. (2004: p.173) noted ‘the value of a social constructivist approach lies in the questioning of assumptions implicit in much housing discourse’. Unfortunately most previous research on capacity has taken a positivistic approach, relying on taken for granted assumptions which are seldom stated, contextualised or challenged (Glickman & Servon, 1998). As Kemeny (2004: pp.50-51) observed, ‘until very recently housing research has remained a bastion of traditional positivism, heavily influenced by structuralist explanations and strongly orientated toward the use of quantitative methods’. Gilmour (2007) critiqued attempts to develop capacity measurement metrics, whether using scaled attributes (Lessik & Michener, 2000; Fredericksen & London, 2000; McKinsey & Co, 2001; Eringa et al., 2008) or quantitative tools (LaMore et al., 2001; Charity Navigator, 2007). The main problem with capacity measurement is less the mathematics, more the lack of clarity about capacity and how assessments are bounded by normative thinking. The numbers appear precise, yet value judgements are required to decide which capacity attributes are important, how they should be quantified and, in some cases, their relative weighting to calculate a ‘capacity score’.

TRADITIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

A variety of approaches are possible to build capacity. The most common techniques mentioned during research interviews involve improving how organisations are run, for example sending staff on training courses and professionalising management. These are ways of building *organisational capacity* With funding for core housing delivery programs tightly controlled and earmarked for specific property and tenancy tasks, financial support for capacity building must often be raised separately. Hence the need for capacity building grants from the state or philanthropic donors, or generating income through commercial ventures.

Governments intervene in the nonprofit housing sector and help build organisational capacity both to protect public investment and ensure funds are used effectively (More, Pawson & Scott, 2005). Organisational inefficiencies may reduce the volume of housing that can be provided for the same level of taxpayer funding. According to an Australian housing official 'the reason we're into capacity building and wanting to work with the housing associations is because they're our investment partners and we want to know that they've got the capability of taking our investment dollars, and turning them into developments'. Methods of state intervention that help build organisational capacity are summarised in Table 2. State finance is important in increasing professionalisation, and structuring the sector. This is also true with regulation. For example, part of the rationale for the Australian state of Victoria introducing strict new regulation in 2005 was to re-order the state's nonprofit sector. As an official admitted: 'getting agencies to merge ... is part of our strategy. There is some rationalisation going on here as well. It's not just about the introduction of a regulatory framework'.

Table 2: State capacity building approaches

Type	Category	Examples
Finance	Grants	*US* - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) used to build capacity of community groups assisting low income households from 1974
	Funded intermediaries	*Australia* - trade and professional associations given state funding to build capacity. This is an approach used historically in England
	Strategic funding	*Australia & England* - funds for new affordable housing development concentrated on growth providers, to re-order sector
Regulation	Rules	*Australia & England* - regulator imposes certain requirements, such as governance procedures, record keeping and return of submissions
	Constitutional	*Australia & England* - compulsory registration of housing associations. In Victoria used to exclude smaller providers and consolidate sector
Intervention	Formation	*Burbank Housing & Port Phillip Housing* - nonprofit housing organisations initially established by local government, normally controlled through board
	Resource transfer	*Trafford Housing Trust* - stock transfer of social housing assets and staff. Also transfers of stock ownership to Australian case study associations
	Management	*England* - councillors (and former head of housing at Manchester City Council) often act as housing association and ALMO directors
	Sector coordination	*Australia* - the Victorian Government has established and generously funded a Housing Association Sector Capacity Building unit

The other principal approach to building organisational capacity is through a re-ordering the sector through joint working. These types of initiatives have often been used to build capacity, although are seldom discussed in this context by practitioners or researchers. One of the benefits claimed by supporters of *vertical integration*, where property development, design and tenancy management are carried out in-house by the same nonprofit organisation, is that it promotes economies of scale. Fewer general managers, IT technicians, bookkeepers and human resource staff will be needed in a large, vertically integrated organisation. The alternative way to achieve scale economies is through *horizontal integration*: acquiring or sharing services with similar organisations operating at the same level of the value chain. For example, several small tenancy management nonprofits could come together to form a larger, more efficient entity. Davies et al. (2006b) highlighted the three collaboration approaches as mergers, group structures and partnership working. Mergers involve a high degree of integration, potentially delivering large savings but with a greater risk of dissatisfaction from existing directors, senior executives and tenants. In contrast, partnerships may deliver lower cost savings but are low risk as existing power and control systems remain in place.

Mergers and group structures increase capacity by allowing employment of more professional or specialist staff than would be possible by a single nonprofit with few building projects or modest numbers of tenancies to manage (van Bortel et al., 2008). Cost savings from forming a group structure, for example reducing the numbers of chief executives, can be important. Housing Choices Australia cited reducing costs as the second reason for their recent mergers, behind building capacity. Acquired business may also have complementary expertise. The organisations merging in 2003 to form Melbourne Affordable Housing in Australia brought together, respectively, tenancy management and project development skills.

Collaboration through joint working on project development is an important way of building capacity, through transferring knowledge from an experienced to an emerging organisation. For example, in the 1980s East Bay Asian partnered with Bridge Housing on their first major residential scheme. The US$17 million (€12 million) Frank G Mar project with 119 units and 1,200 square metres of shops and community facilities in Oakland's Chinatown, would have been too large a project for a fledgling nonprofit. In 1984, when the project was planned, East Bay had only 11 staff and developed just 151 units in 9 years. By comparison, Bridge had built 2,792 homes since 1982. The view of a Bridge Housing's director on East Bay Housing was 'they were trying to learn the business. They'd ask questions ad nauseum. I'd think God - can't we move on? They built up a good capacity'. The benefit for the more experienced partner of this joint approach is that often it is 'the smaller local organisation that knows the town council and can get the land deal' (San Francisco Housing Consultant).

NETWORKED CAPACITY BUILDING

Nonprofit housing providers exist in a networked environment, cooperating through formal and informal partnerships with a variety of public, private and nonprofit actors. In the US and England, but not yet Australia, they have broken free from the 'iron cage' bureaucratic control familiar to Max Weber that characterise hierarchical public housing authorities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Just as their way of working is networked, so is their capacity building.

There are many actors in the social housing organisational field that help build capacity They have been separated in this paper between *conventional networkers*, normally familiar organisations such as England's Chartered Institute of Housing, and *emerging networkers*. This latter group are either recently formed, or their role in social housing networks is only beginning to be appreciated. The tensions and dynamics between the conventional and emerging networkers, and different ways they build networks, lead to some of the main findings of this research. Both types of organisation may directly strengthen the capabilities of individual providers by supplying a particular service such as a training course or contract staff. Alternatively, actors may deepen network connections between providers and other service providers, creating arenas where knowledge is shared. The actors may or may not be aware of their role in capacity building, and often will not use such terms. They may themselves be hierarchical organisations with layers of senior management, or virtual networkers needing no more resource than a personal computer and Internet connection.

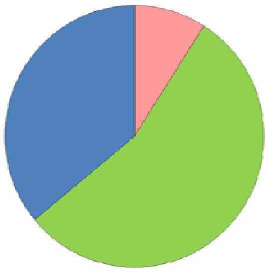
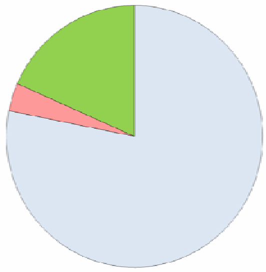
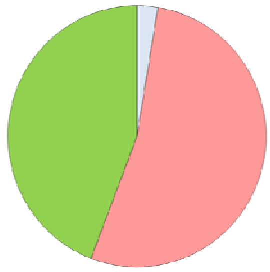
Conventional Networkers

The organisations most closely resembling trade bodies for nonprofit housing providers in the three city regions are shown in Table 3. Trade associations promote networking through organising conferences (particularly in the US and England), member events, lobbying and occasionally shared services. Often there are cross-directorships and staff transfers between the trade bodies and housing providers. In San Francisco, the Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH) is a regional organisation not linked to a national infrastructure. By contrast, the Community Housing Federation of Victoria (CHFV) in Melbourne is linked to other state organisations through a central node - the Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA). Australia's state-based organisations are larger and better resourced than their national body. This is the opposite of England where there is a strong national body, the National Housing Federation (NHF), with small regional branches. The trade associations' capacity support in England and Australia is delivered from locations where most housing policy is determined, respectively in London and in the state capitals. NPH is different in that the organisation is located in San Francisco, not the state capital Sacramento.

The trade bodies in Table 3 undertake similar activities but are financed differently. Each has a dominant form of revenue: commercial income for NPH in San Francisco (55 per cent), membership fees for NHF in London (53 per cent) and state grants for CHFV in Melbourne (78 per cent). In Australia, the trade bodies are top-down, promoted by government as *peak bodies* to represent a sector of social service providers, giving public officials a single point of industry contact. CHFA, the national nonprofit housing 'peak of peaks', is entirely government funded. Financial dependence leads the Australian peak bodies to adopt a less aggressive stance with government: 'we're part of the club, we're funded so you're part of the game' (Executive, peak organisation). This can bring advantages, for example influencing housing policy before publicly announced. The disadvantage is that their independence is compromised: 'we know that the peaks are captive to government, we know that in many cases they have to run their press releases past government officials' (Executive, Australian nonprofit housing provider). Their vulnerability was shown when peak bodies in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory were de-funded in 2007 following political disagreement.

Due to dependence on public funding, CHFV are following a different trend than NPH and NHF in not increasing their emphasis on high-profile lobbying. NPH deepened their role in the regional housing network by leading two broadly-based ballot initiatives in California. For example, Proposition 1C, passed in November 2006, raised US$2.85 billion (€2.05 billion) for affordable housing (NPH, 2006). In England, under the leadership of their new chief executive appointed in 2005, the NHF 'has been much clearer about the need for the organisation to speak outwards rather than inwards to its members' (Executive, Trafford Housing Trust). During recent debates over housing legislation, the NHF (2008b) mounted a strong campaign against proposals they considered compromised the sector's independence. National campaigns require a coordinated and centralised approach which, according to interviewees, has led to a decline in regional representation from areas such as Manchester. The NHF and CHFV are both facing competition and becoming less dominant in their city regions with the emergence of new networked capacity support organisations. By contrast, NPH retain a firm hold on the loyalty of San Francisco Bay Area nonprofit providers.

Table 3: Trade bodies in the US, Australia and England

Category	Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH)	Community Housing Federation of Victoria (CHFV); Australia (CHFA)	National Housing Federation (NHF). Based in England
Income (year to):	€0.71million (Dec 2007)  Commercial 55% State grants 0% Membership fees 9% Philanthropy 36%	€0.35 million (Jun 2008) CHFV  Commercial 18% State grants 78% Membership fees 4% Philanthropy 0%	€17.8 million (Mar 2008)  Commercial 44% State grants 3% Membership fees 53% Philanthropy 0%
Founded:	1979	1997	1935
Members:	700 nonprofit providers and individual members	78 nonprofit providers and 3 individual members (CHFV)	1,200 nonprofit providers
Staff:	8	4 Melbourne (CHFV) 3 Canberra (CHFA)	107 (6 in Manchester)
Fees:	€20 - €166 p.a.	€26 - €475 p.a.	Undisclosed, though could be over €50,000 p.a. for a larger housing provider
Sectors:	Nonprofit providers, banks, professional staff, for-profit developers etc.	Nonprofit providers only (CHFA has state trade associations as members)	Nonprofit providers as full members. Arms length management organisations (ALMOs) join as associates
Regions:	Northern California. Local associate: East Bay Housing Organizations, in Oakland	Office and staff in Melbourne (CHFV) - also CHFA in Canberra	NHF London based. NHF North West has staff and office in Manchester.
Activities:	Awards, conferences, lobbying, networking, publications, research, training	Awards, lobbying, networking, policy, publications, research, tenancy software, training	Awards, conferences, consultancy, lobbying, networking, publications, research, training
Networks:	Brown bag workshops, annual conference, building coalitions through lobbying	Occasional membership meetings with external speakers	Major annual conference in Birmingham. Workshops and events in each region
Business:	Commercial income is from member events such as conferences and training	Training and seminar fees are main source of commercial income	Conferences, training, publications & consultancy generate income
Strategy:	Majority of voting members must be from housing associations	Loose coordination & idea sharing between state bodies through CHFA	Focus on membership services, although strong lobbying in last year
Training:	Few courses offered - NPH more of a lobbying & networking organisation	Influential 'introduction to community housing' course plus others	Wide variety of courses in London and main cities, including Manchester
Sources:	CHFA (2008; 2009); CHFV (2006; 2007; 2008; 2009); EBHO (2007; 2009); NHF (2008a; c; 2009); NHF North West (2008; 2009) NPH (2008; 2009a; b); Personal interviews.		
Notes:	In Tables 3&4, *commercial income* includes fees for events, consulting, training and other income.		

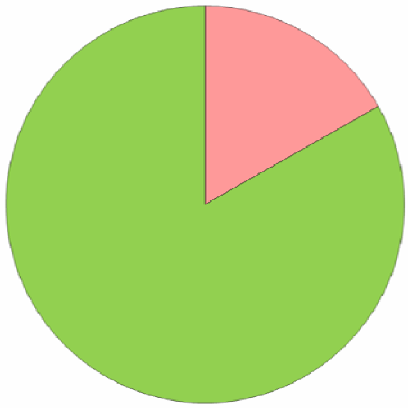
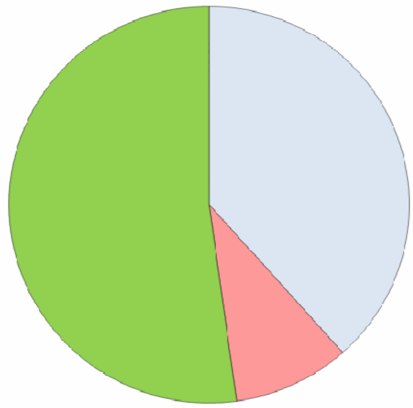
Like the trade bodies in Table 3, organisations providing support for housing staff are facing a period of change. Housing differs from careers such as law and accountancy which are closely controlled by professional bodies who require their members to pass examinations, comply with codes of conduct and pay membership fees to practise their trade. For housing staff, membership of such bodies is not compulsory, more taken as evidence of commitment.

The US has followed a different pathway to England and Australia in that professional associations play a minor and decreasing role. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), founded in 1974 to lobby for affordable housing have only 171 members and two members of staff in California (NLIHC, 2008; 2009). The National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED), formed in 1970 as a national professional association for nonprofit housing providers, reached its zenith in 2000 with 800 members and a staff of 26. In 2006 the organisation closed due to financial problems (NCCED, 2009). US professional bodies are normally based in Washington DC, suggesting their main role is lobbying. Fewer resources are devoted to education, consultancy and training, although the organisations arrange conferences and meetings which are useful for networking. With the closure of NCCED, US nonprofit housing staff lack an obvious national professional organisation to join. This reinforces the strong position of San Francisco's NPH, which admits both institutional and individual members and is strongly connected to local nonprofit providers.

Both England and Australia have a single national professional body covering the entire social housing sector, unlike the fragmentation in the US (Table 4). By encompassing members working for councils, nonprofits and ALMOs, England's Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is also more inclusive that the trade association, the NHF. This places CIH in a strong position with English social housing regulation and funding moving cross-domain following abolition of the Housing Corporation late in 2008. However, with membership fees providing only 17 per cent of income (compared to 53 per cent for NHF), CIH has had to become entrepreneurial, generating revenue from consultancy, the *Inside Housing* publication and the annual Harrogate conference. Although CIH has a regional branch structure, they are more centralised than the NHF with no full time staff or office in Manchester. Local activities include a newsletter, workshops, an awards ceremony in November and the one day combined annual conference and AGM in March. As stated on the CIH (2009) website, 'getting involved in branch activities is an excellent way to find out more about national and regional policy issues [and] to network with key housing professionals in the region'.

Although professional education remains a core CIH activity, interviewees considered this was becoming less important than in the past. The Manchester case study organisations do not insist on staff having CIH qualifications, nor provide day-release for study. With English housing providers responsible for a wide range of non-housing tasks such as community building, the range of professional skills is widening. Therefore CIH is expanding beyond providing housing courses, towards 'delivering a range of respected professional practice products and services that reflect the needs of the sector' (CIH, 2008b: p.5). CIH also appear to be embracing a universal stance, with membership encouraged by a wide range of staff. From 2007 housing providers have been able to enter 'strategic partnerships' with the CIH where all employees become CIH members unless they opt out. Starting with Wakefield and District Housing Association, these partnerships involve the CIH working with management to design tailored training programs to help build organisational capacity. However, this move potentially brings the CIH into competition with the NHF: 'they've blurred completely as to whether they're a professional bodies or a trade body' (Housing Association Executive).

Table 4: Professional bodies in England and Australia

Category	Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)	Australasian Housing Institute (AHI)
Income (year to):	€12 million (Dec 2007)  Commercial income: 83 % State grants: 0 % Membership fees: 17 %	€0.28 million (Jun 2008)  Commercial income: 52 % State grants: 39 % Membership fees: 9 %
Founded:	1916-1931 for predecessor organisations	2001
Members:	20,494 (up 3% in 2007) c.15-18% of social housing workers, as advised by a CIH Executive during interview	621 (down 4% in 2007-2008) c.6-10% of social housing workers
Staff:	c.100 in England	5 in total (3 full time equivalents)
Fees:	€54 - €308 pa	€11 - €168 pa
Sectors:	Nonprofit providers (41%), public housing (27%), retired (11%), private sector (6%), ALMOs (5%), other (10%) + tenants	Public housing (c.60%), remainder: nonprofit providers, indigenous housing, homelessness services, academics
Scope:	England (73%); rest of UK (18%); Hong Kong and rest of Asia/Pacific (9%)	Australia (89%); New Zealand (11%)
Regions:	National business units with offices in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Hong Kong. Branches in regions	Branch committees in most Australian states and territories, and New Zealand. Events arranged regionally
Activities:	Awards, consultancy, conferences, discounts, education, events, lobbying, professional development, research, training	Awards, discounts, events, magazine, workshops
Networks:	Harrogate conference is largest in Europe. In 2007, 11,000 attended CIH England events	2007-08, 70 events in Australia and New Zealand attended by 1,001 participants
Business:	Established consultancy arm ConsultCIH in 2007 which generated income of £1.1 million (€1.3 million)	Growing commercial income: fees from seminars and conferences up 30% in 2007-2008
Strategy:	Now permits Housing Associations to join ‘strategic partnerships’ with CIH: Wakefield and District Housing Association, 2007	State housing authorities provide all of the grant income as ‘seed funding’. Grants are approved annually
Education:	4,087 currently studying for CIH qualifications. Courses provided at 13 UK universities (including Salford)	No professional qualifications. AHI certify Australasia’s only graduate housing courses at Swinburne University.
Sources: AHI (2006; 2008a; b; 2009b); CIH (2005; 2008a; b; c; 2009); CIH North West (2008a; b); Consult CIH (2008); Personal interviews.		

The CIH model was used to establish the Australasian Housing Institute (AHI) in 2001. While the organisations which are comparable in their cross-domain scope and activities, their scale, networking and finance differ. Public funding provides 39 per cent of AHI income, although there is no fixed formula for state contributions and budgets need annual approval. AHI have a regional structure, though few branch events take place and most communication is from the centre. While in-house training can be arranged, there are no courses where staff can meet practitioners from other organisations, which limits networking opportunities. During the last eight years the AHI has faced several management issues. The previous chief executive was encouraged to leave following slow progress launching the organisation. The AHI shares with England's CIH a perceived rivalry with their trade associations, with the nonprofit housing peak bodies said to 'react very badly to the AHI because they felt they'd take their place' (Capacity Building Executive). More recently, during the first three months of 2009, three AHI staff resigned out of a total of five (AHI, 2009a). The AHI was described by an interviewee as 'still a painful organisation … It's not rock solid as I'd like it to be'.

The conventional networking organisations described in this section are facing challenges. Their roles are changing, and the distinction between trade and professional bodies is becoming blurred. In part this reflects increased diversity both in the range of range of social housing providers, and the wider activities undertaken such as neighbourhood regeneration and partnering with the private sector. Some organisations such as CIH are well aligned with the sector's structure, others such as NHF face challenges. Professional housing bodies are either in decline in the US, or like the NCCED, have folded. NPH in San Francisco has established a niche by combining trade and professional body approaches, unlike the AHI in which is struggling to find a role. Comparing Tables 3 and 4, trade associations feature most strongly for lobbying and networking, with professional bodies focused on member services. City region networking is strengthened with the trade bodies having local offices, whereas professional bodies can be seen as remote, run from a distant head office.

Emerging Networkers

Snowballing techniques used during fieldwork identified a variety of networked organisations which strengthen nonprofit housing providers capacity, other than the 'conventional' trade and professional bodies described above. These 'emerging' organisations are first described within their city regions, to capture the dynamics and competition between actors. This then allows a typology to be built that places both conventional and emerging capacity builders within a consistent framework, based on common trends emerging across the organisations.

San Francisco Bay Area networked capacity building organisations are shown in Table 5. Keyes et al. (1996) described LISC and Enterprise as the main supporters of nonprofit housing providers, raising equity by syndicating tax credits and acting as a bridge to philanthropists and investors. For example, LISC use commercial income from syndication fees, together with donations, to cross-subsidise training, capacity building and networking:

> While we bring capital, we also provide the network for organisations. Most of the housing developers that are in the Bay Area ... are excellent developers, but I think there's still a need for some level of capacity building and also the ability to bring people together and share and learn from each other as they have not developed their own systems and one of the things that our office promotes is their learning and sharing of information' (LISC Executive).

LISC's Bay Area office is one of their largest in the US and offers conventional training together with three peer networks for project, asset and finance managers. Training is provided in specialised areas where other courses are not available, such as tax credit financing. This is useful for small and medium sized organisations as 'training is hard to find in the marketplace ... it's the kind we wouldn't be able to do in-house, or pay for' (East Bay Asian Executive). LISC coordinate peer networks, allowing staff to email when seeking immediate answers, then meet together for focused presentations on relevant topics. Each peer network has an annual conference. LISC also fund selected nonprofit housing executive directors to attend leadership courses at Harvard University, while their LISC's Leadership Institute' offers middle managers with a three and half day capacity building retreat.

Table 5: US capacity building organisations

Organisation	Business model and details	Network
Bay Area LISC *San Francisco*	Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) seed funded by Ford Foundation from 1980 to build community capacity. Bay Area office employs 10 staff	Co-located with NPH (Table 3) CHC & CHPC (below). Close links with regional housing nonprofits, banks and councils. Local advisory committee cross-membership with other actors
California Housing Consortium (CHC) *San Francisco*	Housing advocacy group promoting building and preservation of affordable housing. Formed in 1997, has 2 staff and a diverse range of 27 governors.	Co-located as above. A 'big tent' organisation of businesses, for-profit developers, housing nonprofits, banks and city officials. Several directors from regional housing nonprofits
California Housing Partnership Corp. (CHPC) *San Francisco*	Established by the state of California in 1988 as a private nonprofit public benefit corporation to help acquire and preserve low cost housing	Co-located as above. Assists nonprofits and public housing agencies, giving consultancy on tax credit finance. Works with LISC on training. Some staff ex-housing provider
Enterprise Community Partners *San Francisco*	National provider of capital and advice for tax credit financed affordable housing. Founded 1982, after corporate donation. San Francisco office, 2006	San Francisco office mainly works with housing nonprofits. No local board therefore fewer links through individuals. Located within three blocks of above 3 organisations
Housing Partnership Network (HPN) *Boston*	Peer network of 97 US growth housing associations founded 1990. CEOs meet twice a year to exchange ideas. HPN collectively procure cheap insurance	Nine members in California, including Bridge Housing (#1 Bay Area), Mid Peninsula (#4) and Eden (#5). HPN are a closed network with no information shared with non members
San Francisco Housing Action Coalition (SFHAC) *San Francisco*	Advocates for low cost housing in City of San Francisco. Has endorse since 1999 projects that meet sustainability targets, then lobbies city officials	Active membership group with monthly workshops and awards ceremonies. Mix of smaller private developers and range of nonprofit housing providers and local activists
Sources: Bay Area LISC (2005; 2006; 2009); CHC (2009); Enterprise (2009); HPN (2009); LISC (2008; 2009); Personal interviews with representatives of all organisations; SFHAC (2009).		

LISC's cross-subsidised business model is the same as Enterprise's, who recently opened a small San Francisco office. Traditionally LISC and Enterprise worked in different Californian locations, but according to an interviewee this was only under a 'gentleman's agreement'. In the Bay Area the lack of consistent state funding allows the two organisations to find complementary roles: 'there's plenty for both of us to do. I'm not going to do something that they're already doing. It just makes no sense' (Enterprise Executive). Enterprise have a smaller office than LISC and usually provide funds for training, rather than run their own courses (Enterprise, 2009). Both are national organisations, with LISC based in New York and Enterprise in Washington DC. This allows knowledge to be disseminated from the centre to individual states, and for certain specialised functions such as tax credit syndication to be centralised. Knowledge transfer and shared services work similarly for the Boston based Housing Partnership Network, (HPN), a closed-network peer group of US growth providers.

In San Francisco, capacity support organisations LISC, Enterprise (Table 5) and NPH (Table 3) co-exist with each other, and with groups such as CHC, CHPC and SFHAC (Table 5) who are more involved in lobbying. The organisations are either service providers requiring no subscription (LISC, Enterprise, CHPC), or membership groups with nominal fees (NPH, CHC, SFHAC). All three case study nonprofit housing providers are members of several of these organisations, with exclusivity not expected. The Bay Area's affordable housing network works best at times of external stress, for example when broad coalitions are built to supporting ballot propositions raising funds for affordable housing. This is where 'big tent' organisations are effective, such as the CHC whose members include nonprofits, private developers, banks and public officials. LISC, NPH, CHC and CHPC share adjoining offices in San Francisco, and have extensive shared board membership. The clustering of these organisations was not driven by public policy or city subsidy (Gilmour, 2008). Interviews at all four organisations revealed that their choice of location was based on a desire to strengthen affordable housing networks by sharing ideas through networking.

The level of networking through capacity building organisations in San Francisco was not evident from research in Melbourne. Traditional Australian support organisations such as trade associations CHFV and CHFA (Table 3), and the AHI professional association (Table 4) rely on public funding, as did NCHF (Table 6), until it was de-funded in 2006. It is unclear whether the modest number of networked capacity building organisations in Australia is a reflection of the small size and early stage development of the sector, or that public funding has crowded-out private or philanthropic initiatives. However, there is evidence from the emerging organisations detailed in Table 6 of challenges to the state-funded paradigm.

Table 6: Australian capacity building organisations

Organisation	Business model and details	Network
Affordable Housing Network (AHN) *Sydney, NSW*	Affordable housing egroup (web based network) moderated by Shelter NSW, a group advocating housing for low income and disadvantaged groups	90 members include local government workers (main component), nonprofit staff and researchers. Holds 4 face to face meetings pa. Some members receive emails, not use egroup
PowerHousing Australia *Bendigo, Victoria*	National trade association of growth housing nonprofits. Founded 2006, main focus is CEOs and sharing ideas. Procurement partnership in future?	An exclusive membership, although including many large nonprofits. Contact with national government, but seen to be in conflict with the peak bodies, CHFA, CHFV (Table 3)
National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) *Sydney, NSW*	Established 1996, but closed in 2006 when de-funded by government. Goal had been to develop strategic vision of future of Australian housing nonprofits	Formerly 24 full members: local government, peak bodies etc. More of a 'peak of peaks' like CHFA rather than direct membership. Events and workshops brought providers together
Tenant Support Network (TSN) *Bega, NSW*	Replaced previous state funded network in 1998 with an independent email group supplying housing information to tenants and others. Run by a volunteer	4,000 members in Australia, also some emails sent to UK, US and New Zealand. Members are housing provider and peak body staff and academics (67%); social housing tenants (33%)
Sources: AHN (2009); NCHF (2002; 2004; 2006a; b); Personal interviews with representatives of all organisations; PowerHousing Australia (2009).		

In Table 6, the Tenant Support Network (TSN) and Affordable Housing Network (AHN) both used web technology to build low-cost, independent networks. TSN started when the NSW Government de-funded a tenant group that had been closely controlled by the state. An interviewee noted that subsequent refusal of state grants 'gave a level of independence that nobody else had ... [beyond] the tentacles of control'. Run by a retired public housing tenant, part-funded from his disability pension, the TSN is a rich resource linking 4,000 housing professionals and tenants across several countries. The network's strength is its flexibility:

> There's no formality around the organisation, it's not incorporated. There's nothing that would normally be called 'legitimate' about it. It doesn't have a formal front. It's simply a group of people who have found a resource useful and a resource that is supportive. It is fundamentally organic (Capacity Support Executive).

Sharing TSN's desire to remain free of state funding, although adopting a very different business model, is PowerHousing Australia (Table 6). The organisation was established by several nonprofit provider chief executives who thought Australia's peak bodies (CHFV, CHFA) too closely controlled by the state. The peaks were seen to work for smaller nonprofits, not those developing new properties: 'what we need is for those organisations that have the capacity, the desire and the demonstrated ability to be able to grow the sector to have a voice' (PowerHousing member). Relations between PowerHousing and the peaks are often strained: 'they've been launching some pretty substantial personal attacks, which is upsetting' (Peak Body Executive). A PowerHousing member's view is that their role is complementary to the community housing federations: 'we're not looking to replace you. We're not a threat to you. We're just a different market niche that's not being well represented'.

PowerHousing are selective about which organisations can join, and are said to have refused entry to a nonprofit provider considered insufficiently entrepreneurial. However, exclusivity is not expected: two case study organisations are members of both PowerHousing and CHFV, one is just a member of the latter. The view of an executive whose organisation is a member of both is that PowerHousing 'works stronger at supporting its members like us than CHFV ... CHFV is more akin to an industry lobby whereas PowerHousing is more member based'. PowerHousing's annual membership fees of A$7,700 (€4,300) are substantial, in comparison to CHFV's maximum of A$849 (€475), although said to be worthwhile as they 'provide so much more' (Melbourne Affordable Housing Executive). They have explored forming a consortium for joint property development and fund-raising, and procurement partnerships for IT, insurance and vehicles. These ventures are intended to generate income for PowerHousing although at the time of fieldwork (mid 2008), no products had been launched. There are links between PowerHousing and HPN in the US (Table 5), both organisations following the approach of being a national organisation, disseminating ideas through peer networking:

> Getting the CEOs of these organisations who effectively have to drive these various initiatives, getting them into one room just for a conversation is incredibly valuable. Because we all pick up what is happening in different jurisdictions (PowerHousing Member).

If PowerHousing represents the start of a fragmentation of networked capacity builders in Australia, the process has been carried further in England. Gilmour (2009, forthcoming-b) describes emerging network capacity support organisations in the Manchester city region. New regional competitors are challenging the traditional roles historically played by the CIH and NHF. For example, the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) and Housing Quality Network (HQN) cross-subsidise, using income from consultancy and commission on service procurement towards funding member services (Table 7). One reason suggested for their growth is that northern NHF members 'are quite disappointed at the poor service that they receive from the Nat Fed … You asked about the north - I think they pay lip service to it' (NHF Executive). The NHF was thought by a number of interviewees not just to have become London focused, but to have shifted from member services to lobbying. This has allowed organisations such as HQN and NHF to enter the market, and build capacity by providing products and assistance that can best be supplied locally or regionally.

Table 7: Northern England capacity building organisations

Organisation	Business model and details	Network
Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) *Sunderland*	Nonprofit membership organisation for north England social housing providers (86% coverage). Consultancy, research and procurement rather than lobbying	Includes councils (30%), housing profits and ALMOs. Various courses, workshops plus annual 'Northern Summit' between CEOs of main housing providers and civil servants
Housing Quality Network (HQN) *York*	Formed 1997 as a national idea sharing and service organisation for social housing providers. 40 staff. Unlike NHF & CIH, does not lobby government	680 members including housing nonprofits, ALMOs and councils. Wide range of seminars, conferences and training events across whole sector. Runs NFA trade body (Table 8)
North West Housing Forum (NWHF) *Manchester*	Lobbying and networking group, founded 1999. Income €104,000 funds one staff member, outsourced research and sponsorship of national MP	Exec. Committees of council representatives, housing nonprofits, ALMOs, CIH, NHF. Good contacts with politicians, local and nationally. Annual conference attracts 200 delegates
Sources: HQN (2009); NHC (2008a; b; 2009); NWHF (2008a; b); Personal interviews.		

The organisations in Table 7 work across the social housing domain and do not differentiate between public housing providers, nonprofit organisations and ALMOs. This more clearly reflects the balanced mix of social housing stock in the Manchester city region, where ALMOs are strongly represented (Gilmour, 2009, forthcoming-b). It also coincides with England's move to consistent funding and regulation of social housing irrespective of provider type. However, along with the recent growth of 'big tent' organisations in Table 7, several more specialised organisations have emerged, shown in Table 8. Although diverse in location and membership, they differentiate by housing provider type. Both the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) and the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) are single-sector trade associations, structured like NHF. Most funding is from membership fees, and the role combines networking and lobbying government. In contrast, G15 and G320 are specialised nonprofit provider trade associations catering for particular segments of the sector, similar to HPN in the US (Table 5) and PowerHousing Australia (Table 6). The G320 is affiliated to the London region of NFA, while the G15 acts more in direct competition.

Table 8: English specialised capacity building organisations

Name	Membership	Description
Airport Group	10 stock transfer housing associations in NW England	No formal membership procedures, offices or staff. Acts as forum for CEO idea sharing
Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH)	36 (out of 100) councils who still own/manage public housing	Formed 2006 as lobby group to preserve public housing. No permanent staff or offices
Defend Council Housing (DCH)	Informal coalition of activists opposed to stock transfers	No formal structure, though assist local campaigns to preserve public housing
G15 Group	15 large London housing associations, with 353,000 homes	Networking, research and lobbying group. Similar regional role to NWHF (Table 7)
G320 Group	58 small London housing associations with <1,000 homes	Unlike G15, the G320 is affiliated to the NHF. Arranges meetings and shares good practice
National Federation of ALMOs (NFA)	Trade association for c.60 English ALMOs	Established 2003 at government's request, run by HQN (Table 7). Lobby & member services
Sources: ARCH (2009); DCH (2007; 2009); G15 Group (2007; 2008; 2009); G320 Group (2009); NFA (NFA, 2008; 2009); Personal interviews, except ARCH, G320		

In Table 8, ARCH, G15, G320 and NFA share a similar organisation form as membership organisations, in contrast to the Airport Group and DCH which are informal and unstructured. The Airport Group is a local peer networking organisation said to 'have captured that wave of urban, northern, quite meaty, maybe in some cases negative value, stock transfers' (Trafford Housing Trust Executive). The organisation is similar to the London G15 Group of larger nonprofit housing providers, but without resources or procedures. Membership follows individuals, with Trafford Housing Trust 'joining' when their new chief executive was appointed - at the same time his predecessor association South Liverpool Housing 'left'. Peer grouping takes place between chief executives, and among functional specialists such as finance directors who meet quarterly. New organisations are only admitted to the group if they are similar, and the senior management team considered like-minded individuals.

The growth of new and informal networking organisations is evident at local level, in addition to the regional and national organisations shown in Tables 7 and 8. Social housing providers in the same locality often cooperate to reduce costs by forming development or procurement agreements. Research suggests 67 per cent of English associations that have not merged or formed group structures have established partnerships. The most common areas for collaboration are property investment and development partnering, followed by procurement, alarm services, shared asset management and IT (Davies et al., 2006a: p.18). The Housing Corporation's policy of reducing the number of associations bidding for social housing funds, concentrating development into a smaller number of higher-capacity groups, led to the growth of development partnerships (Housing Corporation, 2005a). Research in Greater Manchester identified the BLOC Partnership, a development consortium between Irwell Valley, Great Places and five local nonprofit housing providers. Additionally, Reviva Urban Renewal has been established between Mosscare Housing, Irwell Valley and Great Places to bid for Manchester City Council regeneration contract. These partnerships form important local networks, strengthening links between Greater Manchester nonprofit housing providers.

Similar local and regional networks are built through procurement partnerships. Types of agreement vary, although they normally involve bulk provision of goods and services at discounted rates. The concept is not new, having been used in the past by neighbouring councils reducing costs in running public housing. However, they have become more common after a drive to increase public service efficiencies, implemented in the Housing Corporation (2005b) guidelines. Regional organisations specialising in procurement include the NHC (Table 7), who generate 27 per cent of their income from commission on procurement transactions for gas appliances and household insurance. An example of a local procurement organisations is Golden Gates, a shared IT services partnership between Warrington council, their ALMO, and a nonprofit housing provider. These multi-member partnership, which include various types of organisations across the social housing domain, are relatively common in north west England. While conventional, hierarchical networkers such as NHF and CIH under pressure, a wider range of new organisations and partnership arrangements have emerged, operating at local and regional rather than national scales. These organisations, like the providers they support, more clearly operate through networks.

Typology of Networked Capacity Builders

The previous two sub-sections have described a complex variety of networked capacity building organisations, from traditional trade and professional bodies through to local peer group and procurement networks. Although their diversity precludes a rigid typology, developing a model is a good approach to determining meta-trends. Table 9 proposes four organisational types. *Conventional hierarchical* organisations traditionally rely on state funding, and disseminate information from the centre to the periphery. *Conventional networkers* are less hierarchical, although often their membership exclusivity restricts the access to certain actors. *Diversified networkers* are less concerned with membership, more with service provision. They often include a wider range of actors in the nonprofit, public and sometimes for-profit sector. Finally, *virtual networkers* are less likely to have a fixed organisation infrastructure, often using web based technology to connect actors at low cost.

Table 9: Typology of capacity building organisations

Type	Description	Business model	Networking
Conventional hierarchical	Formal, fixed, top-down organisation	Predictable income, often state funded	Narrowly defined role, centralised
Conventional networker	Relatively formal, moving towards network model	Mixed funding, becoming entrepreneurial	More freely networking but often sector specific
Diversified networker	Hybrid service provider and network actor	Highly entrepreneurial, cross-subsidising	Broad networking, less often sector specific
Virtual networker	Informal, non-hierarchical network actor	Low cost, low infrastructure	Unstructured connectivity, often using web tools

Table 10 maps the capacity building organisations described in this paper against the categories in Table 9. There are some important general patterns. Although the sample of capacity building organisations is probably incomplete, a nonprofit housing provider operating in Greater Manchester will have a greater range of support organisations to choose from than one located in San Francisco or metropolitan Melbourne. In part this reflects the greater size of the social housing sector, with a larger number of providers able to support a larger number of service providers. Similar to the Bay Area, the growth of new capacity builders in Greater Manchester has not - as yet - fundamentally undermined the position of the traditional trade associations (NPH, CIH, NHF). Housing providers become members of, or use services offered by, a number of different organisations. For example, providers will select training courses and conferences from a variety of sources, depending on which offers the best specialisation, most convenient location or lowest cost. CIH and NHF are shown in Table 10 moving towards becoming *conventional networkers*, the same category as NPH. Both have started operating in a more entrepreneurial mode, mixing services with member support, and becoming more networked than hierarchical. CIH and NHF are adopting the approach of housing provision in England, with a shift towards networked governance.

Table 10: Example capacity building organisations by type

Type	US - San Francisco	Australia - Melbourne	England - Manchester
Conventional hierarchical	CHPC *(Table 5)*	CHFA, CHFV *(Table 3)* AHI *(Table 4)* NCHF *(Table 6)*	ARCH, NFA *(Table 8)* CIH *(Table 4)* NHF *(Table 5)*
Conventional networker	HPN *(Table 5)* NPH *(Table 3)*	PowerHousing *(Table 6)*	NWHF *(Table 7)* G15, G320 *(Table 8)*
Diversified networker	LISC, Enterprise *(Table 5)* SFHAC *(Table 5)*		HQN, NHC *(Table 7)*
Virtual networker	CHC *(Table 5)*	TSN, AHN *(Table 6)*	Airport Group *(Table 8)* DCH *(Table 8)*

By contrast to the US and England where most capacity support organisations are in, or moving to, the three ‘networker’ categories in Table 10, most Australian organisations remain hierarchical. In part this reflects their reliance on state funding, in part the continuation of a ‘peak body’ hierarchical approach to information exchange. The community housing federations are a clear example of a hierarchical structure, with the central node CHFA remote from individual housing providers who must join state associations. PowerHousing have started to challenge Australia’s status quo by establishing a service-orientated, networked organisation similar to NPH and NHF. Although not yet fully operational, the PowerHousing model may become more important with the introduction in 2008 of tax credits which are nationally coordinated and require housing providers to work in partnership mode.

The most dynamic, fastest growing organisations in Table 10 are those in the diversified and virtual networker categories. Organisations such as LISC, Enterprise, HQN and NHC have a business model harnessing income from the market based housing delivery policies used in the US and England over the last two decades. This has been through tax credits syndication fees in the US, and the greater use of consultants in both countries as providers face the challenge of greater complexity and risk. In England the CIH and NHF have expanded into consultancy, although remain relatively small players. By contrast, the virtual networking organisations do not provide services, although they have also become more influential over the last decade. As low or zero cost organisations, they are able to cater to niche requirements by client group or location. With the increasing familiarity of web technology among housing staff, virtual networking is likely to increase, although some virtual networking services are starting to be delivered by more conventional organisations such as CIH and HQN.

CONCLUSIONS

There are many alternative pathways to building the capacity of the nonprofit housing sector. Most traditional approaches to discussing, strengthening and measuring capacity focus on *organisational capacity* which has limitations, particularly with the growth of networked forms of governance. Organisational capacity is often seen as a set of attributes that providers possess, such as a strategic plan, competent staff and governance policies. From this perspective, capacity could be built by professionalisation, staff training and regulation. Light (2000) observed commercial management practices washing like ‘tides’ over the nonprofit sector, often accepted uncritically. While it is true that good management is important, there is a need for tools and techniques suitable for hybrid organisations with a social mission.

Because nonprofit housing providers operate in a complex, connected environment and form partnerships and exchange information with a wide range of actors, broader approaches to strengthening organisational capacity are needed. Organisations learn from each other, building strength through mimicking good practice, transferring staff and forming coalitions to lobby governments. Groups structures, mergers and procurement partnerships allow cost savings though scale economies. Recent innovations, from public-private-nonprofit partnerships re-developing public housing estates to arms length management organisations (ALMOs) running public housing in England, are taking a more strategic approach to role specialisation and vertical integration. These new approaches emphasise the role that sector structure plays in building an understanding of the capacity of individual organisations.

Collaboration and partnerships are examples of the inter-related environment in which the nonprofit housing provider case study organisations in San Francisco, Melbourne and Manchester operate. Mirroring this is the ability of nonprofits to strengthen capacity using support organisations that are themselves networked. This is not new. Many professional and trade bodies have a long pedigree (Tables 3 and 4). However, snowballing research reveals a wider and more diverse range of actors that also contribute to *network capacity* (Tables 5 to 8). The various conventional and emerging organisations supply outsourced practical services, ranging from consultancy and contractors to training and professional development. These are specialisations that small and medium sized, programme-focused housing providers are unlikely to have in-house. Beyond meeting a specific need, the service organisations provide arenas where staff can exchange ideas and develop a shared understanding that their activities constitute ‘a recognisable area of institutional life’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: p.148).

This differentiation between hierarchical and partnership approaches to social housing (Reid, 1995; Kickert & Koppenjan, 1997) is apparent not just in the workings of individual housing providers, but in the structuring of networked capacity support organisations. From Table 10, many of the Australian support organisation such as the peak and professional bodies are themselves hierarchical, strongly influenced by state funding and direction. This reinforces what van Bortel et al. (2009: p.95) suggest is a tendency for hierarchy within housing networks, where one or more actors are dominant. However, a trend apparent from Table 10 is the growing importance of networked support organisations (NPH, PowerHousing, HQN, NHC). These are challenging some of the niche roles and services formerly provided by conventional hierarchical organisations, particularly in Australia and England. As a result, some conventional organisations such as CIH and NHF are moving towards more networked models through the provision of services such as consultancy and commercialised events.

The other trend from Table 10 is the emergence of more specialised organisations catering for regional needs (NHC, Airport Group, NWHF, G15). In Greater Manchester the national organisations (CIH, NHF) were considered by interviewees to be remote, particularly if they had no staff in the city region. Housing providers in England and Australia are increasingly seeking support from a variety of organisations operating at a different scales - local, regional and national. A strong relationship with a single service provider is being replaced by a ‘pick and mix’ approach, particularly with the growth of development and procurement partnerships. Fragmentation is also evidenced by the growth of support organisations with a sector specialisation (ARCH, NFA), or for housing providers based on size or growth potential (HPN, PowerHousing, G15, G320). Other networks, such as TSN, AHN and DHC use new technology to cheaply connect new audiences. The complexity and dynamism of capacity support organisations, evidenced through their rate of formation and innovation, both reflects and supports the seismic shifts taking place in the nonprofit housing sector.

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