Magical or monstrous? Hybridity in social housing governance: Understanding market oriented reforms of social rental housing

Blessing, A.P.

Citation for published version (APA):
ABSTRACT

For much of the 20th Century, state agencies were central to the funding, planning and provision of welfare state services in Western democracies. Its final decades, however, were marked by radical reforms. The state took on a facilitative role, incentivizing private not-for-profit and commercial actors to fund and deliver programs of social assistance in education, income support, health, housing and other areas. While these reforms have often been rationalised in terms of complementary blends of social responsibility and commercial innovation, their differing international iterations and long-term impacts remain poorly understood. This study examines how market-oriented reforms have played out within the field of supply-side rental housing assistance, impacting variants such as ‘public’ and ‘social’ rental housing, and in some cases, giving rise to new streams of ‘affordable’ rental. It departs from the view that despite reforms, the dualisms of ‘state and market’ and ‘public and private sectors’ retain both empirical relevance and analytical power.

Through comparisons made across different welfare states and at multiple levels of action, market-oriented arrangements for provision of social or affordable rental housing are explored as ‘hybrid’ constructs, working across the threshold of public and private sectors. Findings show that by combining public and private attributes and action logics, hybrid organisations, programs and systems become subject to multiple accountabilities. While market oriented reforms may create opportunities for trade, collaboration, innovation and systemic efficiencies, the hybrid constructs they bring forth may easily transgress the boundaries of public and private realms, prompting reform. Socially oriented goals and initiatives may be compromised or traded away to commercial interests. Transferring decision-making powers to private actors may lead to eventual problems of legitimacy for the state. Rather than a super-blend of complementary attributes, market-oriented reforms of social rental housing are best understood in terms of context-specific trade-offs between conflicting agendas and action logics in the housing market.