

# **THE POLITICS OF NEED**

ACCOUNTING FOR (DIS)ADVANTAGE:  
PUBLIC HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Carol Lacroix

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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**Carol Lacroix**

## **ABSTRACT**

Concerns about the nature of poverty and how to achieve equitable resource distribution are rife in Australia where, as elsewhere, welfare resources are becoming increasingly scarce. At the heart of these concerns are questions about access: in particular, how to ensure that the least affluent are able to access the resources they require. At the same time, there is a growing sense that cultural as well as social factors are central to patterns of unequal distribution, especially in a neo-liberal context where there is a deregulation of social and economic structures, and a shift to consumption or lifestyle capitalism.

This thesis employs Bourdieu's theoretical framework of capitals to examine the nature of affluence (and therefore poverty) in Australia, the processes that facilitate access to material resources by the affluent rather than the poor and, ultimately, the notion of need that underpins questions of choice, access and resource allocation. Drawing on interviews with members of publicly funded housing co-operatives in WA, an example of welfare housing that simultaneously represents an example of a deregulated symbolic economy and an expression of the contemporary lifestyle movement, I highlight key resources and interests that distinguish these individuals as affluent, as well as some of the cultural and social processes that enable them to convert their resources into the subsidised housing. Based on this analysis, I then interrogate the frameworks for understanding poverty that regulate the distribution of welfare resources, and argue that these were central to the ability of the more affluent to secure publicly funded housing resources. In particular, I examine the new multidimensional frameworks for

understanding poverty in terms of their ability to recognise key resources and processes. I argue that Bourdieu's framework – as a resource based framework that accounts for cultural as well as social and economic factors in the (re)production of advantage and disadvantage – represents a worthwhile inclusion into theories and policies that are concerned with accounting for poverty and ensuring that residual welfare aims are met.

For Anthony McMahon

## CONTENTS

<b>Abbreviations</b>	i
<b>Tables and illustrations</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	iii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
Early beginnings	
Aim of thesis	
Outline of chapters	
<b>Chapter One – The theoretical framework of capitals</b>	15
Background: The need for a framework	
Class	
Bourdieu and the capitals framework	
Developments in the field	
Conclusion	
<b>Chapter Two – Housing co-operatives</b>	55
The co-operative movement	
The social housing framework	
The co-operative housing framework	
Conclusion	
<b>Chapter Three – The case study: Housing co-operatives in WA</b>	90
The sector	
Methodology	
Conclusion	
<b>Chapter Four – Findings</b>	119
Resources: key characteristics of the participants	
Motivations	
Conclusion	
<b>Chapter Five – The nature of affluence</b>	160
Capitals	
Interest	
Affluence and poverty	
Case study: ongoing eligibility	
Conclusion	

<b>Chapter Six – The processes of affluence</b>	193
Conceptual narrowness	
Semantic elasticity	
Habitus: playing the field	
Conclusion	
<b>Chapter Seven – Multidimensional frameworks: new approaches to need and (dis)advantage</b>	226
The new frameworks: deprivation, exclusion and capability	
Evaluating the frameworks	
Bourdieu: an alternative framework	
Conclusion	
<b>Chapter Eight – Conclusion</b>	266
Accounting for need	
Theory in practice	
<b>Bibliography</b>	277
<b>Appendix</b>	298

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ARCH	Association for Resourcing Co-operative Housing
CEHL	Common Equity Housing Limited
CHCSA	Community Housing Council of South Australia
CHCWA	Community Housing Coalition of Western Australia
CHFA	Community Housing Federation of Australia
CHP	Community Housing Program
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
DHW	Department of Housing and Works
FFHC	First Fremantle Housing Co-operative
FIC	Fellowship for Intentional Community
FOHCOL	Federation of Housing Collectives
ICA	International Co-operatives Alliance
LGCHP	Local Government Community Housing Program
NFAH	National Forum on Affordable Housing
QCHC	Queensland Community Housing Coalition
QCOSS	Queensland Council of Social Services



## TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Table 1 - Housing Co-operatives in Perth Metropolitan Area	97
Table 2 - Housing co-operatives in Regional Areas	97
Table 3 - Current tenants	111
Table 4 - Past tenants	111
Table 5 - Unhoused Members	111
Illustration – Homeless woman	210

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