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Living small: The experience of micro-apartment living in Sydney

For many Australian households, the dream of a quarter-acre block faded long ago in the face of housing affordability and congestion-laden commutes. Indeed, even small apartments in inner city locations are out of reach for many households. Single-person households are a fast-growing demographic who are particularly subject to the pressures of high housing costs. These households are forced to compete with dual income households for limited housing stock in good locations. The lack of housing for single-person households has prompted some planners to investigate and promote alternative housing options that trade-off aspects of amenity in order to encourage a greater range of housing options in otherwise unaffordable localities.

One such option is the 'micro-apartment' - single-room and self-contained apartments sized between 24.5m² and 28m². The internal floor area of a micro-apartment is well below accepted minimum size standards for studio apartments in most Australian jurisdictions. Proponents of this typology reference the tiny-house movement, as well as the cosmopolitan lifestyle increasingly available in major cities that make in-dwelling amenity redundant. These discussions often occur with little evidence of the occupant experience, instead making broad assumptions about lifestyles and housing preference.

This presentation outlines the findings of research into the occupant experience of residents of micro-apartments in Sydney, drawing upon survey results and in-depth interviews with occupants as well as engagement with industry and academic figures. The findings challenge a number of the assumptions about the housing preferences of existing micro-apartment occupants that have been prevalent in the current discourse on this housing typology, and offer an important evidence base for housing policy-makers in responding to the rise of the single-person household.