The Desirable Apartment Life?

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Abstract

The ongoing shift towards urban consolidation within the metropolitan strategies of Australia's two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, has seen policy attention focused on a perceived need for a greater proportion of the population to live in higher density housing in order to ease the pressures imposed by urban sprawl. But while planners and developers are forging a new compact city future for Australians, little attention has been directed towards the desirability of these new higher density dwelling alternatives. Drawing on data from a survey of 1,597 apartment residents in Sydney and Melbourne as well as 29 in-depth interviews, this paper explores the desirability of apartments amongst those people already living in apartments in both cities. We explore the implications of planning strategies that are premised upon the assumption that it is prudent to better match household types to dwelling characteristics, thereby providing more 'housing choices' for the increasing numbers of lone persons and couple families without children. We discuss the issue of 'choice versus constraint' in regards to dwelling type, the incidences of other household types (e.g. families with children) living in apartments and the extent to which such dwellings actually suit the lifestyles of those who live in them. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for compact city policies in Australia.

Key words

Urban consolidation, planning, housing choice, apartments

Introduction

Urban policy in Australia has changed significantly over the last few decades. Indeed, it could be argued that there has been a trend towards "anti-suburbanism" (Davison 2006) with concerns raised about 'suburban sprawl' and its assumed associated negative environmental, health and social impacts (Parliament of Australia 1992; Parliament of NSW 2003; Newman and Kenworthy 1998).

While apartments have been built in Sydney and Melbourne since at least the 1930s (for Sydney see Cardew 1970; Judd and Dean 1983; Spearitt 1978 and 2000; for Melbourne, see Lewis 2000; Buxton and Tieman 2005), recent years have seen enormous increases in higher density development. This has been the result of both the passing of strata title legislation in most States in the 1960s and 1970s (which enabled individual apartments to be sold to individual owners) and the move towards urban consolidation in state government metropolitan planning. Indeed, while there remains debate among planners concerning the desirability of increasing the proportion of higher density housing (De Roo and Miller 2000; Jenks *et al* 2000, Newman 2005, Recsei 2005a, Recsei 2005b), urban consolidation has become the dominant policy orthodoxy guiding strategic metropolitan planning in Australian cities (Forster 2006).

Much of the contemporary academic debate about the compact city has focused on the assumed pros and cons of higher density housing as opposed to lower density suburban development, with a predominant focus on environmental or infrastructure issues (Breheny 1995; Jenks *et al* 1996; de Roo and Miller 2000; Bruegmann 2005). Urban consolidation policies, such as those contained in Sydney's *City of Cities* and *Melbourne 2030* are promoted as the best way of meeting changing patterns of housing demand, providing greater housing choices and affordability, improved social sustainability and cohesion, improved access to local employment and services and shorter journey to work time through more efficient transport planning/utilisation (Holliday 2000; Yates 2001: 491; Bunker *et al* 2002).

The aim of the research project is to probe the assumptions underlying this received wisdom regarding higher density living. This paper focuses on the assumption that it is sensible to provide people with more dwelling 'choices' by providing the increasing proportion of smaller households with smaller, higher density, dwellings. In the next section of the paper, following a brief outline of the methodology used in the research, we provide a basis for stating that these assumptions have informed urban planning documents. We then discuss the validity and implications of this planning assumption in relation to our own research findings.

Methodology

There is a growing body of work that questions existing analyses underlying many of the planning assumptions behind the promotion of higher density development in urban areas[i]. The key word here is "*assumptions*" as the majority of the analyses conducted on the function of higher density developments are either discrete to single locations (highly detailed sociological case studies) or encompassing international comparative surveys. From such analyses key assumptions have been structured which, on the whole, do not recognise differing socio-spatial constructs between, and within, unique urban locations.

The research presented in this paper is drawn from an Australian Research Council funded project on the expectations, behaviours and experiences of households living in flats, units and apartments (henceforth 'apartments') in Sydney and Melbourne. This included a factor analysis of the 2006 Census data for residents of private apartments in both cities (i.e. excluding public and community housing), which identified five main groups of apartment residents across the city. It also included a telephone and on-line survey of 1,597 apartment residents in Sydney and Melbourne (582 Melbourne and 1,015 in Sydney), all of whom were subsequently invited to participate in a in-depth telephone interview which explored key issues in greater detail. In all, 29 such interviews were completed.

The methodology for the project is described in more detail in *Working Paper 3: A note on methods* (City Futures Research Centre 2009). Whilst these groupings are used in this paper as a 'pen profile' in order to characterise respondents, it must be pointed out that every individual (even with comparable socio-economic characteristics) will have their own distinct views. The findings thus provide a more qualitative discourse on the nature of certainty in planning assumptions. This approach recognisees that the extent to which these planning assumptions resonate with the experiences of apartment residents varies in different locations and also varies between people with different socio-economic backgrounds, and between people who have had different experiences of apartment living.

Planning assumptions

Both the Melbourne and Sydney metropolitan plans recognise that household structures are changing in Australia, with an increasing proportion of lone person households, and couple families without children. Sydney's *City of Cities* notes that future planning for Sydney should take into account:

> population growth and demographic change, including migration trends, birth rates, an ageing population and less people living in each household (NSW Department of Planning 2005:22).

While *Melbourne 2030* states:

> We must understand not only the implications of projected growth, but the nature of population dynamics ... while the average number of people in each household is getting smaller, new houses are becoming larger … with consequent resource implications (VIC Department of Infrastructure 2002:15).

Melbourne 2030 aims to both "encourage a greater proportion of new dwellings at strategic redevelopment sites ... within established metropolitan urban areas, to reduce pressure for urban expansion" and "reduce the share of new dwellings in greenfield and dispersed development areas while increasing housing choice" (Victorian Department of Infrastructure 2002:30).In other words, *Melbourne 2030* points to the need for high*er* density development because of the decreasing size of households and discusses this in terms of both 'sustainability' and 'housing choice'.

Both plans also assume that given the opportunity (i.e. if more small dwellings were available), smaller households would want, and choose, to live in these dwellings and that these dwellings would suit their lifestyles. For example, *Melbourne 2030* includes a quote from a public forum held in Moorabbin in November 2000:

> There's not enough variety of housing to meet people's needs (VIC Department of Infrastructure 2002:15).

Sydney's *City of Cities* states:

> The trend to smaller households is partly driven by the ageing of the population, which tends to result in more single and two person households. This will inevitably lead to a greater demand for smaller housing with good access to shops, transport and services such as health. Increasing affluence, and more single and young people living alone are also major contributors to the increased demand for housing. These changes in household type and therefore occupancy rates mean that total demand for housing will be greater than population growth and a wider mix of housing types will be required (NSW Department of Planning 2005:24).

The need for more housing choices is also recognised in *NSW State Environmental Planning Policy 65*:

> New developments should address housing affordability by optimising the provision of economic housing choices and providing a mix of housing types to cater for different budgets and housing needs. (NSW Department of Planning 2001: Regulation 17, Principle 9)

It should be noted that while the Melbourne plan points to the inclusion of both medium *and* high density development, the situation in Sydney is somewhat different. As Sydney's *City of Cities* notes:

> Whilst intensification of larger State strategic centres will be a major focus for the Metropolitan Strategy, the high land values in these areas generally mean that mid to high rise apartments are usually the only financially feasible built form (NSW Department of Planning 2005:140).

Hence, both plans are based on the assumption that it is sensible to provide more housing 'choice' by providing smaller (medium and high density) dwellings in line with the increasing proportion of smaller households. However, while the Melbourne plan does not discuss the desirability of different densities, the Sydney plan recognises that high density apartments "are attractive to only part of the market" and that "townhouses and villas are attractive to a broader section of the housing market" (NSW Department of Planning 2005:140).

We use our findings from research undertaken with apartment residents to critique the planning focus on increasing 'housing choice' through the provision of more medium and high density options. Specifically, we ask the questions:

- Do smaller households *want* to live in apartments?

- What types of households *are* living in apartments and do they *choose* to live in apartments, or are their options *constrained*?

- Do apartments suit the lifestyles of those people who live in them?

Do smaller households *want* to live in apartments?

There are more small households living in Australia currently than in the past (ABS 2007a). While both the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan plans have been premised on the assumption that smaller households will choose to live in smaller dwellings, previous research indicates that this is not necessarily the case. In the 1970s an argument emerged that there was a mismatch in Australian cities "between the available stock and the size of households to the extent that there is significant underutilisation and under-occupancy of housing" (Batten 1999:137), due to a lack of appropriately sized dwellings for the increasing numbers of small and single-person households. This orthodoxy, which has informed state planning policies, was challenged by a number of academics (Batten 1999, Maher 1994, 1995). Indeed, the little empirical evidence that exists (e.g. Yates 2001, Wulff *et al* 2004) suggests that small households are reluctant to forgo this 'extra' space:

> Most people who live alone [in Australia] prefer detached three-bedroom houses and ... many of them are able to realise this preference. Planners have too readily assumed that the demographic shift to smaller households will facilitate a shift to more compact cities. There is very little evidence to support this assumption (Wulff *et al* 2004:58).

Furthermore, evidence available on dwelling choices suggests that people's ages are a better indicator of whether they will live in smaller dwellings, particularly apartments. For example, the 1991 Housing and Location Choice (HALC) Survey of 8,530 people across Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra found that there was "a progression from higher to lower dwelling densities" amongst households (Burgess and Skeltys 1992:21). It also found that those people most likely to move from a separate house to medium and high density dwellings were "young renters in the mobile stages of the lifecycle, rather than people moving to these higher density housing types as an alternative to separate houses". The survey also found that:

> for lower income first home buyers, especially those without children, purchase of a medium or
> high density dwelling may form the stepping stone to eventual purchase of a separate house
> (Burgess and Skeltys 1992:23).

Further, there was "only limited evidence of older people 'trading down' to higher density housing" (Burgess and Skeltys 1992:23). Supporting these findings, Birrell *et al.* (2005) noted (in their assessment of the *Melbourne 2030* plan) that "during the 1990s Melbourne experienced a boom in flat and apartment construction" and that the people re-populating the city tended to be 20-29 year olds, rather than 'empty nesters' as often assumed. A qualitative study by Sweeny Research (2006) on 'empty nesters' provides some support for this finding beyond Melbourne, with the majority of the 'empty nesters' interviewed deciding to remain in their family home, rather than moving into a smaller dwelling. Birrel *et al.* (2005: 04-02) went on to explain that there will be no increase in the number of young households over the next 30 years and it will be households aged 30-40 and baby boomers who will have the main influence on housing preferences:

> As a result, the demand for dwellings is likely to be quite different from that assumed by the
> Melbourne 2030 planners. These dwelling preferences imply further demand for living space
> on the fringe, as well as continuing demand for infill accommodation within established
> suburbia (Birrell *et al.* 2005:04-16).

Indeed, data from the 2006 Census supports these claims and shows that 20-34 year olds are over-represented in the apartment population in the inner, middle and outer zones of both Sydney and Melbourne (see Appendix 1) when compared to the total population (see Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1: 2006 Age Profile – Sydney (ABS 2007b)

Age group	% inner zone apartment population	% inner zone total population	% middle zone apartment population	% middle zone total population	% outer zone apartment population	% outer zone total population
0-4	4%	5%	7%	6%	6%	7%
5-14	4%	8%	8%	13%	8%	15%
15-19	3%	5%	4%	6%	4%	7%
20-24	*11%*	9%	*10%*	7%	*9%*	7%
25-34	*32%*	23%	*26%*	15%	*24%*	13%
35-44	17%	17%	16%	15%	15%	15%
45-54	11%	12%	11%	13%	11%	14%
55-64	9%	10%	7%	10%	8%	10%
65-74	5%	6%	5%	7%	6%	6%
75-84	4%	4%	4%	5%	6%	4%
85+	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%

Table 2: 2006 Age Profile – Melbourne (ABS 2007b)

Age group	% inner zone apartment population	% inner zone total population	% middle zone apartment population	% middle zone total population	% outer zone apartment population	% outer zone total population
0-4	3%	5%	6%	6%	4%	7%
5-14	4%	9%	8%	13%	5%	15%
15-19	4%	5%	4%	7%	4%	7%
20-24	*15%*	9%	*8%*	7%	*14%*	6%
25-34	*32%*	19%	*18%*	14%	*28%*	13%
35-44	14%	16%	13%	15%	14%	15%
45-54	9%	12%	11%	14%	10%	14%
55-64	7%	9%	10%	11%	8%	10%
65-74	5%	6%	9%	7%	6%	6%
75-84	4%	5%	9%	5%	5%	4%
85 +	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%

Furthermore, criticism of the mismatch argument has also noted that the extent to which there is any 'mismatch' varies considerably in different parts of a city. Non-spatial analyses therefore are over-simplifications of the issue. Indeed, both the mismatch argument (Maher 1994) and urban consolidation policies (Forster 2006) have come under criticism for not taking into account the complexity of Australian urban geographies:

> the current metropolitan strategies do not come to terms with the dispersed, suburbanised nature of much economic activity and employment and the environmental and social issues that flow from that, and they are unconvincing in their approaches to the emerging issues of housing affordability and new, finer-grained patterns of suburban inequality and disadvantage (Forster 2006:173).

So, what does all of this mean? It means that it would be naive to assume that smaller households will want, or choose, to live in smaller dwellings. There is evidence that younger households *will* live in smaller dwellings, but that this is not necessarily because they *want* to. We now turn to our own research findings and discuss to what extent they support the above criticisms[ii].

In contrast to the findings of Wulff *et al* (2004), we found that amongst our survey respondents, smaller households were more likely to agree that they would prefer to live in an apartment than a house[iii]. Fifty percent of single person households agreed that they would prefer to live in an apartment and the proportion decreasing as household size increased (see Table 3).

Table 3: Response to 'I would prefer to live in an apartment than a house' for survey respondents in Sydney and Melbourne by number of people living in dwelling

No. of people in property	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
1	30%	20%	18%	17%	14%	1%
2	21%	23%	20%	21%	15%	0%
3	16%	17%	18%	27%	22%	1%
4 or more	13%	17%	13%	27%	28%	1%
TOTAL	22%	20%	18%	21%	17%	1%

However, when analysing our results by the age of respondents, we had some striking findings. While the research outlined above indicates that it is 20-34 year olds who are more likely to live in apartments, our research indicates that people in this age group (and people aged 35-54) are significantly less likely to *want* to be living in those apartments than people aged 55 and over, even when the size of the household is taken into account (see Table 4).

Table 4: Response to 'I would prefer to live in an apartment than a house' for survey respondents in Sydney and Melbourne by number of people living in dwelling and age of respondent

Age	Prefer apartment to house	Number of people in property			
		1	2	3	4 or more
18-34	Strongly agree	21%	14%	10%	ID
	Agree	21%	19%	15%	22%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	22%	22%	21%	ID
	Disagree	18%	26%	32%	22%
	Strongly disagree	18%	18%	22%	33%
35-54	Strongly agree	21%	19%	21%	ID
	Agree	21%	27%	19%	17%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	21%	17%	16%	ID
	Disagree	21%	22%	19%	32%
	Strongly disagree	14%	14%	22%	26%
55-64	Strongly agree	56%	36%	ID	ID
	Agree	15%	30%	ID	0%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	ID	19%	ID	ID
	Disagree	ID	ID	ID	ID
	Strongly disagree	ID	ID	ID	ID
>65 yrs	Strongly agree	48%	48%	ID	ID
	Agree	16%	24%	ID	0%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	13%	ID	0%	0%
	Disagree	12%	ID	ID	0%
	Strongly disagree	ID	ID	ID	0%

Note: ID refers to insufficient data (incidences with a count of less than 10 people). 'No opinion' responses are not displayed.

Indeed, younger respondents living in all household types were less likely to agree that they would prefer to live in an apartment than a house than older people (see Table 5). However, within each age group, lone person households were the most likely to agree that they would prefer to live in an apartment, followed by couple families without children. Group households and families with children were the least likely to agree.

Table 5: Response to 'I would prefer to live in an apartment than a house' for survey respondents in Sydney and Melbourne by household type and age

Age	Prefer apartment to house	Household type				
		Lone person household	Family with children	Couple family without children	Group household	Total
18-34	Strongly agree	21%	ID	15%	15%	14%
	Agree	21%	12%	18%	22%	18%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	22%	18%	21%	26%	22%
	Disagree	18%	31%	27%	26%	25%
	Strongly disagree	18%	33%	19%	12%	20%
35-54	Strongly agree	22%	20%	18%	ID	20%
	Agree	21%	16%	29%	25%	22%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	21%	12%	21%	ID	18%
	Disagree	21%	27%	18%	ID	22%
	Strongly disagree	15%	23%	13%	ID	17%
55-64	Strongly agree	56%	29%	36%	67%	43%
	Agree	15%	ID	32%	0%	22%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	ID	ID	20%	0%	13%
	Disagree	ID	ID	ID	0%	10%
	Strongly disagree	ID	ID	ID	ID	11%
>65 yrs	Strongly agree	48%	ID	50%	NA	47%
	Agree	16%	ID	22%	NA	20%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	13%	ID	ID	NA	13%
	Disagree	12%	ID	ID	NA	10%
	Strongly disagree	ID	0%	ID	NA	8%

Note: ID refers to insufficient data (incidences with a count of less than 10 people). 'No opinion' responses are not displayed. Results for other family types, 'other' and 'do not wish to disclose' responses are not included. Couple families with children and lone parent families are both included in 'family with children'.

The lower proportions of young people already living in apartments who said that they would prefer to live in an apartment than a house provides some support to the finding of the 1991 HALC survey that apartments are often used as a stepping-stone for households before they transition to living in a detached house:

> Myself and wife were just looking for somewhere to get on the property ladder and so we just didn't want to keep on renting. (Martin, Sydney)

Further, for some of the younger apartment residents we interviewed, moving out of an apartment and into a detached house was seen as synonymous with starting a family:

> I suppose if we're going to have children in five years or something then I wouldn't really want to be living in an apartment. (Miranda, Melbourne)

Perceived benefits associated with living in a detached house included having a garden and more space:

> I'd like to have a bit more space, I guess, where you don't feel like you've got people living on top of you. (Martin, Sydney)

We also asked people to respond to the statement 'apartment living is my long-term preferred option'. Again, we see that the younger respondents were less likely to agree with this statement.

Table 6: Response to 'apartment living is my long-term preferred option' for survey respondents in Sydney and Melbourne by number of people living in dwelling and age of respondent

Age	Apartment as long term preferred option	Number of people in property			
		1	2	3	4 or more
18-34	Yes	35%	27%	31%	36%
	No	51%	66%	66%	55%
35-54	Yes	42%	47%	46%	32%
	No	50%	48%	46%	52%
55-64	Yes	68%	70%	58%	ID
	No	25%	23%	42%	ID
>65 yrs	Yes	77%	90%	ID	ID
	No	15%	ID	ID	ID

Note: ID refers to insufficient data (incidences with a count of less than 10 people). 'Not sure' responses not displayed.

An interesting finding is that differences in responses are not as significant between different household sizes as they are between different age groups (see Tables 5 and 6). Indeed, within each age group, while trends that larger households being more likely to want to live in detached houses and less likely to see apartment living as their long-term preferred option are observed, they are not clear cut. For example, more people in the 18-34 age group in households with four or more people saw apartment living as their long-term preferred option than households with two people in the property (see Table 6). One possible explanation is that many of those two-person households may be couples thinking of having children in the future (a life-stage effect) while the larger households may comprise of several un-related individuals living as a group household.

Do smaller households want to live in smaller dwellings? Our findings support the argument that whether people want to live in apartments (which are generally smaller dwellings) seems to have more to do with their age, and the stage in their lifecycle, than with their household size per se.

What types of households live in smaller dwellings and do they *choose* to live there, or are their options *constrained*?

As evident from the survey responses presented above, it is not only smaller households who live in apartments. Furthermore, our analysis so far has indicated that amongst our survey respondents, the age of apartment residents rather than household size or household type has a greater impact on their desire to live in an apartment. While younger people may be over-represented in the apartment population overall, in both Sydney and Melbourne, they are also the group who are more likely to live in an apartment due to other constraining factors.

This indicates that there is 'more to the story' than smaller households desiring smaller dwellings; there are many more factors influencing the desires and choices of apartment residents. Indeed, it is essential that any discussion of the pros and cons of apartment living takes into consideration the complexity of the urban

apartment market as this reflects a wide range of needs, attitudes and intentions. Indeed, as Green and White (2007:4) argue:

It is important that, in designing interventions, policymakers keep in mind that not all neighbourhoods or people are the same – where they are located, their history, their socio-demographic and economic characteristics matter. Place-specific factors, such as geographical location, community norms, and historical and current patterns of local employment, are crucial in understanding how and whether interventions work, alongside who is involved in their delivery. This calls for local flexibility in design and implementation of policy.

While it is important to recognise the multiplicity of apartment residents, typologies can be useful to aid in better understanding this complexity. This is especially true when such typologies can be positioned spatially. Indeed, our analysis of the 2006 Census data suggests five major factor groups of apartment residents across both cities. These groups are described in detail in Randolph and Tice (2009). A short summary of each group is reproduced in Table 7.

The apartment market is certainly not socially or economically homogenous and neither is it a-spatial. Indeed, there are significant differences in the apartment market both across and between both cities (see Figure 1).

Table 7: Attributes of five major factor groups of apartment residents, Sydney and Melbourne

	Dominant household type	Dominant age-range	Dominant income range	Dominant tenure	Dominant countries of birth
Battlers	Families with children		Low income (< $50,000 p.a. common)	Rental and ownership	Australia, China, India, Vietnam
Economically Engaged	Singles and couples	Young adults through to early middle-age	Medium to high income (>$90,000 p.a. common)	Rental	
Apartment Elite	Couples	Over 50	High to very high income (>$130,000 p.a. common)	Rental and ownership	Australia
Residentially Retired	Singles	Over 65		Ownership	Australia and United Kingdom
Achieving Education	Singles and group households	Under 25		Rental	China, India and Korea

Note: Blank squares indicate no dominant attribute.

Figure 1: Structure of factor groups by city
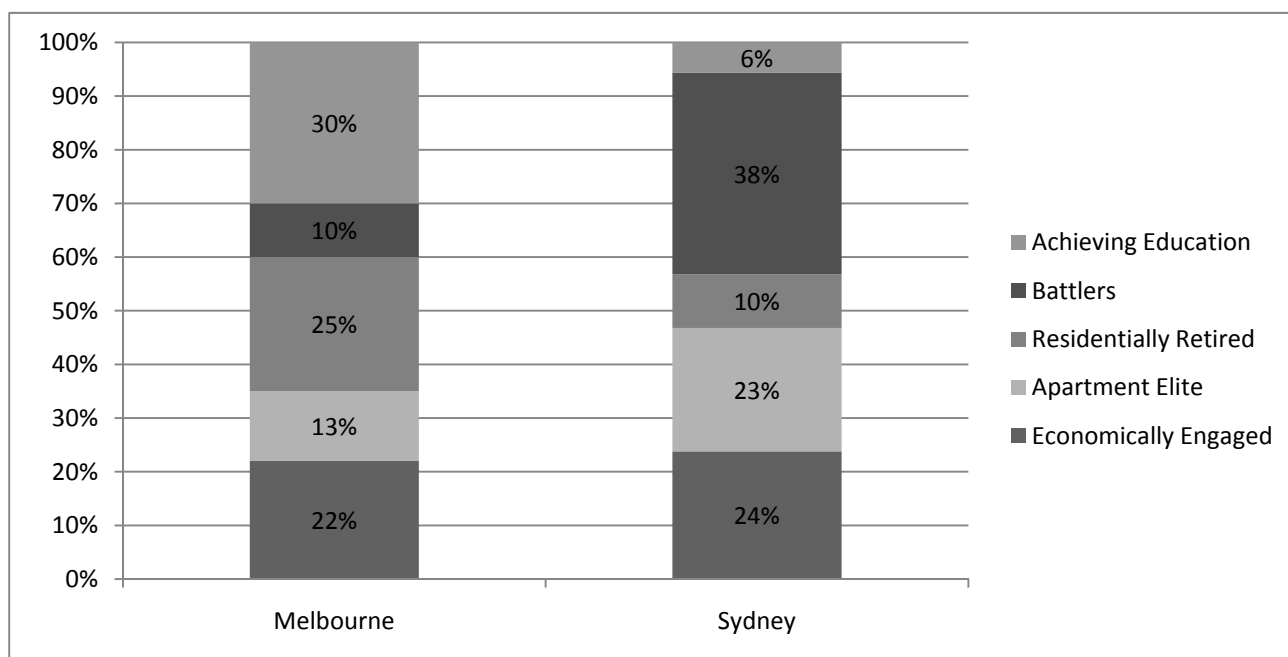
Of particular note is the large difference between the proportions of the Battler, Achieving Education and Residentially Retired groups between the two cities, indicating that the two apartment markets cater to vastly different demographics. As Randolph and Tice (2009) state:

Given the almost identical strategic planning policies in both cities ... the finding that these two markets are driven by significantly different demand groups suggest that planning policies in these two cities may need much finer tuning to the realities of the individual markets than currently.

In addition, the locations of these different factor groups also vary between the two cities. In order to demonstrate this, we split each city into three zones (inner, middle and outer) based on each region's proximity to the CBD (see Appendix 1).

The majority of the Apartment Elite (81% in Sydney and 95% in Melbourne) and Achieving Education (68% in Sydney and 69% in Melbourne) groups in both cities live in inner zones and the Residentially Retired are spread across all zones in both cities. However, the spatial distributions of the other groups vary considerably between the cities. For example, in Melbourne, 89% of the Economically Engaged group live in the inner zone, compared with only 47% in Sydney. Further, while the majority of the Battler group in Melbourne live in the outer zone (64%), in Sydney the majority (63%) are in the middle zone, and only 11% live in the inner zone.

Aside from having vastly distinctive spatial patterns, apartment residents in each of the factor groups also face divergent constraints regarding their housing choices. Indeed, the high proportion of people already living in apartments who said that they would prefer to live in a house, or that apartment living was not their preferred long-term housing option indicates that there are a lot of people living in apartments due to constraints or trade-offs, rather than through personal choice:

I can't afford anything much bigger (Jane[iv], Residentially Retired, Inner Melbourne).

I've traded having – especially for my kids because my youngest is 12 and … I think she still really needed the backyard and it was hard on her because she lost having that kind of suburban stuff around … But what we gained… is … a different kind of lifestyle. Because before I used to have to pick her up from after school care and I'd get there by 6:00pm or

6:30pm. Now … I'm home between 5:00pm and … 6:00pm everyday and then we use that time to do other things (Christine, Economically Engaged, Inner Melbourne).

There was approximately a 50-50 split across both cities between people who would prefer to live in an apartment and those who would prefer a house. However, responses to this question differed significantly between factor groups. In both cities, the group most likely to agree that they would prefer to live in an apartment than a house is the Residentially Retired, followed by the Apartment Elite, while the groups most likely to disagree are the Economically Engaged, Battler and Achieving Education (see Tables 8 and 9). These are also the three groups more likely to comprise younger members, again reflecting the lower desirability for apartments by younger people. Importantly, 45% of the Sydney Battler population (the largest of the five factor groupings in Sydney, and comprised mostly of family households) disagreed with this statement, indicating that not only are there a large proportion of family households in apartments in Sydney, they appear not to be living in an apartment by choice, but rather due to various constraints, such as un-affordability or the need to live close to work or child-care. Conversely, 39% of the Battler population indicated that they would prefer to live in an apartment, suggesting that within this factor group there are also a sizeable proportion that have chosen apartment living:

We've got … no time to upkeep a garden and a house would have been a little bit too much for us to maintain in that sense. And also obviously a house would also beyond what we would be able to pay for. But even if it did come down to being able to buy one … we have no gardening experience at all so that would have been a little bit too much for us I think. (Catherine, Battler, Middle Sydney).

Table 8: Response to statement – I would prefer to live in an apartment than a house – Responses for Melbourne by factor group

Factor group	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Economically Engaged	15%	20%	22%	25%	18%	99%
Battlers	26%	18%	23%	20%	14%	100%
Achieving Education	13%	20%	23%	25%	18%	99%
Residentially Retired	53%	18%	ID	13%	ID	100%
Apartment Elite	26%	20%	26%	ID	ID	96%

Note: ID indicates insufficient data – where there were less than 10 responses.

Table 9: Response to statement – I would prefer to live in an apartment than a house – Responses for Sydney by factor group

Factor group	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Economically Engaged	19%	21%	19%	21%	20%	100%
Battlers	20%	19%	14%	24%	21%	98%
Achieving Education	13%	25%	19%	26%	17%	100%
Residentially Retired	47%	21%	12%	11%	ID	96%
Apartment Elite	28%	28%	16%	13%	14%	99%

Note: ID indicates insufficient data – where there were less than 10 responses.

The interviews also raised a further important point – choice of location, rather than choice of dwelling type, may be the primary factor in decision-making for some households. Indeed, the availability of houses in

particular locations was raised as an issue in the interviews. Some noted that it was not that they did not want to live in a house, but that desirable houses were not available in the area in which they wished to live. For example, Steven, a purchaser (in the Economically Engaged group) from the outer suburbs of Sydney noted:

> If there was a single or double-storey terraced place in the same location … that was close to the station and whatever, like a bit of a small lawn or garden out the back … I think I would prefer that than actually living in a unit, but of course those places aren't available around here.

These findings also reflect the fact that our survey did not ask people whether they would prefer to live in medium density dwelling (e.g. a terrace, row, or semi-detached house). Further research on the desirability of medium-density housing would help further unpack the complexities presented thus far in this paper.

Do apartments suit the lifestyles of those people who live in them?

At first glance, the answer to this question appears to be 'for the most part', with almost three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents agreeing[v] that apartment living suited their lifestyle and 42% strongly agreeing. Further, the majority of people in all five groups said that living in an apartment suited their lifestyle. The Residentially Retired were the most likely to agree (89%), followed by the Apartment Elite (83%), Economically Engaged (73%), Battler (70%) and Achieving Education (68%) groups.

Household size appeared to influence responses to this question, with respondents living in one and two person households being more likely to strongly agree that living in an apartment suited their lifestyle than respondents living in households with three or more people across all factor groups (see Table 10). However, when 'agree and strongly agree' responses are considered together, the picture is less clear. For example, amongst the Achieving Education group, 74% of people in three-person households either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared with 62% of people living in single person households and 65% of those living in two-person households. Again, this indicates that there are more factors at play than household size, even when the results are disaggregated by factor groups.

Our interviews with apartment residents identified a number of factors that influenced the suitability of apartment living to their lifestyles. Common themes from respondents across factor groups included the benefit of not having to care for a garden and maintain a house and being able to live closer to the city. For example:

> I work a lot of hours, so I don't really want to be mowing lawns or tending to a garden or to a really big place and it's quite close to work, which is good. (John, Economically Engaged, Inner Sydney)

> We'd been in our home for 38 years, and [my husband] did all the maintenance, inside and outside, and we just couldn't cope with that anymore, so it was time to downsize. (Sophia, Residentially Retired, Outer Melbourne)

At the same time, we also spoke to people who did not think that living in an apartment suited their lifestyle. For example, Eleanor, a mother of a young toddler noted:

> It's a great apartment if I was a single person or we were just a married couple without kids, but with kids, I just don't feel it's appropriate in our circumstances. (Apartment Elite, Middle Sydney)

People who said that apartment living suited their lifestyle also appeared to be more involved with their neighbours within the building and beyond, being much more likely to respond in the affirmative when asked whether they agreed with the statements 'this apartment block has a good community spirit' and 'I feel as though I belong to my neighbourhood'.

The extent to which apartment living suits someone's lifestyle can also be related to their satisfaction with the apartment they are living in. Survey respondents were asked if they were satisfied with various aspects of their apartments. The majority of people in all factor groups were satisfied with their apartment overall (see Table 11). The lowest level of satisfaction was 68% amongst the 'Achieving Education' group. The Achieving Education group is also the group with the least sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, followed by the Economically Engaged group. These were also the most mobile groups with 88% and 83% respectively having moved within the last five years.

The relationship between household size and overall satisfaction within each factor group is not clear-cut. Amongst the Battler, Achieving Education and Apartment Elite groups, it appears that people in single and two-person households were more likely to say that they were satisfied when compared to people in larger households. However, there was very little difference in response between people in different household sizes amongst the Economically Engaged. The number of Residentially Retired in households of three or more people was too small to make any meaningful observations (see Table 11).

Table 10: Response to the statement 'living in an apartment suits my lifestyle' by number of people living in the property by factor group, Sydney and Melbourne

Number of people in property	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
ECONOMICALLY ENGAGED						
1	51%	30%	12%	ID	4%	ID
2	38%	37%	12%	9%	3%	0%
3	27%	33%	21%	14%	ID	0%
4 or more	24%	36%	16%	19%	ID	0%
BATTLERS						
1	58%	30%	ID	ID	ID	0%
2	39%	37%	14%	10%	ID	0%
3	26%	35%	16%	16%	ID	0%
4 or more	26%	28%	ID	ID	ID	ID
ACHIEVING EDUCATION						
1	28%	34%	ID	ID	ID	0%
2	26%	39%	23%	ID	ID	0%
3	20%	53%	ID	ID	ID	0%
4 or more	ID	52%	ID	ID	0%	0%
RESIDENTIALLY RETIRED						
1	64%	27%	ID	ID	ID	ID
2	70%	20%	ID	ID	0%	0%
3	ID	ID	ID	ID	0%	0%
4 or more	ID	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
APARTMENT ELITE						
1	58%	30%	ID	0%	ID	ID
2	60%	28%	ID	ID	0%	0%
3	39%	35%	ID	ID	ID	0%
4 or more	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	0%

Note: ID indicates insufficient data – where there were less than 10 responses.

Table 11: Level of respondents' overall satisfaction with their apartment, by number of people in the property and factor group of respondent, Sydney and Melbourne

Level of satisfaction	Number of people in property				
	1	2	3	4 or more	Total
ECONOMICALLY ENGAGED					
Satisfied	79%	77%	72%	67%	76%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	12%	15%	22%	26%	16%
Dissatisfied	8%	8%	ID	ID	8%
BATTLERS					
Satisfied	85%	75%	76%	72%	76%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	ID	18%	16%	ID	16%
Dissatisfied	ID	7%	ID	ID	8%
ACHIEVING EDUCATION					
Satisfied	73%	72%	58%	65%	68%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	ID	13%	35%	ID	21%
Dissatisfied	ID	11%	ID	ID	10%
RESIDENTIALLY RETIRED					
Satisfied	89%	91%	ID	ID	89%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	ID	ID	ID	0%	6%
Dissatisfied	ID	ID	ID	0%	ID
APARTMENT ELITE					
Satisfied	89%	83%	77%	ID	82%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	ID	ID	ID	ID	10%
Dissatisfied	ID	ID	ID	ID	7%

Note: ID indicates insufficient data – where there were less than 10 responses. 'No opinion' responses are not displayed. Very satisfied and fairly satisfied responses have been collated and very dissatisfied and slightly dissatisfied responses have been collated.

As well as being asked about their overall satisfaction with their apartment, survey respondents were also asked to report on their levels of satisfaction with a number of attributes of their apartments. These included the size of the apartment, open space, apartment design, noise from neighbours, noise from the surrounding area, affordability and management of the block.

The highest levels of satisfaction amongst all respondents were with size (71% satisfied) and apartment design (70% satisfied), while the lowest levels of satisfaction were with management of the block (55% satisfied) and shared open space (52% satisfied).The implications of these findings are discussed further in the conclusion.

Conclusion

While the supply side of the urban consolidation agenda is well understood by policy makers, economists, planners, builders and developers, much less is known about the demand for apartments in Australia's cities. The little research that has been undertaken in this area suggests that amongst the general population, apartment living has not become a more desirable option. Our own research also indicates that smaller households do not necessarily prefer to live in smaller dwellings and that the extent to which apartments are seen as a desirable option has more to do with a person's age and stage in their lifecycle than their household size.

It is important that urban policy is based upon an understanding of housing demand and preferences if it is to enable free choice among city residents regarding their dwelling options. Indeed, Hamnett (2000:169-170) notes that strategic planning promoting more compact cities "sits uneasily … with current government preferences for urban outcomes which are determined by market and individual choices" (Hamnett 2000:169-170). If urban consolidation policies are to be successful in the long term, they will need to be adapted to take into consideration the residential desires of the population. In a culture dominated by the owner-occupied detached house in the suburbs (Lewis 1999:259), what would attract people to apartment living?

In order to properly address this question, it is important to profile the current apartment population. It cannot be assumed that people living in apartments are all young singles and couples or empty nesters. Indeed, our analysis of the Sydney and Melbourne apartment populations identified five main groups of apartment residents across both cities, each with different characteristics. We have also shown that the compositions of the apartment populations in each city are quite different. The fact that 38% of the apartment population in Sydney are 'Battlers' is particularly significant. As this is the factor group with the largest proportion of households with children (almost two-thirds), this throws into question assumptions about apartments being the domain of 'yuppie' and lone-person households. These findings point to a need for more focus on children in apartments (Randolph 2006, Woolcock & Gleeson 2007). Indeed, our findings indicate that stereotypical assumptions about apartment living only suiting young singles living in the inner city are only part of the story. We found people of different ages and backgrounds who enjoyed living in apartments. For example, David explained that apartment living enabled him to spend more time with his family:

> *…because I'm very time poor. I had previously owned quite a nice split-level home on the North Shore but that really cost me a lot of time on my weekends to maintain it in terms of mowing the lawns and cleaning the gutters and maintaining the whole property … Because I've got a young family I wanted to spend more time with them and less time looking after things. So having the apartment puts me in the heart of the city. I don't have to use the car hardly at all. We walk to most things and attractions and it gives me more freedom and more time to spend with my family (Apartment Elite, Inner Sydney).*

However, our analysis of the preferences of people within each of these factor groups also indicated that in many cases, people are living in apartments not by choice, but as a result of a number of constraints. Indeed, the fact that the majority of the Economically Engaged, Battler and Achieving Education groups would prefer to live in a house than in an apartment indicates that they are living in apartments as a result of a series of trade-offs (including location and affordability). It is important therefore not only to make apartment living more attractive so that more people will choose to live in apartments, but to also make apartment living more pleasant for people who have little choice *but* to live in an apartment.

While initial survey and interview results indicate that many people with children would prefer to live in a house than an apartment, the group most likely to prefer this option was actually the Achieving Education group, while the Battler and Economically Engaged groups had roughly equal proportions of people preferring a house or an apartment. The reasons that people gave for preferring to live in an apartment or a

house are of interest. The most commonly cited benefit of living in an apartment for respondents of all age groups was not having to maintain a large house and garden. Conversely, perceived benefits of a detached house included increased privacy and having a garden.

While only half of apartment residents in Sydney and Melbourne would prefer to live in an apartment than a house and a similar proportion did not see apartment living as a long-term preferred option, approximately three-quarters of apartment residents were satisfied with their apartments; approximately three-quarters of our survey respondents also indicated that apartment living suited their lifestyle. Conversely, this suggests that apartment living does not suit the lifestyles of approximately 1 in 4 apartment residents (28% in Sydney and 21% in Melbourne). If we extrapolate these findings to the entire population of apartment residents in both cities, this would mean that approximately 190,000 people in Sydney and 67,000 people in Melbourne are currently living in apartments and do not think that apartment living suits their lifestyle. This varies by factor group, with the Residentially Retired the most likely to say that apartment living suits their lifestyle, while the Battler and Achieving Education groups found it least suitable. This also suggests that particular attention should be placed on finding ways to make apartment living more satisfactory for those people in the groups more likely to say that apartment living does not suit their lifestyle, or provide alternative dwelling options (e.g. medium density town-houses) to these groups. The survey findings also indicated that those areas that require the most immediate attention in order to improve satisfaction levels are the provision and quality of shared open space (see Judd 1993 for a further discussion of these issues) and the management of apartment buildings (see Easthope and Randolph, 2009 for a further discussion of these issues).

Planning assumptions based on an 'ideal type' of apartment resident – young singles and couples and downsizing empty nesters – do not sufficiently capture the complexity of the apartment population. Neuman (2005) makes the point that when considering the question of whether the compact city provides a more sustainable alternative to urban sprawl, the issue is not whether the urban *form* itself is sustainable, but whether the urban *processes* are sustainable. In this case, the question is not whether more apartments are a sustainable option, but whether increasing number of people living in apartments in our major cities can be sustained. If increased urban consolidation is the aim, then this will need to be accompanied by policies to ensure that the people living in apartments are satisfied. This will require an acknowledgement of the different sub-markets within the apartment population, and the needs of these different groups. It will also require an appreciation of the fact that while apartment living suits the lifestyles of many, smaller households will not necessarily want to live in smaller dwellings, and that some people do not live in apartments by choice. Future urban policies premised on urban consolidation will need to take this into account, and should begin by considering the issues of apartment management and provision of open-space in apartment developments, as well as a serious reflection on policies that promote high- and medium-density housing as viable options for the variety of households who currently live in apartments.

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Appendix 1:

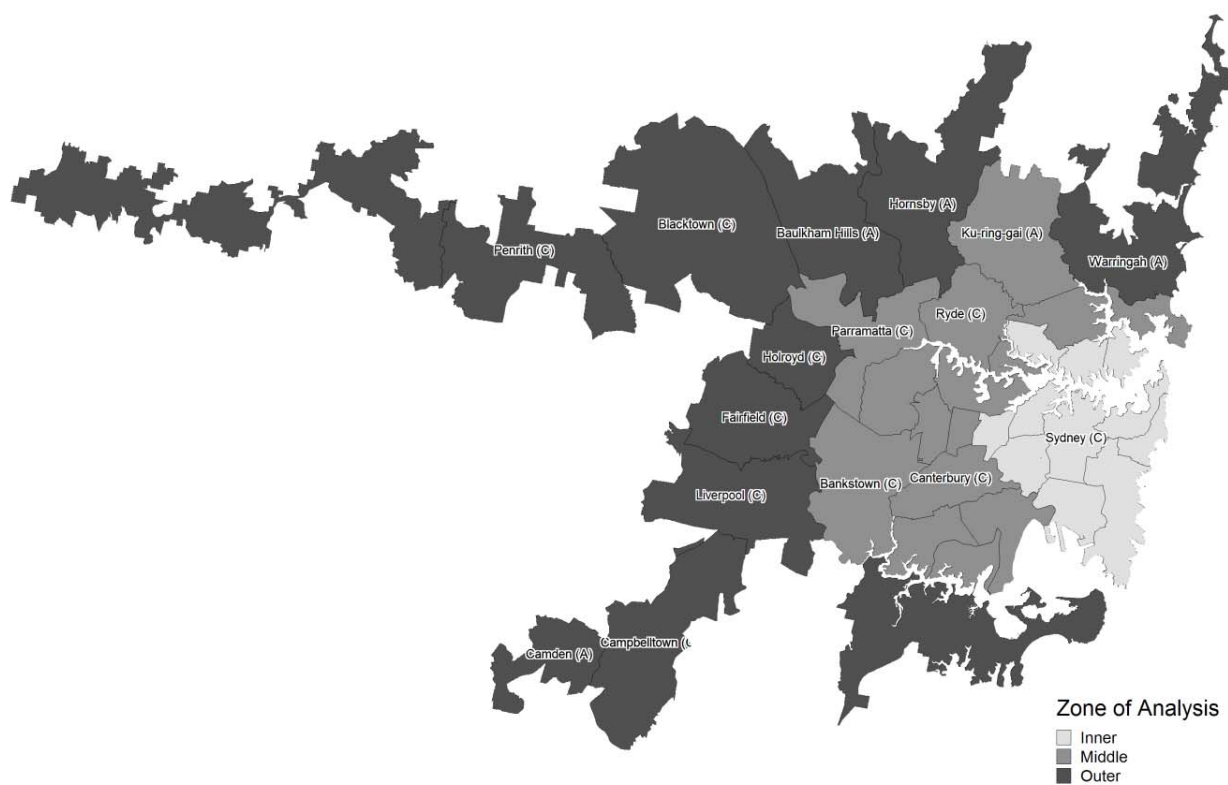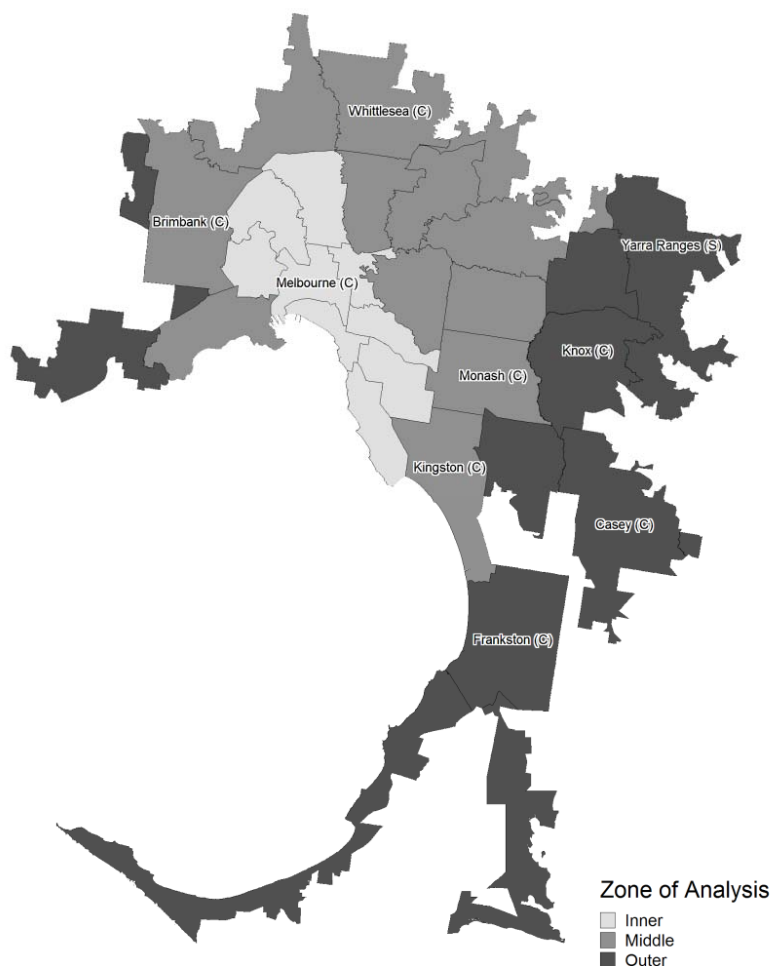Figure 2: Map of inner, middle and outer zones in Sydney

Figure 3: Map of inner, middle and outer zones in Melbourne

[i] For example Mindali *et al*'s (2004) reappraisal of Newman and Kenworthy's (1998) analysis on density and energy consumption.

[ii] It should be noted that our research was undertaken with people *already living in apartments.*

[iii] While this question did not ask if they would prefer to live in a smaller dwelling than a larger one, given the apartment stock tends to consist of much smaller dwellings than the stock of detached houses, this question has been used as a proxy.

[iv] All names are proxies.

[v] i.e. either strongly agreed or agreed.