Tiny Houses: Love, Live or Leave? What factors Influence the Decision?

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Abstract: The tiny house movement in Australia is increasingly popular. It has been touted as a (part) solution to such intractable problems as housing unaffordability, urban sprawl, homelessness and unsustainable housing. Is this hype justified, and has the 'love' of tiny houses resulted in increasing numbers of tiny house dwellers? This paper reports on a research project comprising three questionnaire surveys, social media analysis and informal interviews of those who love, live and leave tiny houses. Demographically, those who lived in tiny houses were younger (under 30) or older (over 55). Most were single or couples, although a few had young children, and a cluster of single women over 55 was evident. The benefits of living tiny included reduced debt, being part of the tiny house community, sustainable living and the 'freedom' to move with one's own home. This freedom was often perceived rather than actual, as local government restrictions on tiny houses remains the most challenging barrier to tiny houses, and often the main reason for leaving for more conventional dwellings. Other issues included difficulties raising children in small spaces, especially in winter; and small space pragmatics such as composting toilets and cooking smells. In conclusion, tiny houses offer some potential to improve housing choice for those who can afford the upfront cost, may offer low impact urban densification option and can foster more sustainable behaviours. This potential will however, not be achieved unless local and state governments regulate tiny houses as a lawful dwelling type.

Key words: Tiny houses, housing affordability, homelessness, densification, Millennials, older women, singles.

Introduction

Are tiny houses the cryptocurrency of housing? Like cryptocurrency, the movement is increasingly popular, with thousands of social media posts and videos; tiny house groups in every city; and regular features in mainstream media (Penfold, Waitt, and McGuirk 2019). Like cryptocurrency, they have been touted as the solution to multiple wicked problems, including unaffordable housing, homelessness, urban consolidation and improving sustainability. Despite this, take-up of tiny house living is extremely low; and in Australia, it is estimated that only around 300 people live in tiny houses (Wenban 2019).

The contemporary tiny house movement is under researched, with most information coming from social media such as Facebook and YouTube. This research paper addresses two important questions; it is common that tiny houses are considered an ‘affordable’ housing option, but how realistic is this assumption; and do the barriers to tiny house living mean that they will always be a very small, niche market?

The paper first identifies how the movement originated and what exactly is a tiny house; then describes how unaffordable housing drives interest in the movement. It briefly describes how local government planning and local laws creates impediments to tiny house living. Then, based on the results of three questionnaire surveys, a series of semi-structured interviews and social media analysis, the paper explores some motivations for tiny house living, as well as the barriers, particularly the planning system and inherent pragmatic problems, to tiny houses.

The paper concludes that tiny houses could be used to allow some (temporary) urban infill, if local government planning restrictions and local laws were modified to allow such dwellings. If councils allowed more flexibility, particularly around renting backyards to tiny houses, they can improve housing outcomes for certain demographics, such as older singles and young people. However, it also concludes that tiny houses are very costly per square meter and need a large upfront cash payment or time and workshop facilities to construct, thus are not necessarily more affordable than standard housing.
**History of tiny houses**

To begin, we need to first briefly explore the history of the contemporary tiny house movement to differentiate contemporary tiny houses from tiny dwellings, which of course, comprise the majority of global housing.

In the late 1990s in the Pacific Northwest of the USA, a recession combined with unaffordable housing made the 'Great American Dream' of owning one’s own (detached) house increasingly remote (Anson 2014; Evans 2018). The writer Jay Shafer and architect Sarah Susanka were early initiators of the Tiny House on Wheels (THOW); building a house on a trailer meant saving on land costs as well as circumventing planning restrictions that mandated minimum sizes for houses and interior rooms (Mutter 2013; Anson 2014; Schenk 2015; Susanka and Obolensky 2001). Their THOW, such as Shafer's Tumbleweed Tiny House however were structurally and architecturally similar to others that preceded it, being the latest in a continuum of mobile housing, ranging from covered wagons and gypsy caravan, to houses on early automobiles, the caravanning culture, to the trailer home (Recreational Vehicle or manufactured home) of the USA and the contemporary #vanlife movement (Anson 2014; Evans 2018; Shearer and Burton 2018). The 'freedom' of a mobile home also reflects the grey nomad and snowbird subcultures, and the counterculture 'hippy' era of the 1960s and 1970s.

Running parallel to this, particularly in the USA, is the trailer home industry (Mitchell 2014; Evans 2019, 2018). In the 1970s, these became popular as affordable housing, but unlike the hippies, who were mostly young, middle class and white, residents of trailer parks are older, from different cultural backgrounds, and from lower socio-economic classes. These mass produced, and rapidly constructed trailer homes are subject to significant stigma in the USA, as wealthier homeowners view their residents as contributing to increased crime rates and reducing property values (Evans 2018). For this reason, most are given special exclusionary zoning, usually in undesirable areas and far away from more permanent housing (Evans 2018). These are less common in Australia, but similarly, ‘permanent’ caravan parks are viewed as home to various undesirables and situated well away from the suburbs. Similarly to the hippies, the creators of the first contemporary THOW were white, middle class professionals, who were forced out of the housing market by global macroeconomic forces (Anson 2014).

Nor was the motivation of self-sufficiency by constructing one’s own house particularly innovative. As far back as the late 1800s, the writer Henry David Thoreau wrote in ‘Walden’ of building his own house to be ‘self-sufficient’ (albeit largely dependent on the largesse of his mother) (Diguette 2017; Anson 2014). Self-sufficiency by building a cabin or taking a caravan and going back to the land has been part of US culture since European settlement. In Australia, the ‘shack’ culture also has a long history, especially in rural and seaside areas (Selwood and Jones 2010).

In Australia, the tiny house movement has followed the same trajectory as the USA, albeit beginning somewhat later (around 2011). Likewise, it was first popularised in social media, and motivated by unaffordable housing, and a desire for self-sufficiency, although, unlike the USA, Australia rarely has minimum house sizes (Ford and Gomez-Lanier 2011; McKinlay, Baldwin, and Stevens 2017). Similarly, the ‘Great Australian Dream’ of owning a detached house is increasingly unattainable (Anglicare Australia 2019). Australia has highly unaffordable housing, and a large property owning urban middle class, which uses its political influence to resist initiatives to densify the suburbs and provide affordable dwellings to purchase or rent (Butt and Stephenson 2019).

**What is a tiny house?**

An attempt to define tiny houses was in Shearer & Burton (2018), who categorised them according to three structural factors (mobility, size and design) and four societal factors (affordability, sustainability, legal status and community focus). Their research differentiated tiny houses into tiny houses on wheels (THOW), semi mobile tiny houses (on semi-permanent foundations) or permanent (granny flats). Caravans and buses, especially if modified, are often considered tiny houses, and many tiny house advocates live in such dwellings, but apartments are not considered as tiny houses. This article only discusses THOW and to a lesser extent, semi mobile tiny houses. It does not discuss granny flats as they are dependent on already owning land, with an existing house.

The first and most obvious differentiation is size; but is this total size, size per capita, or size in comparison to average house size? Size is also dependent on the form, as Tiny Houses on Wheels (THOW) have a maximum possible size, due to road regulations, but semi mobile tiny houses can be larger. Generally
speaking, the maximum size for a tiny house is considered 37 square meters (400 square feet), but most tend to be smaller.

With regard to mobility; the first contemporary tiny houses were built on trailer bases, to circumvent planning restrictions on maximum house size, and to allow the owners to live in a (detached) dwelling without the necessity to purchase (expensive) land. Semi mobile tiny houses are moved more rarely if at all, due to moving costs. As THOW are built on trailer bases, they are subject to size restrictions; the total permissible width for a standard road vehicle is 2.5m wide and 4.2m high, and weight must be less than 4 tons. Because the construction methods for THOW emulate standard houses, they are much sturdier, and heavier than caravans.

Design is integral to the contemporary movement, as the first THOW were built by architects. Although the movement is strident in its desire to differentiate itself from ‘trailers', most contemporary tiny houses borrow liberally from trailer design and they are often constructed by the same companies who offer ‘tiny house loans' instead of trailer loans. Some even term THOW as ‘Hipster Trailers'. The tiny house movement also differentiates THOWs from caravans, although many live in converted caravans, and the movement advocates local government designating them as such to bypass planning restrictions. Nobody in the tiny house movement appears aware of the inherent tension implicit in this.

It is difficult to quantitatively estimate the environmental sustainability of tiny houses, as there is a paucity of scholarly research on the subject (Saxton, 2019). A tiny house uses proportionately fewer resources than a standard house; although they generally use the same building materials. Many are more sustainable in day to day operation, as are off grid and do not use fossil fuel-based power, obtain water from rainwater, and have composting toilets. Their siting is also likely to be more sustainable, as being mobile, they can be located (depending on the size, slope and other constraints of the site) to take advantage of prevailing winds, shade and optimum sunshine.

Residents may also be more sustainable by changing behaviour, even after moving to more conventional dwellings. They may live in a smaller dwelling, continue to conserve resources such as water and electricity, and minimise consumption (Anson 2014; Evans 2019; Mangold and Zschau 2019). For example, ecological footprints of 80 US-based tiny house dwellers diminished by 45% after moving to a tiny house (Saxton 2019). Conversely, some drive more to access distant services (if in a rural area) or spend more on going out (if in the city). Tiny houses are also cheap and easy to heat, cool and clean; the interior heats up quickly with a small heater or fireplace, and to cool, it is simple to open windows, roof vents or use a small air-conditioned.

**Are tiny houses affordable?**

House prices in developed countries such as Australia and the USA have continued to rise at a much faster pace than income (Cox and Pavletich 2018; Anglicare Australia 2019). Australian house prices, especially in capital cities, rank highly in global measures of unaffordable housing, with most considered severely or extremely unaffordable (Cox and Pavletich 2018; Crabtree 2018). Australian property prices have dropped slightly in recent months, but all housing markets are still considered severely unaffordable (Cox and Pavlevitch 2019). The rental situation is worse; a recent report by Anglicare (2019) estimated that only two properties in the entire country were affordable to someone reliant on government benefits. Increasingly common in urban areas are lone households (27.46% of all private rentals) and unrelated group households (9.18%). The proportion of both types is forecast to increase, with lone households making up over one third of all households by 2041 (ABS 2019).

Affordability is not just about cost (rental or mortgage), it is also about land prices, income and labour dynamics (i.e. proximity to jobs and services and availability of finance) as well as location. Australia has areas of cheaper housing, usually in remote areas, generally with limited access to many employment opportunities, services, schools or hospitals. Banks are highly risk averse, and limit mortgage finance to those with good credit ratings, a demonstrated savings record, and steady employment. Affordable rental properties are rare, and while there are fewer checks on proportion of rent to income, the very high demand means owners and their agents can and do discriminate on prospective tenants (Anglicare Australia 2019). Exacerbating this in recent years is the proliferation of short-term rentals such as Airbnb, which puts further pressure on the rental market (Gurran and Phibbs 2017; Alizadeh, Farid, and Sarkar 2018).
Australia has a growing number of ‘hidden homeless’; these people, often single women over 55, are essentially homeless, but are different to ‘rough sleepers’ who may have mental health or substance abuse issues (Petersen and Parsell 2015). Often lifelong renters or having lost a house due to an economic or marital crisis, the hidden homeless have low levels of superannuation and/or contemporary work skills (Petersen and Parsell 2015). They are ‘hidden’ because instead of being on the streets, they live in garages, caravans and sheds, in cars, or move often, pet-sitting or staying with family.

In terms of overall cost, tiny houses are cheaper to build than standard houses, purely because they are so much smaller. Despite frequent claims in social media that a THOW can be constructed for less than $20k, most tiny houses (including owner-built) cost over $25,000, with most ranging from $45,000 to $125,000, and two costing more than $125,000. High-end THOW frequently include luxury fixtures and fittings (Penfold, Waitt, and McGuirk 2019), although the trailer and solar systems are often the costliest features. THOW are generally less than 20 square meters so a $65,000 THOW will cost approximately $3,250 per square meter, whereas a basic mass-produced house costs around $1,000 per square meter.

Tiny houses are not necessarily affordable, because to buy or build a tiny house requires a relatively large sum of cash savings, or a steady income (and time and space to build the tiny house). It is impossible to get mortgage finance or unsecured personal loan for THOW because banks consider these as depreciating assets, like a car or caravan. Moreover, security of tenure is problematic, because persistent and deep-seated land use barriers exist to placing tiny houses in most cities, and the few that are currently sited in urban areas are largely ‘under the radar’ (Weetman 2019).

**Land use barriers to tiny houses**

The planning and zoning system in Australia aims to separate undesirable land-uses to prevent possible impacts on health, safety and amenity (Butt and Stephenson 2019). Within zones, further categorisations require specific site coverages, provision of parking, number of dwellings, and so on. Overlay zones such as steep land, environmental values and fire zones further restrict what may be built. Councils also use local laws to minimise potential impacts on property owners, by prohibiting noise before certain times, or numbers and type of pets.

Planning and zoning restrictions pose a significant obstacle to the incorporation of tiny houses in the urban fabric. THOW, do not fit into any existing planning scheme, are not currently compliant with the Building Code of Australia (BCA). Most councils consider THOW to be temporary mobile dwellings (caravans) which are restricted by the specific local laws, making it difficult for an owner to rent space. Brisbane in Queensland is the only capital city that currently allows this, although Fremantle, a suburb of Perth, has a specific tiny house zone. Even where it is permitted to live in a caravan (some councils ban this entirely), there are usually restricted periods of occupancy and conditions such as access to the main house or connecting to urban utilities. Moreover, even if nominally permitted, a complaint from a neighbor may result in a notice to move the THOW.

Even in the USA, where tiny houses are more common, and which has a (fixed) tiny house specific Appendix Q to the International Construction Code (equivalent to the BCA), few councils allow tiny houses, and they are generally not supported by homeowners. For example, Evans (2019) found that homeowners in two counties only approved of tiny houses if they were placed in a tiny house specific area, and not as infill. Moreover, counter to the arguments by some that tiny houses can be a source of short-term rental income, residents were all significantly against tiny houses for Airbnb (Evans 2019, 2018).

**Methods**

This study used an exploratory, multi-method approach, which included three questionnaire surveys (with closed and open questions), semi-structured interviews with tiny house dwellers and tiny house builders, social media analysis (Facebook tiny house groups and YouTube tiny house programs¹), and ethnographic analysis (attending gatherings and staying in a tiny house). No focus groups were held due to the dispersed geographical location of participants. The research being mostly qualitative, was not random, and results cannot be generalised to the wider population, but it can be used to value-add to other research on the tiny house movement.

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¹ Living Big in a Tiny House (Langston 2020)
Recruitment for the interviews and questionnaires was done by snowball sampling of tiny house social media groups, emails to known associates of the author and by publishing preliminary results of the second survey in an article in The Conversation (Shearer, 2017), which had a link to the survey. This more than doubled responses (from 173 to 442). The third survey was run in 2018 by the Australian Tiny House Association, and the results shared with the author (ATHA Survey 2019; Wenban 2019).

Open questions were collated, recorded and transcribed and inputted into NVivo™, and all interview participants gave permission for recording. Notes were made from social media videos and Facebook posts and added to NVivo. Where possible, demographic data on age and gender was collected, as well as family characteristics (numbers and age of children). Tiny house builders were interviewed separately to provide information on construction cost, and the third survey also sought information on tiny house builders. The text inputs were analysed using content analysis, and coded for common themes, which were further refined with axial coding.

**Results and Discussion**

Six broadly overlapping, but sufficiently distinct themes resulted from the analysis. Two were economic (reducing debt and preventing homelessness), and the others were the desire for sustainable living, the search for community, problems with planning, and freedom. Freedom was a complex, multifaceted theme, and related to both economic (freedom from financial obligations) and socio-cultural (freedom of movement and freedom from regulations). Limitations of the research are of course, that these are qualitative opinions of tiny house dwellers interviewed, and do not provide empirical evidence of the actual affordability etc. of tiny houses.

**Tiny houses and their humans**

Tiny house dwellers were generally under 30 or over 55, with the younger cohort most commonly couples (often with young children) and the older cohort single, and predominantly female. Younger tiny house dwellers wanted to live close to the city (usually for work) or in rural areas (to live sustainably), and ‘under the radar’ (without council approval). Most older dwellers wished to live close to the city, to access services such as hospitals, and be close to family. Nonetheless, the majority (80%) lived in rural areas (ATHA, 2019).

Age was strongly linked to planning regulations; younger participants were less concerned whether they could live legally in the tiny house, while older participants were more risk averse and concerned about their investment. This is likely because younger people are more easily able to find employment than retirees, who were dependent on superannuation or pension income. As one 60+ woman said in the second survey:

> The biggest problem to me is that there is no certainty, even after building and siting tiny house, to think that someone, probably a neighbour, could make it difficult or impossible to live in your tiny house.

Approximately 20% of tiny house dwellers lived with children, even teenagers, although babies and toddlers were more common. Living in a tiny house with babies, especially in areas with cold and wet winters, posed a significant challenge, and was the reason why some people left their tiny house. No private space or ability to close off rooms created issues with sound. When the author spent a week with a couple who lived in a tiny container house, it was impossible to block out a crying baby at 3am.

Tiny house dwellers were almost universally happy with their home (only one interviewee and one survey respondent were unhappy). The main benefits given for tiny house living were pragmatic, day-to-day activities such as ease of cleaning, rapid heating or cooling, minimalisation forcing conscious and reduced consumerism, low cost and maintenance and in the words of two survey respondents: ‘a lifestyle of less - less stuff, less cleaning, less worries’ and ‘freedom and security when society collapses’ (ATHA Survey 2019).

One negative was loft bedrooms, as most THOW had loft bedrooms, accessible by ladder or steps, and too low to stand upright. Loft bedrooms are unsuitable for anybody with mobility issues, and if they lack rails or balustrades, may be dangerous, particularly for young children. Older people in particular were opposed to loft bedrooms:
Rapidly closing in on 60 here...a loft involves stairs, stairs involve bending and straightening knees and hips and <they> often get ornery and contrary (Male, 50s, Facebook comment)

The small size also meant a lack of storage for basic items such as kitchen equipment and clothes, but also for tools, hobby and sporting goods. Toilets and cooking were the source of the many complaints. Many disliked separating and disposing of urine and feces from composting toilets or disposing of the waste from chemical toilets. The small open space also meant that cooking smells permeated the entire house, including bed linen and curtains. Regardless of these criticisms, almost all tiny house dwellers were positive about their experience, even if they had eventually left their tiny house.

**Reduction of debt**
The strongest motivation given for tiny house living was affordable housing, reduction of debt, saving money for a property and reducing the cost of living. People said that tiny houses were *the solution to the housing affordability crisis* and *it's such a priceless and affordable solution*. But how realistic are these assumptions?

Reasons for wanting a tiny rather than standard house were a desire for more secure tenure, for a detached house with a garden and to have pets. Promoters of tiny houses say that they offer one way that people can afford a detached house in a desirable area. Theoretically, a tiny house that costs around $65,000 could be placed in a suburb where surrounding houses cost $650,000 and upwards. Advocates said that they offered more secure tenure—if your lease runs out, you can take your house with you. Many interviewees wished to locate their tiny houses on another person’s property and pay rent (in cash or in lieu of help with gardening, pet sitting etc.). These rents ranged from zero (uncommon) to $200 per week and were generally around $100 per week. Several respondents mentioned dogs; as a single woman in her 40s, said:

> A tiny house with a small fenced off yard for my small dogs is really all I need. I'd be happy to live in a TH community with communal gardens etc. this is my only viable option to own a home and homelessness in the future is <a> real fear.

Although generally negative about debt, some bemoaned the lack of mortgage funding for tiny houses. Many saw their tiny house as a stepping stone to property ownership and recognised that this would have to be in a rural area because of property costs. As noted in Penfold, Waitt, and McGuirk (2019), some felt that THOW allowed luxury fixtures and fittings which would be unaffordable in a larger house; and others felt that tiny houses allowed more disposable income to spend on travel, experiences and luxuries such as private schools. As two survey respondents said:

> We also want to be able to pay for some luxuries such as private school fees (couple, 30s).

> I can have everything I want in a tiny house that I design myself- I don't have to compromise (female, 40s)

Nobody questioned the inherent contradiction behind wanting to reduce debt to afford expensive experiences or include luxury fixtures and fittings. Some briefly mentioned that building or buying a tiny house required upfront cash or income, but this was not seen as an insurmountable problem, as most had some savings, superannuation or were working.

**Prevention of homelessness**
In contrast to those who wanted to reduce debt, save up for a conventional property, or free up income for alternative consumerism, a smaller, but disturbingly large proportion of respondents feared becoming homeless. A single woman in her 50s spoke of experiencing a period of homelessness, where she slept in her car:

> I was homeless following an acute mental health incident. After sleeping in my car for some time a friend offered me a free room in kind for garden work.
The majority of these were women over 55, in keeping with research by Petersen and Parsell (2015). They were either still working, studying to re-enter the workforce, or were retired. This reflects the Anglicare (2019) study which found that there were almost no available rentals in Australia for people on benefits. Like the survey respondent below, most were single and despaired how they would survive on government benefits.

I have rented my entire life. I am now 57 and if I have to continue to rent into retirement, I will be homeless when I retire. My pension will not allow me to pay rent.

Many of the international tiny house initiatives have been to provide such dwellings for the homeless, and include an Australian community group, Launch Housing, has entered into an arrangement with the Victorian Government and a developer to build and place temporary housing on state land such as road reserves (Launch Housing 2019).

The search for sustainable community

Many expressed a strong desire to live together in sustainable ‘community’. Most THOW were off-grid, and residents emphasized minimalisation, reducing consumption and saving on heating and cooling. People expressed a wish to live in harmony, sharing cars and tools, and working on collaborative gardens and other environmental activities. Two survey respondents said:

At this stage I’m curious about tiny house living, exploring an alternative sustainable, debt free lifestyle within a community (Female, 50+).

We are a young couple looking to build our ideal home. Fulfilling our sustainable values, ideally in a like-minded community. We aren’t doing this because of financial reasons but rather in search of a meaningful lifestyle (Couple, 20s) (ATHA Survey 2019).

Despite this, the majority lived as in any other detached house, albeit on other people’s property. They often helped with chores, such as gardening or pet sitting, but no more so than in share housing. When on another property, the council often required access to the main house, for example, for laundry purposes, or to connect to utilities. Tiny house dwellers resented this, complaining that it hindered self-sufficiency and imposed unnecessary obligations.

Urban tiny house dwellers were more often part of the urban community, and used shared public resources, such as libraries, parks and museums. A woman in her 20s frequented the State Library, using the internet to look for jobs, and to socialize. Another young stay-at-home mother, living on a rural property, spoke of driving an hour each way most days of the week to take her son to playgroup, or to meet other mothers. The environmental impact of private vehicle use was not discussed by any respondents, though many strove to live more sustainably. The practice of community, as in sharing resources was rare; highlighted by frequent references to the concept of ‘freedom’.

Freedom

Freedom was a strong motivator for tiny house living in all aspects of the research. The concept was, however, poorly defined, and appeared bimodal—freedom from debt and freedom from regulation. Regarding financial freedom, people wanted to be able to do things that they were not permitted as renters, and to free up time usually spent working.

I just want to own my home. I have been a renter for 30 years and long to own my own space and have more freedom to do things I love and work less (Female, 40s).

Some spoke of the freedom resulting from being ‘forced’ into tiny house living because of financial reasons.

We were financially forced into going down this tiny living road, but along the way have come to realise what a freedom it is to live like this, and are very grateful for it, and feel it’s a better way of living (ATHA Survey 2019).

Others saw freedom as meaning not having to conform with (excessive and onerous) regulations, similar to the more libertarian antecedents of the USA tiny house movement (Mangold and Zschau 2019; Anson 2014). As two young males on Facebook said:
This movement is about FREEDOM and no one should be no one should be told what to do or judges <sic> for their decisions

It's the ‘slavery’ of the consumer/corporate system...freedom to have more life

Freedom from regulation largely meant freedom from council planning policies and local laws; which are viewed as the major drawback to the progress of the tiny house movement.

**Planning**

THOW are illegal in most council areas, and where nominally permitted, are classed as temporary dwellings (aka caravans), with limitations on occupation. In reflection of this, the majority of tiny house dwellers (80%) had not attempted to get council permission to site their tiny houses (ATHA Survey 2019). They placed their tiny houses ‘under the radar’ on large properties in rural areas or in private backyards of urban properties, not seeking council permission, but frequently discussing it with neighbours. As a male survey respondent in his 50s said:

It's all about planning issues, isn't it? Most people...are held back by the fact that it's pretty much illegal...I'm only concerned about being caught out. If I can get away with flying under the radar, I'll be perfectly happy. being outside regular planning frameworks is a freedom as well as a problem. So, I'm hoping to find a spot that I can build a tiny house, and do it however I like, before the planning bureaucrats arrive and ruin all the fun - and the affordability.

Councils were mixed in their attitudes to tiny houses; most considered them caravans and thus subject to local laws on temporary dwellings. Even if people owned their own property, some did not allow them to put any sort of temporary dwelling on the site; a young survey respondent in SA said:

My council had told me I'm not even allowed to camp on my <own> land (ATHA Survey 2019)

Other councils were relatively easy-going, and ignored people living in tiny houses (including caravans) as long as nobody complained. Moreover, a large proportion of people were actively lobbying councils to permit tiny houses,

**Conclusion**

Motivations for choosing to live in a tiny house included reducing debt, as a bulwark against homelessness, environmental sustainability, the search for community and freedom; and barriers were mostly related to inflexible council rules. Nonetheless, the take up of tiny house living is extremely low and is likely due to two major factors; the intransigence and inflexibility of local governments in recognising tiny houses as a legitimate housing option, and the fact that tiny houses are not particularly affordable, as they have relatively high upfront costs.

In terms of total cost, tiny houses are more affordable than standard housing, but require relatively large upfront sums, or disposable income and time and space to build them. THOW are also expensive per square meter, similar to the cost of higher end standard housing; and often included expensive fixtures and fittings. This partly reflects the trailer and solar system that are often the most expensive part of tiny houses but also the lack of competition in a relatively new industry. The frequent references to preventing homelessness is a disturbing reflection of the housing situation in Australia. Providing tiny houses for those at-risk of homelessness would necessitate external funding, as these vulnerable people would almost certainly not be able to purchase or build a tiny house.

The construction and day to day operation of tiny houses was more sustainable than standard housing, as they use lower resources overall and are frequently off-grid. Living in a tiny house also appears to foster more environmentally sustainable behaviour, even after leaving the tiny house; however little mention was made of the environmental cost of increased driving or consumption of experiences. More research is needed on accurately estimating the environmental sustainability of tiny houses however, as this is an almost completely unstudied subject.
Although many respondents wished to be part of a community (in a broader sense than the tiny house community), their actions did not reflect this. They lived as in any other detached house but used public goods and services to a greater extent. In contrast was a strong emphasis on freedom; freedom from debt, work stresses and from regulations.

Council barriers were ever present; arguably, should these be relaxed to permit tiny house dwelling (most likely under specific conditions and possibly paying a rates type fee) it would grow the movement, particularly in the older demographic. THOW are usually built to high standard, and often in accordance with the BCA, and Australia could emulate the USA, where Appendix Q modifies the building code to permit tiny houses. If councils are serious about urban consolidation and improving housing affordability, they should consider permitting tiny houses.

In conclusion, tiny houses are certainly not the panacea for all urban ills but if permitted by councils, may offer some potential for temporary infill housing, as well fostering more environmentally sustainable behaviour. Until local councils are more accepting of such dwellings however, they are not likely to be any more than a niche market. They are not particularly affordable but may provide a stepping-stone to more traditional home ownership, particularly for younger, employed people and some older people with cash savings.. Perhaps the fundamental issue here is that due to the housing affordability crisis, many potential and actual tiny house dwellers are going tiny not from choice but from necessity.

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