

we're livin' in the microsuburbs

a concept for an affordable, small-house suburban typology

The humble Australian house was once the object of the Australian dream. Today, it is caught in a web of ever-widening financial speculation, a world where 'housing' is no longer a verb (to house), but a commodity. Our houses are increasingly the most overextending purchases of our lives, and increasingly an unreachable fantasy for the next generation.

So how do we accommodate 'affordability' in an environment where affordability is itself relegated to being just another market force? How do we accommodate demographics that, in the case of our traditional, mass produced housing typologies (detached, semi-detached, terrace, apartment) no longer need big houses, where rooms are superfluous, expensive and over-extend our financial capacity precisely because of our adherence to 'typology'? What if housing typology was one of the primary causes of over-capitalization, and a fundamental contributor to the housing affordability issues facing Australia? And how can Canberra avoid these trends in its own future?

This proposal explores the 'microsuburb' and the investigation of small, modular, room-based housing typologies. The central refocusing of housing we propose comes from the reframing of the base financial unit of housing. Rather than the 'type' of house - detached, semi, terrace, apartmnet etc - we propose that the base unit of a new typology of housing is the room itself.

Houses and housing typologies are an amalgamation of rooms, in different combinations and in different conventions, but what if we saw the room as the base financial, and base social unit of housing?

We propose a taxonomical approach to housing, whereby each individual house and housing typology is an exercise in modular house construction from an additive combination of a potential infinite selection of carefully crafted rooms.

For example, while a traditional nuclear family might suit an 'off-the-shelf' typological approach, what about - a single work-from-home father with two children? What combination of rooms would be most suitable here?

By reducing the base financial and social unit to 'the room', developers and clients can work together to produce a unique, small-house type for every new client. A single father, a same-sex couple, an immigrant family, or a couple with no children can select only the rooms they want, and new housing typologies emerge from unique, case-by-case, modular construction exercises, and a plan for succession built into the planning of the microsuburb community. Microsuburbs could be proposed as small collections of small houses existing in infill or greenfields sites, along side traditional development forms or in key, strategic locations.

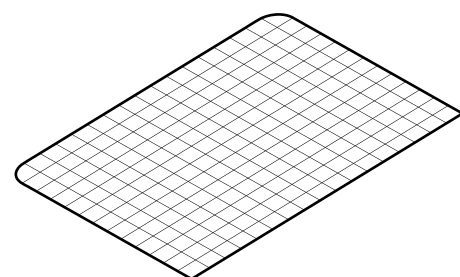
Key Concepts Challenged

- minimum separation/setbacks between individual dwellings
- number of dwellings on individual blocks
- modes of titling (strata, torrens, company etc)

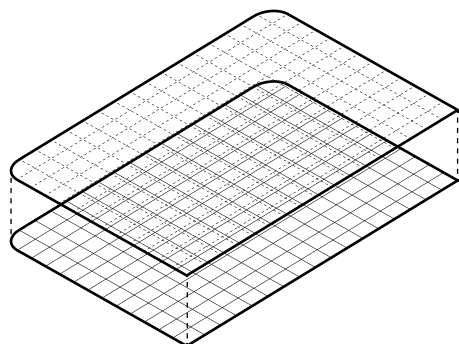
Notes on Construction Costs

- the modular intent provides significant flexibility to mix-and-match products and finishes with budget. We expect, in collaboration with interested parties, a variety of cost brackets could be easily developed, starting with construction sub \$2000/m2. However, we believe that 'affordable housing' should not compromise on quality in favour of cost, but instead focus on delivering smaller, higher-quality dwellings.

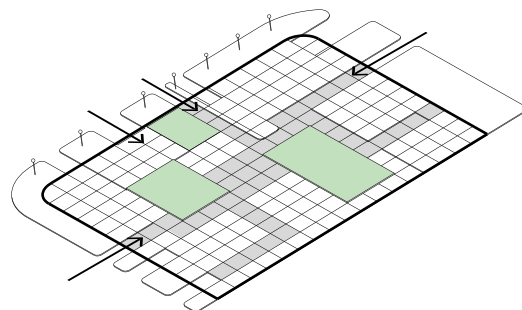
forming a microsuburb (on a generic/provided site)



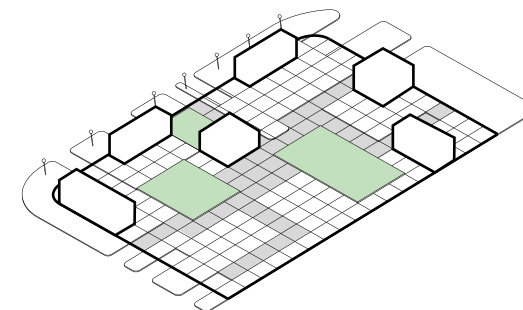
- ① Site is divided in a 'room-grid' - provisionally 4m x 4m to allow for sufficient depth in walls to accommodate well insulated and well built walls and structure.



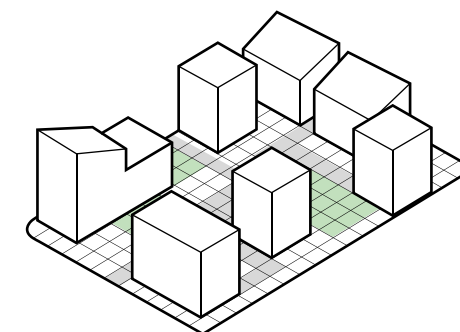
- ② This 4m x 4m grid is extended 3-dimensionally, able to respond to contextual changes in height, solar access or other environmental and legislative controls.



- ③ Traditional 'masterplanning' elements are added into the grid: access routes, public paths, communal gardens or parks, veggie patches. Activation of the rear of the block is prioritized.

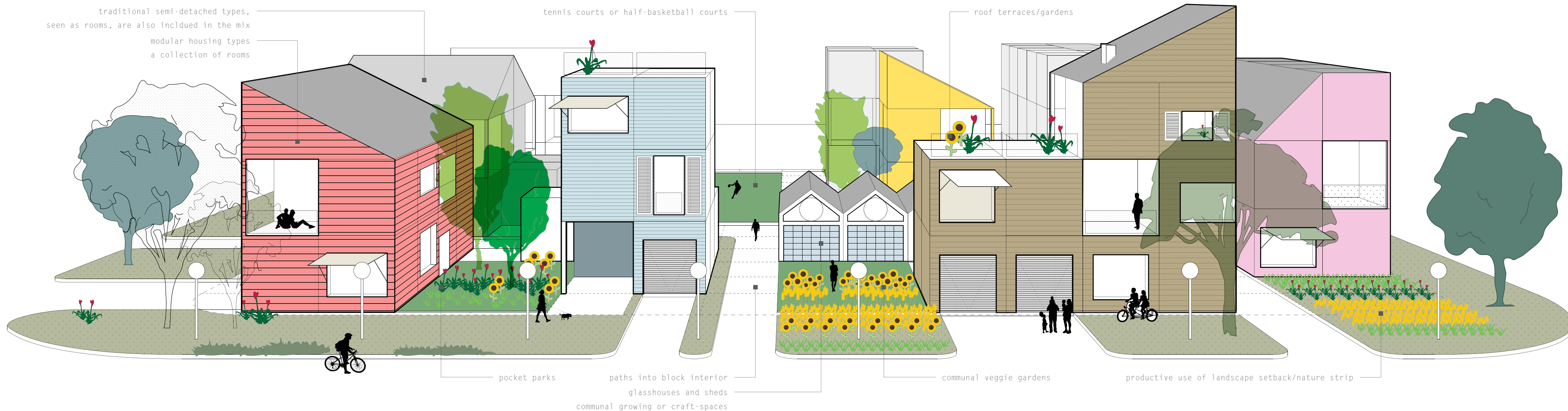


- ④ Houses are added, room by room, starting from the outside of the block and extending inwards. Room is allowed for future expansion, on a room by room, modular basis. Typologies 'emerge' from this accumulative development process.



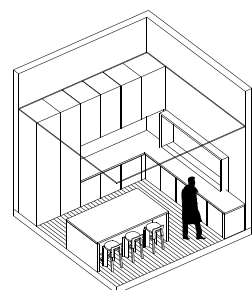
- ⑤ The microsuburb eventually reaches full saturation, as an over-time additive process. Each house is a unique typological experiment, combining modular rooms and modular constructions to present a dense, amenable and affordable lifestyle.

a prototypical microsuburb

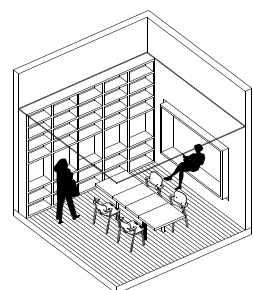


an incomplete taxonomy of potential room modules

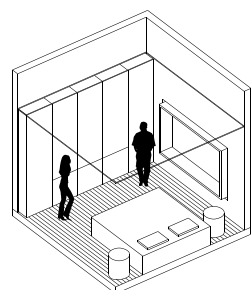
- core rooms in a 4x4 module -



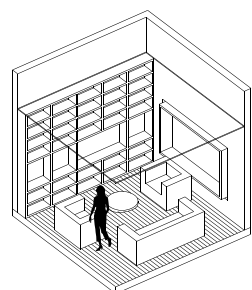
kitchen



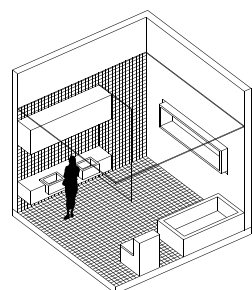
dining room



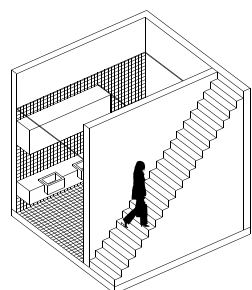
bed rooms



lounge rooms



bathrooms



small bathroom + stair

- a few ideas for other rooms -

study	home gym	conservatory
library	'the pool room'	sun-room
computer room	workshop/atelier	terrace
home cinema	prayer room	greenhouse
rumpus room	family shrine	music room
games room	private garage	whatever!