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New home model is about sharing

The debate about how so many Australians are missing out on home ownership assumes a century-old definition of the home. A hundred years ago there were 5.3 people on average per home. Today the average Australian home has doubled in size yet the average number of people per house has halved to 2.6. In effect, Australians are living in houses with four times the area of their predecessors. This is not sustainable as house prices escalate.

We need another model for how we live that can be afforded by most people and I believe this is a blended model of owning the core bits of a home and renting the extra amenities when you need them.

Many people in Sydney, and other Australian cities, are already living the reality of the new version of home ownership.

The new mode is apartment living where you own your piece of the total but pay a fee to access, or rent, the add-ons. So instead of having your own swimming pool you can access a shared pool. The same applies to lifts and lobbies and stairs and gymnasiums or the local restaurant or coffee shop.

Sydney now has around 35 per

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cent of its population living in apartments in a shared ownership and rental model. We are moving to a 50:50 city with half the population in homes and half in apartments with smaller, cheaper spaces but where they buy the extra services they need.

At the One Central Park apartment complex on Broadway, for example, residents are able to choose their own type of car from a GoGet pool when they need one. They also have a shared park, health centre, supermarket, and universities just next door. Their home ownership is a relatively small apartment but all the other amenities are on hand when needed.

Collaborative economy expert Rachel Botsman has written about the swing from hyper consumption where a family must own everything including three cars and a swimming pool, to co-operative consumption where a family shares the park or the pool.

Botsman explains that the aver-

age amount of time an electric drill is used by a family in a year is nine minutes. Why own one? Surely it is better to hire one when you need it. The same model makes sense for car-sharing services like Uber when compared to car ownership with minimal use. Similarly, Airbnb shares housing more effectively. The number of empty bedrooms across Sydney must be enormous as proud home owners collect extra rooms.

The political discussion about housing affordability needs to ask a serious question. Are we living beyond our means in aspiring to a mini castle for all families? The major cities of the world are dominated by apartment dwellers sharing amenities around them.

Sydney is moving into the London, New York scale of an 8 million people-city and what must come with this is a more co-operative way of living. We must move the debate about falling home ownership away from old-world thinking that we all need our own "castle" to a more co-operative way of living where we own a small home and share all the amenities.

Chris Johnson is the chief executive of Urban Taskforce.