

Ideal verses Reality  
An Investigation into Micro Living



Design: Culture and Society  
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## Ideal verses Reality

Throughout this writing I will be discussing many different issues surrounding Micro living and Micro homes. My main argument will surround the influence micro living has on the kitchen but I think it is a much bigger issue then just how it affects the kitchen's environment. All the small points to do with micro living, that I will write about end up affecting the kitchen eventually. So because of this I will be looking into many different aspects of micro living and both the negatives and positives of living smaller.

As well as talking about the issues surrounding the kitchen, I will be investigating the bigger picture. How everything from the population and economy to the way we use space wisely can change the way we choose and can live. Later in the discussion I will be looking into the psychological and mental effects of living smaller has on people of different ages and especially growing children.

In my own opinion I do personally believe from what I know so far that the way micro living is growing in the west is influenced by the Asian culture and how they have been living for centuries. The western society always wants to be influenced by others and they desire what other cultures have. Culture has a massive affect on how micro homes are used and lived in.

Although all these issues are very big on there own they all stems back to the kitchen and how it changes the way we work and cook. The current society is all about ideal, what we want and desire verses the reality of the world.

Also with everything that is happening in the world with climate change, micro living does have a positive affect on the environment and I will briefly speak about that in my discussion as it links to other areas and positives of micro homes.

I am going into this discussion with an open mind to learn all side's of my chosen topic, positive's and negative's. Although I am hoping that through this argument my opinions and views on the topic may change as I do have a slight opinion on certain areas of this topic. This is the whole point of this discussion to learn and be educated, form an opinion based off of the facts that I will learn.



Population, the Economy and just affordability all link together and all affect each other. With overpopulation come higher housing prices in the city, as most workers need to live where they work. This affects workers as most of them earn a lot less then it costs to live close to their place of employment. Hence why there are a lot more commuters. Economy crashes will affect places for decades not just a couple of years after, so that is another big reason why house/flat prices are so dear.

As more people want to live closer to the city the land prices are getting higher, so smaller and smaller apartments are being built to help accommodate the people who can't afford a lot. That is also another reason for micro homes being built, to try and solve the overpopulation issue's, the smaller the place the more people you can fit around. China/Japan are a key example of overpopulation and try to solve it with micro or capsule living spaces, as (Qin, 2015) wrote in their text about how overpopulation affects design. Overpopulation is a massive issues in the whole of the world, we as a planet are growing too fast for many different reasons, so there are more people on the planet every day and we have to try and house more and more people with not much more space, hence why micro homes are seen as the answer to the population crisis. (Conserve Energy Future, 2019)

The reason behind micro homes is mostly to try and solve the current housing issues in certain countries.

All which stem from the overpopulation of the world right now.

The micro movement was created in East Asia, specifically Tokyo.

'Micro living' all started in Asia with capsule hotels, which was a way of having hotels in the City Centre's that do not take up a wastage of square footage. People who travel only really need a bed and a place to wash, which is what capsule hotels give. Instead of accommodating a couple of hundred people they could accommodate a couple of thousand people. You can really see the affect and look of real capsule hostels in Won Kim's Photography. (Kim, 2019)

Then capsule living went on to become an influence for micro homes, creating a home out of a smaller square footage, so that we only live with what we need and no space was wasted. As I stated before this mainly came about in Asian countries like Tokyo after their economy crashes and overpopulation issues. Micro living is all about solving problems.

In an ideal reality there would be no money problems and everyone would be able to live happily with no worries and be able to afford their dream home, like the wealthy people in the world. In a fair world where the money would be split equally a lot of problems would be solved homing and poverty would be one of the issues solved. The reality is not as nice as that thought, not everyone lives a happy, easy life.



In an article (Urist 2013 cited Kopec 2013) argued about the health risks of small spaces, saying people get affected differently by living in a small space depending on their age, It may be great for people in their 20s but for slightly older people in their 30's – 40's it has a major affect and isn't necessarily healthy living in compact spaces, as they came across different stress factors, due to work e.g..

If someone has a more demanding job it may create the sense of being trapped both at home and work, no place to escape. 'Research shows that crowding related stress can increase rates of domestic violence and substance abuse. (Urist 2013 cited Kopec 2013).



Children who grow up in smaller homes tend to be underachievers, struggle to concentrate and study. It also has a major influence by their parent's income. (Fitts and Petit, 2016)(Urist, 2013).

Gosling who studies the connection between people and the objects that surround them said, "An apartment has to fill other psychological needs as well, such as self expression and relaxation" (Urist 2013 cited Gosling)

Living smaller may have its positive impact on money problems but is it worth the mental troubles?

I think personally living small is more successful when you have a positive attitude towards it, when you want to use less and live less wastefully. It is also very good for interior designers and architects because they have to think creatively and out of the norm box. As a student studying interior design it is one thing I have thought about when researching into micro spaces, it gives designers a chance to use their full potential, express the creativity inside of their minds. It's all about using the free space to its full potential, using things like compact furniture/ foldaway items to make sure spaces are not cluttered. Design ideas have improved drastically throughout time and you can now fit everything you want and mostly need into a small space using smart ideas.

Another massive positive about small spaces is that they help with the fight to save the planet and environment. With living in a small space means less waste as there is less space and less stuff to waste as you want to save the most space so only use items that are not wasteful and last a long time. From what I have seen people living small tend to be healthier and live with a healthier lifestyle, this is all because of the fact that they are living small and have less space to store stuff, so eat mostly fresh. Watching shows liked George Clarke's Amazing Spaces have told me the different ways people live small and the positive affect of micro homes, its not all bad.

(George Clarke's Amazing Spaces, 2012)

In an ideal world there would be no problems and everyone would be happy/healthy but unfortunately that is not the reality. Communities live differently depending on their social class, wealthier people live more privately whereas lower classes have more of a community spirit as the friendships within the community is what helps a lot of people get through their struggles. There are many different stereotypes for different people bad and good whether they are rich or poor does not matter.



Having a small house would obviously affect the way the layout and space in the kitchen is designed/put to use. There would not be enough space for everything, only space for the basics. It would challenge creativity and thinking outside of the box, using the space wisely and to its full potential. The space planning would be key to creating an affective kitchen in a micro home and making sure every available space is used. In my research into peoples self builds of micro homes if they have planned correctly then they can fit a lot into the kitchen space. Communal kitchens are also a very useful choice in space saving, in a block of flats or a certain amount of rooms in a building they are allocated one kitchen between them. (Ahn et al., 2008) If you have everything you need in life, not desire. Like table, chairs, bed, things to live, not luxuries that everyone wants. It doesn't matter about the size of the space its how you fill it. It is about the space saving ideas and creativity of fitting a small space with big ideas. Why do we waste so much on stuff that we do not need we are just made to desire it in our life?

There are many wonderful space saving ideas in the world created and suited for small homes. Many of them are simple but very affective. Here are just a few of the ideas that I have found created for the micro homes that I am writing about.

Increasing cupboard storage space by using the walls instead of just cupboards and draws. Also using the height of walls to store belongings on if there is more height than length in the home. In the kitchen a roll out table under the island bench would create more room to work in but could put away when not in use. Foldaway furniture is also a winner as you only have it out when the item is in use, so does not clutter up needed space. One of the best space saving ideas that I have come across is storage under the stairs, if you are lucky enough to have another floor to your home then this is a winner for creating storage space. A design feature that helps a small square meter home feel bigger is a lot of windows as it lets natural light in but also opens up the room to feel less boxed in, it is more of an illusion. Another design feature that would make rooms feel bigger through an illusion is having white walls and furniture; it makes a tiny room feel more spacious. I found a lot of this information from a website about how to make the most of a space and found it very helpful. (Grisman, 2017)

All of the points/ideas above are subtle but easy ways of trying to solve the issue of feeling like you're in a small space. It wont solve the bigger issue of housing crisis and cramped living but it will defiantly help some peoples living conditions change more positively.

In a lot of the television programs when they speak about and to people who live small and in micro homes they live a lot healthier and with better morals. When I was watching certain programs like "George Clarke's Amazing Spaces" (George Clarke's Amazing Spaces, 2012) I found that people who have smaller homes live with what they need and nothing extra as it takes up too much space to clutter the space with unneeded items. It is also a very environmentally friendly way to live as the less you need and buy the less you waste. Living small would also mean that you get less wasteful food and would most likely eat fresh a lot to keep waste down. There are many different episodes of George Clarke's Amazing spaces that I found inspiring for example Series 5, where they show a creative house that uses more space upwards and more windows to let natural light in to make a small home feel bigger.

With the current climate crisis I think that it is important to think about how we affect the earth and think about what we use and consume. This all comes with being environmentally friendly and I believe if more people started living small it would help solve the climate crisis.

There are many different ways that having a micro home can affect the way you live and the lifestyle you create for yourself. Because of the attitude most owners of micro homes have they tend to re-use old materials from dumps and up cycle them to create something new and that they can use, this also saves the owner money as well as being more environmentally friendly.

In an ideal world everyone would have a big kitchen to work in and cook to their hearts desire and fill all their needs but this isn't reality as a lot of people have small cramped kitchens, which doesn't fit enough in, or no kitchen at all. Communal kitchens are also very common with poorer communities so they don't even have their own space and privacy to cook/work in. A lot of people who have a large sum of money have big kitchens or sometimes even two kitchens.

They do not really use them; they are mostly for show, like a show kitchen in a house for sale. Most rich people have one show kitchen for entertaining and another one for actually cooking in, which can be made messy. I believe that a kitchen is the heart of the home and needs to be filled with life and used and enjoyed.



I have found by doing extensive research there is a massive difference between the look and use of a micro home depending on the culture it is surrounded by. I found this by just comparing pictures of the two countries. In Asia, it was made for what it is still used for to this day, a solution to overcrowding/overpopulation. Whereas western culture has turned it into something it was never meant to be, all about the looks. They now create these small compact homes in giant spaces, which completely defeats the idea of micro homes. In this day and age the western culture is all about social media and Instagram, making things look pretty and that has carried through to peoples homes. It is all about following trends, not living how some people are forced to live.



Crowding that is caused by micro homes is viewed differently depending on your culture (Fitts and Petit, 2016) says "A person from Montana is likely to find a space much more crowded than, say, someone from Tokyo" So culture has a lot to do with how people live and are affected by micro spaces.

A way of showing just how different someone's culture can affect the way they view and design things is by comparing two different thought processes. A design (Yalcinkaya, 2018) shows just how the more innovative the Asian society is when it comes to micro design, its all about making the most of a space, not just the house, everything that goes into the house too makes it micro. Whereas in western society its all about being shabby chic, building a small structure in a small space, not fulfilling the meaning on micro homes. Like Architect Alfonso Arango, who built himself a micro home or retreat as he has called it, standing next to his childhood home. Which is surrounded by a big area of land, a whole waste of space and goes against the concept of micro living in my opinion anyway. (Gibson, 2018)

In an ideal world everyone would have plots of land to live on and be able to build and live how they please but that is not reality. Some people are stuffed into small homes in cities just so they can afford to live in the city and be able to go to work.

In conclusion I have discovered many different things that I did not think about coming into this discussion just from my findings. I have learnt a lot from my research and believe I have discussed both sides fairly and with no bias.

I found that the kitchens space and way it is used is massively affected by the size of the home, as I did think before but this only confirmed my theory. There are many benefits from the shared kitchen spaces, creating a socialized space to come together, but in a single kitchen it would feel quite cramped and unwanted if not designed to fit the size of the space available. Micro Kitchens can be wonderful and used everyday with no problem if designed correctly, I have discovered designing in small spaces is still a massive problem, not enough designers are thinking out of the box to create spaces that you can live and work in. But when micro homes are designed with thought they function and look lovely.

I have spoken about many different aspects not just the kitchen in a micro home; this is because I believe the kitchen is affected massively based on the different areas I have spoken about. It is bigger then just the kitchens space. I feel that with the extra topics I have written about I have confirmed that they all affect the way micro homes function and the reasoning behind micro homes.

Overall I do believe that if not tackled correctly then micro homes have a negative affect on the kitchen but if thought out with innovative design then they will work in many more homes and help to tackle many issues stemming from micro living. As the kitchen is the heart of the home and if you solve the problems there then the rest of the home will follow suit.

On an endnote, if we go back to the roots of micro living but start designing in a more functional manner then it wouldn't feel like rich verses poor and it wouldn't feel like an ideal dream world verses the harsh reality of life. Things can change if we just design with initiative.

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