



New “small living” concepts in Denmark: A way towards sustainable cities?

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Purpose_

- This study aimed to investigate concepts of small housing that exist in a contemporary Danish context and to assess the experiences both at the user level and among developers, municipalities, and industry stakeholders.

Research project

Methods_

- Mapping: Collection of over 60 examples
- A Register-Based Study
- Survey: Conducted in collaboration with the Bolius Knowledge Center
- Literature Review: Review of international research on micro-homes
- Typologization and Concept Clarification
- Case studies, including more than 20 interviews with residents and more than 20 interviews with experts, observations, photo documentation
- Assessment of Environmental Sustainability of Micro-Dwellings
- Discourse analysis of social media, magazines, tv etc.

Financial supported by **Realdania**



Definitions and concepts

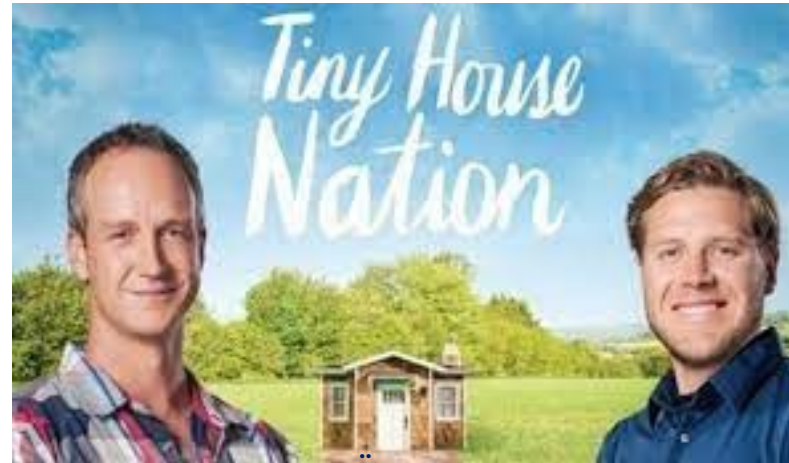
No clear definition of what constitutes a micro-home

- In the Danish context, a small home has been defined as anything under 50 m², but internationally much smaller
- Consist of a single room, in addition to a possible bathroom and toilet
- *Often seen as part of a concept concerning context, target groups, lifestyle, tenure ship and age divided into three global concepts (Harris et al, 2023):*
 1. *Tiny houses*
 2. *Micro apartments*
 3. *Co-living*

Tiny house movement

- A global movement (Willoughby et al, 2020), loosely organised, bottom-up
- From USA in 2000s (from simple-living), but also fuelled by social media, Netflix and magazine
- After the financial crisis 2007-8, the movement has become an alternative to conventional house ownership:
 - Ideology: Anti-consumerism and sustainability
 - In practice: DIY, on wheels, off-grid etc.

Keywords: Economic freedom; nature, mobility and sustainability



It's about liberating oneself as a human being. If you live in a suburban house, you might have fixed expenses of 25,000 DKK per month, but in a tiny house only 2,500 DKK in expenses. This way, you are not forced to work 37 hours a week for the rest of your life. It is no longer the monetary aspect but time that is the ideal. It's about a different life where it's not economic cycles and labor market logic that should define our lives. Danish tiny house-resident



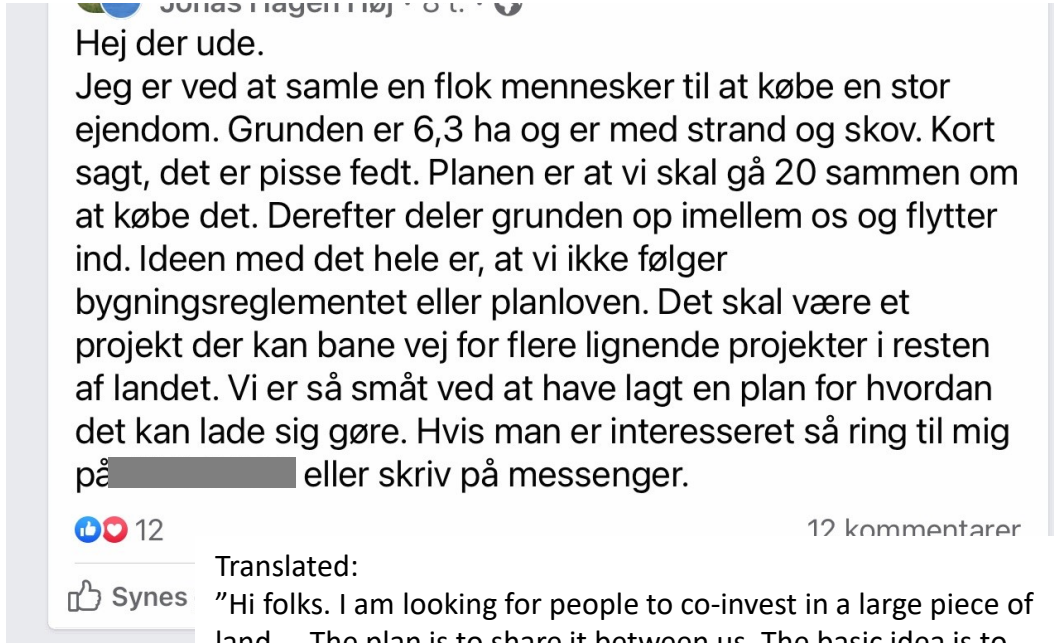
Tiny houses – different types, houses and motifs

Type	Economic freedom	Sustainability	Nature	Mobility	Motif and benefits	Type of house
OPTING OUT OF THE RAT RACE-HIPSTER	X		X		TH is an active, deliberate choice to step away from the city, career, and stressful everyday life. Often, anti-consumerism and a life in nature are ideological ideals. Often couples or young families rooted in a broader rebellion against the job market and an imbalance between work and family life	Self-made or architect-designed – focus on design /individual lifestyle
THE CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS IDEALIST	(X)	X	X		See tiny houses as a collective opportunity to experiment with sustainable building materials, resource recycling, planetary boundaries, and new cultivation methods with a focus on community, education, and learning. A fusion of 1970s eco-communities and 2000s individualism.	Sustainable, off-grid, permaculture, self-made or co-made
THE FREE SPIRIT	X		(X)	(X)	A good alternative for those in society who, for various reasons, do not fit in, do not desire, or cannot attain homeownership but still recognize the qualities of having their own house, access to nature, and financial flexibility.	Reused van or self-made, often off-grid or with limited grid solutions
MIDDLECLASS FRONTRUNNERS	(x)	(X)	X	(x)	Closely connected to the emerging commercialization of the tiny house lifestyle and related to the substantial cultural capital that comes with media coverage, TV series, and the celebration of life in a small home with smart design solutions, attractive flexible design, and authenticity.	"Tesla-model", prefabricated, standard rooms, on-grid and high-end solutions

Tiny houses – Potentials and pitfalls

Our studies shows that there is a huge interest but only few actual houses and communities:

1. Regulations, permits and locations are not in favor of tiny house ideals (many live in the shadow)
2. Municipalities are afraid of “trailer parks” and commons expenses (equal low tax-income) and no studies on the positive social and cultural impacts
3. No standard or “norms” when it comes to housing quality / finance model / insurance etc.
4. Anecdotic and questionable assessment of the environmental impact of tiny houses.



Jonas Hagen Møjl · 8 t. · 🌐

Hej der ude.

Jeg er ved at samle en flok mennesker til at købe en stor ejendom. Grunden er 6,3 ha og er med strand og skov. Kort sagt, det er pisse fedt. Planen er at vi skal gå 20 sammen om at købe det. Derefter deler grunden op imellem os og flytter ind. Ideen med det hele er, at vi ikke følger bygningsreglementet eller planloven. Det skal være et projekt der kan bane vej for flere lignende projekter i resten af landet. Vi er så småt ved at have lagt en plan for hvordan det kan lade sig gøre. Hvis man er interesseret så ring til mig på [redacted] eller skriv på messenger.

👍❤️ 12

12 kommentarer

👍 Synes

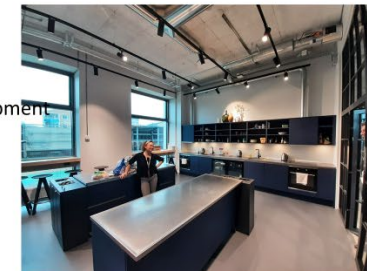
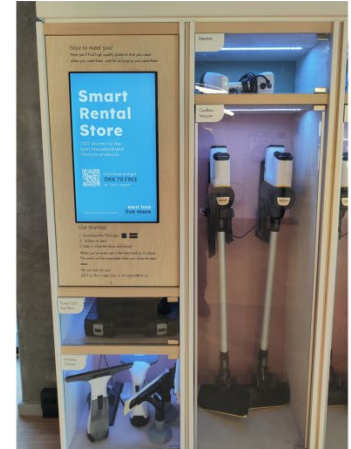
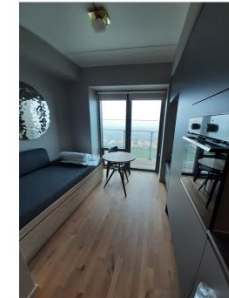
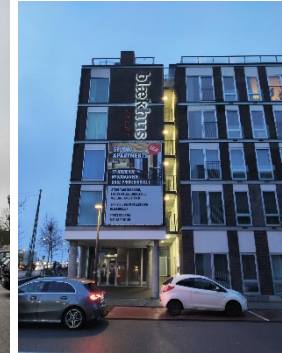
Translated:
"Hi folks. I am looking for people to co-invest in a large piece of land. .. The plan is to share it between us. The basic idea is to not follow the building regulation or planning law. This should be a project that can show the way ..."

Micro-living and co-living

- A new way of living with small space ?
- Tapping into the sustainability agenda: Less private space, more sharing, more community, reducing loneliness, providing affordable housing, reducing CO2-footprint. What's not to like?
- An international trend with increasing supply from international investors
- For whom is it an attractive option? For people on the move, looking for temporary housing and for community – or for a broader audience?

Characteristics

- Tiny private spaces (10-30 m²)
- One-room apartments
- Many shared spaces and facilities, e.g. shared kitchen, roof terrace, fitnessroom, co-working space, cinema mm.
- Shared activities (events, dining etc)
- Facilitation by community manager
- Options for service, e.g. shopping, cleaning, washing etc.
- Furnished rooms
- Digitalisation of service
- Sharing and renting of household equipment
- High renting flexibility (like hotels, i.e. flexible periods, no deposit)



Micro-apartments in Denmark – Potentials and pitfalls

10% growth in small apartments (< 50 m²) nationwide since 2010 (from 123.000 flats in 2010 to 135.000 in 2024). In the two largest cities the growth has been 20% (Copenhagen) and 35% (Aarhus)

Based on desk research, we estimate that there are app 10.000 micro-apartments in Denmark that represent a large share of the small apartments built since 2010

Types of micro-apartments				
Co-living	Student accommodation	Micro-apartments for students and young urban professionals	Serviced micro-living	Hotel-flats



- There is a demand for micro-apartments. For some, micro-apartments fills in "a hole in the market", for other micro-apartments is a way to get a place of their own
- Housing quality is debatable – should shared spaces and facilities be included in the assessment?
- Shared facilities: A large variation. Uncertain how much shared spaces and facilities are being used by the residents – and to which extent shared spaces compensates for small private spaces.
- Municipalities see different potentials and threats in micro-apartments: On one hand providing small and affordable flats, one the other hand risk of "problem"-areas"
- There is a large potential for designing better micro-apartments
- Micro-apartments are not for all; but can they influence mainstream housing on how to maintain quality when shrinking private space?



Potentials and challenges

- There is a demand for micro-apartments, although many claim that they prefer a larger apartment. For some segments, micro-apartments fills in "a hole in the market"
- Uncertain if the housing quality is acceptable – and if shared spaces and facilities should be included in the assessment of the housing quality
- There is a large variety in the amount, type and quality of shared facilities
- Uncertain how much shared spaces and facilities are being used by the residents – and to which extent shared spaces compensates for small private spaces. There are examples on residents praising the shared spaces and the community, but also examples on shared spaces being sparsely, or only by certain groups
- Municipalities see different potentials and threads in micro-apartments: The positive side is that micro-apartments fills a housing-demand for small and affordable units, the negative side is that micro-apartments risk ending as "problem"-areas, and that the flexibility of the apartments is limited
- Within the scope of micro-apartments there is a wide variety in quality; there is a large potential for designing better micro-apartments
- Micro-apartments might be able to influence mainstream housing on how to maintain quality when shrinking private space

" We [a couple of young people] come from a house in Indonesia, so we really had to learn to live small. Our consumption has decreased—for example, clothes and kitchen equipment—because there is less storage space. We have also become more flexible—for instance, I use our bed for working. We have had to learn to live minimally."

(Couple, Blækhus Valby- micro apartments)

Concluding 1

Residents' experiences with micro -iving in Denmark:

- 1. Choosing to Live in a Small Home is Never the Goal Itself**
- 2. Small Homes Affect Daily Consumption and Material Culture**
- 3. Privacy is Especially Important in a Small Home**

"We constantly talk about the fact that we are not a collective. We don't all need to be vegans or live in a specific way. We are a homeowners' association—or perhaps a cooperative, if we were to compare: We have some collective responsibilities, such as maintaining forest areas, renovating a communal house, and maintaining infrastructure. But if someone wants to have chickens, it's not all of us who will have chickens. We want to help decide where the chickens can be, but they are not collective chickens. However, those who have chickens might want to sell eggs cheaply to the rest of us. It's the best of a single-family neighborhood and the best of a collective."

Concluding 2

Residents' experiences with sharing in micro homes:

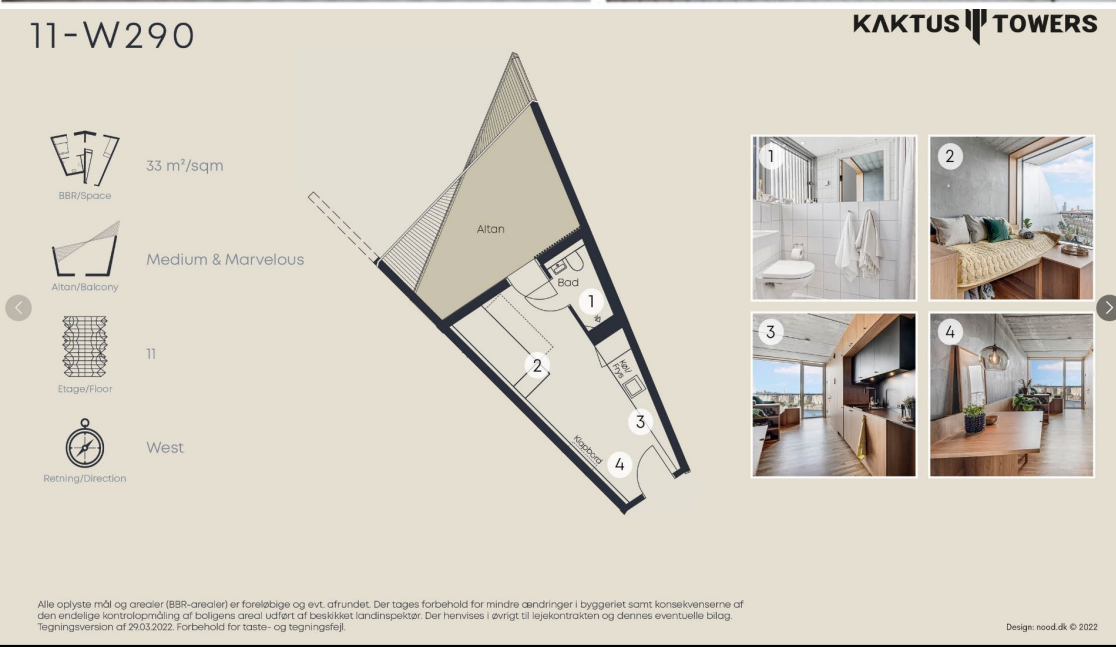
Necessary Shared Functions: facilities that are indispensable in daily life and are therefore typically included in more conventional homes, but here are placed outside and shared with others: bathrooms, toilets, kitchens, storage rooms, etc.

Additional Housing-Supportive Functions: facilities that are not necessary but enhance the housing quality for the individual, such as fitness rooms, workshops, guest rooms, function rooms, communal kitchens with service and industrial dishwashers, office facilities, fire pits, (roof) terraces, and possibly even access to shared cars, vegetable gardens, etc.

Social Facilities and Activities: These concern either obligatory social facilities or interest communities, which are often mandatory (either formally or informally) and part of the housing's branding (e.g., co-living concepts or tiny house collectives).

Micro dwelling dilemmas

1. The potential of micro-homes lies in the concept, but there is a risk of justifying poor housing or "culture-washing."
2. Micro-homes challenge housing norms – this pressures regulation but can also inspire innovation in the entire housing market.
3. Micro-homes have the potential to contribute to a more sustainable society, but we lack experiments, data, and mapping of the derived effects.
4. Micro-homes require new compensations and opportunities for new regulation.





Thank you!

