

Hannah Hall

Mr. Speice

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### Micro-Apartments: Promising Prospect or Cause for Concern?

From New York to Tokyo, micro-apartments are being built in city centers. These units truly live up to their name... “micro.” Some can even be less than 100 square feet! The new tiny living quarters are found fascinating by some and disappointing by others. As new as this idea may seem, there is nothing new about it.

There have been several attempts in the past at big living in small spaces... none of which have been particularly successful. One example would be Kisho Kurokawa’s Nakagin Capsule Tower which experimented with an innovative solution to Japan’s population boom in the 1960’s. The concept was to build about 96 square foot capsules to bolt into place in the tower to be replaced every so many years. The issue with Kurokawa’s idea was that while it may have been very innovative, it was also highly expensive. It would have been cheaper to tear down the whole tower rather than replace each tiny unit individually. Even if it had not been so expensive, people needed more space. Although young singles may have fit fine in these spaces, couples and starting families could not fit into the capsules.

Another attempt at minimalist living was in communist, early 1930’s Soviet Union. Milinis and Ginzburg’s plans for the Narkomfin apartments designed units to have much smaller kitchens and encourage communal living. Vladimir Lenin promoted living in this style because it

supposedly freed women from the ties of the kitchen and housekeeping as well as reducing individualism. This meant supporting feminism while also supporting socialism. However, shortly after the first residents moved in, the project was shut down and was left to become virtually a ghost town because people found ways to make their small spaces individualistic.

During the Industrial Revolution in America, tenement buildings were being built all over the place to accommodate for the heavy influx of immigrants. The units in these buildings were often one or two room apartments that families with several children would cram into. They were small, dirty, poorly constructed, and not well ventilated. Diseases like tuberculosis and influenza spread far more easily between family and neighbors due to these conditions.

Until recently, apartments with less than 400 square feet have been illegal in New York, but exceptions have been made for the Carmel Place project in Kips Bay which includes units with between 260 and 360 square feet. Residents of these micro-apartments seem satisfied for the most part, but admit that living there is just transitional.

This is one of the most major issues of building many micro-apartments in big cities. The residents who are usually young, single millennials, living on their own for the first time, are in and out of this transitional housing, making it hard for much of a community to be built between the residents. It also means that there will be periods of highs and lows for tenant numbers. Because of this, these apartments could either end up booming and popping up in cities all over the globe, or they could become ghost towns like those in Japan and Russia.

Although the downsides of micro-apartments are impossible to deny, there are also many benefits to consider. Because of the small square footage of the units, they are often more environmentally sustainable. They are also safer to build considering that the units are

constructed in a controlled site. Micro apartments are more affordable for millennials when they start to live on their own, so they additionally encourage independence both socially and financially in young adults.

It is hard to say what the future of micro-apartments will look like based on the current positives and the negatives known from the past. Through the different attempts at micro-apartments over the ages, much has been learned-- but how much more is there to learn before micro-apartments can truly be successful?

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