

TINY HOUSE: THE SOLUTION TO THE HOUSING PROBLEM?

Marc Fischer

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies

Abstract: *Housing is a difficult issue in Germany at the moment. Rising interest rates on loans, the refugee crisis and rising commodity prices have already led to a shortage of thousands of homes, hardly any of which are being built or are affordable. To address some of the problems, there are alternatives in the housing sector, such as tiny houses or container houses. Designed to meet only the most basic, almost minimalist requirements, these can be a cheaper alternative for individuals who either want to fulfil their dream of owning their own home or who cannot find affordable housing in areas close to city centres. In fact, these alternatives are now becoming much more attractive, so much so that companies are already recognising the trend and trying to support it. People should not think that they only work for their house or their own four walls and that they have no other way of living.*

Keywords: *Tiny house, alternative, living, minimalist, container house*

INTRODUCTION

The background to the topic of alternative forms of housing is the current situation on the housing market in Germany. However, it is important to distinguish that the housing market was already in crisis years ago. As early as 2012, Eichener (2012: 3–6) published a study stating that Germany was in a housing crisis and that the federal and state governments should react. The figures quoted were alarming. While more than 600,000 dwellings were completed in the 1990s, only 178,000 dwellings were completed in 2011. Since the turn of the millennium, the federal government has increasingly withdrawn from the social housing sector, abolishing tax breaks for the sector. In addition, from 2010 onwards, other consequences began to emerge that consciously or unconsciously affected the situation on the housing market: a strong economy and demographic change. Just a few years later, Hendricks (2016: 27–29) describes the impact and the consequences. Of course, construction continues in Germany and apartments are being built, but the growing economic strength of Germany is prompting investors and private companies to act. As a result, rent increases of up to 11% are not uncommon, even though demand is higher. This demand is further fuelled by the refugee crisis, which was already underway at the time. Support was provided by Hahmann (2014: 1–2), for example. Together with her homelessness charity, she launched an additional appeal to the federal and state governments to intervene more strongly in housing construction. Not just to get a grip on immigration and social rents. The housing shortage created another problem: many people were left without a home. For example, the evaluation at the time predicted that up to 360,000 people would be without a home in 2016, and this in a welfare state.

It should be noted that all this information and warning signals were available before the coronavirus pandemic, before the Ukraine-Russia conflict and its consequences. However, it was not until 2022 that the German government developed a first concept, the “Housing First” concept. This strategic plan calls for systems and processes to be in place by 2030 to help homeless people find accommodation. However, the measures do not only cover issues such as political persecution, anti-discrimination or forced evictions. The aim is also to ensure that people who need shelter or protection receive it (2024: 1–2). But even this is only an approach and does not yet mention housing alternatives. However, the clock is already 5 minutes to 12 when Sagner and Voigtländer (2024: 6–7) examine the housing and property market. They

show that rents will rise annually, on average by more than 5% between 2023 and 2024. And this is only the median, which means that in industrialised regions there could be significantly higher increases. They also show that rent increases will be significantly higher and faster from 2020 onwards.

Even if all this information seems frightening at first, there are already some approaches that can provide a remedy. Tiny houses or container houses are one alternative. The container house had its origins in the theater, where minimalist attempts were made to create spaces. Matzke (2008: 6) describes it quite succinctly: A container is primarily location-independent and can be used flexibly. Spatially and flexibly deployable, it offers many possibilities in terms of living space. The whole thing is supported by tiny houses. This form of housing is described as an affordable and ecological alternative for 1-2 people (cf. Pottgiesser 2019: 1).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The starting point for the research is a literature and source review. As outlined in the introduction, the core problem is first briefly outlined with facts and what the Tiny House is actually about. The answer to the question of affordable housing and housing alternatives is considered and examined in terms of container and tiny house approaches. To this end, other sources are analysed and evaluated, and the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative house types are discussed, as well as the extent to which their use can be substantiated by figures.

RESULTS

The origin of the term Tiny House, combined with the background of the container house, can be found in the field of sociology, more specifically behavioural psychology. The Tiny Habits method, colloquially known as the method of small or minimal habits, is crucial to this. The background to this is that this method aims to achieve a big effect with small things (cf. Fogg 2021: 12). This is also the aim of tiny houses and container houses. Minimal effort, but great benefit. In addition to the points already mentioned in the previous section, this step is also due to the general trend in household development. For example, Lehmann and his team (2022: 2) describe the trend towards sustainability, cost savings in energy and heating consumption, and a general increase in household efficiency, which has risen sharply since the 2020s. The core idea behind the container house is currently very much in the social sphere. The social system was set up in 1994 to help people without a permanent home get through the winter. The origin was an association founded by several parties. The businessman Franzke, the church community and the Hamburg Social Welfare Office. More than 350 people in the Altona district found refuge here (cf. Brockes 2003: 3–4). So what makes this concept so interesting? First of all, rapid availability and production are crucial. In their research on the container house, Professors Anagal and Dhongde (2020: 177–179) list both challenges and opportunities. While the container house is simple to construct, there are other problems to contend with: stability when several container houses are stacked, acoustics, and climate and temperature conditions are mentioned. Architects have now found ways to overcome these challenges, but it is still far from optimal, and more research is needed into what is considered optimal in order to establish a container house as an independent place to live in the long term. The issue is currently gaining traction as a form of social support. India, in particular, sees great potential here, as the materials and space are available.

Since the 2000s, the issue of container houses has become increasingly important. Studies show that there are already several institutes and institutions dealing with the possible effects of disasters on container houses. In 2017, Hong (2017: 375–377) already dealt with this analysis. She explained that a distinction is made between types of disaster. These can be of biological, precipitation or general meteorological origin. The type of climate is further subdivided into storms, heat and cold, and other disasters. Diseases or changes in plate tectonics such as earthquakes can also be important. The research facilities mentioned above are located all over the world. In the USA, Turkey, Korea and India, to name but a few. They all share the common goal of preparing for these issues and making life safer.

The whole thing is underpinned by the aforementioned tiny houses. The basic movement has its origins in the tiny house movement. Once again you can see the connection with sociological research.

This is because the Tiny House Movement means nothing more than concentrating on the minimum and having no dependencies. This means that you have everything you need to live in a house between 15 and 42 square metres, with multifunctionality as a basic requirement (cf. Kirchhoff 2013). On this basis, the desire to implement this concept in a house initially began in the USA. In the meantime, however, aspects of economy and sustainability have also come to dominate the tiny house sector. Tiny houses are now a popular alternative in the housing sector. At the same time, people are even questioning whether the people who started the movement were aware of its implications. After all, the idea of minimalist living has opened up completely new possibilities for end consumers (cf. Maile 2020: 14–15). The trend is currently being explored to the extent that the idea of a completely self-sufficient tiny house is being floated. Due to the current challenges in the energy sector, Jakob (2020: 186) is exploring the idea of complete independence. He is aware that this is an initial vision and therefore still a dream for the future. In the long term, the idea is to design the tiny house area in such a way that not only energy but also water and food can be supplied on the tiny house site. The idea, however, is to move away from the actual tiny house approach and create a kind of community house, almost like a residential complex. This is still a dream for the future. But current trends show where things are heading. For example, Interhyp, a financing and lending partner for construction, conducted a survey on tiny houses in 2021. The result was that almost 1/4 of the 2100 respondents found the tiny house concept interesting. The article was supplemented with topics such as the energy crisis, the coronavirus pandemic and shortages of building materials. As a result, respondents also mentioned the other benefits of the tiny house: innovation, time saved on cleaning, flexibility. The first question that came up was how they really imagined life in later years and what would be important. Things that all had their origins in the aforementioned movements and research in the field of sociology (cf. Honal 2021).

Tiny houses now come in a wide variety of sizes. The most classic variant is approx. 39 square meters in size. This is enough space for singles or couples to live comfortably. It includes a bathroom of 3.75 square meters, a sleeping area of 7 square meters and a kitchen and living area of just under 18 square meters. The rest of the space is then used for insulation, heating material or hallway and other storage space. Cost factor here, from €90,000 (cf. Fischer 2022: 25). However, Jay Shafer proved that there is another way back in 1999 (cf. Graubner 2019). The Tiny House he developed was on wheels and no larger than 20 square meters, which of course pushed the price down accordingly: from €20,000, you can now fulfill this dream of a mobile Tiny House. However, like all other houses, the mobile Tiny House requires a building permit. If it then needs to be transported, it also requires a road traffic permit as it is on wheels. And even then, the challenges do not subside. If you then want to take this house on a trip, you have to check in advance which parking spaces are suitable. Unfortunately, these hurdles are not uncommon in Germany. This was already examined in 2022, when the housing market situation in Germany was specifically addressed (cf. Vasseur et al. 2022: 19). They describe that the biggest hurdles are in the legal area. In addition to building and licensing regulations, there are the land issues mentioned above. A further complicating factor is that each federal state in Germany has different building laws and may have different or additional road traffic regulations, which can make the construction of Tiny Houses more difficult. In addition to the aforementioned road approval, the mobile tiny house you have examined also requires TÜV approval, which means that it is safe to transport. The complications of building law are the biggest hurdle. In addition to the necessary planning permission, the zoning plan for each development area sets out the exact guidelines according to which a house can be built. There are guidelines on roof pitch, living space and facade colour. However, a recent land-use plan from 2024 for the municipality of Wadern in Saarland shows that people are already aware of all these issues (cf. Huwer et al. 2024: 7). Here, the municipality wants to meet the demand for tiny houses and is integrating their development and use into the relevant landscape plan. This means that the municipality wants to create a long-term residential and nature area where tiny houses can be built as standard.

The Tiny House Association, founded in 2018, shows that the trend is moving towards tiny houses. The association's mission is to bring together interested parties, companies and communities. In Germany, there are now well over 100 companies building tiny houses and more than 60 companies and communities that are open to such projects (cf. Schleyer 2024). Looking at current trends, more than

500 people have searched for opportunities to buy, build or otherwise acquire a tiny house in the last 12 months (cf. Google Trends 2024).

However, there are also downsides to the trend. Housing companies in Hamburg in particular are skeptical about alternatives such as container or tiny houses when it comes to the rent index. Such social housing facilities could create an imbalance in the economic sector (see Grubbauer et al. 2023: 204). If one remains in the urban area, one could be confronted with the problem of stacking. Finkenberger (2022: 32–34) points out that the available space in cities can be misused to build several containers or tiny houses in such a way that the overall picture is simply destroyed and is seen as a remedy for the housing shortage in cities. This creates a feeling of mass instead of class. In order to counteract this, appropriate contemporary ideas based on ecological conditions are needed. She also mentions another potential problem: desocialization. Tiny houses are designed for minimalism. This means that they offer little space for social contact. Kilmann (2016: 7–8) already addressed this problem in 2016. However, he also saw it as an opportunity to improve the social component in the long term. Although he agrees with the basic points of desocialisation, he sees minimalism as an opportunity to be forced to meet other people, as many things are simply not available in a tiny house. He describes one possible outcome as having to work less in the long term because of the lower cost of living and therefore having more time for socialising and leisure, which would sometimes be more difficult with a full-time job.

A trend is emerging. This can be seen in a statistical analysis from 2021, but published in 2024, which calculated a market potential of 3.9 billion euros for tiny houses in Germany (cf. Statista 2024). The latest studies also show that the demand for tiny houses has increased by around 32% (cf. Schwald 2022). Ms Sütterlin-Waack (2023) also describes a study on the current trend, highlighting the challenges as well as the benefits.

CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

The explanations have shown that the housing alternatives of containers and tiny houses are becoming increasingly relevant. Research on alternative forms of housing is becoming more widespread, while studies on the demand for tiny houses are difficult to understand. One disadvantage is that there is no baseline to build on. This makes it impossible to compare and difficult to take into account for research purposes. Only the demand tools on Google provide some relief, but they are still far from the research values. The container house model is already being used for refugee accommodation, while tiny houses still face more resistance from local authorities and the legal framework in Germany. The legal obstacles are currently too great for the concept to take hold in the short term. However, some municipalities are beginning to incorporate the concept into their urban development plans due to increasing demand. It remains to be seen whether the tiny house is the solution to the housing problem.

REFERENCES

- Anagal, V., S. Dhongde (2020). *Container Housing*, S. 175–181, verfügbar unter: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341110767_Container_Housing.
- Brockes, D. (2003). *Neue Wohnung*. Hamburg, Hein & Co. Offsetdruck GmbH.
- Eichener, V. (2012). *Wohnungsbau in Deutschland – Zuständigkeiten von Bund, Ländern, Kommunen und Europäischer Union?* Bochum.
- Finkenberger, I. (2022). *Wohnen als Produktionsgemeinschaftsaufgabe*, 31–42, verfügbar unter: https://www.academia.edu/93645174/Wohnen_als_Produktionsgemeinschaftsaufgabe.
- Fischer, M. (2022). Klein, aber Oho! In: *TEAG Magazin*, Erfurt, S. 24–25.
- Fogg, BJ (2021). *Die Tiny Habits Methode*, 1. Auflage. München, btb.
- Google Trends Datenquelle (2024). *Tiny House Deutschland*, verfügbar unter: <https://trends.google.de/trends/explore?geo=DE&q=tiny%20haus%20deutschland&hl=de>, Zugriff: 14.08.2024.
- Graubner, M. (2019). *Tiny Houses und ihr Ursprung*, verfügbar unter: <https://tiny-houses.de/tiny-houses-leben-auf-wenigen-quadratmetern/>, Zugriff: 09.08.2024.
- Grubbauer, M., J. Metzger (2023). *Wohnen in Hamburg: Akteure, Instrumente und Konfliktfelder*. Wetzlar, transcript.
- Hahmann, S. (2014). *Aufruf zu einer Nationalen Strategie zur Überwindung von Wohnungsnot und Armut in Deutschland*. Berlin, verfügbar unter: <https://www.bagw.de/de/nationale-strategie/uebersicht>.

- Hendricks, B.** (2016). *Nachtrag: Steigende Immobilienpreise und steigende Wohnungsnot: Wohnungsmarkt aus dem Gleichgewicht?* München, S. 27–30, verfügbar unter: <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/165816>.
- Honal, V.** (2021). *Interesse an Tiny Houses nimmt zu*, verfügbar unter: <https://www.interhyp.de/ueber-interhyp/presse/interesse-an-tiny-houses-nimmt-zu/>, Zugriff: 18.08.2024.
- Hong, Y.** (2017). *A study on the condition of temporary housing following disasters: Focus on container housing*. China, S. 374–383, verfügbar unter: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2017.04.005>.
- Huwer, A., M. Kasper** (2024). *Vorhabenbezogener Bebauungsplan "Golfpark Weiherhof – 2. Änderung und Erweiterung" in der Stadt Wadern, im Stadtteil Nunkirchen*. Wadern, P&P GmbH.
- Jacob, K.** (2020). *ownhome. Das autarke Tiny House für ein Leben im Einklang mit der Welt*. Rheine, Verlag der Ideen.
- Kilman, C.** (2016). *Small House, Big Impact: The Effect of Tiny Houses on Community and Environment*. Kanada, verfügbar unter: https://carleton-wp-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/111/2019/07/charlie_kilman_tinyhouses_4_.pdf.
- Kirchhoff, M.** (2023). *Komfortables Leben auf kleinstem Raum – Das Tiny House Movement*, verfügbar unter: <https://www.nawalo.de/tiny-house-movement/>, Zugriff: 06.08.2024.
- Lehmann, T., A. Pfennig, A. Graf, B. Menacher, R. Rehaag** (2022). *Zukunftsbild Fokussiert – Wohnen*, S. 1–3, verfügbar unter: https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/289575/1/Zukunftsbild_Fokussiert_Wohnen_1.0.pdf.
- Maile, L.** (2020). *Tiny House Movement: Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Betrachtung alternativer Wohn- und Lebensformen als Ausdruck einer Postwachstumsstrategie*. München, utzverlag GmbH.
- Matzke, A.** (2008). *Living in a Box – Zur Medialität räumlicher Anordnungen*. Wetzlar, S. 381–387, verfügbar unter: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839410646-037>.
- Pottgiesser, U.** (2019). *Tiny Apartments*. Detmold, verfügbar unter: <https://www.th-owl.de/files/webs/gestaltung/download/Baukonstruktion>, Zugriff: 05.08.2024.
- Sagner, P., M. Voigtländer** (2024). *IW-Wohnindex: Angebot und Nachfrage bestimmen Preise (Datenstand: Q2 2024)*. Köln, S. 1–17, verfügbar unter: <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/300695>.
- Schleyer, R.** (2024). *Die Ziele des Verbands*, In *Tiny House Verband*. Karlsruhe, verfügbar unter: <https://www.tiny-house-verband.de/verband/>, Zugriff: 11.08.2024.
- Schwald, S.** (2022). *Zahl der Anfragen für Tiny Houses gestiegen*, verfügbar unter: <https://www.diyonline.de/d/news/2022/10/17/zahl-der-anfragen-fuer-tiny-houses-gestiegen.html>, Zugriff: 19.08.2024.
- Statista** (2024). *Kennzahlen zu Tiny Houses in Deutschland*, verfügbar unter: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1260932/umfrage/kennzahlen-zu-tiny-houses-in-deutschland/>, Zugriff: 15.08.2024.
- Sternberg, M., P. Weis** (2024). *Housing First*. Bonn, verfügbar unter: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/a-p-b/21016.pdf>.
- Sütterlin-Waack, S.** (2023). *Studie zu Tiny Houses veröffentlicht*, verfügbar unter: https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/landesregierung/ministerien-behoerden/IV/_startseite/Artikel2023/III/230831_tinyhouse_Studie?nn=6b94bbe7-220f-41c2-9bec-bad6898d326d, Zugriff: 22.08.2024.
- Vasseur, V., J. Sing, S. Short** (2022). *Determinants of the adoption of tiny houses and their role in alleviating housing shortages in Germany*. USA, S. 199–224, verfügbar unter: <https://doi.org/10.3934/ctr.2022011>.

МАЛКИТЕ КЪЩИ: РЕШЕНИЕТО НА ЖИЛИЩНИЯ ПРОБЛЕМ?

Резюме: Жилищното настаняване е проблем в Германия в наши дни. Нарастващите лихвени проценти по кредитите, бежанската криза и повишаващите се цени на суровините вече доведоха до недостиг на хиляди жилища, каквите почти не се строят и не са достъпни. За да се решат някои от проблемите, в жилищния сектор има алтернативи, като например малки къщи или къщи от контейнери. Проектирани така, че да отговарят само на най-основните, почти минималистични изисквания, те могат да бъдат по-евтина алтернатива за хората, които искат да сбъднат мечтата си да притежават собствен дом или които не могат да намерят достъпни жилища в райони, близки до градските центрове. Всъщност тези алтернативи сега стават много по-привлекателни – дотолкова, че компаниите вече признават тази тенденция и се опитват да я подкрепят. Хората не бива да мислят, че работят само за дома си или за собствените си четири стени и че нямат друг вариант за живот.

Ключови думи: миниатюрна къща, алтернативен живот, минималистичен, къща контейнер

Марк Фишер, докторант

Университет по библиотекознание и информационни технологии

E-mail: marc-zur.ostsee@gmx.de