



5th International and Interdisciplinary Conference

Happy Homes, Happy Society?

The Contribution of Domestic Life in a Time of Social Changes

Happiness and the Structure of the Home

Stephen Davies, Head of Education at the Institute for Economic Affairs

There is much evidence that happy homes make for a happy society. Many factors contribute to either supporting happy and functional homes or undermine them. One of these, which is often overlooked, is the physical layout and design of houses and of the built environment in general (Coleman, 1987. Mehrabian, 1976). The way these are done is shaped by economic pressures of consumer demand and supply constraints but it also has a clear ideological component because things like house design derive from social ideals as to how people should live and the nature of family and the home. In the nineteenth century a strong social ideal emerged in response to the transformations of industrialism, which was reflected in home design. This provoked several critiques. One of these came from radical feminists, who objected to the vision of relations between men and women that was a part of the dominant vision. Their central proposal was to build homes without kitchens or other service rooms, and to communalise housework (Hayden, 1981). These ideas were widespread, and had support from figures in business, while being mirrored by actual developments in housing practice at the time. However, they were submerged by a reassertion of the classic domestic ideal in an amended form, which found expression on left and right in the 1930s and was to dominate policy after 1945. This second age of domesticity however, has unravelled in the face of policy errors and economic and technological changes, and we are now seeing a resurgence of the idea and practice of the kitchen less home.

*Full papers are being prepared for publication. Further details to be announced.