



proceedings

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<https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2025113010>



Abstract

The Shared City: Housing and Tourism in the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto [†]

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[†] Presented at the XVIII International Seminars on Overarching Issues of the European Area, Porto, Portugal, 23–26 May 2024.

Abstract: This document presents the initial developments of a research work on sustainable housing and tourism beyond the urban centers of Lisbon and Porto's metropolitan areas. The preliminary data are taken from the last three Portuguese censuses carried out in the first two decades of the 21st century, in 2001, 2011 and 2021. Maintaining the balance between housing and tourism is a challenge in the governance of these two major cities.

Keywords: city; metropolis; housing; tourism; Lisbon; Porto

1. Introduction

The recent transformation of both Lisbon and Porto's city centers has been subject of significant social debate, mostly between 2010 and 2020—a decade marked by higher touristic pressure [1]. The urban evolution and socioeconomic shift in Porto, as well as in downtown Lisbon, have been the focus of the recent literature on the subject [2]. Nonetheless, the transformations beyond central areas remain unaddressed and need to be considered in terms of sustainable development.

Before the COVID-19 health crisis, there was a huge transformation in these two major Portuguese cities, causing conflicts that affected the urban environment, social and economic activities, housing, citizens and neighborhoods. International tourism has become a key economic element for the metropolitan governance and, possibly, it will become even more relevant in the coming years. This research investigates the case studies of Lisbon and Porto to understand how the balance between housing, tourism and services beyond the central areas is contributing to preserving urban identities and improving sustainable development and governance.

In the present decade, the return of tourism, with visitors attracted by the cultural heritage, has brought challenges to both metropolitan areas. In addition, previous research has shown that some residents have negative perceptions of tourism and the urban landscape [3]. Therefore, it is important to be prepared and manage integrated urban changes through national, regional and local housing policies to ensure a more sustainable method of development, either in Lisbon or in Porto.

The need to balance housing and tourism to solve these kinds of problems links to the idea of shared cities and places that are appropriate for both local inhabitants and tourists. This emerging concept in the field of urban planning represents a contemporary business model, referred to as a shared economy. A larger-scale approach may improve the quality of services in the public realm, for example, through the application of new technologies, which will enable greater access to goods and services, extending the benefits to a wider range of territories and communities.



Academic Editors: Helena Pina, Diogo Miguel Pinto, André Samora-Arvela and Felisbela Martins

Published: 20 January 2025

Citation: Florentino, R. The Shared City: Housing and Tourism in the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto. *Proceedings* **2025**, *113*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2025113010>

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This paper emerges from an embryo project funded by the research center CIAUD, with a combined methodology using quantitative data and foresight studies, and can be used as an important tool to understand the future impacts of the increase in specialized sectors and its clear impacts on housing for both landowners and tenants. In the framework of the sustainable development goal for cities and communities (SDG n° 11), it is suggested that a shared economy may reduce conflicts and extend its positive effects to a metropolitan area. This goal is connected to the Portuguese competitiveness strategy, especially regarding the exploration of cultural heritage, and also links to regional development strategies: the domain of symbolic capital, technologies and tourism services in the North, and the intention to reinforce the Lisbon brand on a larger regional scale.

2. A General Overview

Through an analysis of the last three Portuguese censuses, it is possible to observe the population growth that has occurred in the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto in the first decade of the 21st century; however, this growth was more significant in the case of Lisbon (4.9% on the north bank of the Tagus River and 9.1% in the Setúbal Peninsula) than in the metropolitan area of Porto (only 1.7%). Despite the huge variation at the municipal level, in both cases, there was a loss of residents in central cities, almost 10% in Porto and less than 3% in Lisbon, which contrasts with the strong increase in peripheral municipalities; for example, the populations of Cascais and Maia increased by 21 and 12%, respectively.

Between 2001 and 2011, the increase in dwellings was very high and quite homogeneous at the metropolitan level, between 15 and 17%, with the same municipalities mentioned above showing the greatest variation, as well as Matosinhos in the Porto Metropolitan Area. The global financial crisis that occurred at the end of that first decade, particularly in Portugal due to the intervention of the Troika in the forced reduction in sovereign debts, led to an abrupt fall in these indicators in the second decade. In parallel with the large reduction in new housing construction, the phenomenon of global tourism emerged, boosted by “low-cost” travel, which revolutionized the real estate markets in the urban centers of Lisbon and Porto. This had known consequences at various levels, including environmental, social and, naturally, economic factors, with the escalation of prices and the replacement of housing (and inhabitants) with this new type of local accommodation.

In the second decade of this century, the decline in residents was accentuated not only in the central cities of both metropolitan areas but also in Maia, Matosinhos and Oeiras. The local population migrated to the regional outskirts in a centrifugal movement contrasting the invasion of tourists, with residents “passing through” the historic areas of Lisbon and Porto. The increase in the number of dwellings between 2011 and 2021 is residual, with only a 2.2% increase, on average, in the Setúbal Peninsula, a minimal increase in the Porto Metropolitan Area (1.2%) and a miniscule increase, on average, in Greater Lisbon (0.4%). The growth in some municipalities was not enough to satisfy the population’s demand, and central cities even experienced a reduction in the total number of houses precisely as a result of the excess of local accommodation.

This phenomenon leads to the concept of a shared city, one that is shared not only between inhabitants and tourists but also by immigrants who come due to the growth of the service economy for foreigners; as such, new urban policies are required. Following on from this introduction, we will discuss the possible spatialization of tourism decentralization in the two metropolitan areas.

3. An Approach to the Cities of Lisbon and Porto

The demand for tourism is centered on historical and heritage areas that present signs of identity and cultural diversity. In the case of the metropolitan area of Lisbon, the heritage is mixed in the central parishes and along the estuary up to Belém and then along the waterfront of Oeiras and Cascais, areas which benefit from an important railway connection enabling daily movements of commuting workers and tourists, such as between the town of Sintra and downtown Lisbon. The central municipality has taken advantage of major international events to promote the capital abroad but is slow to implement a program with an integrated vision to combat the problems of a shared city. Following the consolidation of the new neighborhoods, proposals for further housing construction are debatable and immigration pressure requires urgent measures to ensure the quality of the urban environment.

On a smaller scale, it is possible to understand the potential development of the Alcântara area, which appears to mediate different heritage zones, striking a balance between central density and modern identification. It is an essential area for urban mobility and is able to solve social and housing needs through a concerted program that regulates tourism. The parish has a moderate ratio of local accommodation in relation to housing (5%), as does its neighboring parishes of Ajuda and Campo de Ourique. However, its geographical constraints require special attention to be given to the environmental sustainability of the urban proposals [4].

This ratio of pressure from local accommodation on services like water for housing is also unequal in the cities of Porto and Lisbon. In the five central parishes, the index is above 15%, which prevents new registrations, but in the other ten parishes, there is still a possibility for tourist growth until this “*numerus clausus*” value is reached. In the general perspective of the Porto case study, the specialization of heritage is also aligned with what happens in the capital region. Given the smaller separation between the banks, the central heritage area extends immediately to the south side of the river but also extends towards the sea and the neighboring municipality of Matosinhos, with peripheral spaces of great cultural interest.

By looking closer, we can see how contemporary heritage emerges in the western part of the area through the architectural works of Pritzker Prize winners and in the urban parks of Serralves and the city, extending to the coast of Matosinhos. The Porto City Council is now developing, in this sense, a strategy that aims to disperse tourist flows through the implementation of six “*territorial blocks*” in the downtown area and historical center [5]. The so-called “*Boavista, Campo Alegre and Marginal*” area is located there, situated in the Lordelo do Ouro and Massarelos union of parishes between the center and the mouth, where there are still relevant social challenges. The ongoing projects for urbanization and mobility, if implemented in the articulated way, constitute an opportunity for territorial cohesion between the resident population, services and tourist regulation, utilizing the logic of a shared city.

4. Brief Conclusions

The data initially analyzed have demonstrated the evolution of the number of residents in the main municipalities of metropolitan areas in the last two decades, accompanied by a drastic reduction in the construction of new housing, in contrast to the increase in local accommodation and the massive presence of tourism in the urban center. By disaggregating the indicators at the scale of parishes, the difference is accentuated; for example, in the case of the city of Porto, the number of inhabitants only increases beyond the main circular road in Aldoar, Paranhos and Ramalde.

The “expulsion” of the local population from central parishes is even greater in the case of Lisbon, with losses of more than 20% of residents in Baixa, Misericórdia and Santa Maria Maior, almost 6500 inhabitants, in the last ten years. The dynamics of tourism that cause this substitution is reflected in the real estate distribution, which also has worrying consequences for the wave of immigrants who have arrived to work precariously in services without urban quality in the high-density areas of the Arroios parish.

This problem is being faced in several European cities, with measures and urban policies being implemented, sometimes causing mass disruption, such as the policy recently announced in Barcelona to eliminate local accommodation in a couple of years. In the central municipalities of these two metropolitan areas, there are efforts to limit the number of registrations in the most pressured parishes, but the integration of other planning and mobility actions is necessary in order to avoid the mischaracterization of cultural identity and public space.

At the national government level, it is not yet possible to understand the effects of the “More Housing” and “Build Portugal” programs, which seem to be facing implementation difficulties given the complexity that is inherent in purely financial and fiscal measures without spatialization. But there is no doubt that the procedural simplification of urban legislation can produce results and should be extended to planning and construction regulation.

In terms of this study, Lisbon and Porto are expected to develop new strategic plans, preferably aligned with urban and mobility options, in coordination with the municipalities in their metropolitan area. This is a process that will have to respond, in addition to the usual sectoral studies, to proposals integrated into the economic, social and environmental dimensions of housing and tourism.

Funding: This research was funded by an embryo research project of CIAUD, under the support of FCT, by the references UIDB/04008/2020 and UIDP/04008/2020.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable for studies not involving humans.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this work were collected in the census inquiries, available on the official page of the Portuguese Institute of Statistics, accessed on the 17 May 2024, www.ine.pt.

Acknowledgments: The author wants to thank architects Fátima Lourenço and Joaquim Flores and student Federico Cuevas, from the Architecture and Urbanism Integrated Master’s program at Universidade Portucalense, for their collaboration in the research project.

Conflicts of Interest: The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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