

SECOND HOME TOURISM IN THE OESTE REGION, PORTUGAL: Features and impacts

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ABSTRACT: The growing omnipresence of second homes in Portugal and the inherent changes in land use have been discussion topics among policy- and opinion-makers, but the complexity of this phenomenon has not yet become part of the territorial development research agendas. This gap is being filled by the research project “Second Home Expansion and Spatial Development Planning in Portugal”. This paper presents the findings of this project’s case-study of the Oeste Region, a NUTS III in the area of influence of Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA) with a rapidly rising tourism industry, particularly residential. The majority of second home owners are LMA residents, followed by Portuguese emigrants and foreigners. These groups differ in frequency of use of second homes, given that LMA residents and emigrants are mostly economically active couples with children, while foreigners are predominantly retirees. The former two groups are similar in terms of lower tendency to change second into first home, while this tendency is significantly higher among foreigners. The degree of expansion of second homes owned by LMA residents and foreigners is much higher than of emigrants. All three groups prefer individual renovated old houses in the countryside. This partly explains why local authorities emphasize positive impacts of second home expansion in the countryside of the Oeste Region. Furthermore, given the declining and aged agricultural population, the expansion of second homes is viewed as a positive externally-driven demographic compensation. **Keywords:** second homes; territorial development; residential tourism.

RESUMEN: La creciente omnipresencia de segundas residencias en Portugal y las alteraciones inherentes en la utilización de la tierra han constituido tópicos de discusión entre políticos y formadores de opinión, pero la complejidad de este fenómeno aún no hace parte de la agenda de las pesquisas acerca del desarrollo territorial. Esa laguna está siendo rellenada por el proyecto de pesquisa “Expansión de las Segundas Residencias y Planeamiento del Desarrollo Territorial en Portugal”. Este artículo presenta los resultados de este proyecto de estudio

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del caso de la Región Oeste, una NUTS III en el área de influencia del Área Metropolitana de Lisboa (AML), donde la industria de turismo, principalmente el turismo residencial, ha crecido rápidamente. La mayor parte de los propietarios de segundas residencias son habitantes de la AML, seguidos por los emigrantes portugueses y extranjeros. Esos grupos difieren en la frecuencia de utilización de segundas residencias, una vez que los moradores de la AML y los emigrantes son en su mayoría parejas económicamente activas con niños, mientras que los extranjeros son predominantemente jubilados. Los primeros dos grupos son semejantes en términos de menor tendencia a que la segunda residencia pase a primera residencia, en cuanto esta es una tendencia significativamente mayor entre los extranjeros. El grado de expansión de segundas residencias detenidas por residentes de la AML y extranjeros es más grande que en el caso de los emigrantes. Todos los tres grupos prefieren casas de campo antiguas y recuperadas. Eso explica en parte la razón por la cual las autoridades locales enfatizan los impactos positivos de la expansión de las segundas residencias en el medio rural de la Región Oeste. Además, dada la disminución de la población agrícola y envejecida, la expansión de segundas residencias es vista como una compensación demográfica externa positiva. **Palabras clave:** segundas residencias, desarrollo territorial; turismo residencial.

RESUMO: A crescente omnipresença de segundas residências em Portugal e as alterações inerentes na utilização da terra têm constituído tópicos de discussão entre políticos e formadores de opinião, mas a complexidade deste fenómeno ainda não faz parte da agenda das pesquisas acerca do desenvolvimento territorial. Essa lacuna está a ser preenchida pelo projeto de pesquisa “Expansão das Segundas Residências e Planeamento do Desenvolvimento Territorial em Portugal”. Este artigo apresenta os resultados deste projeto de estudo de caso da Região Oeste, uma NUTS III na área de influência da Área Metropolitana de Lisboa (AML), onde a indústria de turismo, principalmente o turismo residencial, tem crescido rapidamente. A maioria dos proprietários de segundas residências são moradores da AML, seguidos pelos emigrantes portugueses e estrangeiros. Esses grupos diferem na frequência de utilização de segundas residências, dado que os moradores da AML e os emigrantes são na sua maioria casais economicamente ativos com crianças, enquanto os estrangeiros são predominantemente aposentados. Os primeiros dois grupos são semelhantes em termos de menor tendência a tornar a segunda residência em primeira residência, enquanto esta é uma tendência significativamente maior entre os estrangeiros. O grau de expansão de segundas residências detidas por residentes da AML e estrangeiros é muito maior do que no caso dos emigrantes. Todos os três grupos preferem casas de campo antigas e recuperadas. Isso explica em parte a razão pela qual as autoridades locais enfatizam os impactos positivos da expansão das segundas residências no meio rural da Região Oeste. Além disso, dada a diminuição da população agrícola e envelhecida, a expansão de segundas residências é vista como uma compensação demográfica externa positiva. **Palavras-chave:** segundas residências, desenvolvimento territorial; turismo residencial.

INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, land use patterns and landscape features have been significantly changed by the expansion of second homes. In the 2001-2011 period their number increased 22.6% (first home dwellings grew only 12.6%), so that 1,133,166 second homes in 2011 represented 19.3% of all dwellings. The presence of second homes has been evident in diverse parts of the country – from the highly urbanized and dynamic coastal area to the aged and stagnating rural interior, especially in areas rich in natural and cultural amenities.

Recent spatial and sectoral development policy agendas have been marked by the growing importance attributed to second homes in the Portuguese tourism. However, the impacts of second home expansion have been perceived quite differently. For example, in the National Strategy for Tourism Development, the Portuguese Government considers second home tourism as one of the top-ten priorities

to be promoted, while in the National Programme for Spatial Planning it is recommended that its expansion be controlled because of the effects it can have on the sustainability and management of land use and landscapes. The problem is that such policy statements have not been based on any solid scientific understanding of this phenomenon. Only a few local field studies about second home expansion in some rural and coastal resort areas were carried out in the 1980s and 1990s (Castelo and Ferreira, 1988; Cravidão, 1989; Cravidão, 1989a; Santos, 1993; Mendonça, 1999-2000; Sampaio, 1999-2000), but no research on second home tourism *per se*, or in a broader context, was ever undertaken at regional and national levels. The only exception is Caldeira's M.A. dissertation (1995) on second homes in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). This gap between policy rhetoric and scientifically based knowledge has been bridged by the 2009-2012 research project entitled "SEGREG - Second Home Expansion and Spatial Development Planning in Portugal", financed by the Portuguese Fund for Science and Technology. In this article, the main results of the first phase of the field research of this project are discussed. They are preceded by a brief review of the major factors of second home expansion in Europe, particularly in Southern Europe, including Portugal, and by methodological notes on how the field research was conducted.

FACTORS OF SECOND HOME EXPANSION IN EUROPE

In the 1990s and 2000s, the expansion of second homes throughout Europe was highly influenced by factors of different nature. The following are frequently highlighted in the literature: greater affluence and, therefore, higher disposable income of the population; fewer working hours and longer periods of leisure time (Hoogendoorn and Visser, 2004; Sharpley and Telfer, 2002; Casado-Díaz, 2004); new and more flexible forms of labour (e.g.: teleworking and telecommuting), together with rural restructuring and, in some cases, depopulation, which enlarged the available housing stock (Müller, Hall and Kenn, 2004); increased mobility due to growing car ownership and improved accessibility (Hall and Müller, 2004); the baby-boomers' approaching retirement age which has increased the demand for second housing (Di, McArdle and Masnick, 2001).

In Southern European countries, the share of second homes in the housing stock is bigger than in other parts of Europe for instance, 27% in Spain; 9% in France; 5% in the Netherlands, 1% in UK and Germany (Leal, 2006; Casado-Díaz, 2004), which is due to some specific migration-related factors. Strong internal rural-to-urban migration flows and also intense emigration to North-western Europe marked the 1960s and 1970s. First and second generations of migrants still maintain strong links to their rural place of origin, keeping their former

permanent houses, or building new ones which are occupied nowadays during the entire summer vacations on a regular basis due to decreasing transport costs (Cólas and Cabrerizo, 2004; Deffner et al. 2002; Roca, Oliveira and Roca, 2010). Most of these houses are located in the depopulated countryside, in villages or in former agricultural holdings. In addition, Leal (2006:5-6) points to the following major specific causes of second home expansion in Southern Europe in the last two decades *prior* to the economic crisis, which severely affected real estate business: (i) seasonal climatic change and, particularly, the summer heat, which makes life in the cities unbearable; (ii) poor quality of urban life (housing in high-rise buildings, lack of leisure facilities and activities, insufficient public services for children and teenagers), which forces families to look for alternatives outside the cities; and (iii) families' ability to invest in real estate property, encouraged by economic and housing policies favouring consumption, which has made second home ownership affordable to a larger number of middle-class urbanites. Also, Aledo and Mazón (1997), as well as Romita (2010) considered the lack of land use regulation and inadequate urban and tourism planning the major factors which led to chaotic second home expansion in coastal areas of Spain and Italy, respectively. In the particular case of international second home tourism, which has developed significantly in recent years, the following causes are worth mentioning: natural and cultural amenity-rich areas; expansion and/or improvement of road infrastructures and airports; low-cost flights; comparably lower land prices and lower costs of living; and the perception of real estate acquisition as sound investment (Williams, King and Warnes. 2004, Casado-Díaz 2004, Müller, 2000; Mazón, Huete and Mantecón, 2010; Romita, 2010; Karayiannis, Iakovidou and Tsartas, 2010, Grznic, 2010, Roca et al, 2010).

All these factors resulted in the strong expansion of two opposite types of second home tourism in Southern Europe: first, mass internal tourism and international tourism, the main destination being urban summer vacation resorts frequently characterized by high housing densities, including multi-storey buildings (Leal, 2006; Tamer et al. 2006, Roca et al, 2010), and, second, elite tourism with a growing offer of exclusive large fully-commodified second home developments, often including other leisure and commercial developments, such as shopping centres, golf courses and marinas, mostly taking the form of tourist resorts or gated communities (Paris, 2006:8).

In Portugal, since the early 1990s, unlike in other Southern European countries, particularly Spain and Italy, land use has been quite regulated through national spatial planning legislation. Thus, real estate developments, including second homes, are confined to urban perimeters defined in the Municipal Master Plans. The only exceptions are tour-

ist resorts that are also designed and built under quite restrictive spatial development regulation, including low building density and other environment-friendly norms. Thus, with such regulation it is easier to control the negative economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts of second home expansion.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Any research on second homes is confronted with the lack of consensus about the definition of this phenomenon. This is because of the complexity of their origins, frequency of occupancy and purpose of use. As Coppock (1977) stated, the dynamic character of the second home, particularly the changing relationship between the first and second home, makes identification and measurement difficult. This situation is mirrored in the multiplicity of terms found in the literature, such as 'second homes', 'holiday homes', 'seasonal homes', 'weekend homes', 'cottages', 'recreational homes', etc. and researchers have to rely on definitions set by the available data sources. In this article, the following definition of second homes by the Portuguese National Institute of Statistics is adopted: "classical family dwelling of seasonal or secondary occupancy where no family member lives permanently".

Within the SEGEX project, the Oeste Region, located NW of LMA, a region in rapid socio-economic and cultural change, was chosen as the case study area for the field research aimed at attaining the following objectives: (i) drawing upon the findings of a previous desk study at national level, to compare and characterize the phenomenon of second home expansion at regional level; (ii) to identify place-specific driving forces, as well as spatial and socio-economic effects of second home expansion; (iii) to provide an insight into the interrelations of second home expansion and spatial planning policies and development in the municipalities of the Oeste region.

The Oeste Region is characterized by a diversified and dynamic economy marked by numerous small and medium-sized firms in the agro-business and ceramics industry, a competitive market-oriented agriculture, and a rising tourism sector. According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census, the share of second homes in the total number of dwellings is 23.9 % (22.6% at national level) in the Region, while in the 2001-2011 period their number grew to 26.6% (19.3% at national level). In view of such a high rate of growth, the Oeste has been considered, together with the Algarve, a priority region for the development of second home tourism in the National Strategic Plan for Tourism.

The first phase of the field research consisted of a questionnaire-based survey directed at the Parish Council representatives (parish is

the lowest territorial-administrative unit in Portugal), who are thought to be the leading local stakeholders in terms of holding the most valuable firsthand knowledge about the changing territory where they operate and its inhabitants, both permanent and temporary. The following main objectives would be achieved by asking closed questions: (i) to identify localities with a strong presence and/or growth of second homes, in order to obtain a sample of different types of second home owners, who would subsequently be interviewed; (ii) to find out about the geographical origin of second home owners; (iii) to determine the frequency of use, location, type, state and age of construction of houses and types of households belonging to second home owners. Also, by asking the Parish Council representatives open questions, the intention was to ascertain how they perceive the economic, social, cultural and environmental effects of second home expansion.

In the second phase of the field work, second home owners were interviewed about, among other topics: their motivations for choosing a second home; the use of local infrastructure; house maintenance services and related expenses; the frequency of use of local natural and cultural amenities, commerce and services; their attachment to the place, including interpersonal relations and relations with local stakeholders; and their willingness to contribute actively to local development initiatives.



Fig. 1. Spatial distribution of second home owners from the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, as perceived by the respondents.

Source: Questionnaires applied to Parish Council representatives.



Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of emigrant second home owners, as perceived by the respondents.

Source: Questionnaires applied to Parish Council representatives.



Fig. 3. Spatial distribution of foreign second home owners, as perceived by the respondents.

Source: Questionnaires applied to Parish Council representatives.

The representatives of 112 Parish Councils in the Oeste Region (92.6%) responded the questionnaire out of a total of one hundred and

twenty one. Almost half (44.6%) of these parishes are semi-rural, while 30.3% are rural and 25% urban. According to their responses, second home owners from LMA are an overwhelming majority (79%) in the parishes across the Region (Figure 1). In turn, second homes belonging to emigrants (mostly from France and Germany) and foreigners (mainly from the United Kingdom), were located in 42% and 23% of the parishes, respectively (Figures 2 and 3). The following section is focussed on the features of these three groups of second home owners.

SECOND HOMES AND THEIR OWNERS IN THE OESTE REGION

Most respondents evaluated the expansion of second homes owned by LMA residents as “medium to strong”, “strong” or “very strong” (49.5 %) (Figure 4). In general, such a trend can be interpreted as the result of a wide range of different factors, such as: (i) improvement in living standards of the population, including the generalised use of private automobiles and, related to that, the contemporary development of a Veblenian “leisure urban class” and of recreation-based lifestyles; (ii) intention of transforming the second home into primary home after retirement; (iii) escape from everyday urban life; (iv) longing for the closeness to nature; (v) the desire to spend quality time with the family; (vi) investment in real estate; (vii) controlled vacation expenses; (viii) overall enhancement of the social status (Hall and Müller, 2004:12-14; Quinn, 2004; Timothy, 2004 and Kaltenborn, 1998:123 in Quinn, 2004).

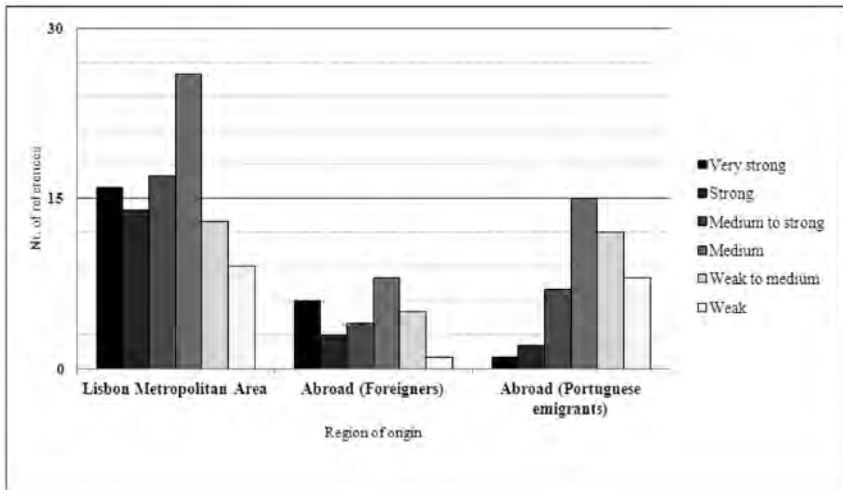


Figure 4. Expansion of second homes by owners' origin

The majority of respondents evaluated the growth of second homes owned by foreigners as “medium to strong”, “strong” or “very strong” (48%). This validates an extensive search on the Internet, also implemented as part of the SEGREGX Project, which identified a sizable number of websites dedicated to the sale of properties in the Oeste Region directed to the foreign market. Indeed, it seems that many foreigners decide to choose this region as a tourism destination because it does not have such high demand as the Algarve does. Also, in this region property prices are more affordable. Furthermore, the Oeste is connected to the Lisbon airport by a modern highway network which considerably decreases travel time. Last but not least, the region is not only rich in natural amenities (beaches and protected environmental areas) but also in cultural amenities, such as the Cistercian Gothic Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage site in the city of Alcobaça, along with a wide variety of other primary tourism resources.

Regarding second homes owned by Portuguese emigrants, it seems that the pace of their expansion has been slower than that of the other two groups. Indeed, 44.4% of the representatives of the Parish Councils considered such expansion “medium to weak”, or “weak”. This is probably related to the fact that, as in other Southern European countries, the strongest emigration flows from Portugal took place between the mid 60’s and mid 70’s of the last century, but have decreased significantly since then.

As expected, the respondents considered the frequency of use of the second homes to vary considerably among the three groups of owners (Figure 5). Most LMA residents use their second home over the weekends, emigrants stay during the summer vacations, and foreigners reside for longer periods. Such differences have mainly to do with the distance between the place of permanent residence and the place of the second home, but also with the prevailing age and family structure of each type of second home owners (Figure 6). Besides the relative proximity of the place of the second home to LMA residents, most of them are economically active, with children of school age, so their leisure time is predominantly over the weekends. Distance also plays the most important role for emigrants, the most numerous among whom are economically active or retired couples, with children or grandchildren, so that they preferably spend time in their second homes during the school vacations. On the other hand, the fact that most foreigners are retired is more important than the distance between the place of the first and of the second home. This trend among foreign owners of second homes is also present in other Southern European countries (Leal, 2006; Paris, 2006; Williams et al, 2004; Mazon et al, 2010).

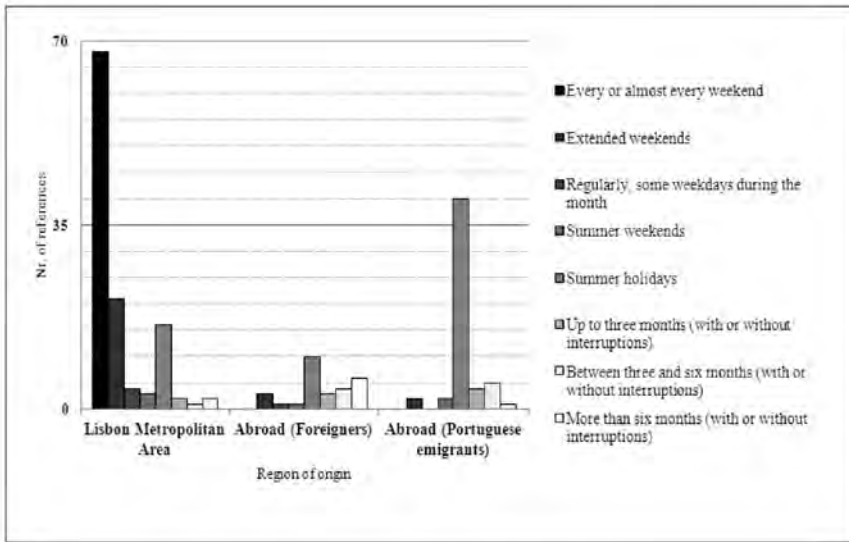


Figure 5. Frequency of use of second homes, by owners' origin

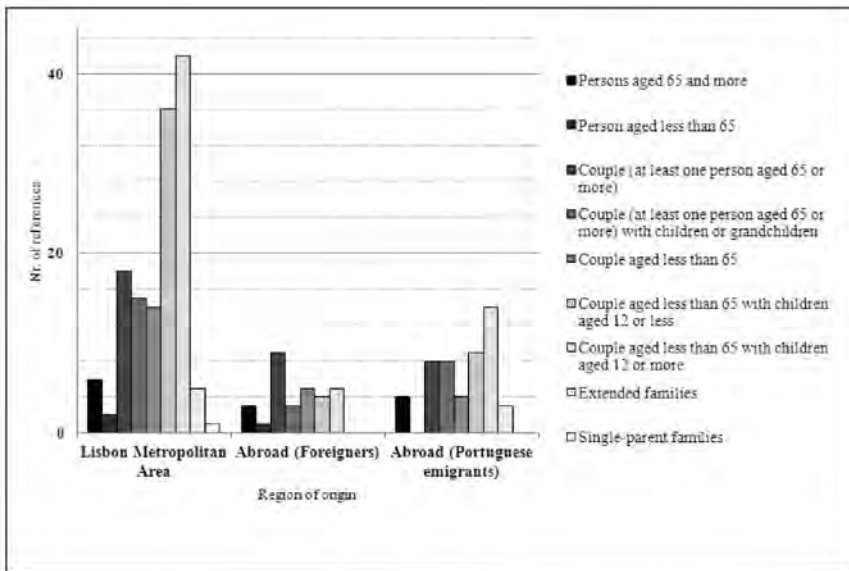


Figure 6. Types of families of second home owners, by owners' origin

Age and family structure also seem to be the key variables for explaining the differences between the three groups of owners concerning the propensity to change second into first home (Figure 7). Actually, such propensity among LMA residents and emigrants is perceived by the respondents as “medium to low” or “low” (51.1% and 59%, respectively). In the case of LMA residents, the low level of propensity

to change second into first homes can also be related to push factors in the Oeste Region. For example, there are still few alternative higher-income employment opportunities that would motivate the more educated second home owners to move to this Region. In fact, it seems that at this stage the strong expansion of second homes in the Oeste Region is a result of a growing rural gentrification (Hoogendoorn and Visser, 2004), rather than of the first stage of urban sprawl. On the other hand, concerning foreigners, most respondents consider this trend “medium”, “medium to high” “or “high”, which is logically related to foreigners’ preference for longer stays in second homes. In the near future, the propensity to change second into first home is likely to be higher within all three groups when the *post-World War II* baby-boom generation starts to retire.

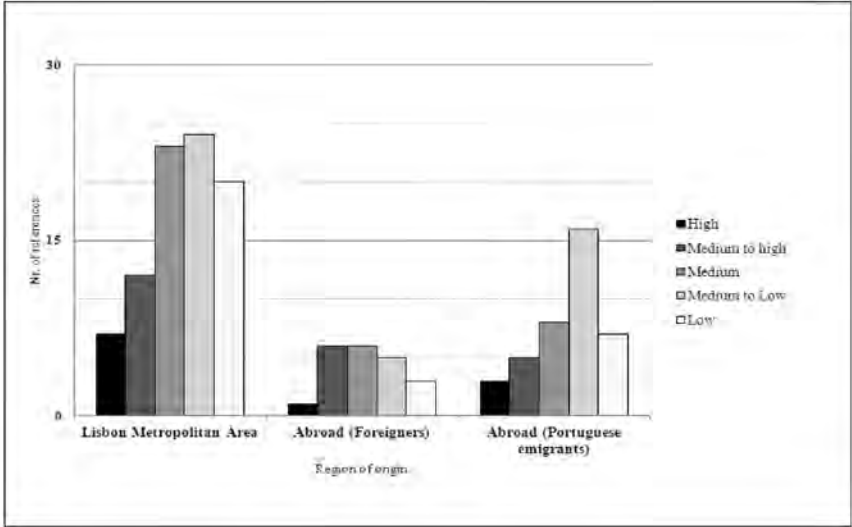


Figure 7. Propensity to change second into first home, by owners’ origin

There are no significant differences among the three groups of owners in terms of the location of second homes (Figure 8). The majority prefer to buy those located either within, or outside, rural settlements (68.3%, 66.7% and 64.1% for LMA residents, foreigners and emigrants, respectively). While more than two thirds of the first two groups of owners prefer individual houses (70.7 % and 68%), among emigrants this figure is even higher (82.3%), which has to do with the fact that *prior* to emigration most of them were already owners of individual country houses that became second homes. It is also worth mentioning that although the respondents considered that only a small number of second home owners stay in gated communities or tourist resorts,

direct observation during the field work has shown that they are being recently built in quite selected natural amenity-rich areas. Thus, in the Oeste Region, the probability of rural landscapes being transformed into “elite landscapes” (Halseth, 1998) is becoming ever higher.

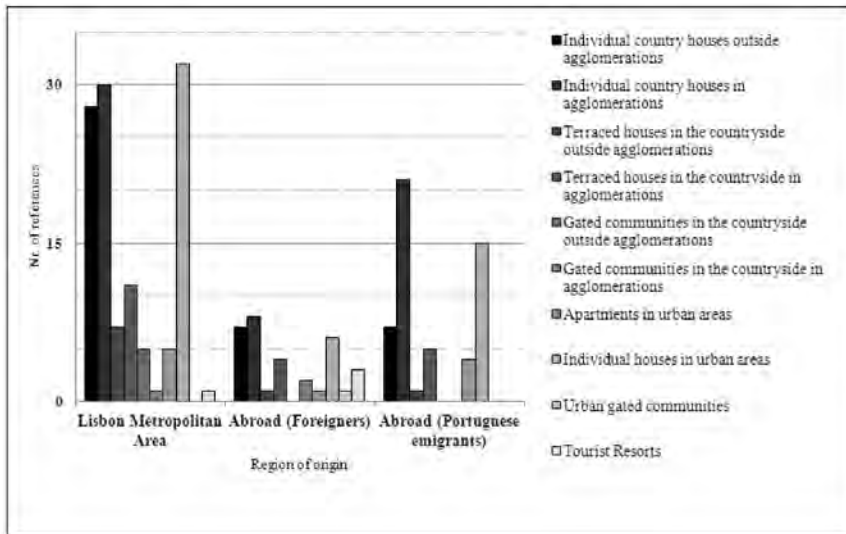


Figure 8. Location of second homes, by owners' origin

In rural areas, most second home owners from LMA (62.3%) and, to a lesser extent, foreigners (58.8%) prefer to live in restored houses, while in urban areas they would rather live in newly-built houses or apartments (50.7% and 80%, respectively) (Figure 9). In fact, field research conducted in other parts of Portugal gave evidence of the important role of second home owners in the conservation and preservation of the built heritage of villages and hamlets. For example, in the Lousã Mountain (Mendonça, 1999-2000; Dinis and Malta, 2001) and in the rural municipality of Trancoso (Carvalho, 2003), second home owners were identified as the most important type of residents accountable for housing renewal. Conversely, most emigrants live in non-restored old houses, either in rural or urban areas.

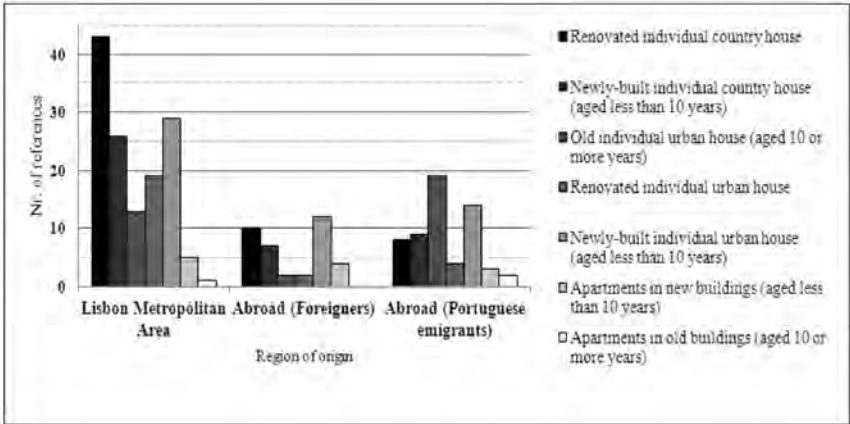


Figure 9. Construction age and state of second homes, by owners' origin

5. The impacts of second home expansion, as perceived by local authorities

The Parish Council representatives were also asked to reflect on the environmental, social, economic and cultural impacts of second home expansion in the urban and rural areas of their parishes. Most gave concrete responses to the questions on such impacts in rural areas, but did not know or did not answer anything on impacts in urban areas (Figures 10 and 11). The reasons behind this outcome could be two-fold: (i) the environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts of second home expansion are more visible or easy to perceive in rural areas than in urban settings; (ii) since most parishes are classified as semi-rural or rural, the respondents are more aware of such impacts in the countryside than in urban nuclei.

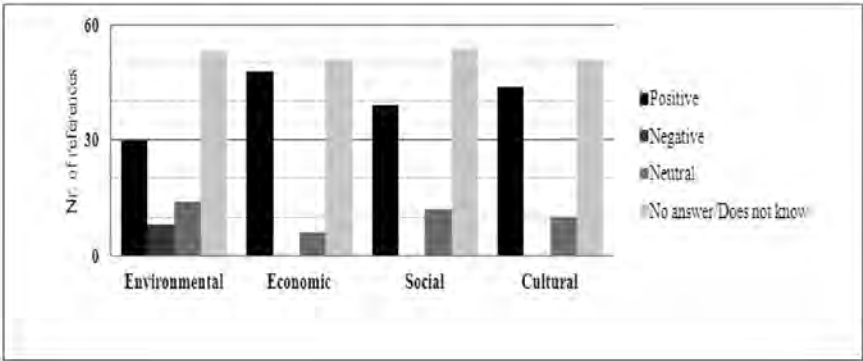


Figure 10. Impacts of second homes located in urban areas

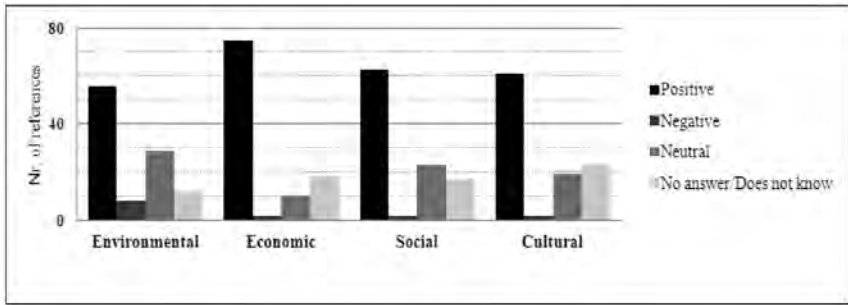


Figure 11. Impacts of second homes located in rural areas

To clarify this issue, an additional analysis of the impacts was conducted separately for each type of parish - rural, semi-rural and urban (Figures 12 to 14). It was found that, in the case of the impacts on urban areas, in the three types of parishes the share of responses “do not know” and “no response” was quite similar, while in the case of the impacts in rural areas the responses manifesting defined opinions on the issue of impacts clearly prevailed. It seems that the answers on impacts by the local authorities are influenced by the higher visibility of, or higher degree of sensitivity to, such phenomena in rural areas.

Positive evaluation of the environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts of second home expansion in rural areas prevailed. This is in line with findings by Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones (2000: 51) in a literature review that evaluated the impacts of second home growth in the United Kingdom and other European countries, as “particularly linked to the types of dwelling used to this purpose”. Since most of the second homes in the parishes included in the field research sample belong to the type of housing stock classified by these authors as “derelict and empty surplus dwellings” (i.e. old country houses), their expansion provokes much less negative impacts than the other two types, i.e., newly-built and mainstream housing stock.

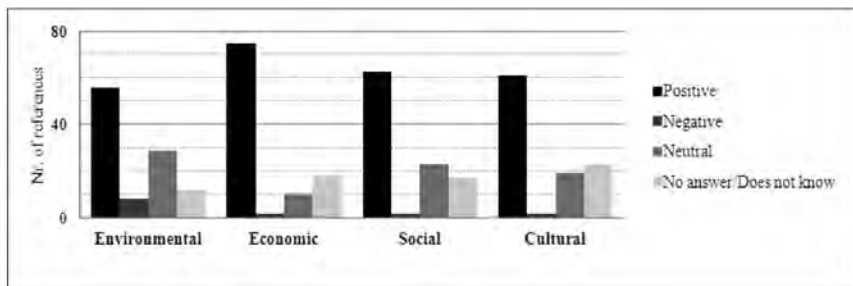


Figure 12. Impacts of second homes in rural areas of rural parishes

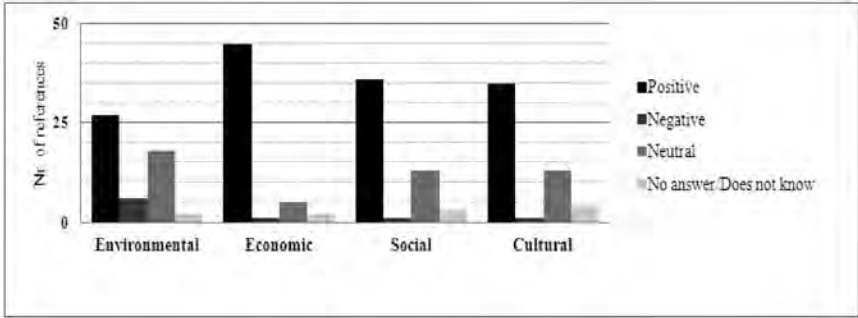


Figure 13. Impacts of second homes in rural areas of semi-rural parishes

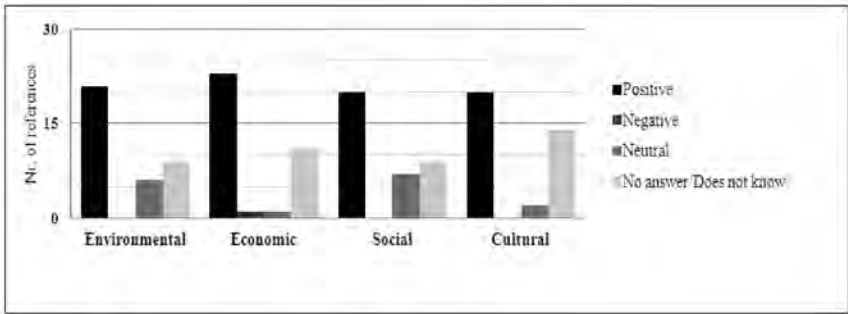


Figure 14. Impacts of second homes in rural areas of urban parishes

As examples of positive assessments of the environmental impacts, the following answers by the Parish Council representatives are worth highlighting: “Second home owners are more aware of environmental impacts and introduce good practices of environmental protection”; “They contribute to the restoration of the built heritage, housing renewal or maintenance” and “More investments in the improvement of physical infra-structures and of the sewage system benefit the local community”.

The predominance of positive environmental impacts is also supported by Muller et al (2004) in the literature review on the impacts of second homes in different geographical settings. They argue that, compared to other rural development stakeholders, second home owners are more environment-friendly. Also Jones et al (2003 in McIntyre, Williams and McHugh. 2006: 243) in their field research in rural USA “provided evidence to suggest that second home owners are environmentally better informed and educated than the local population”. Correspondingly, Buller and Hoggart (1994 in Müller, 2004:22) stress that British second home owners in rural France follow a “museum-strategy” of local development, that is, they aim to preserve the coun-

tryside as an artefact, while local people choose the “home-strategy”, i.e., they wish to develop the countryside without alienating its singular elements.

The following opinions illustrate the perceived positive economic impacts of second home expansion: “Second home owners significantly increase the consumption of local products”; “They boost the local economy, mainly with the restoration of built heritage, housing renewal or maintenance, with the improvement of social and physical infra-structure”; “They encourage job and firm creation”.

In fact, as claimed by Gallent, Mace and Tewdwr-Jones. (2005:55) in their book on European perspectives on second home expansion, this phenomenon provides a flow of money supporting local economy. Other authors also point out that with longer stays, second home owners will purchase locally available consumable goods more frequently (Jacobs, 1972 on England; Archer, 1973 on Wales; Clout, 1972 on England). Likewise, in a literature review on second home expansion in Europe and North America, Paris (2006: 7) argues that many second home owners favour expenditure within the local economy of their second home. Also, Hoggart and Buller (1995) in their field work in rural France, as well as Wallace et al (2005) in the UK, Albarre (1977) in Belgium and Shellito (2006) in the USA stress the role of second home owners in the conservation and renovation of derelict houses, which create job opportunities for the local communities.

The following responses show best the perceived positive social impacts of second home expansion: “Second home owners cultivate good relations with neighbours”; “They are willing to interact with local people”; “They want to participate in the civil society initiatives”. Such answers reveal that second home owners can also show strong attachment to the place. Stewart and Stynes (2006) came to a similar conclusion doing field research in the US Midwest, and Stedman (2006) in Northern Wisconsin. In fact, this should be expected since, as Müller (2000) points out regarding Sweden and Finland, the owners visit their second homes regularly and are thus closely attached to that particular area. Also, as Kaltenborn (1998) emphasizes in his case study on Southern Norway, others may have family links to the place of the second home.

The respondents in the Oeste Region were also confident that second home owners want to learn about habits and customs of the local people, are fond of participating in cultural activities and events, and participate in the creation of cultural groups and associations. They are also responsible for the restoration of built heritage. Such statements can partly find an explanation in Stoa's assertion (2007:10) that “many second home owners lead a more active social life in the cottage village than they do in their urban home because working days tend to be too busy”.

CONCLUSION

The field research in the Oeste Region, revealed that the majority of second home owners are permanent residents from LMA, followed by emigrants and foreigners. These three groups predictably differ in the frequency of use of the second homes. On the other hand, both LMA residents and emigrants are mostly economic active couples with children, while most of the foreigners are retirees. Consequently, the former two groups are also similar in terms of the lower propensity to change second into first home while this tendency is significantly higher among foreign second home owners. On the other hand, the degree of expansion of second homes owned by LMA residents and foreigners is much higher than in the case of emigrants. What is common to all three groups is their preference for renewing individual derelict, or old empty houses in the countryside.

The latter finding partly explains why, in the opinion of the local authorities of the Oeste Region, the positive impacts of second home expansion in the rural areas clearly outweigh the negative ones, particularly in view of the fact that most of the houses converted to second homes are derelict and/or empty surplus housing stock. This means that second home owners do not compete with the local permanent residents for mainstream and newly-built housing stock and, thus, do not contribute to the inflation of housing prices. Consequently, the displacement of the local population is less likely to occur (Gallent et al., 2005).

Also, in light of the fact that most of the countryside of the Oeste Region, particularly in the interior areas, have an aged and declining agricultural population partly due to negative net migration, local authorities can easily perceive the impacts of second home expansion in rural areas as mostly positive, since they look forward to external forces that could compensate negative demographic trends, and thus diversify the local economy.

These positive views of the impacts of second home expansion on the local rural society and economy are similar to those expressed by the local people interviewed during field research conducted in depopulated and economically depressed rural areas, both in Europe and North America. Citing Hall and Muller (2004), Paris (2006:7) stresses that "many studies have recorded benefits of second home ownership on local economies especially as an antidote to declining primary sector employment and depopulation". Marcouiller et al (1996: 4) interviewed local government members and businessmen, as well as permanent residents in the Upper Great Lakes States in the USA and found out that recreational housing development from the respondents' perspective has positive local benefits that outweigh costs. After

interviewing local rural populations during his field research in Norway, Rye (2011) found out that views on second home expansion are in general positive. Also, Gallent et al (2005: 115) in their book on European perspectives on second homes, argue that nowadays “the movement of people into the countryside – whether seasonally or permanently - is generally viewed positively in France. It is seen as part of the revitalisation of economically lagged areas and a welcome relief from agricultural decline”. Similar are the findings of González (2009), who considers second home tourism a key factor in the recent demographic and economic recovery of some areas of the depopulated rural interior of Spain.

In the above context, if Coppock’s famous question “are second homes a curse, or blessing?” (1977) was asked of local authorities in such geographical settings, their response would be rather easy to guess. However, as mentioned earlier, a significant growth in the number of tourist resorts located in rural areas, with second homes (built, under construction, or planned) oriented to the international real estate market was observed during the field work. This could provide fertile ground to possible conflicts between second homes owners and local residents around issues related to land use, including rising land prices. Therefore, it is necessary to design and implement spatial planning measures at regional level in line with central government spatial development policies which may prevent or minimize the negative consequences of such conflicts, or bring about improvements.

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