

The impact of closed condominiums in the urban form and structure of metropolitan areas

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During the last two decades, the area of Greater Oporto has been progressively occupied by a new type of private residential developments, so-called closed condominiums. This phenomenon has amplified the more general trends of urban dispersion and fragmentation of this metropolitan area. The paper is part of a research project which is currently studying the impact of these closed condominiums in the urban form at two different scales of analysis - micro and macro. The micro scale comprises the analysis of the local physical and social impacts of these new developments on the immediate surroundings and on the existing urban and suburban fabric. The macro scale refers, on the contrary, to the whole area of Greater Oporto and will be the focus of this paper. Our main concern is the identification and analysis of the physical and functional impacts of these private residential developments on the overall metropolitan form and structure. A sample of over one hundred closed condominiums in Greater Oporto constitutes our database which includes several socio-economic, spatial and location indicators as well as their main typo-morphological characteristics. Closed condominiums are usually recognized by their high level of functional auto-sufficiency presenting, consequently, a greater capacity to adapt to different locations and urban contexts. Our understanding of the past evolution and present dynamics of the metropolitan area of Oporto is an essential prerequisite for this research. Our methodology combines GIS with a number of simple techniques of spatial statistics. The research points out the importance of these residential developments in reshaping certain urban and suburban areas. This paper is expected to contribute to a better understanding of these new types of urban production in the overall metropolitan form and structure and provide valuable recommendations to design more responsive planning policies.

Keywords: closed condominiums; urban impact; metropolitan form and structure.