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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to analyse the motivations of the participants of the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime in Fafe (located in the north of Portugal) and provide an overview of the tourism opportunities and impacts associated with the event. To this end, the study analysed the main events on the programme for the 2024 edition of this religious festivity. According to the interviews and participant observations, the impact of the religious festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime on the faithful who participated was evident. For this study, semi-structured face-to-face interviews and participant observations were conducted, and the former were recorded for subsequent content analysis and categorisation. Participant observation was conducted, focusing on the events that occurred during the religious festivity in honour of the Lady of Antime. The limitations of this study relate to the fact that this is a resource that has not yet been explored as a lever for religious tourism in the municipality, although it has received more media attention in recent years. After carrying out this study, it was possible to conclude that the religious festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime is attracting more and more believers, and that this event has become a resource that is complementary to the basic tourist resources of the destination of Fafe.

**Keywords:** religious tourism; religious festivity; Marian devotion; Fafe



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## 1. Introduction

Pilgrimages, common across both monotheistic and polytheistic religions, have roots in classical antiquity. In fact, journeys to Delphi originated in Greece to celebrate sacrifices to the god Dionysus. But it was the conquest of Jerusalem in the 11th century that gave rise to the great pilgrimages to the Holy Places. During the Middle Ages, as is still true today, believers undertook pilgrimages to the Holy Places (Shaver-Crandell 1982; Domingues 2013). The most prestigious pilgrimages for a Christian were those to Jerusalem (where Christ lived and died), Rome (the administrative centre of the Church and the place where the first Pope, St Peter, was martyred) and Santiago de Compostela (where the Apostle James was believed to be buried).

Tourism can also be seen as a form of pilgrimage because, like pilgrimage, it involves stages in rites of passage: ‘the start of the journey; the journey itself; the stay at the shrine or place where the sacred is encountered; (and) the return home’ (Hoggart 1992 cited in Burns 1999, p. 90). Indeed, MacCannell (1973) sees tourism as the modern equivalent of religious pilgrimage: the two are homologous in that they both seek authentic experiences. For his part, Amirou (1995) speaks of a tendency towards sacralisation, particularly in the

choice of places to visit. So, it is not uncommon to see an ancient religious site and a tourist attraction overlapping in time and space.

As [Domingues \(2013\)](#) points out, while in Greek and Roman civilisations the worship of the gods was usually accompanied by festivities and games that encouraged people to mobilise, today pilgrimages are more spiritual in nature, although tourist and cultural motivations for participating in these activities are common ([Silva et al. 2023](#)). In Portugal today, festivals and pilgrimages are held all over the country, combining religious motivation with recreation.

In this region of the Minho, Fafe is one of the regions that is still considered very authentic in terms of preserving traditions with distinctive characteristics.

The festivity of Our Lady of Antime, held in Fafe on the second weekend of July, is an important event for the local community, combining religious devotion and cultural expression ([Leal 1874](#); [Pereira-Caldas 1858](#)). Dedicated to the patron saint of the parish of Antime, it is marked by a series of rituals and activities that not only celebrate faith but also strengthen the cultural and social identity of the region ([Coimbra 1997](#)).

Processions and pilgrimages take place in honour of the Virgin Mary, adopting characteristics that are specific to the key activities of each location. For example, in Lamego, the image of the Virgin is carried on an oxcart; in Viana do Castelo, Constância or Albufeira, it is carried on fishing boats by fishermen; in Fafe, the image Our Lady of Antime is carried through both parishes on the outskirts of Fafe.

One of the most emblematic moments of this religious festivity is the majestic procession in which the images of Our Lady of Antime and Our Lady of Sorrows meet on the São José Bridge. This undoubtedly illustrates the interconnectedness of local religious traditions ([Gonçalves et al. 2009](#)).

The devotion to the Lady of Antime has deep historical roots (the first reference to the festivity dates back to 1736) and reflects the spiritual importance of the patron saint for the parish and community of Fafe. The fact that the procession takes place on the second Sunday in July ([Oliveira n.d.](#)) allows a wide participation due to the summer holidays and the return of emigrants, creating a festive atmosphere and intense community participation. This seasonal period also contributes to the vitality of the festivity and the integration of religious and cultural celebrations ([Cabral \[1989\] 2019](#)).

We performed ethnographic interviews to gain an understanding of the meanings that the interviewees give to the phenomenon in question. The small number of interviewees in the sample made it difficult to compare the responses. Nevertheless, as this research is still in its infancy, the ethnographic interview was suitable for obtaining contextual data, which was useful as there is still very little published research on the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime ([Altinay et al. 2024](#); [Finn et al. 2000](#)). These results are inductive, generating hypotheses that should be confirmed in future deductive studies, particularly with regard to gauging the impact of this religious event on the city of Fafe.

In addition to the ethnographic interviews ([Spradley 1979](#)), participant observation ([Spradley \[1980\] 2016](#)) was carried out during the main days of the festivity to gain a deeper understanding of the practices and dynamics involved. Observation allowed for a detailed analysis of rituals, community participation and the interaction between religious and cultural elements. This methodological approach provided valuable insights into the conduct of the events and the experience of the festivity, complementing the information obtained in the interviews.

The aim of this article is to provide an exploratory study of the religious festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime, from the point of view of the anthropology of tourism, with particular emphasis on the day of the religious procession in which the images of Our Lady of Antime and Our Lady of Sorrows meet. This article will also address the origins and historical evolution of the festivity, describe the rituals and celebrations and assess the cultural and social impact of the event on the Fafe community. In those ways, this study aimed to provide a detailed understanding of how these traditions shape and are shaped by local identity, how they fit into the wider context of religious and cultural

festivities in Fafe and how they can be turned into a tourist resource that complements other basic resources of the region, such as rallying, gastronomy and cultural or natural heritage (López Olivares 2014).

This event can be included in the folklore category (religious manifestations and popular festivals) within the local portfolio of tourist attractions. In terms of the hierarchical value of the event, and in line with the proposal of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and that of Leno (as cited in García-Delgado and Felicidade-García 2014, p. 200), this is of hierarchy 2: 'attractions capable of stimulating regional or local tourist flows'.

## 2. Religious Tourism and Pilgrimages

Religious tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism in the world, considered the main motivation for people to travel. Several studies suggest that religious tourism is a "fast-growing segment" of this industry (Griffin and Raj 2017). According to various definitions, religious tourism concerns all travels outside the natural environment for religious purposes, which includes pilgrimages (Di Giovine and Elsner 2016). Thus, religious tourism is a type of tourism including people of faith who travel individually or in groups, for religious or spiritual purposes (Griffin and Raj 2017). Indeed, religious tourism can be understood as an activity carried out by people who travel for religious motivations or to attend events of a religious nature. Its main characteristics are the multifunctionality of journeys and the overlapping motivations of pilgrim-tourists. Pilgrimage is an example of this experience.

Pilgrimage is an ancient form of travel and a precursor to modern tourism (Zapponi 2010). Pilgrimage involves a journey of some sort, usually one of enough distance to be a hardship, or at least an inconvenience, to the pilgrim (Dubisch 1995). It can be said that tourism has its roots in the practice of secular pilgrimages (Cohen 1992; Digance 2006; MacCannell 1999; Smith 1992; Turner and Turner 2011; Webb 2001). As Di Giovine and Elsner (2016) refer, pilgrimage is an individual experience, a social process developed iteratively over time.

Contemporary religious tourism has evolved to combine with other forms of tourism, such as cultural tourism. Nolan and Nolan (1992) identified three types of religious tourism attractions: pilgrimage shrines devoted to religious practice and with little attraction of secular tourism; shrines that are simultaneously centres of devotion and tourist attractions, due to their historical, artistic or performative features; and places where religious festivities are the main attraction.

Going to a shrine is, to a large extent, the externalisation of a need for protection from the hostility of everyday life, expressed in veneration, whether isolated or collective. In any case, pilgrimages always have two perspectives: one spiritual and the other practical. The former is the motivation behind the desire to travel; the latter includes, among other things, travelling to and often staying in the place where the shrine is located (Ambrósio 2000).

In many tourist destinations, including Portugal, religious tourism is one of the increasing segments. Portugal is a route of temples, cults and religious festivities that we can travel through full of faith or a more universal spirituality, either in search of the sacred or of ourselves. Fátima, one of the world's most important Marian sanctuaries, is an example "of very large shrine complexes in small communities that are visited primarily by pilgrims and religiously-oriented tourists" (Nolan and Nolan 1992, p. 71). Fátima, where Our Lady appeared to the three little shepherds in 1917, is a hub of faith and peace, especially on the 13th of every month from May to October.

Another route that has created greater dynamism, especially in the northern region of Portugal, is the Portuguese Way to Santiago, namely the Central Way and, more recently, the Coastal Way. Pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela have doubled in the last decade. The fact that the Holy Year celebrated in 2021 was exceptionally extended to 2022, due to circumstances caused by the pandemic, has contributed to this increase in the number of pilgrims on the roads. There are many routes travelled today by pilgrims who repeat the steps of the past on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

In addition to the cultural and social perspective, religious tourism is extremely important from an economic point of view, not only because of the large number of people it attracts but also because of the investments made in the destinations. It should be emphasised that places of religious worship are generally located far from traditional tourist destinations, which is why it is also an important factor in regional development. Examples of this are Fátima, Lourdes or Mecca.

Religious tourism has, indeed, an important socio-economic impact on its destinations, with a significant impact on the social and economic viability of the communities as an economic activity and as an outcome of the movement of people. It represents an opportunity for the development of tourist activities and for the economic and social development of the locations where they were built (Silva et al. 2023).

Like tourism destinations, religious tourism also contributes to increasing the financial revenue of local governments, playing an important role in supporting and sponsoring the development of low-density areas such as Fafe.

### 3. The Minho Region and Its Religious Events

In the kaleidoscope of regions that make up Portugal, the Minho stands out as a natural amphitheatre in the north-west of the country, bordered by the Atlantic coast and limited to the east by the Marão mountain range. It is also a region of high rainfall, and is therefore covered with vegetation, but is inhabited by a large number of people (1,077,781) (Ribeiro 1987; Mattoso 1998; O Minho 2021; Diário do Minho 2022). In the past, this region was called Entre-Douro-e-Minho, because it was located between these two important watercourses (Mattoso 1998). With the Portuguese Constitution of 1822, the province of Minho (see Figure 1) replaced that of Entre-o-Douro-e-Minho (Claudino 2006).



**Figure 1.** Traditional province of Minho. **Source:** Wikipedia (2016).

The popular culture of the Minho is characterised by songs, dances, costumes and handicrafts. In fact, since the 19th century, the literary and iconographic discourse of the Minho has favoured the rural character of this province, often describing its green landscape or rustic scenes (Braga 2007; Braga and Otón 2017). In reality, the Minho

was the preferred tourist destination in 19th-century Portugal: ‘the Minho brought together landscape, history, folklore, gastronomy, exoticism and even therapeutic virtues’ (Gonçalves et al. 2009, p. 413).

In the words of 19th-century Portuguese writers such as Almeida Garrett and Alexandre Herculano, the province of Minho is described as the cornerstone of the Portuguese nationality, but also as a picturesque, romantic, nostalgic and relatively underdeveloped territory. In this context, the superstitions of the people are also mentioned. Júlio Dinis, for his part, narrated a rural Minho, alluding to the innate inclination to sing and dance and the survival of traditions in this province (Medeiros 2003). In this context, the 19th-century Portuguese historian Oliveira Martins also described the Minho populace as a simple people for whom the denial of contemporaneity is intrinsic.

The Minho region of Portugal is also associated by writers such as Dionísio (1978) with places of remembrance, where you can see very clear signs of the culture of yesteryear, original and autonomous, which would give rise to the Kingdom of Portugal. It is, therefore, the cradle province of the nation. Almeida (1987) also recognises popular belief as a characteristic of the Minho. In fact, some festivities, such as the Festa da Coca (a Minho word meaning evil), typical of the town of Monção and dating back to the 16th century, represent the struggle between good and evil, truth and lies. In one of Teófilo Braga’s works (1885), we find a detailed description of this festival:

‘This coca is a monster in the shape of a dragon. It has arches covered with canvas and wheels underneath on which it marches and counter-marches. It has wings, spikes and a great twisted tail. Its mouth is made of springs, and to open and close it they tie a rope to it, because the men who make the dragon run pull it behind them to frighten the horse. It is this battle between St George and St Coke that amazes people the most. After many attacks, St George always manages to pierce the monster’s back, and when he has done so, it retreats. Finally, the people of Monção go in large numbers to Salvaterra da Galicia, where they spend the rest of the day celebrating’.

Festivities such *Corpus Christi* in Monção or the Cruzes in Barcelos bear witness to the subjugation of ancient pagan rites to Christianity (Braga and Otón 2017).

The Minho region is rich in festivities, especially in its rural parishes, where the religious fervour is decisive. There, festivities also stimulate the social structures of the community and are a symbolic way of confronting the evil and chaos that threaten society (pain, the harshness of work, envy, inequality, sex and the devil), thus establishing social order (Cabral [1989] 2019). The association of the Minho identity with religious festivities and celebrations testifies to the connotation of this people with the integrity of faith and religious devotion (Medeiros 2003). According to Ferreira de Almeida (1987), the saints invoked have specific functions and powers derived from their name, a miracle they performed, the time in which they lived or their hagiography.

In this way, the festivities stimulate competition between the parishes, and this rivalry helps the parish to open itself up to the outside world, to attract outsiders in order to proclaim and display its attributes and power and to gain fame.

The religious festivities represent the seasons of the year and their occupations (Easter is the time to plough the land, St. John’s is the time to thresh rye, in summer—as it is not a time of great agricultural zeal—most of the festivities are held, St. Michael’s is the time to harvest grapes and corn, St. Martin’s is the time to kill pigs and gather chestnuts, etc.) (Cabral [1989] 2019).

Portuguese ethnographers, such as Jorge Dias, have highlighted the contrast between the strong religiosity of northern Portugal, where the extended family predominates, particularly in the Minho, and the weak religiosity, with a predominance of the nuclear family, typical of southern Portugal (Sobral 2004). In general terms, Dias (2004) notes an antinomy between the religiosity of the Portuguese, which is of a more human nature, believing in miraculous solutions and supported by a solid faith, and that of the Spanish, which, according to the same ethnographer, is abstract, mystical or tragic.

According to [Dias \(2004\)](#), Portuguese devotion itself has a human, welcoming and peaceful quality. Portuguese villages do not build the huge, austere churches that are so typical of the Spanish countryside, so excessive that they lack the human touch. The Portuguese church is always a welcoming temple, according to the same author, inhabited by good, human saints. You do not see the angry, tortured Christs of Spain. Portuguese sensibility cannot bear that tragic and painful vision. For [Dias \(2004\)](#), this human and earthy feeling of Portuguese religiosity is evident in the great expansion of the Romanesque style and the lack of absorption of the Gothic style. In most of the architectural monuments that are characteristically Portuguese, there is a certain density of columns, a clear tendency towards depth and horizontality, which is the opposite of the Gothic's desire for ascent. [Caro Baroja \(1986\)](#) is perennial:

The turbulent mysticism and a kind of obscure paganism associated with it in an ambiguous and unconnected way is, in any case, more often followed by the 'Gothic order'. The great sculptural decorations always seem to be a commentary on the ritual phrase: 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will'. And peace—above all—is the daily, mechanical work.

For their part, [Gonçalves et al. \(2009\)](#) point out that for intellectuals and ethnographers, both national and foreign, the Minho people are inescapably intensely religious and manifest this in festive ways. This region is home to Braga, the religious capital of the North, the seat of the first Portuguese archbishopric ([Oliveira 2016](#)). In fact, the diocese of Braga was established in 1070, before the dioceses of Coimbra (1080) and Porto (1112) were established in Portugal ([Oliveira 1996](#)).

More recently, the results of the census of Sunday practice show that in the 1977, 1991 and 2011 censuses, the diocese of Braga was the first place, followed by Viana do Castelo ([Gonçalves et al. 2009](#)). Thus, both Baixo Minho and Alto Minho were characterised by the intensity of their Catholic religious practices. Festivities and pilgrimages also have abounded in this region. In fact, these events have "mixed Christian-inspired religiosity, pagan rites, mysticism and superstition" ([Cascão 1998](#), p. 442). In the 19th century, the most popular festivities in the Minho region were, among others, São Torcato (Guimarães), Bom Jesus do Monte and Senhora do Sameiro (Braga), Senhora da Agonia (Viana do Castelo) and Senhora do Alívio (Vila Verde).

The Minho is a region with a high level of emigration, due to its high population concentration, and Minho people in diaspora regularly return to their homeland. The reason for the spread of these social rituals over time is explained by the same authors as a certain cultural atavism in the Minho identity. This explains why "young and old, believers and non-believers, folk, cadres and local elites coexist in these events" ([Gonçalves et al. 2009](#), p. 437).

#### 4. Fafe and the Pilgrimage in Honour of Our Lady of Antime

In Portugal, Marian devotion has deep roots that can be traced back to the foundation of the country, when D. Afonso Henriques, the 'young chief of the Portuguese', finally became sovereign and took the title of king (in 1139 or 1140) ([Peres 1992](#), p. 124). In the Middle Ages, as [Dias \(2019\)](#) points out, there was a great increase in the construction of chapels, churches and cathedrals dedicated to Our Lady. In addition, devotional objects such as relics and various iconographies related to the Virgin multiplied. The same author also records an increase in apparitions and miracles associated with the Virgin during the same period. In the 12th and 13th centuries, as [Marques \(2010\)](#) points out, pilgrimage centres were almost exclusively located in Entre-Douro-e-Minho and Beira (in central Portugal). The same author places the outbreaks of Marian devotion in the 14th and especially in the 15th century. In the early modern period (16th to 18th centuries), Marian devotion flourished in response to Protestant heresies. However, it was in modern times (19th and 20th centuries) that this manifestation reached its zenith, with an increase in the number of feasts dedicated to the Mother of Jesus, as well as apparitions of the Virgin, namely in Lourdes (1858) and Fatima (1917).

Until the liberal revolution of the 19th century and the subsequent administrative reforms, Fafe was called Monte Longo. The municipality received its charter from King Manuel in 1513. In 1836, the name Monte Longo became obsolete and the municipality was renamed Fafe (Coimbra 1997).

Currently, the Minho municipality of Fafe, which belongs to the district of Braga (and the archdiocese of the same city) and is included in NUT II of the Northern Region and NUT III of Ave, has 36 parishes, one of which is called Antime. This parish gives its name to the most important popular festivity in the municipality, held on the second Sunday in July, in honour of Our Lady of Antime or Our Lady of Mercy or the Sun (Porto Editora n.d.; Leal 1874).

According to Coimbra (1997, pp. 269–70), the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime was associated with a solar cult or a fertility ritual, the former being linked to paganism or even to the name of the Virgin ‘and the latter to the ritual of passage from adolescence to adulthood’. According to the same author, the procession was the realisation of a distant ritual performed by young married men. In this context, the carrying of the platform—the weight of which, according to some authors, was 8 arrobas, according to others 24 arrobas and according to others 360 kg—would be a ‘public proof of the virility or manhood of the young men, who would legitimise their future marriage by this act’ (Coimbra 1997, p. 270).

Branco ([1862] 2020), the greatest name of literary Romanticism in Portugal, alludes to Our Lady of Antime in his *Memórias do Cárcere* (Prison Memoirs) of 1862:

The Lady of Antime is made of stone and weighs twenty-four arrobas with her charola. The strongest young men in the parish carry the float. Years ago, one of those who carried the float was frowned upon by the others, especially by one of them. As he turned a corner, the hated young man felt himself fall under the twenty-four stone arrobas and was instantly crushed to death. The dead man’s main enemy was soon identified and struck him down with a blow, spilling his blood and life into the image’s charnel house.

Thus, it is eight boys, the bravest of the bachelors, who carry the Lady (Capela 2003; Oliveira n.d.), who is made of metamorphic granite, ‘with false arms, and without feet or legs, nor any form of statuary, apart from her face alone’ (Pereira-Caldas 1858, p. 274). In one of his works, Teófilo Braga (1885) mentions that the image was carried in procession to Fafe at ten in the morning and returned to Antime at three in the afternoon. Oliveira (n.d.), for his part, gives a more detailed account of the route taken by the procession.

According to the same author, the procession starts early in the morning, leaves the Mother Church of Fafe at a fixed time and goes to the neighbouring parish, where it waits to meet the Lady leaving the parish church of Antime, supported by the eight young people already mentioned—‘16 in all, to take turns holding the eight arms or *banzos* of the said *charola* of the Lady’ (Pereira-Caldas 1858, p. 274). It is this float that the people ‘want to see, accompany, follow, surround, elbow and push each other in a strange and moving religiosity’ (Oliveira n.d., p. 399). In the afternoon, the procession went in the opposite direction, followed by the other one. The two processions reach the wide, hilly Largo do Lombo and continue to the church.

Although some authors who have studied the festivity claim that it is more than five centuries old, according to Coimbra (1997), the oldest documented reference to the festivity dates back to 1736 and appears in the *Monografia do Concelho de Fafe* (Monograph of the Municipality of Fafe), written by the parish priest of Santa Eulália de Fafe, João de Sousa Homem.

Today, the festive programme (see Figure 2) consists of four processions and attracts many pilgrims to the town of Fafe and the parish of Antime. The first procession leaves from the São Brás chapel and heads for the Antime parish church on Saturday.

**PROGRAMA**

**8 a 12 de Julho**  
Missa com Pregação  
*Igreja de Antime, às 20h*

**10 de Julho**  
Peregrinação dos Frágeis  
*Igreja de Antime, às 10h30*

**12 e 13 de Julho**  
43º Encontro de Coros Litúrgicos  
do Arciprestado de Fafe  
*Igreja Nova de S. José, às 21h*

**13 de Julho**  
Procissão de Velas seguida de  
Pregação e Bênção do Santíssimo,  
da Capela de S. Bras até a  
*Igreja de Antime, às 21h30*

**14 de Julho**  
8h15 – Missa na Igreja de Antime  
*presidida por D. Bellim Gomes  
solemnizada pelo Coral de Antime*  
8h30 – Missa na Igreja Nova de S. José

9h45 – Saída da Procissão da Igreja Nova de S. José  
10h – Saída da Procissão da Igreja de Antime  
10h15 – Encontro na Ponte de S. José

12h – Chegada da Procissão à Igreja Nova de S. José

16h45 – Vésperas de Nossa Senhora na Igreja Nova de S. José  
18h00 – Saída da Procissão da Igreja Nova de S. José  
18h30 – Cerimónia do 'Adeus', no Lombo  
20h – Chegada à Igreja Paroquial de Antime

**Antime**  
**NOSSA SENHORA**  
08 a 14 de julho  
2024

**Figure 2.** Programme for the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime—8–15 July 2024. **Source:** [Paróquia de Antime \(2024\)](#).

On Sunday morning, after the solemn Eucharist presided over by the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Braga, the image of Our Lady of Mercy, or of Antime, is taken in procession from the parish church of Antime to the church of St Joseph (Fafe).

At the same time, another procession with the image of Our Lady of Sorrows will leave from St Joseph's Church. The aim is for the two images to meet on the way. This meeting of the "cousins", as the people say, is the most moving and eagerly awaited moment of the celebrations, and it takes place next to St Joseph's Bridge. After this moment, the two images continue their journey to the Mother Church of Fafe, where another solemn Mass is celebrated.

The platforms are carried by shifts of ten barefoot and bandaged men wearing white opals. The barefoot accompaniment of this pilgrimage is a deep-rooted custom among the devotees of Our Lady of Antime.

The celebrations end in the late afternoon with another procession carrying the image of Our Lady of Mercy from Fafe's main church to the parish of Antime. About halfway, in a place called Lombo (near the site of the apparition, according to legend), a sermon is given, followed by the release of the white doves (see Figure 3).

The procession ends at around 8 p.m., bringing to a close the celebrations in honour of Our Lady of Mercy (Arquidiocese de Braga 2013). As Coimbra (1997, p. 276) puts it: 'At the end of the afternoon, when the promises have been fulfilled, the image of Our Lady of Antime returns to its year-round place'.



**Figure 3.** Release of the white doves. **Source:** Own elaboration.

## 5. Results

An interview with Participant E1 occurred during the candlelight procession on Saturday 13 July. The procession is as follows: the priest arrives at the chapel of São de Brás, says a short prayer and then, at 9.30 p.m., as planned, people go in procession to pray the rosary to the parish church, where the priest blesses the Blessed Sacrament and the religious ceremony ends. For the sacristan (E1), the feast is very important because he has great faith in the Lady of Antime. The sacristan's duties on this feast include preparing the pallbearers, the gifts for the procession, the celebration of the Father and, above all, the reception of the Auxiliary Bishop of Braga. Some young people take part in the feast, but there are many middle-aged people. The participants are mainly from the Minho region, but people from the coast of this region are also common. E1 stated that 'the religious feeling of the people who participate depends on the suffering of each person. Some people become so emotional that they cry. But they cry with joy, with the satisfaction of being at the side of the Blessed Mother. They are very moved.'

As for the candlelight procession in the afternoon, the candles are displayed on a table in a small house next to the church. Some are shaped like organs (ears, feet, heads, etc.) (see Figure 4), according to the illnesses that the faithful wish to alleviate with the help of the Lady of Antime. The sacristan keeps the remaining candles in the chapel.

One of the most important moments of the festivities was the ceremony dedicated to the most vulnerable (Figure 5), which this year included the weakest members of the population (the elderly, those weakened by illness and those with some form of disability such as reduced mobility, blindness, cognitive impairment, etc.). Since the aim is to consecrate them to Our Lady of Antime to help them obtain graces and recover from their illnesses, one of the interviewees (E3) said that this year's ceremonies had this innovation. This ritual shows the sensitivity of the organizing bodies in bringing activities to the most vulnerable, who in other situations end up being forgotten when planning an event.

During an informal conversation (i.e., during participant observation) with one of the faithful attending the religious celebration, we asked her what the feast of Our Lady of Antime meant to her. She said that when she needs something, the Lady is there. She also mentioned that she was brought up 'on it'. For her, to really see what the festivity is about, you have to come on Sunday. On that day, the feast is a spectacle, the Blessed Mother 'is there and we call for everything and she answers us'. The lady also said that she has a son who lives abroad and that for him the greatest feast is not Christmas, but this feast. She also said that they know that if they need anything, she is there to help them. The lady said that this was the first time the priest was 'doing this'. There was a mass before, but it was

not supported by the community. Now they come from all over the community. Finally, the same faithful said that coming to this pilgrimage is almost like going to Fatima.



**Figure 4.** Devotional candles. **Source:** Own elaboration.



**Figure 5.** Ceremony dedicated to the most fragile. **Source:** Own elaboration.

Of all the moments of the festivities, the one that is considered the most imposing for the participants and the entire population that attends is the festive procession, which takes place on the main Sunday, 21 July 2024, as described by Oliveira (n.d., p. 399). This procession has a ritual and follows a spatial and temporal sequence, beginning with an evening mass in the Church of Our Lady of Antime.

The route of the procession is described below: Our Lady of Mercy left the parish church of Antime at 10 a.m. and went down the main street of the parish of Antime, slowly, because along the way there was a huge crowd of people on the sidewalks venerating Our Lady, and in the windows, there were quilts greeting Our Lady and welcoming her. There were also people throwing flowers at Our Lady, with several moments of applause, both on the way out and along the route until they reached the São José Bridge (see Figure 6), where they came face to face with Our Lady of Sorrows from the New Church of São José/Fafe; here, they greeted each other and the attendants of Our Lady of Sorrows with a bow.



**Figure 6.** The moment when Our Lady of Mercy and Our Lady of Sorrows met on St Joseph’s Bridge. **Source:** Own elaboration.

The meeting of the images of Our Lady of Antime and Our Lady of Sorrows is a central aspect of this religious festivity (Coimbra 1997). Our Lady of Sorrows, venerated in the church of Fafe, represents an important dimension of local spirituality. The ritual meeting, which takes place during a special procession, symbolises the union and communion between the different expressions of faith. In the gesture of the two images bowing in greeting, the two Christian communities (Fafe’s and Antime’s), who love and adore their mother, greet each other (Ecclesia 2007). This event is marked by the joint carrying of the images, accompanied by prayers, songs and blessings, and is enriched by a series of cultural celebrations, such as fairs, concerts and dances, which combine the sacred with the profane (Braga and Otón 2017).

The two ladies are praised and fireworks and doves are released, by local pigeon fanciers, to great applause. At this point, you can feel the emotion and see it on the faces of the participants and the audience, through the tears shed and the emotional words that are uttered: “Thank you, Madam”, “Long live our Mother”, waving to Our Lady and also bowing.

A good example of devotion is that of the gentleman who came on foot from his house and whom we approached during participant observation. During an informal ethnographic interview, this informant told us that he lives in the neighbouring village and

came alone; his wife stayed at home because she cannot walk anymore, as her health does not allow it. He came out of faith, because he likes it and because he prays for his wife's health; they have been coming to this procession for years.

Additionally, several images of Our Lady of Antime/Misericórdia can be seen on balconies of the houses, as well as some trade in wax figures, paintings and images of Our Lady. Afterwards, the pickers (four uniformed members of the Fafe Fire Brigade Cooperation) turn the charola with Our Lady of Sorrows in the opposite direction to Fafe, and the two ladies continue their journey to Fafe to the New Church of São José. At this point, a flag that had accompanied Our Lady of Sorrows (Our Lady of Mercy/Our Lady of Solitude) was added.

After passing through the main streets of the town of Fafe, where crowds gather to watch the majestic procession, the procession makes two important stops: the stop at Fafe Town Hall and the Mother Church, with the ceremony of welcoming the mayors, the release of white doves, applause and fireworks. Then, at 12.45 p.m., there is a final gathering at the New Church of São José in the centre of Fafe, followed by the Eucharist.

During the afternoon, the two statues of Mary were on display for the pilgrims until 6pm, when the farewell ceremony for Our Lady of Mercy to Our Lady of Sorrows took place in the New Church of St Joseph. Here, they throw flowers from a basket on a balcony at the exit door of the church, while the pickers lead them out of the enclosure. There is much applause at the farewell, and so begins the procession for Our Lady's return 'home'—to the Church of Our Lady of Antime, but with a farewell ceremony to the city at Lugar do Lombo.

After visiting some parts of the city, including the Fafe Theatre, we arrive at the long-awaited Lugar do Lombo, to celebrate the farewell of Our Lady of Mercy of Antime to the city of Fafe, beginning with the ritual of placing Our Lady on a pedestal, where the mural with the image of Our Lady is blessed. This is the sign of the place dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, where prayers of devotion, farewell and thanksgiving are said. As soon as they arrive, the organisers hand out a blue napkin and a white napkin to nod to the Mother of God when the final farewell song is sung. The ritual continues with applause, the throwing of confetti projected from holders designed to paint the sky blue and white in the Lugar do Lombo (see Figure 7), and the distribution of white and blue handkerchiefs to the people to say goodbye until next year.



**Figure 7.** Our Lady of Antime's address and farewell at Lombo in Fafe. **Source:** Own elaboration.

At the end of the ceremony, Our Lady of Mercy returns to the church of Antime, with a rosary of blue and white balloons, applause and fireworks. After the Madonna is taken into the church, the ceremony and closing of the festivities follows, with people emotionally trying to touch the Madonna's platform. The greenish-blue colour symbolises the mantle and the golden-brown colour the Lady's tunic (Coimbra 1997).

The official representatives of the Church refer to the impact of this festivity in terms of reaching a large number of people, justifying the faith and offering blessings to the faithful with the spirit of sacrifice, and we found confirmation of that among the crowds during the various religious ceremonies. It is the main requests for help and the faith expressed that show the phenomenon of devotion to Our Lady of Antime:

E2: '[...] I wasn't a sacristan yet, I didn't even think I would be, I also made a promise here, for a son. At that time, he was one month old and a [cyst] began to appear on to appear on [a part of his body] and I clung to Our Lady [of Antime] and she granted me . . . my son didn't get an operation and he healed. And I came to fulfil my little promise with great joy and satisfaction. Today, even when I remember it, tears come to my eyes'.

E1: 'It's really a unique moment. So much so that there are things that can't be explained, no matter how much I try to explain what happens there, it's difficult because it's such an emotional and personal experience that only those who make the pilgrimage realise what's there, what it represents, but it's undoubtedly the highlight of the municipality of Fafe. And it's strange that, according to what I've heard and what I've noticed in the last two years, the trend is upwards, there are more and more people on the day of the pilgrimage. This year, it's true that the weather helped, because it was a mild day, but they say it must have been the year when more people came to the pilgrimage'.<sup>1</sup>

The festivity honouring Our Lady of Antime is considered the most significant in the municipality, both due to its scale and the widespread community participation. The time of year, summer and the holidays, is a favourable time to hold this event:

E1: 'I think it's the high point of the community. It's where people get together with their families to eat roast veal or roast goatting. It's when people come together, congregate. I remember that during that week the church is open from morning to night, and pilgrims come to pray to the Lady of Antime, to make promises, to give thanks for the graces they have received. And then you just have to look, of course it happens during the week, but to look on the second Sunday in July and see that the city comes to a standstill is something extraordinary. The roads are cut off, we can only move on foot, with thousands and thousands of people, and one thing that surprised me was the human presence, both when the two Ladies, the Lady of Sorrows and the Lady of Antime, meet on the São José Bridge, and when we're in the avenue by the Town Hall'.

Another factor linked to the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime, and to its climax, the Sunday procession that attracts so many people, is that of legends and ancestral stories:

E2: 'There used to be a legend that if the Lady didn't come out of the new church at sunset—but this is a legend that I don't believe in—then the people of Fafe would take care of the Lady, they would take possession of her'.

In terms of communicating the event, the aim is to reach as many people as possible and also to attract more tourists to the region, with an emphasis on religious tourism. To this end, several press conferences are usually held with the participation of local and regional media. They will be invited to be present at all the most interesting points of the festivities, both cultural and religious.

E1: 'It's also about religious tourism, because we're very keen to publicise this pilgrimage, so much so that we're holding a sort of press conference to which

we've invited the media here in Fafe, but also in Braga, because one or two media organisations come from the Braga district and belong to the Braga municipality. It's also in our interest to publicise this pilgrimage and the potential it offers'.

E3: 'FafeTV, on our own initiative and with our own programme, of which I am the director, we follow all the events and this one in particular. . . .we were present at the music shows. . . .we were live at these events. On the day that we call the biggest day, which is the Sunday of the Procession, we usually broadcast the Mass, this year we didn't broadcast it for lack of human resources, we didn't have the human resources for it, we didn't broadcast the Mass, but, as I said, we were in prayer for the most fragile, We were in prayer for the most vulnerable, we were in the church following this moment of celebration with different tones, we followed the procession at the essential points: exit [Antime Church], then the meeting of the images, the two Ladies [Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Sorrows] on the S. José Bridge, then to the City Hall, which is also one of the fundamental points. . . where the political power salutes the images, the procession and the faithful, and then the arrival at the New Church of S. José. Then we made the big note, which is the farewell ceremony at the place of Lombo. . . and the arrival of Our Lady at the church of Antime. . . .'

The way in which the celebrations in honour of Our Lady of Antime have been communicated has been adapted over time and is currently more focused on the digital aspect, without neglecting other means of communication.

E3: "In terms of communication, the communication is now done in a different way. . . .the religious aspect. . . .there is a greater concern to be with us directly to clarify what is going to happen, more direct contact. . . . But they [the municipality] also communicate a lot in terms of image in offline communication (billboards and posters that are spread around the city and flyers). . . .online communication, they use their networks [municipality], they use the press and other media bodies in Fafe [Notícias de Fafe and Expresso de Fafe] and also. . . .Porto. . . .online communication, they use their networks [municipality], they use those of the press and other media bodies in Fafe [Notícias de Fafe and Expresso de Fafe] and also. . . .Porto. . . .online communication, they use their networks [municipality], they use those of the press and other media bodies in Fafe [Notícias de Fafe and Expresso de Fafe] and also. . . . Porto Canal, which publicised the festivities".

With regard to the type of public involved, which is essentially religious in nature, this is a distinctive feature compared to other similar celebrations, mainly due to the large number of young people at various stages of the procession, a phenomenon that was also considered by the interviewees to be worthy of further study.

E3: ". . .this is a very interesting phenomenon. . . .this festivity [the procession] in relation to other types of other similar processions, there is a lot of youth. . . .it hasn't always been like this, it's been a few years now. . . .we can say that it's about for the last 15 years, young people have been participating a lot and. . . .are very present in this particular procession. . . .unlike other types of religious events, they have a tendency to eventually fade away and end, not this one, every year we look at the pictures and say, so much youth. . . ."

E3: ". . .This is a very interesting phenomenon. . . ., this festival [the procession] in relation to other types of other similar processions, there is a lot of youth. . . .it wasn't always like this, but it has been for a few years now. . . .We can say that it's been about 15 years since then, young people participate a lot and. . . .are very present in this particular procession. . . . Unlike other types of religious events, this one has the capacity to last, instead of fading and perhaps ending later, every year we look at the pictures and say, so much youth. . . ."

In short, according to the observations made by the participants at different moments of the celebration and the results of the interviews, there is unanimity in the speeches and responses. This celebration in honour of Our Lady of Antime has evolved over time in terms of adjustments in the organising bodies, and it is currently the responsibility of the municipality of Fafe. The media have also changed due to the technological advances and partnerships associated with this event. They were previously more limited to promotional posters, flyers and radio communications and specific meetings, and they are currently more extended to social networks through various channels such as Facebook and Instagram, blogs and online television channels, with the broadcast of press conferences, reports and livestreams from different moments of the cultural and religious festivities.

The target audience is also diverse, ranging from the elderly to middle-aged couples, young people, teenagers, children and babies. In the younger age group, there is a clear increase and a certain curiosity about this type of event, which until recently could only attract older people. This reality of diversification of audiences and age groups is in line with what was mentioned, as well as the return of emigrants during this festive season (Gonçalves et al. 2009, p. 437). In general, the audience has been increasing year after year, possibly due to the issue of faith and the graces obtained, which are conveyed through the testimonies of believers, as well as due to greater publicity, thus capturing an external market for religious tourism.

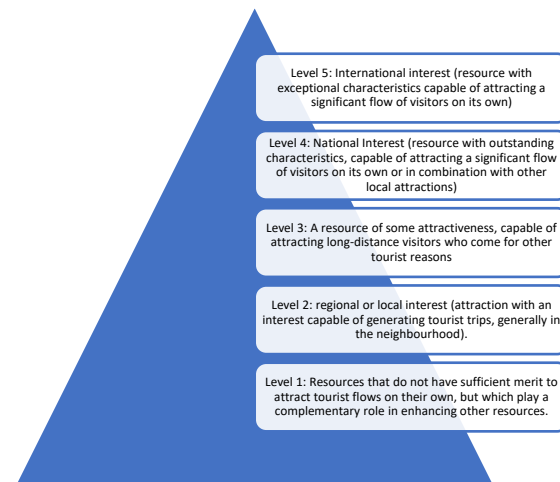
This festivity plays a role in the promotion of the parish of Fafe, due to its religious, cultural and dynamic components, raising the potential of religious tourism in the interior parishes of the Minho. It is integrated as an important annual milestone in the Minho identity, where these religious celebrations reaffirm the essence of a people with integrity of faith and religious passion (see Figure 8) (Medeiros 2003).



**Figure 8.** Demonstrations of faith (barefoot believers). **Source:** Own elaboration.

Regarding the festival's impact on local tourism, the head of the Culture and Tourism Department of the Fafe Municipality says that the festival does not have the capacity to attract tourists from all over the country, although it is effective in attracting the diaspora. We can therefore say that this festivity is a complementary resource to other basic resources in the tourist offer of Fafe.

This folklore resource therefore falls under hierarchy 2 for the valorisation of tourist resources (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9.** Hierarchical valorisation of the tourist resources. **Source:** adapted from Leno as cited in [García-Delgado and Felicidade-Garcia \(2014, p. 200\)](#).

E4: This resource contributes to the promotion of tourism in the municipality because of the activities that it manages to bring together and the people from outside the municipality that it manages to attract, since the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime has this movement. There is also the heritage and artistic value of the monuments; we don't have monuments of national interest, but regional ones. The church of Arões is a national monument. The rest is in line with the regional structures of the Minho. It's not a differentiating element; it complements the visibility of Fafe.

Fafe's basic resources are as follows:

E4: The Rally of Portugal is one of the things that makes Fafe most famous. It identifies Fafe with a wide audience, as does the Tour of Portugal. These are events that give Fafe an above-average level of positioning and awareness. The complementary products are gastronomy (Fafe-style veal) and heritage (a distinctive element).

The festival in question cannot be considered a basic resource, as it is only one of many festivals, fairs and pilgrimages that are typical of the Minho. In fact, there are events of this kind that are internationally attractive resources, such as St. John's in Braga or St. Benedict of Porta Aberta (i.e., Open Door). For the same participant, although the festivity in question is unique, this type of festival is recurrent in the region. So, this is a complementary resource to others in the community:

E4: Without wanting to devalue it, it's a complementary resource for the positioning of Fafe. If it were only this festival, it wouldn't have the potential to attract tourists. We have a lot of potential in active tourism, the routes are competitive resources—the mountains—and perhaps international (the proximity of Braga and Guimarães always appears as an opportunity and a threat in the SWOT). Important complementary events with others can help tourism to be relevant.

Thus, although it is a complementary resource to Fafe's tourist offer, the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime can help improve the municipality's portfolio of relevant events, making it more competitive from a tourist point of view.

## 6. Materials and Methods

This study employed ethnography as its research method (Braga 2016). Ethnography captures the complexity of social interactions as they manifest in everyday life. The emphasis is on the meanings that the participants themselves give to these interactions. The aim of this method is to obtain a detailed description of a group's activities, which requires the researcher to immerse him/herself in the social situation for an extended period of time, ideally by participating in it. In general, the researcher has to live within the group being studied in order to learn its language, culture, traditions and way of life (Altinay et al. 2024).

In ethnographic research, samples are typically small and non-random, so we interviewed three participants who we thought might be important informants about the religious event we wanted to study. According to Sandiford and Ap (1998 cited in Finn et al. 2000), ethnography can be used to assess the cultural and social impact on host communities. The sample chosen for this study primarily took into account the accessibility of the informants and aimed to study small societies. Although only four informants were chosen, who are neither representative nor allow for generalisation, the selection of critical cases, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) point out, can be a fruitful approach. The selection of four informants, one from the church (the parish priest of Antime, the local media outlet) (E1), another a sacristan (layman) (E2), one from the audiovisual sector (the director of Fafe TV) (E3) and another the head of the Culture and Tourism Department of the Fafe Town Council (E4), aimed to maximise the differences between the cases in order to increase the possibility of generating hypotheses to be tested in future studies. Thus, we adopted a selective approach, identifying the most important moments of the festivity that warranted extra attention.

The priest gave a detailed overview of the historical and religious significance of the festivity, explaining the evolution of the rituals and the meaning of the images. The sacristan provided practical information on the logistics of the events and liturgical preparation. In turn, the head of the media organisation gave an insight into the coverage and public perception of the event, highlighting how the feast is represented in the local media.

The authors attended three different times during the feast. On Wednesday 10 July, during the pilgrimage of the frail, which began at 10.30 a.m., the researcher attended the liturgy for a group of elderly people from nursing homes in the vicinity. The same researcher had informal conversations with two members of the audience (in the context of participant observation), two women, one from a nursing home and the other a parishioner. He also carried out participant observation throughout the event.

On Saturday 13 July, one of the authors interviewed the sacristan of Antime Church as he prepared for the candlelight procession, followed by the sermon and blessing of the Blessed Sacrament. At this time, in addition to the interview, the researcher also had the opportunity to conduct participant observation in the vicinity of the Antime parish church, where he witnessed believers on the ground on their knees circling the church and observed the candles arranged on a table in a room next to the church.

On Sunday 14 July, two of the researchers of this article took part in the procession of Our Lady of Antime. This procession was marked by several moments: the Mass in the Church of Antime, the Mass in the New Church of S. José, the departure of the procession from the New Church of S. José, the departure of the procession from the Church of Antime, the meeting between Our Lady of Antime and Our Lady of Sorrows on the bridge of S. José, the arrival of the procession at the New Church of S. José, the performance of the song of Our Lady of Sorrows at the New Church of S. José, the arrival of the procession at the New Church of S. José, the performance of the song of Our Lady of Sorrows at the New Church of S. José, the arrival of the procession at the New Church of S. José, the celebration

of Vespers in the New Church of S. José, the departure of the procession from the New Church of S. José, the farewell ceremony in Lombo and the arrival at the parish church of Antime. Throughout the event, the researchers alternated between participant observation and informal interviews with attendees. The fieldwork thus took place in the parishes of Antime and Fafe.

The ethnographic method we used to analyse this religious phenomenon allowed us to understand the complexity of the context we were observing (Tarozzi 2020). The ethnographic observation and interviews used in this study are an essential research technique for disciplines such as anthropology (Adler and Adler 1998). According to Pereira (2010), participant observation involves observing others, taking into account their cultural particularities and comparing these observations with hypotheses, ideas, concepts, categories and theories related to the problem in question.

The data were analysed using content analysis, specifically discourse analysis, to identify the motivations behind the participants' actions. Chiefly, we sought to identify perspectives and themes that would allow us to understand the phenomenon of celebrations in honour of Our Lady of Antime through discourse analysis (Everett and Aloudat 2018).

Through the data collected in this study, we sought to capture the essence of a Minho festivity, in terms of its cultural/professional and religious components, in this specific case, the venerable festivities in honour of Our Lady of Antime in the municipality of Fafe, belonging to the district of Braga. Our aim was to describe in detail all the main phases of the event's programme, and the research methodology used in this article, ethnography, is characterised by cultural observation in its natural environment.

We also tried to identify the profile of the participants and their interest in taking part in this festivity, which has an impact on the local community and religious groups, as well as on the tourists who come to the municipality to take part and see the most interesting cultural and religious attractions of the festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime. And finally, we sought to understand the motives behind the growing influx and the variations in the manifestations of faith that make this event distinctive and unique in the whole region, with a great impact on religious tourism in the town of Fafe. The informal ethnographic interviews, which took place over three days of participant observation, allowed us to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon in question. Spradley's ([1980] 2016) nine dimensions (space; actor; activity; object; action; event; time; goal; and feeling) served as a reference in the pursuit of participant observation.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In the research conducted, which included the technique of participant observation and three interviews, it became clear that the religious festivity in honour of the Lady of Antime has lasted for centuries, bringing together a vast audience of devotees and curious people. During this study, participant observation allowed for a deep immersion into the dynamics of the religious festivity in honour of the Lady of Antime. From the meticulous preparations to the culmination of the celebrations, it was possible to witness the fervent participation of thousands of people, coming not only from the municipality but also from other neighbouring and more distant regions, as well as from other countries.

Through the interviews, it was possible to capture a diversity of perspectives on the meaning and importance of this cultural and religious event, which significantly enriched the present study. The participant observation at different festive moments and the results of the interviews reveal the existence of consensus in the statements and responses. The festivity in honour of Our Lady of Antime has evolved over time, with regard to the change in organizing entities, currently under the responsibility of Fafe City Hall. The means of communication have also evolved significantly due to technological advances and partnerships associated with the event. Previously limited to promotional posters, pamphlets, radio broadcast and specific meetings, dissemination is now expanding through social media, in addition to online television channels, including press conferences, reports and live broadcasts of cultural and religious festive moments.

The target audience has diversified, from the elderly to young children. There has also been a significant increase in the presence of young people, who have been attracted by the nature of the event, which has traditionally attracted mainly older people. The audience has grown every year, possibly due to the faith and the graces obtained by the faithful, as well as the greater publicity that attracts an external market in religious tourism. It seems that the religious festivity in honour of the Lady of Antime not only plays a fundamental role in the spiritual and cultural sphere but also represents a significant economic boost for the municipality, especially through religious tourism. The festivity attracts a large number of visitors who contribute directly to the local economy. Firstly, the flow of visitors during the festivity period stimulates commercial activity in the municipality.

Restaurants, cafes, souvenir shops and accommodation all benefit from the increased demand, creating jobs and increasing income for local businesses. There is also a positive impact on the informal economy as street vendors and small traders seize the opportunity to offer their products to visitors. In terms of infrastructure, the festivity also encourages investment in urban improvements and the conservation of historical and cultural heritage, preparing the city to receive large numbers of visitors in a more comfortable and safe way.

In addition to the immediate economic benefits, the religious festivity in honour of the Lady of Antime can have a long-term impact on the community's reputation as a cultural and spiritual destination. Visitors who experience the local hospitality and rich religious traditions may return or recommend the visit to others, thus increasing the number of tourists in Fafe. Thus, the religious festivity in honour of the Lady of Antime not only celebrates faith and local culture but also plays a fundamental role in promoting the sustainable economic development of the municipality through religious tourism, which attracts visitors, promotes local commerce and strengthens community identity.

However, this festival is also a complementary resource to the basic resources of the Fafe destination, which are active and nature tourism and major sporting events. Both the religious and cultural heritage are still of limited interest to tourists.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The parish priest of Antime, Tiago Costa, told the *Diário do Minho* (Lemos 2024) that the festival 'exceeded all expectations, especially because of the huge turnout and the emotion with which people pray to Our Lady, their devotion and the life they place in her hands'.

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