



Good Practice Story Title: The superstitious Friday 13th

Destination: Montalegre

Country: Portugal

Submitting Organization: Municipality of Montalegre

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Montalegre, located in the picturesque region of Alto Tâmega and Barroso, in the North of Portugal, is a village where traditions are deeply rooted. With a stunning area covering approximately 805.5 km² and made up of around 9 279 thousand inhabitants, it is a destination that enchants and fascinates those who visit it. Surrounded by stunning natural scenery, Montalegre offers towering mountains, lush green valleys and serene lakes, perfect for outdoor activities. The village is also host to a series of cultural and traditional events throughout the year, including music festivals, themed fairs, art exhibitions and sports competitions, enriching the community's cultural life.

Montalegre stands out for its distinctive features, such as traditional architecture, with granite houses, dark slate roofs and wrought iron details. Gastronomy is another major attraction, with dishes such as Barrosã stew, grilled Barrosã steak, trout from the Rabagão river and traditional sausages. The tradition of handicrafts is very present, with unique weaving, ceramics, basketry and woodwork products.

It can be seen that culture and tradition are fundamental aspects of Montalegre's identity and, as a result, it is famous for being one of the places where the superstition of Friday the 13th has deep roots. It is said that on this



date, the air carries a peculiar energy, where the supernatural seems to be closer. Ancient legends tell of encounters with witches and mysterious beings that dwell in the shadows of the forests and mountains that surround the village. This is a remarkable example of how a local celebration can grow into a large-scale cultural phenomenon. Montalegre is a hidden treasure that captivates visitors with its natural beauty, its rich culture and its ancient traditions, where the past and present meet in enchanting harmony, providing an unforgettable experience for everyone.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

In Montalegre, historical roots are intertwined with ancient legends and traditions that echo through the centuries, including the mysterious and integral Friday the 13th. Montalegre is said to be one of the places where this superstition has deep roots, adding an aura of mystery to the already rich atmosphere of this Portuguese village. Whenever Friday is the 13th, they gather in Montalegre, the capital of mysticism, to gather together in Montalegre, the capital of mysticism, rascals, belzebuses, goblins, druids, wizards and other elements of the fantastic, which, as they are part of the common popular imagination, gradually become a tourist attraction and culture of the entire region. Each passage on the calendar marks a ritual of spiritual liberation and territorial and identity affirmation, in the national and international context. Its genesis dates back to and resides in the traditional fireside evenings in Barroso, through which winter nights were shortened and allowed closer ties between generations, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. There, stories, tales, legends, litanies, rhymes, puns, popular beliefs were shared, full of superstition and magic, creating moments of connection with the world of the fantastic and transcendent. Moments of sharing that constituted and provided an important process of transmitting and safeguarding Barroso's popular wisdom, today in a constant process of security, collection, classification, conservation and promotion by cultural institutions existing in the territory, of which the Ecomuseum of Barroso is an example and maximum reference entity.

António Lourenço Fontes, fully aware of the value and need to safeguard and promote this legacy for future generations, as well as the added value for the territory, implemented the Popular Medicine Congress in Vilar de Perdizes at the beginning of the 1980s. It is precisely from this connection and relationship between traditional wisdom and scientific, sacred and profane knowledge that this cultural manifestation later and spontaneously emerges. Superstition, mysticism, the party as a social exaltation and context of public celebration, but, mainly, a curious feeling of confrontation with all dogmatic ways of looking at life, are the structuring elements of the event that shape its identity matrix. Based on superstition linked, on the one hand, to the number 13 where, as Father Fontes says, «The 13th is unlucky, as is the number 13. If there are 13 people at the table, one of them dies. It is necessary to bring in, even if it is a child, or one of the diners to leave” and, on the other hand, on Fridays when “on Tuesdays and Fridays they neither weave the web nor marry their daughter”, the event elevates Galaico-culture. Barrosã to the level of a great popular festival. The relationship with Galicia is umbilical, shaped by the recitation of conjuration, a litany with roots on the other 'side of the border', where mysticism and superstition play a similar role in the collective imagination.

This cultural event was initially carried out in and by the local community, namely by the town's restaurant business owners.





The surprising support from the public led the Municipality to take over its organization. With its frequency decreed by the calendar, from 1:13 pm, crowds head to the Trás-os-Montes village seeking to cure the ills of the flesh and spirit. The territory shaped by valleys and mountains, dresses up and challenges the visitor to follow paths that abstract them from reality, immersing themselves in a magical world provided by the panoply of theatrical performances, games of light, sound and fire, present in every corner and corners of the village. It is, however, at nightfall that this celebration reaches its peak with the *Conjuro da Queimada* by Padre Fontes next to the town's castle. Considered the elixir against all evils, ailments and the weapon against the fear of the unknown and the supernatural world, is distributed, free of charge, under a theatrical and pyromusical show. This celebration goes beyond the limits of superstition or tradition. Few festivals in Portugal can so affirmatively and unanimously associate popular culture with contemporary challenges. This probably represents one of the most widespread examples of popular traditions in and around the Trás-os-Montes region, with an average population of around 50 000 people.

Issues faced:

The history of the Friday the 13th event in Montalegre dates back to the mid-20th century and has evolved over the decades to become one of the largest and most emblematic themed festivals in Portugal.

The Friday the 13th event in Montalegre began in 1957, when a group of locals decided to celebrate the unlucky day with a themed party, partly as a way of challenging the superstition associated with the date. The idea was to transform something negative into something positive, promoting the region's folklore and traditions.

At first, the event was a simple celebration, centered on activities such as dances, popular theater, bonfires and traditional food. The main objective was to provide entertainment and promote coexistence among the inhabitants of the region.

Over the years, the Friday the 13th event in Montalegre has grown in popularity and complexity. However, Montalegre faced a significant challenge: keeping its ancestral traditions and rich culture alive. Like many rural communities, Montalegre felt the pressure of modernization and urbanization, which often threaten to dilute or even extinguish deeply rooted cultural customs and practices.

The village is known for its unique festivals and traditions, which include celebrations of patron saints, folk festivals and cultural events dating back centuries. However, the continuity of these traditions was at risk due to the migration of young people to larger cities in search of better opportunities, as well as the growing influence of global culture that often overshadows local values and practices.

Faced with this scenario, Montalegre faced the problem of how to revitalize and preserve its cultural traditions so that they remained relevant and engaging for new generations, while at the same time attracting visitors from abroad.

Solution:

Given the need to preserve the cultural and ancestral traditions present in the village, Montalegre committed to promoting the Friday the 13th event.

This cultural event was started in 1957 by the local community, as a party to challenge the negative superstition of the date, the event has evolved over the decades, with activities such as dances, popular theater, bonfires and



traditional food. However, with the surprising support of the public, it led to the municipality taking over its organization.

And so it quickly evolved to become one of the largest and most emblematic themed festivals in Portugal, with new activities incorporated, such as parades, concerts, themed fairs, exhibitions and street shows. The atmosphere of the event is unique and mysterious, decorated with symbols associated with the occult and the supernatural, such as witches and ghosts, and participants often dress up, creating a festive and immersive experience.

The Friday the 13th event in Montalegre is a notable example of how a local celebration can grow into a large-scale cultural phenomenon.

The creation of this event not only attracted visitors from all over the country and even abroad, but it also became a vital platform for the promotion and preservation of Montalegre's cultural traditions. The festival's mysterious and festive atmosphere, with themed decorations and costumes depicting witches and ghosts, helped keep the village's cultural heritage alive, transforming local legends and folklore into tangible and memorable experiences. In addition to revitalizing local traditions, the Friday the 13th event played a crucial role in strengthening community identity. It united the inhabitants of Montalegre around shared values and traditions, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. The active participation of the community in organizing and celebrating the event ensured that traditions were passed down from generation to generation.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

For the Friday the 13th event to transform from a local celebration to reach the size it has today, it was necessary to go through several phases.

The event began as a themed party organized by a group of locals to challenge the superstition associated with Friday the 13th. Then as interest increased, the organization of the event became more structured with the active participation of local authorities, cultural associations and local community.

It is possible to list some initiatives that were applied to lead to success:

- Community involvement: encouraging community participation in themed costumes, contributing to the festive atmosphere
- Diversification of activities: the program of activities is diverse, with face painting, theater, dance, illusionism, fire shows, art exhibitions, workshops and lectures on folklore, mythology and local traditions and even shows in the castle
- Promotion and dissemination actions: targeted marketing campaigns to attract visitors from across the country and abroad
- Infrastructure improvements: investments in accommodation, transport and other infrastructure to receive a growing number of visitors
- Cultural collaborations: partnerships with artists, folk groups and others
- Sustainable practices: implementing sustainable tourism practices, such as waste management and promoting the use of renewable resources
- Environmental education: programs and workshops during the event to raise awareness about the importance of environmental preservation



Achievements and Results:

Friday the 13th in Montalegre has become an important tourist attraction for the region, attracting visitors from all over the country and even abroad. The event contributes significantly to the local economy, boosting:

- Increased Tourism: The event attracts thousands of visitors, promoting Montalegre as a prominent tourist destination. With each edition, more people discover the natural beauty, cultural richness and hospitality of the village, contributing to the region's visibility and renown.
- Economic Diversification: The festival contributes significantly to the local economy, benefiting sectors such as commerce, restaurants and accommodation. Small local businesses flourish with the increased flow of tourists, creating new employment opportunities and sustainable economic development.
- Cultural Preservation: Keeps local traditions and folklores alive, strengthening the community's cultural identity. Montalegre's stories, legends and customs are celebrated and passed on to new generations, ensuring that the village's cultural heritage is not forgotten.
- Community Engagement: Unites the local community, encouraging active participation and pride in cultural heritage. The inhabitants of Montalegre get involved in organizing and celebrating the event, creating a strong sense of community and belonging.

In short, the transformation of Friday the 13th in Montalegre into a major event was the result of a combination of strategic planning, effective promotion, collaborative partnerships and a commitment to sustainability and cultural preservation. The event not only resolved the challenge of keeping the village's ancestral traditions alive, but also boosted the economic and social development of Montalegre, becoming a successful example of how a community can preserve its cultural heritage while embracing the future.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

The lessons learned from the success of the Friday the 13th event in Montalegre offer a valuable insight into the future, highlighting several areas of growth and innovation that can be explored to ensure the continuity and sustainable development of the festival.

Sustainable economic growth stands out, that is, the Friday the 13th event in Montalegre has demonstrated a significant impact on the region's economic growth. The continuity of this development depends on strategic investments in several areas:

- Tourist Infrastructure: It is essential to invest in improvements in tourist infrastructure, such as accommodation, transport and public services. These improvements not only accommodate an increasing number of visitors, but also ensure that the tourists' experience is pleasant and safe.
- Promoting Local Entrepreneurship: Encouraging and supporting local entrepreneurship is crucial for sustainable economic development. Creating business opportunities in sectors such as commerce, restaurants and accommodation, as well as cultural and recreational activities, can help diversify the local economy and provide jobs.
- Diversification of Cultural Activities: Expanding the range of cultural activities offered during the event can attract a more diverse audience and increase the length of time visitors spend in the region. This includes



the addition of new shows, workshops, exhibitions and other forms of cultural entertainment. Another potential success factor has to do with internationalization, that is, Friday the 13th can be a point of internationalization for Montalegre, through promotion abroad, global partnerships and welcoming visitors. Friday the 13th, based on sustainable economic growth, internationalization and cultural innovation, will continue to preserve its rich cultural traditions, and will also establish itself as a world-renowned tourist destination. Ultimately, the lessons learned from the Friday the 13th event have the potential to serve as an inspiring model for other communities and rural regions, as they can also benefit from following Montalegre's example, adapting and applying the lessons learned from according to your own specific characteristics and needs. By investing in the tourism, cultural and economic potential of their localities, these communities can not only address similar challenges, but also create opportunities for a prosperous and vibrant future.

Recognitions and Additional References:

The quality and media reach of the party earned it some awards and recognition:

→ Newcomer of the Year Award (2009)

→ Best Public Event (2010, 2012)

→ Five Star Regions 2023 Award, in the Festivals, Fairs and Pilgrimages category.

→ In 2019, it also achieved certification as an EcoEvent, by Environment Global Facilities.

Other important references about this event, which support its relevance:

→ Website official: <https://www.sexta13.pt/>

→ Teaser promocional 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-YoR1eMMd8&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sexta13.pt%2F&source_ve_path=MjM4NTE&feature=emb_title

→ Teaser promocional 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/sexta13montalegre/videos/887806005794634>

<https://www.facebook.com/MunicipioMontalegre/videos/860045805629069>

→ Examples of participation the community of São João da Madeira:

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/756564209608864>

Summary of Good Practice Story:

