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**PROTEÇÃO DO PATRIMÓNIO EM ÁREAS DE BAIXA DENSIDADE: CIM DOURO**  
**HERITAGE PROTECTION IN LOW-DENSITY AREAS: CIM DOURO**  
**PROTECCIÓN DEL PATRIMONIO EN ÁREAS DE BAJA DENSIDAD: CIM DOURO**


Carlos Araújo<sup>1</sup>

Paulo Barrosa<sup>1</sup>


Tiago Gomes<sup>1</sup>

Xavier Dias<sup>1</sup>

Milena Carvalho<sup>2,3</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1897-9686>

Susana Fonseca<sup>1,4,5</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1004-4504>

Ana Guia<sup>1,6</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2102-0791>

Susana Martins<sup>2,3</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5871-9849>

Ana Branca Carvalho<sup>1,7</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8979-6644>

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Porto, Portugal

<sup>3</sup> Centro de Investigação, Cultura, Espaço e Memória (CITCEM/FLUP), Porto, Portugal

<sup>4</sup> Centro de Estudos em Educação e Inovação (CI&DEI), Viseu, Portugal

<sup>5</sup> Centro de Estudos Transdisciplinares de Desenvolvimento (CETRAD-UTAD), Viseu, Portugal

<sup>6</sup> Centro de Estudos de Recursos Naturais, Ambiente e Sociedade (CERNAS), Viseu, Portugal

<sup>7</sup> Centro de Investigação em Serviços Digitais (CISeD), Viseu, Portugal

Carlos Araújo - pv25795@estgl.ipv.pt | Paulo Barrosa - pv22808@estgl.ipv.pt | Tiago Gomes - pv26644@estgl.ipv.pt | Xavier Dias - pv26638@estgl.ipv.pt |

Milena Carvalho - mcarvalho@iscap.ipp.pt | Susana Fonseca - sfonseca@estgl.ipv.pt | Ana Guia - aguia@estgl.ipv.pt | Susana Martins - smartins@iscap.ipp.pt |

Ana Branca Carvalho - acarvalho@estgl.ipv.pt



**Corresponding Author:**

*Susana Fonseca*

Av. Visconde Guedes Teixeira  
5100-074 - Lamego - Portugal  
sfonseca@estgl.ipv.pt

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## RESUMO

**Introdução:** Este estudo investiga as estratégias de salvaguarda do património em territórios de baixa densidade na Comunidade Intermunicipal do Douro (CIM Douro), explorando os desafios da preservação do património cultural e natural nessas áreas.

**Objetivo:** O objetivo é avaliar a eficácia das medidas de proteção do património nos 19 municípios da CIM Douro, fornecendo um instrumento de verificação sistemática para autoridades locais e a Direção-Geral do Património Cultural (DGPC).

**Métodos:** A metodologia incluiu o desenvolvimento de uma checklist para assegurar uma análise padronizada dos bens culturais, facilitando a avaliação sistemática das estratégias de conservação.

**Resultados:** Os resultados destacam a necessidade de uma ação coordenada entre municípios e organismos de tutela, evidenciando a relevância de programas como o PROVERE Douro 2020 e a Estratégia Douro 2030 na promoção do desenvolvimento territorial sustentável.

**Conclusão:** Conclui-se que a preservação do património em áreas de baixa densidade requer abordagens inovadoras, combinando cooperação institucional, envolvimento das comunidades locais e alocação estratégica de recursos para garantir a sustentabilidade cultural e socioeconómica a longo prazo.

**Palavras-chave:** legislação; comunidades intermunicipais; património; territórios; baixa densidade

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This study investigates safeguarding strategies for heritage in low-density territories within the Intermunicipal Community of Douro (CIM Douro), exploring the challenges associated with the preservation of both cultural and natural heritage.

**Objective:** The objective is to assess the effectiveness of heritage protection measures in the 19 municipalities of CIM Douro, providing a systematic verification tool for local authorities and the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC).

**Methods:** The methodology included the development of a checklist to ensure a standardized analysis of cultural assets, facilitating the systematic evaluation of conservation strategies.

**Results:** The results highlight the need for coordinated action between municipalities and heritage management bodies, emphasizing the relevance of programs such as PROVERE Douro 2020 and the Douro 2030 Strategy in promoting sustainable territorial development.

**Conclusion:** It is concluded that effective heritage preservation in low-density areas requires innovative approaches, integrating institutional cooperation, active community involvement, and strategic resource allocation to ensure long-term cultural and socio-economic sustainability.

**Keywords:** legislation; intermunicipal communities; heritage; territories; low density

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Este estudio investiga las estrategias de salvaguarda del patrimonio en territorios de baja densidad dentro de la Comunidad Intermunicipal del Douro (CIM Douro), explorando los desafíos de la preservación del patrimonio cultural y natural en estas áreas.

**Objetivo:** El objetivo es evaluar la eficacia de las medidas de protección del patrimonio en los 19 municipios de la CIM Douro, proporcionando una herramienta de verificación sistemática para las autoridades locales y la Dirección General del Patrimonio Cultural (DGPC).

**Métodos:** La metodología incluyó el desarrollo de una lista de verificación para garantizar un análisis estandarizado de los bienes culturales, facilitando la evaluación sistemática de las estrategias de conservación.

**Resultados:** Los resultados destacan la necesidad de una acción coordinada entre los municipios y los organismos de gestión del patrimonio, enfatizando la relevancia de programas como PROVERE Douro 2020 y la Estrategia Douro 2030 en la promoción del desarrollo territorial sostenible.

**Conclusión:** Se concluye que la preservación eficaz del patrimonio en áreas de baja densidad requiere enfoques innovadores, que integren la cooperación institucional, la participación activa de las comunidades locales y la asignación estratégica de recursos para garantizar la sostenibilidad cultural y socioeconómica a largo plazo.

**Palabras Clave:** legislación; comunidades intermunicipales; patrimonio; territorios; baja densidad

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## INTRODUCTION

This study falls within the sphere of Tourism and Heritage Law, where the issue regarding the protection of heritage in low-density areas will be analyzed.

Heritage is a means for human development, the promotion of cultural diversity, and the stimulation of intercultural dialogue, integrating a model of sustainable economic development (Council of Europe, 2021).

Heritage has been a pivotal topic in debates on political and social issues concerning territorial development, relating to tourism and cultural heritage. In this article, a more extensive view of heritage as a whole will be adopted, going beyond topics concerning the valorization of its dimensions.

The focus of this study is on the analysis of variables that underlie the protection of heritage in low-density regions, where themes related to the role of CIM Douro in these territories, its connection with local heritage, and its contribution to its construction will be observed. This analysis will also consider to what this type of analysis represents at the national and international level.

We can say that in the Intermunicipal Community of Douro (CIM Douro), low-density territories are characterized as areas that have a population density of less than 100 inhabitants per Km<sup>2</sup> or a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita below 75% of the national average. Within the scope of the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy of the Douro Region (2014-2020), promoted by CIM Douro, strategic axes were established that highlight the valorization and protection of natural and cultural heritage. These initiatives seek to combat issues related to depopulation, pressure on natural resources, and the urgency of revitalizing the region economically.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. Heritage Legislation

Heritage legislation in Portugal encompasses a set of legal norms aimed at regulating the management, protection, and enhancement of the country's cultural heritage. This heritage includes both tangible and intangible assets that hold significant artistic, scientific, cultural, or historical value. The main legal framework that establishes the foundations of this policy is Law No. 107/2001, of September 8, known as the Cultural Heritage Basic Law (PGR Lisboa, 2021).

Several specific legal acts complement this law by regulating various aspects of cultural heritage, including:

- Decree-Law No. 139/2009, of June 15, establishes the legal framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.
- Decree-Law No. 140/2009, of June 15, which defines the legal regime applicable to studies, interventions, works, projects, reports related to classified cultural assets or those in the process of classification.
- Decree-Law No. 148/2015, of August 4, which sets out the classification and inventory regime for movable assets of cultural interest, as well as rules for their admission, dispatch, export, and import.

These legal provisions aim to ensure the protection of cultural heritage by establishing clear procedures for its classification, conservation, inventory, and enhancement, safeguarding it for future generations.

### 1.2. Intermunicipal Communities

Law No. 75/2013, of September 12, establishes the statutes of intermunicipal communities in Portugal (Borges, 2020).

From a legal perspective, within a national legal framework, member municipalities transfer some of their legally granted functions or responsibilities to provide services to all their associates. Intermunicipal organizations require that their main objectives be clearly defined, with their own budget and management entities. These communities have a legal personality to fulfill their purposes and can exist indefinitely or for a specific period to complete various tasks (Borges, 2020).

The Douro Intermunicipal Community (CIM Douro) is an association of 19 municipalities with public, associative, and territorial objectives (CIM Douro, 2023). The municipalities that form CIM Douro are: Alijó, Armamar, Carraceda de Ansiães, Freixo de Espada à Cinta, Lamego, Mesão Frio, Moimenta da Beira, Murça, Penedono, Peso da Régua, Sabrosa, Santa Marta de Penaguião, São João da Pesqueira, Sernancelhe, Tabuaço, Tarouca, Torre de Moncorvo, Vila Nova de Foz Côa, and Vila Real (CIM Douro, 2023).

CIM Douro's strategic and operational objectives include sustainable development, promoting economic, social, and environmental progress in the region, fostering municipal cooperation, supporting municipalities in implementing public strategies, promoting tourism to highlight Douro's cultural and natural richness, and managing waste to protect the environment (CIM Douro, 2023).

Additionally, CIM Douro undertakes various initiatives and projects, such as incentives for micro and small businesses, cultural promotion, organizing cultural events and festivals that highlight local identity, and infrastructure improvements to enhance accessibility and regional development (CIM Douro, 2023).

### 1.3. Heritage

Regarding tangible heritage, it refers to a set of assets owned by an individual or regulatory body at a given time (Património, s.d.). Legally, heritage is recognized as a patrimonial sphere, meaning the set of rights and obligations associated with a specific person or regulatory institutions. This includes personal property, such as ownership rights over an urban building (Património, s.d.).

Certain historical elements can be classified as heritage. The concept of heritage goes beyond inherited legacies, as it involves a selective process in which a notable group within society decides to preserve certain assets for future generations (Silva, 2000).

This process entails a cultural choice that deliberately determines the transmission of specific assets or cultural traits. Additionally, it involves a sense of belonging, where a specific group defines itself as the collective custodian of the inherited heritage (Silva, 2000). According to Ballart's observations, heritage gains significance "when an individual or group identifies certain objects or collections of objects as their own" (Silva, 2000). Tangible assets can only be fully understood when they are actively utilized or,

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indirectly and partially, through their records or representations (Cabral, 2011). In tangible heritage, objects take precedence, whereas in intangible heritage, the focus is on people (Cabral, 2011).

#### 1.4. Low-Density Territories

Low-density territories are characterized by a low population density and benefit from investment incentives under the Portugal 2030 program. This program aims to promote territorial cohesion and stimulate the socio-economic development of these regions (Portugal 2030: What are low-density territories? 2023).

The rural world, as it is currently conceived, is undergoing a transformation marked by the enhancement of endogenous resources, competitiveness, sustainability, and connectivity. These factors are crucial in defining intervention strategies tailored to the characteristics of low-density territories (Silva, Lima & Chamusca, 2010).

The classification of low-density territories is not limited to demographic criteria but also considers economic, urban, institutional, and relational dimensions. Economically, these areas experience a scarcity and limited diversity of activities, along with high unemployment rates. In urban terms, they are characterized by the small size of their urban centers, even the most significant ones (Silva, Lima & Chamusca, 2010). Institutionally, these territories have a limited number of entities with functions and competencies directed toward local governance. Lastly, from a relational perspective, they are marked by weak partnership networks and insufficient community participation (Silva, Lima & Chamusca, 2010).

Tables 1 and 2 outline the main challenges and strengths of low-density territories.

**Table 1 - Problems of Low-Density Territories**

Indicator	Problems
Territories	Family-based rural economy Weak territorial cohesion
Economy	Low-mechanized farming systems Emigration
Society	Demographic aging Weak equality of opportunities, goods, and services

**Table 2 - Strengths and Opportunities of Low-Density Territories**

Indicator	Strengths
Territories	High-value historical, cultural, and natural heritage Increasing recognition of sustainable development processes
Economy	Favorable conditions for tourism and heritage-related activities EU recognition and support for rural areas
Society	Role of Local/Regional Development Agencies Workforce qualification strategies

The Douro Intermunicipal Community (CIM Douro) has focused on implementing strategies to enhance territorial efficiency. The EEC PROVERE DOURO 2020 and Douro 2030 (a ten-year strategy) were created to achieve this (CIM Douro).

The EEC PROVERE aims to foster sustainable competitiveness in low-density territories by promoting innovative economic activities that generate tradable goods and services. These activities are based on the enhancement of endogenous resources, which are typically unique and difficult to replicate, such as natural resources, historical heritage, and traditional knowledge (CIM Douro). Through PROVERE DOURO 2020, the combination of public investment efforts, mainly from local governments, with complementary private or business sector investments, centered on the Douro as a symbolic and globally recognized identity, will drive the creation of innovative economic activities, boost tourism, and promote the development and appreciation of traditional products (CIM Douro).

The president of CIM Douro presented the four main guidelines of the document titled “Douro 2030: A Strategy for a Decade”, which outlines the region’s development priorities for the next ten years. These guidelines are as follows (CIM Douro):

- A connected and internationally projected territory with an attractive profile;
- An entrepreneurial and innovative territory, enhancing and leveraging its human capital;
- An efficient and sustainable territory, characterized by inclusion and social cohesion;
- A territory that strengthens its institutions, promoting effective partnerships and network collaboration (CIM Douro).

## 2. METHODS

This article presents a descriptive methodology typology based on documentary research. This methodology involves the creation of a Checklist, which, once validated, will be applied to a representative sample. This Checklist can serve as a support tool not only for local authorities but also for the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage (DGPC), enabling them to monitor and inspect each type of heritage within the 19 municipalities that make up CIM Douro.

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## 2.1 Results Analysis

Table 3 presents the Checklist, which can be used by both the DGPC and local authorities to inspect the heritage sites across the 19 municipalities of CIM Douro. The checklist incorporates various variables, aligned with the applicable legislation, and, as part of the administrative framework, it establishes a specific legal sphere linked to the principle of legality.

**Table 3 – Checklist on the Cultural Heritage of CIM Douro**

Heritage Analysis Checklist				
Heritage Site: <i>(Monument Name)</i>				
Responsible Entity: <i>(Entity Name)</i>				
Applicable Law: Law No. 107/2001, of September 8				
Preservation Criteria	Applicable	Not Applicable	Executed	Not Executed
Cleaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interior conservation status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protection zones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Existence of management and protection plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regular inspections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surveillance systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compliance with visiting hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Noise control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintenance of access routes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compliance with legal framework <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vandalism in the exterior area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pest control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Traffic flow (vehicles and pedestrians)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate-related risks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Virtual interactivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety equipment (fire extinguishers, fire blankets)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: <sup>1</sup>Verify if the church is properly registered as classified heritage.

## 3. RESULTS

**Table 4– Practical Case 1**

Heritage Analysis Checklist				
Heritage Site: <i>Lamego Cathedral</i>				
Responsible Entity: <i>General Directorate of Cultural Heritage (DGPC)</i>				
Applicable Law: Law No. 107/2001, of September 8				
Preservation Criteria	Applicable	Not Applicable	Executed	Not Executed
Cleaning	X		X	
Signage <sup>2</sup>	X			X
Interior conservation status	X		X	
Accessibility	X			X
Protection zones	X			X
Existence of management and protection plans		X	-	-
Regular inspections	-	-	-	-
Surveillance systems	X			X
Compliance with visiting hours	X		X	
Noise control	X		X	
Maintenance of access routes	X		X	
Compliance with legal framework <sup>1</sup>	X		X	
Vandalism in the exterior area	X			X
Pest control	X		X	
Traffic flow (vehicles and pedestrians)	X			X
Climate-related risks <sup>3</sup>	X		X	X
Virtual interactivity	X			X
Security	X		X	
Safety equipment (fire extinguishers, fire blankets)	X		X	

Note: <sup>1</sup>Verify if the church is properly registered as classified heritage. <sup>2</sup> Not signposted at the main entrance. <sup>3</sup> 80% of the interior is well preserved; 20% of the exterior has moss in some areas, and the stone on the facades is deteriorated.

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Table 5 – Practical Case 2

Heritage Analysis Checklist Heritage Site: <i>Chapel of the Holy Spirit</i> Responsible Entity: <i>Lamego City Hall</i> Applicable Law: Law No. 107/2001, of September 8				
Preservation Criteria	Applicable	Not Applicable	Executed	Not Executed
Cleaning	X		X	
Signage	X		X	
Interior conservation status	X		X	
Accessibility <sup>2</sup>	X			X
Protection zones	X		X	
Existence of management and protection plans		X	-	-
Regular inspections	-	-	-	-
Surveillance systems	X			X
Compliance with visiting hours	X		X	
Noise control	X		X	
Maintenance of access routes	X		X	
Compliance with legal framework <sup>1</sup>	X		X	
Vandalism in the exterior area <sup>3</sup>	X		X	
Pest control	X			X
Traffic flow (vehicles and pedestrians)	X		X	
Climate-related risks	X		X	
Virtual interactivity	X			X
Security	X		X	
Safety equipment (fire extinguishers, fire blankets)	X			X

Note: <sup>1</sup>Verify if the church is properly registered as classified heritage. <sup>2</sup> Lack of ramps for people with reduced mobility. <sup>3</sup> Graffiti observed on the exterior side facade.

## CONCLUSION

After conducting the literature review and creating the validation tool for key variables in this study, we observed the growing importance of cultural and natural heritage in the sustainable development of low-density territories. Municipal associations are increasingly gaining crucial importance in local development and heritage preservation. In this case, we noted that the CIM Douro played a strategic role by promoting initiatives that balance preservation and socioeconomic progress. However, challenges such as depopulation and resource scarcity demand innovative solutions and collaboration between entities.

We also observed that programs like PROVERE Douro 2020 and the Douro 2030 Strategy demonstrate how well-planned projects can revitalize these regions. Undoubtedly, this partnership between Europe and Portugal enables intermunicipal communities to access very advantageous EU funds for the territories.

The focus on valuing local resources and sustainable tourism has brought relevant advances, but the active participation of communities is essential to ensure lasting impact.

Based on the data obtained through the checklist, we can conclude that there is much to be done in terms of implementation and action plans to ensure the existing strategic plan fulfills its purpose.

In the context of cultural heritage protection, it is possible to list some suggestions aimed at its preservation and safeguarding. Among the main recommendations to achieve these objectives, the following stand out:

- Implement educational initiatives to raise public awareness about the relevance of cultural heritage, promoting greater appreciation and involvement of civil society;
- Conduct regular inspections and plan preventive interventions to avoid irreversible damage or significant loss in the integrity of cultural assets;
- Use building materials that respect the authenticity and original characteristics of each heritage element, ensuring the preservation of its historical and architectural identity;
- Encourage coordination and cooperation between different institutional levels, such as local authorities, national public entities (e.g., the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage – DGPC), and regional organizations (such as the Intermunicipal Community of Douro – CIM Douro), promoting coordinated conservation actions;
- Develop tourist itineraries and experiences that carefully consider the carrying capacity of monuments, to avoid excessive pressure or negative impacts that could accelerate their deterioration;
- Invest in detailed digital documentation by creating robust databases containing photographs, videos, and technical analyses that thoroughly document every aspect of heritage, ensuring comprehensive records for future interventions or studies.

Increasingly, populations feel the need to preserve their identity, their vernacular heritage, and, above all, to keep people in the territories, regardless of their population density. Living with a quality of life and a sense of well-being in a less tumultuous world, where time management has become chaotic, has become an option.



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Conceptualization, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; data curation, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; formal analysis C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; funding acquisition, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; investigation, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; methodology, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; project administration, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; resources, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; software, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; supervision, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; validation, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; visualization, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; writing-original draft, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.; writing-review and editing, C.A., P.B., T.G., X.D., M.C., S.F., A.G., S.M. and A.B.C.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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