Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management
2026, 11(4s)
e-ISSN: 2468-4376
https://www.jisem-journal.com/

Research Article

One event, Three Contexts: Analysing the Socio-Economic Impact of the 2030 FIFA World Cup

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ARTICLEINFO

Received:04 Aug 2026

Accepted:22 Sept 2026

Published: 04 Oct 2026

ABSTRACT

The 2030 FIFA World Cup marks a hundred years since its inaugural, making it the centenary World Cup and presents an opportunity to study how the outcomes of hosting a mega-event like the World Cup has evolved over the past century.

Comparative multi-host studies are underrepresented, especially where co-hosts sit at very different points on the development spectrum, consisting of two high-income European nations and an emerging African nation. The purpose of this study is to analyse how the socio-economic gains and costs of the mega-event are to be distributed across host countries, regions, institutions, and social groups. This has been done using a qualitative comparative case study design across the three principal co-hosts, including a consistent four-dimension analytical framework applied to each country for comparability. The results consist of a consistent

three-tier pattern recurs across all four dimensions. The same structural asymmetry found in the nations' development level and institutional capacity repeats itself consistently across infrastructure, tourism, economic, and social outcomes, suggesting it to be the underlying variable driving all four. The paper concludes stating that a nation's pre-existing structural position is the major determinant for how costs and benefits are to be distributed.

INTRODUCTION

The FIFA World Cup , one of the most significant mega-events in the global calendar taking place every 4 years, is set to mainly take place in Morocco, Portugal, and Spain in the year 2030. The mega-event is known for attracting high levels of media attention and heavy investments in infrastructure, which is typically followed by increased tourism flows (Madden, 2025). The World Cup's significance extends well beyond football. The tournament acts as a catalyst in terms of urban development in host cities (spanning 18 venues), and national branding in host nations, therefore strengthening the geopolitical position of the countries. The 2030 edition carries significant research importance, as it marks a hundred years since the inaugural edition was hosted in Uruguay, 1930. The centenary tournament and the milestone not only enhances the event's symbolic and commercial dimension, but also allows us to see through a historical lens, to assess whether hosting outcomes have evolved meaningfully across a century of mega-event practice.

Research on sporting mega-events has increasingly moved beyond narrow estimates of short-term economic gains toward broader

analyses of governance, social legitimacy, and long-term development (Madden, 2025; Boto-García & Santana-Gallego, 2025). At the same time, broader mega-event literature remains cautious, arguing that projected economic benefits are often overstated and may be offset by high public expenditure, cost overruns, and uncertain long-term legacy (Madden, 2025).

Scholarly approaches to mega-event impact are divided between modernisation-oriented perspectives, which has particular emphasis on tourism multipliers, infrastructural gains, and soft-power developments (Boto-García & Santana-Gallego, 2025), and critical political economy analyses, which highlights cost overruns, displacement of

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residents, and unequal distribution of burdens and benefits (Madden, 2025).

Current literature on mega-events suggest that the primary research concern is no longer whether the 2030 FIFA World Cup will generate socio-economic gains or not, but rather how these gains and costs are to be distributed across host nations, institutions, and social groups.

Existing mega-event literature shows that macro-level indicators such as GDP growth, tourism arrivals, or infrastructure spending can

conceal or fail to capture significant territorial and social inequalities (Madden, 2025).

Most qualitative work on mega-events is anchored in institutional perspectives. While there are a few works with reference to the host city residents, these still tend to survey attitudes rather than deeply explore lived experience. The voices of peri-urban residents, construction workers, and informal traders barely appear in the literature. Mega-events tend to be regarded as singular points in time, often downplaying the long-term urban development process that precedes any presumed benefits to local people from the event.

Despite a growing body of mega-event literature, comparative multi-host analyses remain underrepresented, particularly where co-hosting nations occupy markedly different positions in terms of

economic development, institutional capacity, and regional geopolitics. The 2030 World Cup, jointly hosted by two high-income European states and an emerging African economy, provides a distinctive opportunity to examine how socio-economic impacts vary across structurally asymmetric co-hosts, a question the existing literature has not yet substantively addressed.

While the 2030 World Cup formally spans six nations, including centenary fixture hosts Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, the

principal co-hosting responsibilities are concentrated in Morocco, Portugal, and Spain. This study focuses on these three nations. The event will be shared across multiple states with different levels of aspects such as economic development, institutional capacity, and

financial resources, suggesting that the host nations, Spain, Portugal, and Morocco, are unlikely to experience identical outcomes. Current research on co-hosting governance frameworks suggest that benefits such as tourism growth, investments, and international visibility may be unevenly distributed between each state, while financial and administrative burdens may fall disproportionately across host territories (Ribeiro, Almeida, & Anagnostopoulos, 2025; Ait Soussane & Ibourk, 2025).

This research aims to examine the anticipated socio-economic impact of the 2030 FIFA World Cup on the principal co-hosting nations, with particular emphasis on how differences in national contexts,

institutional capacity, development priorities, and planning frameworks may shape the distribution of expected economic and social outcomes, and how the impact is spread over host countries, regions, institutions, and social groups.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the infrastructure expansion requirements and investments undertaken by the co-hosting nations, including stadium upgrades, training centre enhancements, efficient modernized transport, and airport expansions.
- To assess the potential impact of the 2030 FIFA World Cup on tourism growth in the co-hosting nations, analysing the anticipated growth in international visitor arrivals, hotel capacities, digital transformation, and sustainability.
- To evaluate the potential economic impacts of co-hosting the tournament, including employment creation, short and long term effects of investments, GDP growth, and public expenditure.
- To interpret the potential social impact of the mega-event on the co-hosting nations, including strengthening international relations, global prominence of the nation, sustainable development, and potential living

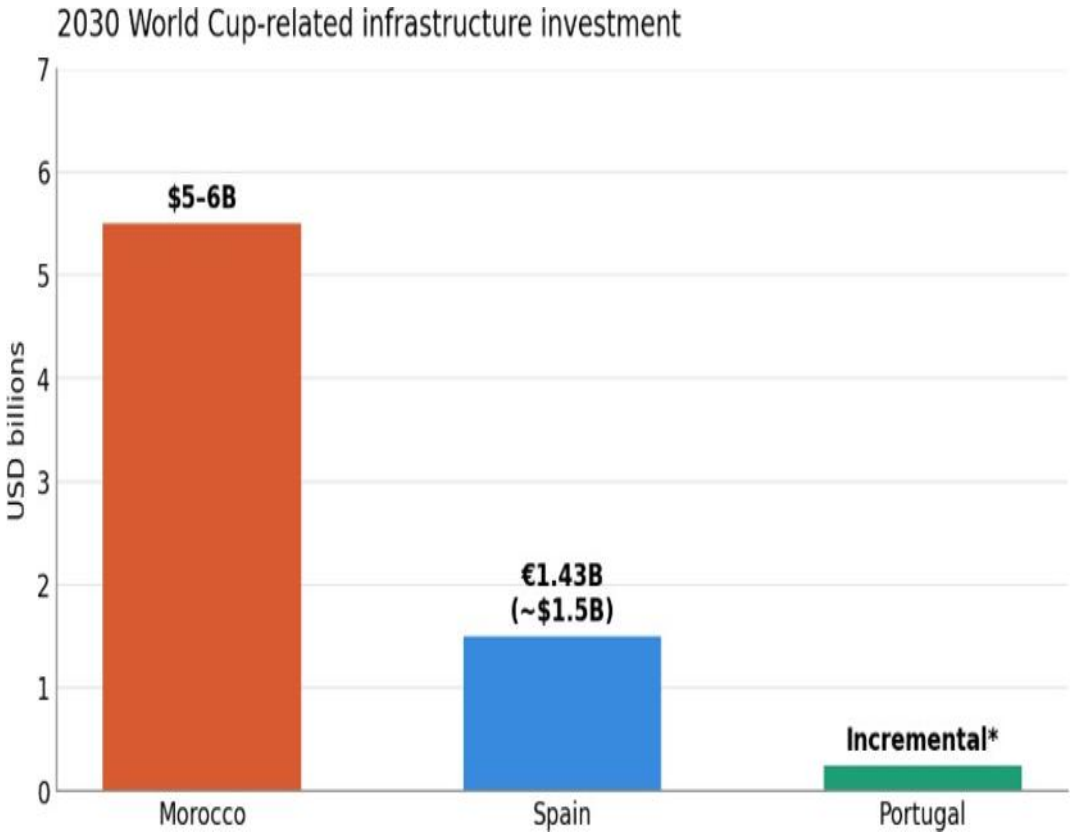
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conditions.

INFRASTRUCTURE



Morocco, out of the three principal co-hosting nations, faces the most transformative infrastructure challenge, which has already been taken up by the government and is now working towards their collective goal. The kingdom is undergoing its most extensive modernization phase, including the vast public investment in modern history, with

total World Cup-related allocations and outlays estimated between USD 5 billion and USD 6 billion (IQAL Analysis, 2025), as shown in figure 1, forming part of a broader national programme exceeding

USD 20 billion(IMF Country Report No.26/73). This indicates Morocco has plans exceeding the World Cup, but uses the mega-event as a crucial accelerator in their plans.

Morocco will be accountable for 6 of the stadiums in the FIFA World Cup 2030 (Morocco World News, 2026), while also planning to construct, up to 2026, the largest football stadium in the world. The Grand Stade Hassan II in Casablanca is a multi-functional stadium designed to host dynamic sporting mega-events while operating as year-round entertainment hubs, designed to accommodate 115,000 spectators (Morocco World News,2025). The design draws inspiration from the traditional Moroccan social gathering known as a "moussem".

The 2025 Africa Cup of Nations acted as a preparatory platform for the World Cup. It generated over EUR 2 billion in economic benefits, and included more than 3,000 Moroccan companies (Morocco World News, 2026), and is described by Moroccan officials as the best

AFCON in history. In under two years, Morocco completed infrastructure works that officials say could otherwise have taken a decade. This focus on improved infrastructure connectivity is partly motivated by the need to meet the standards required for the World Cup, and partly by a recognition of the economic benefits such modernisation could bring.

Morocco's broader national programme is one of aggressive modernisation, with emphasis on heavy transportation

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investments. Key investments include a USD 1.3 billion highway expansion, a USD

9.6 billion high-speed railway modernisation programme, a USD 7.5 billion national port strategy, and a USD 2.8 billion airport upgrade programme, targeting an increase in passenger capacity to 80 million by 2030, is also underway. (IMF Country Report No. 26/73)

Spain approaches the 2030 FIFA World Cup from a position of existing infrastructural maturity, with eleven of the twenty tournament stadiums located on Spanish soil and already operating at FIFA Level standards. Spain's expenditure is comparatively low, at a humble EUR 1.43 billion (DLA Piper,

2023), mainly concentrating on stadium modernisation and transport enhancement rather than foundational development.

Real Madrid, one of the world's most commercially significant football clubs, is also contributing in helping Spain prepare for the World Cup. Their confirmed total spending on the Bernabéu currently sits at $1.5 billion (Real Madrid financial reports), with the club stating that this will be close to the final total. The Camp Nou in Barcelona too recently underwent a USD 1 billion upgrade (Sports Illustrated, 2025). However, these upgrades are only partly motivated by the World Cup, and are more towards the independent club's growth, while also helping in the overall fan experience in the stadium. Large-scale events, such as the 1982 FIFA World Cup and the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, usually spark upgrades that last for a long time.

Spain's high-speed AVE rail network model, which is considered efficient, sustainable, and technologically advanced, is expected to manage inter-city fan movement efficiently, therefore reducing both congestion and domestic flight demand. It is the longest in Europe at nearly 4,000 kilometres (The Spain Post, 2025). A EUR

1.5 billion expansion of Málaga Airport, increasing annual passenger capacity from 25 million to 36 million, is also planned to begin between 2027 and 2029 (Idealista, 2025), which is consistent with the fact that Spain is preparing to deal with an excessive fan population with their new developments.

With investment demands expected to be more extensive than Spain's relatively limited upgrades, yet far less transformative and financially burdensome than Morocco's large-scale infrastructural expansion, Portugal is expected to occupy a middle position within the 2030 co-hosting framework. As of June 2026, has not published a consolidated World Cup budget, and the numbers on Figure 1 are incremental upgrades only. However, the Portuguese government has announced that it will be investing in other sports infrastructure, namely training centres, which would be utilised by the participating nations in the tournament. In the Algarve, the southern region of Portugal, there are training centres for teams that will compete in the 2030 World Cup, including those that will play in Spain and Morocco.

Its three designated host stadiums, Luz Stadium, Alvalade Stadium, and Estádio do Dragão, are well-known stadiums for top-flight football matches watched from around the world. They were originally constructed for UEFA Euro 2004 and already hold FIFA Level 1 classification, therefore indicating an incremental investment. The Luz Stadium will add 5,000 seats to bring

capacity to 70,000 , while Alvalade will gain 2,000 additional seats and undergo architectural remodelling (Stadium DB, 2024). The stadiums and training centres are served by two airports (Faro and Beja), which are close to the coastal area, close to Morocco and southern Spain, namely Málaga and Seville, which will also accommodate tournament fixtures. There are also numerous training centres in the northern part of Portugal, which are subject to redevelopment. Portugal's

The government has acknowledged that any new investment will be modest relative to its co-hosts, signalling more of an upgrade rather than a revolution. Strategic investments in training centres and the expansion of Lisbon Airport, nevertheless, is projected to handle 39 million passengers by 2030 (Government of Portugal, 2024). In addition, Portugal's road network is already the

second-largest per capita in Europe, reflecting a measured approach to hosting preparedness without incurring the level of fiscal risk faced by Morocco.

Therefore, qualitatively, the infrastructure aspect of the World Cup reveals a significant divergence. Morocco views

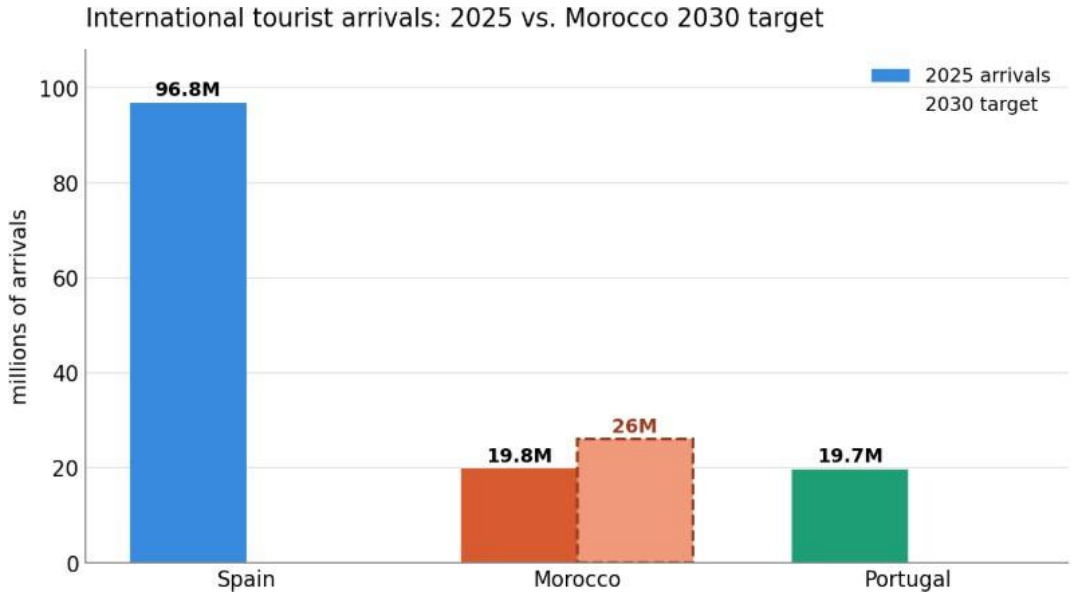
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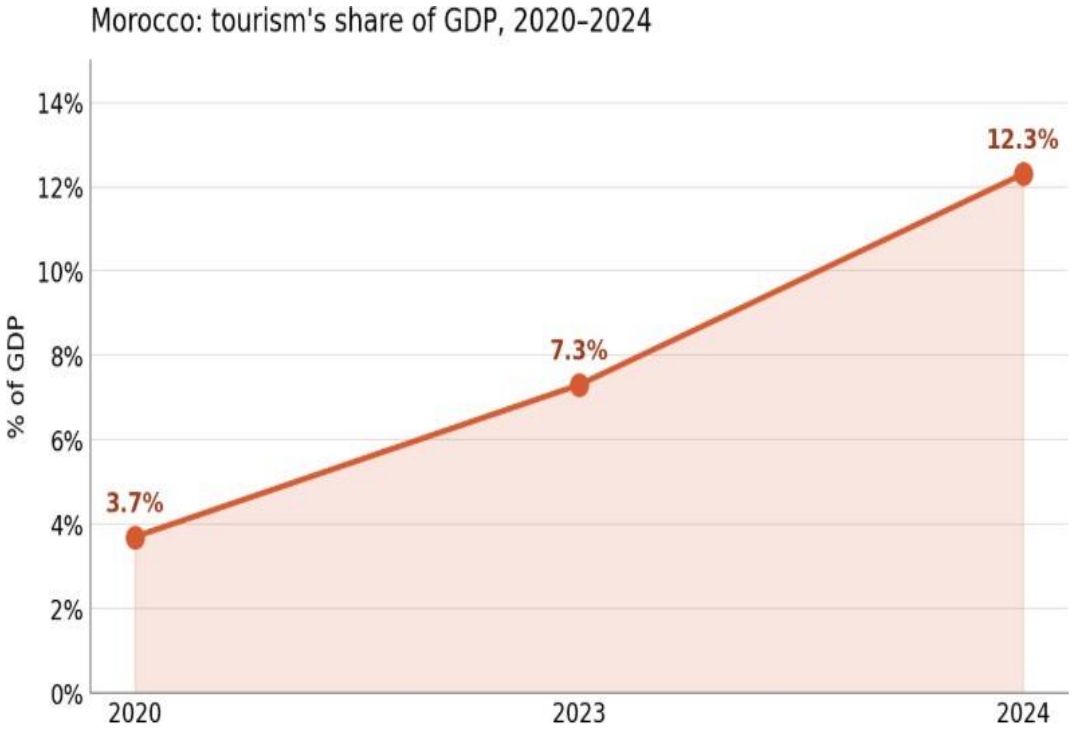
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2030 as a development leap, using the World Cup as a catalyst in their broader plans. Spain views 2030 as an enhancement of existing strengths and modernisation. Finally, Portugal, expected to take up a middle position, while upgrading their already proven assets. This divergence already reveals the asymmetry between the principal co-hosting nations, and their approach to the World Cup.

TOURISM



For Morocco, tourism is both the most critical opportunity and the foundation for long-term modernization, part of the 2030 preparation and their national programme. As Africa's top tourist destination for the second consecutive year in 2025, the country recorded 19.8 million foreign guests, as shown in figure 2, up 14% year-on-year (Ministry of Tourism statement, 2026), generating around USD 13.5-14.8 billion in receipts, with some variation across sources. Tourism's contribution to GDP climbed from 3.7% in 2020 to 7.3% in 2023 and maintained 7.3% in 2024, indicating a rapid structural shift with consistency. The numbers in Figure 3 are as of 2025, with the exception of Morocco as there isn't yet a clean, official full-year GDP-share figure published as of June 2026.



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The national economy is significantly dependent on tourism activities, with tourists from all over the world growing year by year in the country. Morocco aims to allocate nearly 12% of GDP annually to accelerate public investments in transport and tourism infrastructure (IMF Country Report No. 26/73). A holistic policy framework must be adopted by Morocco to leverage the World Cup as a major driver for sustainable tourism growth, including a massive digital transformation and health security, ensuring

long-term competitiveness in the global tourism landscape. By 2030, they aim to reach 26 million tourists (Figure 2), when they co-host the football World Cup with Spain and Portugal (Reuters, 2026).

To support this ambition, the tourism and travel industry are too receiving heavy and crucial investments. An investment of USD 4 billion is being directed toward adding 25,000 hotel rooms, a 20% increase in national hotel capacity (Morocco World News, 2024), while the government has also committed to doubling air capacity, suggesting Morocco's early preparedness. Morocco's tourism challenge is not one of maturation or overtourism, but of rapid and strategic expansion. The question and risk remains whether the pace of infrastructure expansion can match the projected demand and whether quality and distributional equity in tourism benefits can be sustained.

Spain is already one of the world's most visited countries. A mega-event such as the FIFA World Cup helps in attracting even more visitors. *Spain received 96.8 million international tourists in 2025*,(INE, 2026). As displayed in Figure 2, this number far exceeds the numbers in the other host countries. The Spanish tourism industry is laying a solid foundation for continued growth, a figure that may be exceeded in 2030 when the World Cup is

co-hosted, which could contribute positively to the hospitality sector. Spain projects an estimated economic impact of 5.5 billion euros in the tourism industry (Hespress, 2024), reinforcing Spain to be the country with the highest number of arrivals out of the three countries.

Tourism in Spain is the key driver of socio-economic development (OECD, 2024). Tourism contributed 13% of Spain's GDP in 2025, as shown in Figure 3 (Exceltur, 2025), while providing jobs to around 3 million people (WTTC, 2025), making tourism responsible for approximately 1 in every 7 jobs in Spain. As a result of existing tourism infrastructure, the need for heavy investments and risk of underused facilities post-event reduces.

Therefore, Spain is a low-risk host compared to emerging economies.

Yet this dominance brings structural pressure. The country is steadily facing overtourism, with record arrivals occurring simultaneously with overflowing rental costs, displacement of residents growing, and sustained protest movements in Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, San Sebastián, and the Canary Islands since 2024. Six neighborhood associations from San Sebastián, who petitioned FIFA directly, and other activists argue that the World Cup risks further aggravating or accelerating 'touristification'. This development has prompted the government to introduce provisions and prevention methods to handle this social challenge, including a sustainable tourism strategy. Spain's Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030 is designed to shift the model from volume-led to value-led growth, though its implementation alongside a mega-event of this scale presents a significant governance challenge (Ministry of Industry & Tourism via INE press release, 2026).

Portuguese tourism has obtained a considerable number of international recognitions the past decade, most notably the title of Europe's Leading Destination (World Travel Awards 2023, 2022, 2018-2020). They have been repeatedly recognised internationally from tourists all over the world. A mega-event such as the World Cup is expected to reinforce this position and attract higher volumes of tourists. Portugal welcomed 19.7 million international visitors in 2025, contributing to a record 32.5 million total guests and tourism receipts of approximately EUR 29.1 billion (Statistics Portugal, turismodeportugal, 2026), which suggests that the country is doing extremely well in the tourism industry and is expected to grow until the World Cup in 2030.

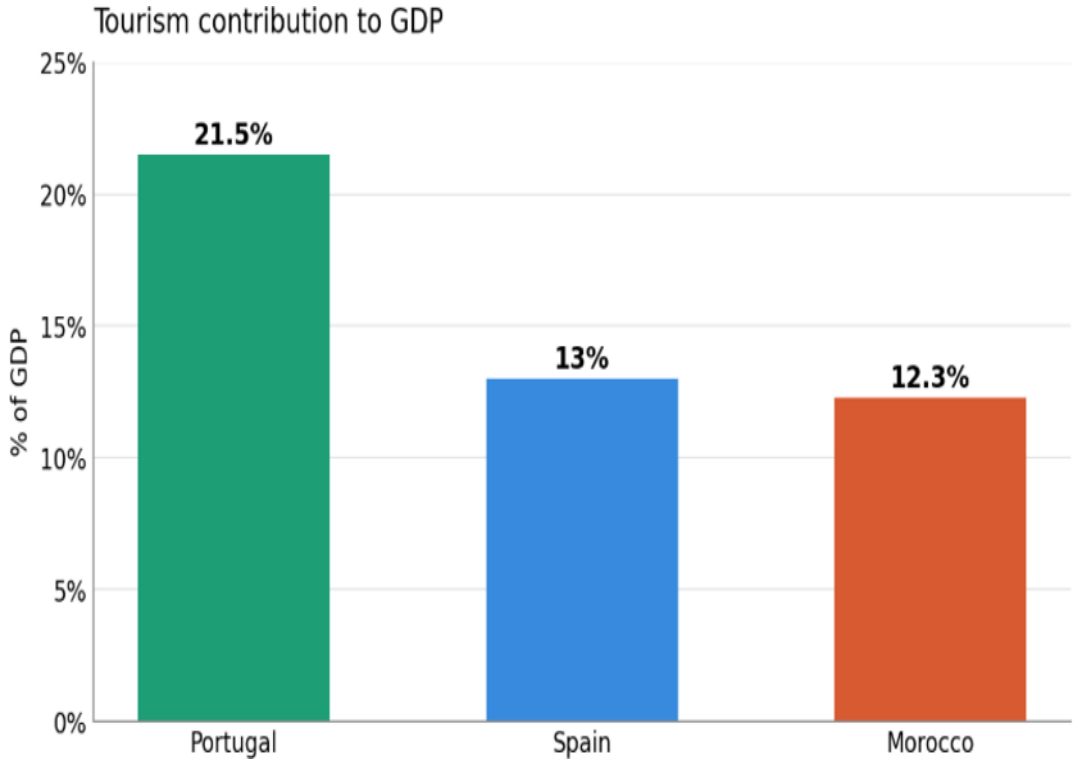
The travel and tourism industry is an integral part of the country's economy and GDP. Directly and indirectly, it contributed an estimated EUR 62.7 billion to the national economy, equivalent to 21.5% of GDP, the highest share among the three nations, clearly displayed in Figure 3, and supporting approximately 1.2 million jobs, a significant share of employment, accounting for nearly one in four jobs within the Portuguese economy (WTTC, 2025). It is one of the strongest engines of the economy. Its growth is supported by raising wages, tax cuts, and government transfers (Economy and finance, 2025).

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Lisbon, home to multiple footballing talents in the world and a host city in the 2030 World cup, is anticipated to be the most visited city in the country throughout the hosting period. The city is already facing the congestion visible in Spanish cities, and unequal benefit distribution is a concern which may grow over time. To mitigate this, Lisbon is set to see 36 new hotels open by 2026, adding over 4,400 rooms, placing the city third among European cities for new hotel supply. As for the entire country, 114 hotels with 14,247 rooms will be built, putting Portugal fifth in European countries with the most hotels under construction by 2026. As evident from the text, a similar pattern arises between the three countries as seen in the infrastructure dimension. Morocco invests the heaviest and builds the foundational building capacity, with the main concern being completion. Spain looks to upgrade their already existing tourism infrastructure, while mitigating the issue of overtourism in the country. Portugal yet again occupies a middle ground, with expansion more significant than Spain's but considerably lesser than Morocco's, and also having more arrivals than Morocco in 2025 but staying behind Spain, while mitigating the issue of equal distribution of gains in host cities. However, Portugal does account for the highest share of tourism in their GDP in comparison to Morocco and Spain.



POTENTIAL ECONOMIC EFFECTS

Morocco is projected to gain the most transformative economic advancement in relation to its current GDP, with the Economy and Finance Minister Nadia Fettah projecting the co-hosting arrangement would generate over 100,000 jobs per year and boost economic growth by 1.7% (Morocco World News, 2025). The IMF's analysis of Morocco's accelerated infrastructure investment programme estimates that their cumulative infrastructure spending could raise real GDP by 2% by 2030 compared to a baseline scenario, rising to a 3% long-term gain after 2031 as efficiency improvements compound. Under

higher-efficiency assumptions, long-term GDP gains could reach 4% (IMF Country Report No. 26/73), indicating and presenting Morocco's significant opportunity in terms of using the World Cup to achieve a sustained economic advancement.

However, the IMF also warns that public debt is expected to rise by 7 to 8% of GDP before gradually stabilising (IMF Country Report No. 26/73), with Morocco's GDP growth projected to exceed 3.6% in 2026 (IMF Country Report No. 26/73). The government recognises that the effectiveness of public investment will ultimately be determined by how efficiently projects are delivered. Delays and cost overruns need to be removed in order to achieve greater efficiency in project delivery, and therefore strengthening long-term gains.

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The IMF has been direct that the difference between efficient and inefficient public spending could determine whether the tournament becomes a generational catalyst or an economic liability, warning that cost overruns on large infrastructure projects could raise public debt substantially without generating any additional economic growth. The IMF's conclusion is that Morocco must manage public investment carefully, enforce strict cost controls, integrate maintenance into budgets from the outset, and monitor off-balance-sheet debt closely if the long-term gains are to materialise.

At the policy level, Economy Minister Fettah has highlighted the economic transformation must be inclusive of small and medium enterprises, not merely large contractors, ensuring that World Cup spending circulates more broadly through the domestic economy. She adds that what they are experiencing today constitutes a transformation boulevard for our country, not on the horizon of 2030, but right now, serving a more inclusive future.

Out of the three co-hosts, Spain has the significantly largest economy, presenting a highly contrasting economic trade-off when compared to the other co-hosts. Estimates of a total expenditure of EUR 1.43 billion, against projected benefits exceeding EUR 5.12 billion in GDP impact, have been made by the government. Approximately, this accounts for a return of 3.6 times the investment, with the subsequent creation of 82,513

full-time equivalent jobs (The Local, 2023). The acting Minister of Industry projected a GDP multiplier of EUR 4.3 for every euro invested, with EUR 1.3 in tax revenue (The Local, 2023).

Despite the recent global demand weakness and trade tensions that has slowed down export growth in Spain, the country's GDP grew at approximately 2.8% in 2025 (INE, 2026), with the number varying between sources. Their existing infrastructure and comparatively lower number of investments displays the low-risk nature of the country. Another concrete factor for this is the certainty of high international visitor numbers, especially in the coastal regions and major cities. Residents are likely to experience higher costs during the event, especially around transport, accommodation, and hospitality.

The potential economic impact in Portugal is projected to be significant, for an economy of Portugal's scale. However, they are also the most modest out of the three countries, with the World Cup projected to contribute over EUR 800 million to the economy, with tourism revenues growing by 2.3% and approximately 20,000 jobs created (DLA Piper, 2026). In 2025, Portugal's GDP grew approximately 1.9%, with OECD projecting a growth of around 2.2% for 2026 (OECD, 2026). It was also named 'Economy of the Year' by The Economist in 2025 (The Portugal News, 2025).

Portugal's economic impact expectations are the least ambitious out of the three countries in absolute terms, though the impact remains significant for an economy of Portugal's scale and openness. The World Cup is expected to contribute over EUR 800 million to the economy, with tourism revenues growing by 2.3% and approximately 20,000 jobs created (DLA Piper, 2026). Portugal's GDP grew by approximately 1.9% in 2025, with OECD projections of around 2.2% for 2026 (OECD, 2026). It was named

'Economy of the Year' by The Economist in 2025, reflecting its reform momentum (The Portugal News, 2025).

The CIP president, Armindo Monteiro, has highlighted the World Cup as a vehicle for accelerating the internationalisation of Portuguese companies and integrating them into global value chains. The FIFA World Cup attracts fans from all over the world, thereby increasing interest among companies for sponsorships from all over the world, mainly Europe. With mindful planning and carefully implemented strategies, the rise in GDP may also help the country long-term and set a standard for the coming years.

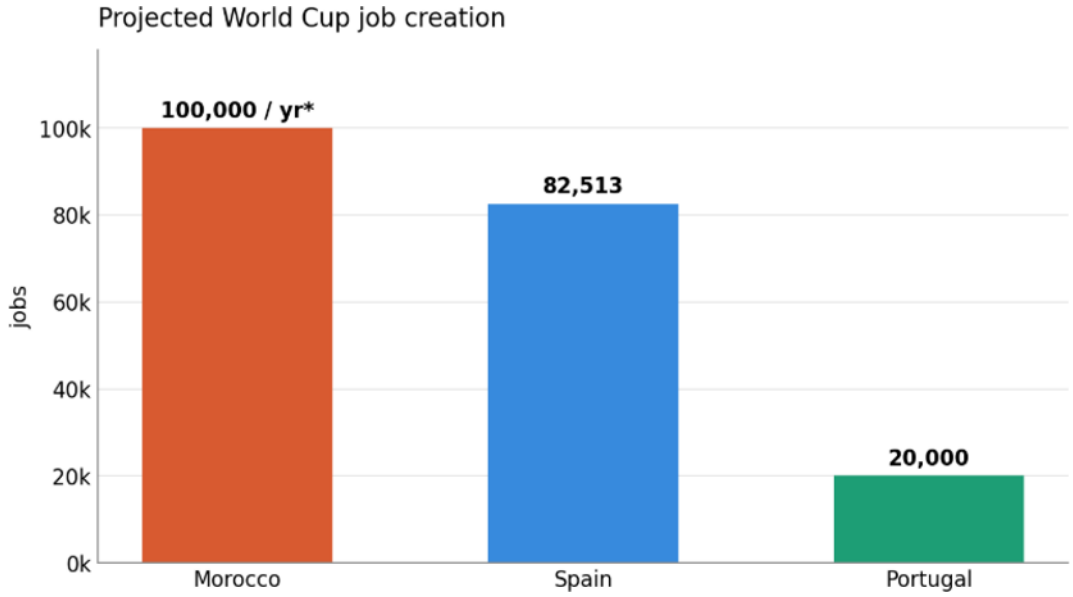
Portugal presents a low fiscal risk for the World Cup, being between the two countries yet again.Their economic growth prospects until 2030 are promising, with significant developments expected in green energy and tourism. However, without careful planning, these positive impacts may be only short-term.

One caution echoed across the three nations is the caution against over-optimism. Scholarly studies show that the benefits from mega-events are usually overstated, equated by cost overruns, displacement and its consequent effects, and the underuse of facilities post-event. As shown in Figure 4, Morocco is significantly higher than Spain and Portugal in terms of job creation, which is an estimated 100,000 per year. Morocco is by far carrying the highest financial risk, but also has the highest development potential. Spain has the lowest risk out of the three countries, and Portugal yet again occupies a carefully balanced middle position.

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SOCIAL IMPACT

From a Moroccan standpoint, the World Cup is seen as an institutional, economic, strategic, geopolitical, and civilizational occasion, as quoted by FRMF President Lekjaa. The global prominence of Morocco is expected to strengthen during and after the event, particularly its cultural influence across Africa and the Arab world. Another aspect is its geopolitical positioning as a bridge between Africa and Europe, the continents where the World Cup is taking place. Investments in sports infrastructure being designed, such as the Grand Stade Hassan II, the rebuilt Moulay Abdellah Complex in Rabat, and the upgraded Tangier stadium, are expected to leave a social legacy beyond 2030.

Although numerous positive social outcomes, the societal impacts are not uniformly positive. The Gen Z 212 movement of autumn 2025, a significant protest movement, was taken to the streets by the citizens of Morocco in more than 20 different cities. Under the slogan 'hospitals, not stadiums,' they express their deep frustration over what they saw as the misallocation of significant public funds away from healthcare.The repercussions of this protest was far from positive.

Three protesters were killed, and over 2400 were arrested. Demonstrations were subsequently diminished after royal intervention. The underlying social tensions reflect structural inequalities that the World Cup alone cannot address.

Another major concern may be the factor of environmental sustainability. Morocco has large-scale plans in terms of infrastructure. These large-scale infrastructure events generate significant greenhouse gas emissions, and use up a considerable amount of energy, therefore increasing the energy demand. Morocco's planning frameworks must account for these negative consequences, therefore implying a sustainable planning framework, including a holisticevaluation of both GHG emissions and energy demands, must be in place. (Environmental Impact Assessment or EIA)

Due to existing infrastructure, developed countries like Spain are more likely to benefit from hosting a mega-event such as the 2030 World Cup socially. The World Cup will further facilitate enhanced transport systems and improved infrastructure and public spaces. Mega-events are expected to reshape cities, tourism patterns and infrastructure. However, there remain potential negative impacts.

Spain's social tensions are the most visible and extensively documented among the three nations. The country has been a victim to anti-tourism protests since 2024, with major coordinated actions in 2025 across Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, San Sebastián, Ibiza, and Granada. Protesters argue that mass tourism has driven rents beyond local affordability, displaced communities from their neighbourhoods, and reshaped public space in ways that serve commercial rather than residential interests.

Among the three nations, Spain stands to be the nation with the most visible and extensively examined social tensions.

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Anti-tourism protests have been taking place in the country since 2024, with major synchronised actions in 2025 across Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, San Sebastián, Ibiza, and Granada.

Protesters have argued that mass tourism has shaped public space in ways that favour commercial rather than commercial interests, while also raising rent significantly, causing displacement among the local communities from their neighbourhoods. The Barcelona city council's decision to eliminate short-term tourist rentals by 2028 and Madrid's plan to introduce a 100% tax on non-EU property buyers signal a policy response, but one frequently criticized as fragmented and unevenly enforced.

Six neighbourhood associations in the Basque city of San Sebastián have asked Fifa to withdraw it as a venue for the 2030 men's World Cup. They stated in their letter that hosting the cup will only worsen living conditions and "further exacerbate the touristification" of the city.

This issue was taken to the streets by a wide range of citizens in Spain in October 2025. "Residents are being pushed out of the city, public spaces are being reshaped according to commercial interests, infrastructure is being designed to meet the needs of the tourism industry, and the local language and culture are being fetishised for marketing purposes."(The Guardian, 2025)

Portugal's expected social outcomes are relatively optimistic. However, they remain vulnerable to certain structural constraints. The World Cup 2030 is seen as a strategic bridge between Europe and Africa, as stated by CIP President, Monteiro, implying Portugal to reinforce its international visibility, while subsequently strengthening the nation's historically unique position as a gateway to both continents. As seen in the Euro 2004 in Portugal, the country is likely to use the mega-event to strengthen their tourism branding, attracting tourists from around the world.

Employment creation, although modest in scale, is expected to be distributed across the tourism and hospitality sectors

The principal social risks are concentrated in Lisbon, which is expected to be the country's busiest host city. Congestion, strain on public services, and unequal distribution of benefits between tourist zones and residential communities are already being raised. The long-term legacy of Portugal's hosting role will be determined through its ability on careful regional and social planning.

As evident, each nation is characterized by its own society tensions and sustainability concerns. Therefore, the geopolitical significance in each country differs with Morocco using the World Cup to enhance global visibility, Spain to reinforce their already established position, and Portugal to strengthen Europe-Africa relations.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this paper was to examine how the anticipated socio-economic impacts of the 2030 FIFA World Cup are distributed across three structurally asymmetric co-hosts. The analysis revealed a similar and recurring pattern in the four dimensions explained, infrastructure, tourism, potential economic impact, and potential social impact. Out of the three countries, Morocco is by far taking the furthest leap in terms of development, while also having the highest fiscal risk. Spain is dependent on their infrastructural maturity, and has the lowest fiscal risk comparatively, but has the highest social risk with early scares occurring in the country. Portugal repeatedly takes up a measured middle ground, while also consisting of the most

tourism-dependent GDP out of the three countries. Crucially, the same asymmetry which occurs in the infrastructure dimensions reproduces itself in the tourism, economic projections, and social impact, therefore suggesting that instead of the event itself, the country's starting structural point plays an important determinant of outcomes.

The significance of this pattern is that rather than a single event with a single impact, the 2030 World Cup is better understood as three distinct national projects sharing a common label. The distribution of gains and profits are mainly determined by the

pre-existing economic conditions, institutional capacity, and national development priorities in the countries and less by the tournament itself. The novel contribution of this paper lies in its comparative nature amongst the principal co-hosts. While existing literature has concentrated on single-host cases or treated

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co-hosting as a governance arrangement, this study examines how different socio-economic impacts arise when co-hosts occupy different positions on the development spectrum, a high-income European pairing alongside an emerging African economy. In practical terms, for policymakers and event governance, this paper implies that uniform expectations and

standardised hosting frameworks are incompatible to asymmetric co-hosting arrangements, and that financial safeguards, legacy planning, and social mitigation strategies must be tailored to each host's structural position.

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