

Web Summit is windfall for Portugal's economy

November 6 2016, by Brigitte Hagemann



A view from Web Summit in 2014 held in Dublin, Ireland, as Portuguese government officials expect the upcoming edition to inject 200 million euros into the economy

The bars on the banks of Lisbon's Tagus river are gearing up for a bonanza as tens of thousands of people descend on the city for Europe's largest tech event.

The Web Summit, also known as "Davos for geeks," which runs from Monday to Thursday with more than 53,000 people from 165 countries signed up to attend, is expected to deliver a shot in the arm for Portugal's ailing economy.

The summit's previous five editions were held in Dublin, where a tradition for partying into the night was firmly established.

The Portuguese government expects this sixth edition to inject 200 million euros (\$220 million) into the economy, with a quarter of that going to the [hotel industry](#) and another 50 million euros to the conference's various suppliers.

The national carrier, TAP, has seen a 15 percent jump in sales of European flights.

"The indirect impact could be much bigger, because hundreds of major investors will be there," economy minister Manuel Caldeira Cabral told AFP.

He added that the summit would give Portuguese start-ups "international visibility that will allow them to expand more quickly."

The event's Irish co-founder Paddy Cosgrave said a lot would be happening after sunset.

"Late in the night, we will be on the streets of Lisbon... What I like is to see tens of thousands of business people, entrepreneurs or those who want to become entrepreneurs, and they are all just learning from each other and doing business, hopefully. That's exciting," he said.

Uber's big break

Nights on the town can sometimes serve as a springboard for start-ups. Uber was an unknown Californian company when it attended the 2011 Web Summit.

According to Cosgrave, during a Dublin pub crawl, the company's founder met two investors who put up 50 million euros two days later.

"There are many others, hundreds of other stories like that, when I hear them that is what drives me on," said Cosgrave.

Hotels near the summit's venues, usually half empty at this time of year, are booked solid.

Across the city, room prices have seen a 68 percent spike, according to Trivago, a price comparison website.

Some 15,000 reservations have been made through Airbnb for the summit, for a total value of 2.8 million euros.

After being hit by a major economic crisis in 2011 that prompted tens of thousands of graduates to emigrate, Portugal emerged from recession in 2014, but its recovery has been slow.

The economy minister hopes the Web Summit will help "put the brakes on emigration and even encourage qualified young people to return from England, France and Germany."

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Citation: Web Summit is windfall for Portugal's economy (2016, November 6) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-11-web-summit-windfall-portugal-economy.html>

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