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Arab Trade Expansion Strategy in Portugal: Opportunities for Innovation and Development

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Master in Business Administration

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Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September 2025

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BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Department of Marketing, Operations and General
Management

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Dedication

To those who enabled me to navigate my path through the difficulties of exile, research, and new motherhood.

To my beloved husband, my companion and safe haven, who has supported me endlessly and been patient with me.

To my young son, born in the womb of this research, whose pure presence was the greatest motivation for its completion.

To my dear parents and sisters, despite our distance, your presence has remained an unquenchable light in my heart.

To my esteemed husband's family.

I dedicate this work to everyone who believed in me when I had nothing but my faith.

Acknowledgements

Thank God foremost and first for the will and strength to complete this study, despite the challenges it faced academically and personally.

My deepest gratitude and appreciation to my academic supervisor, Professor Renato Pereira, for his scholarly mentorship, patience, and insightful debates that shaped this work into what it is today.

I particularly thank my loving husband, who did his best to give me the time, psychological, and intellectual room to finish this endeavor.

Thanks to my little boy, not knowing he was sleeping with me during the nights and who helped me make this dream a reality while starting his life.

I also offer my sincere thanks to my family in my home country, who supported me with their prayers and love despite being far away.

I will never forget my husband's family.

To those who listened, supported, kept quiet, and understood. thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Resumo

Este estudo literário explora a possibilidade de expansão do comércio árabe em Portugal, à luz da estratégia em evolução da globalização económica. Propõe uma abordagem singular para a reformulação das políticas comerciais árabes com Portugal, um país com vantagens geográficas e abertura económica, e membro da União Europeia. Apesar das diferenças económicas entre as duas partes, este estudo centra-se na convergência dos objectivos de diversificação económica nos países árabes, especialmente após a recuperação da economia europeia da crise financeira. Baseia-se num conjunto de teorias económicas, como a teoria da vantagem comparativa, a Análise SWOT e a Análise PESTLE, para alcançar a integração e formular uma visão clara para a construção de relações comerciais bem-sucedidas. A partir daí, expande as relações para além do comércio, incluindo a cooperação em áreas como a energia limpa, entre outras. Isto demonstra que os países árabes, que testemunham visões nacionais ambiciosas, como a Visão Saudita 2030 e a Visão 2071 dos EAU, procuram construir parcerias equilibradas e sustentáveis, garantindo um ambiente legal e institucional que garanta esta expansão bem-sucedida. O estudo sistemático baseou-se em análises qualitativas, analisando os dados comerciais oficiais e apoiando-se nas teorias referidas. Consequentemente, os resultados deste estudo concluem que as relações comerciais árabe-portuguesas são limitadas, apesar do potencial de cada país para construir relações comerciais recíprocas. O estudo descreve um conjunto de recomendações-chave, como o estabelecimento de um comité económico árabe-português e outros pontos que definem claramente esta estratégia. Com base nisto, é possível desenvolver uma visão geral, incluindo uma perspectiva teórica, para criar um novo modelo de cooperação entre eles, baseado na complementaridade, no valor partilhado, numa visão sustentável e na eliminação da dependência. Uma perspectiva científica adopta uma visão viável que integra as dimensões económica, cultural e legislativa. O estudo confirma as aspirações dos países árabes na expansão comercial em mercados emergentes e promissores, como Portugal.

Estratégias de Expansão Comercial (JEL: F10).

Desenvolvimento e Inovação (JEL: O30).

Relações Económicas e Comerciais (JEL: F15).

Políticas e Regulamentações Económicas (JEL: E60).

Expansão do Comércio Árabe (JEL: F14).

Abstract

This literary study explores the possibility of Arab trade expansion in Portugal, in light of the evolving strategy of economic globalization. It proposes a unique approach to reshaping Arab trade policies with Portugal, a country with geographical advantages and economic openness, and a member of the European Union.

Despite the economic differences between the two parties, this study focuses on the convergence of economic diversification goals in Arab countries and Portugal's desire to open up to foreign investment, especially after the European economy recovered from the financial crises. It relies on a set of economic theories, such as the theory of comparative advantage, SWOT, and PESTLE, to achieve integration and formulate a clear vision for building successful trade relationships (particularly between the Gulf and Maghreb countries, and Portugal). From there, it expands relations beyond trade, to include cooperation in areas such as clean energy, among others. This demonstrates that Arab countries, which are witnessing ambitious national visions, such as Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE Vision 2071, seek to build balanced and sustainable partnerships by ensuring a legal and institutional environment to ensure this successful expansion. The systematic study relied on qualitative , analyzing official trade data and relying on the aforementioned theories. Accordingly, the results of this study conclude that Arab-Portuguese trade relations are limited, despite the potential of each country to build reciprocal trade relations.

It outlines a set of key recommendations, such as establishing an Arab-Portuguese economic committee and other points that clearly define this strategy. Based on this, an overview can be developed, including a theoretical perspective, to create a new model for cooperation between them, based on complementarity, shared value, a sustainable vision, and the elimination of dependency. A scientific perspective adopts a viable vision that integrates economic, cultural, and legislative dimensions. The study confirms the aspirations of Arab countries in commercial expansion in emerging and promising markets such as Portugal.

Keywords:

Trade Expansion Strategies (JEL : F10).

Development and Innovation (JEL : O30).

Economic and Trade Relations (JEL: F15).

Economic Policies and Regulations (JEL : E60).

Arab Trade Expansion (JEL : F14)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The world is witnessing intense commercial competition due to countries' desire for commercial expansion, aiming to achieve economic development, expand their growth, and expand internationally. This is clearly evident in Arab policies, such as those of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

When countries seek to expand internationally economically, they can accurately predict the results of expansion and, accordingly, make more accurate strategic decisions, reducing the risks of expansion and increasing their returns (Familyoni and Babanvand 2024).

This necessarily leads to an increasingly competitive and dynamic market. By analyzing the target market in all its internal and external aspects (Rejeesh & Sunfararj 2021), identifying its trends, and understanding customer behavior, we can achieve innovation and economic development, which contribute to and lead to sustainable economic growth. Here, Arab interests intersect with Portugal's.

Arab countries seek to free themselves from solely relying on oil and gas, and to expand their trade network to the widest possible global scale. They see in Portugal advantages such as its geographical location, its desire to open up trade to foreign markets, its strong infrastructure, and its status as a member of the European Union. Because of these interests, Arab trade expansion into Portugal has become an urgent necessity to enhance opportunities for development and innovation.

1.2 Contextualization:

This study is limited to analyzing trade and economic relations between Portugal and Arab countries, focusing solely on Arab trade expansion strategies in Portugal, without addressing relations with other European countries. The study also focuses on the period from 2020 to

2025, a period that witnessed significant transformations in Portuguese policies related to the economy, immigration, and citizenship, making it directly relevant to the research topic. The study relies on secondary sources, including official reports, economic data, and recent academic studies related to the topic.

1.3 Definition Of The Research Problem:

Despite global economic transformations and the increasing importance of cross-border partnerships in achieving sustainable development and promoting innovation, Portugal still exhibits a relative tendency toward economic isolation, particularly with regard to its trade openness to regions outside the European space. Although Portugal is an active member of the European Union and seeks to stimulate domestic innovation, its trade policy tends to focus on traditional European and American markets, reducing the opportunities for Arab markets to integrate into the Portuguese economic landscape (Middell, 2019; Pieterse, 2021).

This isolation is manifested in several dimensions, most notably the stringency of legal procedures related to commercial expansion, the slowness in adjusting economic policies to reflect globalization changes, and the limited channels of direct trade exchange between Arab countries and Portugal compared to the capabilities of both parties. This creates an economic and trade gap that limits the ability of Arab companies to expand within the Portuguese market, while simultaneously depriving Portugal of opportunities to benefit from Arab resources and markets (Prabhakar et al., 2019). In addition, this isolation is accompanied by a rise in nationalism in economic policymaking and the adoption of laws that may restrict the movement of individuals and foreign investors. This reflects a trend toward economic and social isolation, directly impacting the investment environment and commercial expansion (Khosrow-Pour, 2019). Based on the above, the research problem arises in the question of how Portugal's relative isolation limits opportunities for Arab commercial expansion, and what strategies are possible to overcome this isolation, achieving development and innovation and opening new horizons for economic integration between the Arab world and Portugal.

1.4 Significance of the Study:

The relevance of this study emanates in light of issues surrounding international economic relations, particularly in the backdrop of rapid transformations the world is witnessing in relation to globalization, innovation, and the emergence of nationalist and isolationist political powers in some European countries, such as Portugal (Pieterse, 2021; Middell, 2019). As the Arab world attempts to expand its economic and commercial reach beyond its natural frontiers, it is faced with complex problems in reaching the markets of Europe, which tend to adopt closed or restrictive policies. It is the case with Portugal, which, despite its geographic position and centuries of history of trade, continues to experience a certain economic and social alienation, embodied by legislation and regulation that limit foreign investment and trade opening up, particularly from Arab countries (Khosrow-Pour, 2019; Prabhakar et al., 2019). The importance of the study is further emphasized given the recent changes in Portuguese policies, which strongly confirm the country's move towards strengthening control, which could have negative implications on the business climate and business development (Das et al., 2024). Upon this, this study seeks to shed light on this topic and analyze its aspects and potential impacts, in addition to offering practical recommendations to help in the formulation of Arab commercial expansion strategies in the Portuguese market, enabling growth and innovation and achieving common interests of the two parties.

1.5 Research Questions:

1. What are the most important economic and investment dimensions underlying Portugal's expansion strategy in its Arab trade? How can they be leveraged to promote innovation and sustainable development?
2. To what extent do current trade policies between Arab countries and Portugal contribute to enhancing trade exchange?
3. What are the main challenges facing the establishment of these trade relations between Portugal and Arab countries?
4. What untapped market opportunities can be developed through improved trade and investment relations between Portugal and Arab countries?

5. How can Portugal, within the framework of its alliances with Arab countries, attract and develop innovative knowledge as a driver of economic growth?

1.6 Research Objectives:

1. Analyze the main economic and strategic reasons for increasing Arab trade with Portugal and how Portugal can leverage these incentives to drive innovation and sustainable development.
2. Study the current trade policies between Arab countries and Portugal to further develop trade and investment relations, and identify the most significant challenges that hinder the development of these relations.
3. Suggest strategic ways in which Portugal, taking into consideration its connection with Arab states, can draw new technology and innovative knowledge and translate it into productive players in the Portuguese economy.
4. Identify the untapped potential of each sector that would attain maximum Arab-Portuguese cooperation in trade.

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation:

The dissertation has four core chapters which, collectively, are meant to analyze Arab trade expansion policy in Portugal from an economic and strategic perspective, and outline ways of enhancing these relations to be of value for innovation and development purposes within Portugal. Below is a description of the topic for each chapter:

Chapter One: Introduction

Includes the study background, research problem, its purpose, its importance, and its questions, and the dissertation organization.

Chapter Two: Political Economy and Previous Work

Reviews the essential theoretical concerns on the expansion of trade, innovation, and economic associations. It also summarizes previous studies of Arab-Portuguese commerce and acknowledges the research gap that the dissertation seeks to address.

Chapter Three: Research Design And Research Hypothesis

This section explains the research methodology followed by the study, and presents examples from selected Arab countries to study their trade relations with Portugal within the framework of basic concepts in trade and its strategy, and as hypotheses to see the extent of their validity at the end of the research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Explains the research method used in the study, the instruments of data collection, the reason for the choice of the descriptive analytical technique, and the official data sources and methodological limitations.

Chapter Five: Presentation and Discussion of Results

Has a clear presentation of the data based on the official sources and discusses them in relation to the background of the research questions and objectives. It also speaks about the findings in comparison to the relevant literature and theories, pinpointing gaps and consistency.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Has the conclusive conclusions derived, sets the academic and practical contributions of the study, presents the research limitation, and provides suggestions for future research directions.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Trade Expansion Strategy:

Trade and trade expansion are two pillars of a country's modern economy. Based on an economic imagination to expand beyond the boundaries of a country and into new markets to achieve this business expansion and economic development, enhancing its competitiveness.

2.1.1 Commercial expansion as economic diversification and income diversification.

In pursuing business expansion in a foreign market, one relies on relativity theory, which studies economics. Low-cost and effective availability markets lead to increased sales. Marchionatti (2020) emphasized that growing from a single business market to over one market reduces shrinkage in a sole market and increases financial stability. That was demonstrated by Saudi Aramco, which diversified its businesses to Asia and America through strategic alliances, hence acquiring an international perspective.

2.1.2. Commercial expansion as means to achieve international competition:

Ghauri & Cateora (2021) assert that commercial expansion has the impact of increasing an organization's international status, provides it with the chance to enter into alliances, and wields global power.

With the implementation of the theory of transcendence, it becomes understood that an organization able to expand beyond its geographical boundaries shall be able to establish business relationships and interests that are not limited by borders, expanding competition and stamina.

Tesla provides the best case because it has provided innovation to enter into different markets without any constraints.

2.1.3 Why target market analysis is important:

PESTLE theory is based on the reason that it is crucial to understand the target market politically, economically, and socially. Technologically, culturally, and legally, Burri & Polanco (2029) assures the success of a firm's commercial expansion into a new market. SWOT analysis, which understands the strengths and weaknesses of the target market, provides a clear, accurate, and well-reasoned conclusion. Carrefour withdrew from Russia because it was unable to adapt its style to Russian legislation and regulations.

2.1.4 The art of studying the challenges is a critical part of future expansion: Andrews et al. (2022) identified that numerous challenges exist in commercial expansion, including legislations such as taxes, cultural such as consumer products, and distribution logistics. To limit such challenges, we need to innovate in order to counter them and set in motion the real process of commercial expansion.

2.2 Innovation and Development

To achieve sustainable economic growth, innovation must extend beyond technology to business models and even public policy. Because the relationship between innovation and development is in proportion, the relationship must be addressed hereinafter.

2.2.1 Innovation is the primary driver of economic growth

Studies by Das et al. (2024) confirm that innovative societies are more immune to economic crises. Innovation is therefore closely related to economic development, which creates new job opportunities that attract domestic and foreign investment (Das et al. (2024)).

A good example of this is South Korea's investment in an innovation strategy since the 1990s, from being an agricultural giant to an industrial and technological giant within a span of less than three decades. This is what the knowledge growth theory (Knowledge - based growth theory) posits, that the growth in knowledge and scientific research is the backbone of modern economic development.

2.2.2 Innovation is a commercial expansion strategic tool

To achieve successful business expansion, there must be a strategy of innovation to get change and strong competition in the new market. With such innovation, the organization can make its products adaptable to the provided market, which allows it to overcome all the challenges and barriers earlier. Andrews et al. (2022) stated that business model innovation improves expansion and reduces costs.

One example of this is Apple's entry into small markets like China and India, where cultural and regulatory barriers arise.

2.2.3 Innovation and developing countries' challenges:

Farahane & Heshmati (2020) explained that no innovation policy exists that prevents other countries from catching up with development and economic growth. This theory justifies the technology deficit, which assumes that third-world nations will never succeed competitively abroad unless they bridge this gap through incentive legislation to overcome them, such as the inability to invest in infrastructure, lack of proper education and research, and the lack of incentive bills. The majority of the African countries are unable to produce their raw materials because It doesn't have science and research.

2.2.4 Institutional Innovation as a Turning Point to Development and Commercial Expansion:

Burri & Polanco (2020) require that institutional digital change increases the likelihood of international expansion because it facilitates this and enhances desired efficiency.

Institutional innovation includes innovation in management, governance, and customer interaction. This is what Morocco has done to transform its electronic system to simplify customs and attract new investors.

Therefore, we can assert that commercial development is not a syllabus but a prerequisite for international competition. Therefore, innovation is a potent catalyst of progress, combining technology and knowledge in the continuously evolving world.

2.3 Arab Trade Expansion Strategy:

As the subject matter of this research pertains to Arab trade expansion in Portugal, it must clarify the expansion measures proposed by these countries so that this experience could be used for Portugal in the future.

The Arab world consists of 22 countries across the Asia and Africa continents. They are all categorized by the Arabic language and common religious culture. They are all members of the Arab League, and they also have the Gulf Cooperation Council which consists of the Gulf states.

2.3.1 Reasons for Arab Trade Expansion:

It is widely known all over the globe that Arab countries are relying primarily on oil and gas for their business and therefore are in a stagnant position, lacking any sort of international economic progress and unable to catch up with international developments.

Marchionatti 2020. Therefore, the need arises to resort to relying on comparative advantage theory, which leads to switching to a new mode that does not lead to economic stagnation. Therefore, the need arises to export and produce, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has so done in its 2030 vision because it attempted to raise its non-oil exports and invest in global trade while taking advantage of its position in between Asia and Europe.

2.3.2 New Visions for Trade Expansion:

The Changes the World is Undergoing Enabling Arab countries to conceptualize commercial expansion beyond their frontiers, as European countries' necessity to find new potential markets developed, which has been attempted to exploit and access by some Arab countries.

World Bank reports indicate that Portugal is searching for new southern partnerships, which will be good for Arab business development. The best example is the Belt and Road Initiative, which offers an Arab-European corridor in logistics and infrastructure.

2.3.3 The Demand for a Strategy That Achieves Innovation:

As was previously mentioned, any expansion of business beyond the borders of a country must go through innovation to do so, overcoming its challenges thereof, and above all else, using

PESTLE and SWOT analysis, which must first be preceded by international change in the country itself, including everything that is beneficial to such growth. Andrews et al. 2022 and Das et al. 2024.

A prime example is the United Arab Emirates, which has worked to implement foreign trade and customs policies to attract investment.

2.4 Arab Trade Expansion Strategy in Portugal:

2.4.1 Why Portugal

Research has shown that Portugal, due to its unique geographical location in southwestern Europe overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, has an important commercial position connecting three continents: Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Being a member of the European Union, Portugal can benefit from European trade agreements (Liu & Richerla 2019), its strong infrastructure and recent development, in addition to its close cultural ties with the Arabs, makes the Portuguese market a target for Arab trade expansion.

2.4.2 Reasons for Arab Commercial Expansion in Portugal

Arabs' desire for commercial expansion outside traditional markets and the search for sustainable development in an emerging European market, especially since Portugal needs to attract investment in emerging fields such as the blue economy and artificial intelligence.

Let's not forget that any country, after an economic crisis, works to re-stimulate its economy, especially if it has suffered from an economic crisis. This is true for Portugal.

The cultural and historical ties between Portugal and the Arab world

2.4.2.1 The importance of cultural and historical ties

The historical dimensions linking the Arab world to Portugal, including Arab migrations from the history of Andalusia, make commercial communication open and flexible enough to

overcome and reduce cultural barriers that prevent any society from accepting the introduction of...(Ghauri & Cateora 2021).

The United Arab Emirates is considering expansion opportunities in Portugal through Carrefour and Noon.

2.4.2.2 Portugal and its attractiveness:

Since Arab countries are seeking to expand commercially in countries that contribute to their sustainable development, Portugal, with its strong infrastructure, is... Its trade policies are more flexible compared to other European countries.

2.4.2.3 Trade potential between Arab countries and Portugal

As we mentioned earlier, Arab countries rely primarily on oil, gas, and petrochemical industries, which enable them to export these products to Portugal. In return, they will import agricultural technologies, food industries, and renewable energy solutions.

This benefits each party individually, and can be combined to generate comprehensive economic development for both parties through real estate and tourism investment.

2.4.3 Challenges Facing This Expansion

As we noted previously, for commercial expansion to succeed, a set of economic theories must be applied. If we apply these theories to Arab commercial expansion in Portugal, we will notice a number of problems and challenges that hinder the success of this expansion. Therefore, it is important to highlight these challenges, the most important of which are: regulatory restrictions and laws that, for example, do not provide foreign investors with the assurances they will continue operating without sudden laws regarding residency, citizenship, or taxes. On the other hand, despite a shared cultural history, the difference in business management culture between the two countries constitutes an obstacle to conveying the desired understanding of a company's expansion. Here, we must apply the theory of economic blocs to enhance cooperation between them through bilateral agreements that lead to successful expansion. More importantly, the Arab countries face strong commercial competition from European countries themselves to gain a foothold in the Portuguese market. Because the focus of this study is on Arab commercial

expansion in Portugal, it should be noted that if this expansion is undertaken within a systematic and robust strategy based on economic theories that address all aspects of the trade expansion strategy, it will lead to a radical and progressive shift in bilateral relations from the Arab perspective, opening new markets for its products and diversifying its economic resources. In turn, this will contribute to Portuguese economic development.

2.5 Arab-Portuguese partnerships:

Arab-Portuguese Cooperation in the Aftermath of Trade Diversification and Transfer of Knowledge

Existing literature indicates the growing significance of bilateral arrangements between Portugal and Arab countries as a strategic tool for solidifying trade ties, diversifying the investment base, and knowledge transfer between both sides. A World Bank publication (2019) noted the signing of numerous bilateral agreements between Portugal and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on various sectors, including tourism and energy. This is a declaration of strategic orientation towards the creation of reliable institutional channels that facilitate Arab investments to flow into the Portuguese market in a safe and balanced cooperative context.

These agreements support the view that commercial partnerships are not merely a means for the growth of trade, but also a prime tool for technology transfer and knowledge beyond the traditional import-export model. For example, the research by Andrews et al. (2022) considered how Moroccan-Portuguese cooperation evolved in the sector of smart agriculture, where collaborative work on water management using solar power was initiated, providing a tangible example of green technology transfer in strategic cooperation.

These partnerships also point to the bilateral nature of trade relations, as the benefits are not only accruing to the Arab side, but also allow Portugal to benefit from the Arab markets as an export market, and from Arab investment and financing opportunities in strategic sectors that are confronted with shortages locally in Portugal, i.e., renewable energy, food security, and green infrastructure. This concurs with the theoretical framework used in this thesis, namely the SWOT and PESTLE models, which stresses the importance of seizing opportunities outside by creating strategic collaborations with complementary resource and expertise providers. On this level, the Arabo-Portuguese coalition constitutes an alternative economic pattern to the classical trade patterns, departing from customs of complete acquisition or commercial imperialism to a pattern based on integration and reciprocity. The vision of the thesis is also

supported by it because it attempts to look for "soft" solutions for Arab economic presence in Europe without geopolitics or economic showdowns.

These partnerships are doubly important in the context of the recent geopolitical shifts and the new European imperative to strengthen bonds with economic partners outside the European Union, particularly in the sectors of energy and food security. In that context, the Arab world—through shrewd partnerships with Portugal—are presenting real solutions by providing access to knowledge and investment, particularly in those fields where Portugal has a comparative advantage, i.e., agricultural technology, sea technology, and renewable energy management.

Thus, the literature establishes a new paradigm of Arab-Portuguese relations in trade based not only on exchange of commerce, but also on joint innovation and knowledge transfer, a model that is able to realize the maximum benefit to both and initiate sustainable development for both.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Methodology :

For all countries, opportunities for trade expansion are a fundamental and important axis for their own economic development and for building mutual economic relations.

Despite the growing awareness and interest in global trade expansion, particularly in Arab countries, and in Portugal in particular, there remains a clear and deep gap in the studies that address strategic Arab-Portuguese trade relations. These studies are almost nonexistent from the perspective of innovation and economic development for both countries. These studies demonstrate how Arab-Portuguese economic relations can be commercially successful and attract Arab companies, particularly given the desire of Arab countries to move beyond their globally recognized oil and gas resources and move towards markets that possess, like Portugal, strong commercial potential, including geographic location, infrastructure, and technological advancements, enabling them to achieve sustainable economic competitiveness. These studies also address the challenges that hinder this trade cooperation.

This study aims to raise a set of questions that aim to answer in order to create a successful academic model for the Arab commercial expansion strategy in Portugal, achieving innovation and sustainable development, which is evident in the following:

1. What are the most important economic and investment dimensions underlying Portugal's expansion strategy in its Arab trade? How can they be leveraged to promote innovation and sustainable development?
2. To what extent do current trade policies between Arab countries and Portugal contribute to enhancing trade exchange?
3. What are the main challenges facing the establishment of these trade relations between Portugal and Arab countries?

4. What untapped market opportunities can be developed through improved trade and investment relations between Portugal and Arab countries?

5. How can Portugal, within the framework of its alliances with Arab countries, attract and develop innovative knowledge as a driver of economic growth?

This professional is striving to achieve his goals to go out and be able to expand his business in Portugal, so he aims to:

Research Objectives

1. Analyze the main economic and strategic reasons for increasing Arab trade with Portugal and how Portugal can leverage these incentives to drive innovation and sustainable development.

2. Study the current trade policies between Arab countries and Portugal to further develop trade and investment relations, and identify the most significant challenges that hinder the development of these relations.

3. Suggest strategic ways in which Portugal, taking into consideration its connection with Arab states, can draw new technology and innovative knowledge and translate it into productive players in the Portuguese economy.

4. Identify the untapped potential of each sector that would attain maximum Arab-Portuguese cooperation in trade.

Therefore, this research adopts an objective, interpretive research philosophy, emphasizing its interest in understanding the political, economic, cultural, and legal aspects of both parties, particularly with regard to Arab commercial expansion in Portugal. It also describes bilateral economic relations and provides a comprehensive picture of both parties, serving the purpose of Arab commercial expansion.

This research is based on deductive reasoning, focusing on studying cases and experiences of Arab commercial expansion in general, based on a set of theoretical concepts and models. It relies on a qualitative approach, using agreements, document analysis, and official reports.

The study is descriptive-analytical and qualitative, seeking to understand the economic and political relations between Arabs and Portugal. It develops a case study of several projects and partnerships existing between the two parties. It is cross-sectional because the data extracted pertains to the current period. Accordingly, this research is based on key concepts and themes, which it relies on to develop a coherent approach that encompasses the motivations for commercial expansion: the goal of expansion is to take advantage of growth opportunities that

may not be available in the local market, to strengthen its international presence, and to gain competitive advantages. This research focused on a set of key concepts that form the framework for qualitative analysis, addressing them as analytical dimensions for understanding the Arab trade expansion strategy in Portugal. The Arab trade expansion strategy was represented by tracing the patterns and policies adopted by some Arab countries to enter the Portuguese market, through direct investment projects or bilateral partnerships. Innovation opportunities emerged through an analysis of joint technological initiatives, particularly in the fields of smart agriculture and renewable energy. Development as an analytical concept was reflected in tracing the contribution of these strategies to supporting the development agendas of both Arab countries and Portugal. Economic and strategic factors were analyzed by monitoring incentives such as Portugal's geopolitical location, tax opportunities, and institutional stability. Trade policies and partnerships were also included in the analysis of bilateral agreements and joint initiatives supported by institutions such as the World Bank. Finally, challenges were studied as a qualitative dimension related to market entry barriers, cultural differences, and bureaucracy, which may affect the effectiveness of Arab trade expansion in Portugal.

The research included all community organizations, agreements, and Arab projects in Portugal, outside the scope of the appropriate oil and gas target, encompassing diverse sectors. Four countries were selected: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Morocco.

Due to the nature of this research and academic study, it relied on a purposive sampling approach, which is consistent with the qualitative research approach adopted here. This, in turn, saves time and avoids the specific costs required by probabilistic research (not applied in this study). The criteria for selecting the previous samples were determined by:

1. The existence of direct trade relations between Arab countries and Portugal.
2. The availability of specific and reliable data and analyses on the cases.
3. These agreements and projects are at the party level.

The nature of the sources is secondary, consisting of international reports, economic databases, trilaterals, and scientific and literary reviews. Primary sources are not applicable, given the fact that this research is new and previously unavailable, and the lack of reliance on interviews and data. Secondary: Reports from government institutions and official statistics, scientific interviews, and published data from international organizations such as IRENA, FAO, Banco de Portugal, and CEO. Tertiary: Includes databases such as FAostat, IRENA Statistics, and EU

Data Portal. Documentary reports from parliamentary committees and reports from startups such as ADGM and ACWA Power.

Accordingly, systematic documentary analysis was adopted as the primary tool for collecting information. It includes key words such as:

- 1.Sustainable agriculture Morocco and Portugal
- 2.Saudi investment in solar energy Portugal.
- 3.UAE Portugal fintech Cooperation.

These results were filtered according to credibility, date, and the approved publishing authority. Documents were arranged analytically by (project, participating entity, economic or commercial output). This research relied on systematic data collection. The systematic search relied on academic and governmental databases using English keywords . The search focused only on academically recognized sources such as the Saudi Ministry of Energy - World Bank (2019), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2022), Economic Council of the League of Arab States (2022), AICEP Portugal Global (2024), United Nations Development Program (2020), Gulf Business Council (2023), CCIAP Report (2023), European Commission (2020), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2021).

This research relied on data analysis, using qualitative analysis (open coding was used to identify key concepts (strategy, etc.) and axial coding (selective understanding of relationships between concepts (to group these concepts)), where data was categorized into key concepts such as expansion, innovation, and thematic classification. Data was grouped into axes and each case was studied separately. This research then conducted a comparative analysis between the four aforementioned cases to identify common success factors and significant differences in the investments of various Arab countries in Portugal. Credibility was achieved in this research by consulting governmental and scientific databases and official documents. Due to the nature of this research, its results can be generalized to similar Arab projects in European contexts, taking into account the differences between countries. Therefore, all stages of the analysis and the methodology used were documented in a clear academic manner to allow for replication in contexts similar to this research. This research avoided personal bias by relying on multiple analytical methods and documents. This research respected intellectual property rights and cited official sources. APA standards are followed without distorting their content in a way that conflicts with academic integrity requirements. Given that this research does not rely on this questionnaire (personal interactions between parties), there is a discrepancy

between official sources documenting financial and commercial implications between countries. Therefore, as previously mentioned and clarified, a qualitative analytical documentary methodological analysis is appropriate for the nature of the study, especially since previous studies in the field of international relations (YIN 2018, Creswell 2020) confirm the effectiveness of this approach in analyzing international policies and projects that cannot be represented quantitatively, especially given its requirement for an understanding of the main concepts underlying the research topic, such as the strategy for expansion and innovation.

3.2 Research Design:

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical design, examining the potential for Arab trade expansion in Portugal, within the context of the developments and changes taking place in both markets.

Therefore, this research must focus on the relationship between the economic, political, and social environments in both Arab countries and Portugal. Models of existing and emerging trade relations between Arab countries and Europe are examined to form a preliminary understanding of whether this expansion will succeed, particularly within the context of the economic transformations and visions in Arab countries, as previously mentioned.

This is certainly achieved by applying economic theories that support the clarity of the study, leading to valuable results and recommendations that can be implemented if appropriate, or by working to reform and develop what hinders this expansion and the success of its innovations to achieve economic development.

Therefore, based on what has been mentioned, the problems presented in this research, and the questions it aims to answer academically, there is a set of hypotheses that this research will select from within the basic hypothesis, which calls for strengthening Arab trade expansion in Portugal and opportunities for innovation and economic development for both sides through the creation of strategic partnerships, knowledge transfer, and market expansion.

3.3 Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: (Expansión Factors): Shared economic and strategic factors (such as the geographical location of Portugal, resources, and diversification needs of the Arab economy) significantly enhance Arab expansion of trade into Portugal, generating immense innovation and development potential.

Hypothesis 2: (Policies and Challenges): In spite of the existence of trade policy frameworks between Portugal and Arab countries, bureaucratic challenges and legislative coordination deficits prohibit the full exploitation of trade possibilities and investment flows, which call for structural changes.

Hypothesis 3: (Attracting Innovation): Enhancing strategic partnerships with Arab countries, especially in research and development and technology transfer, will directly affect attracting innovation and stimulating industrial growth and the digital economy in Portugal.

Hypothesis 4: (Target Sectors): There exist vast untapped potential possibilities in target sectors such as renewable energy, new tourism, and agriculture technology between Portugal and the Arab countries. Investment policies can complement the potential to boost the sectors.

3.4 Dimensions of Analysis:

1. Arab Trade Expansion Strategy: Refers to the strategies and policies of Arab countries to expand their business presence beyond their traditional regions by entering new markets, expanding their partnerships, and enhancing economic integration. In the case of Portugal, this strategy manifests itself in direct investment, bilateral agreements, and joint ventures to expand the economic benefits of the European market to Arab countries.

2. Innovation Opportunities: Refers to the ability to use knowledge and technology to produce new products, services, or processes to enhance competitiveness. Innovation opportunities exist in Arab-Portuguese relations in the fields of smart agriculture, green technology, and renewable energy, where knowledge is available and can be transferred to the benefit of both parties.

3. Development: Refers to policies and actions that lead to improved living conditions and economic and social growth. In this thesis, development is considered the natural outcome of trade and investment cooperation, especially when accompanied by innovation and the integration of human and technical resources between Arab countries and Portugal.

4. Economic and Strategic Factors

Establish variables that affect economic decisions among countries such as location, natural resources, rule of law, and government stability. Portugal is an extremely important Arab strategic alternative because it is a gateway to Europe, has foreign investment policy, in addition to possessing historic and cultural affinity with some Arab countries.

5. Trade Partnerships and Policies:

Impressing the legal and regulative order of economic relations between states, i.e., bilateral agreements, customs regimes, and cooperation schemes. The Arab-Portuguese Alliance is a typical example of the kind of practice, as it is a means of satisfaction of economic interests without resort to potentially offensive coercion.

6. Challenges: These are the challenges that we have which may hinder successful cooperation. They include bureaucratic obstacles, bad legal coordination, bad institutional communication, and opposing economic agendas. Discovery of these challenges is the key to overcoming them in order to build successful cooperation strategies.

CHAPTER 4

Data Presentation and Discussion of Results

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter constitutes the most important chapter of this study. It presents detailed and organized data based on the methodology previously followed, which focused on analyzing official documents and bilateral trade relations between Portugal and the selected Arab countries in this study: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Morocco. This methodology relies on descriptive and statistical data from reliable secondary sources World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Arab-Portuguese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIAP). To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the economic and investment dimensions that support the Arab trade expansion strategy in Portugal, qualitative analysis of trade relations was combined with economic data. The results of this study were presented using a documentary analysis approach. Trade relations between Portugal and the aforementioned Arab countries were presented through an analysis of legal aspects and substantive provisions, and an examination of import and export data and growth rates over the past five years (2020-2025). Furthermore, after a presentation consistent with the research questions, these results were analyzed and discussed in accordance with the research objectives and accompanying hypotheses, to verify whether these results are consistent with the research hypotheses, which highlighted the existence of a positive relationship between them and the contribution of these relations to achieving development and innovation.

4.2 Data Presentation:

This analysis, within this chapter, also relied on the theoretical framework previously identified from previous literature, primarily the PESTEL model, SWOT analysis, and the theory of relative boundaries. These theories serve to interpret the deeper meanings of the data presented, and within them, a precise interpretation of the axes of trade relations between Portugal and the specific Arab countries will be provided.

At the end of the chapter, the research focused on summarizing the main themes and patterns that emerged from the document analysis, directly supporting them with the accompanying documents and data to enhance the credibility of the research. So that the research would reach a formulation that produces and allows the reader to have an idea about the aspects of trade relations between these countries, and the opportunities and potential they hold for achieving innovation and development.

This section presents an organized presentation of the raw data and results, based on the methodology adopted in this research. These data were collected and presented as mentioned in official documents and statistical reports, without interpretation here. The explanations will be presented in the subsequent section within the discussion of the results. These facts are presented in an organized manner that aligns with the research questions, objectives, and concepts.

The research in this section relies on dividing this presentation in accordance with the approved guidelines. This creates a link between the qualitative data and the hypotheses, forming a solid foundation that enables us to move to the section discussing the results and interpreting them within the contexts that guide the thesis.

Thus, it does not present conclusions, but rather presents abstract and reliable ideas to advance the discussion.

As previously mentioned, this study relied on a systematic analysis of trade relations between Portugal and the countries (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Morocco), which represent a strategic trade sample for the diverse sectors covered by the agreements. This study aimed to understand the mechanism of Arab trade expansion in Portugal.

More than 45 official and technical documents covering several fields were analyzed.

- 15 agreements and memoranda of understanding from relevant Arab ministries
- 12 official economic reports from BDP/ECO/IME
- 10 commercial and financial records from INE Portugal/CEIC ACCIA P, Portugal's foreign trade
- 8 sector reports and their analyses from Eupato/IRENA/PWc/EAOA Cwapower for the period (2020-2025) between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the UAE, and Morocco

The data are statistical, qualitative, and textual.

5.2.1 To illustrate what falls under the first research question, we first cite texts from official reports (2020-2025):

In 2022, Saudi Arabia and Portugal signed a strategic cooperation agreement in the maritime economy with the aim of establishing smart ports and digital supply chains. (Ministry of Environment, Portugal, 2022)

The 2023 bilateral cooperation plan between Morocco and Portugal included the renewable energy sector, particularly green hydrogen, among investment priorities. (Ministry of Environment and Agriculture, 2023)

Qatar and Portugal launched a cooperation platform for blue innovation, such as co-financing aquaculture and digitizing environmental projects.

Comparative Report: Qatar Ministry of Environment , EU Blue Economy Report, 2023

The United Arab Emirates and Portugal signed an agreement on artificial intelligence and technology governance to stimulate government innovation.

(GITEX World Report - Portugal Digital Agenda, 2024).

Summary of themes and patterns in documents.

Concept: Key recurring patterns in official documents

Arab trade expansion strategy: diversification, sectoral interconnection, knowledge, maritime, and digital

Investment opportunities: blue economy, renewable energy, and smart logistics

Innovation and digital transformation: digital infrastructure, technological transformation, and artificial intelligence

Sustainable development: green economy, environmental governance, and good projects

Trade policies: simplified customs corridors, non-tariff agreements, and export financing support

General challenges: unstable legal frameworks, weak institutional interconnection, and data exchange gaps

Third: Data from official (2024)

Trade volume between Portugal and the four Arab countries: €4.7 billion (a growth of 41%) since 2020 (National Institute of Statistics of Portugal, 2024)

Portuguese Arab direct investment: €1.2 billion (mostly from the UAE and Saudi Arabia) (Bank of Portugal, 2023)

Joint projects in the field of renewable energy: 29% of total Arab cooperation Portuguese, International Renewable Energy, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the Arab-Portuguese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2024

Key sectors for cooperation: energy, maritime transport, smart agriculture, and financial services. Arab-Portuguese Chamber of Commerce and Industry Report, 2023-2024

Number of bilateral agreements during the period 2020-2025: 19 official multi-sector agreements. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Expansion of Arab exports to Portugal: +35% between 2020 and 2024. (Economic Data Portal ECO.pt, 2024)

Fourth: Organize the dimensions according to the required concepts.

Economic drivers: Growing demand in the Portuguese market and investment incentives. (World Bank, 2024)

Untapped markets: food security, fintech, higher education. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, Portugal, 2023)

Institutional cooperation: research exchange programs and joint innovation incubators.

Cooperation between the European Union and the Middle East and North Africa Region, 2024

Trade Policies: Customs Facilitation, Exporter Incentives, Non-Tariff Arrangements. Directorate-General for Trade. (European Union, 2024)

Challenges to Expanding Trade: Diverse Administrative Procedures and Diverse Regulatory Legislation (IMF Country Report, 2023).

5.2.2 Regarding the second research question, the study cited excerpts from official documents (2020–2025):

The economic cooperation agreement between Saudi Arabia and Portugal in 2022 included the removal of customs duties on 78% of bilateral goods and the establishment of a direct maritime logistics corridor between Jeddah and Lisbon.

(MNE Portugal & Saudi Gazette, 2022)

The investment cooperation agreement between the UAE and Portugal (2021) listed areas such as renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and financial services as preferred sectors for exchange without trade barriers.

(UAE Ministry of Economy – Portugal Business Council, 2021)

Morocco and Portugal signed a memorandum of understanding in 2023 to promote agricultural trade and agricultural technology, while revising the value-added tax to benefit Moroccan exporters.

(Ministério da Agricultura e Alimentação, 2023)

Qatar and Portugal approved a policy for direct exports of refined products in 2024, without transiting through a third party, to reduce customs costs.

(Qatar Chamber of Commerce – CCIAP Joint Report, 2024)

Summarizing themes and patterns in the documentary analysis by identifying the concept and recurring patterns in documents between 2020 and 2025.

Trade expansion strategy: removing customs barriers, signing non-traditional partnership agreements, supporting support services.

Trade policies: reducing customs duties, facilitating procedures, export incentives, service exchange agreements.

Innovation and technology: integrating smart solutions into trade procedures, facilitating the entry of logistics innovation.

Institutional partnerships: joint committees, digital platforms for trade, electronic customs data exchange.

Economic factors: stimulating the flow of goods, financial stability, and supportive banking agreements.

Existing challenges: weak legal compatibility, lack of structural connectivity between ports, disparate quality standards.

Metadata from official sources (2020–2025)

Economic indicator and value or ratio (2024–2025).

The percentage of duty-free goods between Portugal and Saudi Arabia is 78% according to the 2022 agreement (DGAV). Portugal – Ministry of Commerce SA)

Bilateral trade growth between Portugal and the UAE: +44% between 2020 and 2024 (INE Portugal, 2024)

Number of active customs agreements with the four Arab countries: 13 active agreements (Banco de Portugal, 2024)

Average customs clearance time for Arab goods at Portuguese ports: 36 hours (compared to 58 hours in 2019) (Portugal Customs Authority, 2023)

Value of trade exchange between Portugal and Arab countries (2024): €4.7 billion (41% increase since 2020) (ECO.pt Trade Report, 2024)

Contribution of non-oil trade with Portugal to Arab exports: 32% (agriculture, technology, financial services sectors) (World Bank – Arab Trade Outlook, 2024)

Organization of dimensions according to the basic concepts of the question

Dimension representation in documents and data:

Trade policies: tariff reductions, trade corridor agreements (CCIAP, MNE Portugal)

Opportunities for trade innovation: Expanding exchange mechanisms Digital, Smart Trade, Portugal Digital Strategy

Economic Factors: Export Growth, Improved Port Infrastructure, Policy Stability (INE Portugal, IMF, World Bank)

Institutional Partnerships: Customs Coordination Committees, Recurring Economic Forums (Portugal–GCC Joint Forums)

Existing Challenges: Regulatory Disparities, Slow Mutual Recognition of Standards (European Commission Report, 2023)

Thus, the summary of the data presentation shows:

1. Trade policies between Portugal and Arab countries have become more integrated and effective between 2020 and 2025.
2. Agreement documents demonstrate a real trend toward trade liberalization, export facilitation, and digital transformation.
3. Trade growth is supported by concrete policies and clear facilitation documented by official bodies.
4. Technical and regulatory challenges remain a key determinant of the effectiveness of these policies, despite the observed progress.

5.2.3 Documents that correspond to the third research question (2020–2025)

Customs bureaucracy is one of the biggest obstacles to trade flow between the Gulf countries and Portugal, as commodity classification standards and certificates of origin differ radically. (European Commission – Trade Facilitation Report, 2021)

Trade between Portugal and Morocco suffers from weak interbank coverage, which makes direct money transfers difficult and delays documentary credit processes.

(Bank Al-Maghrib & Banco de Portugal – Joint Study, 2022)

Despite the signing of several economic cooperation agreements with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, some logistical procedures were not implemented until 2024 due to the lack of clear institutional follow-up mechanisms.

(CCIAP – Gulf–Portugal Economic Overview, 2023)

There is a slow digital adaptation between the two parties regarding electronic customs exchange systems, which limits the effectiveness of paperless trade.

(Portugal Customs Modernization Strategy, 2022)

The limited direct shipping links between Lisbon's ports and Gulf ports are among the most significant logistical challenges, increasing shipping costs by up to 18% compared to the European average.

(ECO.pt Maritime Transport Cost Analysis, 2024)

Summary of Themes and Patterns Used

Concept, Patterns, and Recurring Problems According to Official Documents

Infrastructure and Logistics: Weak direct maritime connectivity – Variation in shipping costs

Customs Integration: Variation in certifications and standards – Complexity of procedures

Financial and Banking System: Lack of joint banking facilities – Difficulty in transfers

Trade Policies: Slow implementation of agreements – Lack of institutional follow-up

Technical and Digital Challenges: Weak electronic exchange – Variation in clearance systems

Regulatory Environment: Varying investment protection laws – Limited mutual recognition

Descriptive Data and Reliable Figures (2020–2025)

Indicator or Variable: Value or Ratio:

Shipping costs between the Gulf and Portugal increased by +18% compared to the EU average (ECO.pt Maritime Cost Report, 2024)

Number of agreements not yet operationalized logistically by 2024: 6 agreements (out of 11 signed) (CCIAP & MNE Portugal Report, 2024) 2024)

The average delay in bank credit between Morocco and Portugal is 4–6 additional days compared to European transfers (Banco de Portugal & Bank Al-Maghrib, 2022)

The coverage rate of direct maritime links with the Gulf is only 22% of the total goods transported (Portugal Port Authority, 2023)

The level of customs digital readiness (out of 5) is 2.8 in the Gulf countries, compared to 4.6 in Europe (OECD Trade Facilitation Index, 2023)

The percentage of legal obstacles to protecting foreign investors: 41% of projects expressed regulatory reservations (Arab-Portuguese Investment Dialogue, 2024)

Organizing data according to the question concepts:

The dimension or concept with the most prominent challenges mentioned

Arab trade expansion strategy: Lack of maritime and digital connectivity - Slowness of agreements

(CCIAP, ECO.pt)

Opportunities for innovation and development: Weak technical exchange - Lack of tax incentives (OECD, Portugal Innovation Agency)

Economic and strategic factors: High costs - Complexity of transportation and financing (Banco de Portugal, IMF)

Trade Policies and Partnerships: Uneven Executive Commitment – Weak Institutional Follow-up (European Commission, Gulf-Portugal Reports)

Structural and Procedural Challenges: Bureaucratic Customs Clearance – Limited Infrastructure (Portugal Trade Observatory, 2025).

5.2.4 To answer the fourth question:

1. Official document excerpts (2020–2025)

Saudi Arabia – Portugal

The 2023–2024 cooperation plan agreed to explore new areas of investment, including pharmaceutical manufacturing and the digital economy, which are currently untapped.

(Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia & AICEP Portugal, 2023).

Qatar – Portugal

The 2022-2025 cooperation program also includes smart agriculture and the Internet of Things to construct Red Sea farms, industries in which no robust partnerships have been established until the end of 2024.

(QSTP Strategic Tech Roadmap, 2023)

Morocco – Portugal

The 2023 technical agriculture protocol requires opening investment in intelligent silo systems and clean energy to farms, although investment activation has not occurred until mid-2025.

(Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture, 2023)

UAE – Portugal

The 2024 UAE-Portugal Ministry of Economy release indicated that despite existing cooperation, the Islamic financial services (Islamic FinTech) sector remains commercially under-exploited.

(UAE–Portugal Economic Council, 2024)

Summary of Themes and Patterns

Untapped Sectors: Agritech and Biotechnology, Blue Economy

Innovation Opportunities: Smart Agriculture, Islamic FinTech, Digital Pharma Manufacturing

Sustainable Development: Clean Agricultural Environments, Shariah-Compliant Financial Services

Economic/Strategic Factors: Rising Market Demand, Investment Incentives, Government Support

Policies and Partnerships: Missed Cooperation Plans, Shared Incubation Opportunities

Sector Gap Challenges: Lack of Financing, Distorted Institutional Linkages, Distorted Governance

Metadata (2020–2025)

Saudi Arabia: Digital Economy and Pharmaceutical Production Under-Invested, Expected to Grow 30–40% in the Next Ten Years (World Bank Investment Report, 2024)

Qatar: Internet of Things and Intelligent Farming: Future Initiatives Post-2024 (QSTP Roadmap 2023)

Morocco: Clean Energy and Intelligent Silos for Agriculture: <5% of Agriculture Investment (FAO – Morocco Agriculture Profile, 2023)

UAE: Growth in Digital Financial Services and Islamic FinTech <20% in trade exchange (IMF FinTech Quarterly, 2024)

Ranked by major themes, potential sector, and estimation

Strategy for Arab trade growth: pharmaceutical economy, agri-tech, hidden growth volume >30%

Innovation opportunities: Islamic FinTech, intelligent agriculture, high-growth sectors of capital

Sustainable development: Green technologies and clean energy, environmentally and economically sound projects

Economic and strategic drivers: Arab business tendency towards investing in technology, societal demand, expected trade models growth

Trade policy: Gigantic agreements that are not converted to investment, investment renewal potential

Challenges and threats: Underfinancing and insufficient operational agreements are likely to affect targeted growth

1 - Despite the transparency of cooperation models in official reports, most modern knowledge sectors remain largely untapped up to 2025.

2 - All information are derived from official reports and sound investment reports (World Bank, IMF, FAO, AICEP, bilateral cooperation ministries).

3 - Increasing cooperation in these areas is a strategic opportunity to enhance mutual development.

5.2.5 Moving on to the answer to Question five

Excerpts from Official Documents (2020–2025)

Saudi Arabia – Portugal

The agreement between the Saudi Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Institution of Portugal in 2022 included knowledge exchange programs on artificial intelligence and renewable energy.

(Saudi Ministry of Education, 2022)

Memorandum of Understanding between the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and AICEP to exchange researchers and experts in smart city systems.

(SDAIA – AICEP Report, 2023)

Qatar – Portugal

Qatar Innovation Center (QSTP) and the Portuguese Ministry of Economy launched an initiative to exchange technical food security and agricultural robotics projects.

(QSTP Annual Report, 2023)

Morocco – Portugal

The Hassan II University of Casablanca, University of Porto, and UNIDO tripartite agreement is comprised of technology transfer projects in water management and solar energy.(UNIDO Morocco-Portugal MOU, 2024)

UAE – Portugal

A collaboration agreement was signed in 2023 between the Mohammed bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation and INESC TEC Centre, Porto, for joint research in technical and digital learning.

(UAE Government Innovation Portal, 2023)

Summary of Themes and Patterns

Main Themes: Recurring Patterns in the Data

Arab Trade Expansion Strategy: Linking Innovative Knowledge to Shared Export Sectors

Opportunities for Innovation: Focus on Artificial Intelligence, Renewable Energy, and Smart Agriculture

Development: Technology Transfer for Closing Gaps in Energy, Water, and Agriculture

Economic and Strategic Factors: Economic Diversification Imperative in Portugal and Arab Countries

Policies and Partnerships: Academic and Technical Bilateral and Multilateral Partnerships

Challenges: Challenge of Sustained Swift Commercial Translation of Research Output

3. Metadata (2020–2025)

Country Area of Innovative Knowledge Transfer Indicator/Estimate (2020–2025)

Saudi Arabia: Artificial Intelligence, Smart Cities: 41% increase in innovation programs across 2021–2024 (SDAIA – Annual Data Brief 2024)

Qatar: Food Security, Agri-tech: 12 innovative joint projects since 2022 (QSTP Reports 2022–2024)

Morocco: Water Management, Solar Power: 7 higher education and applied collaboration hubs since 2021 (UNIDO Project Tracker 2024)

UAE: Smart Governance, Digital Education: 3 joint research centers opened by the end of 2024 (UAE–Portugal Research MOU 2023)

Data classification by main concepts, sanctioned or potential applications, and comments.

Arab expansion strategy: Joining new knowledge with new export industries (technology, energy) is part of economic change.

Innovation opportunities: Platforms for research in intelligent cities, food security, and solar power at the beginning of implementation.

Development: Projects that increase farm productivity, reduce water and energy wastage, and have potential economic and environmental impact.

Economic/strategic: Portugal does not desire to be reliant on conventional industries. Innovation needs to be promoted as an economic necessity.

Partnerships and trade policies: Memoranda of understanding, university collaborations, and jointly founded international initiatives in implementation between 2022–2025.

Challenges: Lack of adequate linkages between the university and the employment market, and sometimes the lack of enough funding, affecting the rate of economic returns.

Notes

1. Indicators reveal more efforts towards using partnerships to facilitate the transfer of innovative knowledge where they intersect with the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Portugal's persistent attempts to solidify its knowledge economy are evident, supported by Arab proficiency in several fields.

4.3 Discussion of Results:

4.3.1. Relating the conclusions to the first research question:

Data received from official sources such as the World Bank (2024), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2023), and the Portuguese Investment Agency (AICEP) report structural developments in Portugal's economy that have opened it to new markets with a long-term investment nature, including Arab countries.

Foreign trade statistics published by the Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE 2025) also indicated that Portugal has seen a steady increase in the value of bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Morocco since 2020, particularly in agricultural technology, clean energy, and logistics infrastructure.

The above conclusions indicate the major economic factors that have been promoting the growth of Arab trade in Portugal as:

Portugal's politics and legislation stability, further favoring the business environment (OECD, 2023).

Portugal is a gateway country into the European Union, leveraging its location and logistics.

There is a common interest between the two parties in investment in green energy, digitalization, and technological innovation, based on the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2024).

The increasing involvement of the sovereign investments in the Gulf in visionary Portuguese ventures such as solar power and precision agro-tech technologies.

All these indicate that Arab-Portuguese economic partnerships are no longer traditional or unilateral, but they are on a development strategy based on collaborative innovation, exchange of technology, and integration in the region's economy.

2. Contribution of the results to achievement of the study objectives:

Objective One:

The results created a series of different economic variables, including:

1. Portuguese market attractiveness to Arab investors on the basis of tax incentives and stable regulatory framework (AICEP, 2024).
2. Huge potential in untapped sectors such as agriculture technology, green hydrogen, health tourism, and global schooling.

CEIC Data revealed Arab investment in Portugal increased 34% from 2020 to 2024, primarily from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states. Different analytical reports also demonstrated that this surge comes with integrating innovation elements into typical value chains, with an additive effect towards sustainable development goals between the two sides.

Second Objective

The results on the first research question show that the Portuguese trade policy with Arab countries has been characterized by flexibility and flexibility over the past five years, particularly through bilateral investment promotion and protection agreements and memoranda of understanding on innovation and energy, particularly with Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

However, they also indicated slight Arab trade representation in Portugal and inefficient Arab economic centers there, which are issues that hinder the full realization of potential available.

Third Objective:

Develop a strategic mechanism which assists Portugal, through its connections with Arab countries, to attract contemporary technology and innovative knowledge and convert them into driving forces of the Portuguese economy.

The results indicate that the fields of artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and finance technology are promising fields of collaboration with good potential. Portugal is already building open innovation clusters with the help of Emirati and Saudi companies, such as the Lisbon Tech Corridor initiative with the partnership of Gulf institutions.

International Monetary Fund reports also indicate that flows of investments comprising knowledge or technology transfer elements are now 27% of total Arab investment in Portugal (IMF, 2024).

Fourth Objective

The data reported that sectors such as higher education, advanced healthcare, the blue economy, and the digital content industry remain untapped in Arab-Portuguese cooperation, despite the available appropriate infrastructure. These sectors provide scope for accelerating economic partnerships and knowledge exchange to promote innovation and co-development. The results presented assisted in the production of an integral vision of the economic and investment systems supporting Arab trade growth in Portugal, demonstrating how they are to be employed in order to produce value added by innovation and sustainable development. The results further disclosed the great interdependence between the research issues and the study goals, making this thesis's scientific and analytical credibility even greater.

4.3.2 The results solve the second research question:

The results derived from the documentary analysis revealed that modern trade policy between Portugal and Arab countries is characterized by imbalances in terms of scope and impact. Despite the signing of a number of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding, the policies are limited in their ability to promote a dynamic and diverse trade and investment environment.

The most significant trading partners of Portugal in the Arab world are the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia, however, their collective trade with these countries totals less than 2.6% of the overall Portuguese exports in 2023. Additionally, Arab direct investment in Portugal did not exceed less than €1.5 billion until 2024, a negligible amount relative to the potential of both sides (Banco de Portugal, 2024). The official reports of the European Union (EEAS, 2023) indicate that part of this fall lies in the fact that no comprehensive framework exists for the economic integration of Portugal and the Arab world, combined with an absence of legal instruments that form the foundation of bilateral investments, poor commercial infrastructure, as well as a lack of proper commercial representation in the target markets.

On the contrary, Arab countries, particularly the Gulf countries, are attempting to expand investment in Europe through long-term collaborations, based on reports such as the PwC Middle East (2024) report. However, there is the limitation brought about by the lack of some commercial undertakings on the Portuguese side that downsizes this possibility. Further, some of the bilateral arrangements contain no innovation, intellectual property, or research cooperation provisions, which downsizes their long-term economic contributions.

2. Therefore, the findings helped to achieve the objectives of the study as follows:

Objective One:

The results indicated that Portugal's geographical location as a crossroads between Europe, Africa, and Latin America, and its full integration within the single European market, presents a good chance for Arab countries to gain access to the European market safely. Portuguese trade policy, however, has failed to translate this geographical location into a profitable appeal for trade since most of the exports from the Arabs to Portugal are traditional exports and of low value-added content (TradeMap ITC, 2025).

Therefore, capitalizing on these strategic determinants means improving bilateral trade agreements to include technology, the green economy, and scientific research, a target yet to be achieved under current policies.

Second Objective:

The results showed that the existing trade policies, even though comparatively better, still bear numerous weaknesses, including:

The lack of a comprehensive legal system to protect Arab investors in Portugal, in comparison to other European rival countries such as France or Spain.

Poor logistics connectivity and direct ports between Portugal and Arab countries.

Low awareness among Arab companies regarding the investment environment in Portugal, due to the lack of Arab institutional presence in Portugal.

Bilateral efforts also focus on commodity trade, failing to adequately address new industries like digital transformation, renewable energy, or artificial intelligence, leading to the loss of good investment opportunities (Eurostat Trade Database, 2023).

Objective Three:

The results confirmed that there is one of the strongest deficiencies in current trade relations, which is the absence of policies aimed at knowledge and technological exchange. There are no bilateral agreements with clear provisions for expertise exchange or support for joint innovation, aside from some limited actions, such as the promotion of Gulf sovereign funds for certain infrastructure and digitalization programs (AICEP, 2024).

This absence emphasizes the need to adopt a new policy by means of technological and scientific partnerships, and the establishment of joint research complexes or free zones for Arab-Portuguese industrial innovation.

Objective Four:

The figures revealed that the untapped potential is in sectors such as smart agriculture, the blue economy, health tourism, renewable energy, and technical education. These are the sectors that the Arab world is targeting, as is evident from the Gulf nations' economic transformation plans (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE's "New Economic Model").

However, Portugal's current trade policies do not have platforms or systems to benefit from such opportunities in terms of investment incentives, research partnerships, or special trade areas. Accordingly, the lack of interconnectivity of trade policies with sectoral opportunities is a major issue.

4.3.3 Discussion of the findings related to the third research question:

1. How the findings respond to the third research question

The conclusions drawn and collected through official reports and statistical and economic reports provide a sufficiently clear picture of the main obstacles to the development of trade relations between Arab nations and Portugal. The reports indicate that the obstacles are common to institutional, structural, and legal factors, in addition to the disparities in the regulatory and commercial frameworks of both sides.

The most prominent challenges registered are:

The absence of comprehensive and updated trade agreements between Portugal and Arab countries, as most relations are based on limited memoranda of understanding or outdated agreements that have not been updated in line with economic and technological developments (AICEP Portugal Global, 2024).

The limited Arab business presence in Portugal, and the absence of operational economic offices of Arab countries with investment stakes, such as Saudi Arabia or the UAE, hinders direct contact and limits bilateral understandings (Arab-Portuguese Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

Inefficient logistics infrastructure and lack of direct sea and air links between Portugal and most Arab capitals render trade economically less effective and more expensive, especially in the agricultural and industrial domains (UNCTAD Maritime Connectivity Index, 2024).

The gap between taxation and customs policies and the lack of coordination of technical and regulatory standards, which makes the access of Arab products to the Portuguese market and vice versa problematic (European Commission, Trade & Market Access Database, 2023).

Additionally, there is a clear cultural, linguistic, and knowledge gap between the two sides' business communities. Portuguese companies are known to have little knowledge of the Arab

business context. Arab investors, on the other hand, are inclined to turn to other European nations with deeper Arab penetration, such as France and Germany, due to closer historical and institutional ties.

2. How the findings assisted in the achievement of the study objectives:

Objective One:

Analyzing the major economic and strategic determinants of trade expansion to Portugal, and how they can be utilized to propel innovation and advancement.

The results indicated that the structural and institutional issues revealed, if exploited, would be transformed into strategic opportunities. By way of illustration, the low level of logistic connectivity is an opportunity to foster direct sea transport programs between the Gulf and Maghreb ports, on one side, and Setúbal or Lisbon ports, on the other. This would render Portugal more competitive and open the way for faster and cheaper trade flows, thus supporting supply chains and industrial innovation.

Furthermore, closing the cultural and institutional knowledge gap between both sides by establishing joint business councils or economic information centers could open new opportunities for collaboration based on innovation and knowledge transfer, reinforcing Portugal's position as a platform for Arab-European commerce.

Second Objective:

In order to study the current trade policies in Portugal and Arab countries in promoting trade exchange and investment flows, and disclose the main challenges hindering the development of these relations.

The report's findings gave a detailed analysis of the impediments to the flow of trade and investment, most notably the weakness of specialized trade agreements and the fact that they lack innovation or intellectual property protection provisions. The absence of memoranda of understanding in key sectors such as agricultural technology or logistics hurts the efforts towards economic integration.

On the other hand, the study revealed that Portuguese economic diplomacy remains non-proactive towards Arab markets compared to competing European countries such as the United States and Germany, who have doubled their trade missions to the Gulf and Morocco over the past five years (PwC Middle East Economic Outlook, 2024).

Third Objective:

Propose a strategic process in which Portugal, via its interactions with the Arab world, can attract new technologies and innovative knowledge and transform them into engines of the Portuguese economy.

These challenges recognize the need for the provision of mutual platforms for knowledge transfer and innovation, which current policies do not provide. While Gulf countries, for example, have mega investment funds like Mubadala and the Saudi Public Investment Fund that focus on emerging technologies, cooperation agreements with Portugal in these fields have yet to be inked. Here, Portugal can convert this challenge into a strategic opportunity by developing technology partnerships that include business incubators, scientific exchange, and joint research agreements. Fourth Objective:

Identifying untapped potential in various sectors that can streamline Arab-Portuguese trade cooperation.

The above challenges clearly indicate a number of untapped sectors, which include the blue economy, sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and technical higher education. The lack of trade policies promoting these sectors with the Arab world has led to declining Arab presence in these sectors in Portugal.

The OECD Investment Policy Review (2023) Report noted that the opening of these sectors to Arab investment, under good policies and strategic partnerships, could bring about a leap in sustainable growth rates, especially in Portugal's less developed interior regions.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that the challenges facing Portuguese trade relations with Arab countries are not merely obstacles, but also represent critical points that can be leveraged to reshape trade and investment relations in a more dynamic and comprehensive manner. The study's findings directly contributed to identifying these critical points, which supports the formulation of effective strategies to achieve research objectives related to innovation, development, and expanding sustainable bilateral cooperation.

4.3.4 Discussion of the results related to the fourth research question:

The research findings, based on documentary analysis of commercial and official sources in the Arab region and Portugal, revealed that there are a number of vital economic sectors that are unexploited or partially exploited, while an enabling environment for the development of cooperation in them exists. Based on the study of reports issued by the Portuguese Investment and Trade Agency (AICEP), the European Union (EU Market Access Database), and the Arab

Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO), the following sectors were identified as the most important:

Blue Economy: This includes maritime transport, marine energy, and sustainable fishing. Despite the existence of a common maritime geographic location between Portugal and certain Arab countries (such as Morocco, Egypt, and Oman), cooperation in this field remains limited. The document "Portugal Ocean Strategy 2021–2030" noted the absence of Arab-Atlantic cooperation in the field of the blue economy, despite its enormous potentials. Smart agriculture and food security have remained an untapped field, particularly with heightened Arab interest in collaboration on irrigation technology and sustainable agriculture, for which there was Portuguese expertise. FAO reports (2024) confirmed that Gulf countries are keen to identify reliable European partners with whom to achieve food security, and that Portugal had acquired experience in precision agriculture and drip irrigation systems.

Renewable energy industry: Despite Portugal being amongst the leading European countries in reliance on renewable energies (accounting for approximately 60% of its production in 2023 according to Eurostat), cooperation in this sector with Arab countries is still in its infancy, despite Gulf ambitions in this sector with projects such as Saudi Vision 2030 and Morocco's (Noor Project.).

Creative and technological industries: These are sectors such as design, artificial intelligence, digital games, and cultural contents that are growing intensely in Portugal and the United Arab Emirates. According to the StartUp Portugal Annual Report 2023, roughly 34% of the startups in Portugal are in the tech sector, but there are no bilateral stimulus programs for such businesses to penetrate Arab markets.

Technical Education and Vocational Training: Erasmus+ reports (2024) indicate that there are excellent opportunities for Portugal to export technical education models and training to Arab countries that need to develop technical skills, particularly in energy, technology, and the environment. This is another area that offers a bridge to the development of long-term relations but lacks strong institutional agreements.

How did the findings assist in addressing the objectives of the study?

Objective 1:

The findings showed that unrevealed sectors constitute economic concentration points through which the Arab investment footprint can be expanded in Portugal. For example, the blue economy and renewable energy sectors not only support commercial growth but also open up

research and development fields and innovative cooperation, thus enhancing the business environment and promoting sustainable development rates. The growth of these sectors is a strategic dimension of building a diversified and innovative economy. Objective Two:

To evaluate the contribution of current trade policies between Portugal and Arab countries in promoting trade and investment flow, and to identify the main obstacles to the improvement of these relations.

The results of this research directly challenged one of the weaknesses of current trade policies: the lack of promotion instruments or institutional arrangements to incentivize modern or non-traditional sectors. Most bilateral agreements focus on traditional sectors (e.g., tourism, transportation, and infrastructure), but fail to mention emerging and innovative sectors of high strategic importance. The lack of clear promotional efforts by Portugal and Arab countries for these sectors is a serious challenge that must be immediately addressed.

Objective Three: To recommend a strategic framework that would enable Portugal, via its alliances with Arab countries, to attract contemporary technologies and innovative expertise and transform them into propellers for the Portuguese economy.

The study of untapped sectors reveals that unlocking cooperation in areas such as agritech, technical education, and renewable energy would enable Portugal to access Arab investment in future technologies, in addition to opening up opportunities for long-term knowledge and institutional cooperation. As an example, the UAE's Masdar cooperation with European solar energy companies could be replicated in Portugal with similar efforts, driven by more aspirational bilateral agreements and a focus on innovation.

Fourth Objective:

Identifying unknown potential in every field that can streamline Arab-Portuguese trade cooperation.

The research findings provide a straight answer to this goal. Five priority areas with untapped opportunities and excellent trade and investment prospects were identified. These areas can form the cornerstone of establishing a new cooperation agenda between Portugal and Arab nations, based on long-term partnerships that go beyond traditional trade to include innovation, technology transfer, and institutional capacity building. They also provide fertile terrain for the launch of sectoral free trade areas or joint cooperation programs within the framework of the European Union and the League of Arab States.

According to the results, it is clear that one of the most untapped growth engines of Portuguese-Arab relations is to be discovered in modern, specialized economic sectors, which are capable of expanding bilateral trade and having a mutual development impact. Identifying and scientifically delineating these sectors, as indicated by the findings of this question, has a major role in understanding the existing strategic gap and guides decision-makers in developing effective cooperation policies toward innovation and sustainability.

4.3.5 Discussion of the results for the fifth research question:

The research results answered this question by studying and analyzing economic and trade reports, policies, and indicators issued by official institutions such as the World Bank (World Bank, 2024), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), and the Portuguese Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade (AICEP). These articles revealed that Portugal is showing a growing interest in the formation of strategic alliances with Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco in order to bring innovative knowledge and expertise and leverage them in its economic model based on sustainable industries and technology.

Statistics provided by AICEP (2023) indicate that Portugal has doubled bilateral memoranda of understanding with Arab nations over the past five years in areas like clean energy, digital economy, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. StartUp Portugal also saw increased collaboration with Emirati and Moroccan entrepreneurial ecosystems such as Hub71 and Technopark Casablanca, reflecting a shared aspiration to exchange technical know-how and invest in human capital and talent. In contrast, the research revealed a deficiency in translating such partnerships into tangible economic drivers for Portugal. They are, for the most part, experimental or exploratory and have not yet been translated into viable national policies that stimulate the exploitation of Arab knowledge or investment in shared human resources. The OECD (2023) report also noted the limited role of research institutions in linking technology partnerships to the actual economy, despite the existence of potential.

How did the findings enable the achievement of the objectives of the study?

The first objective: Analyzing the economic and strategic drivers of commercial expansion to Portugal and how they can be leveraged to develop and innovate.

The results of this question determined that innovative know-how transferrable from Arab countries—particularly from the Gulf—forms a strategic driver of Portuguese commercial expansion, given these countries' extensive experience in investing in innovative industries

(e.g., the NEOM and Dubai Future Foundation projects). By cooperating with these countries, Portugal is not only able to attract investment but also to adopt new business models that stimulate local innovation and accelerate the country's digital and development transformation process. Knowledge attraction is therefore one of the most essential factors for achieving sustainable development through knowledge-based rather than purely financial trade expansion channels.

The second objective: Evaluate the contribution of current trade policies between Portugal and Arab countries in promoting trade and investment flow, and identify challenges.

The results revealed that current trade policies still lack a strategic dimension in knowledge and technology transfer because most of the trade cooperation is focused on traditional goods and services. For example, the research of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD, 2023) has shown that 78% of Portugal's trade with Arab countries is limited to food industries and raw materials, while exports in technology and knowledge only represent 9%. This indicates an imbalance in the trade structure and the failure to effectively utilize the added value inherent in innovative cooperation. This calls for a review of current policies and digital transformation and innovation as main drivers.

The third objective: Propose a strategic mechanism through which Portugal, through its partnerships with Arab countries, can attract modern technologies and innovative knowledge and transform them into economic drivers. Based on the findings of this question, it is possible to conclude that the mechanism for knowledge transfer must be built on three pillars:

1. Establishing bilateral innovation hubs: These would be Portugal-Arab nation business incubators (for example, the technology-enabled "Free Zones" model), with a focus on knowledge transfer and technology localization.
2. Joint funding for research and education programs: This would unite universities and research institutes on both sides (for example, the University of Lisbon and KAUST in Saudi Arabia) to transfer technology and develop innovative solutions for both markets.
3. Promoting investment in technological areas: Through tax exemptions and innovative acceleration programs, these initiatives would promote Arab startups to establish branches in Portugal, stimulating local economic activity and the generation of highly qualified job opportunities.

This proposed strategic mechanism aligns with European success experiences in knowledge cooperation with Gulf countries, such as the German-Emirati model in energy and hydrogen technologies.

4. Objective Four: Identify unspecified opportunities in various sectors that would enable maximizing Arab-Portuguese business collaboration.

The research results determined that there are enormous opportunities yet to be tapped in clean technology, artificial intelligence, technology-enabled food security, and digital vocational training. Increased cooperation in these areas can open up new opportunities for innovative knowledge and take Arab-Portuguese cooperation beyond mere commercial exchange to a strategic partnership based on capacity sharing, digital empowerment, and institutional transformation.

Overall, the research findings answered the fifth research question clearly and profoundly, demonstrating that the pulling of innovative knowledge and its transformation into economic incentives requires reframing Arab-Portuguese partnerships in a more efficient and strategic manner. The research findings contributed directly to the achievement of the study's goals by recognizing gaps and opportunities and formulating future recommendations for innovation-based and mutually development-driven trade policies.

4.3.6 Interpretation and Implications of the Results:

From data and information analyzed and evaluated through the five research questions within the previous chapter, the next section provides an in-depth explanation of the findings. The explanation is provided by entering into common themes and patterns that emerge from documentary analysis, noting their potential reasons, and remaining watchful of any anomalies or surprises. The explanation comes from recorded evidence for 2020 to 2025, holding tight to the study aims and prominent themes.

1. Thematic and Pattern Analysis of the Emerged Themes and Patterns

A. Arab Expansion of Trade in Portugal: Between Economic Incentive and Strategic Nature

The research shows that the pace of Arab trade expansion into the Portuguese market is being driven by economic interests of diversification of European counterparts in response to shifts in international supply chains (post-COVID supply chains) as well as by Portugal's drive to attract foreign direct investment into critical sectors such as energy and logistics. This trend is seen in the increase in trade between Portugal and Arab countries to €4.7 billion (INE Portugal, 2024) and Arab direct investment growth to €1.2 billion (Banco de Portugal, 2023).

B. Pattern of Sectoral Partnerships – Renewable Energy as a Model

There was a clear trend uncovered by the outcome of the analysis: the renewable energy sector became a priority field of trade cooperation, and those projects related to it represent approximately 29% of Arab-Portuguese cooperation (IRENA & CCIAP, 2024). This is due to the complementarity of interests: Arab countries have significant investments and advanced experience in solar energy and hydrogen, while Portugal seeks to transition towards clean energy and reduce dependence on Russian gas.

C. Diversification of Cooperation Instruments – From Bilateral Treaties to Joint Ventures

The recurring pattern in the results is the increasing utilization of bilateral treaties as a leading tool of maintaining economic ties. 19 treaties were signed between 2020 and 2025, covering energy, transport, smart agriculture, and finance (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 2024).

D. Development of Arab Exports – Towards a New Trade Model

Arab exports to Portugal have risen 35% in four years (ECO.pt, 2024), indicating a new trend in the flow of goods, based on expanding the foundation for exported items to include minerals, fertilizers, and plastics, besides crude oil.

2. Explain the probable causes for the result

A. Political and Economic Stability in Portugal as an Incentive for Partnership

Portugal's strong economic status, with an average growth rate of 2.4% in the economy between 2020 and 2024 (Banco de Portugal, 2024), and foreign investment-friendly policies, has been attractive to the Arab countries in their quest to diversify their investments outside their region.

B. Digital Transformation and Energy Technology as a Key Driver of Cooperation

The results of Arab-Portuguese collaboration demonstrate a clear orientation towards innovation, particularly clean energy and smart agriculture, to justify the choice of such sectors for investment. This is driven by the shared strategic orientations of the adoption of digitalization and the green economy as a path for sustainable development with the backing of the European plan such as the European Green Deal.

C. Flexible Trade Policies and Bilateral Agreements

The results showed that Portugal's flexible trade policies and compliance with EU norms have facilitated it in establishing more effective partnerships with Arab countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. Low customs barriers and the availability of support mechanisms like the Joint Venture Support Fund also facilitated the implementation of bilateral projects.

D. Maturity of the Arab Institutional Environment

The increased level of institutional coordination among Arab and Portuguese players is explained by the presence of more professional Arab investment institutions, such as the Saudi Initiative for Investment in Europe within Vision 2030 and UAE-based Mubadala Development Company, which have built confidence and facilitated technology transfer.

3. Highlighting Paradoxes or Unexpected Results

A. Scant Arab Presence in Digital Sectors Despite Presence of Opportunities

Despite the rise in collaborations, the most striking paradox within the results is the absence of Arab focus on the digital economy sector in Portugal, though Portugal is an emerging hub in Europe for digital startup incubation (Startup Portugal Report, 2023). This is a lost opportunity that would be a strategic Arab expansion gap.

B. Investment Focus in Few Arab Countries

The conclusion was that the Arab-Portuguese cooperation is mainly achieved in three nations: the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. The focus raises doubt about other Arab countries' poor contribution to this aspect and implies that the number of participating nations should be expanded in order to attain investment diversification.

C. The disparity between the high number of agreements and their poor full implementation

Despite the signature of 19 agreements, they are reported to be mainly pending implementation, but only in negotiation or incipient implementation, evidencing a potential gap between implementation and planning, perhaps due to procedural or bureaucratic complexities in specific areas.

Interpretation of these facts is a critical process in understanding the reality of Arab-Portuguese commercial relations, not only in numerical and ratio terms, but also in terms of politics, technology, and developmental forces that drive them. The conclusions establish that Arab expansion in Portugal is more than a temporary economic phenomenon but is supported by policies of the long run with outstanding prospects that require enhanced activation, diversification, and innovation to realize their full potential in enriching both the Arab and Portuguese economies.

4.3.7 Comparing the Results with Previous Literature and the Theoretical Framework

The results of this study generally indicate a clear convergence with most of the concepts, models, and theories contained in previous literature addressing trade expansion, international partnerships, and innovation as a lever for development. The results also contribute to filling

previously identified research gaps, particularly regarding the practical dimension and the discourse surrounding Arab-Portuguese partnerships, which are considered an incomplete formulation in academic discourse. However, the results also reveal some contradictions or paradoxes that deserve further consideration, which in turn contribute significantly to expanding the theoretical and practical understanding of the phenomenon under study.

1. The Extent to Which the Results Support the Theories and Models in the Literature

The results of this study are consistent with Relative Border Theory, which assumes that economic relations are not only influenced by geographical or political factors but also by the redefinition of border relations based on strategic and economic interests. In the case of Portugal, the research results showed that relations with the four Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Morocco) were not bound by geographical or political barriers, but rather were shaped by economic interests and mutual opportunities, reinforcing the validity of the theoretical assumptions. This was reflected in data showing a 41% increase in trade since 2020 (INE Portugal, 2024) and the signing of 19 bilateral cooperation agreements, confirming the decline of the influence of "traditional borders" in the face of the logic of strategic advantage. The results also supported the practical application of the SWOT model used in the theoretical framework, as documents of trade and political cooperation between Portugal and Arab countries showed that strengths (such as Portugal's position as a gateway to European markets) and opportunities (such as Arab demand for agricultural technology and renewable energy) were effectively leveraged. Conversely, the results revealed threats and challenges, such as tax mismatches and the lack of mutual knowledge between the private sectors on both sides, underscoring the importance of applying strategic analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In terms of PESTLE analysis, the results support the hypothesis that political, economic, and technological changes play a crucial role in reshaping partnership dynamics. For example, official data revealed that 29% of joint projects in the period 2020–2024 were in the renewable energy sector (IRENA & CCIAP, 2024), reflecting a direct response to environmental pressures and changes in European policies related to the green transition.

2. Do the results conflict with the literature? And why?

Despite the general consensus, some findings partially contradict previous literature assumptions about the equivalence of partnerships between Arab countries and Portugal. While

some studies describe relations as equal or "balanced partnerships," the research findings indicate that relations have remained unequal—with most activity centered around financial flows and direct Arab investments without any qualitative counterpart in terms of technology transfer or local innovation empowerment in Portugal. This disparity is clearly demonstrated by the concentration of 70% of investments in the energy and infrastructure sectors (Banco de Portugal, 2023), while the knowledge and technology sectors remain underinvested in, potentially indicating weak qualitative integration.

Moreover, the results contradict some studies that have assumed that Portugal is not an attractive hub for Arab investment compared to larger European countries such as Germany or France. The results of this thesis indicate a noticeable shift in this trend, especially after 2020, with Portugal emerging as an alternative hub for green investment in the European Union, strengthening its position as a target destination within Arab trade expansion strategies.

3. The extent to which the results contribute to bridging the research gap

One of the most important gaps the study sought to address is the lack of scientific documentation of Arab-Portuguese economic relations and the absence of studies that address these relations outside of a political or historical framework. The findings contributed to filling this gap by monitoring and documenting updated figures and data collected from primary sources (such as CCIAP, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Banco de Portugal), in addition to analyzing official documents of cooperation agreements and joint projects between 2020 and 2025.

The descriptive nature of previous literature was overcome by an exploratory documentary analysis methodology that deepened understanding of the practical content of cooperation. For example, the findings helped deconstruct the discourse of "public partnership" into precise categories related to renewable energy, smart agriculture, and maritime supply chains, making it a qualitative contribution that enriches academic debate and opens paths for future comparative studies.

4. Expanding the current understanding of the concepts and phenomena studied

On the conceptual level, the findings of this thesis contributed to repurposing the concept of "commercial expansion strategy," demonstrating that it is not merely a tool for market penetration, but rather a platform for knowledge transfer, technology attraction, and generating local development. This cognitive dimension has not been clearly documented in previous studies, making the research findings a clear contribution to expanding conceptual frameworks.

Regarding the concept of "innovation and development," the findings support the hypothesis that innovation is not always created locally but may be imported through qualitative partnerships. This is illustrated by the case of cooperation between Portuguese and Emirati companies on precision agriculture projects and the use of artificial intelligence to rationalize water consumption—applications that drive sustainable development based on imported innovation.

Regarding the concept of "partnership," the results reinterpret it from an economic relation per se to a multi-level strategic formula encompassing shared interests, green transition, and responses to changes in geopolitics (such as the European energy crisis after 2022). This new vision reorients partnership from a bilateral to a wider, more integrative dimension, elevating Portugal as a strategic bridge between Arab countries and Europe.

Comparison of findings with available literature guarantees that the thesis does not restate what is already available, but rather adds to the available body of knowledge, elucidates contradiction, and offers new horizons for understanding of the topic of Arab commercial expansion in Portugal in the context of innovative partnerships and innovation as development. One can argue that the results theoretically and empirically support the trend towards transforming such alliances into strategic models that can be utilized elsewhere in Europe and the Arab world in the future.

4.3.8 Theoretical, Scientific, and Practical Contributions of the Research

This is the third axis of the analysis of the results. It will attempt to highlight the scientific and administrative contribution of the results within the context of the research literature and established theories, as well as provide practical implications and initial recommendations that can be utilized by the stakeholders in economic, investment, and trade relations between the Arab countries and Portugal. The contributions are delineated into two connected subsections: academic contributions (theoretical and scientific) and administrative/applied contributions.

First: Academic Contributions (theoretical and scientific)

This study demonstrates a clear and thorough contribution to the scientific literature regarding trade expansion, international cooperation, the knowledge economy, and Arab-European economic relationships. The theoretical contribution is evident at different levels:

First: Confirmation and verification of the relative theory of borders:

The findings of the research directly validate the hypotheses of the relative theory of borders regarding the diminishing significance of geographical borders over economic, technological,

and knowledge borders. The results showed that Portugal was a convergence point between Arab development interests, and that of Portugal towards maximizing innovation through variable strategic alliances. Accordingly, this research confirms that the modern concept of borders is an elastic, relative concept defined by mutual interests, and this theoretical practice is added to by new meaning related to Arab experiences of expansion beyond traditional geographic scope.

2. The construction of the SWOT model in Arab-European economic analysis: The present research provided a detailed applied model in analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in bilateral economic relationships between Portugal and Arab countries, which was a tangible improvement in applying the model in research on bilateral economic relations. The analysis extended beyond the identification of the SWOT factors, but linked them to the existing political and technical context, particularly to the green economy and agricultural technology sectors.

3. Filling a knowledge gap in Portuguese-Arab relations literature: The research highlighted the limited academic treatment of economic relations between Portugal and Arab countries as opposed to Arab relations with other great powers such as Germany and France. The research fills this gap to some extent by providing new data and qualitative and descriptive results from 2020 to 2025, which reveal new dynamics in these relationships that have been little or inadequately investigated or examined in the literature.

4. Reframing the concept of "strategic partnership" in the Arab-European worldview: The use of the concept of partnership in this research is already an intellectual contribution in itself. The results offer a fresh understanding of the concept of partnership, moving away from the acquisition-control binary, and targeting a teamwork-oriented model based on the building of partnership upon the convergence of resources and opportunities, particularly in high-value-added industries such as agro-tech, digitalization, and renewable energy.

5. Contributing to the literature on innovation and development: The research explicitly provides a theoretical contribution towards bridging the link between innovation and development in the Portuguese case through Arab cooperation. The findings of the research indicate that the importation of knowledge and sophisticated technologies through cooperation with the Gulf states in general can be a catalyst for industrial development and digital transformation and thus contributes to previous propositions but introduces an added geo-economic perspective.

Second: Administrative/Practical Contributions

The conclusions are of strategic importance to policymakers, investors, chambers of commerce, and development institutions in Arab countries and Portugal due to the practical recommendations made, which are as follows:

1. Activation of bilateral instruments of trade policy: The report emphasizes the importance of studying the institutional basis that governs Arab-Portuguese collaboration and of concentrating on the abolition of bureaucratic obstacles, harmonization of legislative standards, and streamlining customs procedures. This action requires closer coordination between the economies and trade ministries of both nations and the creation of joint follow-up committees for evaluating the implementation of signed agreements.
2. Fostering investment in new areas: Data between 2020 and 2025 pinpointed new untapped potential in fields such as renewable energy, smart agriculture, and marine technology. Investors from both sides can benefit from these figures in the development of strategic investment portfolios based on market data and analysis, translating these opportunities into reality projects of actual economic value.
3. Leveraging Research Partnerships for Technology Transfer: Research collaboration and technology transfer are identified in the findings as a strategic opportunity for sustainable development in Portugal, especially considering the financial and technological capabilities of certain Arab nations. Therefore, the study suggests establishing joint research and development platforms sponsored by institutions and governments with the aim of achieving a common environment for innovation and generating value added to both sides.
4. Expanding the chambers' function as a cooperation promoter: The study emphasized the crucial role that institutions such as the Arab-Portuguese Chamber of Commerce must play in building trade bridges. Their role should be expanded to cover investment coordination, assistance to new ventures, and the provision of business assistance services, which establishes them as a principal impeller for the implementation of the joint strategy.
5. Developing joint training and qualification schemes: In the context of legislative and regulatory challenges, training and experience-sharing programs are a great resource in building institutional capacity. The study recommends the development of joint qualification schemes for investors, decision-makers, and senior executives to enable mutual understanding and close the gap between regulatory practices.

Summary of these contributions:

This study is an abundant source of good information and valid analysis, a scientific and practical ground for enhanced knowledge of Arab-Portuguese economic relations up to 2025. This not only provides a new analytical framework, but also turns the academic and practical discourse on cross-border alliances in a multipolar world into new dynamics based on innovation, balance, and common interests.

4.3.9 Partial Summary and Discussion of the Results

The results of this study are consistent with the literature and the theoretical framework used and show a more explanatory description of the relationships between Arab trade development in Portugal, innovation, and economic development. The results support the main hypotheses of the research, confirming that economic and strategic factors, namely Portugal's geography, natural resources, and political and economic proximity to Arab countries, form an essential incentive to enhance trade and investment relations. They also demonstrate that current trade policies, although heterogeneous in character, are still afflicted by regulatory and bureaucratic problems in need of structural reforms to enable more efficient promotion of trade and investment flows.

It is evident from the data analysis that strategic partnerships, particularly in the fields of technology, renewable energy, and the digital economy, can be a game-changer in making innovation a strong tool for economic growth in Portugal. This is also consistent with the literature on knowledge empowerment and technology transfer-based alliances. It also revealed clear gaps in exploiting business opportunities, particularly in areas such as sustainable tourism, smart agriculture, and logistics, and called for the elaboration of more targeted investment strategies in these areas.

The results validate relative frontier theory as an explanation for how shifts in global economic and political circumstances open up the possibility for restructuring trade relationships on more accommodative foundations. The results also demonstrated the utilitarian value of using strategic analysis frameworks such as SWOT and PESTLE in understanding the competitive environment of the Arab-Portuguese alliance. The results of the research not only confirmed the literature but also expanded it by indicating unused potential and relations yet to be systematically tapped.

And regarding practical impact, the findings help guide policymakers and investors by directing them to precise priorities: legislative coordination improvement, trade agreement efficiency improvement, and the launch of real cooperation mechanisms in research and

innovation. They also offer a realistic roadmap for transforming bilateral partnerships from traditional models to a collaborative system based on digital transformation and innovation. On this ground, these findings form a platform for a deeper understanding of Arab-Portuguese trade relations, not merely as an economic exchange, but more specifically as a potential strategic field for inducing mutual development and empowering geopolitical ties through knowledge, technology, and sustainable collaboration.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Main Themes

Grounded in rigorous data analysis and cross-validation with established literature and theory, the following series of core findings were constructed:

1. Economic and strategic factors such as geographical position of Portugal, flexible business environment, and high-end infrastructure are key drivers to pursue expanding trade agreements with Arab countries, particularly in new and development fields.
2. Current trade policies, as diverse as they are, suffer from procedural and legislative problems that impinge on the efficiency of investment and trade exchange, and illustrating the urgency of top-level structural reforms.
3. Arab-Portuguese partnerships, particularly in the fields of technology transfer, renewable energy, and smart agriculture, are viable paths of stimulating domestic innovation and expanding the industrial base of Portugal.
4. Poorly tapped strategic areas such as new tourism, the blue economy, and agricultural technology present a best course of action for Portugal to enhance Arab cooperation and reap high-value investment.
5. The results reinforced the four hypotheses advanced and filled the research gaps in the issues dealing with regulation of bilateral relations and transforming them into instruments of sustainable economic growth for Portugal.

5.2 The added value of the work (theoretical and administrative contributions)

1. Academic contributions:

The study provides an exhaustive overview of Portuguese-Arab economic relations and is part of the outstanding studies to treat this topic from an applied strategic perspective, with support from SWOT, PESTLE, and relative frontier theory analysis models.

The results placed emphasis on balancing trade policies with instruments for innovation and development, a qualitative contribution to the literature on "trade expansion strategies" within the European-Arab context.

The study demonstrated that bilateral flexible agreements are more effective than comprehensive ones, re-shaping regional economic cooperation models in the literature.

2. Empirical contributions:

The study enhances the ability of Portuguese decision-makers to develop foreign economic policies based on realistic analytical assumptions, as opposed to merely politics or business.

It helps to guide Portuguese institutions (e.g., AICEP and Ministry of Economy) in implementing selective strategies towards the Arab world on the basis of technology integration rather than commodity exchange.

It provides a viable model for the launch of joint innovation centers between Portugal and the Gulf countries, particularly in agricultural engineering, green technologies, and the digital economy.

5.3 Methodological Limitations of the Work

Despite the accuracy and adequate representation of the data for the 2020–2025 period, there were some limitations to the study:

There is limited availability of accurate and recent data on Arab private investment in Portugal, especially in new sectors.

It is challenging to follow up on information about actual bilateral negotiations between Arab states and Portugal due to limited political transparency or inadequate public documentation.

The horizontal aspects of Arab international rivalry for investments in Europe were not addressed extensively and might play a role in future action proposals.

5.4 Future Research Directions

1. Expand the analysis to include an analytical comparison between Portugal and other European countries in attracting Arab partnerships, e.g., Spain or Greece.

2. Analyze the influence of non-economic determinants like culture, geopolitics, and language in fashioning Arab-Portuguese cooperation.

3. Develop economic simulation models to measure the impact of Arab investment flows on increasing Portugal's GDP and fueling technology exports.

4. Study Portuguese SMEs' experience of having partnered with Arab counterparts to gain knowledge of the patterns of success and failure.

Strategic Implications for Portuguese Decision-Makers

1. Strengthen the institutional framework of bilateral relations.

Establish a special section within the Portuguese Ministry of Economy for "Economic Relations with Arab Countries" that acts as an economic watchdog as well as a joint venture coordinator.

2. Transition from trade relations to cooperation in innovation.

Recast economic agreements as technology transfer programs, vocational training, and innovation support, particularly with Gulf nations possessing know-how and financial reserves.

3. Invest in new industries with strategic sense.

Building a national action plan to appeal to Arab investments in precision agriculture, clean energy, and shipbuilding technology, through tax incentives and regulatory flexibility.

4. Marketing Portugal as a European platform for the Arab world

Building Portugal's image in the Arab world as a safe, digital, and green investment platform through trade missions and joint economic exhibitions.

5. Promoting joint research and development initiatives

Securing funding for co-research centers among Arab and Portuguese universities, particularly in agricultural technology and artificial intelligence, as a tool to fund local industrialization and the digital economy.

This study is an intellectual and applied contribution to moving Portugal toward a state-of-the-art participatory economic system with Arab countries, based on heightened smart exchanges, innovative partnership, and sustainable development. This vision, considering changes in the world, is not an extravagance but a strategic necessity to enable Portugal to remain a European hub with open access to the South.

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