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Abstract:

A Geopolitical Economy of the World Cup: Lessons from Qatar's Hosting of FIFA's Showcase Tournament

Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup is the embodiment of a new way in which sport in the 21st century is being conceived. This challenges prior utilitarian and neoclassical notions of sport, which are evident both in prevailing academic literatures about sport but also in sport management practices displayed over the last century. The emerging body of work frames the hosting of mega-events and sport in Qatar as geopolitical economy, a multi-dimensional notion combining elements of geography, politics and economics. As such, this paper will address the following questions: What is the geopolitical economy of Qatar's 2022 World Cup hosting? What are its characteristics and features? And, what issues and challenges does it pose for those leading and managing within the geopolitical economy of sport?

Sport in the 19th century was dominated by European utilitarian thinking, which conceived of it as a public good. These foundations of modern sport are still pervasive today with, for example, many governing bodies and mega-event owners located in Europe. Following economic and political change in the 20th century, a North America conception emerged in which sport is a private good in which, for instance, sponsorship rights are traded. However, following a series of giga-changes – specifically globalisation, digitalisation and issues pertaining to energy use and the environment – the utilitarian and neo-classical views are being rendered obsolete. This has accentuated the need for a new view of sport: a geopolitical economy, defined by Chadwick in *European Sport Management Quarterly* as:

The way in which nations, states and other entities engage in, with or through sport for geographic and politico-economic reasons in order to build and exert power, and secure strategic advantages, through the control of resources within and via networks of which sport is a constituent part.

Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup is a clear example of state-led geopolitical economy. The decision to bid for hosting rights was partly driven by geographic factors, both physical and human. Oil and gas deposits generated the revenues that have enabled the country to host the tournament, whilst some challenges posed by the disparate nature of Qatar's population are being addressed by via the tournament. Politically, the World Cup has provided a platform for the Qatari government to pursue an array of nation building and international relations outcomes, such as enhanced international diplomacy. Otherwise, the diversification and development of Qatar's economy is being served by, for instance, initiatives such as Challenge 22 and the Doha Sports Tech Accelerator.

In adopting a view of the World Cup as geopolitical economy, there are clear leadership and managements lessons that are relevant to other nations and states investing in sport. This includes how to configure elements of geography, politics and economics, especially in terms of formulating and implementing vision and strategy. Furthermore, leading and managing in this context necessitates making decisions beyond purely social or commercial parameters. As its conclusion, this paper will examine such matters.

Bio:

Professor Simon Chadwick is a researcher, writer, academic, consultant and speaker with more than twenty years experience in the global sport industry. His current work focuses on the geopolitical economy of sport, though his background is in marketing, business strategy and economics. Chadwick is Professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy at Skema Business School in Paris. In addition, Simon co-founded and co-directs the China Soccer Observatory (University of Nottingham, UK). He is Founding Editor of GeoSport, a digital sports platform created with the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs. Chadwick previously founded and directed Emlyon Business School's Centre for the Eurasian Sport Industry, the University of London's Birkbeck Sports Business Centre, and Coventry University's Centre for the International Business of Sport. In addition, he has worked at several of the world's most prestigious business schools, such as IESE in Spain, Otto Beisheim in Germany, Tsinghua in China, COPPEAD in Brazil and Waseda in Japan. Simon has written numerous articles, books and research reports for the likes of Forbes, Sloan Management Review, the Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Forbes, Thunderbird International Business Review, Mastercard, Newsweek, Reuters, Time, Routledge and Financial Times Prentice Hall. In addition, he has worked with some of the biggest names in sport, including Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, FC Barcelona, UEFA, Adidas, the Association of Tennis Professionals, Nielsen, the European Clubs Association, Ping, Formula E and Coca Cola.