



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

## Workshop 4

# **The Rise of International Sport on the Arab Peninsula: Politics, Art, Ethics**

### Workshop Directors:

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### **Abstract**

This workshop invites research on the politics, art, and ethics of international sport, with a special interest in the Arab Peninsula.

### **Description and Rationale**

The discovery of oil reserves on the Arab Peninsula in the early twentieth century brought about rapid socio-political and urban developments set against expanses of desert. Traditional society on the Peninsula has bootstrapped itself, seemingly out of nowhere, into modernity.

The structures of modernity, foremost the nation-state and thriving urban centers, as well as the trappings of modernity such as higher education, capitalist economics, and an appreciation for the arts and sport, have not evolved organically over time in the region. Rather they have been master-planned with a sense of urgency over this short period. And now, with peak oil looming, governments in the region are seeking new ways to sustain this drive toward modernization without a dependence upon oil revenues.

One strategy toward this end is to develop the region's tourism industry. For example, by developing the region as a new hub in the international worlds of art and sport. Mega-projects such as [Saadiyat Island](#) in the UAE, which will be the home to Guggenheim and Louvre franchises, will presumably make the region a tourist destination. Another mega-project, relevant to this workshop, is the [2022 FIFA World Cup](#) in Qatar. However, these projects are not only strategic for building tourism, they will also foster education and culture in the region, and put the Peninsula, particularly the UAE and Qatar, on the map as cultural centers in their own right.

It might be wondered, however, whether there exists an indigenous constituency for international art and sport on the Peninsula, with a capacity to engage critically and productively with the arts and organized sport.

It might seem that the instrumental values of fostering a post-oil economy and international standing are at the heart of these emerging worlds, not a love of art or sport as such. However, ideally Peninsula society will not simply own and/or manage these emerging worlds of international art and sport, but will have a meaningful stake in them. This requires a constituency capable of appreciating the arts and sport as something more than a luxury or recreational good to be managed and consumed, but as something to be engaged in for its own sake.

Indeed, without such a constituency it might also be wondered if the mere trappings of modernity will actually bring modernization to the Peninsula.

### **The Workshop's Contribution to the Expansion of Gulf Studies**

The accelerated rate of modernization on the Peninsula allows little room for error, and the vast wealth being invested in the infrastructure for art and sport on the Peninsula is sobering. It is critical to have some bearing on how, or even whether, the region should stay the course.

For this, it is useful to know the broader implications of staying the course. Can the structures of regional and international sport foster civil society as well as national and global citizenship? Indeed, we might ask how the concepts of 'civil society' and 'citizenship' are to be articulated in this context? Or is sport only useful as a benevolent form of social engineering and nation building? How, if at all, can the region build a constituency for sport on the Peninsula?

The workshop will bring a critical perspective to the rise of regional and international sport on the Peninsula, as well as open lines of inquiry on this development among scholars from across the disciplines.

### **Anticipated Participants**

The workshop welcomes research from across the humanities and social sciences—from the perspective of historians, social and political theorists, philosophers, cultural theorists, as well as from researchers in the arts and architecture—on the ideas and events, and their legitimacy, that are shaping regional and international sport on the Peninsula.

The objective is to gain some bearing on the rapid rise of modern sport in a society that a generation ago was preoccupied with subsistence in a harsh desert environment.

Attention to the rise of *regional* sport is also welcome, for example the rise of local ‘sports authorities’ in the region. However, the focus will be on the ideologies and their legitimacy underpinning local sport, such as the political ambition for instilling youth with a productive work ethic, or for fostering national pride and allegiance to these young states, or as an opportunity to ‘raise the flag’ at international events.

The workshop especially welcomes research on how the rise of both regional and international sport on the Peninsula impacts on women’s issues within the region, as well as the lives of disadvantaged members of society.

Also welcome are case studies in the arts and architecture of sport on the Peninsula. Will it be enough to build a world-class infrastructure for a successful World Cup? How do the politics of the World Cup impact on the aesthetic value of the architecture and venues of the World Cup in Qatar?

## **Workshop Director Profiles**

**Dr. Andrew Edgar** (DPhil Sussex) is Head of the Philosophy Department and Deputy Head of the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University, Wales. His research interests cover twentieth century German philosophy and contemporary applied philosophy, in particular the philosophy of sport and also medical ethics. He is the current editor of *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, the journal of the British Philosophy of Sport Association. He is president of the European Association for the Philosophy of Sport. A selection of his published research in philosophy of sport is included in the readings list below.

**Dr. Rita Elizabeth Risser** (PhD McGill University) is an assistant professor in the Philosophy Department at United Arab Emirates University. Her research centers on political and ethical issues as they arise in the arts and architecture. Recently she was a visiting research fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at The University of Edinburgh, where she researched the rise of an international art world on the Arab Peninsula. This research is forthcoming in *Constellations: An International Journal on Critical and Democratic Theory*. She is currently researching the intersection of aesthetic and political issues in the architecture of the upcoming World Cup in Qatar.

## Selected Readings

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