

The Emirates must work together if Dubai makes an Olympic Bid

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Mr Omar is reported to have said that Dubai hoped to submit a bid to host the Olympic Games within the next eight years.

While Mr Omar is not the first person to talk about Dubai's potential to host an Olympics, he is a senior figure from the right part of the government making positive overtones about a subject that has not been aired in public for a while.

If indeed a Dubai bid does eventually emerge, that would be exciting news for the Middle East, which has never hosted an Olympics. Most people would have to believe that Dubai stands a real chance of winning, especially after its successful bid to host Expo 2020.

Of course, success breeds success, and when it comes to hosting major events Dubai does this brilliantly. The Emirate already attracts a plethora top tier sports tournaments and is able to keep them year after year precisely because they are hosted so well.

The reason for Dubai's strength in this area is its ability to get the mix of hard and soft infrastructure elements right. Although more would be needed, the current array of venues, transportation, hospitality, and security infrastructure is all world class. Simultaneously, the numerous regulatory requirements that come with hosting major events are constantly improving and adjusting, in line with international standards and association guidelines; as are related commercial sector practices. In addition, the Emirate's favourable climate, extensive coastline, and formidable retail experience means that tourists love coming to Dubai. The location is close to ideal in a number of respects.

Given all these positives, one could be forgiven for thinking that winning the right to host the Olympics would be a *fait accompli* for a place like Dubai. Well, if only it were that simple.

The truth is that while hosting a number of big tournaments and international events every year is a significant achievement in itself, winning and then actually hosting a successful Olympics and Paralympic Games is a step up in virtually every sense. Moreover, there is a challenging legacy issue that must be considered so that the Games have a lasting impact, both in the region and in terms of leaving a positive cultural impression on the rest of the world.

The biggest risk of getting an Olympics wrong from a hosting perspective is reputational. The Olympics is beamed around the world to billions of people and the country is very much on display. So, deciding to bid and to do this credibly, is a big decision and not to be taken lightly.

Once a decision is made, the first step in the planning process would require the UAE's National Olympic Committee to develop a 'Project Delivery Plan' – a blueprint for how Dubai, as the candidate city, wants to conduct its Games. This would encapsulate the many elements involved: everything from stadia location and transport routes, to essential legislative changes.

These legislative changes could stretch across virtually all parts of the economy, including competition rules, land usage, procurement procedures, construction laws, intellectual property rights, media freedom and special security situations. As a result, they may have an impact across the country, and not just in

Dubai. This is not to say sweeping change is required throughout, but given the huge task at hand to deliver an Olympic Games, we can anticipate that new legislation and significant amendments to existing laws will need to be planned, coordinated and implemented at both local and Federal level.

If ill-prepared, the task ahead would be a daunting one; and, we should remember that after two years of hard work planning and orchestrating a formal bid, the candidate city still might not win. That is the harsh reality of the International Olympic Committee's bidding process. However, there are some relatively simple things that can be done to strengthen the framework behind the bid, and to enhance Dubai's overall chances of winning.

First, the other six Emirates – and Abu Dhabi in particular as the capital – would need to ensure they offer Dubai every support and assistance during the bid process. This is not just because all the other Emirates will see residual benefits from Dubai hosting the Olympics, including acting as venues for some of the events, but because the reputation of the country as a whole is at stake.

Second, the UAE's National Olympic Committee will need to be strategically led and empowered by the Federal Government, to ensure it is able to easily coordinate the various government entities, authorities and other bodies that must come together to make a mega event like the Olympics a success.

Finally, depending on the timing of a Dubai bid, there is a possibility that some of the additional hard infrastructure required would already be existence, or a good part of it, as a result of the projects recently underway for Expo 2020. A really smart bid from the Emirate, which in my view would seek to host the Games immediately after Tokyo (an event that is likely to propel the Olympic brand and cultural concept to new heights), would approach the two occasions as coordinated steps – with Expo used as a springboard to the Olympics and the build-up to both events being key components of Dubai's Vision 2020.

Bidding for an Olympics is both an exciting and challenging undertaking for any candidate city. It is, by an order of magnitude a step up from hosting other events, and there are significant risks and rewards to weigh up. However, with the UAE fully behind a Dubai bid, the National Olympic Committee ready and able to coordinate and deliver, and through the intelligent use of timing and infrastructure, the city should feel optimistic about its chances of bringing the Olympics to the Middle East for the first time.

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