

EDITORIAL

The Omnipresence of Business – and, Potentially, Business Anthropology

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Writing this brief editorial from the city of Copenhagen in Denmark, the summer is finally upon us. The sun is shining, and the temperatures have risen to almost 30 degrees Celsius. As always in Copenhagen, bikes are out, filling the streets of what is often celebrated as one of the most bike-friendly cities in the world. What is not so usual, however, is that many of the cyclists are wearing the red national team shirt of the Danish football team, because Denmark is currently competing in the EURO 2024; that is, the European football championships. With “Danish Dynamite,” as is often stated – and, indeed, with some difficulties! – Denmark has qualified to the tournament’s knockout phase. Tomorrow evening, Denmark will play in the round of 16 against none other than our close neighbor, Germany, who is also the host of the tournament. It goes without saying that this is a match loaded with historical and cultural importance. Although, of course, football is “just” sport.

The thing is, however, that sport is never *just* sport, even if we like to pretend that it is. In Denmark, this is common knowledge for everyone. When Denmark won its first and only (so far) European championship in football back in 1992, the Danish national team had not qualified for the championship, but was granted entry only because the former Yugoslavia

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had been banned due to the ongoing civil war in the Balkans. As such, it could hardly be more evident that football is also politics, and that sport and politics cannot be separated. Indeed, sport history in general abounds with examples of how sport and politics are inextricably entangled.

But sport is not *just* sport and politics either. More evident than anything else, sport is also big business. The national team shirts worn by so many cyclists in the streets of Copenhagen are made and sponsored by Hummel, an international sport and fashion company based in Denmark. In 2017, when the world-famous Brazilian footballer Neymar was sold by FC Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), the price was more than 200 million euros, and it was said that this amount would easily be covered by the revenues from increased sales of PSG shirts with Neymar's name on the back – a claim that we, admittedly, have no clue whether it is true or false. In Germany, moreover, thousands of football fans have fought hard against what many see as a threat of pure commercialization of German football, recently epitomized by an agreement that would allow private investors to buy shares of the TV and media rights to German football matches. For many fans, this is perceived as a strong attack against the very uniqueness of German football; that is, that football in Germany is for everyone and that it is “owned” by the fans. The entanglement of sport and business is, in other words, so obvious that we are here tempted to rephrase the much-quoted statement attributed to literary critic Fredric Jameson: It seems easier to imagine the end of the world – or the end of sport, we might add – than to imagine the end of capitalism – or the end of capitalism's entanglement with sport.

Now, these somewhat banal deliberations on sport and business are not only meant to give you a sense of the current football fever in and around our little editorial office in Copenhagen. Much more importantly, the case of football and the EURO 2024 – and we could easily have chosen a wide range of other cases – serves to illustrate a simple yet foundational point behind the *raison d'être* of the *Journal of Business Anthropology*: That business is, whether you like it or not, omnipresent. As we stressed in a previous editorial in which we proposed to understand the concept of business broadly, “the point is not only that people all over the world are inextricably embedded in trading relations,” but that “logics and practices commonly associated with business [...] have increasingly pervaded areas and matters that were hitherto distinct from associations with business” (2023: 2). Therefore, we contend, anthropologists' inclination to focus on business in research and practice – or lack thereof – is not a question of manifestation or significance of business matters, but of perspective and emphasis. In a nutshell, if business is omnipresent, then so might business anthropology potentially be. We thus urge everybody with an interest in exploring and working with business from an anthropological and/or ethnographic perspective to submit your work to the journal or, perhaps, more simply, reach out to us with your ideas and thoughts.

In this issue, the omnipresence of business can particularly be seen in two research articles that deal with issues from large-scale data infrastructures to more intimate entrepreneurial aspirations. In the first research article, “Data Is No Free Gift: An Anthropological Perspective on Data Sharing in an Inter-Organizational Context,” Leonore van den Ende and Alfons van Marrewijk zoom in on the infrastructure sector in the Netherlands to show the social and cultural norms and values, as well as issues of power, underlying the sharing of data across organizations. More specifically, van den Ende and van Marrewijk ask how data sharing is both enabled and constrained according to actors of infrastructure operators who are increasingly urged to share their data in order to reach solutions to critical issues. In the second research article, “To Be ‘Entrepreneuried’: An Ethnographic Study of Tech Entrepreneurship Competitions in China,” Olivia Yijian Liu unpacks the processes around technological incubators functioning as a performative apparatus governed by the state. With a specific emphasis on China, Liu demonstrates how the state purposefully fosters entrepreneurial hopes and expectations among certain groups of talents, who are, in this way, not merely actors with agency, but also being “entrepreneuried” and acted upon by socialist mechanisms and through a performative state governance.

Following these research articles, we present a book review by Haytham Althubaiti, who describes and discusses the recently published *Women Business Leaders: Identity, Resistance, and Alternative Forms of Knowledge in Saudi Arabia* by Liela A. Jamjoom. This is followed by our Millennial and Post-Millennial Perspectives section in which Elisabeth Powell focuses on anthropologists at work, presenting no less than nine different cases of how anthropologists have created values in business. If you are on the lookout for concrete, actual examples of the relevance and value of anthropology in business, this is the place to start.

As always, we hope that you will enjoy it all!

References

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