EUROPEAN GRASSROOTS ESPORTS

Mapping of stakeholders, practices and models of Grassroots esports

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1. Executive summary

The main goal of this project is to underline and show a third way between commercialized esports and individualized gaming culture.

European grassroots esports are participant-oriented, value-based and value-driven local communities that allow beginners and aspiring players to engage in esports and gaming activities. It is non-profit oriented and centred on fostering an inclusive environment. Grassroots esports initiatives are driven partly or solely by volunteers.

Some of the main stakeholders for grassroots esports are national and international associations and federations, sports clubs, the local community, cross-sector initiatives, and schools. Additionally, game developers/publishers, professional teams, players and event organizers, broadcast and media, sponsors, and government play important roles in grassroots esports initiatives.

From the mapping of the stakeholders, we have identified five common approaches to grassroots esports. These five approaches are based in schools, communities, sports clubs, cross-sector initiatives, and commercial-based initiatives.

Each approach can be done very differently, which is also showcased in case studies from organizations and associations from across Europe.

2. Welcome Words

Following DGI's values of community-based esports clubs, the International Sport and Culture Association has applied for co-funding for the project "European Grassroots Esports".

A sincere thank you to our project partners for their contribution towards the mapping of stakeholders, practices, and models of grassroots esports, which you will find in this document.

The project partners are:

- DGI, Denmark
- Play-eS-HanseSPIEL e.V., Germany
- H2O ESports Campus, the Netherlands
- Viken Sport Region, Norway
- Hungarian ESport Federation, Hungary
- International Sport and Culture Association (leader)

The project partners want to enable local sport clubs and schools to reach out to young esports practitioners and gamers and include them in value-driven communities that provide them a chance to meet, play and learn how to lead balanced and physically active lifestyles.

The main goal with this project is to underline and show a third way between the commercialized esports and the individualized gaming culture.

We hope you enjoy reading through the document.

3. Introduction

The project's main goal is to underline and show a third way between the commercialized esports and the individualized gaming culture.

In this document we have taken the first step towards this.

First, we have provided our **definition of grassroots esports.** In our definition, we focus on both the actual activity and everything surrounding it, as well as the people who participate.

Afterwards, we have mapped the stakeholders for grassroots esports. We have divided them into two categories – grassroots esports stakeholders and general stakeholders in esports.

While doing the mapping of the stakeholders, we have been able to identify some of the most common ways to work with grassroots esports initiatives.

When you read through this document, you will get a definition of grassroots esports, a mapping of the stakeholders, grassroots esports tactics, and case studies with specific esports initiatives.

4. First Framework and Definitions of European Grassroots eports

Promoting positive sports values through local communities and local sports clubs – a chance for young people to meet, socialize and share their passion.

European grassroots esports are participant-oriented, value-based and -driven local communities that allow beginners and aspiring players to engage in esports and gaming activities. It is non-profit oriented and centred on fostering an inclusive environment. Grassroots esports initiatives are driven partly or solely by volunteers.

Local communities play a crucial role in engaging young gamers and esports players in meaningful, value-based social activities. We consider this as a "third way" between commercialized esports and individualized gaming culture, promoting values and social responsibility.

European grassroots esports aims to promote inclusivity, a healthy lifestyle, quality, and ethics in its approach, as well as to provide a safe and organized space for young people to play and develop personal and sports-specific skills. Participants can train and improve, have fun, and compete. The local context serves as a vehicle to ensure and instil values in participants including positive social behaviour, a healthy lifestyle, fair play, responsibility, and inclusivity. These sporting values can be incorporated into the local setting, addressing some of the shortcomings of the current gaming and esports culture.

In the local sports club context, the young players can meet, socialize and share their passion. Local grassroots sports clubs primarily focus on practice, training, and competition, but they also naturally emphasize physical activity, healthy lifestyles, and the social aspects of a given activity.

In other words, by organizing esports activities in local sports clubs, young people are understood and respected for their interest in gaming activities. They are gathered in meaningful social connections in a safe and inclusive environment.

In addition to local sports clubs, this project suggests that various stakeholders, such as local volunteers, cross-sector initiatives, gaming communities, and volunteer-based school activities, play a crucial role in defining grassroots esports. In comparison, these stakeholders can all contribute to the grassroots esports perspective by supporting and promoting:

1. **A value-based approach:** Principles such as positive social behaviour, a healthy lifestyle, fair play, responsibility, honesty, and inclusivity. An approach that supports meaningful social connections.

2. **Ethical principles:** Adhering to a set of principles, such as promoting a general focus on health, responsible consumption, strong goals, no gambling, and event responsibility. Thereby taking a distance from some of the clear challenges in terms of excessive screen time, skin gambling, toxicity (offensive online language and harassment, especially gender-based), and even doping and match-fixing.

3. **Membership-organized activities:** A structured approach with clear rules, procedures, and protocols for engagement, involvement, and management.

4. **A specific youth focus:** A commitment to offering opportunities for young people to engage in esports/gaming activities, with a focus on personal growth and development in these activities.

The following values are essential for grassroots esports:

- **Health:** Grassroots esports practices include promoting physical health by combining esports practice with physical activity, sports and play, and by encouraging healthy eating and avoidance of energy and sugary drinks, nicotine, and drugs.
- **Inclusion:** Grassroots esports practices get players involved in pro-social activities, also physically, as well as invite and include players from both genders, different backgrounds, and with different skill levels in the activity.
- **Respect:** Grassroots esports practices promote tolerance, the use of respectful language, fair play, and respect for the opponent.
- **Responsibility:** Grassroots esports practices are delivered with a clear plan for safety, event management, and protection of minors. Volunteering and local engagement are encouraged.

5. Stakeholders for Grassroots esports and their roles – A Cross-Sector Approach

This chapter discusses various stakeholders in esports and provides an overview of the different roles that they play in the esports industry, as well as their relevance and impact from a grassroots perspective.

Today, the esports sector is predominantly driven by commercial actors such as publishers, event organizers, media, and sponsors, which has sparked a surge of interest in the best teams and biggest tournaments. On the other hand, gaming and esports are largely individualized and home-based activities, whether as a player or spectator.

To understand the role and significance of stakeholders from a grassroots perspective, we have divided the stakeholders into two different categories in our mapping. We have done this to provide an overview for you, as a reader, but also to maintain respect for the existing research in the field, which has not yet created a clear picture of the grassroots aspect in esports and is still a relatively new phenomenon that especially the Nordic EU-countries have a unique approach to.

The two categories of stakeholders in this project are as following:

- *Grassroots esports stakeholders* dives into the specific stakeholder groups that contribute to the overall definition of grassroots esports. This category is the main object for this mapping.
- *General stakeholders in esports* refers to the key stakeholders in esports who historically played a significant role in the industry's development.

In the following section, we will try to describe our perspective on the different groups within each category. We have mapped the categories based on the perspectives across a range of organizations in various European countries, all of which operate from a common understanding of what grassroots esports is.

5.1. Grassroots Esports Stakeholders

Grassroots esports stakeholders refer to specific groups of interest in this project. With this category, we wish to show you, that there are many different approaches to grassroots esports – and we are specifically looking at the following stakeholders:

- Association & Federations
- Communities
- Sports clubs
- Volunteers
- Cross-sector initiatives
- Schools and Academia

Note that there is limited research on grassroots esports. Here we are trying to see similarities between countries as well as providing some unique examples to inspire future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports.

5.1.1. Association and Federations

There are international associations and federations that represents esports on a global level and are supporting esports in different ways providing standards and policies to govern esports worldwide.

They play a key role in advocating for esports as a legitimate and recognized sport in general and have connections to the national federations in each country – however, this varies from country to country.

Some of the international esports associations are mentioned below:

- Global Esports Federation (GEF)
- The International Esports Federation (IESF)
- World Esports Association (WESA)
- World Esports Consortium (WESCO)
- Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC)

There are several sports organizations starting to recognize and dealing with esports. The International Sports Federation is one example. In addition, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) newly launched selection of virtual sports for its "Olympic Esports Series 2023" presenting a somewhat random mix of virtual sports (archery, baseball, chess, cycling, dance, motor sport, sailing, taekwondo, and tennis), which might not reflect what the majority of young people are playing. However, they play a big role in setting the standards of how esports is perceived.

There are national federations and associations playing a crucial role in the development and growth of (grassroots) esports in the country as well. These organizations act as governing bodies, providing structure and support for esports in different perspectives.

Most countries have an esports federation, although some are dealing with multiple esports organizations trying to become the national body for esports. But there are also several organizations emerging in the field of esports. This can be sports-, youth-, school/educational organizations providing structure and support for specific target groups.

Associations and federations, in general, are evolving as perceptions of esports change over time. For example, in Germany, there is an ongoing debate about whether esports is a sport. There is no political framework and responsibilities are shifted back and forth between the ministries. More and more countries are, however, now focusing their attention on gaming and esports – so the picture will for sure change during the coming years.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about associations and federations within esports.

> **Understand the role of associations and federations:** They can set standards, regulations, and policies for esports and can advocate for esports as a legitimate and recognized sport. Grassroots are particularly interesting for most associations and federation to further understand the development of esports in general.
>
> **Keep an eye on the development within your country:** The area is evolving, and organizations are finding their ways. It is important to stay updated with the national situation as well as identify associations that might be supportive of you and your future project.

5.1.2.   Sports Clubs

Esports can be integrated into traditional local sports clubs, much like any other sporting activity. In addition to traditional sports, esports can be offered as a membership-based activity, introducing new opportunities and activities within the sports club.

Denmark and Norway are experiencing somewhat similar tendencies in sports clubs – as 70-80% of all organized grassroots esports clubs are within existing sports clubs.

The integration of esports into traditional sports clubs is gaining momentum. Recognizing the wide-reaching appeal of esports, some clubs are offering esports activities either independently or as a supplement to existing sports engagements.

Esports seems to fit perfectly into local sports clubs and grassroots sports organizations. There are positive experiences across clubs/organizations promoting grassroots esports in sports clubs. Grassroots sports clubs/organizations that get involved in esports, suggest a positive influence on:

- More (younger) members

- New target groups

- New sponsors

- New volunteers

- New PR/media exposure

- New activities to offer to different events, parties, festivals, etc.

On the social responsibility side, it is implied that a lot of new members in grassroots esports clubs never took part in a sports club before. In addition, it seems that esports has a positive influence in attracting young people with tend to feel lonely or even kids with special needs (including kids with autism or ADHD).

> *"When these kids and young people become members in sports clubs offering esports, they get a chance to participate. They get a chance to blossom, gain new friends, and new networks – and even develop positively in school, because of the positive boost they get, from the meaningful community they are part of, as a member of a grassroots esports club."* DGI

In other words, by organizing esports activities in local sport clubs, the young people are understood and respected for the interest they have in their activity, and are brought together in meaningful social connections, in a safe and inclusive environment.

The experience from Denmark and Norway regarding grassroots esports might be a special case due to government support and foundation funding, which assist volunteers within grassroots sports clubs, including esports. However, the values and overall approach to grassroots esports in sports clubs present an open opportunity to promote important values and ensure that young people's activities are happening in a balanced way and in a safe community.

The grassroots esports approach in sports clubs is relatively uncommon across Europe, and most countries would refer to sports clubs as professional organizations tapping into esports with an elite approach, hosting a team with great players trying to activate extra sponsorship value to their brand.

Much potential seems to remain untapped across Europe. While large professional sports clubs have embraced esports at an elite level, grassroots clubs are yet to follow suit. Expanding esports at the grassroots level could attract new members and the clubs could benefit from further integrating esports into their activities.

Sports clubs, in general, are experimenting with the approach to esports in a different way – trying to find the right way of "doing esports" that suits their brand. Especially soccer seems to be a convenient example, as the games (FIFA/eFootball) are easy to translate into the traditional soccer game. Football clubs across the world are mainly interested in the virtual product of soccer, which might also match the club's identity of being a soccer club – as well as the interest from soccer players that are already playing the traditional game. This, however, might not be the case for all the clubs or all virtual sports (referring to the Olympic Series 2023). And there is potential in looking beyond one specific game that suits the traditional version - esports could be used as a community outreach and engagement tool. Sports clubs could host community esports events or partner with local schools to promote esports at the same level as their traditional sporting activities.
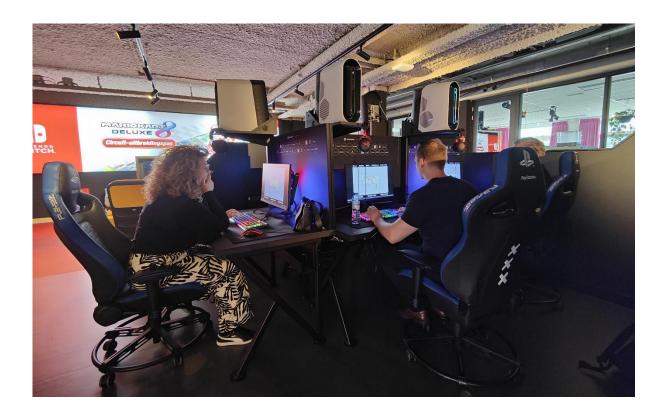
So – when referring to grassroots esports in sports clubs, there are different ways of approaching this area. It seems that the sports clubs in the grassroots sector are interesting stakeholders for the further development of esports from a grassroots perspective.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about sports clubs within esports.

Esports can be an activity in sports clubs: Offered as a membership-based activity or as an add-on to existing activities in traditional local sports clubs, esports can have a positive impact on the development of the sports club.

It brings new to old: Grassroots esports in sports clubs can bring in more young members, new target groups, sponsors, volunteers, PR/media exposure, and new activities.

The approaches vary from country to country: Grassroots esports in sports clubs is relatively uncommon, and an area still to be unfolded in a European context. The Nordic approach seems like a good case for further exploration.

5.1.3. Community

Community is often referred to as "gaming communities" or "esports communities" in general and would often be described as online-based. Community includes fans, viewers, players, or people in public gatherings with common interests within the gaming space.

The nature of gaming is participation in activities, social networks and building community. People connecting, starting a team or an organization (clan, guild etc.) is a part of this universe. There are many communities, ranging from large groups of people to small niche groups. Some are organized within a specific game (League of Legends, Counterstrike, Fortnite, Valorant, fighting games communities etc.) – and some are organized within a specific topic (Cosplay, Students, gender-specific communities etc.).

> *"In Norway, we have digital communities such as "[Gamer Gæls](#)" (Gamer Gals), which is an online community on Discord for females only with over 1000 users"* - Viken

Communities in esports are somewhat special, as there is no geographical limitation on community growth and the possibility to play together. The focus is often just chatting and playing together – however, this varies, as the community is defined by the members themselves.

There are opportunities related to grassroots esports where sport clubs and physical centres can create places where like-minded people can meet and thrive by playing and engaging together. The cooperation between (online) communities and grassroots sports clubs is interesting, as there might be a lot to learn both ways.

In addition to the numerous trade fairs and events on gaming and esports, which bring the communities together, some countries also have esports bars where fans can meet and watch games. Cinemas are also broadcasting esports events in some countries, which also tends to attract communities and people in general.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about communities in esports.

Understanding the diversity of gaming communities: Recognize the importance of diverse gaming communities and understand that they are not limited by geographical boundaries.

Future collaboration between online communities and physical spaces: Explore opportunities and potential learnings for collaboration between online gaming communities and physical spaces.

Understand the power of social engagement and connection: Recognize that gaming is not just about playing games but also about building social networks and communities.

5.1.4.   Volunteers

Volunteering within esports can vary, as it touches a lot of different areas, making an impact in the local or public.

Volunteering within esports plays a pivotal role in a lot of European countries, particularly at the grassroots level. Numerous initiatives are volunteer-driven in the Nordic countries.

Volunteers are often the driving force behind local esports events and tournaments, dedicating their time and energy to organize, manage, and run these gatherings. These events are crucial for the grassroots scene, providing amateur players with competitive experiences.

In schools, volunteers often spearhead the creation and operation of esports clubs, coaching and mentoring students. Not only do such initiatives expose students to esports but also teach them valuable skills, such as teamwork, strategic thinking, and communication.

Moreover, volunteers often contribute to online communities, streaming channels, and forums, helping to build and maintain supportive and inclusive spaces for gamers of all skill levels. These platforms allow players to share strategies, discuss games, and form connections, fostering a sense of community.

There are huge differences between countries in how volunteering in esports is organized besides online communities. In Hungary, volunteer projects in esports are relatively uncommon, as most esports projects/clubs are commercially driven. In Denmark, the case is different as most of the esports clubs are based on voluntary leaders (in the same way as traditional sports clubs). This makes the picture cluttered, as there are different approaches and cultures towards volunteers in general.

In Germany play-eS-HanseSPIEL e. V. Hamburg was the first club to receive non-profit status for esports, recognizing games as cultural assets. They work on a non-profit basis collaborating with schools and clubs, and organizing regional school tournaments.

> *"In April 2021, 20 youth facilities with 35 teams and around 200 children and young people would have joined together to form the youth league. The esports titles were selected together with the children."* - play-eS-HanseSPIEL e. V. Hamburg

The experience gained by involving students as volunteers to promote esports projects seems like an interesting approach to gathering people around a common interest in esports.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about volunteers in esports.

> **The importance of volunteers in grassroots esports:** Understand that volunteers can be the backbone of grassroots esports initiatives, playing a vital role in organizing, managing, and creating new initiatives. Acknowledge their contributions and value their dedication and commitment to esports.
>
> **Learn from others:** Recognize that approaches may vary between countries. Explore and learn from different models, such as the voluntary-based grassroots esports clubs in Denmark or Norway. Gain insights into successful volunteer-driven projects and adapt them to the local context to further promote and develop grassroots esports initiatives.

5.1.5. Cross-Sector Initiatives

A cross-sector initiative is defined within groups, like government, businesses, non-profits, and/or academia, which work together to archive a common goal. The initiative can have a primary focus on promoting esports as a goal itself, or a secondary focus with esports being a common third to reach the goal.

An example from Denmark is the "GoGaming" (Good gaming) from YMCA Social Work, where young people are invited to join small gaming communities, meeting once a week to play, have dinner and connect with each other:

> *"The concept is inspired by practical experience and recent research in both what computer games can do in an educational context, but also what young people need and thrive in. The project uses computer games as a common third element to meet young people where they are and to have an educational tool that they are already familiar with. The offer aims to prevent social challenges where computer games are*

used to improve well-being, strengthen social skills, and promote the path to construc-
tive social communities. The concept is targeting young people from some of the most
difficult circumstances in society." – DGI

In Norway, there is another example from KRED – "Competence- and resource centre for computer culture" with a specific focus on bridging the gaps between technology and society. This is further described in our case studies.

Cross-sector initiatives within esports seem to have a strong impact as well as support from some countries – often targeting specific groups in society or specific issues addressed in the country/region/system. It could be:

- People out of job
- People with special needs
- People with bad health habits

Some of these initiatives are great partners for organizations working within grassroots esports, as they support the diversity and different target groups in esports. Especially the target groups that might be tough to involve in usual social areas (schools, clubs, jobs etc.).

Esports/gaming seems to be a great tool to connect with people – and cross-sector initiatives can be of huge support to the overall approach in grassroots esports. Although esports may not always be the prime focus, it's a potent tool for achieving broader goals in society.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about cross-sector initiatives in esports.

Collaborative initiatives in grassroots esports: Recognize the power of collaboration between different sectors. Cross-sector initiatives can be effective in addressing specific social challenges, supporting diverse target groups, and utilizing esports as a tool for positive impact.

Esports/gaming as a valuable tool for social connection: Acknowledge the potential of esports/gaming to connect with people and promote social interaction.

5.1.6. Schools and Academia

Educational institutions such as primary, high and boarding schools, as well as higher education institutions in some countries, are offering esports through classes, courses, school teams etc. This move is placing esports within the educational curriculum, sports programs, or recreational activities.

Some educational institutions offer advanced esports courses that focus on gaming tactics, teamwork, communication, healthy diets for gamers, and physical exercise. Others offer esports for promoting social activities for students or even just to provide a youth-oriented space for the youth.

In Germany, there are examples of school competitions in which students compete against each other as school teams in a national championship. Many teams form working groups at the schools, which exist alongside the regular curriculum and may be supervised by a teacher.

For some grassroots esports players, scholastic or academic esports can be a way forward in the educational space, as well as business life. Some countries are seeing local schools cooperating with local sports clubs with esports, using their facilities for educational purposes for the students. The schools can also use the facilities for challenging groups at the school, which might increase their attendance at school.

Educational institutions are embracing esports in various ways and still experimenting with "best practice" – often with the goals to provide recognition and a strong reputation among the public – and to attract students to attend the education.

There are issues to address as there may be significant differences in teaching skills and experience levels among employees (teachers, coaches etc.) working with esports. This is due to the fact, that esports is still evolving as a learning tool as well as it is as a sport.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about schools and education within esports.

The ultimate target group: Note that schools are in touch with kids and adolescents, which might be your target group as well. Schools are possibly one of the crucial stakeholders to collaborate with when engaging young people in grassroots esports initiatives.

Esports is still new: Some schools and educational institutions in general are experimenting with esports. Grassroots initiatives (such as esports clubs) can help offer knowledge and experience in esports – and this might be a way for future cooperation.

5.2. General Stakeholders in Esports

General Stakeholders in esports refer to entities with interest or involvement in the industry. Looking into general stakeholders in esports from a grassroots perspective, we focused on the following stakeholders:

- Game developers/publishers
- Professional teams and players
- Professional tournament organizers
- Broadcast and media
- Sponsors
- Government

Each stakeholder plays a unique role in the esports ecosystem, and they are often characterized as key stakeholders or primary stakeholders within the esports industry.

As mentioned, we are, in this project, focused on the stakeholder's role within the topic "grassroots esports". Within this category we are digging into experiences and reactions from several European countries, and their view on the role they play for future development of grassroots esports.

5.2.1. Game Publishers

From a traditional sports perspective - Not only do they own the ball, but they also own the court and the rules as well (referring to the platform and the games).

Game publishers are the overall institutions of esports- and gaming titles. They refer to companies publishing or developing video games that are produced either internally or externally (i.e., by financing external developers to create games), and they hold the intellectual properties of the video games.

Its publisher governs each game, and different publishers may have their governance approaches. They own the game and hold the intellectual property. Some examples below:

- Riot Games owns the intellectual properties for "League of Legends," "Teamfight Tactics," "Valorant," and more.
- Activision Blizzard owns the intellectual properties for "Call of Duty," "World of Warcraft," "StarCraft," "Diablo," "Overwatch," and more.
- Epic Games owns the intellectual properties for "Fortnite," "Rocket League," "Fall Guys," and more.
- Valve owns the intellectual properties for the Steam platform with games like "Half-Life," "Counter-Strike," "Dota," and more.

There are many other game publishers and a swarm of different games. However, not all games are suitable as an esports title. Furthermore, this changes over time, and just a few games remained esports titles for a decade. These conditions are heavily influenced by the audience, the communities, and the public's overall interest in the game.

From a grassroots perspective, the game publishers are influencing the market, impacting which games are trending and how accessible they are for people promoting activities through the single game title. Therefore, they can play an essential role in grassroots activities, especially concerning the organization of tournaments and activities where people gather to play a specific game.

Trending games and the younger generation's choice is important to notice when organizing grassroots esports - following what is highlighted at international competitions and on social media, as well as being curious about what is trending among young people locally.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about game publishers:

> **Understanding the importance of game publishers**: they govern the games they publish, and their governance approaches can vary.
>
> **Knowing the trending games**: Game publishers heavily influence which games are trending, and it is vital to keep an eye on what games are popular at both international and local levels. This knowledge can help in organizing activities such as training or tournaments.

5.2.2.   Professional Teams and Players

Professional esports teams are companies that employ players to participate in competitions on their behalf. Many of these organizations have rosters that play different games. Players encompass, at the highest level, high-paid professionals hired by teams to compete at the world stage tournaments and leagues.

Like professional teams in traditional sports, these esports teams try to get the best players possible and support them with coaches, training possibilities, and an environment in which they can focus solely on becoming better and ultimately winning tournaments.

Professional players and teams in esports are like in traditional sports. They are the stars exposed in media, followed by a lot of people in public and are influencing the general understanding of esports at the highest level – and they are just as active on social media as many other professionals in traditional sports.

Many sports organizations have started their own esports approach. For example, in Germany, where many Bundesliga football clubs have founded esports branches or started cooperating or investing in existing esports teams. Another good example would be the virtual Formula 1 teams.

Many youngsters want to become professional players and make a living through gaming and esports. Grassroots players will watch professional teams and discuss international events.

However, breaking into the world of esports can be quite challenging compared to traditional sports. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to achieve a professional career, and even more challenging to earn enough money from salaries and prize money. Additionally, players need to focus on mastering a specific game, which is like traditional sports. But, as mentioned earlier, the trending period of a game can be short, which means that players may have a limited time to compete at a high level. While playing video games competitively is mainly possible at a young age, some unique challenges and uncertainties come with pursuing esports as a career.

In Denmark and Norway, several challenges are emerging from both grassroots and top-level esports. For example, grassroots teams becoming too good for grassroots-level esports and are looking for possible organizations to apply for while top-level teams want to have a broader impact on the esports scene as well as looking for new talent.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about professional players and teams:

> **Like traditional sports:** Professional teams and athletes competing at the world stage – represented by a professional organization.
>
> **They influence:** Like in traditional sports, professional players and teams are the stars, often exposed in media and have a significant influence on the general understanding of esports.
>
> **Hard to break through:** Players need to focus on mastering a specific game to become professional, like in traditional sports. However, the lifecycle of a game can be short, which means that players may have a limited time to compete at a high level.

5.2.3. Professional Tournament Organizers

Esports events in which players and/or teams compete against each other with the goal to win. People want to participate in the tournaments to be part of the gaming community, to watch their favourite players and teams, to connect with friends they played with and met online, or to meet the pro players in real life at professional setups.

In the history of esports, tournament organizers have been a driving force for bringing people together with a common interest. Especially in the beginning, it was essential to bring the competitors together to establish a fair competitive environment.

Tournament organizers design and produce esports competitions in line with the terms and conditions set by the publisher for each video game. What might be unique for esports is that, in many competitions, participation is not restricted to professional or amateur players - even for world-class tournaments or events. However, some of the biggest leagues in media would be invitationals or accessible through tough qualification series.

Some of the major tournament organizers operating internationally (ESL, Blast etc.) are generating massive attention as it promotes professional teams and players. Nationally there are also organizers hosting events in every country on a professional level as well as amateur events hosted on a voluntary basis.

The category can be split up in different types of organizers, as there is quite the difference between the different organizers in terms of reach, economy, and target audience:

- International Offline Tournament Organizers
- International Online Tournament Organizers
- National Online Tournament Organizers
- National Offline Tournament Organizers
- Local Offline tournament Organizers

Especially the local and national organizers seem to be of value for grassroots esports:

> *"We believe that national tournament organizers can be a great partner to grassroots esports, with a good collaboration bringing in more grassroots esports activity. Often mentioned barriers from the volunteers working with grassroots esports are either 1) time consumption (e.g., don't have time to host a tournament/league), and 2) not competent enough to initiate and maintain a tournament/league. Both issues can be alleviated with cooperation with a tournament organizer. In this way, we believe professional tournament organizers can both be a grassroots esports stakeholder and a general stakeholder in esports."* - Viken

Norway and Denmark are experiencing somewhat similar tendencies. Grassroots esports clubs are seeking more "offline events" - like in traditional sports. This does not refer only to the traditional "LAN-events", but small child-friendly events that are (1) shorter in time, (2) promote grassroots values rather the win/loss and (3) are accessible for young kids with adults as social as well as technical support.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about professional tournament organizers:

> **Big events can gather people:** Understand that tournament organizers play a crucial role in bringing the esports community together, establishing fair competitive environments, and promoting professional teams and players. Acknowledge their ability to generate attention and create opportunities for players and fans to connect.
>
> **Needs of grassroots events:** Consider the possibilities of organizing smaller, accessible events that focus on community-building and child-friendly environments for the local community.
>
> **Potential partnerships between stakeholders:** Encourage collaboration between grassroots esports initiatives and tournament organizers to enhance grassroots esports activities. Explore ways to work together to create meaningful experiences for members.

5.2.4. Broadcast and Media

Media play a significant role, as they expose esports in its many forms to the public.

More and more media companies and broadcasters distribute esports-related content online or offline. It can be on national television, local papers as well as on esports-related channels (such as Twitch.tv). In addition, social media platforms are growing, as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok etc. also provide platforms for sharing esports-related content for tons of people every day.

From a grassroots perspective, media are interesting, as it is a way of promoting grassroots activities to the public. However, and as grassroots esports take a new approach, it might risk going "under the radar" compared to commercialized esports or the traditional way of looking at esports. Making connections with broadcast and media and creating visibility for grassroots esports is important to distinguish the different aspects of esports.

Local news channels, television stations, etc., which do not follow a commercial approach and are funded by state governments, can play an important role as media partners for grassroots

activities. A local club promoting grassroots esports activities can be of big value to the local community – but still fights with the overall perception of esports, which tends to focus on either:

1. Professional top-level performance, the big competitions, and huge prize pools.
2. Young people isolating themselves dreaming of becoming the next star on the stage.

Grassroots esports can put a new perspective into these perceptions. Esports can be social, engaging and community building – and does not have to rely on a competitive drive towards an elite 'peak of a pyramid', but as a social activity that is an intrinsic part of popular culture and civic movement.

Grassroots esports provide an approach with value-based and inclusive activities, particularly for young people, and the story about this is important to share with the world.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about broadcast and media:

> **Differentiate grassroots esports from commercialized esports:** Grassroots esports may risk being overshadowed by commercialized esports or traditional perceptions of esports. There is a third way to be highlighted promoting the social, engaging, and community-building aspects of grassroots esports as a counter-narrative to the traditional perceptions of esports.
>
> **Share the story of grassroots esports:** Emphasize the importance of sharing the stories of grassroots esports. Utilize media platforms, both traditional and online, to raise awareness and showcase the positive impact of grassroots esports initiatives.

5.2.5. Sponsors

Sponsorships are a driving force in professional esports. This has been developing throughout the years, as more non-endemic sponsorships are entering esports. During this time the sponsorships in esports moved from being mostly endemic sponsorships such as hardware/software brands to a more diverse non-endemic brand that you might not first expect to see within esports.

> *"In Norway, we have many different sponsors in esports, ranging from banking and investment, IT-consultant firms, broadband companies, food stores, and so on."* – Viken

From a grassroots perspective, sponsorships can play a significant role, as they might provide external funding as well as awareness. Local activations can be a key part of success within grassroots esports:

> *"We still see clubs lacking the abilities to activate new sponsors, as esports might still be new to a lot of potential sponsors. One of the major issues can be the visuality they expect when entering a sports-like sponsorship. As esports is digital, this makes it somewhat harder to see the value, as they might compare it to the local soccer club, where they get exposed in weekly games on shirts, banners etc. Grassroots esports clubs must rethink how they activate sponsors"* – DGI.

In the future sponsors might be a piece of the puzzle solving the issues regarding sustainability for grassroots esports projects. More systematic modelling of grassroots esports, including the skills you develop from playing esports regularly and the interests you have (e.g., when participating in esports you might be more tech-savvy), coupled with an education and potentially work-life situation. Treating grassroots esports more than just an activity, engaging the youth in education and jobs that might be of interest, both for the esports athletes as well as potential sponsors.

There is still space for innovations in esports, and sponsors can utilize the branding opportunities for a young audience – and there are a lot of different areas not yet explored in esports locally as well as globally.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about sponsors:

> **The evolving landscape of sponsorships in esports:** Understand that sponsorships in esports have evolved from predominantly endemic brands to more diverse non-endemic brands. More and more branding opportunities are seen, where sponsors can capitalize on reaching a young esports audience.
>
> **Challenges and opportunities in activating sponsors:** There are challenges in activating sponsors within grassroots esports, as the visuality and exposure may differ from

traditional sports sponsorships. One might consider a more systematic approach to grassroots esports, highlighting the skills and values developed through esports participation and aligning it with education and potential career opportunities, which can be appealing to some sponsors.

5.2.6. Government

The lack of effective governance in esports is a widely criticized aspect, which is reported by all countries contributing to this project.

Britain, The Netherlands, and Hungary are reporting similar cases with a lack of political framework, guidelines, or laws to handle esports in general – making it hard to organize, fund, and develop grassroots esports.

Norway and Denmark are examples where the government is partly supporting the growth of grassroots esports through several politicians highlighting the importance of strategy and political guidelines for esports in general.

In Germany, a solution is yet to be found, as esports did not yet receive sports status. However, a positive stance towards esports and a willingness to address its governance and recognition was highlighted in March 2023. While the specific outcomes remain to be seen, this could pave the way for the development of grassroots esports in Germany.

The development of esports is unstoppable in general as it taps into other important areas in society. Some of the larger topics influencing the debates are the protection of children and young people's privacy, well-being, and safety from commercial exploitation by tech companies using algorithms, digital manipulation, data collection, and behavioural designs. These are some of the topics also affecting the understanding of esports by politicians and the general society. This makes esports/gaming somewhat unique compared to traditional sports, as the development continues with the tech industry.

In addition, cases about "toxicity and bad behaviour on online platforms", and "young people using too much time on digital devices" as well as concerns about "radicalization on the gaming platform" are also colouring the debate in some countries.

The topics above are just some of the concerns also affecting the general discussion about esports, gaming and digital youth in general. The grassroots approach to esports seems like a solution to one or more of the topics – but seems to lack the possibilities and the necessary political attention.

Generally, the emergence of governing bodies and governance structures is a common occurrence in growing industries like esports. However, the diverse nature of esports presents a challenge in determining the most suitable governance solution. Defining the essence of esports itself becomes a hurdle in finding the right method of governance. Consequently, bottom-up corporate governance, with all stakeholders working together, may be a meaningful approach – and this might be the call for future leaders and organizations promoting grassroots esports.

For future leaders or organizations promoting grassroots esports, here are your most-knows about governmental structures in esports.

Advocate for the establishment of political guidelines and strategies: Learn from countries like Norway and Denmark, where the government partially supports the growth of grassroots esports through the recognition of its importance.

Understand the unique challenges and influences in esports: Recognize that the development of esports is influenced by broader societal debates and concerns. It is important to notice that grassroots esports seems to be a solution to more of these concerns.

Promote the importance of future leaders: Recognize the need for passionate leaders who can navigate the complex landscape of esports. Encourage other individuals to step forward and take up leadership roles to advocate for the development of grassroots esports, address governance challenges, and drive towards positive change.

5.3. Conclusion of the Mapping

We have now tried to map perspectives across a range of organizations in various European countries, all of which operate from a common understanding of what grassroots esports is. We have done this on top of two main categories; general stakeholders in esports and grassroots esports stakeholders.

As you might have noticed throughout the reading, esports and gaming are diverse and in constant development. Therefore, use this mapping as guidelines, inspiration, and useful knowledge.

In the following chapter, we will try to outline different approaches and tactics to grassroots esports.

6. European Grassroots Esports Tactics

In the mapping we have split the stakeholders in two categories.

Grassroots esports stakeholders who can be considered as internal stakeholders as they are working and directly influencing the development of grassroots esports.

And **general stakeholders** who are not directly involved in grassroots esports. However, they do have an interest and involvement in the industry which affect the grassroots esports initiatives.

When we look at the mapping of the stakeholders for grassroots esports and esports in general, we have identified the most common ways to work with grassroots esports initiatives. And while the first four approaches are directly linked to the stakeholders identified under 'grassroots esports stakeholders', there is also a fifth approach which is the commercial-based activities and does not directly fall under the definition of grassroots esports.

From the mapping, we have identified the following approaches to grassroots esports:

1. A school-based approach where gaming or esports is a learning tool or used to socialize and involve pupils or students.

2. A community approach where gaming and esports gather people (as a virtual meeting ground or physically at events or local gatherings) to involve in a wide range of different activities and digital as well as social connections.

3. A sports club approach where gaming and esports are being organized within a club or team environment.

4. A cross-sector approach which refers to cooperation between multiple organizations, industries, or sectors where esports and gaming are a part of reaching a goal or target group in society.

5. A commercial approach that is a business- and profit-oriented way of promoting esports and gaming activities in general - often referring to a specific team or brand.

Volunteer project leaders and helpers are almost always one of the biggest reasons why and how grassroots esports initiatives happen and succeed. This is the case for initiatives based on

schools, in the community, in sports clubs and cross-sector initiatives. And there are national associations and federations in most of the involved countries working towards, or with the intent to support and help the initiatives while they also set national standards for esports. This is, however, still fragmented across Europe, as governments and federations are taking different positions on esports in general.

Furthermore, you will find, that it is different from each country which approach is the most common. As an example, we can see that in Denmark and Norway, it is the sports clubs which are the most common approach, while this might be different in other countries. This goes for the understanding of "grassroots" in general as well, which might be different from one culture to another.

7. European Practices in Perspective

In the next chapters you will find case studies from 10 different countries providing insights on different approaches to esports.

- **Sørby Esport** – the biggest Danish grassroots esports club
- **Mysen E-Sport Arena (MEA)** – a free gaming and esports activity for children and youth
- **KRED** – a competency - and resource centre for computer culture
- **France Esports** - the French national esports association
- **eSports Nord** – Association from Harrislee, Germany
- **SVEROK** – a Swedish youth organization
- **British Esports Association** – A non-profit organization that supports and promotes esports in the UK.
- **H2O Esports Campus Amsterdam** – A Valhalla for the new generation
- **Esports Plaza, Malta** - a place for esports enthusiasts
- **Békéscsabai E-sport Egyesület –** Hungarian association with a focus on talent development
- **JUNIOR Esports** – a Spanish school project

The case studies for Sørby Esport, Mysen E-sport Arena, and KRED show different ways to create esports activities for children and youth.

If we look at the case studies for France Esports, eSports Nord, Sverok, and British Esports Association we have federations/associations that work to help, support, and guide the local esports initiatives. They also work to improve the local esports initiatives opportunities and to educate the population about what esports is.

The two case studies for H2O Esports Campus Amsterdam and Esports Plaza from Malta show two types of commercial esports stakeholders. They both have great facilities and although they are currently focusing on commercial activities, they have the facilities to create and host some great grassroots esports initiatives.

Békéscsabai E-sport Egyesület is a general esports stakeholder in Hungary. The organization was created to discover and train talented young people in esports. And while they are not directly working with grassroots esports, they have similarities. As an example, they also focus on personal development for young kids.

Junior Esports is added as a case to provide insights from a Spanish project with a strong focus on the integration of esports in schools and educational centres.

The Cases will conclude this report with a diverse picture of different approaches to esports in general and with the perspectives on Grassroots esports as a topic to be further explored.

We hope that this reading has provided valuable insights and inspiration towards the main goal of this project: "to underline and show a third way between commercialized esports and individualized gaming culture".

7.1. Sørby Esport – the Biggest Danish Grassroots Esports Club

Sørby Esport is a Danish gaming and esports department in the local sports club "Sørbymagle Idrætsforening", founded in 1907. Sørby Esport was founded in January 2016 and is permeated by the traditional association values: community, learning, development, and experiences.

In Sørby Esport, there are more than 500 members and volunteers participating throughout the year. The board consists of professionally competent people with different backgrounds but a shared ambition to be an association that pushes Danish esports forward offering a unique community for members as well as for more than 100 volunteers.

Sørby Esport is bringing key values into esports – promoting knowledge, learning, and friendship as well as creating fun events and a strong healthy culture in esports. They inspire other clubs and have been a beacon for others to follow the same path in grassroots esports clubs in Denmark.

Through their love for gaming and people, they have witnessed the transformative power of their work in gaming and esports since 2016. Lonely children and youth find community, those lost discover purpose, the unemployed find employment, and individuals with disabilities gain joy, confidence, and togetherness.

Sørby Esport works in three areas: **Online community** with a strong connection to their brand "the blue bull", one of the biggest **esports centres** in Denmark for weekly training and gatherings, and **external activities** to promote the club and its people behind. [12]

Sørby Esport, archive photo

FACT BOX

1. A local volunteer-driven sports club
2. Started as an online community
3. One of the first esports clubs in Denmark providing a Grassroots esports approach

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[1] Martin Fritzen, Sørby Esport
[2] https://sorby-esport.dk/om-soerby-esport/

7.2. Mysen E-sport Arena (MEA)

Mysen E-sport Arena (MEA) is a free gaming and esports activity for all children and young people in the Indre Østfold region in Norway. It is a collaborative project initiated by the partners Indre Østfold coding club, Mysen Football club, and Indre Østfold Municipality (IØM) in 2021, located on the Mysen Citizen Centre and library premises. The purpose is to allow all children and young people to engage in gaming and esports.

The municipality has organized citizen-oriented services and libraries in five different "citizen centres and libraries" (CL) and Mysen CL is one of these. These CLs will be meeting places for residents and organisations based on volunteering and cooperation with these organizations is highly valued. It includes free services such as meeting rooms, courses, help, and advice, to collaborate on activities and events for the population. MEA is a result of such cooperation where the municipality, at the Citizens' Centre and library, allows the volunteers to utilize rooms and the Internet for esports. A strategy for esports is on the way to help establish esports arenas in several of the municipality's other citizen centres and libraries.

This model differs from other esports clubs, often organized under sports teams, or strictly volunteer initiatives. The Citizen Centre and library in the municipality acknowledge that gaming is an essential expression of culture, which comes under the library's mandate as a cultural mediator. The voluntary organizations in the project have acquired all of the gaming equipment by applying for funds from funding arrangements, such as bank foundations.

As of today, Mysen E-sport Arena is open three days a week, where you also have a separate girls' gaming session. It is operated with multi-gaming machines, VR, PS5, Nintendo Switch, and a racing rig. Young people work as tutors in games and are paid by project funds that the municipality has received from the Directorate for Children, Youth, and Families. [3]

FACT BOX

1. MEA is a collaborative project between the municipality and volunteers.
2. MEA allows all children and young people in their region to experience gaming.
3. MEA has its own girls' gaming offer

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[3] Arild Pedersen: " Founder and leader of Mysen E-sport Arena"

7.3. KRED – a Competency- and Resource Centre for Computer Culture

Kompetanse- og REssurssenter for Datakultur (Competency- and REsource centre for Computer culture), KRED, is a dynamic organization that plays a vital role in fostering digital culture and engagement in Norway.

A cross-sectoral initiative at its core

With their expertise in data-driven projects and commitment to promoting digital literacy, KRED brings immense value to Rotaryon Esports, a renowned organization in Norway dedicated to esports excellence and talent development while combating social exclusion. Their collaborative approach and innovative initiatives, empower individuals through technology and education. By partnering with KRED, Rotaryon Esports gains access to knowledge and resources, enabling them to create impactful programs that bridge the gap between technology and society.

"Rotaryon Esports is the operational part of KREDs vision: empowering individuals through technology and education. This vision is brought to life through esports."– Ole Martin Gjestad, CEO, KRED.

Established grassroots esports activities

The support from KRED enables Rotaryon Esports with different esports activities for kids and young adults. Their Rotaryon Academy recruits players from local esports teams and sports clubs in the Viken region, offering a platform similar to traditional sports academies. Players gain access to top-tier resources, including training facilities, professional coaching, and travel support. In addition, they host academies for popular games like Rocket League, SSBU, Valorant, and Sim Racing. Rotaryon's Gaming School, a free service in the lower Glomma region, offers weekly training sessions, tournaments, and social activities for children and teens.[4]

FACT BOX

1. Rotaryon is the operational part of KREDs vision.

2. Rotaryon hosts a 3-week free gaming course each summer for 90 young gamers.

3. Rotaryon facilitates school tournaments nationwide.

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[4] Ole Martin Gjestad, CEO of KRED

7.4. France Esports

France Esports is the French national esports association. It was created in April 2016 at the request of the public authorities, and more specifically the Ministry of Digital Affairs.

The association, which is not a sports federation and does not seek to recognize esports as a sport, represents three types of stakeholders: (1) players and associative clubs, (2) esports economic promoters such as professional organizations, competition organizers, specialized agencies, broadcasters, and all service providers, and finally, (3) game developers and video game publishers, including the French publisher's trade association. Each of the 3 types of stakeholders elects 4 representatives (i.e., 12 people) who compose the Board for a 2-year term. The association thus represents and defends the interests of all stakeholders in the esports sector and is the main contact for public authorities and institutions (i.e., ministries and local authorities). For the past 1 year, the association has also been divided into local offices for each of France's 12 regions.

Making an impact

Among the association's main achievements since its creation, the legalization of esports competitions in France and the recognition of the status of professional players of video game competitions are major advances (articles 101 and 102 of the Law for a Digital Republic of October 2016). In 2019, the association was participating in the implementation of the inter-ministerial Esports 2020-2025 strategy, co-led by the Ministries of Sport and Digital, aiming to make France the European leader in esports in Europe by 2025. In 2023, after years of lobbying, the association obtains visa facilitation for foreign players from outside the European Union and Schengen area who come to practice their activity in France on a long-term basis. At the same time, France Esports conducts and publishes an annual national survey called the France Esports Barometer, aimed at quantifying the practice and consumption of esports in France. The association has also published a number of resources and tools for the sector, including a guide to event organization, an economic study of the French esports sector, a directory of amateur clubs, an inventory of diversity initiatives around the world, a calendar of French LANs, and more.[5]

> **FACT BOX**
>
> France Esports is one of the only national associations, along with Japan, to include publishers in its governance. France Esports has visa facilitation for foreign players.

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[5] Nicolas Besombes: "Assistant Professor, Université Paris Cité, Former VP France Esports"

7.5. eSports Nord

One of the first registered e-sports clubs in Germany

The eSports Nord is a registered association from Harrislee, near Flensburg, since 2016 and deals with eSports as a popular sport. The number of members amounts to more than 150 members throughout Germany. The registered association is already firmly established in the far north of Germany and acted as a contact for all e-sports activities in Schleswig-Holstein on a political level before the formation of the state association. Since last year, the clubhouse of eSports Nord represents the regional centre for e-sports in Flensburg. Especially the assistance with topics like livestreams the E-Sports Nord has done an excellent job.

Development of the e-sports scene

In particular, the successive development of the e-sports scene in northern Germany was the basic idea behind the founding of the association. In addition, several e-sport events were accompanied (for example, e-sport at the festival Wacken). Also, the support of the local e-sport university group in Flensburg was offered which is another aspect of grassroots promotion in e-sport.

Education as an essential factor

The commitment of the members from all over Germany helps the association to a broad competence portfolio with which one promotes popular as well as the competitive sport. In addition to numerous information events, workshops and lectures, eSport Nord also offers consultations on all e-sports issues. [6]

FACT BOX

1. Offers analogue and digital e-sports training sessions
2. One of the first official e-sport clubs in Germany.
3. One of the first official e-sport clubs in Germany.

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[6] Source: Leon Felgendreher, managing director of the eSport Association Schleswig-Holstein

7.6. Sverok – Swedish youth organization

Sverok - Spelhoppyförbundet (Gaming Federation), is a youth organization that holds a significant role in the gaming and esports community in Sweden. Since its establishment in 1988, Sverok has been a driving force for promoting gaming and fostering a strong sense of community among gaming enthusiasts. With a focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and fun, Sverok aims to make gaming an enjoyable and engaging experience for all.

One of the key reasons why Sverok is particularly interesting for grassroots esports is its dedication to supporting and empowering local gaming associations. Sverok provides a platform and resources for individuals and groups to start their own "Forening" (club), allowing them to create their communities and pursue their gaming passions. Board games, figure games, trading card games, role-playing games, e-sports/gaming, video games, airsoft, laser games, paintball and fantasy are some of the main branches in Sverok.

By joining Sverok, clubs gain access to a wider network of like-minded individuals, sharing knowledge, and experiences, and collaborating on various gaming-related initiatives. Within Sverok, associations have the opportunity to actively shape the gaming culture in Sweden. Members can participate in decision-making processes, contribute to the development of policies and guidelines, and engage in the long-term vision of the federation. By being part of Sverok, associations gain a voice and can influence the direction and future initiatives.[7]

FACT BOX

1. A youth-organization in Sweden with over 55.000 members (2020).
2. Developed the framework "Esports code of conduct" in 2016.

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[7] https://sverok.se/

7.7. British Esports Association

The British Esports Association is a not-for-profit organization established in 2016 to support and promote esports in the UK. As a national body, they aim to foster future British talent, increase the awareness of esports and provide expertise and advice. They are focused on the grassroots level of esports and are not a governing body.

They help educate the masses – including parents, teachers, media and government – about what esports is and what its benefits are.

Their three goals are to Promote, Improve and Inspire.

- Promote esports in the UK and increase its level of awareness.
- Improve the standard of UK esports.
- Inspire future talent.

The British Esports Association helps to educate parents, teachers, media, policymakers and government about what esports is and what its benefits are. They work with schools, colleges, and other educational establishments to embrace esports and create some inspiring events and activities. The main activity is running the British Esports Championships for schools and colleges.[8]

FACT BOX
1. In 2017 they held a one-month kids esports club pilot scheme at Maida Vale Library.
2. In 2018, they crowned our first British Esports Championships winners (schools and colleges) at Insomnia Gaming Festival.
3. In late 2019, they launched a Women in Esports campaign to celebrate female talent in esports.

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[8] https://britishesports.org/about-us/

7.8. H2O Esports Campus, Amsterdam

With more than 12,000 m2 H2O Esports Campus is a Valhalla for the new generation. In the heart lies the Rabo Esports Stadium, a permanently equipped event location for esports and gaming events and productions.

H2O Esports Campus is for a wide esports target audience. Proving a Talent Development Program for upcoming esports talents, to running a gaming club for regular gamers. With a bigger player- and interest pool for games, more people will eventually go to esports and gaming events. Which will benefit H2O Esports in the long run.

H2O founders are ex-professional sports players, who thrive to support new and upcoming gamers in their journey to a professional level. Not necessarily only players, but the esports gaming community in general. With education, jobs on the campus they aim to inspire the youth to work in the gaming and esports scene. [9]

H2O Esports focused on the following items for the gaming and esports community:

- Grand Esports Finals; National competitions in gaming centres across the country and hosting a grand finale for the best players.
- Gaming Club; Providing gamers with a place to play together with high-quality gaming equipment and being able to sit next to each other.
- Children Parties; Unique children's parties in the Netherlands focus on games like Minecraft, Fortnite, Sim Racing and Interactive sports.
- Virtual Reality; Play and experience Virtual Reality in the H2O VR Sports Centre, free-roaming VR, Augmented Reality HADO games and stationary VR games.
- Group Gaming Activities; Various groups of 10-250 persons to experience a learning and gaming experience at H2O with a custom-made program for the day.
- A lot more of custom activities in various rooms of the H2O Esports Campus

Picture of the VALORANT King Cup by Alienware in the Rabo Esports Stadium at the H2O Esports Campus Amsterdam.

[9] Sjaak Kuil, H2O Esports Campus

7.9. Esports Plaza, Malta

Esports Plaza is Malta's premier, one-of-a-kind esports arena, providing entertainment. With gaming technology and professional staff, they offer a unique haven for gamers and esports enthusiasts. Video gaming, kids' parties, corporate team building, all-nighters, social activities and more.

Esports Plaza is a place for esports enthusiasts on the island of Malta. The regular internet connection is not well-established and lots of Maltese people do not have the facilities and equipment to play esports at a high level. However, there is a huge interest in playing esports together and participating in events.

Esports Plaza is located in the city area of Tigné Sliema, just north of the capital Valetta. The centre is stationed in a very popular city mall with thousands of visitors every month. This brings a wide variety of audiences to the centre. Esports Plaza adapts to this situation with the pricing, products and services. You can purchase game time on Desktop PC's or consoles and that has become popular among tourists as well as locals.

The centre from Malta hosts various events and activities - one of their key successful esports is hybrid events. Where people play online and qualify for an offline event. With these events, there are hundreds of gamers signed up, and there is only one place for a limited amount for the grand finals. [10] [11]

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[10] Malcolm Saleed, CEO of Esports Plaze
[11] https://esportsplaza.com.mt/ - June, 2023

7.10. Békéscsabai E-sport Egyesület (Békéscsaba E-sport Association or BEE)

The association was created to discover talented young people in esports.

The association participates in the everyday life and the career of their esports players, managing their careers and contributing to their personal development. For them, not only must the right e-sport athlete show his talent in the given game, but he also must approach training and esports with humility and a desire to improve.

BEE owns their semi-professional teams in many games, including Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, League of Legends or Rainbow Six: Siege or VALORANT. Youth development also plays key importance in the everyday function of BEE, as the association has their own academy program. As an Academy member, players receive at least 2 trainings a week and teams are assembled based on their skills.

Even though the activity of BEE is remarkable; it can hardly be characterized as a grassroots esports – but a commercial approach within the development of players and people. With the active help of the Hungarian Esports Federation, BEE has become an active organization with more focus on grassroots perspectives. BEE is mainly local in the city of Békéscsaba. The tournaments in which they participate are generally nationwide. They travel all around Hungary (and even to Indonesia for the IeSF World Championship in Bali, Indonesia in 2022) to promote their activities. The player development in their community is central for them, but as a community, BEE is not personal as players live all around Hungary (and even abroad).

Overall, one can assure that the activities of BEE are a state-of-the-art approach to community building, creating a professional gaming environment and being a key stakeholder in Hungarian esports. [12]

> **FACT BOX**
> 1. Founded in 2020, under the COVID-era
> 2. Semi-professional e-sports team
> 3. Has their own academy team

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[12] https://bcsesport.hu/ - June 2023

7.11. JUNIOR Esports

JUNIOR Esport is an educational and technological esports project for pupils, schools and educational centres throughout Spain previously known as IESports promoting education, learning and personal development both inside and outside the classroom through esports. The project is aimed at students between 12 and 18 and teachers, always accompanied by their teachers to create a controlled and safe environment. One of the main objectives is to teach students to make responsible and controlled use of video games.

The young people can compete in the first official video game competition between schools and educational centres in Spain. GGTech Entertainment supports the winning competitors with a prize pool for the digitization of classrooms, providing technological material valued at 20.000 €.

Besides the competitions their fundamental objective, is to promote and contribute to the dissemination of a series of values among young people, both in the online and real world. To do this, they selected 16 values that they consider important to apply in daily life. Some of these values are respect, diversity, sportsmanship, commitment, and friendship. Through integration, inclusion and diversity, they want to break the generation gap between students, teachers and parents and to strengthen the bond between teachers and students looking for new formulas and increasing commitment.

In addition, they offer educational projects for pupils and teachers throughout the school year such as the "Talent Awards", "Learn with Gaming" educational webinars, "Fortnite Creative" or the "Fancast" contest.

In the five seasons carried out so far, JUNIOR Esports has had the participation of more than 1,700 schools and educational centres, more than 2,000 teachers and more than 6,000 students from all over the country.[13]

FACT BOX

+ 1,700 Educational Centres

+ 6,000 Students

+ 2,000 teachers responsible for the activity

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[13] https://junioresports.es/ - June 2023

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Country specific mapping amongst project partners:

DGI, Denmark

Play-eS-HanseSPIEL e.V., Germany

H2O eSports Campus, Netherlands

Viken Sport Region, Norway

Hungarian eSport Federation, Hungary

For case studies:

Fritzen, Martin: Development consultant, Sørby Esports

Pedersen, Arild: Founder and leader of Mysen E-sport Arena

Gjestad, Ole Martin: CEO of KRED

Besombes, Nicolas: Assistant Professor, Université Paris Cité, Former VP France Esports

Felgendreher, Leon: managing director of the eSport Association Schleswig-Holstein

Kuil, Sjaak: H2O Esports Campus

Websites:

Sverok: https://sverok.se/om-oss/

British Esports: https://britishesports.org/about-us/

Sørby Esport: https://sorby-esport.dk/om-soerby-esport/

Békéscsabai E-sport Egyesület: https://bcsesport.hu/

JUNIOR Esports: https://junioresports.es/

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