EUROPEAN GRASSROOTS *ESPORTS*

Conceptual Models and Dimensions of Grassroots esports

Table of contents

1.0 Executive Summary

Children and young people participate in esports in many ways and esports activities and initiatives are organised very differently across the world. The purpose of this project is to enable local sports clubs and schools to reach out to young esports practitioners and gamers and include them in value-driven communities. Communities that provide them with a chance to meet, play and learn how to live balanced and physically active lifestyles as well as provide the know-how to future leaders on *"how to promote grassroots esports"* identified as a "third" way between commercialized esports and the individual gaming culture.

In this report, the main purpose is to identify and outline different conceptual models and dimensions of grassroots esports and to give perspectives on how to promote grassroots esports where the focus is solely on participating, socializing, and enjoying esports- and gaming activities.

Five different approaches to organising esports- and gaming have been described as well as their contribution to grassroots esports. In addition, three models are presented to provide additional understanding and inspiration on how to start up a grassroots esports club or other initiatives where people can meet and share their passion for esports.

Finally, we provide perspectives towards the overall promotion as well as a glimpse into the potential future of grassroots esports.

2.0 Introduction and Context; the Mapping of Stakeholders and Practices

This report builds on findings and perspectives from a mapping of stakeholders and practices towards grassroots esports and serves as inspiration to readers with the intention to start new grassroot initiatives with esports as a driver towards reaching youth or creating new communities.

Going through different stakeholders it stands clear, that the esports sector is largely driven by commercial actors (publishers, event organisers, media, and sponsors), and that this has driven a surge of interest in the best teams and biggest tournaments. However, gaming and esports are to a certain degree individualised and home-based activities, whether as a player or spectator. Between these two approaches, many children and young people are engaged in activities organised by e.g., their local schools, online communities, and sports clubs.

Based on a mapping of stakeholders, we identified that esports and gaming can be organised within five different approaches, all contributing to the grassroots esports landscape in different ways:

1. The school-based approach where gaming or esports is a learning tool used to socialize and involve pupils or students.
2. The 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 making digital as well as social connections.
3. The sports club approach where gaming and esports are being organised within a club or team environment.
4. The cross-sector approach refers to cooperation between multiple organisations, industries, or sectors where esports and gaming is a part of reaching a goal or target group in society.
5. The commercial approach is a business- and profit-oriented way of promoting esports and gaming activities in general - often referring to a specific team or brand.

We will guide you through each of the five approaches and give insights to the diversity and different perspectives. In addition, we introduce three conceptual models to support future leaders in developing new grassroots esports initiatives.
- **People, Places, and Practices**: This framework helps in understanding the various aspects of grassroots esports, providing a comprehensive view of the subject.
- **How to Start Up a Grassroots Esports Club**: A quick guide to assist you in kickstarting your own project, offering practical advice and direction.
- **The Ethical Code of Conduct**: This framework establishes a set of strong values for the esports community, ensuring ethical practices and fostering a positive environment.

The intention is that this report proves interesting and serves as an inspiration for those engaged in leveraging esports as a tool to connect with youth and build new communities.

3.0 Categorisation of Approaches – Main Tendencies and Directions

Grassroots esports initiatives are seen within different approaches and have developed as a dynamic and diverse aspect of the esports landscape, adding new perspectives to the sector. These approaches and different categories of initiatives take various forms, but each contribute to the growth and development of grassroots esports in its own unique way.

To gain an understanding of the diverse nature of grassroots esports initiatives, five approaches have been identified during the mapping of stakeholders. These approaches serve as an overview as well as a framework to inspire, facilitate and organise different types of initiatives effectively in the future:

1) The school-based approach
2) The community approach
3) The sports club approach
4) The cross-sector approach
5) The commercial approach

Each of the five approaches is unique in the way it is promoting esports at the grassroots level, with specific stakeholders contributing their expertise, resources, and passion within their respective domains. By recognizing and embracing these diverse approaches, the esports ecosystem can continue to thrive and evolve, providing opportunities to those who want to promote esports "the grassroots way". We will dig into the different approaches but, firstly, we will share some general thoughts, when looking at the approaches.

It is important to note, that these five approaches are not necessarily parted from each other. Our mapping shows, that there are several overlaps within different stakeholders in terms of operating within the different approaches. Therefore, the approaches offer perspectives and inspiration to support and develop grassroots esports in general.

One main tendency in the field of esports is the ongoing perception of esports as an activity primarily suited for a selected few who aspire to reach elite levels. If the activity is based on a hierarchical, pyramidical and competitive mindset, the primary goal becomes establishing a structure that encourages early specialization and increased selection of players/individuals. While this mindset may produce high-performance athletes, it also has the unintended consequence of causing many young individuals to drop out of social communities during the process due to the unappealing nature of the competitive environment. This is something strongly related to the "peak-of-the-pyramid" known from traditional sports, and the thinking is somewhat affecting esports in its way to finding a place in the organisational structures.

Another trend, however, is to see esports as activities and possibilities for everyone, where individuals engage simply because they find it interesting and enjoyable. People are motivated by various reasons when participating in esports, and that should be embraced by various stakeholders to make sure, that especially children and young people can enjoy these activities in the environments they are a part of or might be a part of in the future.

We believe that European grassroots esports should promote inclusivity, a healthy lifestyle, quality, and ethics in its approach, as well as provide a safe and organised space for young people to play and develop personal as well as esports-specific skills. Grassroots esports is for *all* and not just for the few that want to be the best. That's why this project is a reality – to promote grassroots esports as activities for everyone and with strong values for the benefit of especially young people.
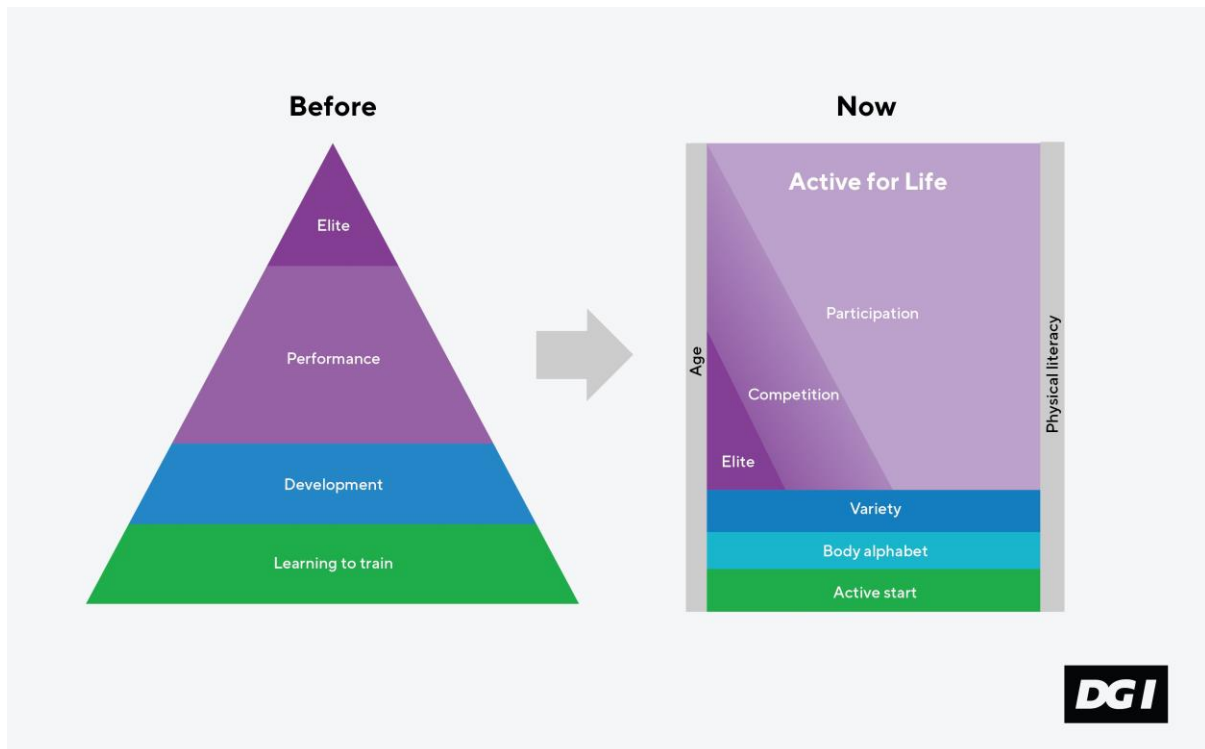
Figure 1: The Active for Life Long-Term Development rectangle (Based on the work by the Canadian Sport for Life).

The following sections outline five different approaches and how they are connected with the overall definition of grassroots esports:

Definition of European grassroots esports:

"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."

3.1 - #1 The School-Based Approach

Esports in schools and educational institutions are opening exciting opportunities for students. From primary schools to higher education institutions, esports is finding its place in the educational curriculum, sports programs, and recreational activities.

Some schools offer specialized esports courses that teach gaming tactics, teamwork, communication, and even the importance of healthy habits for gamers. It is not necessarily about the games and the game improvement; esports in school can also promote social activities and provides an innovative space for young individuals to connect and express themselves both digitally and in real life.

Imagine students creating esports school teams, forming working groups, and enjoying the thrill of esports alongside their regular studies. Or schools collaborating with local sports clubs, creating unique educational opportunities, and boosting student engagement.

The school-based approach is esports as a tool to create a feeling of community within the schooling system or to provide innovation within the curriculum. It is often driven by highly passionate teachers or leaders within the school and can include students and parents or other volunteers for the benefit of the initiative whether it is forming teams, planning events or, in general, supporting the movement.

While esports is still evolving as both a learning tool and as social or even sports-like activities, schools and educational institutions are testing, experimenting, and seeking best practices within this approach. If you are not working or participating in school or education, be aware that partnering with schools can be an essential step in engaging the youth and fostering a thriving grassroots esports initiative.

Esports as an activity in the school system is still a somewhat new phenomenon across a large range of countries. Therefore, it is likely that this approach develops a lot during the next decades with the evolution of different learning technologies including games, gamification tools and software in general and a new generation of people with a different view on learning, technology, games and even socializing.

3.2 – #2 The Community Approach

Online social networking plays a significant role in gaming and esports, attracting many individuals who engage in activities through online platforms (game clients etc.). These platforms serve as virtual meeting grounds for like-minded people to come together and participate in gaming. People connecting, starting a team or an organisation (clan, guild etc.) is a part of gaming and esports. It is simple and easy to do with your friends – and this is where most young people participate in esports. Gaming on a regular based with friends and social networks.

Community-based initiatives are built and driven from within (fans, players or like-minded) and are a wide-ranged category. It is built on connecting, practising, and belonging. Moreover, it is by far one of the most flexible ways to enjoy esports and gaming activities with others. It is embracing the nature within gaming and esports, where participation is not just about playing games but also about connecting with others, sharing experiences, forming teams or small as well as big organisations – and is by many characterized as the "real grassroots in esports".

It is incredible to witness across countries how people navigate and built social communities within the digital universe. Communities are formed every day and it is an easy way to start a movement. Normally it just takes one person to invite a couple of like-minded and go from there. Sometimes it grows bigger, sometimes it stays small. This is the beauty of the community approach.

3.3 – #3 The Sports Club Approach

Esports initiatives can be organised within traditional sports clubs – or esports clubs can be established in the same way as traditional sports clubs. Esports and gaming have over the years in some countries (especially Norway and Denmark) become a part of traditional sports clubs, alongside such activities as football, tennis, gymnastics etc.

In some countries sports clubs with esports operate on a non-profit basis, relying on the dedication of volunteers. These initiatives cater to various target groups, primarily children and young individuals who not only engage as players but also become members of a real club in a traditional way.

Sports clubs are typically structured within national federations or organisations and operate under the legal framework of governing civil organisations. However, in certain countries, esports may not be officially recognized or acknowledged on an equal footing with traditional sports. The recognition of esports as a legitimate activity varies across different nations. While some countries have embraced esports and integrated it into their sports federations and regulatory frameworks, others may still consider it an emerging or non-traditional form of activity or even subculture.

The grassroots esports approach in sports clubs is relatively uncommon across Europe – but the Sports club approach seems like a solid way of integrating gaming and esports activities into local communities where young people get a chance to meet, socialize and share their passion.

Later in this report, we present a couple of models, heavily inspired by the Nordic countries, to inspire you and give directions on how to start up a grassroots esports club.
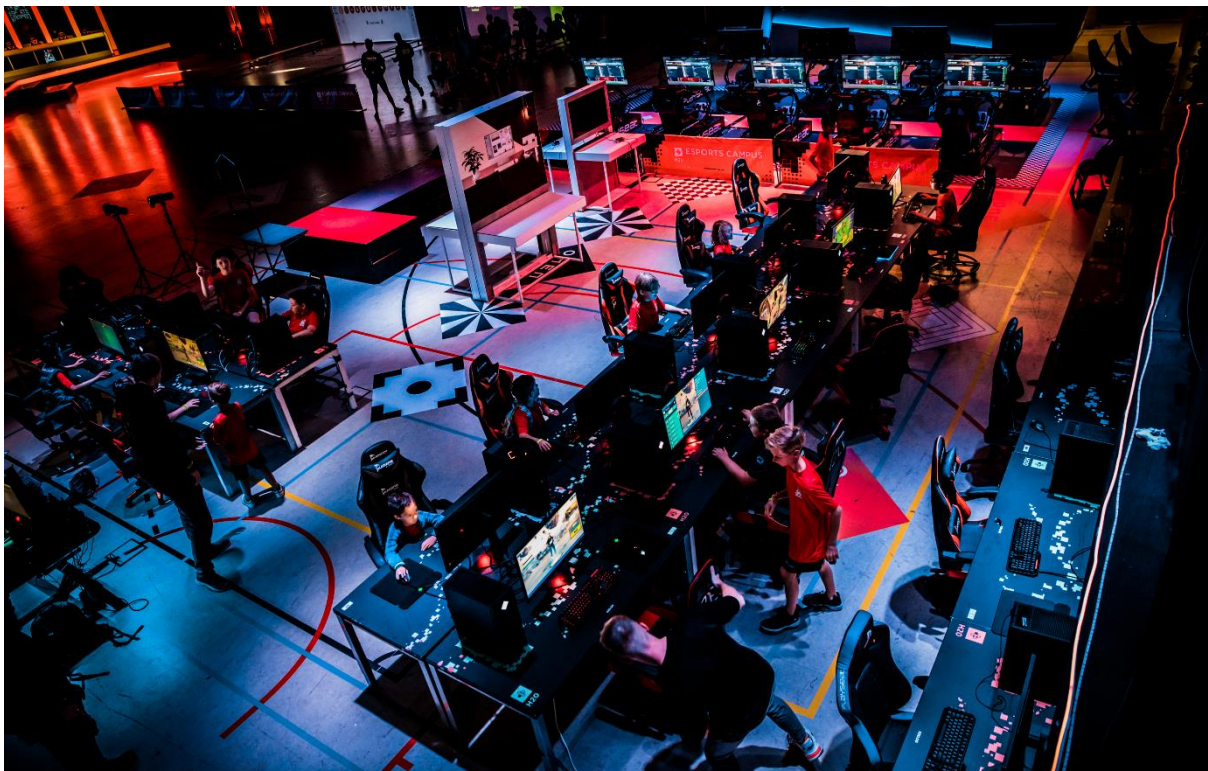
3.4 - #4 The Cross-Sector Approach

Cross-sector esports refers to collaborative efforts between multiple industries and sectors. Cross-sector initiatives are typically funded by the government or foundations. These initiatives aim to leverage the strengths and resources of different sectors, such as technology, entertainment, social, education, and business, to create meaningful activities for many different target groups.

Cross-sector esports initiatives can take various forms and involve partnerships between organisations, institutions, and individuals from different sectors. Some examples from the mapping include cross-sector initiatives where esports can be a tool to promote:

- Competencies within Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) through gaming and esports.
- Providing opportunities for children and young people facing mental health challenges.
- Social responsibility and thereby support within socially disadvantaged areas.

By bridging gaps between sectors, these collaborations aim to develop activities for specific target groups. The power of collaboration between different sectors, can address social challenges, support diverse target groups, and utilise esports as a tool for meaningful impact.

3.5 - #5 The Commercial Approach

There are professional players and teams, big tournaments with tens of thousands of spectators in large stadiums and event facilities, and millions of simultaneous online viewers. Prize money for the biggest tournaments is huge. Venture capitalists, businesses, brands, founders, and owners contribute their expertise, experience, and capital to create and sustain these organisations.

As a business, professional esports organisations often revolve around building a team and establishing a brand. These entities create new businesses by investing in players, coaches, managers, or other professionals to scale the business in additional directions. Their objective is often to compete in major tournaments, get media attention, sell merchandise, and secure sponsorships. This is typically the way commercial organisations work – however, it differs and develops. Some brands are also providing training for amateurs, hosting smaller events for the public, providing education, or cooperating with schools, municipalities, regions, or other sectors of society.

But how does a commercial approach even fit into the definition of grassroots esports? It does not entirely but there is still value in mentioning this way of promoting esports, as grassroots clubs and commercial actors can cooperate and even coexist for the benefit of each other's.

This approach is constantly evolving, as there is not yet a traditional way of building an esports brand. The commercial approach does unlock opportunities, that are hard to reach for

grassroots clubs. For example, commercially owned esports centres can be hosting grassroots events and training facilities for youth – or in general, pushing the understanding and best practices for the benefit of all involved in esports.

In addition, this project recognizes that not all countries have the same approach towards volunteers or democratic structure within sports clubs as Norway or Denmark. The commercial part can play a role in different settings, especially in countries where public funding towards grassroots esports initiatives is not yet a reality.

4.0 A Summary Assessment of Emerging Models

The five approaches presented above offer insights into various conceptual frameworks for esports in different sectors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the landscape. However, the approaches should not be seen as five separate initiatives, but rather five different ways of approaching esports and gaming activities – and can all serve value towards an understanding and promotion of grassroots esports.

In the following section, we will dig into some models, that provide additional understanding and inspiration on how to start up a grassroots esports club or other initiatives where people can meet and share their passion for esports.

We will present the following models:
- **People, Places and Practices** (a framework for understanding different aspects of grassroots esports)
- **How to Start Up a Grassroots Esports Club** (a quick guide to kickstart your project)
- **The Ethical Code of Conduct** (a framework providing strong values in esports)

All models are to a great extent inspired by DGI and their approach to grassroots esports in Denmark. We suggest that all three models can provide inspiration for future grassroots esports leaders and can serve as a European Grassroots Esports approach.

4.1 People, Places, and Practices

People, places, and practices are key factors when developing grassroots esports initiatives.

People refer to who is engaging in the activity and what are the motives for participating. Who is the target group for the initiative? Who do we want to attract to the activities? What is their motivation for participating?

Places refer to where the activity takes place and to what kind of culture exists in the local area. Every local area is influenced by the surroundings, the facilities available and the people who live there. Is the local area in a big city, a provincial city, or a rural area? Is it an area with rich people and a lot of resources or is it a marginalized residential area?

Practices refer to the approach of organising the activity and the participatory dynamics and culture in action. How do coaches facilitate the practice? What is the degree of involvement of the participants? What activities and exercises are trained?

The following sections will introduce various themes related to organising grassroots esports aiming to make your future initiative successful.
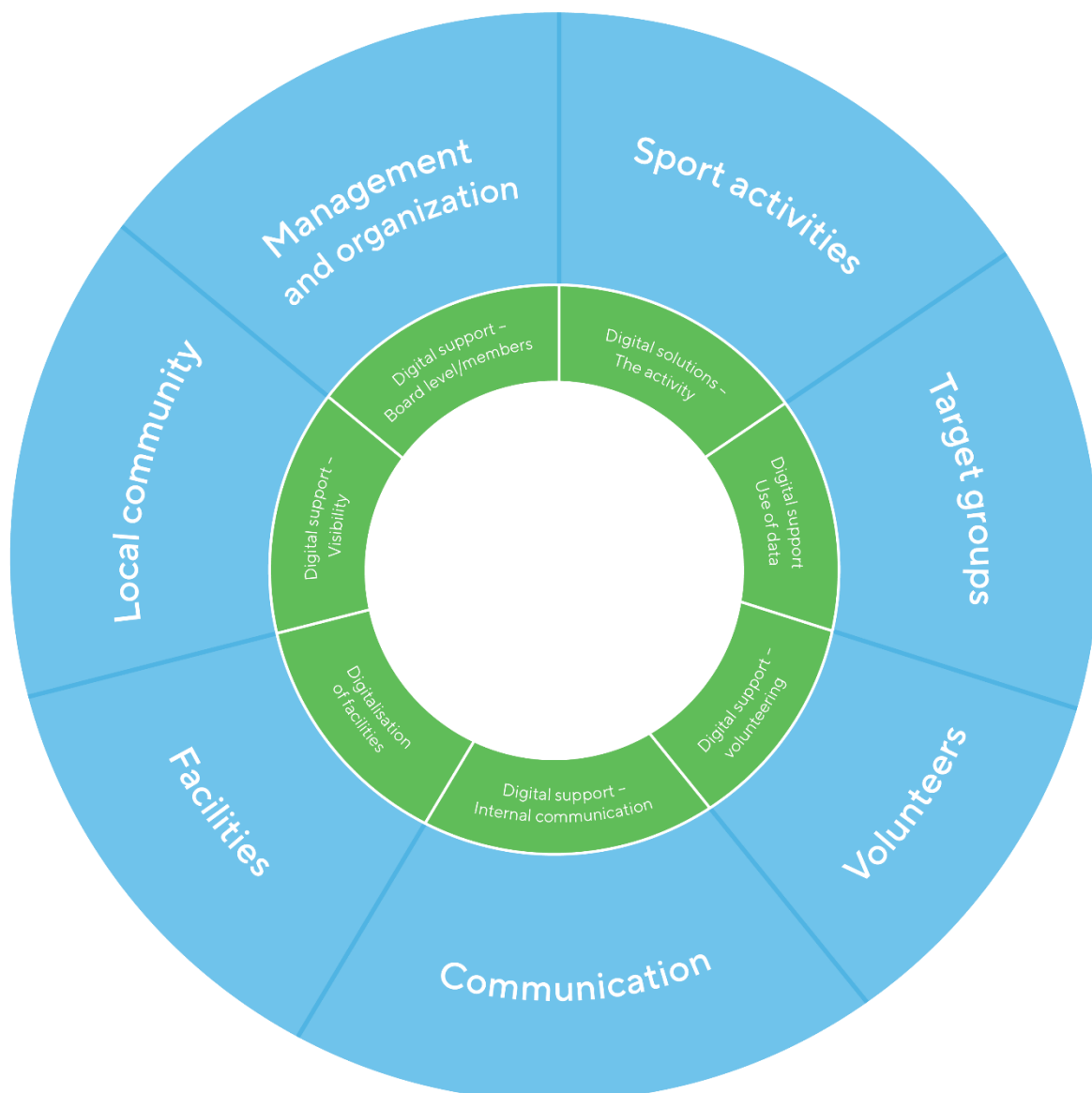
4.1.1 Target groups – Who Do We Attract?

Knowing your target group is one of the first steps in establishing a grassroots esports initiative. Firstly, age is not so important, but the life stage you have reached is. It reveals your choices and provides important insights into your motivations and prerequisites for participating in grassroots esports. The motivations and barriers for being active as a participant, member, or volunteer can vary widely depending on the life stage you are in.

- Who is the target group – Tweens? Teens? Students at high school or college?

- What activities are interesting for them?

- Are there special characteristics within the target group?

Secondly, participants in any activity have different needs and are motivated by various reasons. Some people are motivated by challenges, learning and development whereas others are motivated by the joy of being together with their friends.

It is important to develop motivating environments within any initiative (like a good club or school environment) and understand what motivates the participants. If the practitioners understand the participant's motives, it is more likely that fewer people will drop out of the activities because it is then possible for the practitioner to match the participants' motives with the focus of the activities.

- What do you know about the motivation of your target group?

- How can different activities in esports contribute to the different motivations? (Learning-, challenging-, socializing- or health-related motives of participation)

4.1.2 Volunteers

The volunteers, who are typically passionate individuals driven by their interest in gaming, play an important role. Many are willing to make a significant effort without needing payment for their work, while others expect to receive some form of compensation. Grassroots esports initiatives rely on the dedication and efforts of volunteers who can take different roles depending on the context. In an esports club, this could be organising, leading and coaching activities among other important roles. Without the involvement of volunteers, grassroots esports clubs and other important initiatives would cease to exist.

Volunteers are motivated by various factors such as necessity, influence, personal development, and social networks. All four of these reasons hold equal value. However, building strong relationships is the starting point for many volunteers because effective recruitment requires familiarity.

In every setting, there are both small and large tasks. In a local sports club, there could be tasks like baking cakes for small events, parent meetings, driving to matches, team leader duties, committee positions, or roles with significant responsibilities such as treasurer and chairman. This is depending on the approach and might be different in schools, commercial or cross-sector settings. However, for an initiative to be truly grassroots-oriented, volunteers must play

a central role in the overall development of the initiative as well as a democratic and participant-oriented approach to people.

Most grassroots esports clubs focus on a primary activity (like esports training or event organising), but it is also important to focus on how to recruit and attract volunteers. With a strategy for recruitment, the leaders of a club initiative can become more aware of the tasks and focus on the fact that there is always a need for passionate people to be a part of the club/community/initiative.

Use these four steps as a guide to shape your strategy for attracting volunteers for your initiative.

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1. Describe different tasks
It can be helpful to provide an overview by describing each task in the initiative, both big and small.

- What does the task entail and how much time does it require?

- When and what competencies should the person responsible for the task possess?

Once you have the overview and descriptions, it becomes easier to determine if some tasks can be divided among multiple individuals or if some should be consolidated and handled by a committee, team, or group.

This applies to daily or weekly tasks. The board of a club may also have plans, and perhaps even visions, to launch new initiatives. This could involve creating a new team, including a new target group in the association, or building something new.

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2. Who identifies and asks?
Typically, it is the leader's (the board's, steering committee's etc.) responsibility to identify and approach new volunteers. However, if you involve as many as possible, you have a much larger network to rely on. Therefore, everyone needs to know that they can also recommend potential candidates for roles such as organizers, instructors, coaches, and even future leaders.

Make it visible that it is okay to point out individuals with passion and skills in various areas so that the board or those in charge of recruitment become aware of the possibilities.

You can also ask others to identify and approach new volunteers. Here are some person types, that could be a part of a grassroots esports initiative:

- Instructors, coaches, and assistants
- Teachers, pedagogues, and educators
- Entrepreneurs
- Resource persons
- Parents
- Members

3. How open to new people are you really?

Signal openness and always leave room for one more. It is a good idea to invite openly, for example:

- Alongside the announcement of the activities
- On the website
- On social media
- On enrolment day
- In the welcome folder
- During the welcome on every specific occasion

Often, it is most effective to ask directly. This shows that you have thought about your goals and that you are interested in the individuals and their qualifications.

4. When is the right time to ask?

Find appropriate opportunities to deepen your understanding of members, parents and others you have a connection with. Pay attention to:

- Registration calls
- Parental presence
- Increased interest in esports
- Active engagement in esports

4.1.3 Local Area

To create a successful grassroots esports initiative it is relevant to gain knowledge and data about the local area to enhance cooperation between many local stakeholders – local schools, companies, municipalities etc. Working on a databased basis it is possible to exploit the potential of cooperation.

- Who are the local stakeholders?

- Are there other similar initiatives in the area?

- What are the demographics in the area?

- How does our club or grassroot initiative contribute to the local community?

4.1.4 Facilities – More Than Just Hardware

Most grassroots esports clubs are seeking physical facilities – and in general, grassroots esports is pushing towards the meeting of people. But facilities in esports are not just 10 computers in a closed basement. Your meeting place is the heart of the initiative. Ask yourself what the purpose of your facility is.

When done right, you can create an esports facility that encourages movement, comfort and focus. But you can also end up building an esports facility that promotes isolation, passivity, confinement, disruption, and limitations if you don't take your time and think about the needs of your target group.

Often the facility is a physical place where the activity is taking place, but the activity could take place in different types of settings or arenas - e.g., classrooms, sports facilities, cultural centres etc.

When most people hear the term "esports facility," they immediately think of the training room itself, with computers, screens, headsets etc. (like a typical "internet café"). However, the experience from more than 200 club-based initiatives in Denmark shows that creating a successful esports facility involves more than just the physical esports-training room.

While having a well-equipped esports training facility might be important, the significance of having an adjacent facility for the members is often underestimated.

- Where do members socialize before and after activities?
- Where do parents wait and chat during activities?
- Where do members engage in conversations with members from other teams?

When creating an esports facility it is important to consider the target group(s). What do they have in common and what do they prefer to do together and individually? Here are three different examples of esports facilities:

Create a cosy meeting place
Should you introduce fun and cosy games to your meeting place? Here are some examples, however, be creative and ask the members what they like to do, between activities.

- Consider having a VR machine with a "monthly high score" competition.
- Add a ping pong table for physical activity and energy release.
- Create a relaxed area for members to unwind and chat.
- Make the meeting place feel just like an extra living room where board games, Mario Party challenges, and casual conversations take place.

Create a professional meeting room
Having access to a meeting room is also important for a grassroots esports initiative. The teams and the leaders often need a space where they can have discussions without being disturbed or disturbing those who are doing activities or conversing in the facility.

A meeting room can also serve as a tactical space where an esports coach or teacher can present theory, strategy, and tactics without any distractions from the other screens. But it can

also serve as a space for leaders to discuss future initiatives – or even be used for external meetings when showing the facility to new people or partners.

A functional training facility

First and foremost, consider how many computer stations are necessary for your esports facility if you are providing training sessions. What games do you offer, and how many players are in a team for those games? Experience has shown that it is better to prioritize space and room for movement rather than just focusing on the number of computers installed.

Secondly, consider where you place the hardware in the room. Are the tables placed against the walls? Does the coach have a view of all computer screens at once? If the coach wants to show something on the projector, can all players easily turn and follow along from their positions? Can the coach easily see if everyone is keeping up?

If you place the tables along the walls, you create space in the middle of the room and have better options for dividing the computers if you want to play in-house matches or do short physical breaks during the training session. This is just an example as there is no definition of the perfect esports training room.
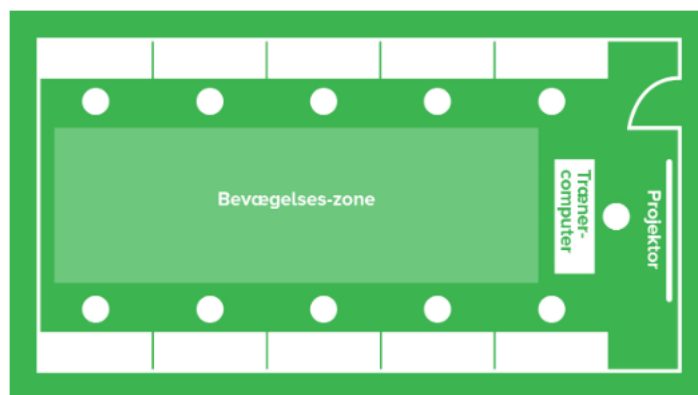
Thirdly, it is relevant to consider the light and indoor climate in the facility and try to keep your esports facility as bright and open as possible, with good ventilation and a reasonable room temperature. This can easily be underestimated but does a huge difference.

4.1.5 Equipment for Esports

It is different how well-equipped esports facilities are and it depends on what is possible within the facility and what resources are available. Do the participants bring their own devices (smartphone, console, computer, keyboard, mouse, headsets etc.) or are the devices available when they attend practice?

There are obviously tons of different answers to how the equipment should function, and what is necessary for different kinds of facilities. Before you throw yourself into investing in a huge equipment package, it is important to first clarify which equipment you really need.

Regarding software, it must be updated regularly to live up to the demands of the games and the participants. During major updates in games, you may encounter challenges if the download speed in your facility is not particularly high, and the facilitators have not had the opportunity to update the computers 1-2 hours before activities.

This can be avoided by installing scripts on the computers that turn them on, update specific games at designated times, and then shut them down again. There is different software available to help with issues like this.

4.1.6 Communication – Spread the Message of Your Initiative

Once the activities become a reality and you are ready to open your doors, it is time to kickstart your marketing efforts. You need to spread the message about your exciting offerings and activities. This topic is wide and could fill out a book itself so here the focus is on external digital and traditional marketing strategies.

Digital marketing
There are many different media and communication channels to choose from, but today, digital marketing is especially crucial and cannot be overlooked. This is particularly relevant when targeting the primary audience for esports initiatives. It is an audience that is familiar with navigating the online space and accustomed to having their information needs met through social media, blogs, and online news sites. Note that children and young people might get awareness through the parent, therefore, the focus is on the platform where they might be present. However, some of the examples below could also target the younger generations.

Examples could be:
- Social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Google marketing
- YouTube
- Website
- Email signature
- Newsletters (e.g., Mailchimp)
- Streaming (e.g., Twitch)

Traditional marketing
Although your target group might be a digital-oriented target audience, it is a good idea to combine digital marketing with more traditional marketing media and channels.

You can, for example, promote your initiative through:
- Advertisements in local newspapers
- Press releases to local media outlets
- Posters displayed in places frequented by your target audience, such as schools and educational institutions
- Flyers and postcards for distribution
- Networking
- Open events

If posters, flyers, and postcards are to have a real impact, it is important to do thorough groundwork. Research where your target group spends their time in the local area and ensure that your marketing materials are accessible and visible in those locations. It would be a waste of effort to hang materials in places like a swimming pool if your target group never visit it but instead spends time at the library, for example.

It is also a good idea to reach out to local media and try to establish a partnership. The local newspaper can be a valuable collaborator for you and serve as an effective channel for promoting your activities. Contact the local newspaper when something newsworthy happens and send a brief press release or an invitation to events. Often, the local newspaper is interested in sharing positive stories from the local community and the local association's life.

There are, of course, tons of different ways you can handle communication. The objective is to tell stories about the things you do and the people you do it for. And get people onboard to help you do so.

4.1.7 Organisation and Leadership

There are significant differences in how grassroots esports are practically managed depending on the mission and vision. Some associations like sports clubs have a board consisting of 5-9 individuals with different skills and responsibilities. Others may have fewer board members, requiring individuals to take on multiple tasks.

The board or the leadership of a grassroots esports club is ultimately responsible for the day-to-day operations of the initiative between general assemblies, including the finances and obligations to authorities and other partners.

Additionally, the tasks include motivating, communicating, involving, organising, and evaluating with the responsible parties in committees, teams, and other active roles, ensuring that the initiative becomes known for its positive contributions.

This might be different for a grassroots initiative in school; however, some tasks and roles might be relevant to consider. When starting a grassroots esports initiative here are some task-oriented roles often needed in esports clubs with a local facility:
- The board members (Chairman, vice-chairman, and treasurer)
- Club developers for the general development of the club
- Communicators for internal and external marketing
- Event managers for internal and external events
- Technical (IT) responsible for facility management
- Coach-coordinators for orchestrating activities
- Team leader - socially responsible

Note that the roles don't have to rely on one single person but can be a group or team working within each category. Also note that people usually find it interesting to work with esports, even as a volunteer.

4.1.8 Activities – What Types of Activities?

Development and training of skills related to esports is often a focus when gathering people in esports. However, there are several other elements to consider when hosting activities and gathering people. Things like social events, tournaments or physical activity can be some of the roads you can follow. Most established grassroots esports clubs provide weekly training

sessions and a variety of other social and physical activities. Here are four examples of different activities that might be relevant to consider but it is only the imagination that sets the limit.

Training sessions

Many established grassroots esports clubs are providing training sessions within different games online as well as together in an esports training room (we are focusing on the part where people are physically present). Well-organised training consists of some fundamental building blocks such as "play", "compete", "exercise", and "social activities". All elements should be present in each training session, but you are free to vary the emphasis on each building block and remember that different players are motivated by different types of blocks.

Try having an internal discussion with the participants about which building blocks you want to focus on and consider learning from traditional sporting activities is a great way to develop well-organised esports training sessions.

The following questions can help you reflect on the training:
- How is the balance between exercises, play, social, and competition in daily training?
- Why is the training composed in this way?
- What aspect does the coach feel most inclined to work on?
- Is there room for experimentation?

Tournaments

Tournaments are a great opportunity for the participants to compete against others and challenge themselves. You can host tournaments and organise them either as a separate activity or as an integrated part of a LAN event. You can choose to host an online tournament or a tournament where players need to be physically present.

Five tips for planning a tournament:
1. Involve people who are familiarized with the procedures for a tournament in the specific game.
2. Allocate sufficient time for planning.
3. Decide whether participants can win prizes or compete for the honour.
4. Allow enough time between matches to account for unforeseen challenges.
5. Choose a good tournament management tool to keep track of matches and results.

Bootcamps

A bootcamp is a training camp centred around esports, where participants can fully immerse themselves in their favourite game. Bootcamps should be fun, enjoyable, and educational, strengthening the friendship among participants.
Boot camping can be a nice way of getting members to know each other and tie them more together as teammates. It is also a good idea to think about activities "out of the server", so people really can get to know each other as persons rather than players.

Slow and Social Gaming

Some grassroots esports clubs and different projects offer "slow gaming" or "social gaming" which is aimed at a target group that places a high value on immersion and social interaction – often the younger target groups. The focal point of social gaming is particularly games based

on fantasy and storytelling, as well as games with a strong social aspect that manage to create cohesion and bring players together around common challenges.

Social gaming typically revolves around creative and social games rather than competitive games – but can basically be all kinds of games. The goal is usually to encourage players to immerse themselves, express their creativity, and take their time to explore and just have fun. For your organisation, project, or initiative offering social gaming can be advantageous as it attracts a different group of gamers than competitive esports. By introducing social gaming, you can also contribute to an inclusive organisational culture where there is room for everyone, and where not only results but also the social aspect takes high priority.

LAN

LAN stands for Local Area Network and is simply an event where participants play their favourite games and compete against each other. LAN events often attract many participants and are, therefore, frequently held in sports halls or other spacious venues. LAN events often include overnight stays, and participants typically bring their own computers and other equipment.

A LAN event does not have to solely focus on gaming and esports activities all the time; it can also incorporate other offerings and opportunities for the participants. Think creatively and consider the desires of the participants and the location where the event is being held. What activities are available there, and what would the participants find enjoyable? Perhaps, there is a bowling alley or a swimming pool adjacent to the rented venue that participants can make use of.

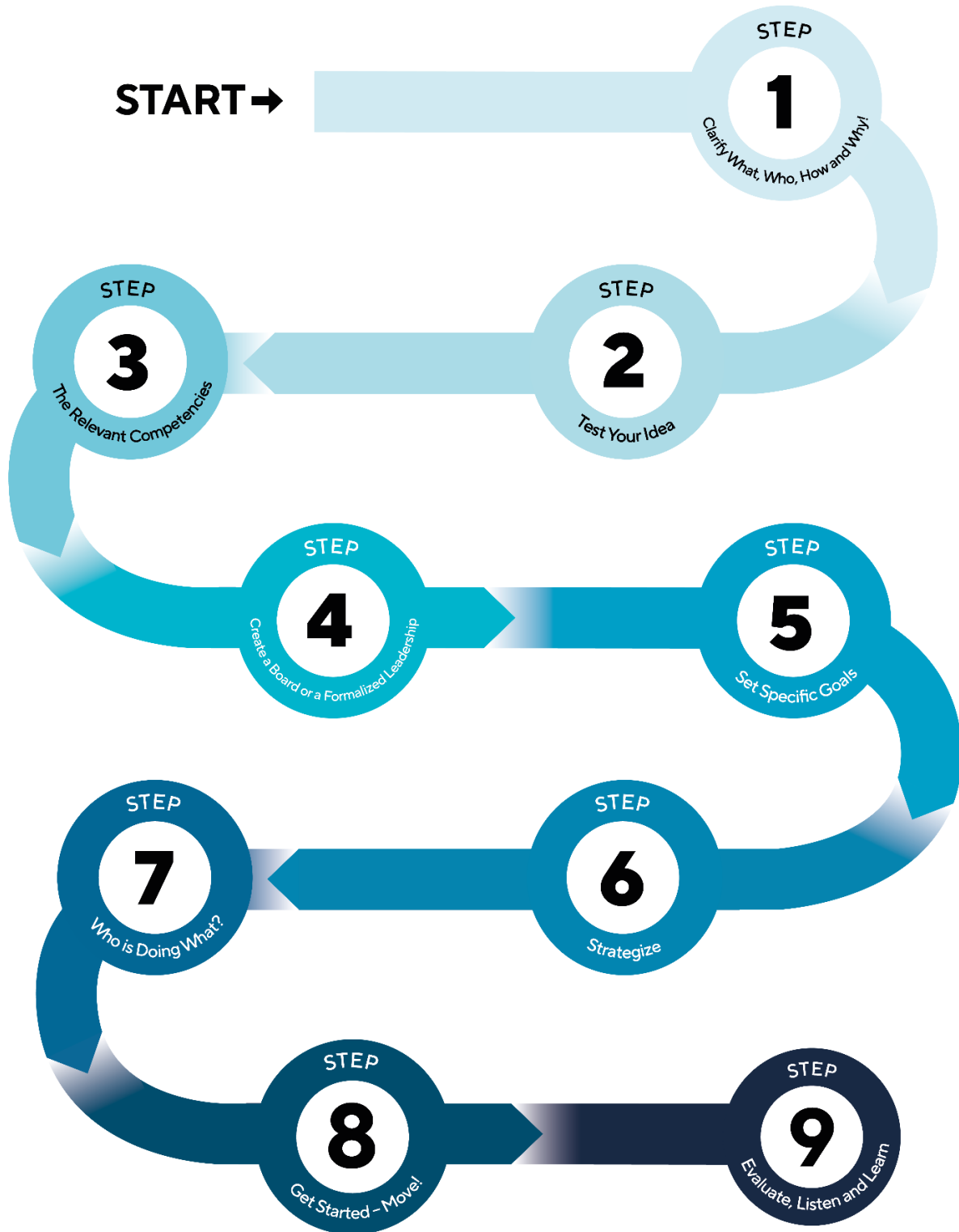## 4.2 Guide – How to Start Up a Grassroots Esports Club

Starting up a grassroots esports club can be a complex and challenging endeavour, requiring careful planning, strategic thinking, and a solid understanding of best practices within esports as well as involving people around a common goal. No matter where your grassroots club is based the key principles are essentially the same. This starts with an idea and great people who want to make a change with esports as the main tool for engaging people.

This guide aims to provide valuable insights and practical advice on how to navigate the intricate landscape of grassroots esports initiatives. It serves as a blueprint, offering a simple roadmap to start up your grassroots esports clubs or likewise. It is inspired by local grassroots sports clubs and esports associations in Denmark and Norway offering esports as a membership grassroots activity.

It is important to note that while this guide offers an example that might be valuable across different ways of promoting esports rather than just sports clubs or local associations, there are crucial dynamics within esports as well as diverse contextual differences across countries. What works for one type of initiative may not necessarily apply universally. Nevertheless, the principles and strategies outlined here serve as a strong starting point, allowing you to really think about your possible future within grassroots esports. The roadmap has been a framework for organisations promoting Grassroots esports and should easily be converted to other areas (school, cross-sector, commercial or communities in general).

Throughout the following nine sections, we will delve into the key aspects that contribute to the success of the grassroots esports club.

START →

STEP
1
Clarify What, Who, How and Why!

STEP
2
Test Your Idea

STEP
3
The Relevant Competencies

STEP
4
Create a Board or a Formalized Leadership

STEP
5
Set Specific Goals

STEP
6
Strategize

STEP
7
Who is Doing What?

STEP
8
Get Started – Move!

STEP
9
Evaluate, Listen and Learn

4.2.1 Clarify What, Who, How and Why!

Grassroots esports clubs and new initiatives, in general, are like any other startup activity or developing project. It requires time, resources, people, competencies, and finances. Before you get started, you should, therefore, address some of the following questions – begin with the why...

- Why do I want to start this initiative?
- What is the vision?
- What do we aim to achieve?
- Do I know others that can inspire me because they do something similar?
- Who can I involve in my idea?
- Is it based on gaming activities? (What games might the target group play?)
- Do I want to start a locally based club, online or hybrid?
- What location am I looking for?
- How do I involve competent people? (Volunteers, coaches, leaders etc.)
- How do I get funding, sponsors, and support?
- What tasks are involved?

In general, you want to type everything down and do a solid preparation, as these questions are some of the keys to a good starting phase.
Even in this early phase, it is important to involve people in your thoughts. This can be people who know about esports, but it does not have to be. A lot of successful grassroots esports clubs are formed by a mix of people with different competencies and experiences within and outside of esports.

4.2.2 Test Your Idea

Before you start realizing your plans, it is a good idea to investigate if there is an interest in the idea you are presenting. If you are already part of an organisation, you could consider discussing with the board/leaders, members, coaches, parents, and others that might have an opinion on what you are planning to start up. This is important to gain insight into whether there is support for your idea.

Gain an overview of who might potentially assist you in bringing the plans to life and collectively create a plan for how the idea can become a reality.

- If you are part of a sports club, set up a meeting with the club manager and board member. Starting a grassroots esports club or initiative within an existing sports club can be a good idea, as you have an existing community and platform to build upon. In addition, there might be great value in your idea, as sports clubs usually are interested in attracting new members.
- If you are not associated with a club, your idea might still be worth presenting to local sports clubs, as they might be looking for your exact idea.
- You can, of course, start your own esports club from scratch with no existing club or association. In this case, you might want to take extra time planning the starting phase, as everything will be new.

4.2.3 The Relevant Competencies

Knowledge and expertise within esports are crucial for the success of any grassroots esports initiative. It is, therefore, important that you connect with others who have knowledge about esports. They might also be interested in getting involved in the project as a coach, player, board member, event manager, or another role.

Start by asking your network and follow up with postings on social media, at the local school, library, or even in the supermarket if that is what it takes.
It is crucial to set the working team from the very beginning. List 10 people down that you want to do this with and the role you see them fulfil. If you do not know 10 people for this exact initiative, try asking others, who they know, that might be the right person.

It is important to notice, that relevant competencies are not only "knowledge about esports". As mentioned above, there is great value in getting different professions and experience into the project group/leadership/board.

Use the time to secure this step, and make sure to involve a lot of people. When the team is set, you can finally sit down and discuss the whole idea, as there will be valuable inputs and new ideas to strengthen the original plan of the initiative.

4.2.4 Create a Board or a Formalized Leadership

Once you have found a group of individuals who are interested in getting involved in your plans, you should establish a board, a steering committee, or another kind of formalized leadership. If you are already part of an existing organisation (sports club, school etc.), this should be done in collaboration with the main board or existing leaders. It is a good idea for the new board members to cover a wide range of skills, such as sponsorship, project management, finance, and other relevant areas (again – more than just knowledge about esports is necessary).

The role of the board or steering committee is to further develop your idea and create a strategy for the ongoing work. Schedule an initial meeting where the new board members can freely contribute ideas to the project. The meeting should particularly focus on:

- What do we want to achieve, and why?
- Who is our primary target group?
- Which partners do we need to have?
- What is our timeline?

If you start a grassroots esports club, you might want to discuss the different aspects within the "People, Places and Practices" model. Especially regarding activities, target groups, volunteers, communication, and facility/equipment.

The decisions made at the first meetings should serve as guidelines for the project in the future.

4.2.5 Set Specific Goals

If you have come this far in the guide, you are good going. However, you need specific goals to make sure, you and your fellow leaders have something to achieve. Goals will help drive the project forward and ensure that all involved parties are moving in the same direction.

Here are some examples of goals from a grassroots esports club in the startup phase:

We want to...
- Provide training in xx game(s) by xx date.
- Provide a location with xx equipment by xx date.
- Recruit xx number of coaches for xx game(s) by xx date.
- Have xx number of members by xx date.
- Generate sponsorship revenue of xx by xx date.
- Have an active website and social media platform by xx date.
- Send xx players to xx events xx times this year.
- Host xx number of our own events this year.

Setting goals is easy – contributing to the goals is the hard part. We will touch on this in the following steps.

4.2.6 Strategize

Once you have defined the goals you want to achieve, you should develop a strategy for how to reach each goal. A strategy is a long-term plan for your work and provides specific answers on how to approach the task.

Based on the question in the last step, here are some questions that can help strategize your goals:
- How do we select the games in which members should train?
- How do we find coaches for specific games?
- How do we finance the project?
- How do we find sponsors?
- How do we acquire facilities and equipment?
- How do we market ourselves and tell stories about our club?
- How do we secure an increase in members?
- How do we plan esports events?
- How do we plan to attend other events?
- How will we collaborate with schools, companies, municipalities, regions, parents, and others?

For every goal, there is a "how". This phase takes time, but will help you find out, how you are going to work towards the goals you've set.

4.2.7 Who is Doing What?

When you have collectively defined how you will achieve your goals, you should allocate tasks and responsibilities. To ensure progress in the project, everyone must know who is doing what and when.

Plan with tasks and deadlines so there is no doubt about the distribution of work and everyone's role.

Again, based on the same questions before, the plan could answer the questions like:
- Who is responsible for establishing xx sponsor agreements before xx date?
- Who is responsible for finding xx coaches for xx games before xx date?
- Who will establish cooperation/meetings with, for example, schools, the municipality, and regions before xx date?
- Who is responsible for creating a website, social media profile, and marketing before xx date?
- Who will arrange for venues, equipment, and clothing before xx date?

To be able to allocate tasks and responsibilities is crucial – and here, you will find yourself being a part of a real working group that depends on each other to reach the goals you've set together.

One good piece of advice is to start with easy tasks as it can give a feeling of progress. Do not be afraid to make mistakes but make sure you learn, adjust, and involve the right people to ensure you are on the right path.

4.2.8 Get Started – Move!

The plan is ready. You have competent people with you. Goals are set. Tasks are given and some of them are already done! Good job!

Now the exciting work of bringing the visions to life begins. However, when you truly kickstart the plans, it is important that you still take the time to listen and talk to many people who have an interest in or are involved in the project. You might find yourself talking to a lot of people, as many stakeholders (municipalities, regions, schools, companies etc.) usually are interested in esports – and some might even want to support you.

Haste makes waste and it pays off to do the work thoroughly, both when organising and planning activities, collaborating with coaches, leaders, and board members, and entering contracts or partnerships.

At this point, you should have a functional working leadership (board or steering committee) – starting to gain members, volunteers, sponsors, and a lot of interested people (parents, schools) that wish to collaborate. Your initiative starts to provide activities (training, events, camps) for people – and you may find yourself revisiting the strategy to adjust.

4.2.9 Evaluate, Listen and Learn

As time and the project progresses, you will undoubtedly gain a range of experiences about what works and what does not. Therefore, it is a good idea to hold regular meetings, possibly once a month, and continually evaluate in the group of leaders.
- What can we do better?
- What can be improved?
- Can we do something different to achieve our goals?

For example, maybe you have found out that hosting events does not work for you at this point – then do not do it. Maybe members do not want to play the games that were selected for the activities – adjust and find out what they want. Maybe your way of organising tasks does not work as intended – get together and make a new strategy.

Focus on what makes a real difference for your club and the development of its members and the people involved. Especially the members are an integral part of their everyday lives and can contribute with valuable and constructive input on how to improve.

Listen, learn, and adjust – it pays off.

4.3 Ethical Code of Conduct

Within esports and especially grassroots esports, there are various ethical problems and integrity challenges to address, such as health issues, betting, gambling, and age restrictions. As promoters of grassroots esports initiatives, it is crucial to address these problems seriously. As an example, the major Danish stakeholders for youth and esports engagement have developed an "Ethical code of conduct" for the work of local esports clubs as well as for organisations or associations in general (see an inserted picture of the code). This code of conduct focus on health, responsible consumption, strong goals, no gambling, event responsibility and fair play. Sweden has similarly formulated an "Esports Code of Conduct (Sverok, 2016) which also outlines ethics for players, support for parents, tips for organisers and more to ensure a strong set of values within communities in esports.

We will highlight 5 topics that are relevant to understand and follow when starting a grassroots esports initiative no matter if the approach is club-, school-, cross-sector-, community- or even commercial-based. The topics serve as clear guidelines and should be followed by everyone leading, organising, or participating in esports.

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(1) Physical and mental health

Nutrition, physical activity, rest, and well-being are important factors in maintaining mental clarity as a player and a human being in general. As esports and gaming, in general, are subject to different health-related issues, it is important for stakeholders to address that:

- Sleep and healthy eating habits are important to ensure focus and energy to perform well in school or at work.
- Children and young people should maintain a consistent sleep schedule to ensure that their gaming habits do not negatively impact their social and academic lives.
- Esports and gaming activities should be combined with physical exercise or an active lifestyle.
- It is crucial to prioritize overall well-being and foster positive communities.

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(2) Fairplay

The foundation for the spirit of grassroots esports is a safe inclusive environment. Esports and gaming are tied to the digital universe with different challenges such as cheating, toxicity etc. Therefore, it is important for stakeholders to address that:

- Cheating is a no-go.
- Doping is illegal.
- Illegal behaviour should not be tolerated.
- Toxic language does not have any place.
- Esports should be inclusive.
- Discrimination is unacceptable.
- Fair play should be a core part of any esports community.

(3) Alcohol, drugs, and energy drinks

Embracing grassroots esports with responsibility. Thereby, taking a clear position towards drugs and unhealthy consumption. Therefore, it is important to address that:

- Narcotic substances are prohibited.
- Alcohol and nicotine products have no place in grassroots esports
- Children and young people under the legal age should not consume energy drinks.
- Energy drinks should only be consumed in moderation.

(4) Gambling

Esports without gambling. Every stakeholder in esports should be aware of problems within gambling and should address that:

- Children and young people under the legal age are not allowed to gamble.
- Gambling has no place in grassroots esports clubs
- Skin betting is illegal and should not occur in esports.
- Leaders, coaches, teachers, and adults, in general, must not encourage gambling.
- Leaders, coaches, teachers, and adults, in general, should address gambling as a problem.

(5) Tournament and event organizers

The ethical code of conduct serves as a framework and a set of values within our definition of grassroots esports.

With the Ethical Code of Conduct, we would also like to highlight one stakeholder – tournament and event organizers. We believe that especially event-organizers should adhere to the ethical code of conduct and create a plan for how it should function in practice, as they are gathering a lot of people to experience esports and should thereby show responsibility and awareness that they highly influence the culture within grassroots esports.

In addition, we strongly encourage all esports clubs, associations, and different stakeholders to embrace and adhere to the values of the Ethical Code of Conduct. We recommend taking a position on how you relate to the ethical code of conduct so that children and young people involved experience that it is possible to engage in esports in a safe and healthy environment with strong values.

The following 6 topics can be directly used within any grassroots esports club or school to show responsibility and the fact that you care about the people involved.

Esports Ethical Code of Conduct

EUROPEAN GRASSROOTS ESPORTS

We have strong goals!

- We want to create positive communities.
- We focus on health and well-being.
- We aim to develop individuals.
- We desire a responsible development of esports.

We are healthy!

- We sleep sufficiently and eat healthily to maintain the necessary focus and energy.
- We engage in esports in balance with a social and professional life.
- We train in esports and supplement it with physical activity.

We are responsible!

- We strongly oppose the use of drugs
- We support that individuals under the legal drinking age should not consume alcohol.
- We support that individuals under the legal age should not use nicotine products.
- We support that individuals under the legal age should avoid consuming energy drinks.

No gambling!

- We support that individuals under the legal age should not engage in gambling activities.
- We want no skin betting in esports.
- We strive to aid and support players who encounter gambling-related issues.

We have a responsibility when participating in or hosting events!

- We have a special responsibility as promoters of esports.
- We always have a plan for how event management should work in practice (including nutrition, safety, sponsors, etc.).
- We pay special attention to participants under the age of 18, ensuring their well-being when hosting events.

We are committed to fair play!

- We do not cheat.
- We do not tolerate doping.
- We do not tolerate illegal behaviour.
- We exhibit sportsmanship and always speak respectfully to and about others.
- We embrace inclusivity - any form of discrimination is unacceptable.

5.0 Strategies for Grassroots Esports: Platforms and Drivers

Based on the five approaches provided, the following strategies along with suitable platforms and drivers should serve as inspiration to promote Grassroots Esports in different environments and to engage different stakeholders, provide growth opportunities, and create a supportive ecosystem for grassroots esports development across Europe. Each approach can have overlapping strategies and platforms, and it is important to tailor them to specific (regional) contexts, resources, and target groups. Additionally, leveraging multiple approaches in combination can enhance the overall promotion of grassroots esports.

Generally, to develop grassroots esports across Europe among organisations and leaders of different initiatives:

- **Knowledge sharing:** Organise conferences, workshops, or webinars where national/international grassroots esports stakeholders can share their experiences, challenges, and best practices.

- **Recognition and support:** Collaborate with organisations, industry associations, and policymakers to raise awareness about the importance of grassroots esports and lobby for funding and infrastructure support at national and European levels.

- **International collaborations:** Encourage cross-border partnerships and initiatives that promote cultural exchange, international events, and collaboration between grassroots esports communities across Europe.

- **Better infrastructure:** Support the establishment of esports hubs, gaming centres, and educational and training facilities that provide accessible spaces for grassroots esports activities paving the way for different communities.

- **Diversity and inclusion:** Ensure that grassroots esports initiatives actively promote diversity, gender equality, and inclusivity by organising events, initiatives, and awareness campaigns that create a welcoming and supportive environment for all participants.

Promotion of School-based initiatives

- **Strategy:** Engage pupils, teachers, and school administrators, collaborate with schools, educational institutions, and educators to incorporate esports into extracurricular activities and the curriculum, organise tournaments, and create gaming clubs, teams, or other initiatives within schools. Partner with education boards and work with local education authorities to gain support and recognition for esports initiatives in schools. But most importantly involve parents, guardians and the school environment and educate them about the benefits of esports/play in terms of skill development, teamwork, and digital literacy, and encourage their participation and support.

- **Platforms:** Utilise school websites, social media groups, and educational platforms to promote esports initiatives.

- **Drivers:** Pupils, passionate teachers, school administrators, and student ambassadors who advocate for esports in schools.

Promotion of Community-based initiatives

- **Strategy:** Foster online communities and establish dedicated online platforms, forums or social media groups where like-minded individuals can connect, share experiences, and form teams, organisations, or even events. Encourage community members to participate in or organise small-scale tournaments and (local) events at gaming cafes, community centres, or other accessible venues. Partner with content creators (e.g., streamers), brands and personalities who can promote the initiatives and engage their network.

- **Platforms:** Use social media platforms, gaming forums, and dedicated community websites to facilitate networking and collaboration.

- **Drivers:** Community leaders, streamers, influencers, passionate gamers, and brands.

Promotion of Sports club initiatives

- **Strategy:** Collaborate with existing sports clubs to integrate esports activities alongside traditional sports or establish esports activities into existing sports clubs, providing opportunities and a structured environment for young people to engage in esports activities. Help organisations in conducting workshops or knowledge-sharing for sports club administrators to help them understand the benefits and logistics of incorporating esports into their club activities.

- Help is needed, in terms of providing resources, and support, and offering guidance to sports clubs looking to establish esports activities, including equipment, training facilities, and technical assistance.

- **Platforms:** Sports club websites, social media pages, and local community platforms can be used to promote the integration of esports into sports clubs.

- **Drivers:** Sports club organisers, volunteers, and local community leaders who recognize the potential of esports to engage and connect with youth.

Promotion of Cross-sector initiatives

- **Strategy:** Collaborate with different sectors such as technology, education, youth development or social services to create impactful grassroots esports initiatives targeting specific groups or addressing social challenges. Engage with governmental bodies, foundations and brands that support initiatives related to those topics to secure funding and resources for grassroots esports initiatives. Work with schools,

colleges, and universities to integrate esports into STEM programs, organise esports activities as part of educational events, or provide mentorship opportunities for students interested in the gaming industry. Identify organisations focused on mental health, social inclusion, or other social causes and develop initiatives within esports that align with those objectives.

- **Platforms:** Engage with relevant government organisations, foundations, and sector-specific platforms to showcase the cross-sector benefits of esports.

- **Drivers:** Cross-sector partnerships, government initiatives, media and foundations that provide funding and support for innovative esports projects.

Promotion of Commercial-based initiatives

- **Strategy:** Build and forge partnerships with professional esports organisations, brands, commercial esports centres, and event organisers to create a commercial ecosystem that leverages their resources, expertise, and network for the benefit of grassroots initiatives. Engage brands to promote engagement with grassroots esports and encourage local businesses to support grassroots esports through sponsorships, hosting events, or providing resources like gaming equipment, venues and more.

- **Platforms:** Use esports-specific websites, social media channels, and industry events to establish a strong brand presence and attract sponsors.

- **Drivers:** Business owners, brands, and commercial esports organisations that invest in grassroots initiatives, provide training/event opportunities, and support the development of the "third way of esports".

6.0 Scenarios for the Future Development of Grassroots esports

In this future scenario, grassroots esports in Europe has grown in popularity as well as in support, establishing itself as a recognized and valued part of mainstream culture, education, and sports. It has become a "new way of esports" with strong values and a growing focus on participation within established schools, sports clubs and other communities where young people meet and has overall influenced the general understanding of esports.

Esports is fully integrated into educational institutions across Europe, from primary schools to universities. Esports courses and programs are offered, allowing students to develop not only gaming skills, but also teamwork, creativity, communication, and digital literacy. Educational institutions actively support and encourage the formation of local esports clubs and side-activities activities based on technology and gaming experiences. Esports has become a legitimate extracurricular activity, valued, and respected alongside traditional sports.

Sports clubs expand their offerings to include esports as well as new grassroots esports clubs are being established, attracting a diverse range of participants, and providing activities for young people. They prioritize physical activity, inclusivity, diversity, and overall wellbeing, fostering an environment that is welcoming to all participants, regardless of background, gender, or skill level.

Grassroots esports initiatives receive substantial funding and resources from governments, foundations, and commercial entities, leading to the establishment of dedicated and innovative esports facilities. Esports organisations and brands actively collaborate with grassroots esports clubs and schools, providing sponsorship opportunities, development, and new pathways for young people.

Grassroots esports initiatives, led by volunteers and community leaders, get support from national associations and federations providing education, collaboration, and networking to strengthen the grassroots esports community by welcoming new clubs and new people to this international movement.

Strategic partnerships are formed to support the sustainability and growth of democratic value- and community-driven esports initiatives and to create a holistic ecosystem for grassroots esports.

This scenario provides a glimpse into potential futures for grassroots esports. The actual trajectory of grassroots esports will likely be influenced by a combination of factors, including societal attitudes, technological advancements, funding opportunities, and the collective actions of individuals passionate about the growth and sustainability of esports at the grassroots level.

In contrast, without a supportive governance structure, esports might direct itself towards self-organised and business-driven initiatives. The esports sector is expected to increase within professionalization and continue to grow as a market. As more stakeholders become involved, the esports industry risk becoming even more fragmented. This is why grassroots esports emerges as an alternative "third way".

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