

eSport and Governing Bodies

– An outline for a research project and preliminary results

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Introduction

Sport in different forms plays an important role in every culture, both in the past, and in the present.¹ The most dominant form of this in contemporary societies – modern competitive sport – emerged in the symbiosis of the western industrialism. According to Norbert Elias, the development of modern competitive sports is also linked to the civilizing process – from crude, vulgar games to the civilized modern sport.² The traditional definition of modern sport involve that it is a physical, competitive and institutionalised activity. Furthermore, sport is characterised by both, a scientific world view³ (standardised rules, measurement of time, height and length etc.), and an ethos, constituted by notions of *fair play* and equal conditions, competitively. Besides, the view of modern sport is that it is beneficial providing better physical and psychological health, integration in various ways and internalisation of good societal values. Organised sport is, in addition, seen as an important socialisation arena where adults are given the possibility to effect children's social-, physiological and psychological development in a positive way. In contrast to this positive view we have seen deviant behaviour like doping and different cheating, exclusion, hooliganism within sport. Overall and despite some deviance, sport is in general regarded as something that contributes to society. In Sweden, as in probably most countries, organised sports are supported financially by the state and by adults who recommend children to be involved in sport. The legitimacy of sport is, in general, strong.

The phenomenon of competitive computer gaming, called eSport, is in some aspects challenging the modern and hegemonic sport.⁴ Computer gaming is, in contrast to

¹ Guttman. *Sports: The First Five Millennia*.

² Elias and Dunning. *Quest for Excitement*.

³ Guttman. *From Ritual to Record*.

⁴ There are no reliable data about exactly how many people there are, playing computer games; probably hundreds of millions worldwide. See, Danielsson, "E-sport: rörelse utan rörelse"; Ungdomsstyrelsen. *New game: Om unga och datorspel*.

involvement in organised sports, not a fully accepted leisure activity and parents and adults do not encourage and support the activity in the same manner.⁵ On the contrary, computer gaming is presented, in newspaper and other media, as an activity which confronts more wholesome activities like doing homework, being physically active, and socializing with friends.⁶ The oppositional views of computer gaming as something “bad” and sport as something “good” makes it very interesting to study the phenomenon of eSport.

Furthermore, in line with Huizinga’s contemplation, modern sport can be described as a cultural phenomenon that has emerged, derived and developed from play.⁷ Play is, in some way, related to something that children and young people do, not grown-ups. Nevertheless, within organized sports adults still have the opportunity to play, but in an accepted manner without being accused of being childish.⁸ Sport governing bodies have played an essential role in the process to form “childish” games into the accepted modern sport as we see it today.⁹ Furthermore, the governing bodies are important role when it comes to the development of a sport – the continual standardization and rule- and norm setting.¹⁰ Competitive computer gaming is, in correspondence to this development, in the process to becoming less childish and more alike modern sport than just play. At an international level, eSport is either recognized or accepted as a sport but in over 60 countries around the world, especially in Asian countries, eSport have got some recognition by being encouraged financially by the state.¹¹ As well as within modern sports the governing bodies within eSport play a significant role in the development to becoming accepted and recognized, this calls for an analysis.

In this light, the aim of this paper is to outline a research project with the aim to describe, discuss and analyze the concept of eSport in relation to modern sport with a special focus on the role of governing bodies. In detail, the aim with the research project is to answer the following three questions:

⁵ Brun. *När livet blir ett spel*.

⁶ Jansz and Martens, ”Gaming at a LAN Event: The Social Context of Playing Video Games”.

⁷ Huizinga. *Homo Ludens*.

⁸ Caillois *Man, Play and Games*; Sutton-Smith. *The Ambiguity of Play*.

⁹ Hoye and Cuskelly. *Sport Governance*.

¹⁰ Pfister, ”Sportification, power, and control: Ski-jumping as a case study”.

¹¹ Müller-Lietzkow, Bouncken and Seufert. *Gegenwart und Zukunft der Computer- und Videospielindustrie in Deutschland*.

- 1) How is the concept of eSport defined within the eSport milieu?
- 2) Who govern eSport and what are their purposes and aims?
- 3) Does eSport, besides the name, relate to the concept of modern sport? And if so, how?

Method

The study has a qualitative and explorative approach because of the nature of aims and research questions. In qualitative studies the operationalisation is rather described by the way the researcher collects the data than by the process of breaking down theoretical concepts.¹² In this part a description of the study follows. A qualitative content analysis of Wikipedia and websites of eSport governing bodies is used to fulfill the aims and research questions.

The purpose of using Wikipedia is two folded, the first is of course to find information about eSport and the second one is to identify governing bodies within eSport. Wikipedia is an open and free encyclopedia where anyone with access to the website has the opportunity to write and comment articles without undergoing a formal peer-review process.¹³ Furthermore, Wikipedia have today approximately 235 different language editions which are active.¹⁴ Due to the fact that anyone can write an article and there is no formal review of it, the reliability can be questioned. On the other hand, everyone who has access to the article can comment or change the article, so in that respect the articles always are under an ongoing informal review. One way, in addition, to increase the reliability is to search within different language editions about the same theme and check the references and internal-/external links presented in the articles. Furthermore, the information can be contrasted with other sources.

In order to find information about the concept of eSport different search words have been used such as electronic sport, e-sport, esport, pro gaming, cybersport, competitive computer gaming. Seventeen language editions had an article about “eSport” but with different headlines. For examples, in Russian the word “Cybersport”, in Korean “E-sport” and in Spanish “Deporte electronico” was used as headline for a article. These articles (except the

¹² Neuman. *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*.

¹³ Source: Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>

¹⁴ Ibid.

English edition) were translated via Google Translate to English and all articles were saved as pdf-documents. The same procedure was conducted with relevant references and internal-/external links in the articles. Through Wikipedia the following eSport governing bodies was identified: International e-Sport Federation (IeSF), eSport Verband Österreich (Austria), Belgian Electronic Sports Federation (Belgium), E-sport Denmark (Denmark), Deutscher eSport Bund (Germany), Nederlandse Electronic Sport Bond (Netherlands), Swiss E-sport Federation (Switzerland), Korea e-Sports Association (South Korea), Taiwan eSports League (Taiwan), eSports Vietnam (Vietnam) and associations from UK, Japan, Bulgaria and China.¹⁵ Other cooperation's and organizations which govern eSport was found but the abovementioned was outlined as such and therefore selected for this study.

To find and identify the websites of the eSport associations a search via Google (besides external links at Wikipedia) was conducted and every one (except IeSF and Japan) was found. The websites of e.Sports Vietnam and Bulgaria Federation of Electronic Sports was under construction and thereby not fully available. Two of the available websites was written in English and the others were not. Google was used to translate the non-understandable languages (Vietnamese, German, Korean and Dutch) to English.

Before continuing with a description of the data processing some accounts about the use of Google Translate as a tool is in its place. The tool is a statistical machine-translator in which is developed by a research group at Google.¹⁶ With help of Google Translate you can translate both segments of text and websites.¹⁷ When translating websites with large amount of text and/or long text-segments some information was limited. Furthermore, because it is a statistical machine-translator, one word with multiple-explanations or with a language-specific meaning can be translated wrong in the context or not be translated at all. Although the bias you can understand the core of the text or website if you are familiar with the context. My standpoint is that it's better to use Google Translator than to limit the selection to English-, Swedish- and Danish written websites of the outlined eSport governing bodies.

¹⁵ Source: Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UKeSA>

¹⁶ Source: Google, http://www.google.com/intl/en/help/faq_translation.html

¹⁷ Ibid.

The content and structures of websites are in different to other forms of written text and evoke methodological issues when researchers conduct an analysis.¹⁸ In contrast to a novel websites contains not only by written text and pictures but sounds, animations, movie clips, interactive elements and links to other websites as well. Furthermore, the structure is not linear as in a novel where the reader usually begins with reading the first page and finishing with the last. Website can, in simplicity be defined as, “a group of related web pages, produced by one person, group or organization, which are closely interlinked”.¹⁹ This means that a websites consist of several documents linked together at one “place” and the reader orientate among them by clicking. Readers can thereby both start and finish in a different manner. How the websites are used depends on the reader’s interest and aim with the visit. An eSport gamer maybe wants to read about the upcoming event which is arranged by the eSport governing body, read news or interact with other gamers. A sport researcher, like me, is in contrast more interested of the description of eSport and the presence of sport elements.

The data, Wikipedia including references and external links and websites of eSport governing bodies, was processed by a qualitative content analysis. May describes this method with the following:

In the process, the analyst picks out what is relevant for analysis and pieces it together to create tendencies, sequences, patterns and orders. The process of deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction breaks down many of the assumptions dear to quantitative analysts.²⁰

The first step was to assess the authenticity and credibility, representativeness and currency of the websites by asking and answering questions like: Who is behind the website? To whom does the website turn to and in what respect? When was the website updated? After the first step the content of the websites an analysis will be conducted in order to answer the three abovementioned research questions. To answer the questions about how the concept of eSport is defined and the purposes and aims of eSport governing bodies the written text on

¹⁸ Svenningsson, Lövheim, and Bergquist, *Att fånga nätet: Kvalitativa metoder för Internetforskning*.

¹⁹ Gauntlett, *Rewiring media studies for the digital age*.

²⁰ May, *Social research: Issues, methods and process*, p. 173.

Wikipedia and the websites was up for an analysis. In contrast, when it comes to the third question, how eSport relate to the concept of sport other accessible forms of text (besides written) such as video clips and pictures were used.

The empirical findings, so far, are presented in a sum-up of the texts meaning and text quotations and imbedded in the description, discussion and analysis of eSport.

eSport and its relation to modern sport

So far eSport has been defined as competitive computer gaming. The core of the definition is the same when looking at articles in different editions at Wikipedia and websites of national eSport associations.²¹ This indicates a consensus within the eSport milieu or it might be people from the associations who write the articles on Wikipedia. Competition through computer- and videogames stands out as the general definition. In addition, the different articles on Wikipedia and text on the websites described the history, content and concept of eSport. A brief presentation of this information is in its place.

A Brief Presentation of eSport²²

The origin of eSports is said to heavily rely on the launching of the worldwide web (www) in 1989, and on the early 90s software and hardware technologies with network and multiplayer functions. In the early 90s, the history of eSport started and it became more and more popular during this decade and the number of players has increased considerably.

The most popular genres within eSport are first-person-shooter (FPS), real-time strategy (RTS) and sports game. In FPS-games, the player control an avatar; the virtual representation in the game. The virtual environment of the game is approached from the perspective of the avatar. The only thing visible of the avatar on the screen is the hands and the weapons they handle. In contrast, in RTS-games the player control a whole army, which are seen from a “bird perspective” and the games include combat in different ways. One of the most popular FPS-game is Counter strike and its counterpart in RTS-game is Star Craft. In sport-games, naturally, traditional (or modern) sports are simulated. A popular title is the FIFA football series. eSports is always about defeating other contestants, by either destroying them, or, as in sport games, just

²¹ See, all articles at Wikipedia and websites of eSport governing body.

²² Jonasson and Thiborg, “Electronic Sports and its impact on Future sport”.

race the fastest, or score the most goals. Over time the number of different games in which competitions are held has increased and it is still increasing. The competitions are carried out over Internet or through so called Local Area Network (LAN). The most prestigious competitions are carried out in LAN where both smaller and larger amount of computers are linked together in one building.

eSports organisations like World Cyber Games (WCG), Electronic Sports World Cup (ESWC) and Electronic Sports League (ESL) in cooperation with corporations within the computer game industry, are arranging LAN-competitions at both a national and international level. The best eSport participants are earning money and some can make a living out of it. At a LAN-event held in Sweden in June 2008, the total amount of prize money was 200 thousand Swedish crowns (€ 2 000). The economic resources within eSport make it worthwhile for players to spend hours after hours on training and competing to get better. On Internet communities the players can train against other competitors via something called Ladder. Ladder is a system where players challenge others and the winner climbs higher on the ladder and the loser must climb down.

Today there are many eSport players, organizers, competitions (via LAN) and communities around the world.

Furthermore, eSport was described as a modern sport but with less physical demands and as an upcoming sport or as a new sport of today's society.²³ It can be argued that eSport fulfill the broad definition of modern sport as a physical, competitive and institutionalised activity. Wagner defines eSport as "an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies".²⁴ However, a problem of using definitions or characteristics of sport is that such classifications may well include or exclude too many activities. Nevertheless, inspired by George Dickies definition of art, Kutte Jönsson presents a solution, by asserting that "sport is what the sports 'world' (athletes, sport journalists, sport spectators etc) consider as sport"²⁵ (own translation). In

²³ See, Taiwan eSport League, <http://www.esports.com.tw>; Wikipedia, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-Sport>

²⁴ Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSports", p. 3.

²⁵ Jönsson. *Idrottsfilosofiska introduktioner*. p. 23.

some countries, such as Korea, China, Russia, Hungary and Denmark, eSport is considered as an official sport by the national “sports world”.²⁶

In contrast, International Olympic Committee, neither accept nor recognize eSport as a sport due to their standards.²⁷ This may well change in the future. But, in such case, a unified front in eSport is a major prerequisite. Actually, the plethora of organizations and communities in the field of eSports has to assemble in a united global organization, which then could proclaim and promote eSport as a sport in its own right. The development of national eSport governing bodies and the birth of the International e-Sport Federation is one step in this direction. By being a *sport* might make eSport legitimized and accepted in a larger extent. In that respect, national eSport associations as well as players get a higher social status and obtain bigger founding and sponsoring.

Purposes and aims of the national eSport associations

As mentioned before, the national eSport associations which were selected for this study was those outlined as governing bodies in the articles at Wikipedia. Due to this fact it is interesting to discuss if the selected associations per definition also are governing bodies. Governance can be defined as “the structures and processes used by an organization to develop its strategic goals and direction, monitor its performance against these goals and ensure that its board acts in the best interest of the members”.²⁸ Does the selected national eSport associations stands for governance within eSport? The question is hard to answer due to the analyst data but one answer is that they aim to do it. On the websites the purpose of the associations are clarified.

All the selected eSport associations worked on a national level and their first priority was to govern eSport in their own country. The description of purposes and aims differed. The purposes and aims can be divided into two categories, external and internal. External refers to purposes and aims in which involve organizations and people outside the eSport milieu and the internal was directed to people and organization within the milieu.

²⁶ Ungdomsstyrelsen. *New game: Om unga och datorspel*.

²⁷ See, http://www.olympic.org/uk/sports/recognized/index_uk.asp.

²⁸ Hoye and Cuskelly. *Sport Governance*.

To begin with the latter one, there were manifold of internal purposes and aims. Although the diversity I will present a general view. Overall, the main aim is to unify the nations eSport. United Kingdom eSports Association describe the need of a unifying body within eSport and they outline a general purpose of the governing body.

Due to the sustained and widespread growth in eSports, together with the launch of National organisations across the globe, there is a need for a unifying body in the United Kingdom that acts in the interests of all aspects of eSports, through developing and protecting principles that promote a safer and good gaming climate.²⁹

In some respect, the general purpose is significant for most of the national eSport associations but in what way to obtain it and ambition varied. Belgian Electronic Sports Federation (BESF) mainly support and help tournament organizations and gamers by informing about the laws and guidelines set by the Belgian Government.³⁰ Furthermore, they arrange a tour with sanctioned competition in which the members can participate in.³¹ Although, the efforts of the association the players seems to not participate. In contrast to BESF, Korea e-Sport Association provides the members with multiple support and services.³² Besides arranging competition they support the gamers with facilities, an e-Sports stadium with a museum and infrastructure for competitions and training. Furthermore, they arrange seminars, symposiums and exhibitions, upheld a norm- and rule setting, register pro gamers and organize national teams' etcetera. Korea e-Sport Association is the strongest and most advanced governing body within eSport and can be compared with national associations within modern sport. Most of the national eSport associations is in the range between the examples of BESF and Korea e-Sport Association when it comes to development, although, the latter one function as a role-model.

The external purposes and aims can be traced to be involving spreading information about and promoting eSport. In some extent, all of the national eSport governing associations

²⁹ United Kingdom eSports Association, <http://www.ukesa.co.uk/content/structure>

³⁰ Belgian Electronic Sport Federation, <http://www.besf.be/index.php?module=content§ion=contact>

³¹ Belgian Electronic Sport Federation, http://www.besf.be/index.php?module=content§ion=tour0607_q1

³² Korea e-Sport Association, <http://www.e-sports.or.kr/>

had an aim of making eSport legitimized and accepted. The objective of the Deutscher eSport-Bund is a good example of external purposes and aims.

*The objective of promoting eSports is to establish it in the public perception. Creating clear structures is necessary to make eSports transparent and interesting to outsiders and to make it interesting for investors. eSports has become an important social and cultural instrument of the youth and because of that it needs to be recognized by the public, media and industry.*³³

In abovementioned quotation the aim to be accepted as a sport is not explicit declared but when reading other texts on the website it's obvious an aim. Almost at every website of the national eSport association it is declared, in some extent, that they aim to make eSport accepted and legitimized as a sport.

To sum up

In this paper an outline for a research project and preliminary results has been presented. Some methodological considerations about using Wikipedia and websites as sources have been up for discussion. Furthermore, the concept of eSport has briefly been described followed by a discussion about its relation to modern sport. General purposes and aims of national eSport associations have been spotted. Further analysis of the sources needs to be conducted, especially when it comes to answering the third research question.

The national eSport associations' purposes and aims are related to governance within eSport, how big impact they have on eSport and its development is hard to appreciate at the time. Many of the associations was started recent and it was first 2008 the International e-Sport Federation was created to organize the national association. Furthermore, in this paper the question about the support of players and other organizations has not been discussed. The support of players and other established organization is essential. Further research to answer this question must be conducted.

³³ Deutscher eSport Bund, http://esb.geetac.de/cache/filedb/esb_Facts_ENGL.pdf

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