E-SPORTS IN OLYMPIC GAMES: A GLOBAL TREND AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract: *The high popularity of Esports in recent years has turned many researchers into investigating this phenomenon. This article attempts to summarize what Esports are and if they can fit into the realm of sports. Besides, it investigates the main legal issues about Esports and whether Esports can be recognized as Olympic Sports. It seems that Esports meet several of the dimensions that confirm whether one sport is a real sport or not. Such dimensions are the element of game and competition, the development of motor and cognitive abilities among players. Moreover, there is a contradiction that claims that Esports are highly dependent on technology. To prevent these difficulties from being a constraint, actions should be taken to globalize eSport through an International body which should address governance, regulation and development issues by focusing more on integrity issues (e.g. doping, cheating software), athlete protection issues (e.g. contracts), issues related to the rights of the game publishers. Due to the rapid evolution of Esports, it is likely to join the program of the upcoming Olympic Games. Necessary prerequisites for doing so are initially the unequivocal admission of arguments that Esports are sports, the resolution of governance issues and finally the creation of an International Federation under the IOC.*

Keywords: Esports, legal issues, Olympic Games

Introduction. What Esport is?

Esports or "electronic sports" is a relatively new field in the global industry. Its roots are coming from the early 1970s, where the first electronic gaming tournament is being held in the USA, with the annual subscription to Rolling Stone magazine. In the first decade of 2000, they were essentially based on the rapid spread of the Internet and its immediate access to it. Small-scale games unexpectedly led to massive global successes with millions of people daily. This is a new form of sports athletes who participate in via computer or videogame consoles[1]. Also, there is an offline mode (LAN) that means that the player is not connected to the internet during the game, such as Manager Career mode in FIFA, and online mode in which the gamers play over the internet with other

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1. Hamari Juho, Keronen Lauri (2017), "Why do people play games? A meta-analysis."

players from all over the world, such as League of Legends[2]). ESport Gaming is very popular mostly among Millennials (the generation born between 1980 and 2000). About 60% of the players are between the ages of 18 and 34, and almost 10% of Esports' friends are over 45. Esports are commonly used today in the genres of MMORPG, MOBA, Real-Time Strategy, Fighting, First-Person Shooters and Sports.

Most Esports tournaments are live but sometimes are conducted through online channels such as Twitch, and YouTube or TV channels (OnGameNet – OGN, and SPOTV). Not only players, coaches, referees, event planners, scouts, managers, public relations officers, but live spectators, on-line viewers and sponsors take part as well[3]. From the above, it springs that in large Esports events the focus on not only to players but also to spectators and audience too.[4]

In Greece, recent years Esports are developing rapidly and it is estimated that there are approximately 500.000 players in Greece who participate in championships. This number will increase in the coming years as the players are mainly teenagers and youngsters (https://www.insider.gr).

Is Esport a real sport?

Many sports science theorists have tried to give a complete definition of sports. There are, in fact, several approaches, some of the more complete and others less, but a universal definition has not been determined until now[5]. According to the Council of Europe "Sport includes all forms of competitive physical activity or games which, through casual or organized participation, aim to use, maintain or improve physical ability and skills while providing enjoyment to participants, and in some cases, entertainment for spectators" (https://en.wikipedia.org). From the above, the question that springs is whether Esports are real sports.

Sports can be analyzed based on some scientifically recognized dimensions and accordingly correlated with Esports. This approach can draw some safe conclusions. In particular, everyone recognizes that competition and the race to win under certain rules are an essential part of sports. In this dimension, sports appear to have similarities with Esports. It seems that in some cases that is a difference that is about the specific eSport goal because it is not unusual during a game the rules and goals not to be clear from the beginning and subject to change. For example, during an MMOG game, players have the right to create their own goals

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2. Zagała Kacper, Strzelecki Artur (2019), "Esports Evolution in Football Game Series"

3. Hilvert-Bruce Zorah, Neill James, Sjöblom, Max, Hamari, Juho (2018), "Social motivations of live-streaming viewer engagement on Twitch."

4. Zagała Kacper, Strzelecki Artur (2019), "Esports Evolution in Football Game Series"

5. Kane Daniel, Spradley Brandon (2017), "Recognizing Esports as a Sport."

or sub-goals, which can be different from the basic main goals of the game[6]. At that point, it would be useful to refer to the phenomenon of "modding" that refers to the modification of the computer/video game by the gamer himself, which separates traditional sports and Esports[7].

Another similarity between sports and Esports is the fact that athletes are trained systematically under the guidance of specialized coaches, and develop specific motor cognitive skills, such as perceptual skills, attention and concentration, hand-eye coordination, critical thinking, and under pressure fast decision making that relies on spatial memory. In both sports and Esports, there is a strong relationship between players' cognitive and in-game performance[8]. The third dimension concerns kinetic-physiological adaptations. Based on the definition given by Wagner[9], Esports is an "area of sport in which people developmental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies", physical abilities seem to be an essential component of Esports, as Esports require many types of body movements. Both sports and Esports have been shown to develop specific motor skills such as to increase cardiopulmonary function, fine motor skills, which in the case of Esports are mainly in fingers and hands, endurance, persistence, need of high energy consumption, as well as they are physically demanding.[10] Moreover, there are sports (e.g. chess, darts, and shooting) that lack physical activity elements[11].

An amateur eSport athlete has recreational features, the same as in the case of "classic" sports. Besides, spectators in both cases watch sports competitions mainly for entertainment and recreation[12]. On the other hand, involving in elite

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6. Van Hilvoorde Ivo, Pot Niek (2016), "Embodiment and fundamental motor skills in Esports"

7. Ansgar Thiel, Jannika John (2018). "Is eSport a 'real' sport? Reflections on the spread of virtual competitions"

8. Ansgar Thiel, Jannika John (2018). "Is eSport a 'real' sport? Reflections on the spread of virtual competitions", and Aung, Myat, Bonometti, Valerio, Drachen, Anders, Cowling, Peter, Kokkinakis, Vassileios, Yoder Christian, Wade Alexander (2018), "Predicting skill learning in a large, longitudinal moba dataset"

9. Wagner Michael (2006), "On the scientific relevance of eSport. In Proceedings of the 2006 International Conference on Internet Computing and Conference on Computer Game Development"

10. Kane Daniel, Spradley Brandon (2017), "Recognizing Esports as a Sport.", and Bratu Emilia (2018), "Why the 2018 Asian Games Is a Breakthrough for Esports."

11. Hallmann Kirstin, Giel Thomas (2018), "Esports – Competitive sports or recreational activity?", and Jenny Seth, Manning Douglas, Keiper Margaret, Olrich, Tracy (2016). "Virtual(ly) athletes: Where Esports fit within the definition of "sport"

12. Hallmann Kirstin, Giel Thomas (2018), "Esports – Competitive sports or recreational activity?"

and highly competitive eSport or sports competitions, this produces in both cases high levels of stress. When a computer or video gaming turns from a hobby to occupation and career in which gamers make a financial living, it potentially changes the motivations of gaming and the emotions of the participant, producing psychological and/or physiological stress[13].

On the other hand, some researchers argue that Esports are not sports. This position is based on the assumption that Esports are not sports because they are not entirely human, but they combine human participation with technology. Moreover, they lack direct physicality; there is no whole-body control, and so they cannot contribute to the development of the human as a whole. Also, the whole structure of the Esports which includes the production, the creation, and the ownership is not following the persisting institutions' characteristics of sports governance[14]. According to Abanazir[15], the main issue about recognizing or not Esports as real sports is the term 'institutionalization', by giving solutions in fundamental institutionalization problems and not falling into traps.

Legal issues in Esports

It seems that Esports meet several of the dimensions that confirm whether one sport is a real sport or not. Such dimensions are the element of game and competition, the existence of regulations, the intensive coaching and training, the presence of spectators, the development of motor and cognitive abilities among players, such as endurance, speed, persistence, perception, concentration, quick decision making, and the presence of stress before and during the games. On the other hand, there is a contradiction that claims that Esports is not completely human activity, but they are highly dependent on technology, which can potentially interfere with gaming processes[16]. To prevent difficulties from being a constraint to the further development of Esports, and the recognition of Esports as official sports, actions should be taken to globalize eSport through an International body/federation which should address governance, regulation and development issues. The institutional framework should take into account all the aspects relating to Esports, with emphasis on doping, gambling, match-fixing, cheating software, and delaying or even disabling an opponent. In these major issues, solutions should be given in ways that guarantee the reliability and validity of the games.

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13. Griffiths Mark (2017), "The psychosocial impact of professional gambling, professional video gaming & Esports.", and Leis Oliver, and Wendeborn Thomas (2019), "Stress in Esports - A Systematic Review."

14. Parry Jim (2018), "E-sports are Not Sports"

15. Abanazir Cem (2019), "Institutionalisation in E-Sports"

16. Papaloukas Marios (2019), "E-Sports Explosion: The Birth of Esports Law or merely a New Trend Driving Change in Traditional Sports Law?"

The Korean Esports Association (KeSPA) that established in 2000, is regarded as a pioneering structure internationally that has laid a solid foundation in the institutional framework of Esports. KeSPA tried successfully to improve the legitimacy of Esports by establishing a pro-gaming license system. As such every pro-gaming player has to acquire a proper license and be the owner of a registration number that uses every time he or she plays video games. The registration number protects young players under 16 years of age of abusive gaming (shutdown law) and makes all players more responsible for gaming ethics[17]. All these actions reinforce the social role of the state, which should protect citizens of all ages. Besides, KeSPA regulates Esports tournaments and in collaboration with the game, publishers provide a license to TV channels.

Moreover, Esports athletes should be recognized as athletes by gaining the benefits and protections that all traditional athletes have. Most important athlete protection issues are employment contracts, player salaries, job security, and special visas[18].

Since Esports have recently entered the sports industry, there is no single governance structure. The publishers of the games play a key role in organizing the tournaments as they have the right to manage the rules of their games because they own the copyrights.

However, as the global federations of traditional sports are primarily concerned with governing a sport, in the case of publishers their interest is focused on sales because eSport is not their sole business and pursuit. From the above, it springs that publishers can do their job properly, but they put us in thoughts because they have different aspirations and philosophies in contrast with traditional sports. Another issue with great importance is gambling. Only one company, in particular Riot Games, a leading game company, which among others is the publisher of the famous game LOL, ensures that professional players do not bet. This action has not been achieved by other publishers. Besides, the two existing international bodies do not seem to be able to resolve the major issues that are plaguing the Esports ecosystem so far[19]. Certainly issues of legitimacy have also been raised in federations such as the FIFA with the recent corruption scandal and the FIA with the increased accidents in motorsports. In both cases, however, serious steps are being taken to resolve these problems[20]. Although there is no

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17. Ozkurt Emin (2019), "Esports in South Korea- a short overview of the legal ecosystem."

18. Star Shaun, Bakshi Nirav (2019), "The growth of Esports in India- a short review of the main legal and regulatory challenges.", and Ozkurt Emin (2019), "Esports in South Korea- a short overview of the legal ecosystem."

19. Joost, K. (2019). "Esports Governance and its Failures."

20. Joost, K. (2019). "Esports Governance and its Failures.", and Barretto Lawrence, Renck-

Global Sports Organization (GSO) like the traditional sport's standards, efforts have been made by other bodies to meet the needs of this lack. Specifically, in the case of Esports, there are two major bodies. The International e-Sports Federation (IeSf), that was founded in 2008 and started with only nine members. Currently, 46 members of national Esports federations are under the umbrella of IeSf. IeSf's structure is not much different from traditional GSO's. The most important activities of IeSf are the host of international tournaments, the set of strict regulations, and the effort to attract new members. Unfortunately, the nature of Esports differentiates in comparison with traditional sports because major eSport events are not national ones. Besides, from the 46 national federations, it appears that only the Chinese and the Koreans systematically cooperate with IeSf, as the respective governments are positive about this cooperation[21]. It follows from the foregoing that the task of this federation, due to its particularities, is difficult.

The second body is the World Esports Association (WESA) that was founded in 2016 by the ESL game organization and eight more game organizations. According to the website of WESA, the vision is "to create an authentic framework to support and enhance the sustainable development of Esports, based on shared values of fairness, transparency, and integrity that are shared between players, teams, and leagues"[22]. WESA has so far not shown any significant progress and has been criticized for the choices that were made. Nevertheless, in 2017 WESA has adopted regulations that may be very useful in the future, such as rules for better professionalizing Esports and rules to ensure that all organizations are operating on the same level playing field[23].

The electronic games market in Greece is regulated alongside with the gambling games, and both are under the supervision of the Hellenic Gaming Commission, According to law 4002/11, technical-entertaining games are only allowed for entertainment, and it is forbidden for the players to receive any financial profits. Electronic games are a category of technical-entertaining games, which provide hardware and software[24].

Esports in the Olympic Games.

There is a big dilemma of whether Esports should be in the Olympics or not. Both sides provide different arguments. All those who agree with the

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en Dieter (2017), "Halo Set for 2018 Introduction after Strategy Group Meeting." and FIA

21. www.ie-sf.org

22. Http: //www.wesa.gg/

23. Lewis Richard (2017), "Can WESA Stamp out Multi-Team Ownership.", and http://www.wesa.gg/

24. https://www.e-nomothesia.gr

statement that Esports can be included in Olympics support that Esports are real sports because they meet basic requirements such as stamina, mental skills, strategy, hand-eye coordination, etc. Also, Esports are more popular than many other traditional sports are, and finally, the Olympics need renewal and modernization and this has been shown by the integration of sports such as BMX, tae kwon do, and mountain biking in recent years. On the other hand, others support that Esports isn't a real sport because it doesn't involve movement and physical exertion like running, jumping, swimming, and sweat. Moreover, Olympic sports shouldn't rely on technology and computers. Finally, in case that Esports are accepted in the Olympics, many other "mind sports" such as chess and bridge that are already included in the International Olympic Committee's list of recognized sports, will seek to join the Olympics. The IOC's list of sports can be featured in future Olympic Games, but this is not necessary[25].

The International Esports Federation's (IeSF) goal is Esports to be recognized as official sports by important sports international bodies, such as the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), which is the most influential sports organization in the Olympics. For this reason, IeSF strives to become a member of the IAAF. It seems that this decision is probably not too far off considering the point of the view of IAAF spokesman Chris Turner who stated "Representatives from both sports are put under immense pressure to consistently perform at the highest level on an international stage, more than anything, e-sports demands fitness of the mind for players to cope with lengthy practice sessions. As the [organization for the] number one Olympic sport, the IAAF believes that fitness of the mind is a quality that any top athlete can relate to, but we also recognize the importance of physical fitness to enhance a competitor's mental strength" taking into account that Esports are taking more recognition year by year[26].

Moreover, INTEL, an American multinational corporation, and technology company, is moving in this direction as well, by organizing the Intel World Open Esports Tournament, which will be a leading event of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2021. IOC via Kit McConnell, Sports Director, supports that the Olympic Movement will learn from this event and continue engaging with the Esports community from around the world[27]. About INTEL's involvement in the Tokyo 2021 Olympics, we might need to keep in mind that the same company has al-

25. Stefani Raymond. (2017), "E-sports, mind sports and the Olympics: What is a sport, anyway?"

26. Ruch John (2015), "Olympic Games: E-Sport Inch Closer to Becoming an Olympic Sport."

27. Martinello Eva (2019), "Intel World Open brings Esports to 2020 Summer Olympics."

ready a big presence in the 2021 Olympics, as it brings a 3D athlete tracking, a 5G network and a drone light show[28].

Epilogue.

Although, it is not surprising that eSport is not accepted as an official sport since the general public does not know a lot about eSport. Besides most eSport games are almost inaccessible, as participants should be familiar with computers and consoles, and have an advanced understanding of the game to compete.

The Esports industry is relatively new and it will take time to receive public acceptance similar to the process of traditional sports such as Basketball. To conclude, there is a widespread belief that if eSport continues growing at the current rate, they can even bypass traditional sports.

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