



**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS** FOR THE NORDIC COUNTRIES  
BASED ON NORDIC ESPORTS RESEARCH



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Esports has become a significant part of contemporary culture and especially young people's lives.

Unlike traditional sports, esports are owned and largely driven by international commercial companies, for which it is important that national decision-makers and stakeholders seriously involve esports in their local discussions.

The societal opportunities offered by esports can only be redeemed if we:

- 1) recognize esports as a major aspect of youth media culture,
- 2) manage esports with clear awareness of both commercial and civic domains
- 3) rise to the challenge of countering bigotry, commercial exploitation, and health risks.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

This text is aimed to inform public debate around esports in contemporary society as well as (Nordic) policy, from National to municipal. It does not contain concrete recommendations such as proposals of law or policy, but rather a perspective that should be taken into consideration when drafting these.

## INTRODUCTION

This white paper is one of the outcomes of a series of three NOS-HS funded seminars organized by esports researchers at universities in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden with the participation of diverse stakeholders in esports, including civic society organizers, and owner of an esports team, the police, and members of the esports industry and community more broadly. The researchers are coming from disciplines like Culture, Health, Psychology, Sociology, and Game Design.

## CENTRAL ISSUES

Three central issues are important to consider in policy making and the public debate regarding esports in the Nordic countries.

- 1) Esports and competitive gaming is a major aspect of contemporary youth media culture

In terms of societal institutions, funding, and public discourse, esports is frequently positioned as a new culture with an indeterminate status. Nevertheless, today, esports has factually come to represent a major aspect of youth culture which is not sufficiently addressed by policy makers and institutions in the Nordic countries. Surveys across Nordic countries show that gaming is one of the most popular leisure activities among children and remains important throughout teenage years. Esports should thus be included in current and future efforts to support the growth of young people into healthy, informed, autonomous, and responsible adults.

- 2) Esports is both commercial gaming and participatory civic culture

Esports is most visible as the commercial edge of competition where professional players, as employees of international for-profit companies, compete for large prizes surrounded by media attention, advertisement, and increasingly sports-betting. The less visible side of esports is the broad, participatory, grass-roots civic culture where players come together in communities where they make culture with and for each other. They might create teams that play competitively, but such teams are typically not run as companies. This is indeed a characteristic of sports. In the same way as policies regulate traditional sports on both commercial and civic domains, respectively, so should policies that aim at regulating esports.

- 3) Esports involve the same opportunities and perils as traditional sports and should be addressed as such

Like traditional sports, esports offer young people a place to belong and to improve their competences in collaboration with others. This also means that we can learn from the past issues of traditional sports. Both esports and traditional sports cultures involve sub-segments with misogynist, racist, ableist, and other non-inclusive worldviews. Like traditional sports, esports have been intensely commercialized during recent years, leading to a range of ambiguous consequences such as questionable business models, player exploitation, the exposure of young people to sports betting, and related health risks. These issues should be part of public health and policy discussions and those of media literacy education.

## LIMITATIONS

Although efforts have been made to be inclusive, we emphasize that we do not represent all stakeholders; players at different levels of professionalization could for example be a relevant group to involve further. We are also not experts on public management. It will also be useful to continue long-term research and work with stakeholders, some of which the authors are currently engaged in. However, we believe that, within the limits that are outlined here, there are already meaningful perspectives that may serve as an invitation to an open and informed conversation.

Sincerely,

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