EUROPEAN GRASSROOTS ESPORTS

The Policy Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

The policy recommendations were developed in response to the growing significance of grassroots esports and its potential to serve as a powerful tool for community engagement, skill development, and economic growth. As esports gains traction, particularly among younger generations, it is essential to establish a framework that also supports its expansion and ensures that it contributes positively to society.

Grassroots esports goes beyond the competitive aspect of gaming. It encompasses community-driven activities that are accessible, inclusive, and aimed at fostering personal development and social interaction. By providing structured environments for amateur players to engage in organised gaming activities, grassroots esports promote essential life skills, including teamwork, strategic thinking, digital literacy, and effective communication. Additionally, it offers a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between digital and physical activities, encouraging a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

The recommendations are designed to support a variety of stakeholders, including:

- **Municipalities:** By investing in esports infrastructure and programs, municipalities can engage with their communities ways innovatively, promoting social inclusion, youth development, and local economic growth. Grassroots esports can also help bridge generational gaps and foster a sense of community.

- **Local Sports Clubs:** Integrating esports into traditional sports clubs can attract new members, engage youth who may not be interested in traditional sports, and diversify club activities. This can increase membership, sponsorship opportunities, and broader community outreach.

- **Educational Institutions:** Esports in schools and universities can enhance student engagement and learning by incorporating digital skills and teamwork into the curriculum. This can also open pathways to careers in the expanding esports industry and related fields.

- **Governmental Organisations:** Strategic support and investment in esports can drive technological innovation, economic development, and youth engagement. Governments can play a crucial role in setting standards for fairness, inclusivity, and safety in the esports community.

- **Businesses and Commercial Sector:** Companies can benefit from engaging with grassroots esports through sponsorships, partnerships, and marketing opportunities. By supporting local esports initiatives, businesses can enhance their brand visibility and connect with younger, tech-savvy audiences.

These recommendations aim to create a sustainable and inclusive grassroots esports ecosystem that benefits all stakeholders involved. By promoting a holistic approach to esports, stakeholders can ensure that it serves as a positive force for social cohesion, youth empowerment, and economic development. The document provides a roadmap for leveraging the potential of esports to build stronger, more connected communities and to prepare for the future of this rapidly evolving field.

Document Structure

1. **Introduction**: Explains the importance of grassroots esports and why these recommendations are needed, highlighting its potential sectors.

2. **What is Grassroots Esports?** This section defines grassroots esports and its significance in promoting health, skill development, and inclusivity among amateur players and communities.

3. **Recommendations for Various Stakeholders**:

   o **Municipalities**: Focus on community engagement, economic development, and creating supportive environments for youth.

   o **Local Sports Clubs**: Explore integrating esports to attract new members and promote social responsibility.

   o **Governmental Organisations**: Emphasise strategic investment in esports to drive economic growth and innovation.

   o **Educational Sector**: Utilise esports to enhance student engagement and skill development.

   o **Commercial Sector**: Highlight opportunities for business growth through sponsorship and partnerships in grassroots esports.

4. **How to Develop Partnerships**: This section guides on building collaborations with organisations and companies to support and expand grassroots esports activities.

5. **Event Organisation for Beginners**: Offers practical advice on organising esports events, from planning and promotion to execution and feedback collection.

6. **Conclusions**: Reinforces the need for stronger engagement from the grassroots sports sector to support and structure esports activities, highlighting the potential to connect gaming enthusiasts with community organisations.

The document aims to serve as a comprehensive guide for stakeholders looking to navigate and contribute to the evolving landscape of grassroots esports.

WHAT IS GRASSROOTS ESPORTS?

Esports is a form of "digital play" - competing individually or in a team. It is often distinguished from gaming, with gaming often being associated with less goal orientation, competition, and structure.

An introductory form of esports, grassroots esports, is quickly gaining momentum, with grassroots esports focusing more on the enjoyment of playing with its value-based approach. However, **grassroots esports is more than just playing and having fun; it's about promoting overall health, providing a positive experience for children, and developing valuable skill sets.**

Grassroots esports refers to community-driven, local-level organisations and participation in competitive gaming, often involving amateur players and small clubs or events. It emphasises accessibility, inclusivity, and talent development outside the professional esports ecosystem.

In a world where sedentary lifestyles are increasingly common, grassroots esports in schools or sports clubs offer a platform for players, especially children, to engage in activities that hone their strategic thinking, teamwork, and decision-making skills while pursuing their passion for gaming. Encouraging the development of these skill sets and the importance of a healthy lifestyle benefits the players' mental acuity and contributes to their overall well-being. By incorporating skill development into esports and creating a supportive environment for children, the aim is to promote a more holistic approach to competitive gaming.

Expanding the understanding of grassroots esports and acknowledging that it is a field of interest at the core of children and young adults will cross multiple societal pillars. Esports, particularly grassroots esports, are a part of our culture, education, entertainment, and sports; therefore, they are relevant for many stakeholders today.

The policy recommendations

If you are from a Municipality?

Grassroots esports are a valuable opportunity for municipalities to engage with their communities, especially younger generations innovatively. These local esports initiatives can be a powerful tool for building communities, fostering social inclusion, and encouraging youth development. By supporting grassroots esports, municipalities can create safe, structured environments where young people can come together, form teams, and develop skills that are transferable beyond gaming—such as teamwork, strategic thinking, and problem-solving.

Moreover, grassroots esports can help bridge generational gaps, offering parents and other community members a window into the interests and passions of younger residents. These events and leagues can also stimulate local economies by drawing participants and spectators to venues, boosting revenue for local businesses. Municipalities that invest in esports infrastructure, such as gaming facilities or internet cafes, can further position themselves as forward-thinking, tech-savvy destinations, attracting tech companies, startups, and even tourism.

Additionally, grassroots esports can provide municipalities with a platform to promote health and wellness by integrating physical activities, mental health resources, and educational workshops into gaming events. This holistic approach ensures that esports is about playing games and nurturing a well-rounded, healthy lifestyle.

In summary, grassroots esports can be a dynamic and valuable asset for municipalities, promoting community engagement, economic development, and youth empowerment while keeping pace with the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

How can municipalities be a positive force for esports?
Municipalities can boost esports by creating local facilities, hosting tournaments, and supporting community programs that engage youth and promote digital skills. This can stimulate local economies, foster community spirit, and position cities as vibrant hubs for the growing esports culture.

In what way can municipalities support grassroots esports through an intervention?
Municipalities can support grassroots esports by providing funding and spaces for local gaming events and clubs, helping to cultivate talent and community engagement at the local level. For example, a city could partner with schools and community centres to establish esports leagues, offering youth a structured environment to compete, learn, and develop their skills while fostering a strong local esports culture.

If you are from a local sports club?

By integrating esports as a membership-based activity, sports clubs can attract new target groups and offer exciting new activities. In Denmark and Norway, 70-80% of all organised grassroots esports clubs are part of existing sports clubs, showcasing a successful model from which your future initiative can learn.

Including esports can engage younger members, attract new sponsors and volunteers, and increase media exposure. Esports fits perfectly into local sports clubs and can be a vital subject in promoting social responsibility. Experience shows that many new members in grassroots esports clubs have never been part of a traditional sports club before. These children and adolescents gain new friends and a community by joining a sports club offering esports.

Organising esports activities in your sports club allows young people to be understood and respected for their interests, giving them meaningful social connections in a safe and inclusive environment. The Nordic experience with grassroots esports, supported by government and foundations, highlights the potential for balanced and safe community activities.

While professional sports clubs all over Europe have embraced esports at an elite level, grassroots clubs have yet to explore their full potential in the ecosystem. Expanding esports at the grassroots level can attract new members and integrate esports into club activities. Sports clubs can experiment with different approaches to esports, finding the right fit for their brand. Esports can also be used as a community outreach tool, hosting events and partnering with local schools. Grassroots esports is a unique opportunity to support essential values and ensure balanced, safe activities for young people with an interest in gaming.

Why should sports club initiatives include esports?
Starting an esports initiative can help grassroots sports clubs attract younger, tech-savvy audiences, diversify revenue streams, and promote inclusivity by engaging individuals who may not participate in traditional sports. Esports fosters skill development in teamwork and strategy while increasing member engagement and retention year-round. It also strengthens community building by connecting with local esports enthusiasts and businesses. Integrating esports allows clubs to be more tech-forward and creates cross-promotional opportunities between esports and physical sports, ultimately future-proofing the club in a rapidly evolving sports landscape. Grassroots esports is a unique opportunity to support essential values and ensure balanced, safe activities for young people interested in gaming.

How can grassroots sports clubs foster esports players' development?
Grassroots sports clubs can foster esports players' development by offering structured training programs, access to experienced coaches, and regular competitive opportunities. They should emphasise teamwork, communication, and physical and mental well-being, promoting a balanced lifestyle to prevent burnout. Providing high-quality equipment and gaming facilities can enhance training while focusing on personal development helps players build leadership and resilience. Additionally, creating pathways to professional opportunities through partnerships with larger organisations or educational institutions can help talented players advance in their esports careers.

If you are from a governmental organisation / institution?

Investing in esports presents a unique opportunity for the nation to drive economic growth, foster innovation, and enhance social cohesion. The esports industry is booming globally, and with strategic investment, one can position oneself as an assertive stakeholder in this rapidly expanding market. This investment will create new jobs in technology, media, and event management, fuelling local economies and reducing unemployment. Esports also plays a vital role in youth engagement and skill development, serving as a gateway to STEM education and fostering essential soft skills like teamwork and strategic thinking. By supporting esports, we can prepare our youth for the future job market while promoting inclusive participation across diverse communities.

Moreover, esports has the potential to boost tourism and local businesses by attracting international tournaments and spectators. Government investment in infrastructure and event hosting will stimulate the local economy and put our nation on the global map as a hub for esports excellence. Additionally, by investing in esports, one can drive technological innovation, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence and virtual reality. This will have far-reaching benefits beyond the gaming industry, contributing to the overall technological advancement. Finally, government support will allow for the setting of industry standards, ensuring fairness, safety, and inclusivity in esports. This is an opportunity to lead in gaming and create a thriving, innovative, and inclusive digital economy.

How can the government be a positive force for esports?
Investing in infrastructure and education and setting industry standards for fairness and inclusivity. With this support, the government can drive economic growth, enhance education, and ensure that esports can be enjoyed by as many as possible.

What should the government focus on to support grassroots esports?
To support grassroots esports, the government should primarily focus on providing accessible infrastructure, such as gaming facilities and equipment, and offering funding for local programs and events. Additionally, implementing educational initiatives that integrate esports into schools and community centers can help nurture young talent and ensure widespread participation.

If you are from the education sector or school?

Grassroots esports is about much more than just playing video games. It's a powerful tool that can transform the educational landscape. By embracing esports, schools can tap into students' passion for gaming to boost engagement and create exciting new learning opportunities.

Esports can inspire students to develop teamwork, communication, and strategic thinking skills. It can also open doors to exciting career paths in the rapidly growing esports industry. Schools can make use of the growth of esports to attract more students. Combining innovative learning experiences with student activities to learn, work, and play.

How to best integrate esports into our curriculum or activities?
Dedicate a part of the activation budget for esports so students can unlock their passion for esports. With a dedicated budget, there are opportunities for students to host, facilitate, and bring together esports enthusiasts in the school.

How to facilitate esports activities in the school building?
To empower grassroots esports, think of what you already have in the school building that might be used for esports. A big screen to watch esports matches, a television to play console games, or a room that can be turned into a gaming room. There are a lot of opportunities within your school building that can already be used!

If you are from a commercial sector?

The world of grassroots esports is rapidly growing, presenting plenty of opportunities for sports clubs and event organisers. It might be the opportunity you are looking for to boost memberships for your club or expand your reach. Organising tournaments, leagues, activities, training, or game nights is a great way to tap into this social environment of gamers.

However, the world of gaming is a challenging area with equipment and technology involved. This can be a hurdle to get started. This is where the commercial side gets really interesting. Reach out to partners to rent or acquire equipment or create win-win scenarios. There are plenty of examples of using local partners to boost your esports initiative. And it can be of great help to even turn a profit for your gaming initiative!

A wide range of businesses are involved in gaming and esports. Gaming and esports are hot topics to reach the next generation, and businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGO) like to dive into this opportunity. Use your esports initiative to provide solutions for sponsors, local businesses, and NGOs. Even a small win is a win!

How can grassroots esports benefit my organisation?
Grassroots esports presents a prime opportunity for my business to connect with a young, passionate audience and strengthen brand loyalty. By sponsoring events or providing resources, we can boost brand awareness, demonstrate our commitment to the community, and potentially tap into a new customer base. This can be done through local, regional, or national opportunities.

Can grassroots esports generate revenue or profit?
The potential for revenue generation is significant. We can explore sponsorships and product placement and even create exclusive merchandise tied to local esports events. Additionally, by aligning ourselves with a popular community initiative, we can foster positive brand sentiment, potentially driving sales in the long run.

If you are from a company?

Companies can play a vital role in supporting grassroots esports by providing sponsorships, financial backing, and essential gaming equipment. This support helps elevate the quality of local tournaments, reducing barriers for participants and making competitive opportunities more accessible. By partnering with grassroots organisations to organise events, businesses can help expand the reach of these initiatives and foster a more inclusive esports community. Additionally, companies with expertise in areas like marketing, event management, or business development can offer mentorship and guidance, helping grassroots clubs grow sustainably.

Beyond direct support, businesses can also create pathways for aspiring esports players and enthusiasts by offering internships, training programs, or scholarships, aiding in career development within the industry. Marketing efforts through social media campaigns and local promotions can raise awareness for grassroots events, attracting larger audiences and sponsors. Investments in gaming infrastructure, such as local gaming arenas or esports hubs, also provide valuable spaces for players to train and compete. By collaborating with schools to integrate esports into educational programs, companies help build a future talent pipeline, ensuring a steady flow of skilled players and professionals from the grassroots to the professional level.

What is the best way for your company to support grassroots esports?
If your company could choose one solution to best support grassroots esports, sponsorship and financial support would be the most impactful. With financial support, your company will make an immediate impact, gain brand visibility, grow the community, and enable scalability (customisation of involvement).

How should my company start to engage with grassroots esports?
To start engaging with grassroots esports, your company should first research the local scene to understand the community's needs and opportunities. Defining clear objectives, such as building brand visibility or fostering talent, is critical. Beginning with small-scale sponsorships or partnerships allows the company to provide immediate value while testing its approach. Building solid relationships with local organisers and offering more than financial support—such as equipment or event hosting—enhances engagement. Leveraging social media to connect with the community and creating content that resonates builds brand trust. Finally, measuring impact and gathering feedback ensures the company's efforts remain aligned with community needs.

How to develop a partnership along the esports activities?

Developing esports partnerships can be vital to long-term success. The first step is to identify potential partners. It is essential to find companies, organisations and communities that represent similar values and are interested in the field of esports. After that, a clear and attractive offer must be prepared, showing the benefits offered to the partner, such as increasing brand awareness or reaching new market segments. Communication and contact are essential: contact the selected partners and present the future vision and goals of our esports activity. Face-to-face meetings, presentations, and demonstrations can help build trust and foster collaboration. Defining the framework of cooperation is also an important step. A detailed agreement must be drawn up, which sets out the terms and objectives of the collaboration and ensures measurable results for the partners.

Who can be the potential partners in the field of e-sports?
Potential partners in esports encompass stakeholders interested in community building and entertainment. These include gaming hardware manufacturers, game developers, streaming services, media outlets, apparel brands, local retailers, and energy drink companies. Additionally, tech companies, sports entities, academic institutions, and influential figures in the gaming community are also valuable sponsors to consider.

What values do grassroots esports represent that might be attractive to partners?
Esports offers innovation, audience engagement, and community building. The focus is on shaping a network centered around digital growth, inclusivity, and advanced technology, which positions us as a dynamic partner. It enhances brand visibility, fosters collaboration, and provides opportunities to influence the future of community connecting via gaming and esports.

Esports event organisation for beginners

Organising esports events can be a big challenge for beginners, but with proper planning and preparations, they can create a successful event.

The first step is to define the objective: it is essential to decide whether we want to organise a competitive event, a community meeting or an educational event. Then, you have to choose a suitable location that has the necessary technical conditions, such as a stable Internet connection and appropriate hardware.

Promotion and communication also play a key role in the success of the event: using social media, local news channels, and e-sports forums is essential. A well-designed website or event page can help you effectively disseminate information and manage the application process.

Developing the competition rules and event schedule is also essential. It is necessary to clearly communicate the rules to the participants and ensure a smooth operation. It is important to have a well-prepared team in the background who are able to react quickly to any problems. Collecting and analysing post-event feedback can help improve future events.

What type of event do you want to organise? (games, live, virtual)
The objective determines the nature of the event. One could consider organising hybrid e-sports events that combine live and virtual experiences. This encompasses competitive gaming tournaments, live-streamed matches, community gatherings, and interactive virtual arenas, all designed to captivate both local and global in-person and online audiences.

How to build, measure and ask for feedback about the event?
The success of your initiative may hinge on the outcomes of an event. To achieve this, create engaging content, focus on community interaction, and ensure seamless technology integration. Gauge success by monitoring player and viewer engagement, social media impact, and sponsor contentment. Solicit feedback through post-event surveys, social media polls, and live chats during the event.

CONCLUSIONS

The vast number of people interested in individual gaming and esports, including younger generations, calls for stronger engagement from the grassroots sports sector and its many social organisations. It calls for a type of engagement where we meet the young people where they are and understand their gaming and esports interests. It also calls for engagement by which the grassroots sports sector shares its organisational models and social values.

The global esports community is diverse, and it involves a variety of stakeholders. It spans from individual gamers who play or compete for fun or at an amateur level to the commercialised heavily branded and broadcasted esports events.

The grassroots sport sector also consists of multiple national organisations and local clubs that have extensive experience in organising value-based and inclusive activities, particularly for young people. There is, therefore, a huge opportunity to connect individual gamers with local clubs and to organise value-based, social and inclusive esports as well.

To succeed with fruitful interaction between the grassroots sport and esports communities, we need to meet the young gamers where they are – with the games that capture their interests. This does not mean virtual archery or online cycling. The popularity of gaming and esports among young people is an opportunity to be curious, explore, and elaborate on our involvement in community sport – and it is an opportunity not to be missed.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Mapping of stakeholders, practices, and models of grassroots esports
https://esports.isca.org/resources-mapping-stakeholders

The main goal of the European Grassroots Esports project is to underline and show a third way between commercialised esports and the individualised gaming culture. In this document, we have taken the first step towards this. First, we define grassroots esports, which focuses on the actual activity and everything surrounding it, as well as the people who participate. After this, we map the stakeholders that are involved in grassroots esports.

We divide them into two categories: grassroots and general esports stakeholders. While mapping the stakeholders, we were able to identify some of the most common ways to work with grassroots esports initiatives. The document provides you with a definition of grassroots esports, a mapping of the stakeholders, grassroots esports tactics, and case studies with specific esports initiatives.

Conceptual models and dimensions of grassroots esport:
https://esports.isca.org/resources-conceptual-models-and-dimensions

In this document, 'Conceptual models and dimensions of grassroots esports', 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 solid values for the esports community, ensuring ethical practices and fostering a positive environment.

- The intention of this document is to serve as an inspiration for those engaged in leveraging esports as a tool to connect with youth and build new communities.

More here: https://esports.isca.org/resources

European Grassroots Esports online learning course
https://esports.isca.org/online-course
https://learn.isca.org/courses/enter-the-game-of-grassroots-esports/

You are welcome to explore an online course 'Enter the Game of Grassroots Esports' – a guide to developing and running your own grassroots esports initiative.

You will need up to 90 minutes to complete the course. Downloadable video transcripts, readings, podcasts, and presentations are included within each module. On completion of the 'Enter the Game of Grassroots Esports' online course, you will be able to:

- Understand and explain what esports and, in particular, grassroots esports is (Bust the myths)

- Scan your environment and spot favourable conditions to set up a new grassroots esports initiative (Set it up)

- Design a plan to deliver grassroots esports activities for a range of different target groups (Implement)

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