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EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN SPORTS ORGANISATION MANAGEMENT



MEMOS XXVI
2023-2024

“QUO VADIS ESPORTS?”

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Abstract

Hardly any other topic in sport is discussed as controversially as the question of whether and how to position oneself in esports.

So far, a rather heterogeneous picture has emerged. The continental federations have not yet developed a uniform position. In Europe in particular, there has been no significant dialogue between the ENOCs on this issue.

Based on a questionnaire sent to the ENOCs, this study provides an overview of the current situation. It focuses in particular on whether and how the ENOCs and NFs have approached the issue structurally. The questions do not stop at whether the ENOCs recognise esports as a sport and, if so, to what extent. Rather, it was also asked whether esports are represented by the NFs or by independent national esports associations. Furthermore, it was asked whether these associations have access to voting rights and, if applicable, funding in the respective NOC.

The results are intended to provide an overview of how ENOCs currently deal with esports. From this overview, conclusions will be drawn as to what can be expected in terms of defensive or offensive positioning with regard to the activities of the EOC and the IOC with regard to esports. Finally, a recommendation for the development of one's own position will be given against the background of these organisations.

This consideration of the possibilities and opportunities should also help the DOSB to review its own position, which dates back to 2021.

However, it can also be used by the NFs as member organisations to develop their own objectives or to encourage the ENOCs to take an interest in the opportunities and developments in this segment.

Summary

The questionnaire revealed the unsurprising result that only a small proportion of ENOCs are proactively involved in esports, creating their own structures or perhaps even funding opportunities. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that there is very little European dialogue within the ENOCs, beyond the still unanswered question of how to define esports (and sport). On the other hand, the IOC and EOC also tend to create facts rather than exchanging or even discussing short, medium or long-term goals with the ENOCs in dealing with esports. The ENOCs lack these plans in order to make their own deductions from these goals. In principle, a NF can only address the topic of esports structurally and enter into a dialogue with ENOCs and funding bodies if it knows and can demonstrate

what prospects such activities have in an international context. In addition, small and medium-sized NFs in particular will not be able to devote themselves to this topic if they are not aware of its potential or if it is not shown to them.

Therefore, a key finding from the results of the questionnaire is that the IOC and EOC (and IFs) are also called upon to enter into a dialogue with the ENOCs about the goals and motivations of their activities, in order to enable them to create the necessary or desirable structures for competitions such as the future Olympic Esports Games in good time, should the (E)NOCs decide to invest in this area.

Résumé

Le questionnaire a révélé le résultat peu surprenant que seule une petite partie des CNOE est impliquée de manière proactive dans les esports, créant leurs propres structures ou peut-être même des opportunités de financement. D'une part, cela est dû au fait qu'il y a très peu de dialogue européen au sein des CNOE, au-delà de la question toujours sans réponse de savoir comment définir les esports (et le sport). D'autre part, le CIO et les COE ont également tendance à créer des faits plutôt que d'échanger ou même de discuter d'objectifs à court, moyen ou long terme avec les CNO en ce qui concerne les esports. Les CNOE n'ont pas besoin de ces plans pour faire leurs propres déductions à partir de ces objectifs. En principe, une FN ne peut aborder le sujet de l'esport de manière structurelle et entamer un dialogue avec les CNO et les organismes de financement que si elle sait et peut démontrer quelles sont les perspectives de telles activités dans un contexte international. En outre, les FN de petite et moyenne taille en particulier ne seront pas en mesure de se consacrer à ce sujet si elles ne sont pas conscientes de son potentiel ou si on ne le leur montre pas.

Par conséquent, une conclusion clé des résultats du questionnaire est que le CIO et les COE (et les FI) sont également appelés à entamer un dialogue avec les CNO sur les objectifs et les motivations de leurs activités, afin de leur permettre de créer les structures nécessaires ou souhaitables pour des compétitions telles que les futurs Jeux Olympiques eSport en temps utile, si les CNO(E) décident d'investir dans ce domaine.

Keywords

NOC, NF, esports, Olympic Esports Games, Olympic Esports Week, Questionnaire

Acronyms

IOC – International Olympic Committee

EOC – European Olympic Committees

NOC – National Olympic Committee

ENOC – European Olympic Committees

DOSB – German Olympic Sports Confederation

NF – National Federation

IF – International Federation

ESBD – German Esports Federation

UCI - Union Cycliste Internationale

GAISF - Global Association of International Sports Federations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 Esports - an economic factor with a young target group	6
1.2 Esports and sports - do they go together?	9
1.3 Esports and the DOSB	10
1.4 Objectives of the research	10
1.5 The Questionnaire	11
II LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 General	11
2.2 Literature	12
2.3 Judgements	14
2.4 Definitions of the IOC, DOSB and the ESBD	15
2.4.1 IOC	15
2.4.2 DOSB	20
2.4.3 ESBD	23
III METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES	25
3.1 General	25
3.2 Questionnaire	26
3.3 Others	30
IV RESULTS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS	30
4.1 Questionnaire results	30
4.2 Findings and Conclusions	33
4.2.1 General information	33
4.2.2 Need for coordination among the ENOCs	34
4.2.3 Recognition of game titles	34
4.2.4 Responsibility of NFs or National Esports Associations	35
4.2.5 Public funding and sponsorship	37
4.2.6 Assessment of the IOC's involvement in esports by the ENOCs	38
V RECOMMANDATIONS	39
VI REFERENCES	41
IV APPENDICES	41

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Esports - an economic factor with a young target group

Esports is a huge and exciting market. As such, it is of fundamental interest to organised sport. Estimates of the size of the market vary widely. While Fortune Business Insights estimates that the market will be worth USD 2.06 billion this year,¹ Germany's Statista GmbH puts the figure at EUR 4 billion.² The exchange rate between the US dollar and the euro does not justify this range either³ - but the market segments are taken into account. Fortune Business Insights based its data on revenues from merchandising & ticket sales, sponsorship, media rights, advertising, game publisher fees and others. Statista also included esports betting as the largest market segment at EUR 2.3 billion in 2023.⁴ A whopping 58.44% of the total revenue of the esports market in 2022 came from esports betting.⁵ This compares to only 3.78% of esports revenues generated by publishers in the same year.⁶ The eSports market is currently in crisis, largely due to the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, the war in Russia and a global economic situation that is not particularly conducive to investment.⁷

Among the organised games with the highest prize money, the annual competition "The International" of the game title Dota 2 dominates with proceeds of up to USD 40 million (2021).⁸ The game is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) video game from Valve.⁹ The new Esports World Cup tournament format in July/August 2024 will see a total of USD 60 million spent on various game titles.

¹ <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/de/esports-markt-106820>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

² <https://de.statista.com/outlook/amo/esports/weltweit>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

³ Tagesaktuell liegt der Wechselkurs bei 1,07 USD für 1,00 EUR (17.06.2024).

⁴ <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/677986/umfrage/prognose-zum-umsatz-im-esports-markt-weltweit/>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

⁵ Jonah Trenker, Statista Market Insights 2023, p. 78.

⁶ Ibid, p. 71.

⁷ „E-Sport in Deutschland, Im globalen Kontext“ PriceWaterhouseCoopers(PwC), August 2024

⁸ <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/261931/umfrage/preisgelder-der-hoehstdotierten-esports-turniere/>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dota_2, accessed on 17.06.2024.

The games with the highest prize money on offer in the past year are Dota 2 (approx. USD 350 million), Fortnite (approx. USD 183 million) and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (approximately \$162 million). The first sports simulations in the ranking are the game title Chess.com (approx. USD 7.5 million) in 31st place and the football simulation FIFA 23 (approx. USD 6.2 million) in 40th place.¹⁰

The number of at least occasional esports viewers is expected to grow from 489.5 million in 2021 to more than 640 million in 2025.¹¹ The three most popular game titles on the Twitch.tv platform are League of Legends, Dota 2 and Counter Strike 2 & GO, which generate double to triple digit millions of viewing hours.¹² These are watch times that can also be used to target the younger demographic with advertising. In contrast to sports (around 50 years old), the average age of viewers is expected to be 26, with 60% of viewers aged between 16 and 35.¹³ With this in mind, the esports sector is certainly of interest to the IOC and possibly the ENOCs. Television audiences for the Summer Olympics have declined in recent years. While 3.5 billion people watched in Beijing in 2008 and 3.6 billion in London (2012), the figure for Rio de Janeiro 2016 was 3.2 billion and 3.05 billion in Tokyo (2021).¹⁴ These developments are of course worrying from an economic point of view, as less reach (in perspective) is likely to mean less advertising revenue, which is a key determinant of the market value of an ad. It remains to be seen whether this downward trend can be halted at Paris 2024. Against this backdrop, the thriving market of esports viewers on streaming platforms such as Twitch etc. is of course extremely exciting.

¹⁰ <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

¹¹ F. Tenzer vom 28.02.2024 auf <https://de.statista.com/themen/3993/esports/#topicOverview>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

¹² Digital & Trends eSports, statista GmbH, 2024, p. 19-21.

¹³ Francesco Alivia vom 09.06.2021 auf <https://www.infront.sport/de/blog/sportsponsoring/chancen-wachsendes-esports-publikum#welcome>, accessed on 17.06.2024.

¹⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/280502/total-number-of-tv-viewers-of-olympic-summer-games-worldwide/>, accessed on 18.06.2024.

In addition, IOC sponsors also act as advertising partners in the esports cosmos. Naturally, they are interested in creating synergies by supporting their involvement in both - sport and esports. While initially it was mainly endemic sponsors that invested in esports, non-endemic brands are now also involved. Endemic brands are those that are broadly associated with the esports market. These include, for example, hardware or software manufacturers, or companies in the food industry (particularly energy drink manufacturers or fast food chains).¹⁵ Non-endemic brands, on the other hand, need to demonstrate their commitment through storytelling. This can be done, for example, through a visible commitment to an esports team. This can create a connection with the non-endemic brand.

Worldwide partners for the Olympic Games (TOP sponsors) are currently in favour of the IOC: AB InBev, airbnb, Alibaba, Allianz, Atos, Bridgestone, Coca Cola, Deloitte, intel, Omega, Panasonic, P&G, Samsung, Toyota and VISA.¹⁶ Of these, at least Alibaba¹⁷, Atos¹⁸, Coca-Cola¹⁹, intel²⁰, Panasonic²¹ und Samsung²² are also endemic partners of esports and invest in it or offer products for esports. Even some of the partners of the IOC, which are not endemic to esports, are to a greater or lesser extent active in this segment (AB InBev²³, Bridgestone²⁴, P&G²⁵, Toyota²⁶ and VISA²⁷). It can therefore be assumed that the IOC has a considerable economic interest in acting in the interests of its

¹⁵ Brand Trust, Esport-Markt 2021, <https://www.brand-trust.de/de/artikel/2022/e-sport-warum-keine-marke-um-hype-herumkommt.php>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

¹⁶ <https://olympics.com/ioc/partners>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

¹⁷ <https://german.alibaba.com/g/esport.html>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

¹⁸ https://atos.net/en/2024/me-news_2024_03_05/atos-and-saudi-esports-federation-join-forces-boost-the-gaming-and-esports-ecosystem-in-saudi-arabia, accessed on 19.06.2024.

¹⁹ <https://esportsinsider.com/2023/06/coca-cola-riot-games-league-of-legends-drink>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²⁰ <https://www.intel.de/content/www/de/de/gaming/esports.html>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²¹ <https://experience.panasonic.de/tv-audio/makellooses-gaming-auf-dem-4k-fernseher>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²² [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samsung_Galaxy_\(E-Sport-Team\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samsung_Galaxy_(E-Sport-Team)), accessed on 19.06.2024.

²³ <https://strivecloud.io/blog/customer-highlights/esports-fan-engagement/>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²⁴ <https://www.gummibereifung.de/bridgestone-bereift-auch-digitalen-lamborghini>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²⁵ <https://www.gillette.de/de-de/perfekte-rasur/das-beste-im-mann/esport-pionier-gillette>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²⁶ <https://toyotagazooracing.com/e-motorsports/>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

²⁷ <https://www.mastercard.com/global/en/business/gaming-esports.html>, accessed on 19.06.2024.

TOP partners when they become involved in esports. Finally, the IOC's "TOP Partner" status for the Olympic Games could be considered for endemic or non-endemic partners of esports, which is not yet an exclusive business segment. For example, the crypto industry, which plays an economic role in the lucrative area of esports betting²⁸ and is already investing heavily in esports, could be considered.²⁹ This industry could certainly be interested in what the IOC has to offer if it were to become involved in the virtual environment with the Olympic Esports Games - provided that the TOP partnership with VISA does not stand in the way.

1.2 Esports and sports - do they go together?

Everyone will answer this question differently. The usual lawyer's answer, "It depends", will also apply here. It depends on whether the two worlds want to come closer together, develop an understanding of each other and take advantage of synergies. The opportunities that esports can bring to sporting activities can be interesting in terms of sustainability, inclusion or gender parity, for example, regardless of the specific game title. For example, it is possible to organise a competition (with or without the physical performance of the players) using avatars and to visualise it for the athletes without the need for the opponents (or team members) to be in the same place. Complex sports facilities that require a high level of environmental protection, such as clay pigeon shooting ranges, can be recreated perspectively and even weather or other environmental influences, such as rain, wind or fog, can be taken into account in the programming. This can be of great interest for both training and competition scenarios, and not only in regions that do not have such competition venues. By influencing the game software, people of different abilities can be brought up to a comparable level and compete against each other. Beyond competitive sport, physical activity can also be offered to groups of people whose movement

²⁸ <https://www.esports.net/crypto/>, accessed on 20.06.2024.

²⁹ Mit Verweis auf die Crypto.com-Arena in Los Angeles, die FTX Arena in Miami und Bitpanda beim Davis Cup im Jahr 2022: <https://www.trendingtopics.eu/crypto-sport-sponsoring-2022/>, accessed on 20.06.2024.

is restricted, for example due to age.³⁰ There are, therefore, enough approaches to make it worthwhile to explore the possibilities that the use of technology can bring to the physical movement of athletes. Whether and how the debate is conducted in relation to pure console games, on the other hand, is controversial. However, this is not the primary focus of this thesis and will not be explored in depth.

1.3 Esports and the DOSB

In 2018, almost all member organisations of the DOSB were opposed to the phenomena of "esports". In this year 2018, the German Olympic Sports Confederation adopted a position by the Executive Committee and the General Assembly that is dedicated to the topic of so-called "esports". The current developments in Europe and the ambitions of the IOC were still unknown at that time. It should be examined whether the framework conditions lead the DOSB to a new assessment of the opportunities and risks of positioning to esports. In addition, the NFs could argue that the changed framework conditions make it necessary to reassess their positioning. In addition, new sports or competitions in competitive sport could gain in importance internationally without the NFs having the opportunity to participate.

1.4 Objectives of the research

The main aim of the study is to provide an overview of the activities of the ENOCs in dealing with esports within the association structures of the European National Olympic Committees, something that has not been done before. The study did not stop at the question of whether eSports is considered a sport. Rather, it delved deeper into the current situation. The ENOCs were asked about structures as well as their interest in future international events. The main reason for this was to find out whether the ENOCs are

³⁰ Beispielfallhaft sei auf die National Senior League im Bowling in den USA verwiesen: <http://www.nslgames.com/>, accessed on 20.06.2024.

willing to contribute financially, structurally and in terms of personnel to the preparation and organisation of national and continental competitions, similar to the qualification for the Olympic Games.

The data obtained should also be used to draw conclusions on the level of development of esports in the ENOCs. This question was particularly interesting in view of the fact that a significant number of ENOCs criticised the unsatisfactory level of information on the paths and objectives of the EOC and the IOC.

The questionnaire was designed to analyse whether this different status in the ENOCs is also reflected in different stages of development.

1.5 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire allowed feedback from ENOCs to be obtained in a relatively short time in response to pre-prepared closed questions. More individual responses would have been expected from interviews. However, this was not necessary as the questions were essentially objective and were not designed to elicit opinions or feelings, nor were any questions used that would lead to unpredictable responses or findings.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 General

The literature review was limited to the central question of whether there are reliable and generally accepted definitions of sport and esports. Furthermore, there is no literature on whether and how esports can be implemented in the ENOCs. The results of the questionnaire can therefore only provide limited information as to whether the scientific definition of e-sport corresponds to that of the ENOCs.

In relation to the project, the following literature and judgements and the definitions of the DOSB and the ESBD has been identified as primary literature. This forms the basis for the basic definitions of sport and esports. To summarise, it must be noted that it has not yet been possible to agree on a uniform definition of the term 'esports', which does not exactly make it any

easier to deal with this topic. Furthermore, it should be noted that neither a legal definition of esports in the context of a regulation on non-profit status, nor court decisions, nor a definition of the IOC, an NOC or a NF are binding. The federations decide what they define as sport and what they define as esports within the framework of their organisational autonomy. A binding situation would only arise for the ENOCs (and all other NOCs) if the IOC were to recognise esports as an Olympic sport or, due to the organisation of Olympic Esports Games, were to develop a regulation identical to the regulation in the IOC Charter for newly included Olympic sports, according to which a "sport" should be recognised by NOCs and IFs if it becomes part of Olympic Esports Games. However, this is not foreseeable at the moment.

2.2 Literature

Maties, Martin **"StichWortKommentar eSport-Recht"**, Nomos Verlag 2023, 1st edition.

Starting on page 809, Deringer attempts to define the term "sport" using various approaches. These approaches are based in particular on sports science, legal, fiscal and criminal law implications. He concludes that the concepts of sport and esports are neither congruent nor clearly definable. This finding is derived from the comprehensive analysis.

Cranmer, Eleanor E., Han, Dai In Danny, van Gisbergen, Marnix, Jung, T. **"Esports matrix: Structuring the esports research agenda"**, Journal: Computers in Human Behaviour, (2021), 106671, 117

The authors attempt to bring together the various definitional approaches in a holistic approach. They are convinced that the heterogeneous approaches hinder the further development of the phenomenon of esports. They summarise their thoughts in a matrix:

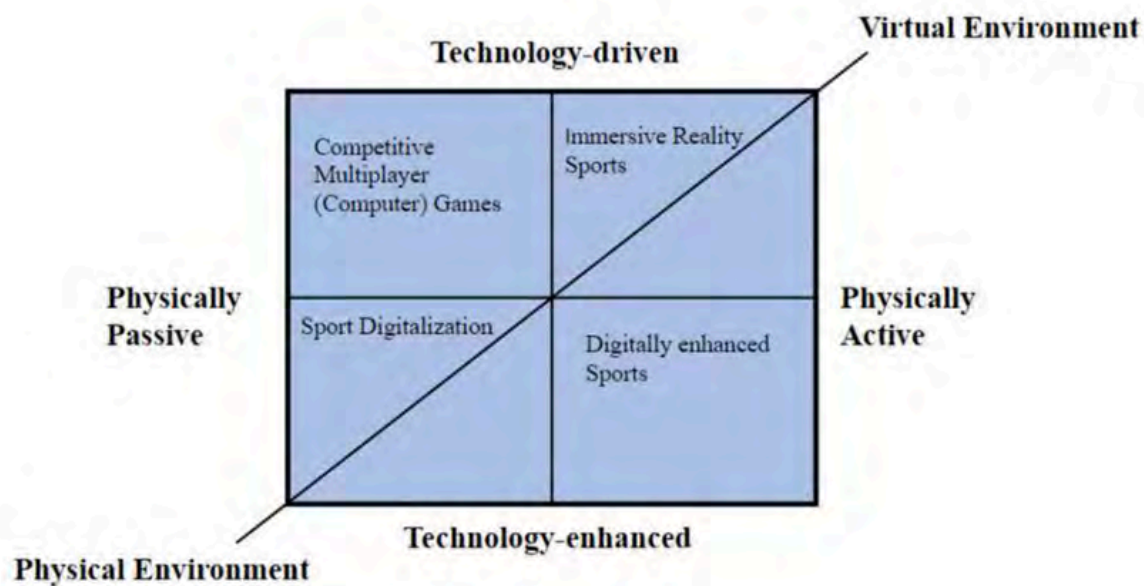


Fig. 1. Esports Matrix.

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347802429_Esports_Matrix_Structuring_the_Esports_Research_Agenda

The aim is to find a framework for esports. It should be considered whether this framework can lead to a different consideration of the results found by Maties when considering esports vs. Sport.

Hilvoorde, Ivo van, Pot, Niek **"Embodiment and fundamental motor skills in eSports"**, Sport, Ethics and Philosophy, (2016), 14-27, 10(1)

The two authors approach the juxtaposition of sport and esports from an interestingly different angle. They consider the pedagogy of movement and go beyond other sport science definitions (Are specific motor skills required for esports to be considered a sport?) They focus on the level of interaction between players and the resulting physical education context. There are also interesting comments on embodiment and the 'virtual' as a simulation of the 'real world' (point 4. (1)).

2.3 Judgements

In addition to academic views, the judgments of national and European courts will also be examined for definitional and possible delimitation views. For reasons of relevance, the focus will be on the case law of the higher and supreme courts.

The **European Court of Justice** has indicated that, in its view, the concept of sport should be interpreted narrowly and in accordance with common usage. It is characterised by a physical activity or a not insignificant physical component. In the so-called Turnierbridge decision of 2017, the Court emphasised that the concept of sport must be limited to activities which have a significant physical component, "without extending it to all the activities which, from one point of view or another, may be associated with that concept". (European Court of Justice, 4th Chamber, Decision: 26/10/2017 - C-90/16, p. 18, (Tournament Bridge Decision)). From this perspective, esports can hardly be equated with sport.

The same applies to the relevant decisions of the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Fiscal Court. The former ruled in the so-called "Spielhallen decision": "The mere fact that the game may involve achieving the greatest possible success in the shortest possible time does not make a game a sport. Nor does the fact that many games can be organised under competitive conditions make participation in the game a sport. A computer game is not a sport even if it is organised as a competition. Typically, a computer game is not played in order to "exercise" (Federal Administrative Court, 6th Senate, judgement of 09.03.2005 - 6 C 11/04 (available in juris), para. 18). With regard to the question of charitable status, the Federal Fiscal Court had to deal with the question of whether the Tournament Bridge was to be regarded as a charitable activity in general and as the "promotion of sport" in particular, and came to the following conclusion: "In the absence of a statutory definition, the term 'sport' within the meaning of § 52 para. 2 sentence 1 no. 21 AO only covers activities that correspond to the general definition of sport and serve the purpose of physical exercise [...] A prerequisite is

therefore physical activity that goes beyond the otherwise usual level and is characterised by externally observable exertion or by artistic movement that can be attributed to personal skill. The performance of a game in the form of competitions and under a special organisation alone does not make it a sport in the sense of § 52 paragraph 2 sentence 1 No. 21 AO". It is expected that the Federal Fiscal Court will not take a different view when assessing computer games. In summary, it can be said that esports would not currently be recognised as a sport at European or German level from a legal point of view. However, especially in Germany, there have been political interests and considerations for years to recognise esports as a non-profit activity. It is not unlikely that this recognition will take place in this legislative period before the next federal elections. However, it is unlikely that this will cut the Gordian knot in the definition of sport and esports. Rather, the interests involved suggest that esports is currently not legally defined as part of sport.

2.4 Definitions of the IOC, DOSB and the ESD

The IOC's definition approach refers to all ENOCs. The definition approach of the DOSB and the ESD naturally only has a national effect and can at best serve as an example for the situation in other ENOCs.

2.4.1 IOC

The IOC has seen a remarkable evolution in its approach to esports. After esports first became part of the Asian Games in 2007, the IOC took up the issue ten years later. An Olympic Summit in 2017 focused on esports. The following year, the Olympic Liaison Group was established. It was set up to discuss the inclusion of competitive gaming in the Olympic Games and consisted of representatives from the IOC and GAISF.³¹ It was chaired by David Lappartient, President of the UCI, which also organises the Cycling World Championships using Zwift software and can be seen as a best practice example of a functioning virtual image of a sport. The symbiosis of a successful

³¹ <https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/ioc-olympics-esports-liaison-group-inaugural-gaming-forum/>, accessed on 5.4.24.

collaboration between a publisher and an IF for mutual benefit has been achieved.

An Olympic Virtual Series was then launched in 2021. Due to COVID-19, the competition was only held in five games and only online. Two years later, a face-to-face event was held in Singapore - the Olympic Esports Week, which was to become part of an Olympic Esports Series. The games are chosen by the International Federations and are intended to be virtual representations of the sport, usually involving a motorised movement component. The disadvantage of these games is that they are far less well known and are not played or watched by as many people as the industry leaders. As a result, the IOC has not been able to benefit from the reach of mainstream esports events or access to the young target audience. However, both are likely to be a key element of the IOC's objectives for its involvement in esports. With this in mind, it remains to be seen what direction future events will take. At the 2023 Olympic Esports Week, participants were not mandatorily sent by the NOCs. The IOC did not hand out medals and certificates as prizes, as it does in other IOC competitions. Instead, there were trophies for the winning athletes. The reason for this may have been that they did not (yet) want to give the feeling that this was a competition comparable to other IOC competitions.

In September last year, the IOC set up an Esports Commission to study the feasibility of Olympic Esports Games.³² The Commission is chaired by David Lappartient and has 21 members.³³ In addition to his UCI presidency, Lappartient is also President of the French National Olympic and Sports Committee and was in charge of organising the Olympic Esports Week in Singapore. The results of the Esports Commission's investigation are still pending.

Given the economic opportunities and access to young audiences that could result from a successful Olympic eSports Games, it seemed likely that

³² <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1140553/lappartient-esports-commission>, accessed on 1.12.23.

³³ <https://olympics.com/ioc/esports-commission>, accessed on 10.6.24.

such an event will be held for the first time in 2025 or 2026. It remains to be seen whether it will take off and become a success story similar to the Olympic Games or the Youth Olympic Games. Meanwhile, on 15 June 2024, the IOC Executive Board issued a press release stating that it will propose the creation of "Olympic Esports Games" at the 142nd IOC Session, which will take place during the XXXIII Olympic Games in Paris. As a member assembly of the IOC, it is responsible for such a decision. *„The IOC is already in advanced discussions with a potential host, and an announcement can be expected very soon after the last formalities have been finalised.”*³⁴ The wording of this communication shows that the IOC's deliberations on the way forward are already well advanced.

On 12 July 2024, in another press release, the IOC announced that the first Olympic Esports Games will be hosted by the Saudi Arabian NOC in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2025. At the same time, the IOC announced: *„The duration of the partnership between the IOC and the Saudi NOC will be 12 years, with Olympic Esports Games held regularly.”*³⁵ By IOC standards, that is a long commitment period.

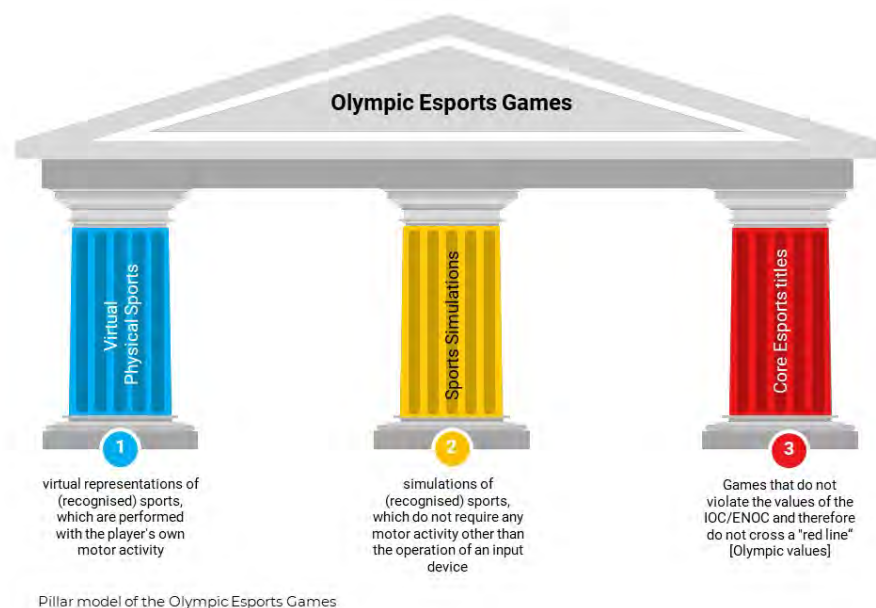
Dr Thomas Bach, President of the IOC, is quoted in relation to the expected Games: *„With respect to esports, our values are and remain the red line that we will never cross,”*³⁶ As a result, first-person shooter titles should be denied access to the Games, despite their undoubted commercial success. It remains to be seen which game titles will actually be included when the first Olympic Esports Games are held. However, it can be assumed that the majority of the games that were played at last year's Olympic Esports Week will be included. Vincent Pereira, the IOC official responsible for esports at that time, commented on this on LinkedIn as follows: *“The philosophy behind the concept remains the same. Bringing the best of both worlds together*

³⁴ <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-eb-proposes-creation-of-olympic-esports-games-to-ioc-session>, accessed on 15.06.24.

³⁵ <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-announces-olympic-esports-games-to-be-hosted-in-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia>, accessed on 14.07.2024.

³⁶ <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-eb-proposes-creation-of-olympic-esports-games-to-ioc-session>, accessed on 15.06.24.

meaning that we will have the 3 types of games represented as mentioned by president during his Press conference: Virtual Physical Sport, Sports Simulation and the core Esports titles reflecting Olympic values.”³⁷ He referred to a press conference with IOC President Dr Thomas Bach on 14 June 2024 in which he described this division into these "three pillars" of the Olympic Games to be decided.³⁸



At this point, it was also interesting to note that the organisers of the World Championships in the individual sports, as well as the IFs, should not be affected by the Olympic Games. The Olympic Esports Games should be a "peek". He reiterated that the Olympic Esports Games will not be co-hosted with other organisers, saying: *"We are the exclusive owners of these Olympic E-sport Games"*.³⁹ This underlines the IOC's claim to act independently, just as it does with the Olympic Games and the Youth Olympic Games.

³⁷ Vincent Pereira, IOC, https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/all/?fetchDeterministicClusterOnly=true&heroEntityKey=urn%3Ali%3Afsd_profile%3AACoAAAlfNXQBwfmAsqQXam14nmW-7ZxdanFAj-o&keywords=vincent%20pereira&origin=RICH_QUERY_TYPEAHEAD_HISTORY&position=0&searchId=48088745-6f8a-4ce8-8b9d-fb58d8c0eefb&sid=P%3B3&spellCorrectionEnabled=true, accessed on 15.06.2024.

³⁸ Dr. Thomas Bach, IOC Press Conference – 14.06.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/live/OXcTYPR6Vuw>, accessed on 14.06.2024. started app. at 45:25 min.

³⁹ Dr. Thomas Bach, IOC Press Conference – 14.06.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/live/OXcTYPR6Vuw>, accessed on 14.06.2024. started app. at 46:25 min.

The message of the last paragraph of the press release is also particularly important: *"Nevertheless, the IOC EB stressed that IFs already involved in an e-version of their sport, which is being considered for inclusion in the "Olympic Esports Games", would be the first partners of the IOC. The same will apply to National Olympic Committees that include esports in their activities."* Accordingly, the IOC will not put any pressure on NOCs or IFs to represent esports at the national level in their respective federations. Those who want to send players to the "Olympic Esports Games" and achieve success for themselves will therefore still have to decide whether and to what extent they want to get involved in this sector.

The press release also contains an important statement from an economic point of view: *"At the IOC EB meeting today, it was highlighted that such organisation must happen under a completely new dedicated structure within the IOC, clearly separated from the organisational and financial model for the Olympic Games."*⁴⁰ This makes it clear that the Olympic Esports Games must be financially self-sustaining and should not share in other IOC revenues. It remains to be seen what is meant by an independent organisational structure. It is conceivable, for example, that sending organisations that are not NOCs will not become independent IOC recognized or member organisations or be granted other rights. This idea could also serve as a model for national structural and financial models of NOCs.

It remains to be seen how the third pillar will deal with another peculiarity. The teams in 'core of esports' games usually consist of three or five players. They specialise in certain characteristics of avatars. Especially the professional teams are sometimes international. If these popular teams were to compete in the Olympic Esports Games, the rules would have to be adapted. Nationally mixed teams have not been allowed in IOC competitions to date. The problem could possibly be solved by players qualifying independently rather than being nominated by the NOCs. In this case, however, it could be

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

problematic whether the NOCs (can) send the individual athletes and also bear the associated costs. Allowing only national teams would mean that unknown teams would have to compete, as there are no national teams in these games.

2.4.2 DOSB

The German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB), the non-governmental umbrella organisation of German sport, was founded on 20 May 2006 through the merger of the German Sports Confederation and the National Olympic Committee for Germany. Almost 28 million members are organised in around 87,000 gymnastics and sports clubs in 101 member organisations. There are 8 million volunteers involved in sport and physical activity, 750,000 of whom hold office at board level.⁴¹

As already mentioned, the DOSB has adjusted its definition of esports in 2021 by positioning itself:

“In order to refine the previous definition of virtual sports, we will use the communication of physical performance as a central criterion, i.e. the existence of a motor activity that determines the type of sport. In this new and more specific definition, the question is now whether it is 'just' the operation of input devices or whether it is a real motor activity that determines the type of sport. Sport is characterised by motor activities that have no other purpose than their own. In computer and console games, on the other hand, the motor activity of operating input devices is merely a means to the end of moving an 'avatar'.

On the basis of this distinction (the presence of a motor activity that determines the nature of the sport), computer and console games, regardless of their content, are not sports. However, offerings such as Zwift, Peloton, laser shooting or 'sim racing', i.e. virtually (digitally) supported sporting activities, are.

⁴¹ <https://www.dosb.de/ueber-uns>, accessed on 15.07.2024.

The term virtual sports should therefore be subdivided into

- a) console and computer games, which merely reproduce a real sport virtually, and
- b) virtually (digitally) supported sporting activities, which are defined by a motor activity that determines the type of sport.

The term "eGaming" remains unchanged and includes all computer and console games that do not involve real sports.

These definitions also include innovative technologies that are not yet widely used in sport, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, which, depending on their characteristics and content, can be categorised either as virtually (digitally) supported sporting activities, as sport-related console and computer games, or as e-gaming. This includes the rapidly growing area of mobile gaming, a development that organised sport will have to deal with in the future.

This definition is compatible with the IOC's current definition, which distinguishes between "physical forms of virtual sports" (e.g. cycling) and "non-physical forms of virtual sports" (e.g. football) in its "Agenda 2020+5". At this point, the IOC defines eGaming as 'competitive gaming' (e.g. League of Legends) and 'casual gaming' (e.g. Super Mario).

Digitally supported sporting activities can be categorised as sport - as they involve a motor activity that defines the nature of the sport - and are therefore the responsibility of the respective federations. Console and computer games that are virtual representations of a real sport, on the other hand, are not classified as sports, but may contribute to the development of clubs and federations."⁴²

⁴² DOSB, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://cdn.dosb.de/UEber_uns/eSport/DOSB_Sachstand_eSport_Oktober_2021.pdf, p. 4 f., accessed on 10.6.24.

The definition is still valid today. However, it is expected that member organisations will submit an amendment to the DOSB this year in order to adapt this position. In August 2024, the conference of the state sports associations had to pass a comprehensive resolution on a proposed resolution, but had (so far) rejected it. This included the position of the conference of state sports federations that it rejects the explicit depiction of violence ("This refers in particular to titles of the "shooter" genre, which contain the explicit depiction of violence against humans, living creatures and human-like avatars. There are still moral concerns about such titles and we see no place for them in sports clubs"). At the same time, however, it was proposed that esports in its entirety be equated with sport and recognised as being in the public interest by adding the following to the legal provision § 52 para. 2 no. 21 AO: "Under the conditions of paragraph 1, the following are to be recognised as being in the public interest: ... the promotion of sport (chess and esports are regarded as sport). This would mean that the entirety of esports would be recognised as sport without the differentiation previously made by the DOSB (and also by the IOC). Neither the genre differentiation (no first-person shooter) nor the activity describing the action as a motor activity would play a role in determining the type of sport". In the author's view, this is not necessary to provide sports clubs with the best possible service, as recognition of the promotion of the general public would already be possible under § 52 (2) sentence 2 AO, which reads as follows: "If the purpose pursued by the corporation does not fall under sentence 1, but the general public is selflessly promoted in the material, spiritual or moral field, this purpose can be declared as charitable". The highest tax authorities could therefore come to the conclusion that esports does not fall under sport (or any other catalogue purpose mentioned in the literature, such as the "promotion of youth welfare" or the "promotion of culture"), but that it promotes the general public in the material, spiritual or moral field. German sports science, in

particular, has largely rejected the idea that esports should be regarded as sport in its entirety.⁴³

2.4.3 ESBD

The ESBD sees itself as "the association of organised esports" and "the central point of contact for politics, society and the public for the development of esports in Germany. The focus is on the legal recognition of esports clubs as non-profit organisations, the political integration of the esports industry, the development of nationwide structures and formats for industry-wide exchange".⁴⁴ Members include non-profit associations, commercially organised companies for professional teams and event organisers.⁴⁵ The ESBD's definition dates back to 2018 and reads as follows: *"Esports is the direct competition between human players using suitable video and computer games on various devices and digital platforms under defined rules. The comparison of athletic performance in esports is determined by the interaction of a targeted operation of the input devices in direct response to the presented gameplay and the simultaneous tactical mastery of the entire gameplay. The reference object of the sporting activity is video games which, in their structure and mode of operation, fulfil the requirements for determining sporting performance, do not leave the success of the game predominantly to chance and offer a reproducible game framework for comparing the performance of the players."*⁴⁶ According to the ESBD, the distinction between esports and gaming is fundamental: *"Esports is a dedicated sub-sector of gaming that operates under specific conditions. The use of video games to compare sporting performance determines the core content of eSports and thus forms a separate system in the leisure, recreational and cultural area of gaming"*.⁴⁷ Finally, the association distinguishes between game titles according to the underlying game mechanics: strategy

⁴³ [Stellungnahme zum eSport](#), 16. September 2019, Prof. Dr. Carmen Borggreffe.

⁴⁴ <https://esportbund.de/>, accessed on 15.06.24.

⁴⁵ <https://esportbund.de/mitglieder/>, accessed on 15.06.24.

⁴⁶ <https://esportbund.de/themen/>, accessed on 11.06.24.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

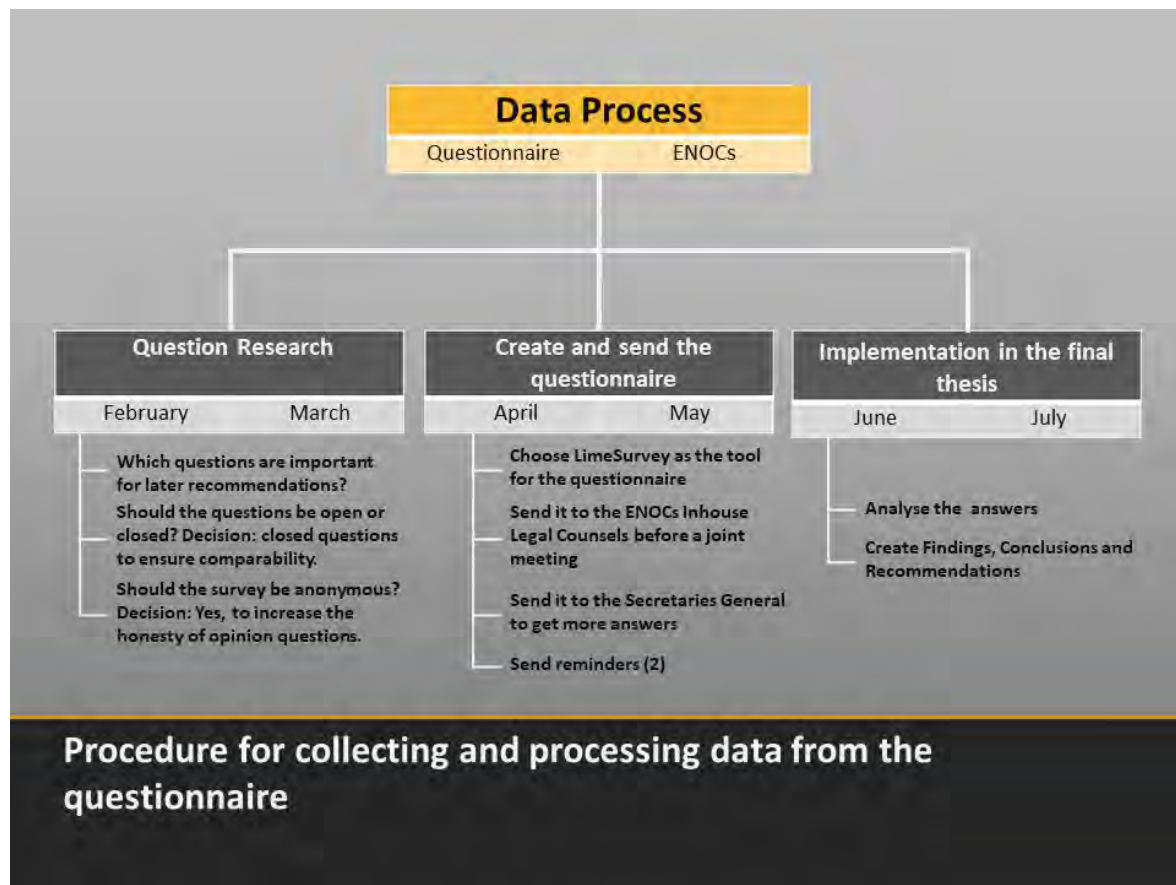
games (RTS - real-time strategy, MOBA - multiplayer online battle arena), first-person shooters (FPS - first-person shooter) and sports and racing games as well as simulations (such as sim racing).⁴⁸ In particular, the categorisation has no consequences. The IOC (see paragraph 2.4.1) and the DOSB (see paragraph 2.4.2) consider that a "red line" has been crossed if the content of a game does not correspond to the values, as is the case with first-person shooters in particular.

An analysis or evaluation of the various opinions and positions, which would go beyond the scope of this presentation, is not provided here, as this is not the focus of this paper.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

III METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

3.1 General



Data Process for the final thesis

The collected data is rather qualitative. In addition, the questionnaire was only be sent to the ENOCs. The research sample is therefore rather small compared to the actual number of worldwide existing NOCs. Furthermore, the information requested is detailed and in-depth. It relates to the individual activities of the associations in the field of esports. Furthermore, the focus is not on the accuracy of the data collection. Rather, the aim was to analyse whether there is a trend in engagement with and treatment of the issue. This does not mean, however, that there is no quantitative element to the data collection.

The main forms in which data can be collected are primary and secondary data. While the former is collected first-hand by a researcher, the latter is collected by someone other than the user. Secondary data surveys are used

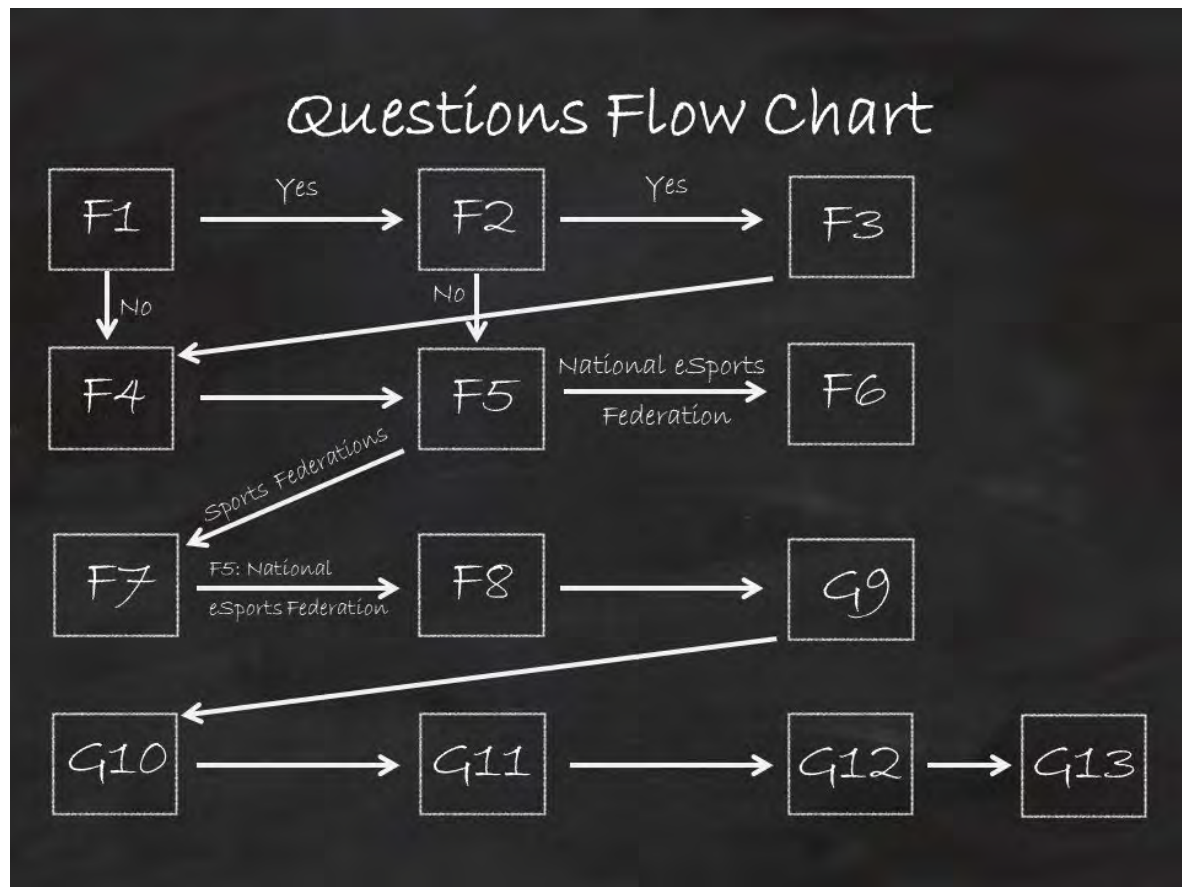
to make general observations about the nature of esports and its relationship to the concept of sport. These are not intended to be the main subject of the thesis. They are taken from previously published books, journals and/or online portals. The data on the use of esports is primarily collected. The data is collected from the federations as administrative units and not from the athletes. Both can describe how the federation deals with esports from their own perspective. However, the athletes cannot provide any insight into the current and future strategic direction of esports within the federation. And it is precisely this that should be considered in the context of international developments in the IFs, the EOC and the IOC.

3.2 Questionnaire

Initially, the author planned to collect the data through interviews. However, he quickly realised that, given the time available, it would not be possible to arrange the necessary meetings with leaders of the ENOCs. He therefore anchored the questions in questionnaires. He used the software LimeSurvey Professional and formulated most of the questions as closed questions (yes/no answers or predefined answer options). The background to this was the consideration of enabling comparability of the statements made. Open response options would not have made sense in this context. Some of the questions were designed to build on each other to avoid redundant questions and were divided into three groups.

The categorisation has been made to emphasise the nature of the questions. The first set of questions deals with the extent to which esports is recognised and structurally anchored in the ENOCs. These findings are necessary in order to identify the current situation and place it in the context of international developments. The second set of questions is designed to get a picture of the mood regarding the activities of the IOC and the willingness of the ENOCs to change. This should allow conclusions to be drawn about the likelihood of recommended structural adjustments in relation to the

objectives of the ENOCs. The two questions in the third complex serve to categorise the participants internally.



How questions depend on previous answers. First Complex: F1-F8,
2nd Complex: G9-G11, 3rd Complex: G12+G13

The first complex on the recognition of esports was introduced as follows:
"The questions in this group are concerned with whether or not structures have been put in place for eSports at your NOC".

If the answer to the **first question** *"Is eSports considered and treated as a sport by your NOC?"* was "Yes", respondents were taken to question two, if it was a "No" they were taken to question four.

The **second question** was: *"Does this recognition apply to all eSports game titles?"* If the answer was no, the fifth question was asked.

If the answer was yes, the **third question** followed: *"What type of game titles have been recognised?"* There were three possible answers to this question:

- *“Only virtually (digitally) supported sporting activities that are defined by a sport-defining motor activity (‘physical virtual sports’), e.g. Zwift and SIM racing (‘physical virtual sports’ where applicable) were recognised”*
- *“all virtual forms of sports (including console games such as NBA2k or FC (formerly FIFA)”*
- *“All video games except first-person shooters”*

The **fourth question** then appeared: *“Is there currently a discussion or vote being prepared on whether eSports should be recognised as a sport by your NOC?”*, which could be answered in the affirmative or negative.

The **fifth question** combined the two strands of answers:

“Is a national eSports federation a member of your NOC or are the interests represented by the sports federations responsible for the sports depicted (e.g. the national cycling federation for the virtual cycling game Zwift etc.)?”

The question could be answered *“national eSports federation”* or *“sports federations”*. If the answer was *“national eSports federation”*, the **sixth question** followed: *“Is the national eSports federation a full member of your NOC with its own voting rights at the General Assembly?”*, which could also be answered yes or no. If the sixth question was answered in the negative, the **seventh question** followed: *“Are there any current discussions or is a vote being prepared to recognise the National eSports Association as a full member?”*, which could also be answered in the affirmative or negative. If the fifth question (membership of a national eSports federation) was answered *“National eSports Federation”*, this was followed by the **eight question**: *“Does the national eSports federation receive sports or federation funding from your NOC or state?”* This completed the series of questions on the recognition of esports.

The second set of questions was entitled *“Questions about developments at the IOC and EOC and the involvement of their NOCs”* and described as follows: *„Last year, the EOC organised the first European Games Esports*

Championships as part of the European Games. The basis for this was a sponsorship agreement with a global esports association. The IOC organised last year the Olympic Esports Week in Singapore. An Esports Commission was subsequently established by the IOC. Among other things, this commission is examining whether the IOC should organise Olympic esports games. The following questions deal with whether your NOC is prepared to participate in these formats - or whether it is already doing so."

The questions in this complex were:

- *"Did you send your country's athletes to the Olympic Esports week or the European Games Esports Championships?"*
- *Would your NOC consider sending athletes in the future, especially if the IOC actually creates an Olympic Esports Games?*
- *Do you welcome the IOC's idea of offering events for virtual sports?*

All three questions could be answered in the affirmative or negative and did not build on each other.

The third and final complex consisted of two general questions with an open-ended answer:

- *Which NOC do you represent?*
- *What position do you hold in your NOC?*

The questionnaire was designed and sent online rather than on paper. This made it easier to send and process the raw data. The response rate was good. Out of 48 enquiries (Belarus and Russia were excluded), 35 ENOCs answered the questionnaire in full. The response rate is therefore 72.92%. A meeting of the European NOC lawyers in March, at which the author asked for their co-operation, was helpful. The representatives of the ENOCs were very interested in receiving information from other NOCs in order to draw their own conclusions for their own decisions on how to deal with esports in the future.

3.3 Others

Focus groups, benchmarking and case studies should not be taken into account. They are not necessary for the preparation.

IV RESULTS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Questionnaire results

The results of the questionnaire are presented below and conclusions are drawn. It should be noted that the questionnaire was sent and answered before the IOC announced that it would decide on and organise the Olympic Esports Games.

The **first question** *"Is Esports considered and treated as a sport by your NOC?"* was answered by 8 of the ENOCs surveyed with "Yes" (22.86%), 25 with "No" (71.43%) and 2 (5.71%) did not answer. Both larger and smaller ENOCs, mostly from Northern, Central and Eastern Europe, answered "Yes".

The **second question** *"Does the recognition apply to all eSports game titles?"* was only asked of the 8 ENOCs that answered "Yes" to the first question. Two (5.71% of the total number of responses) answered "Yes", three (8.57%) answered "No" and three (8.57%) left the question unanswered. 27 respondents (77.14%) did not see the question.

The **third question** *"What kind of game titles were recognised?"* was only shown to the three ENOCs that had answered "No" to the second question. This was to determine what type of games were recognised by their ENOC. Two of them (5.71%) chose the answer *"Only virtually (digitally) supported sporting activities that are defined by a sport-defining motor activity ('physical virtual sports'), e.g. Zwift and SIM racing ('physical virtual sports' where applicable) were recognised"*. One ENOC (2.86%) did not provide an answer. 32 ENOCs (91.43%) were not shown the question.

The **fourth question** *"Is there a discussion going on at the moment or is a vote being prepared on whether eSports should be recognised as a sport by your NOC?"* was shown to those federations that answered "No" to the

first question. Eight of these associations (22.86%) answered in the affirmative, while 17 ENOCs (48.57%) answered in the negative. 10 ENOCs (28.57%) were not shown the question. Discussions are ongoing in both small and large ENOCs.

The **fifth question** *"Is a national eSports federation a member of your NOC or are the interests represented by the sports federations responsible for the sports depicted (e.g. the national cycling federation for the virtual cycling game Zwift etc.)?"* was displayed to all participating federations. 12 of them (34.29%) responded with *"national eSports federation"*, three ENOCs (8.57%) with *"sports federations"* and 20 (57.14%) gave no answer. The ENOCs with their own national esports federations as members are mostly smaller and from the east or south, occasionally from the north of Europe.

The **sixth question** *"Is the national eSports association a full member of your NOC with its own voting rights at the general meeting?"* was put to the ENOCs who had answered the previous question by saying that a National esports Federation was responsible for esports in the ENOC. Four NOCs (11.43%) confirmed the question, seven (20%) answered in the negative and one NOC (2.86%) gave no answer. 23 ENOCs (65.71%) were not asked this question, as the previous question about the responsibility of a national esports federation was answered in the negative.

The **seventh question** *"Are there any current discussions or is a vote being pre-pared to recognise the national eSports association as a full member?"* only went to the seven ENOCs that had answered the previous question in the negative. One ENOC (2.86%) confirmed an ongoing discussion, while six ENOCs (17.14%) answered in the negative. 28 ENOCs (80%) were not asked this question as they had not answered the fifth or sixth question at all or had answered "No" to the sixth question.

The twelve ENOCs who answered "Yes" to the fifth question about the responsibility of a national esports federation were asked the **eighth question**: *"Does the national eSports federation receive sports or federation funding*

from your ENOC or the state?". Five of them (14.29%) answered in the affirmative, seven ENOCs (20%) answered in the negative. 23 participating ENOCs (65.71%) were not shown the question.

The **ninth question** related to recent competitions: *"Did you send your country's athletes to the Olympic Esports week or the European Games Esports Championships?"* and was asked of all participating ENOCs. Four ENOCs (11.43%) answered in the affirmative, 26 (74.29%) answered in the negative. Five ENOCs gave no answer.

The **tenth question** looked to the future: *"Would your NOC consider sending athletes in the future, especially if the IOC actually creates an Olympic Esports Games?"* 24 ENOCs (68.57%) answered this question in the affirmative, three (8.57%) answered in the negative and eight (22.86%) gave no answer.

The **eleventh question** was: *"Do you welcome the IOC's idea of offering events for virtual sports?"*. 20 ENOCs (57.14%) were in favour of the idea. Six ENOCs (17.14%) did not. Nine participating ENOCs gave no answer. Interestingly, there is no correlation between the answers to questions 10 and 11. ENOCs who answered question 10 in the negative mostly answered "Yes" to question 11 and vice versa.

The **twelfth question** was *"Which NOC do you represent?"* and was answered by 33 ENOCs (94.29%). Two participants (5.71%) gave no answer. Due to the promise of anonymity, the participating ENOCs are not named.

The **thirteenth question** was *"What position do you hold in your NOC?"* and was answered by 32 ENOCs (91.43%). Two participants (8.57%) gave no answer. The participants predominantly stated that they belonged to the legal or human resources department, the general secretariat or the internal relations department.

4.2 Findings and Conclusions

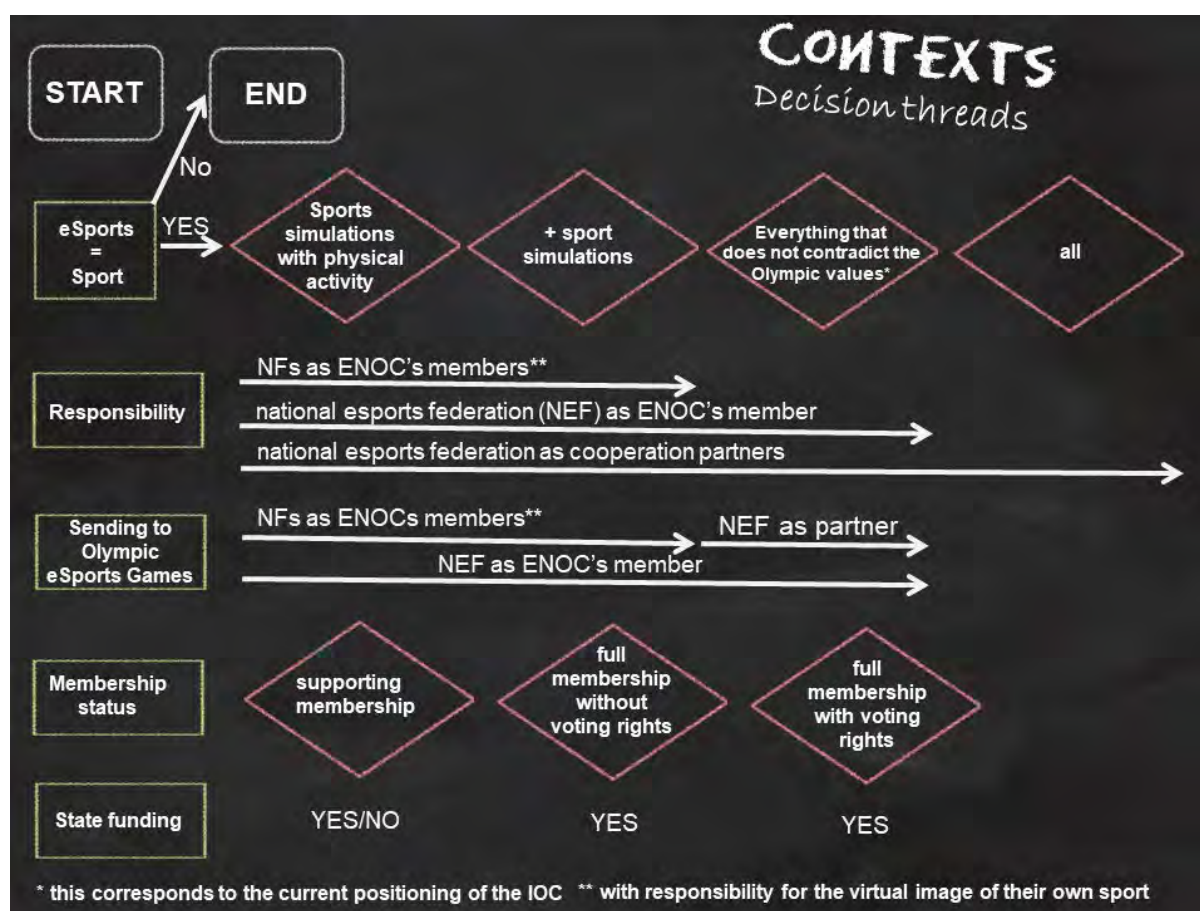


Illustration of the necessary or possible decisions

4.2.1 General information

Firstly, it should be noted that the issue concerns a large number of ENOCs, which is reflected in the high response rate of almost 73%. In addition, the response came from the top management of the ENOCs. On the one hand, this may be due to the fact that mainly the legal department and the CEO were contacted directly. In such cases, however, there is often an internal forwarding and response from other departments. However, this was not the case here, as can be seen from the answers to the thirteenth question. In the meantime, i.e. after the IOC's announcement of the creation of the Olympic Esports Games, the interest in the subject is likely to have increased, as such an event is likely to arouse the interest of ENOCs to (successfully) participate in it.

4.2.2 Need for coordination among the ENOCs

When it comes to the specific answers to the questions, it can generally be said that they cannot be categorised according to size or location in Europe. Obviously, the ENOCs' approach to esports is driven by their own experiences or perceptions. There does not seem to be any uniform or coordinated behaviour among the ENOCs. This supports the theory that there is either a lack of information or a lack of coordination between the associations. Coordination, for example at the level of the EOC, is quite common between ENOCs. Especially with the growing importance of the expected Olympic Esports Games, this is likely to be remedied. So far, it has probably not been considered necessary, as the one-off Olympic Esports Week 2023 (IOC) and the European Games Esports Championships Katowice 2023, which were organised by the EOC as part of the European Championships framework programme on the basis of sponsorship, were manageable and it was not necessary for the ENOCs to send a delegation. The number of seven out of 35 ENOCs that have so far recognised esports as a sport is manageable. However, eight other ENOCs are currently discussing the issue of recognition. However, the IOC's decision to organise the Olympic Esports Games will certainly lead to more ENOCs taking the step of discussing and possibly recognising esports (or parts of it) as a sport.

4.2.3 Recognition of game titles

The question of the recognition of sports titles as sports will be interesting. From today's perspective, there are tendencies towards differentiation, which are also reflected in the pillars mentioned by the IOC President⁴⁹:

- virtual representations of (recognised) sports, which are performed with the player's own motor activity, and/or
- simulations of (recognised) sports which do not require any motor activity other than the operation of an input device (e.g. racing or football simulations on a PC, console or telephone), and/or

⁴⁹ cf. chapter 2.4.1 with reference to <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-eb-proposes-creation-of-olympic-esports-games-to-ioc-session>, accessed on 15.06.24.

- Games that do not violate the values of the IOC/ENOC and therefore do not cross a "red line",⁵⁰ or
- all game titles

The questionnaire does not yet show any tendency in which direction the ENOCs are likely to recognise esports as a sport. The position of the DOSB currently only refers to the game titles of the first bullet point. In the opinion of the author, the IOC's selection of game titles for the Olympic Esports Games will have an influence on the acceptance and recognition by the ENOCs in the short to medium term. If the Olympic Esports Games include competitions for titles in the second and/or third bullet points, it stands to reason that these will be recognised by the ENOCs sooner or later. It is also conceivable that the second and/or third pillar titles will not be recognised, but that access to the participation of Olympic Esports Games will be provided through cooperation with the respective national esports federation. The announced announcement of the specific game titles for the Olympic Esports Games will therefore also have an impact on the recognition of esports and its components in the ENOCs.

4.2.4 Responsibility of NFs or National Esports Associations

As part of the recognition process, it will also be necessary to clarify and decide which organisation should be responsible for esports. In principle, three constellations seem obvious:

- A national esports association will be responsible for esports, but will not become a member of the respective ENOC, but will be bound by a cooperation agreement.
- A national esports association, which also becomes a member of the respective ENOC, will be responsible for esports.
- For virtual representations of sports, the respective NF responsible for the sport represented will be responsible. Simulations and other

⁵⁰ Ibid.

game titles will not be provided or will be provided through a cooperation agreement with a national esports federation.

Which of the options is chosen depends in particular on the answer to the question of what the NFs that are already members of the respective ENOC have in mind, and thus whether they consider it necessary to attach such importance or specialisation to the subject that it requires its own association. As the development of game titles for virtual sports is currently more controlled by the IFs, the author believes that it is not absolutely necessary to involve a national esports association in the NOCs, as the NFs can get involved in the esports work of their IFs if necessary. If further esports title groups are recognised, cooperation with a national esports federation would be conceivable in order to develop them or to nominate players for the Olympic esports games.

If a national esports organisation is not only bound by a cooperation agreement but also becomes a member of the ENOC, it is important to consider what rights it is granted. While 12 ENOCs stated in the questionnaire that esports is overseen by a national esports federation or the NFs (question 5), only four stated that a national esports federation is a full member with voting rights. With the increasing importance of esports in the IOC's (and perhaps also the EOC's) programme, the importance of this segment will increase and possibly also the demand for full membership. This demand would be entirely understandable. Whether this demand will be met can certainly be predicted differently at national level. It can be assumed that there will be parallels with the national approach to disability sport, rehabilitation sport and the like. Another factor may be the economic importance or the interest of national sponsors. Ultimately, it will remain an autonomous national decision of the ENOCs to what extent they co-operate or integrate.

However, the situation would be different if the IOC were to make the national participation of an association or a delegation at the Olympic Esports Games mandatory. According to Rule 27, Paragraph 3, Clause 1 of the Olympic Charter, the NOCs are solely responsible for representing their respective

countries at global title competitions under the auspices of the IOC and are only obliged to participate by sending athletes to the Olympic Games in accordance with Clause 2 of the standard. To date, this has only been the case for those Olympic sports for which a national federation or its representative must be responsible for national participation in accordance with the Olympic Charter (Rule 28, paragraph 1.2). However, neither the requirements for the Olympic Esports Week nor the requirements for participation in the Olympic Esports Games that have become known so far indicate that the IOC is currently planning to equate the above NF and delegation obligations for Olympic sports and Olympic Esports Games. For these reasons, the ENOCs currently have the autonomy to decide whether and how to involve a national esports federation or the NFs in esports.

4.2.5 Public funding and sponsorship

For ENOCs, the question of membership can also be linked to the question of support for esports from public sports funds. The proportion of 14.29% of ENOCs surveyed in the questionnaire in which a national esports organisation receives funding from an NOC or a country (question 8) can at least be increased if this task is taken over by the NFs for the virtual representation of their sports. The taxpayer-funded promotion of sport is often linked to integration into organised sport and thus to the NOCs or their member organisations. The idea behind this is that the use of funds in organised sport promises a higher degree of effectiveness, as the higher level of professionalism promises a higher quality of use. At the level of the NFs, the focus is less likely to be on promoting the (further) development of the game titles that represent the virtual image of the NF's sport, as this is a task for the IFs. Rather, the focus should be on the acquisition of hardware, possibly licences for the game software or for the training and competition platforms on which it is used. In addition, efforts could be made to make the costs of sending players to competitions, such as the Olympic Esports Games, eligible for funding. This will also be linked to the fact that an allocation to sport

can be made, at least if the sports budget items in public budgets are to be used.

By creating more binding structures, it might also be possible to open up new sponsorship fields in the context of marketing with new or existing, endemic or non-endemic esports partners, not only at IOC level, but also at national level. By creating more binding structures, it may also be possible to open up new sponsorship areas in the context of marketing with new or existing, endemic or non-endemic esports partners, not only at IOC level but also at national level. This possibility is particularly conceivable in countries with a high affinity for technology, where successful esports players are active or where important esports competitions are held. As the national opportunities for ENOCs are likely to be very heterogeneous, considerations in this regard are only hinted at here and will not be explored further.

4.2.6 Assessment of the IOC's involvement in esports by the ENOCs

Finally, there are some interesting conclusions to be drawn from the answers to questions 9-11. Only 11.43% of the 35 responding ENOCs sent athletes to the Olympic Esports Week or the European Games Esports Championships organised by the EOC last year. However, 68.57%, or 24 of the ENOCs, would be willing to send athletes in the future. The question is what prevented them from doing so last year. The reason could have been the actual responsibility for sending the athletes or the uncertain question of how to cover the costs. As there is a fundamental willingness to deploy, the above applies all the more to the clarification of national structural issues in order to create national responsibility or funding requirements where necessary. The fact that the basic statement in question 11 regarding the IOC's fundamental support for esports events is somewhat more reserved, with 20 in favour and six against, is not considered unusual. Firstly, the difference is not significant, and secondly, change processes always carry risks that can lead to fundamental scepticism.

V RECOMMENDATIONS

1. At the latest since the IOC's decision to organise the Olympic Esports Games, the ENOCs should no longer stop at the question of whether esports or parts of esports titles are sports. Rather, the decision has to be made whether to participate in this (currently) voluntary offer of the IOC.
2. ENOCs should discuss with their sponsors and TOP partners whether they see potential for further sponsorship involvement in the Olympic Esports Games and contact endemic national companies to see if they are interested in sponsoring the esports segment of the federation.
3. In order to realise the full potential of involvement in esports, structural considerations are necessary to create the basis for secondments or national funding or sponsorship. As change processes and their preparation in ENOCs generally take a considerable amount of time, they should be started immediately if they are being considered. The General Assembly is usually responsible for admitting new member organisations, recognising sports or amending the statutes. It often meets only once a year or even every two years. The internal discussion about such a change often takes a long time, especially in large ENOCs as the DOSB - member organisations, government institutions, sports science and other stakeholders want to be involved in the decision-making process. Experience shows that these processes can take several months at best. If the changes deemed necessary can be implemented by the time of the first Olympic Esports Games in 2025, the processes described above should be initiated as soon as possible.
4. The IOC (and EOC) should communicate their plans with regard to virtual sport earlier and in a more binding manner in order to provide the ENOCs (and all other interested NOCs) with certainty and arguments for possible national transformation or development processes. It is recommended that they be informed at an earlier stage. This does not imply a demand for participation in the decision-making process. However, if the ENOCs knew what steps the IOC and EOC were planning to take, and were able

to communicate the steps of the developments in the IFs together with the NFs, this process could proceed faster and more profitably. The ENOCs would then be able to achieve a higher level of participation in competitions such as the Olympic Esports Games more quickly.

5. The IOC would do well to differentiate the participation of ENOCs (and NOCs) in the various pillars currently announced. In doing so, it will take into account the different views on what is considered sport and where the responsibility of sport lies. It is not expected that this will be necessary in the long term at the current intensity. However, the 'red line' of respecting Olympic values should continue to be a navigational compass, even if in some cases this is likely to reduce the economic potential, reach or acceptance in the esports scene.

Recommendations for a NOC that may wish to send players to the Olympic Esport Games

Priority	Recommendation	Action	Lead	Resources	Timescales	Critical success factors
1	deciding whether the ENOC wants to become active in eSports	consult with all member organisations	Sec Gen	time	asap	commitment and interests of member organisations
2	deciding whether NFs should be responsible for eSports	consult with all NFs	Sports Director	time	asap	commitment of the NFs
3	approaching (state) funding organisations to finance the development of structures and sending players to competitions	enquiry to funding bodies	Sec Gen	time	end of the year 2024	Government interest in promoting eSports
4	enquiry to (potential) sponsors as to whether there is interest in advertising opportunities in esports.	enquiry to sponsors	Marketing department	time	end of the year 2024	Recognising marketing potentials
5	development of a national team that is being prepared for the Olympic Esports Games	develop, promote and prepare players with the NFs (and possibly a national esports federation)	Sports Director	Time Money Player	from the announcement of the game types to the dispatch of the players	talent and interest of the players, financial resources

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IV APPENDICES

ENOCs eSport handling survey as [Annex 1](#)

ENOCs eSports handling Questionnaire as Annex 1		
Number of questionnaires sent	48	
Total number of data records in this questionnaire:	35	
	72,92%	
Summary for F1		
Is esports considered and treated as a sport by your NOC?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes. (AO01)	8	22,86%
No. (AO02)	25	71,43%
No answer	2	5,71%
not shown	0	0,00%
Summary for F2		
Does the recognition apply to all eSports game titles?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes. (AO01)	2	5,71%
No. (AO02)	3	8,57%
No answer	3	8,57%
not shown	27	77,14%
Summary for F3		
What kind of game titles were recognised?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Only virtually (digitally) supported sporting activities that are defined by a sport-defining motor activity ('physical virtual sports'), e.g. Zwift and SIM racing ('physical virtual sports' where applicable) were recognised (AO01)	2	5,71%
all virtual forms of sports (including console games such as NBA2k or FC (formerly FIFA) (AO02)	0	0,00%
All video games except first-person shooters (AO03)	0	0,00%
No answer	1	2,86%
not shown	32	91,43%
Summary for F4		
Is there a discussion going on at the moment or is a vote being prepared on whether eSports should be recognised as a sport by your NOC?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes. (AO01)	8	22,86%
No. (AO02)	17	48,57%
No answer	0	0,00%
not shown	10	28,57%
Summary for F5		
Is a national eSports federation a member of your NOC or are the interests represented by the sports federations responsible for the sports depicted (e.g. the national cycling federation for the virtual cycling game Zwift etc.)?		
Answer	Number	Percent
national eSports federation (AO01)	12	34,29%
sports federations (AO02)	3	8,57%
No answer	20	57,14%
not shown	0	0,00%

Summary for F6		
Is the national eSports association a full member of your NOC with its own voting rights at the general meeting?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes (AO01)	4	11,43%
No (AO02)	7	20,00%
No answer	1	2,86%
not shown	23	65,71%
Summary for F7		
Are there any current discussions or is a vote being prepared to recognise the national eSports association as a full member?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes (AO01)	1	2,86%
No (AO02)	6	17,14%
No answer	0	0,00%
not shown	28	80,00%
Summary for F8		
Does the national eSports federation receive sports or federation funding from your NOC or the state?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes (AO01)	5	14,29%
No (AO02)	7	20,00%
No answer	0	0,00%
not shown	23	65,71%
Summary for G9		
Did you send your country's athletes to the Olympic Esports week or the European Games Esports Championships?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes (AO01)	4	11,43%
No (AO02)	26	74,29%
No answer	5	14,29%
not shown	0	0,00%
Summary for G10		
Would your NOC consider sending athletes in the future, especially if the IOC actually creates an Olympic Esports Games?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes (AO01)	24	68,57%
No (AO02)	3	8,57%
No answer	8	22,86%
not shown	0	0,00%
Summary for G11		
Do you welcome the IOC's idea of offering events for virtual sports?		
Answer	Number	Percent
Yes (AO01)	20	57,14%
No (AO02)	6	17,14%
No answer	9	25,71%
not shown	0	0,00%

Summary for G12		
Which NOC do you represent?		
Answer	33	94,29%
No answer	2	5,71%
not shown	0	0,00%
Summary for G13		
What position do you hold in your NOC?		
Answer	32	91,43%
No answer	3	8,57%
not shown	0	0,00%