



# **HOW ENCE CAN HELP DEVELOP THE ESPORTS MARKET IN FINLAND**

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Jingkang Gao

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Author Jingkang Gao

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Supervisors Annaleena Kolehmainen

Abstract

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The aim of this thesis was to explore what ENCE can do to help expand the eSports market in Finland. Nowadays, the Finnish eSports market is not very optimistic, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, some Finnish organizations even filed for bankruptcy. ENCE, the largest eSports organization in Finland is the commissioning company for this thesis, and the goal was to examine what actions ENCE should take to help expand the Finnish eSports market.

The thesis examined the current situation of the Finnish eSports market including its development history, market size and major players. A qualitative research method was used to find out what actions ENCE is currently taking towards the Finnish eSports market, with the aim to analyze these actions and draw conclusions. Three members from ENCE were interviewed, including the CEO, Partnership Account Manager and the Leader of the Academy Project.

Finally, a strategy was proposed for how ENCE can help expand the Finnish eSports market, which includes improving the infrastructure for eSports events, promoting eSports education and training, and fostering a supportive eSports community.

Keywords eSports, Finland, Market development

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# 1 Introduction

Electronic sports (Esports) are competitive sports that utilize information technology. There are two forms of eSports, the team form and the individual form, depending on the sport and the format of the competition. The most common eSports games are recreational games that run on computers or consoles, which are categorized into several sub-genres, for example, FPS (First-Person Shooter), MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) and RTS (Real-Time Strategy). (SEUL, 2021)

The concept of eSports first originated in the 1990s, when most players were playing single-player games and online games were still in their initial stages. With the rapid development of the global Internet in the late 1980s and early 1990s, online games represented by StarCraft began to enter the field of vision of players, and with the popularity of the game, it also pushed the players from traditional role-playing games to the transformation of multiplayer online tactical competitive games. (Lin, 2022)

In 1998, South Korea began to pay attention to the development of the cultural industry, as the best game of the year "StarCraft" also attracted the attention of the South Korean people, so in Asia people generally still play games as entertainment activities, and South Korea has taken the lead in the organization of the "StarCraft" tournament. In addition to the way to watch the game on-site, there was a television station for the game to broadcast the whole process, becoming a fashion among young people at that time. (Lin, 2022)

The emergence of eSports has revolutionized the traditional concept of sports and entertainment, bringing a new form of competition and entertainment that is based on digital technologies. Esports has grown rapidly over the past decade and has become a global phenomenon. According to 2022 Global Esports of Newzoo and Live Streaming Market Report, the global eSports market was expected to generate a revenue of \$1.38 billion by the end of 2022, with an audience of 532 million viewers. As one of the most developed countries in Europe, Finland has a unique advantage in the development of eSports. However, the current status of eSports in Finland is still lagging behind other European countries, which provides both challenges and opportunities for its further development. This thesis aims to explore how to develop the eSports market in Finland and provide recommendations for future industry expansions. (Newzoo, 2022)

The commissioning company of this thesis is ENCE eSports. ENCE is a professional eSports organization founded in 2013, and the organization is mainly involved in the field of Counter Strike: Global Offensive (CSGO) and NHL. (ENCE, n.d.)

ENCE was originally founded in 2013 to professionalize the Finnish eSports scene. Their mission has always been to build a sustainable winning culture and expertise to create success stories. As eSports has become more mainstream over the past few years, ENCE also strives to make the voice of the fanbase heard and play a role in everything ENCE does. "Created for the community. Created by the community" is their motto. ENCE is run by some of the most recognized Finnish eSports pioneers and technologists. They combine decades of experience in the eSports industry. Today, ENCE is most recognizable, most talked about and by far most successful eSports brand in Finland. (ENCE, n.d.)

After ENCE was founded in 2013, they acquired a local Finnish CS:GO team. (Iurppis, 2013). But this lineup didn't achieve anything, and after 2014 this lineup was hastily disbanded. Since then, ENCE had reorganized their roster a few times, but all of them ended in failure. It wasn't until 2018 that ENCE signed Aleksi "allu" Jalli, Aleksi "Aleksib" Virolainen, Jani "Aerial" Jussila, Jere "sergej" Salo, and Sami "xseveN" Laasanen. This lineup has already had a solid year in 2018. It managed to win the S-tier event StarSeries & i-league Season 6 in October and again in the A-tier event Dreamhack Open Winter 2018 the following December. 2019 was a very good year for this ENCE lineup, as well as a rewarding year. The team boasted a runner-up finish at IEM (intel Extreme Masters) Katowice Major, the top CS:GO tournament. (Stubbs, 2019). During the Major, ENCE gained a lot of love from Finnish fans, and the Finnish music group The Verkkars released a song called "EZ4ENCE" as a support song for the team. The music has been listened to over 18.5 million times and the music video has been viewed over 9.4 million times. (Hartikainen, 2020.-a). The song was later added to the game by Valve. ENCE won the Blast pro Madrid Series, and was runner-up at Dreamhack Dallas Masters and intel Extreme Masters Chicago in the same year. (Ashton, 2019). In 2020 the team fell apart due to irreconcilable internal conflicts. (Biazzi, 2020). In 2022, Joonas "doto" Forss was sent down, and active roster of ENCE no longer featured the Finn, but the reorganized ENCE had a good run. (Hartikainen, 2022.-b). This new ENCE finished second at ESL Pro League 15 in 2022 and finished in the quarterfinals at the PGL Antwerp Major in May. In 2023, ENCE finished in the quarterfinals at EPL(ESL Pro League) 17, but won IEM Dallas in June and took second place at IEM Cologne in August. As of September 2023, ENCE is ranked second in world ranking of HLTV. There is no doubt that ENCE is at the top of the Finnish and international scene.

Figure 1, Liquidpedia (n.d).

Date	Placement	Tier	Type	Tournament	Result	Prize
2023-08-20	2nd	S-Tier	Offline	 Gamers8 2023	1 : 2	\$180,000
2023-08-06	2nd	S-Tier	Offline	 Intel Extreme Masters Cologne 2023	1 : 3	\$180,000
2023-06-04	1st	S-Tier	Offline	 Intel Extreme Masters Dallas 2023	2 : 0	\$100,000
2022-04-10	2nd	S-Tier	Offline	 ESL Pro League Season 15	1 : 3	\$90,000
2019-11-24	2nd	S-Tier	Offline	 CS:GO Asia Championships 2019	0 : 2	\$100,000
2019-06-02	2nd	S-Tier	Offline	 DreamHack Masters Dallas 2019	1 : 2	\$50,000
2019-05-11	1st	A-Tier	Offline	 BLAST Pro Series: Madrid 2019	2 : 0	\$125,000
2019-03-03	2nd	S-Tier	Offline	 Intel Extreme Masters XIII - Katowice Major 2019	0 : 2	\$150,000
2018-12-02	1st	A-Tier	Offline	 DreamHack Open Winter 2018	2 : 0	\$50,000
2018-10-14	1st	S-Tier	Offline	 StarSeries & i-League CS:GO Season 6	3 : 2	\$125,000

ENCE formed a CS:GO Academy team for the summer of 2022, which consisted of five Finnish players, Paavo "podi" Heiskanen, Ville "myltsi" Vilkmán, Henri "HENU" Ylilehto,... Yousef "juissi" Adam, Veeti "S1rva" Sirva. the goal of the program was to develop more professional CS:GO eSports players from Finland to reach the top level in the country and the world. Through this program, ENCE has also become more actively involved in the development of the Finnish CS scene! (Hartikainen, 2022.-c).

In September of this year, ENCE continued to expand their presence in the CS:GO program by creating a women's team consisting of two Finns, one Turk, one Ukrainian and one Dutch: Lotta "Waldee" Liesmala, Milona "miLo" Tiainen, Halat "Missy" Naby, Oleksandra "manka" Kruspe. Tude "oxycet" Gursoy. (Hartikainen, 2023.-d)

In this thesis, the author focuses on ENCE as the main research object, and looks for the weaknesses of the Finnish eSports market by studying the history of the Finnish eSports market, the Finnish eSports market today, and by comparing the size of the eSports market in other countries. The author will use a qualitative research method to interview people from ENCE about their strategies for the Finnish eSports market. All the information is summarized to show the current status of Finnish eSports market and answer the research question of the thesis: How ENCE take action to develop Finnish eSports Market?"

## 2 Literature Review

So far, the author has not found many reports and information about the eSports market. But according to McCauley, the rise of eSports represents the birth of a rapidly emerging market that is changing the way the global media landscape is viewed, including the way it is consumed, shared, created and monetized. Viewing and participation within the eSports community is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and the motivations for consumption are very different from those of traditional sports. (McCauley et al., 2020, p. 30)

Scholz categorizes eSports into two main groups, primary and secondary stakeholders, with audiences and funding sources being the main active players in the market. Primary stakeholders contribute directly to the value chain and interact directly with the audience, while secondary stakeholders influence the industry through investment or pressure. Those players directly involved in the industry can be defined by six characteristics: a focus on goal-setting, global localization, change orientation, bottom-up resource allocation, digitization as a whole, and over-energized, over-enthusiastic, and over-dynamic participants. These characteristics contribute to the uniqueness of eSports as a context. (McCauley et al., 2020, p. 33).

Economic concepts are also applied to the eSports environment. Competitive equilibrium concepts commonly used in sports surveillance economics are applied to analyze the demand characteristics of this emerging market. Elite eSports demand is represented by collecting data on total prize money for elite eSports tournaments and explaining eSports demand by testing various factors that measure competitive market attributes. The unique market characteristics of eSports require novel methods and measurements. As a result, alternative methods for measuring the properties of the competitive environment of the eSports market were developed and tested. The Ingenuity Statistical Moments method is able to measure the distributional properties of prize deviations. The distributional information is used to construct various indicator metrics to test the competitive balance of the eSports market, and this information is modeled in regression estimates to explain the demand properties of the elite eSports market. (Mangelaja, 2019, p.34).

The traditional concept of "market" is grounded in economic theory and favors a managerial perspective. That is, markets are viewed as entities that firms target, segment and enter in order to maximize the profitability of customer relationships. However, recent literature has recognized the importance of understanding the context in which non-firm actors contribute to the creation and maintenance of new markets, acknowledging that actors other than firms

are influential in the process and viewing markets as socially constructed phenomena. The market, as a value-creating system, is governed by a variety of institutions that are in turn shaped by the actors in the market. It does so through the redesign of exchange methods, stakeholder networks and institutions by the relevant actors, with the aim of creating new opportunities to link the resources of the various stakeholders in order to improve value creation. (McCauley et al., 2020, p. 31).

## **2.1 Situation of the Global eSports Market**

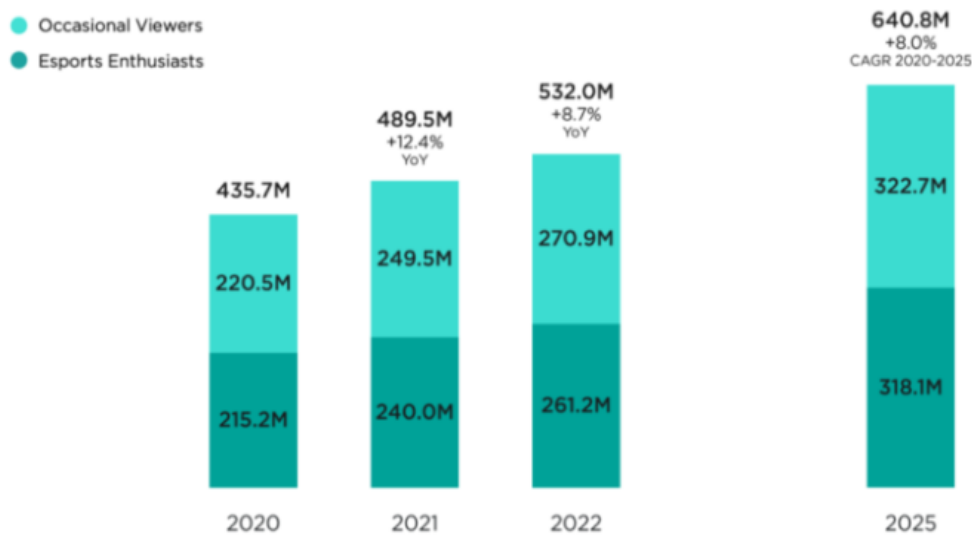
The global eSports market size was USD 1.45 billion in 2022 and is expected to grow to USD 1.72 billion in 2023 and USD 6.75 billion by 2030. Growing trends in live gaming, gaming investments, ratings, ticket sales, tournament activities, and demand for league infrastructure will be the factors influencing the growth of the eSports market. The market is benefiting from the growing revenue opportunities resulting from the increased participation of gamers, organizers, anchors, and game openers. Attractive international prizes and opportunities to earn high income have made eSports a career option for young people. In addition, colleges and universities, as well as some eSports organizations, have begun to set up special programs to develop knowledge and skills of students in eSports. (Fortune Business insights, 2023).

Among the many factors affecting the eSports market, the increase in viewership associated with eSports events has been a major contributor to the growth in revenues, and not just because of the revenues directly generated by viewers. Seeing the potential of a large and active audience, many brands are also investing in eSports marketing, both directly and indirectly. This involves many different types of businesses, from apparel companies, fast food companies, mobile operators, gambling companies and more. (Geysler, 2023).

Due to Covid 19, people around the world were restricted to various blockades, which indirectly led to a surge in viewing across all live streaming platforms. Although the eSports market faced challenges during this time, with major tournaments not being able to be held in venues and some international events having to be restricted to regional locations. (Geysler, 2023). As the chart shows according to a report by Newzoo, eSports viewership has increased significantly since 2016. The report categorizes the audience into two types of occasional viewers or enthusiasts, and those who watch regularly. Between 2018 and 2019, the year-on-year growth was 12.3%. In post-2019 data of Newzoo, there were 200.8 million occasional viewers, 197 million eSports enthusiasts, and 397.8 million total viewers. year-over-year growth continued in 2020 and 2021. in 2022, there were 249.5 million occasional

viewers, 240 million eSports enthusiasts, and 532.0 million total eSports viewers. (Newzoo, n.d.)

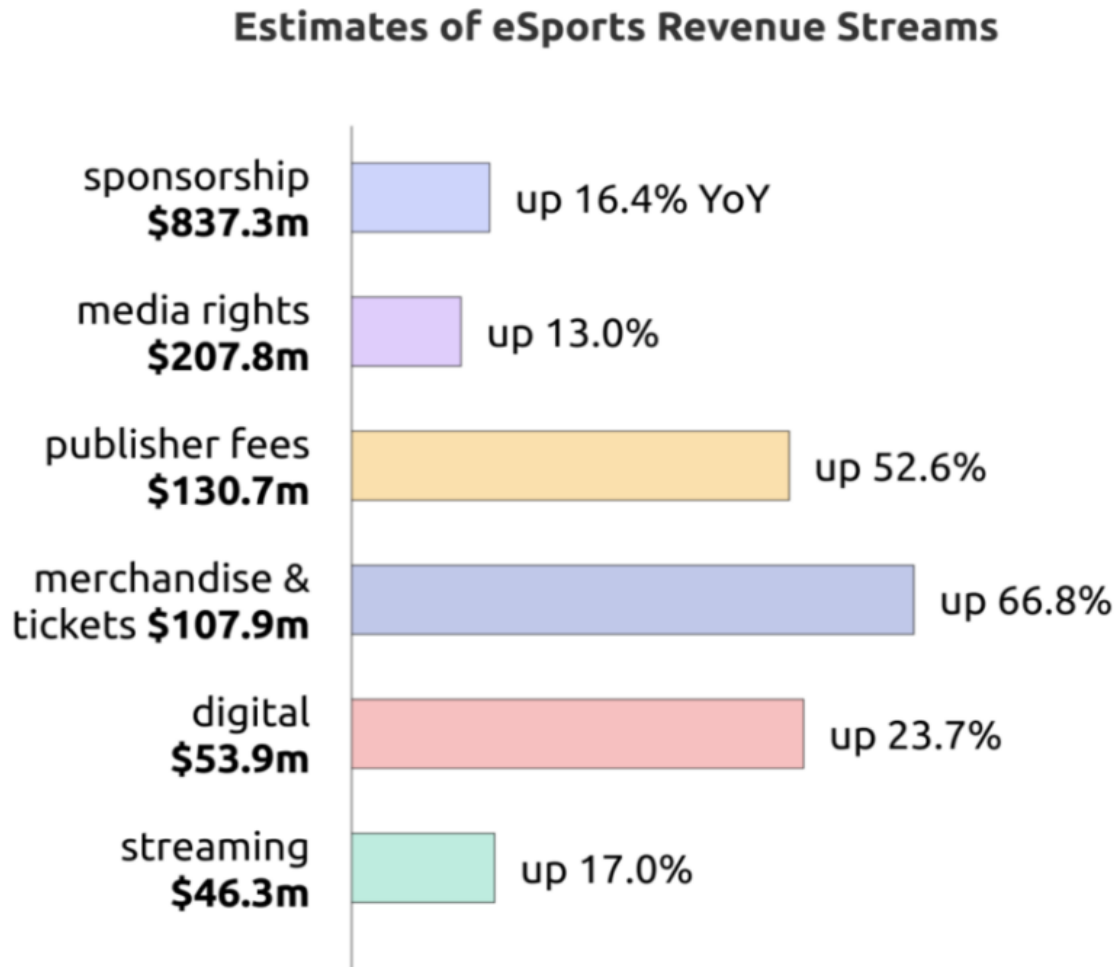
Figure 2: Esports Audience Growth (Newzoo, 2022).



One of the main reasons for the growth of eSports classifications is that more and more people are learning more and more about it. Awareness of the eSports industry has increased dramatically since 2015. At that time, just over 800,000 people had heard of the eSports industry. These figures changed rapidly, and by the following year more than a billion people were aware of eSports. Over the following years, these numbers continued to grow by hundreds of thousands every year. Since 2017, eSports awareness has risen to 1.28 billion, reaching 1.43 billion in 2018 and 1.8 billion in 2019. According to Newzoo, global eSports awareness is expected to reach 2 billion in 2020, of which 530.4 million will be Chinese. (Geysler, 2023)

The growth of the eSports market in recent years could not have been achieved without the sponsorships that some brands have made on the marketing side of eSports. According to analysis of Newzoo, eSports revenues in 2019 were \$957.5 million, a 23.3% year-on-year increase, slightly higher than predictions of Newzoo. The 2020 outbreak led to pessimistic predictions about the market as a whole, which would have resulted in a large degree of losses due to the inability to host offline tournaments, but the end result was not as bad as it could have been. 2020 actual global eSports revenue was \$996 million, only a 1.1% year-on-year drop from initial predictions of Newzoo. (Geysler, 2023).

Figure 3. Estimates of eSports Revenue Streams. (Geysler, 2023)



This is the estimate of eSports revenue streams in 2022 from Newzoo, with a total of 1.384 billion US dollars in 2022 likely to be made up of the following revenues: sponsorships of 837.3 million US dollars, up 16.4%; media rights of 207.8 million US dollars, up 13%; publisher fees of 130.7 million US dollars, up 52.6%; merchandise and tickets of 107.9 million US dollars, up 66.8%; digital 53.9 million US dollars, up 23.7%; and live media 46.3 million US dollars, up 17.0%. 2023 is mostly due to the gradual easing of restrictions due to the Corona Virus, and it is believed that this year will see a big increase in gate receipts, with eSports organizers and teams continuing to diversify. (Geysler, 2023)

### 2.1.1 eSports Organization

The key to the eSports ecosystem are professional organizations and teams. There are a wide variety of competitive gaming organizations and teams in different countries around the globe. Typically, an eSports team consists of a group of individuals who play together under a unified team. In contrast, an eSports organization is larger than a team and consists of a variety of different teams and groups of gamers who play different games under the banner of a single organization. Some of the major eSports organizations include Cloud9, Fnatic, Dignitas, Team Liquid, FaZe Clan, Immortals Gaming Club, and Gen.G. Each of these organizations has different gaming divisions that compete against other eSports organizations and teams in various eSports tournaments. (ebrary, n.d.)

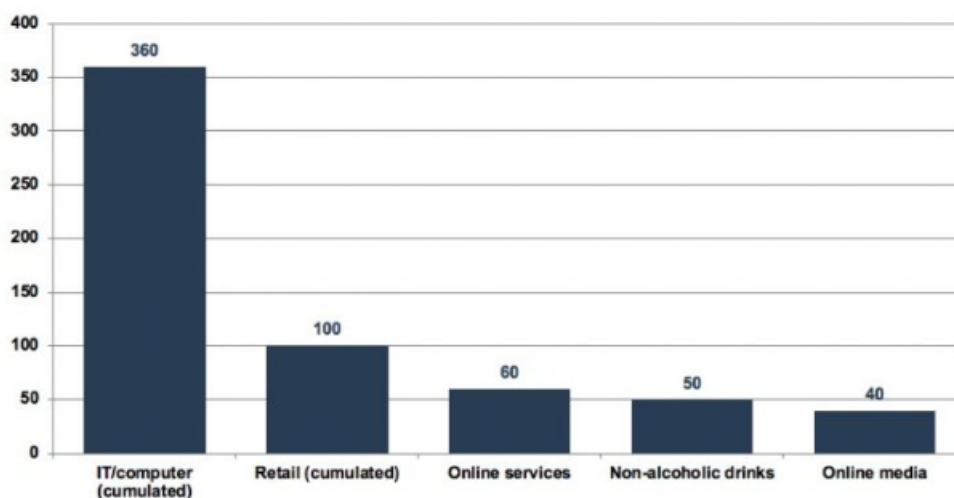
The primary function of eSports teams and organizations is to field lineups in tournaments and organized leagues to compete against other organizations or teams. However, some of these companies also sign up with individual content streamers in order to broadcast live under that platform. Anchors contracted to a particular platform are typically required to broadcast a specific number of hours per month, display the logo of team on their social media accounts, and promote the sponsors and partners of organization during live stream. Many eSports teams typically have a full in-house infrastructure of employees and other independent contractors that assist in the day-to-day operations of the team. This includes specialized coaches and analysts who help train competitive players. There are also social media managers and content creators who work on behalf of the organization in photography, videography, and related video and photo editing. These individuals create and repost team announcements, tournament updates, and any content created, such as photos and video entries, on the team's social media networks such as Twitter(X), Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok. Generally, most of the work created by any team operations personnel, as well as any individual, is proprietary to the organization. (ebrary, n.d.)

In most cases, organizations enter into written agreements with gamers and anchors for their services. In exchange for these obligations, the organization pays the player a salary and may help the player with related expenses. For example, the organization may pay for the travel and lodging of players to tournaments and training camps, as well as pay for the amenity expenses of player, such as rent, food, and other living expenses. Some organizations may also provide players with professional coaches and analysts to improve their game. Other organizations may provide players with physical and mental coaches to help them grow and develop, and may provide them with gaming peripherals and equipment for tournaments and live broadcasts. This assistance may include providing computers,

keyboards, headsets, gaming chairs, and other computer hardware to their contracted players. A "bootcamp" is what is known in the industry as a gaming training "bootcamp," in which players on a team undergo an intensive training program over a short period of time designed to prepare the team for an upcoming tournament or other competition. (ebruary, n.d.)

Esports teams around the world are raising money at an alarming rate. 100 Thieves recently raised \$35 million, with investors from a variety of industries, from Dan Gilbert (owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers) to Toronto rapper Drake. eSports team valuations have skyrocketed, and according to a 2018 Forbes article, U.S.-based Cloud 9 was valued at \$310 million. eSports organizations position themselves in a variety of ways to create value for themselves, their investors, and perhaps most importantly, their fans. Some focus on competitive success, while others delve into certain types of games or emphasize their hometown cities. While many organizations struggle to find a clear voice, 100 Thieves currently has the strongest positioning of any eSports organization, focusing on apparel, with CEO Matthew "Nadeshot" Haag creating a lifestyle brand around gaming and eSports. The main cost to eSports teams is the franchise fees for participating in licensed leagues run by top game developers such as League of Legends and Overwatch. These leagues offer the highest level of competition and provide security for teams with low competitiveness. This allows teams to invest in developing new talent and signing multi-year contracts with sponsors. Some franchises include revenue-sharing models based on selling league sponsorships and media rights, but they are expensive. The Call of Duty league, for example, is expected to have a franchise fee of about \$25 million. (Nelson, n.d.)

Figure 4. Estimated Number of eSports Sponsorships. (Mercer Capital, n.d.)



The data in the chart clearly shows that IT/Computer related sponsorships are the most common in the eSports industry, as gaming equipment and accessories are essential in this industry and will have exposure at all times during tournaments. For example, HP and Intel agreed to sponsor Activision Overwatch League of Blizzard. As part of the agreement, tournament players will have exclusive access to OMEN gaming PCs and monitors of HP. From a valuation standpoint, ongoing recurring revenue favors a value of company. Sponsorships can provide eSports teams with long-term recurring revenue. (Mercer Capital, n.d)

In partnership with game publishers, eSports teams and organizations can also earn revenue from the sale of digital in-game products featuring their team's name or logo. Game developers can sell "stickers" or "skins" that include characters representing individual teams. For example, the competitive game "Rocket League" offers the 11 organizations in its Rocket League Championship Series (RLCS) the ability to earn 30% of their revenues from the sale of their branded in-game items. These items include "branded car decals," team-specific player "banners," and customized "wheel options" that fans can purchase, equip, and use on their consoles. In addition, Rainbow Six developer Ubisoft has created a similar revenue-sharing program. Under the program, each 14 participating teams of the league receives 30 percent of the revenue generated from the sale of their respective items, including team-branded "bundles that include branded headwear, uniforms, and weapon skins," as well as an equal 30 percent share of the revenue generated from the sale of any Rainbow Six Pro League-branded merchandise. Another example is Gears of War, in which "four Gears of War 5 Pro League teams," including NRG ESports and Rise Nation, are currently entitled to receive an equal share of revenues from the sale of "weapon skins and other game items purchased by users of the game. (ebrary, n.d.). In addition, according to an interview with ENCE eSports CEO Mika Kuusisto, ENCE earned more than a million euros in game sticker revenue from Valva in 2022. While the actual amount the organization receives from the sale of in-game items may be somewhat modest, it is an important source of revenue that is likely to grow in the future, especially as the team continues to prosper and more and more fans continue to purchase these items digitally. (Interview with Mika Kuusisto, 2023)

### **2.1.2 eSports streaming**

eSports streaming refers to gamers broadcasting their shows live online to a public audience through a variety of available online channels, with Twitch being the most popular platform. The first platform to popularize eSports live streaming was Twitch. after becoming popular in

the mid-2010s, other platforms soon followed suit, including YouTube Gaming, Facebook Gaming, Mixer and other services. Today, it's one of the fastest-growing segments of Internet traffic, with hundreds of millions of viewers watching streaming services every month. (Suncho, n.d.)

These current game live broadcast platforms make it easier to watch eSports events. More and more people watch eSports videos and events, which has also spawned a new professional eSports anchor. These eSports streamers can use these platforms to live stream events or stream some of their own gaming streams. Sometimes professional eSports players also choose to live broadcast some of their own game rankings, which makes it more convenient for viewers to interact with their favorite eSports players. Streamlabs made some observations in its report for the third quarter of 2022, compared to Newzoo statistics, which combine the eSports market and the gaming market. It reported an overall decline in content viewing in the quarter, with 7.27 billion hours watched across all platforms, down from 7.36 billion hours in the previous quarter. Most live broadcast viewers prefer Twitch, which accounted for 5.7 billion hours of viewing time in the quarter, accounting for 78.6% of the total viewing time on all platforms, an increase of 1.9% from the previous quarter. (Geysler, 2023)

An eSports organization can earn revenue by streaming gaming content on social media platforms such as Twitch and YouTube from individuals contracted with their organization. Organizations can contract directly with these streaming platforms for a portion of the advertising and subscription revenue that the organization's players receive when streaming under their platform. While the money from streaming isn't as large as some of the other avenues available to eSports organizations, teams with a large and active following are able to earn some revenue while also providing opportunities for live fan engagement. Live streaming also provides additional opportunities to showcase team sponsors to a live audience. In recent years, it has become the norm for professional organizations to establish exclusive streaming partnerships with specific platforms. For example, a number of eSports organizations, including Fnatic, TeamSoloMid, and Cloud9, have signed exclusive streaming agreements with Twitch. Fnatic, for example, requires that each of Fnatic's professional players, across multiple eSports disciplines, be streamed exclusively on Twitch. Team Liquid and Team Secret have streaming partnerships with Chinese live streaming platform Huya, where some of the streams are actually translated in real time into Mandarin for Huya's viewers when the club's players are live streaming. In addition to the advertisement revenue earned during live streams, organizations have the opportunity to earn additional revenue from any created content or other saved media they produce. For example, teams can

upload created content to social media platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok, or Twitch. The organization could then receive ad revenue from any advertisements displayed during the content viewing session. Again, while this may not be a large amount, as more viewers watch the content and more original content is published, it creates more opportunities for teams to earn revenue in this way. (ebruary, n.d.)

### **2.1.3 Situation of Finnish eSports Market**

The global market for eSports has been growing in recent years, and Finland is no exception. According to Statista, in 2023, Revenue of Finland in the eSports market is expected to reach \$5.92 million, and the revenue is expected to grow at an annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.41%, so the market is expected to reach \$8.8 million by 2027. (Statista,2023).

Although the Finnish eSports market is smaller than some of the more populous countries, Finland has an advantage that most countries do not have, it has a thriving gaming market, which has given rise to a number of game developers such as Rovio, Remedy Entertainment and Supercell, to name a few. Some of the most famous mobile games in the world such as “Angry Birds” and “Clash of Clans” were developed by these studios. These achievements have attracted the interest of international companies, such as Clash of Clans producer Supercell, which was acquired by Tencent Group from China in 2016 for \$8.6 billion. Finnish developers have also found success by partnering with international companies; Rovio, the studio behind Angry Birds, has partnerships with leading brands such as Coca-Cola and Lego. Gambling games are also well developed in Finland, most notably by Monopoly Veikkaus. It is therefore clear that the Finnish gaming and eSports market is a growing and changing market, and an exciting place for gamers, companies and developers alike. (Esports insider, 2022).

Professional eSports teams in Finland date back to the turn of the century; for example, a Finnish team called the Allstars competed in the World Cypher Games in 2001. But it wasn't until after 2010 that eSports began to receive more recognition and support from the government and media. During this time, a number of eSports organizations emerged in Finland, but they were not successful due to a number of factors, such as an inability to achieve good results or a lack of funds to support the day-to-day operations of the organization, which still affects the Finnish eSports market today. Especially during the pandemic, many Finnish eSports organizations suffered huge losses, and even some have closed down after the pandemic ended due to heavy losses. As of the end of 2021, the only Finnish eSports company that has made profits in consecutive years is Finnish Esports

League, which organizes leagues and conducts tournaments. Although turnover of the company has stagnated at around 100,000 euros, it has made a profit of 59,000 euros over the past three years. The majority of operators have been losing money year after year. The only companies with a turnover of one million are ENCE and Assembly. In 2020, both companies made losses. (Hartikainen, 2021)

A sound and healthy eSports market cannot be separated from government support and regulation by relevant organizations. The Finnish eSports Federation (SEUL) is an umbrella organization based in Finland whose mission is to improve and promote eSports and the activities of its members. Based on the mission of SEUL, the activities of federation are divided into the development of eSports, the protection of interests of players and communication efforts. In addition, the federation has a high level of participation in international organizations, as SEUL represents Finland in the International eSports Federation (IESF). In addition, SEUL cooperates with the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture every year to help with youth projects. (SEUL, 2019). In the Finnish eSports Federation, Decision-making power is exercised by the members of the federation in conjunction with the meetings of federation. Decision-making power of SEUL is exercised by the members of the union through meetings of the union, which are held twice a year. The tasks of the union meetings include electing board of directors of the union and deciding on finances and operations of the union. The federal government, along with union employees, controls the day-to-day operations of the union. The board of directors meets approximately once a month. Its most important tasks are to carry out matters decided at union meetings and to oversee finances of the union. It also monitors the interests and accepts new members. In addition to this, the federation is assisted by a number of volunteers who do important work for the development of eSports as part of various working groups and projects. (SEUL, 2019)

Finland has a special eSports gathering, the Assembly event. The Assembly event has been largest digital festival of Finland for more than 30 years and is held twice a year. The event is world famous, gathering nearly 30,000 enthusiasts every year at Messukeskus in Helsinki. Currently, there are more than 4,000 simultaneous computer and console slots at Assembly events. Assembly is especially recognized as an event for computer enthusiasts, where people can spend sleepless nights playing, coding, live streaming, participating in competitions, learning new things and meeting people interested in the same subject. The focus of the event was initially on demo culture, which is still represented by annual contests and meeting places for the demo scene. Due to its long history, Assembly plays an important role as a meeting place for Finnish game industry experts. As gaming has become more and

more common, gaming, and especially gaming together, has become a very important part of the Assembly event. Today, the vast majority of visitors to the event come to play games and make friends that they originally met through online gaming or on Discord servers. And also competitive gaming or eSports has joined in, Assembly plays an important role in eSports scene of Finland as an organizer of live tournaments and online tournaments. The tournaments offer a wide range of different competitive games for amateurs and professionals. (Assembly, n.d.)

### 2.1.4 Challenges of Finnish eSports Market

The eSports industry has long been known as an industry with a bright future. Advertisers are particularly interested in eSports as it has been found to be an effective way to reach young people, especially males. Gaming is more popular than ever and eSports has grown with it. However, eSports activities in Finland are still small and mostly loss-making due to the size of the Finnish market. Here is the financial situation of some of well-known professional eSports organizations in Finland. (Hartikainen, 2021.-e)

Figure 5. HAVU's most recent fiscal year was by far the weakest for the organization founded in April 2017. (Hartikainen, 2023.-f)



HAVU Gaming is one of the most famous professional eSports organizations in Finland, and their main team is CS Team. The total turnover in 2022 amounted to 523,000 euros, but the

final profit was a loss of 103,000 euors. The figures show that HAVU was in the red for three of the five years between 2017 and 2022. This shows that even the well-known Finnish eSports organizations are not able to guarantee a stable profit. There are many factors affecting financial instability, and according to founder and CEO of HAVU, something happened at the beginning of 2022 that led to the failure of negotiations for some of the larger partners, which was compounded by the difficult economic situation. (Hartikainen, 2023.-g)

Figure 6. ilta-Sanomat. (Hartikainen, 2021.-h).



The KOVA eSports organization is also well known internationally, with Derke (Nikita Sirmitev), a former member of the organization, now a star player in the Fnatic Valorant program. This organization had a total turnover of 258,000 euros in 2020 and a loss of 27,000 euros for the year. In 2019 the organization is in the same state of loss for the whole year in terms of revenue and expenses. At the end of 2022, the organization has filed for bankruptcy due to poor management, making the already small number of professional eSports organizations in Finland even rarer. (Hartikainen, 2023.-g).

In the eSports sector, the turnover of a company consists mainly of advertising sales and sponsorship contracts. This applies to gaming organizations and media players that focus on

league and broadcast operations. (Hartikainen, 2023.-g). In addition to players and teams, organizations usually have content producers to support them, and prize money goes primarily to the players. Tournament participating teams may also sign an agreement with the tournament organizer to become partners, with the proceeds of each tournament being distributed according to a percentage on the agreement. An example is the "Louvre Agreement" of ESL(Electronic Sports League) for the Pro League series. The "Agreement" is the way of ESL of creating a permanent residency in the ESL Pro League. The signatories share financial commitments in exchange for sharing the governance and finances of the tournament each season. (Schellenberg, 2022).

The eSports market needs eSports organizations to promote and participate, but eSports organizations need enough professional players to bring value to the organization. eSports players are the core assets of an eSports organization, and the strengths and performances of players directly determine the achievements and reputation of organization. According to sportsearnings.com, there are currently 176 professional eSports players in Finland, earning 666,000 US dollars this year, ranking 38th out of 131 countries. (eSports earnings, 2023). Some of these players have never been professionally trained in eSports, and only have the opportunity to join a professional organization because they are highly rated players. Others are training to compete at a higher level in the future. But this number is still not enough to expand the professional scene in Finland. According to Newzoo, there will be a total of 2.8 million gamers in Finland by 2020 (Elliott, 2021), which shows that there is potential for eSports players in Finland, but it will take more tournaments and more opportunities for the potential talent to unfold.

Finnish eSports organizations and related companies lack the initiative to look for investment and business opportunities. That's why the revenues of Finnish eSports clubs are getting lower and lower every year, and everyone is waiting for an opportunity to come along. The reason for all this is that eSports in Finland has suffered too many setbacks, and as the setbacks accumulate, companies become more and more cautious about their plans and investments. It is impossible to attract investors without a valid and reliable business and marketing plan. Without a strategic marketing plan, a company's advertising, marketing and promotional efforts are likely to be haphazard. A marketing plan helps a company assess the market, identify the target audience, and select the appropriate marketing tools to promote the company. The development of many marketing plans includes research and comparison of prices for advertising as well as sponsorships. Without this, a marketing plan may be ineffective. Without a proper marketing plan, the worst case scenario is that the eSports business will not be able to attract enough investors to keep the organization running

properly. Investors will not consider investing in such a company if they do not understand the organization's growth plan. This can lead to a slowdown in business, layoffs of employees, inability to pay creditors, and ultimately the collapse of the company. (McQuerrey, n.d.)

## **2.2 eSports Education**

Traditionally, there has been controversy about video games negatively affecting children, as most people agree that gaming leads to an increase in violence and delinquent behavior. However, as video games have evolved from purely console single-player games to multiplayer online competitive games, there are more facts and evidence that eSports have many benefits in terms of the competitive and social aspects of gaming. The benefits are easy to see and understand, especially for eSports in education. Schools play a crucial role in development of a child as the structure of education helps to develop habits, skills, perspectives, and mindsets, which in turn can develop social, physical, mental, and academic abilities of student. With the growing popularity of eSports among young people, it is only natural that schools can adopt this trend and utilize its advantages to promote learning and improve the academic or professional performance of their students. When eSports starts to be seen as a potential career option, it is important to understand the importance of creating opportunities for eSports students to develop themselves or advance their careers. By creating an eSports-centric community at their school, students can combine their passions with their academic and personal goals and create a great environment for students to learn, develop and embrace the different facets of eSports. From tournaments, teams, organizations and practice matches to coaches, team managers and sponsors, these elements of the eSports community help create a structured pathway for students to learn, grow and develop. Esports in education can enhance collaboration and camaraderie among students by creating a sense of community. Unlike traditional sports, it can be participated in by anyone regardless of gender, age or physical ability. Thus, all students interested in eSports can join the same community and collaborate, connect and interact with other like-minded peers. (Chou, 2023)

Esports education refers to the popularization, promotion and teaching of eSports for students, working and socially active people in universities, secondary schools and vocational colleges. (Ma, 2020, p. 6). Esports education is a profession derived from the development of the eSports industry, and from the current situation the main training

direction of eSports education is for two aspects, one is to train high-level age-appropriate players towards the path of professional players, and the other is to train related management and the operation person of eSports organizations. Training professionals in the eSports industry is a daunting task, because not only do we need to get players trained in professional skills, but we also need the relevant supporting eSports organization operators to run the organization in a sensible way. In an interview with *Ilta-Sanomat*, Mika Kuusisto (CEO of ENCE) has said that the Finnish eSports industry lacks a certain level of professionalism as well as longevity. Many Finnish eSports organizations operate more on the basis of hobby and passion. (Hartikainen, 2022.-i). Today eSports industry has evolved into a hyper-specialized environment, similar to the entertainment industry, and not as wild as it once was. This is due to a number of factors, such as non-epidemic stakeholders investing in the industry to capture key demographics; the eSports ecosystem becoming increasingly structured following franchising and partnership programs; and the acceleration of this change due to pandemic. (Daniels, 2023).

Esports is a new specialty in the field of education, and similar to other emerging disciplines, the industry building of this specialty is ahead of the discipline building. In addition, a professional eSports organization needs not only professional athletes, but also a range of operational managers such as managers, marketers, technical and financial professionals, medical staff and recruiters, which will lead to tremendous and rapid employment opportunities. These interests can be fostered from high school, where some students do not have the talent to be professional eSports athletes, but they want to be part of the eSports culture. When schools have eSports, they can get a broader view of the potential career opportunities in the industry. Esports organizations need to do more than just protect the interests of their athletes, they need to establish themselves as a successful brand, and that requires social media operators, and live streaming platform operators to constantly increase their exposure to the public. (ViewSonic, 2021)

### **2.2.1 eSports Academy program**

Unlike eSports related courses offered at universities, eSports academy programs are institutions or organizations that provide training, guidance, and education to aspiring or existing eSports athletes. These academies come in many forms, such as online platforms, schools, colleges, or individual programs dedicated to eSports organizations. eSports academies offer players the opportunity to improve their skills and performance in their

chosen game or sport. These academies provide professional coaches, mentors, analysts and special tools to help players learn new strategies, techniques and tactics. Through rigorous training and regular practice, players can develop a deeper understanding of the game, which can lead to better play and overall performance. In addition, eSports academies usually promote training and competition with other players of similar or higher skill levels, allowing players to grow through challenging experiences. Structured coaching and training can significantly improve skills, according to a study by the University of California, Irvine. On average, eSports players who received expert coaching improved their gaming skills by 17% compared to those who did not. Joining an eSports Academy can provide players with valuable opportunities to develop a career in eSports. eSports Academy often organises or participates in events, tournaments and leagues to attract organization managers, sponsors and organisations. By participating in these events, young players gain visibility and increase their chances of being noticed by industry professionals. eSports Academy also provides guidance on building a strong resume from an early age, as the unique experience of being part of eSports Academy stands out and demonstrates dedication, teamwork and commitment. (New meta, 2023)

### **2.2.2 eSports Education in China and US**

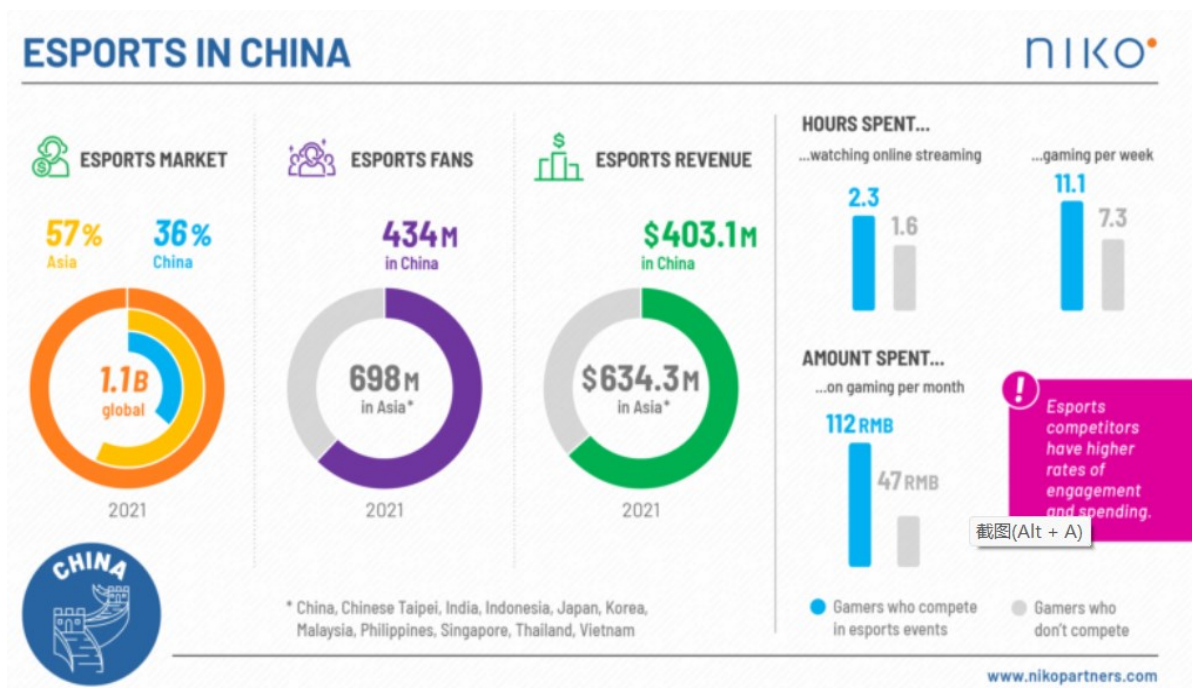
China and the U.S. are both largest market in eSports. in 2017, the eSports market in China and North America alone earned 362 million US dollars, accounting for more than 52% of total eSports revenue that year. (Yuan, 2018).

There are already a significant number of universities in the United States that offer eSports programs, and that number continues to grow. As of December 2022, more than 270 universities already have eSports teams, and some have even invested millions of dollars in these programs. More and more universities see eSports programs as a nice business card for admissions. The growth of eSports in higher education offers tons of opportunities for IT vendors. For example, investing in an eSports team requires a lot of specialized equipment as well as hardware services. Universities may also be interested in event management, advertising, marketing, data analytics and performance tracking to help improve the team as a whole. Of course, some universities are more successful at eSports than others, and universities with larger, more successful eSports programs also tend to be bigger spenders in the industry. For example, UC Irvine is one of the top eSports universities and one of the first public universities to offer an eSports program. Its eSports program includes more than

just its eSports team. UC Irvine has invested in an arena, an annual eSports conference, and even eSports informatics. Other particularly notable eSports universities include the University of Miami, which has a Division I collegiate eSports team, Boise State University, and Georgia State University. All of this buzz in the eSports field has even led to some U.S. universities offering scholarships to promising eSports athletes. For example, in 2020, universities allocated over 16 million US dollars to attract top eSports talent, and as of December 2022, 130 universities are offering eSports scholarships. (Zighelboim, 2023). The eSports education in the United States is not only at the university level, but they also have a corresponding system in secondary education. Educators like Washburn and Isaacs are working to build the knowledge base necessary to utilize competitive gaming to unlock the learning potential of students. These eSports programs can lead to career opportunities for students. Understanding how high school eSports are organized and the impact they may have on student participants will provide an opportunity to leverage the growing popularity of eSports for academic, professional, and personal development. (Reitman, n.d, pp. 7-8).

Asia is the largest eSports region in the world, accounting for more than 57% of the global eSports market. China is the largest eSports market in Asia and the largest single country eSports market in the world. eSports revenue in 2021 was 403.1 million US dollars with 434 million eSports fans. eSports revenue in China grew by 14% in 2021 and eSports audience grew by 11.8%. (Niko partners, 2022). These numbers all point to the success that China has achieved in the eSports industry, and eSports education is one of the key reasons why it has been able to achieve such success.

Figure 7. Esports in China (Niko partners, 2022)



The first thing that needs to be introduced is that as early as 2003, the General Administration of Sports of China has approved the inclusion of eSports as an official sports competition, which shows a strong foresight to the industry and also represents a positive signal from the Chinese government to the industry in the first place. The next step is the opening of related majors in higher education. As of 2019, more than 60 higher education institutions in China have opened eSports-related majors, with third-party platforms providing faculty training, enrollment assistance, and other services, as well as providing tournaments, job opportunities, and other resources for school students. (Internet Education Center, 2020).

The full name of eSports-related majors in Chinese higher education institutions is "Esports Sports and Management". The core courses include eSports concept, eSports event planning, eSports organization operation and management, eSports arena operation, eSports new media operation, eSports coaching, eSports program production and commentary, eSports event execution and business, and so on. (Internet Education center, 2020).

The eSports-related majors in Chinese higher education institutions mainly cultivate talents in the operation and management of eSports industry. Such as professional manager, event hosting, venue operation and maintenance, hosting and anchoring, eSports business, organization manager, youth training management, coaching team, data analysis, psychological consultation and counseling, life and health management, operation manager, new media operation, fan operation, and so on. Supporting the whole eSports industry chain.

Graduates can engage in eSports competition, coaching, refereeing, in charge and anchoring, event arrangement and management, and so on. (Internet Education center, 2020).

Professional eSports training organizations in China will hire active or retired professional players and coaches as teachers to provide professional eSports training to students and systematically teach them how to become a professional eSports player. The institution mainly offers professional courses: eSports game expertise, eSports law practical training, quality ability training, eSports anchor, eSports psychology, game equipment skills practical training, organization post technology, physical training, and so on. Full-time training is the main focus, and training in the direction of professional players. In addition, such eSports training institutions do not recruit students without threshold, they will be strict screening of all applicants, the first is the age, it is known that the career of eSports professionals is generally not very long, so these institutions will relatively need teenagers. The second thing is that the teachers of these institutions need to know the game level of the applicants, which they value very much, because then they can better judge whether the applicants are suitable for the industry. The third point is that the teachers will consult the parents of applicant, because many applicants just like to play games or do not like to go to school and apply for this profession, but their parents are not supportive or even do not understand it, so it is also very important to get the opinion from parents. (Internet Education center, 2020)

### **2.2.3 Finnish eSports Education**

There are many types of eSports education in Finland, including secondary-level studies, colleges and coaching camps. Some of these institutions train the managers of eSports organizations. Coaching camps are mainly aimed at young people who want to become professional players. (SEUL, 2022). But according to the Finnish eSports Federation (SEUL), there are more than 100,000 eSports enthusiasts and nearly 1,000 licensed players in Finland, but there are only about 10 professional eSports organizations operating in Finland (Karvinen, P 2021), so the chances of those players getting a chance are very slim.

The eSports industry needs to build a multi-level talent training system to help promote employment. The eSports industry chain covers a wide range of areas. The upstream is concentrated in the field of game research and development; the midstream includes event organization and operations; the downstream is oriented to audiences, including organizations, players, commentators, and so on. The majors established by existing schools cannot meet market demand. Even universities that offer eSports related majors still face

problems such as a lack of teachers; companies familiar with the needs of the industry chain do not have the time and energy to train students specifically. (Su, 2023)

## 2.3 eSports Event

Esports teams represent the organizations they belong to and will compete in their video game's respective leagues, which have regular season, playoffs, and world championships. Just as basketball teams are part of the NBA and compete against each other, eSports teams are usually under the an organization to compete in video game leagues. Leagues are organized by companies such as Major League Gaming (MLG) or the Electronic Sports League (ESL). Leagues include the North American League of Legends Championship Series, the Call of Duty World League hosted by MLG, or the CS:GO Pro League hosted by the ESL. (Chapman, n.d.)

There was a time when eSports tournaments were very much a niche, with video game-based tournaments dating back decades, but it's only in the last decade that eSports tournaments have really become noticeable. With multi-million dollar prize pools and millions of viewership records, the world's greatest eSports tournaments now have the ability to generate huge amounts of revenue across many verticals. Since 2010, the eSports industry has been growing at an incredible rate, and today the biggest tournaments rival some of the oldest and most popular traditional sporting events. An eSports tournament is a competition played on any video game platform. This has been the case since Stanford University hosted the first world eSports Championship in 1972. In this event, twenty-four players travelled to the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory to compete against each other in the classic arcade game Space Wars. (Catena Media, 2022)

In 2021, the number of simultaneous viewers of a single eSports event peaked at 5.4 million. At the end of the same year, the prize pool for another eSports tournament reached 40 million US dollars. According to Statista, the total number of eSports viewers is expected to grow exponentially over the next few years, increasing to approximately 640 million viewers by 2025. There is no doubt that the eSports industry has tremendous value and is growing at an incredible rate, with more prolific eSports tournaments appearing every year. Currently, the industry's greatest value lies in sponsorship deals, but more avenues for revenue are opening up all the time. Some of the most lucrative areas of the industry include eSports betting, brand marketing, broadcast and media rights, and content creation. In the last twenty or even thirty years, tournaments did exist, but few people knew about them, and even fewer attended them. To a large extent, gaming and the eSports associated with it were just

beginning to take shape, and few could have predicted the potential these industries held. Nowadays, the eSports industry is projected to be worth nearly \$2 billion by 2025, and some of the fastest-growing non-gaming-related gaming markets as well as brands have entered to support the industry. Over time, some of the world's most recognizable entities are entering the eSports space to support tournaments and organizations. The immense popularity of today's eSports tournaments is driving tremendous growth. (Catena Media, 2022)

There have been two eSports tournaments in Finnish history, the first being the Nordic Invitational in 2019 and the second being the Elisa Masters in 2022. The Elisa Masters tournament in 2022 was by far the most successful tournament in Finland, which featured the game Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CSGO). The event received a positive response from the live audience and online followers, and Fnatic finally celebrated a victory in the 200,000 US dollars Counter-Strike tournament. Nearly 10,000 visitors arrived in Espoo in three days. Less than ten percent of the visitors were minors. It was mainly young males, aged 18 to 35. Elisa produced the event in English and Finnish. Three of its own broadcasts ran simultaneously during the block stage, and Elisa own channel was activated more than 5 million times throughout the campaign. The broadcasts were watched for 76 million minutes. The Finnish-language broadcasts were less resourced, but they also attracted the interest of viewers. The cumulative number of broadcasts was close to 500,000, with 5.7 million minutes of viewing time. (Hartikainen, 2022.-j)

### **2.3.1 eSports Event Organizer**

The organization of an eSports tournament is not simply taking the tournament as the main output content, nor is it as simple as gathering players together for the tournament, there are still a lot of cumbersome procedures, additional contents, and preparations in the early and late stages, which need to be solved by the tournament organizer. When the tournament organizer prepares to undertake a tournament, the first thing it will do is to judge whether the tournament is worth doing. The criteria for judging are, firstly, whether there is enough profit margin; secondly, the influence of the tournament, which involves the brand influence of the tournament organizer, and there are many criteria for judging this part, such as the game's heat, the scale of the tournament, and the company's ability to expand its own brand by having or not having a market for this type of game. Meanwhile, tournament organizers will classify tournaments, including online tournaments, offline tournaments, official tournaments, commercial tournaments, leagues, cups, long-term tournaments, short-term tournaments and so on, and according to the different tournaments, the matching tournament planning, resource allocation and so on. are also different. (Sina, 2017)

Official large-scale offline tournaments, for this type of tournament, basically represents the top level of the game tournament, including the official organization of the league and cups and so on, but also represents the official image of the audience. Therefore, for this type of tournament official requirements are very strict. Some big game manufacturers, such as Tencent and other companies, are the ones that all tournament organizers expect to cooperate with. These companies' games are even the most popular games, the influence of the official tournament is large, and the official themselves will also use their own powerful promotional channels to promote the tournament, which is very favorable to the organizer's brand exposure; secondly, these companies have many games under their banners, and there is a lot of demand for organizing tournaments, so if they can carry out a long-term cooperation, this is a certain guarantee for the tournament organizer's cash flow. (Sina, 2017).

In terms of logistics, the tournament venue is the most important aspect of organizing an eSports event. You will need to find a place that is large enough to accommodate all the people attending your event. Keep in mind that you will also need space to host vendor booths, concession stands, and other activities. If you plan to organize an event that will be streamed online, you will also need to make sure that the venue has a good internet connection and enough electricity. Another very important aspect of organizing an eSports event is equipment. You need to make sure that you have enough gaming computers, consoles, monitors and other equipment to accommodate all the players and spectators. If you are hosting an outdoor event, you must also make sure that you have enough sheltered areas, generators, and other backup power sources in case of power outages. Staff is another key factor in hosting a successful eSports event. You need to have enough people to help with setup, registration, and other tasks. You'll also need to make sure you have people to take care of things like tournament management, refereeing, and broadcasting. And, of course, you need to have security personnel present to ensure everyone's safety. Finally, you need to consider logistics such as parking and transportation. Make sure there is ample parking for attendees and that the venue is easily accessible by public transportation. (DHL, 2023)

This kind of official top tournaments, but also distinguish between long-term tournaments and short-term tournaments, the specific embodiment of the league and cup, and these two kinds of tournaments for the organizers of the requirements are also different. For the league, the time span is generally longer, the most important thing is the continuity and stability of the tournament, so the official will choose the most stable way to carry out the planning of the tournament, all aspects are relatively fixed. For the short-term cup tournament is different,

the official hope that in the cup tournament to show some different, unique, different from the league mode, add some peripheral culture. For example, the previous League of Legends' Demacia Cup included cosplay of game elements and candy art of game characters, which could not be seen in the official league. During the tournament, to present a clearer and smoother game and to improve the audience experience is the ultimate goal, some data will be added in the game to let the audience understand the game more intuitively. For example, there will be the data content of each player in the match, and after the match, the MVP will be selected, the best shot of the match, etc. In this part, there is a division of labor between the official and the tournament organizer. (Sina, 2017)

LAN(offline) tournaments are usually the end of months-long competitions. Events such as the International Invitational, LCS Finals, and ESL One are impressive for their lucrative prize pools, showcases of the world's best teams, and production-worthy broadcasts and venues. Due to their size and cost, organizations typically only host these events once or twice a year and usually only showcase one match, but they are also usually the most anticipated and watched events of that particular tournament. For players, it's a chance to compete against some of the best players in the world and potentially earn a huge paycheck. Fans get to watch some of the best eSports talent in the world in impressive venues or through high-quality, professionally-produced broadcasts. These events are often accompanied by in-game activities and items to build hype and introduce a level of engagement. These events attract some of the biggest sponsors and investors. Due to the huge amount of money invested, these events set the benchmark for professionalism in eSports and they also tend to receive the most outside attention. (ESL, 2015)

Online eSports tournaments are held by players connecting to a server in another location via the Internet. The players themselves are located in different locations and must rely on their home computers and personal Internet connections. During these tournaments, players are using settings that are familiar to them and that optimize performance. In contrast, during offline tournaments, players' settings will be pre-determined, and in rare cases, they may not have any say in the equipment they use. Players may be able to participate in online tournaments from home, but they'll also have to deal with server latency or "ping" (the time it takes for a message to be sent to the server and returned), and depending on the location the location of team members can be a real issue compared to where the server is located. Natus Vincere and Virtus.pro in CS:GO, for example, have high latency on Western European servers when playing against teams like mousesports or Fnatic. (Pinnacle, 2020)

Many tournament organizers are actually multi-line development, using the tournament to expand their brand awareness, and then use the fame to develop their other businesses. At present, we can also see a phenomenon in the e-sports event is that some tournament executives in the event of one year, the next year may be out of the tournament, tournament organizers rotate very frequently, and in the development of e-sports in the early stage of a group of tournament organizers, many have no longer do the tournament execution. Because the profit of tournament execution itself is very small, the main source of income for these companies is not here, but the multiple lines of business developed by themselves, tournament execution is just a means they use to increase exposure, and when they have a reputation, these tournament organizers put their focus on other businesses. (Sina, 2017)

### **3 Research Methodology**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore ways to expand the Finnish eSports market, what role ENCE, as the largest eSports organization in Finland at the moment, can play in it, and to analyze where the Finnish eSports market will go in the future. As the thesis involves a high degree of specialization and requires the interviewees to have a certain level of knowledge and expertise in the eSports industry, the characteristics of qualitative research can be well presented. So the authors will use the Qualitative Research Method to learn more about ENCE and the Finnish eSports market. The author will use face-to-face interviews, online meetings and video recording with executives working at ENCE, and the main interviewees will be the CEO of the ENCE eSports organization Mika Kuusisto, the Partnership Account Manager Samuli Kaikkonen, and the head of the ENCE Academy program Eemeli Ikonen. Qualitative research allows for the collection of rich and detailed data on the experiences, attitudes and opinions of participants, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The three interviewees chosen by the authors all have considerable experience in the field of eSports as well as phenomena and data that cannot be searched for on the web. Qualitative research emphasizes the relevance of contextual and subjective data interpretations, which can provide insights into how individuals make sense of their experiences in a given context. The three interviewees were able to analyze in detail the difficulties faced by the Finnish eSports industry through the data available to them. (Abbadia, 2023). Qualitative interviewing is particularly effective when researching sensitive or complex topics. It allows participants to share their experiences and emotions in a safe and confidential environment, facilitating deeper exploration of potentially challenging

themes. This approach also enables researchers to capture the nuances, contradictions and subtleties of these themes, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding. So there is some unpublished data in this interview as well. (Singh&Shareef, n.d.)

The author mainly used interviews, where the interviewees were given a one-to-one approach to allow them to freely express their views on the issues at hand. (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). Qualitative interviews are a research method used in qualitative research that requires more personal interaction and the collection of detailed, in-depth information from participants. Qualitative interviews usually involve follow-up questions and take the form of a conversation or discussion. Qualitative interviews represent a more personalized research agenda than a general questionnaire or focus group study. Such formats usually include open-ended questions and follow-up questions. During the interviews, the author extends the questions based on the answers of the interviewees, so that more information and data can be obtained. Semi-structured interviews combine pre-determined questions with additional exploratory questions and the flexibility of follow-up questions. The researcher has a core set of questions to guide the interview, but can adjust the interview data collection process based on participant responses. This approach allows for a more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, ideas, and perspectives, while maintaining a level of standardization. (Singh&Shareef, n.d.)

In qualitative interviews, researchers usually create a guide ahead of time to refer to or remember the interview during the interview. An interview guide is a list of topics or questions that the interviewer wishes to cover during the interview. The interview guide should summarize the issues that the researcher believes may be important. Participants are asked to provide answers in their own words and to bring up points they feel are important, so the flow of each interview may be slightly different. While the opening questions in an in-depth interview may be the same in all interviews, the information shared by each participant will determine how the interview is conducted. (Pressbooks, n.d.) The interview guide is based on the questions listed and indicates the various points the author wishes to address in answering each question. (1) Relationship of ENCE with the Finnish eSports market. (2) Their initiatives to develop the Finnish eSports market and their effects. (3) Current situation of Finnish eSports market. (4) The main problems that Finnish eSports market is currently experiencing. (5) The progress of the ENCE Academy program, its future goal, origin plan, process, and the difficulties it is currently facing.

The author conducted their interviews through face-to-face video recordings, online conferences, and self-recordings. All interviews are in English. Between October 19, 2023

and November 4, 2023, the authors interviewed a total of three people. The specific titles of the people and the length of the videos are as follows.

Table 1. Interviewee numbers, titles and interview time.

Interview	Participant	Title	Duration of interview
1	Samuli Kaikkonen	Partnership Account Manager of ENCE	9 minutes 32 second
2	Eemeli Ikonen	ENCE Academy program lead	16 minutes 42 second
3	Mika Kuusisto	CEO of ENCE	8 minutes 45 seconds

### 3.1 Narrative analysis

Many qualitative researchers have found that human experience is shaped, transformed, and understood through linguistic representations. Senses of ambiguity and subjectivity characterize cognitive unstructuring. They take on meaning and order when attempting to articulate experiences clearly in communication. Translating experience into words, whether this is done verbally, in writing, or through thought, changes. Translating actual experience into communicable representations. Verbal forms are therefore not experiences in themselves; they are experiences. socially and culturally constructed devices for creating shared knowledge about them. Narrative analysis is a strategy that recognizes the extent to which the stories told by interviewees provide insights about experiences. (Thorne, 2000, p. 69). The author will use this method to integrate the information and experiences told by the interviewee to make these things more structured as well as communicative. The opinions expressed about the eSports market as told by the interviewees and the things they have experienced will be put into words.

### 3.2 Research finding

During the qualitative analysis of the three interviews, the following key points emerged: Finnish eSports organizations can pull in overseas investment, but they need to have reliable programs. There is a lack of initiative in the Finnish eSports market, There are enough eSports business people in Finland, but there is a lack of brands and organizations interested in eSports. ENCE has been involved in almost every event related to the Finnish eSports market and tournaments, and has created an academy program to train future eSports professionals. At the beginning of the program more than 3000 young people signed up to be part of the Academy program. (Interview with Eemeli Ikonen, 2023)

When asked, "What is the state of the Finnish eSports market today?" Mika Kuusisto and Samuli Kaikkonen both commented. They all agree that today's Finnish eSports market is going through a tough time, with not enough players and not enough eSports organizations. They think Finnish eSports investors are cautious and even afraid of investing in the industry compared to other countries, probably due to the fact that there have been so many previous failures in the industry, such as bankruptcy and dissolution of KOVA at the end of last year. Another reason for this is that Finnish eSports entrepreneurs don't have a business plan that can convince investors that even international investors are not interested. ENCE wants to set a benchmark for the Finnish eSports industry, so that later organizations can learn from it. Unlike other Nordic countries such as Sweden and Sweden, where many international events are held every year, Finnish event organizers lack the courage to organize events. In the interview both Mika and Samuli give their opinions on how to develop the Finnish eSports market. For some entrepreneurs, they need to prepare a good plan and make sure that it is feasible and sustainable in order to attract investors. ENCE is also trying to bring the Finnish eSports market into the international arena, which is why they have a lot of international partners such as Red Bull, and why they are trying to bring the Finnish eSports market into the international arena, and why they have a lot of international partners such as Red Bull, Logitech, etc.

ENCE's current revenue is made up of four types of income: the first is from sponsors, the second is from the prize money earned from each tournament, the third is from the ESL tournament side, which is also a very important source of income, and the fourth and largest income is the yearly in-game sticker bonuses that are earned from Valva each year. This also forms the current business model of ENCE, which is more of a media company than an eSports organization.

In the interview, Eemeli Ikonen, the head of the ENCE Academy program, also explains that the goal of the ENCE Academy program is to find and discover young Finnish talent, and that right now the focus of the program is mainly on Counter strike, but that in the future it might be expanded to include more programs. It's a very difficult task, because it's hard to find any eSports organization even in the world that has a perfect Academy program. When the program was first built, there was only one person in charge of the entire program, and the team was slowly expanded with the addition of coaches and counselors. More than 3,000 people submitted applications during the search phase. The Academy program is not only about teaching young people how to become professional players, but also about developing their teamwork and other skills. The main goal of the ENCE Academy program is to be ranked around 60-70 in the world rankings, so that the entire Academy program can be seen

in the public. The future plans for the academy program are intended to find and develop a truly talented young player and to expand the program to other games in the future when possible.

## 4 Recommendation

Combining the information from the interviews and previous research, it is important for ENCE to utilize its influence on the Finnish eSports market if it wants to expand in Finland, and ENCE, as a successful eSports team, can serve as a role model and an inspiration for Finnish eSports enthusiasts. Their success story encourages young people to pursue a career in eSports and proves that eSports can be a promising field. Especially according to ENCE Partnership Manager Samuli's interview, many Finnish eSports organizations are afraid to make any moves because there are too many failures in the Finnish eSports industry, which causes companies to lose faith in the future of the industry. The success of ENCE's development can bring enough confidence to the industry that smaller Finnish eSports organizations can follow ENCE's lead and make progress.

ENCE could invest in and establish an eSports stadium, which would be similar to an internet cafe, to increase the eSports scene in Finland and at the same time expand ENCE's eSports presence in Finland, and even discover and train future Finnish eSports professionals through this project. This strategy has been used by many eSports organizations and has worked very well. For example, in Denmark, which is also a Nordic country, there is an eSports organization called Astralis, which has set up an internet cafe in Denmark, covering an area of about 1,200 square meters, with more than 100 gaming stations, 4 VIP gaming rooms, a media room with a capacity of 50 people, a game and product store and so on. The organization has also set up an internet cafe with a space of about 1,200 square meters. (Astralis, n.d.)

In an interview with the ENCE Academy program leader, we learned that ENCE's Academy program focuses on selecting young and promising CS players in Finland. However, expanding the Academy program to include other games could be part of the future development. (Interview with Emeli Ikonen, 2023) Moreover, this year the Finnish eSports organization ENCE announced a cooperation agreement with Finnish educational institutions. As a result, the ENCE Academy team will be in close contact with Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences and AhlmanEdun. The goal of these collaborations is to bring together participants interested in eSports and to

jointly promote the field by providing students with concrete opportunities to experience eSports through their work. In the future, the program can be gradually expanded to create an eSports education circle with more Finnish educational institutions. (EGW, n.d.)

ENCE has also contributed a lot to the establishment of the Finnish eSports community. In chapter 2.2.3, the author mentions the biannual Finnish eSports event, Assembly. ENCE has been actively involved in this event every year, both during the Finnish and international lineups. At Assembly last year and Assembly this year, ENCE also sent an academy team to compete and interact with Finnish eSports enthusiasts. However, just participating in Assembly is not enough to build a community. In the future, if the funds are secured, ENCE can utilize its influence and connections in the Finnish eSports industry to hold an eSports Cup every year, which can be either online or offline, but offline tournaments allow players to have a greater sense of participation and a greater impact. It gives more players in the community a chance to show what they can do, and for ENCE it's an opportunity to discover potential eSports talent.

ENCE can get in touch with Finnish companies that are interested in the eSports industry and try to work on sponsorships and collaborations, commercial or otherwise, with a number of well-known Finnish companies since its inception, such as Wolt, the famous Finnish takeaway brand, Telia and elisa, the leading Finnish telecommunication company, among others. According to Mika Kuusisto in an interview. Sponsorship is one of the main incomes for eSports organizations, and investors choose to invest in eSports organizations mainly because of the high exposure of eSports clubs. ENCE has enough exposure nowadays, and in the introduction to ENCE in chapter 1.1, they have made it to the Worlds several times, and have also won several tournaments. If ENCE can maintain this longevity and push for investment in sponsorships and advertisements. This could help provide more funding and business opportunities for the Finnish eSports market. More Finnish companies will also invest more budget to expand the market. (Interview with CEO Mika Kuusisto, 2023).

ENCE may want to consider recruiting one or two Finnish players to the team in the future and use this lineup to compete in more international tournaments. ENCE used a Finnish lineup to compete in various international tournaments until the end of 2020, and the overall success of ENCE's various gaming divisions in 2019 has culminated in the influence of Finnish eSports around the world. Especially in 2019, the music "EZ4ENCE", composed by the Finnish band "The Verkkars", has made a huge impact on the world, and the music has been In the introduction to ENCE in Chapter 1.1, it has been listened to over 18.5 million times and the music video has been viewed over 9.4 million times. That year was also the

year in which ENCE achieved the most revenue since the organization's founding. It was also the year that ENCE received sponsorships from international brands such as Red Bull, Samsung, Logitech and many more. Bringing the Finnish eSports scene to the world will stimulate and energize the market. It can also make international investors pay attention to this market, bring more funds and opportunities, and input energy for some Finnish eSports organizations that are struggling to find sponsorships and opportunities, so that this market can become a bright market.

## **5 Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis is to identify ways in which ENCE can help expand the Finnish eSports market by specifically analyzing the form of the world's eSports market, describing the composition of eSports and the information derived from qualitative research. ENCE, as the first chair of the Finnish eSports scene today, has great potential and influence to expand the Finnish eSports market. There are a number of ways in which they can make a significant contribution to the development of the eSports market, thereby contributing to the growth and prosperity of the sector.

The current global eSports market in general is growing year after year, showing that the industry is still growing. Esports organizations have made a great contribution to this by recruiting players and training them to participate in various international competitions, which has brought many opportunities to the market, and not only that, some companies have also advertised their own brands through sponsorships of eSports organizations, which has also brought much commercial value to the whole market. The Finnish eSports market is very small compared to the global eSports market, and today the Finnish eSports market is experiencing a downturn, with companies closing down or dropping out, and companies that are interested in eSports not having the courage to invest in it due to the many failures. In addition, the lack of eSports related talents is also one of the reasons why the Finnish eSports market has entered a downturn. The eSports market needs not only high-level professional players, but also countless behind-the-scenes employees to promote and protect, but these people need to go through systematic training, which requires more educational institutions to open relevant institutions, and more eSports organizations to provide jobs. eSports events play a crucial role in the eSports market and have a profound impact on the development and prosperity of the market. It drives the engine of development of the entire eSports ecosystem, providing the market with tremendous business

opportunities, increasing the visibility of games, players, and teams, as well as driving continuous innovation and growth in the eSports industry.

First of all, ENCE's successes in Finnish and international eSports provide a strong example and inspiration for today's poorly-run as well as fledgling Finnish eSports organizations. Their story shows how much of an impact a sustainable eSports organization and team can have on the operation of an eSports organization. This will encourage more investors to join the eSports industry and bring new strength to the Finnish eSports market.

Infrastructure development is crucial for the maturity and growth of the Finnish eSports market. ENCE can invest in professional training venues or internet cafes to improve the level of Finnish players and build an eSports atmosphere. This will help to make Finland a competitor on the international eSports scene and attract international competitions and tournaments. ENCE's experience and success can provide some ideas and valuable lessons for those who come after them.

In the field of education, ENCE can continue to deepen its cooperation with Finnish schools and universities to provide better eSports education programs. This will help to recognize eSports as an educational field and provide more opportunities for interested young people to learn and develop eSports skills. This will also produce more professionals and future players for the eSports market. It is only with enough relevant professionals that this market can be sustained at a basic level.

Esports community building and interaction are also important tasks for ENCE. They can actively participate in the eSports community by establishing online social media platforms and offline events. Building communities that support eSports will help spread the culture of eSports and encourage interaction and support. At the same time ENCE can cooperate with other eSports companies to organize local and international events. This will increase the visibility of eSports in Finland, attract viewers and fans, and energize the market. At the same time, it will provide opportunities for Finnish players in the eSports community to showcase themselves and motivate more people to join the eSports industry. The Finnish eSports community will be a key driver for the future of eSports.

In addition, partnerships and sponsorship collaborations are business opportunities for ENCE. They can deepen their exploration of opportunities to partner with Finnish companies and use their influence to promote eSports sponsorship and advertising. This will provide the Finnish eSports market with more funding to support the operations of eSports teams and

events. International competitive performance of ENCE will also help attract more international sponsors and partners, injecting more resources into the Finnish eSports market and contributing to the reputation of Finnish eSports organizations on the international eSports stage. Their success will make Finland a key player in eSports, attracting more international events.

Overall, ENCE has a huge influence, opportunity and responsibility to help expand the eSports market in Finland. Their success stories and experiences will inspire not only subsequent eSports entrepreneurs, but also young people interested in eSports to join the industry. The development of eSports infrastructure will improve the level of competition, hosting events will increase market awareness, educational cooperation will develop new talent, community building will spread eSports culture to create an eSports atmosphere, co-sponsorships will provide business opportunities and funding, and international competitions will enhance the reputation of Finnish eSports organizations. Through these initiatives, ENCE can make a significant contribution to the prosperity of the Finnish eSports market and make it part of the global eSports scene.

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## Appendix 1. Interview Question

Samuli Kaikkonen:

1. What is the current state of the eSports market in Finland?
2. What are the serious difficulties in the Finnish eSports market?
3. What actions is ENCE taking or will take to expand the Finnish eSports market?
4. What do you think about the future direction of the Finnish eSports market?

Eemeli Ikonen:

1. What is the Academy Program?
2. What is the purpose and conception of this academy program?
3. What problems were encountered during the initial phase of the creation of the Academy program?
4. How has this program been fleshed out?
5. How many teenagers are involved in e-sports in Finland as a whole? Or how many have the desire to become professional athletes in esports?
6. How is the Academy program today and what are your plans for the future of the program?
7. What do you think about eSports education in Finland?

Mika Kuusisto:

1. What do you think about the eSports market in Finland today?
2. What are the difficulties in the Finnish eSports market?
3. What are the ways to overcome these challenges?
4. What is ENCE's business model?
5. What difficulties do you see in creating an eSports organization in Finland?
6. What's the most important thing as an eSports organization?
7. How do you see the Finnish eSports market in the future?

**Appendix 2. Data Management Plan**

The research methodology used in this paper is a qualitative research method, which mainly consists of a semi-open-ended interview with three executives from Finnish eSports organizations in the form of a question and answer session. The interviews took place from October 19, 2023 to November 3, 2023, and were conducted in a semi-open-ended interview format. The interviews were conducted through face-to-face Q&A, videoconferencing, and video question-and-answer sessions. Consent was sought from the interviewees for all three methods in advance of the start of the study, and their interview data will also be stored on the authors' cell phones and computers, which will not be accessible without permissions.

Once the study is completed, the data will be uniformly stored in a secure folder and will be retained for one year in case it may be useful for further research. Once the one year has expired, the data and files will be deleted from the hard drive of the laptop.