

# **Electronic sports in Finland – current status and the way ahead on public funding and support**

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<p>Electronic sports (esports) is an ever growing phenomenon in the world with hundreds of millions of euros pouring into the field every year. Prize pools of the esports tournaments are on the rise and universities have started to treat players as traditional athletes through programs and scholarships. Even traditional sports teams have started to increasingly pay attention by investing in electronic sports teams and leagues. In Finland, people have noticed competitive gaming's march towards the mainstream by watching the Finnish Broadcasting Company's (YLE) broadcasts of esports tournaments on TV. That said, many Finns seemed to be appalled by YLE using its money to cover the new line of entertainment.</p> <p>The aim of the research was to find out how much currently does esports get public funding and support in Finland. Other objectives were to uncover the potential advantages of esports for Finland and how the esports community would make the industry more attractive in eyes of the public to secure esports better public funding and support.</p> <p>The research method of the study was qualitative. Nine people, mostly from the esports scene, were interviewed and asked four questions. In the analysis phase, the focus was to discern similarities and differences in the answers. The interviews were conducted by email in semi-structured nature.</p> <p>The results showed people having a variety of opinions on most of the issues they discussed of, as there remain many matters to be debated on. However, some consistencies were noted. A part of the interviewees was convinced that Finland is ahead of other countries in terms of public funding and support for esports.</p> <p>Nevertheless, many interviewees called for more private investment for electronic sports. Unfortunately, it looks to them as if corporate leaders do not understand the sector.</p>		
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<p>Elektroninen urheilu on kasvava ilmiö maailmalla ja joka vuosi alalle virtaa satoja miljoonia euroja. Palkintopotit elektronisen urheilun turnauksissa jatkavat kasvamistaan ja yliopistot ovat alkaneet kohdella pelaajia kuten perinteisiä urheilijoitakin tarjoten heille opintolinjoja ja stipendejä. Jopa perinteiset urheilujoukkueet ovat alkaneet kasvavassa määrin kiinnittämään huomiota elektroniseen urheiluun sijoittamalla elektronisen urheilun joukkueisiin ja liigoihin. Suomessa ihmiset ovat saaneet huomata kilpapelaamisen esiinmarssin YLEn kanavien näyttäessä elektronisen urheilun turnauksia televisiossa. Monet suomalaiset ovat olleet tyrmistyneitä, että YLE käyttää rahojaan elektronisen urheilun televisioimiseen.</p> <p>Tutkimus pyrki selvittämään kuinka paljon elektroninen urheilu saa Suomessa tukea. Tutkimuksen muut tavoitteet olivat löytää mahdollisia elektronisen urheilun tuomia etuja Suomelle sekä miten elektronisen urheilun yhteisö voisi parantaa elektronisen urheilun asemaa julkisuuden silmissä, jotta ala saisi paremmin julkista tukea.</p> <p>Tutkimusmenetelmänä oli kvalitatiivinen metodi. Yhdeksän ihmistä, pääosin elektronisen urheilun piiristä, haastateltiin ja heiltä kysyttiin neljä kysymystä. Analyysivaiheessa fokuksena oli löytää samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia vastauksissa. Haastattelut tehtiin sähköpostitse ja ne olivat teemahaastatteluita. Tuloksista kävi ilmi, että ihmisillä oli paljon erilaisia mielipiteitä suurimmasta osasta aiheista, mutta yhtäläisyyksiäkin löydettiin. Eräät haastateltavat väittivät, että Suomi on edellä muita maita elektronisen urheilun saamassa julkisessa tuessa.</p> <p>Joka tapauksessa, moni haastateltava vaati enemmän yksityistä investointia elektroniselle urheilulle. Heidän mukaansa valitettavan suuri osa yritysjohtajista ei ymmärrä toimialaa.</p>		
Avainsanat ( <a href="#">asiasanat</a> ) Elektroninen urheilu, esports, julkinen tuki, julkinen rahoitus, peliala, pelaaminen		
Muut tiedot		

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## Key terms

**Electronic sports** or “esports” or “eSports” refers to multiplayer video games played competitively for spectators, typically by professional gamers.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/e-sport>

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Esports – a brief history

Gaming has always been very close to the author’s heart but only in 2010 did he start to follow esports seriously when StarCraft II came out. After buying the game, even though never been a big fan of real-time strategy games, he quickly realized there is a competitive element in the game and the game made it very easy and convenient to compete with other people online. It did not take long for him and his friends to also realise that people are getting paid for playing the game (and, later on, many other games). Around a year later Twitch.tv was formed and the site started to stream regularly tournaments of various different games. It was a lot of fun to compete online and then watch how the professionals play and try to learn from them, just like in any other sport. The true game changer, for the researcher at least, was when Riot Games started to host World Championships for their game called League of Legends. The second time the tournament was held, concurrent viewership hit 1,1 million people and the event recorded over 8,2 million total unique viewers (Gamespot.com 2012). At the time the author thought it was quite mad, absurd and insanely cool that there had been over one million people watching these ten guys play a video game. The following year the amounts were 8,5 million and 32 million respectively (Leagueoflegends.com 2013). Mixed with this massive viewer count rise in a single year and a young man’s struggles about the future, the author began to look for job postings on the websites of esports companies and planning on how to fling oneself into the business.

## 1.2 Research motivation

The idea of the thesis came from various things. As any other citizen, the author too had been following the public discussion about Finland's unemployment and Finland's brand. Along the years the author had heard non-Finnish people complaining about Finland's brand (Business Insider 2014; The Huffington Post 2016) as well as Finns themselves complain about the brand of Finland (M&M 2016). Finns seemingly thought their country is especially bad at everything (Iltalehti 2015) and set up a working committee on how to enhance Finland's brand (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008) after which a network on enhancing Finland's brand was set up called Team Finland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). Some people seemed to think at the time that the working committee was set up to no avail (Ilta-Sanomat 2013). Given the earlier mentioned articles of The Huffington Post and Business Insider, the statement of "others do not care about Finland" by Simon Anholt, a consultant, in 2010 in Suomen Kuvalehti, still rings true even after half a decade the working committee on Finland's brand published their report on the brand in 2010 (Suomen Kuvalehti 2010). It would be interesting to see how could esports possibly affect Finland's brand.

Along with the laments of the national brand, so too have there been debate over the employment in Finland and how to best improve it. The employment rate was 67% and unemployment rate 9,2% in January, 2017 in Finland (Tilastokeskus 2017). Recently, Prime Minister of Finland Juha Sipilä and his government intends to add 100 000 more jobs in Finland (Uusi Suomi 2016) and aims to raise the employment rate to 72% by 2021 (Suomenmaa 2016). This led the author wonder what kind of part would esports possibly play in employing people and in specific, what kind of jobs would esports truly create.

On top of the previously mentioned matters, the researcher had come to an understanding that traditional sports get quite a bit of funding from the public. However, nobody had talked about how much does esports get – if any.

The industry grows ever bigger with more and more firms, games, sponsors, investors and players splurging into the field. Along with the aforementioned things, esports community has found themselves being in the midst of diverse debates. The

subjects range from whether esports really is a sport, how women are treated in esports scene and what should be done to make their position better, how the business should be grown (how to assure a high level of competition while performing well business-wise), should players have their own union to online gambling and the list goes on. Ultimately all these issues will be at the heart of esports as it attempts break into mainstream in the upcoming future.

With a personal passion towards esports and this paper being part of degree studies, the author tried to combine all the topics of which he is interested in and do some research about it to make sure he would genuinely enjoy the work. With the aim of employing oneself in the industry, the researcher of the study hopes this thesis might serve as a stepping stone of sorts towards that goal.

### 1.3 Research objectives and questions

There will be three research questions for which the author pursues answers for.

Research question number 1: what is the current status of public funding and support for esports in Finland?

Answering this question gives a good basic understanding of “where we are” so that we may continue towards the next research question.

Research question number 2: what would be the justifications for public funding and support for esports?

Answering this question provides answers about the potential benefits of esports.

Research question number 3: what should esports community in Finland do to be more attractive as a funding and support target for the public?

Obviously, esports community in Finland should be active in promoting themselves to the public but the tricky part is in finding out what exactly should they do in order to catch more public funding and support.



## 2 Theory and Knowledge Base

In general, professional players in esports are 15-25 years old (Martoncik 2015, 208). Esports is competitive sports, in which information technology has a massive role. Information technology enables competitive gaming solo or in teams. (SEUL 2016.)

### 2.1 Esports from a business perspective

Esports has seen its worldwide audience grow over the years. In 2015 worldwide esports audience was 188 million people whereas in 2016 it is estimated that the amount was around 214 million people, meaning a year-on-year growth was about 14%. The revenues seem to be healthy worldwide in esports: in 2015 the worldwide revenues reached \$0,75 billion and in 2016 it was estimated to be \$0,89 billion. The industry sees a steady growth in both numbers in the upcoming years as in 2019 it is estimated to reach a worldwide audience of over 300 million people and revenues are estimated to rise to \$1,23 billion. (SuperData Research 2016.)

#### eSports market, 2016

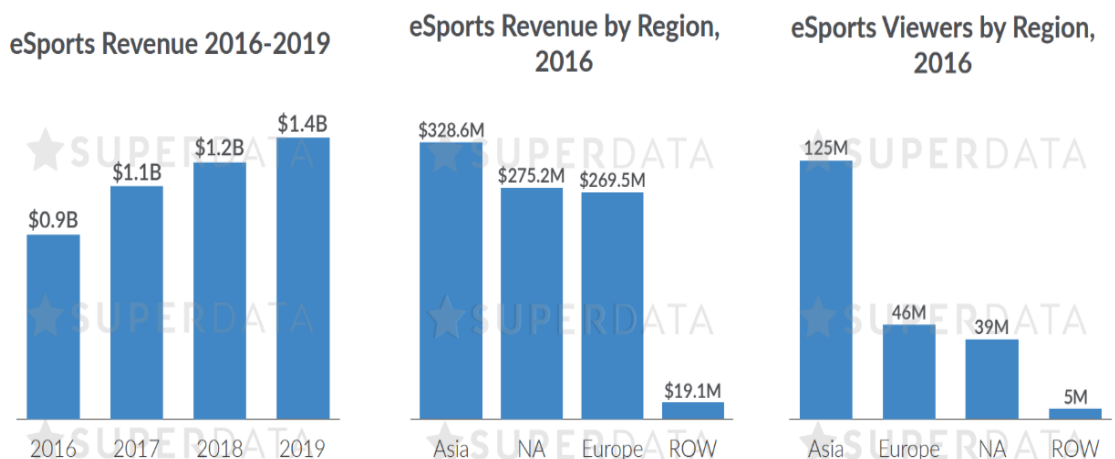


Figure 1. Esports revenues in 2016 (SuperData Research 2016)

As we can see from the graph above, according to Superdata Research esports will see a steady growth in the near future. In light of analysis of the future of esports, it is not a big surprise that the industry is attracting talent and money.

In fact Superdata Research had to revise their expected revenue streams up after 2015 when the following graph was published. One can note the optimism rising as, for example the graph on the above forecasts revenue for 2017 to be \$1,1 billion whereas the graph below indicates the revenue for the said year to be \$1,01 billion. (SuperData Research 2016.)

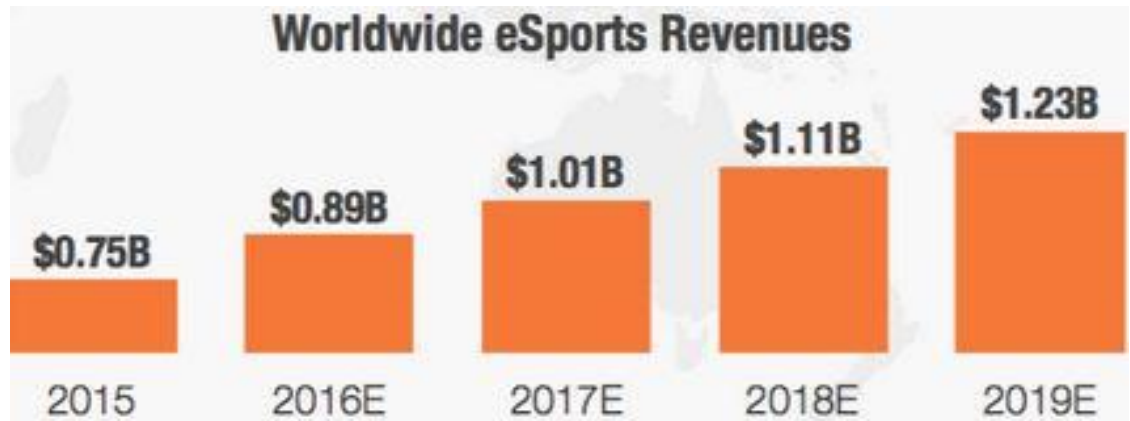


Figure 2. Old revenue estimates for esports industry (SuperData Research 2015)

Over the last couple of years, esports has seen many big, world renowned brands move and gravitate towards esports. Amazon bought an esports streaming platform called Twitch.tv for \$970 million (Business Insider 2014) and esports receives investments from individuals (e.g. Earvin "Magic" Johnson Jr. and Alisher Umanov) to traditional sports brands (e.g. FC Schalke 04, Philadelphia 76ers) (Dot Esports 2016).

### Worldwide eSports Market, 2016E

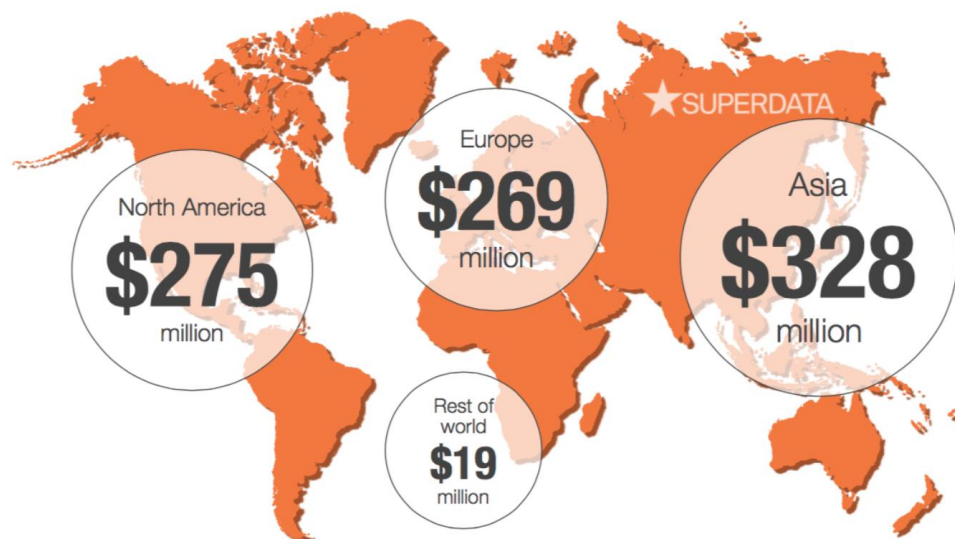


Figure 3. Estimation for 2016 esports market (SuperData Research 2016)

As seen in the picture above, in 2016 it was estimated that Asia was leading esports industry revenue wise with Europe and North America trailing behind relatively closely to each other (SuperData Research 2016.) This illustrates the fact that esports is a phenomenon for mostly developed countries that have high technology available and access to internet. Although it might be fair to estimate that Asia will continue its reign as the kingpin of esports market, given the fast development of technology and its spread all over the world, one could expect Rest of world pick up the pace as well at some point in the future.

Even in Finland professional esports organisations are taking form and major sports brands are investing in esports (Helsinki Reds 2016). Helsinki Reds being a semi professional team (YLE 2016), Finland's only professional esports organization so far is ENCE eSports Oy with turnover of around €200 000 for 2016 (Ilta-Sanomat 2016).

The outlook for the industry seems promising and it will be extremely interesting to see how the public receive esports when it marches to mainstream in Finland. YLE has already shown on TV a couple of times tournaments of Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (YLE 2016) and major media companies are starting to report on esports so the omens are certainly promising.

## 2.2 The funding model of esports

Understanding the funding model of esports, one should first examine how the value chain in the industry works. Below you can see the value chain of esports made by SuperData Research in 2015 (SuperData Research 2015).

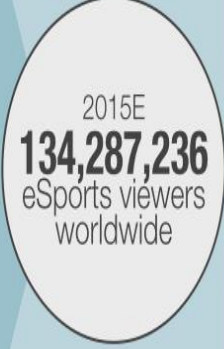
eSports value chain participants			
PARTICIPANTS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES	<b>AUDIENCE</b> 
<b>PUBLISHERS</b>	The various games in which competitive gamers compete, ranging from shooters to multi-player online battle arena.	<b>Titles:</b> <i>League of Legends</i> , (Riot Games), <i>World of Tanks</i> (Wargaming), <i>SMITE</i> (Hi-Rez Studios), <i>Call of Duty</i> (Activision Blizzard), <i>Dota 2</i> (Valve).	
<b>TEAMS</b>	Professional teams that compete in tournaments. Members practice up to 8 hours a day and receive earnings through endorsement deals or by becoming a professional for a particular game.	<b>Teams:</b> NewBee, Evil Geniuses, Natus Vincere, Invictus Gaming, Fnatic.	
<b>LEAGUES</b>	<b>Organizers:</b> Host both of- and online competitions, and generate revenue through corporate sponsorship, membership fees, merchandise and ticket sales. <b>eSports Betting:</b> Facilitate real-money betting on outcome of eSports events.	<b>Organizers:</b> Major League Gaming, ESL (Turtle Beach). <b>eSports betting:</b> Alphadraft, Vulcan	
<b>PLATFORMS</b>	<b>Channels:</b> Facilitate the (live) broadcast of competitions and pro-player videos. Examples: Twitch (Amazon), Azubu, YouTube. <b>Tournament infrastructure:</b> Offer necessary platform to host both amateur and professional tournaments.	<b>Channels:</b> Twitch (Amazon), Azubu, YouTube, MobCrush, Hitbox. <b>Infrastructure:</b> Xfire, Battlefy	
<b>BRANDS</b>	Brand holders and advertisers that pay teams, league organizers and publishers in exchange for displaying their logos, products, or naming a competition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ <b>Consumer Packaged Goods:</b> Coca-Cola, Red Bull</li> <li>★ <b>Automotive:</b> Nissan, Volkswagen</li> <li>★ <b>Technology:</b> Razer, Intel, NVIDIA</li> <li>★ <b>Consumer Electronics:</b> Logitech, Samsung, HTC</li> </ul>	

Figure 4. Esports value chain participants (SuperData Research 2015)

First, there are the publishers who create the video games that people start playing. They make the long-term commitment in balancing the game so that no certain element is superior to others and consequently, killing the fun of playing the game and competing with other people. Nowadays it is a common practice that to support their game, the publisher contributes in prize pools of different tournaments. Whether that is for attracting more publicity, making sure that the game is alive and healthy or some other reason is up for debate. Contributions can be of many shapes. They can be, for example directly pledging money to prize pools as is Valve's custom with Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, a game that is published by the firm (PC Gamer 2016) or by opening the possibility for communities of video games to contribute to prize pools through in-game transactions, of which a certain per cent go straight toward prize pools. The International tournaments in Dota 2, held annually, another video game published by Valve, are famous for its massive prize pools, which are largely enlarged by the contributions of the game's community through in-game purchases (Mashable.com 2016).

Second, teams are the ones that employ personnel to run teams' operations and players to compete in various games. Teams provide proper training environment, tools and schedules for the players to use and follow. In other words, esports teams do not differ much from traditional sports teams. Teams get most of their funding

from investors, publishers with whom teams cut deals to share revenues from in-game sales (Gamesindustry.biz 2016), sponsors who buy advertisement placements from, for example team shirts and publishers who contribute in paying wages to players (Dot Esports 2017). Some teams also do sell their own branded merchandise, for example on their own websites.

Third, leagues create both platforms (not to be confused with platforms such as Twitch.tv and YouTube) and events on which teams can compete against each other online and offline. The platforms that the leagues create operate online and the leagues sell different types of memberships to all laymen. The platforms provide access to better servers and opportunities to participate in tournaments held by the league operating the platform. These leagues host online leagues for professional teams and sell ad spots to firms. Events and online leagues have various firms advertising their products and services during breaks. Now the leagues are trying to make their events more professional and thus, they have started to either bring in people with experience running TV productions (Variety.com 2017) or having TV professionals produce the events (Variety.com 2015). These moves could be interpreted as making the esports events more attractive to both audience as well as potential sponsors. With events comes merchandise and ticket sales which bring some money to leagues' pockets.

Fourth, we have platforms, on which audience consumes the supply of the leagues and events. Most notable platform is Twitch.tv, which sees huge internet traffic in the US alone. The site managed to compete (sometimes even beat) Facebook traffic

wise in its home country as the graph below shows (Wall Street Journal, 2014).

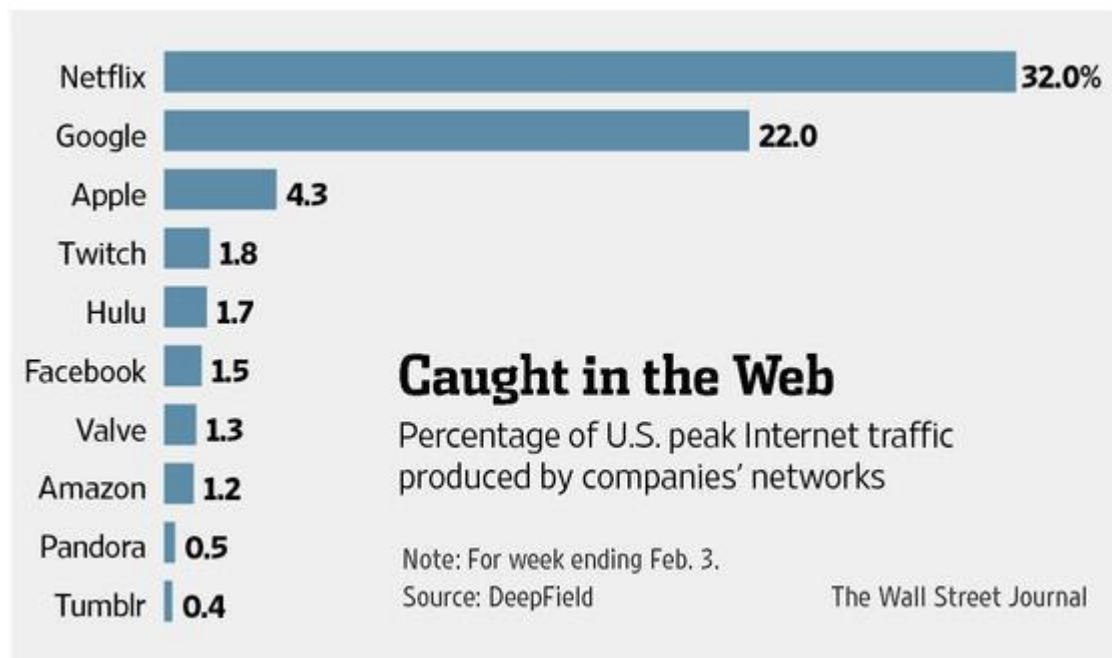


Figure 5. The percentage of internet traffic in the US in 2014 (Wall Street Journal 2014)

Since the acquisition of Twitch by Google never came into fruition, given the antitrust issues that the deal would have potentially raised (Forbes.com 2014), Google decided to launch its own service: YouTube Gaming (The Guardian 2015). The two are now fighting each other in their own league, and lately YouTube has struck blows that will hurt Twitch. YouTube negotiated deals with two big online leagues for exclusive right to stream the matches. Both ESL Pro League (Pvplive.net 2017) and ECS (ESPN 2017) are now exclusively seen on YouTube. One could argue that the more traffic a site sees, the more ad revenue it can create.

At the end of the day, the fifth participant in the esports value chain is arguably the most important one as it pays the biggest chunk of everyone's bills in the value chain, except for publishers. Brands have noticed esports is the most prominent way to reach Millennials, the segment that has been so difficult to reach before (Fortune.com 2014). As mentioned before, brands are the firms who pay for advertising their wares in esports industry, whether it is a team's shirt or a video clip during commercial breaks in esports events.

### 2.3 The market structure of esports

After exploring the value chain of esports, one must look at how does the market itself work in the industry.

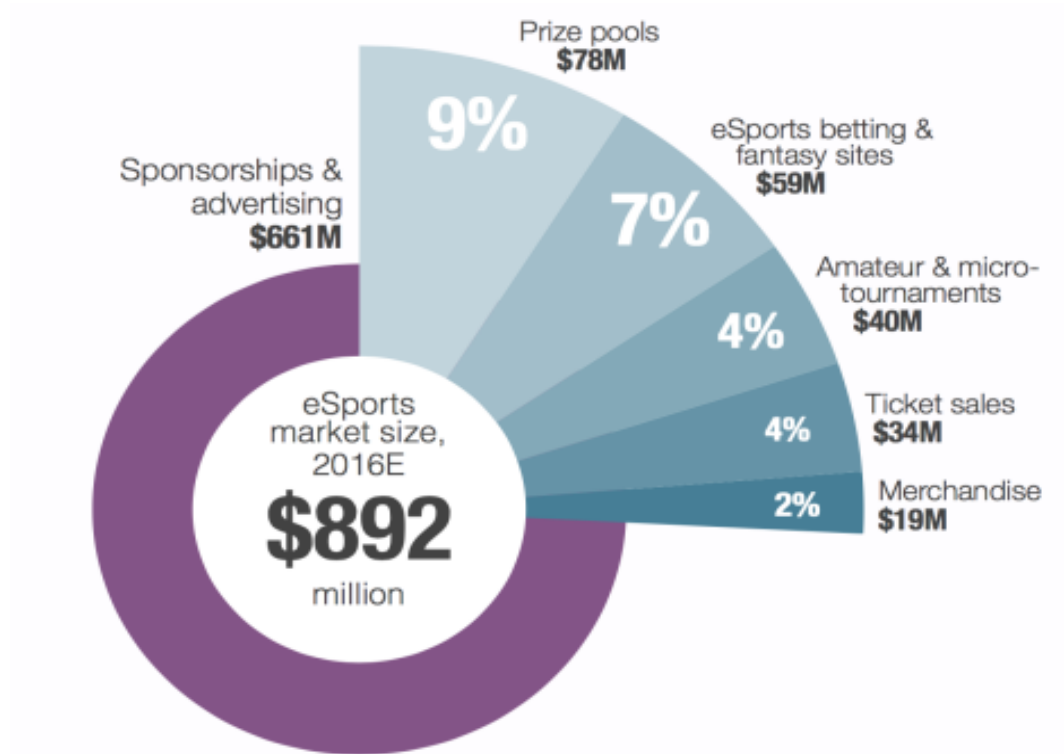


Figure 6. The estimated market size of esports for 2016 (SuperData Research 2015)

As stated before, brands offerings to the table of the industry are the greatest.

Brands made up 74% of the market in 2016 and, according to SuperData Research, it does not seem like they will lose much of their stake in the market (SuperData Research 2015).

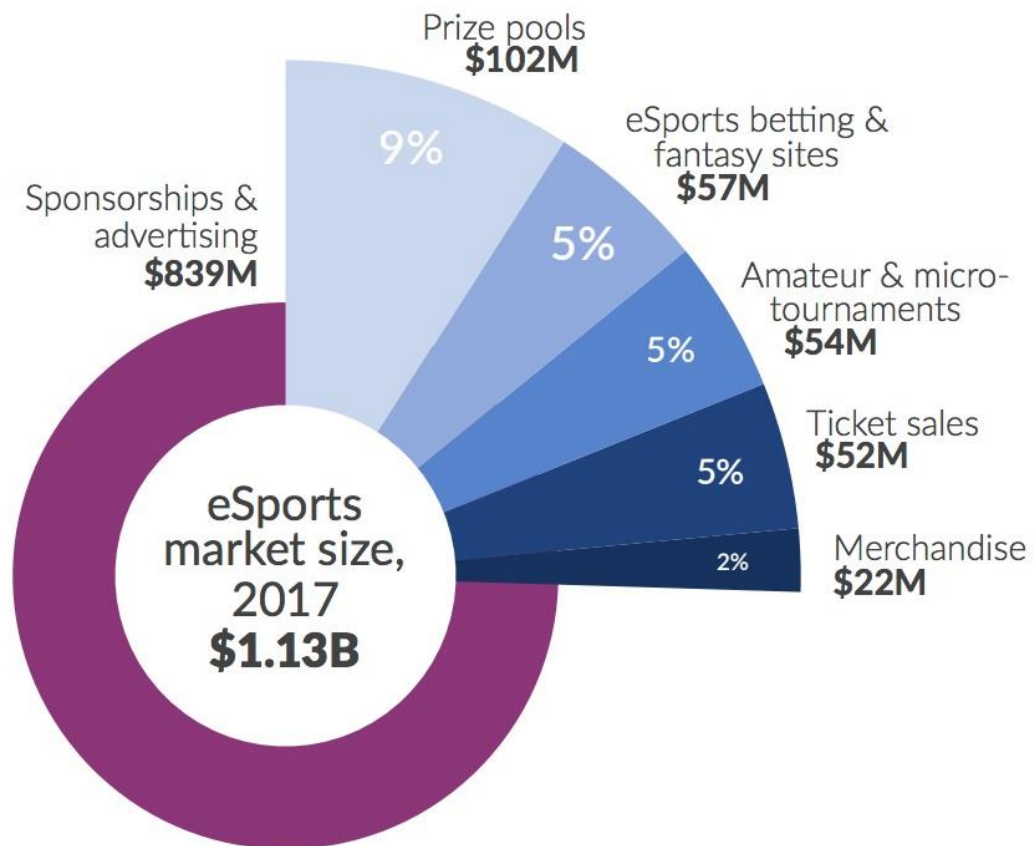


Figure 7. The estimated market size of esports in 2017 (SuperData Research 2017)

In 2017 the firm estimates that sponsorships and advertising of brands will grow ever bigger monetary wise but retain their 74% market share (SuperData Research 2017).

### 3 Research Approach, Method and Implementation

#### 3.1 Choice for research approach and data collection method

When starting a research, a researcher has to ponder on how to answer the research questions he or she has set out for oneself and what kind of sources of empirical data one uses. There two types of such data: primary and secondary. Primary data refers to empirical data collected by the researcher himself through for example, interviews and observations whereas secondary data is the data that's been produced by other people in the form of textual or visual data. The research project affects what kind of empirical data is used and how it is obtained as well as the very purpose of the research, its approach and research questions. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 77-78.)



Qualitative data are fascinating because of the way it functions: it makes a research it is applied to better by providing complete and chronological evidence. The researcher influences greatly on how the data is interpreted in his or her research as qualitative research itself is integrated from explorative and deliberate features. On the other hand, because of its emphasis on testing and verifications some researchers prefer using quantitative methods. Qualitative methods require a researcher to focus on understanding the data and interpret it and thus, the approach to a research is different than of quantitative methods as they steer a researcher towards coherent and critical paths. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 86-87.)

### **Secondary data**

As stated before, secondary data is data collected by other people. Their motivations for the data collection can vary and be different from ours but it still can offer valuable help to one's own research. Secondary data can take many forms such as academic journals, text books, internet sites and reports made by governments. Once a researcher has spotted the relevant sources, a researcher is obliged to check whether the information is applicable to the researcher's study or not. If secondary data that is collected from a diverse pool of sources, they can help the researcher answer research questions. Also, secondary data can play a role in formulating research problems, deepen research questions, help selecting the best research method and pass on benchmarking measures, which could be of help when comparing the information gathered later in the study. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 76-77.)

Using secondary data can save time and money because a researcher needs only to find the source and use it rather than conducting the research from the ground up. As Ghauri and Grønhaug say, secondary data can be a useful comparison instrument in understanding primary data and thus, often one can see researchers combining these two types of data sources. To reduce the burden of time-consuming collection of primary data, researchers are often recommended to start by looking at secondary data as it might provide answers to research questions. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 76-78.)

For this thesis, the author started by scouring through some publications related to the subject of gaming, employment and branding. It is quite tricky to link some publications to the realm of esports and thus, the researcher had to turn to primary data.

### **Primary data**

According to Ghauri and Grønhaug, when secondary data does not cover everything a researcher needs, or for some reason it is not available, primary data is collected by the researcher himself. The research problem and how the research is designed have major impact on the way of collecting primary data. It can be done through a survey, interview, experiment or observation. A given project is always the object that primary data collection gravitates around, making it consistent with the objectives and research questions. If a researcher wants to hear about past experiences, behaviour or the opinions of the people involved, he needs to contact these people directly to ask them the questions. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 81-82.)

Collecting primary data can prove time-consuming, difficult or a researcher might even be unable to gain access to the data. Finding interviewees regarding a sensitive issue, especially from the top of organization, can be challenging and hence, the primary data's quality and scope a researcher collects is highly dependent on the interviewees' willingness. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 81-82.)

## **3.2 Obtaining primary data through interviews**

The data collection itself is extremely important when it comes to doing research as the whole study depends on it. However, the challenging part of data collection is the fact that it must be done by the researcher himself. In order to successfully conduct a case study, the researcher has to be clear of the research problems and the purpose of his study. It is not only that the researcher asks the right questions but also needs to understand how to interpret the answers properly. This requires the capability of good listening as well as reading between the lines, in other words understand the meanings of what has been answered. The researcher must steer clear from his biases so that they do not taint the interpretation. This can be done by using multiple data sources. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 177.)

For this study, especially, it is very important for the study's success that the author is familiar with the research problems, the purpose of the study and the secondary data at hand before conducting interviews because the interviews are the most appropriate method for collecting primary data.

The author calculated that it takes at least eight interviewees to answer all the research questions if each of them answer in 3 of the 4 questions in the following fashion:

Set 1: two interviewees answer to the questions 1, 2 and 3

Set 2: two interviewees answer to the questions 1, 2 and 4

Set 3: two interviewees answer to the questions 1, 3 and 4

Set 4: two interviewees answer to the questions: 2, 3 and 4

Because interviewees might have different understanding and levels of knowledge, they might not answer all four questions. With this method, overall at least 12 answers can be secured, three each question.

### **Types of interviews**

Interviews are often differentiated into two different categories, which are structured and unstructured. Structured interviews follow a certain script that is followed throughout the interview, meaning that it follows a standard format offering little flexibility in wording or ordering of the questions. Unstructured interviews are more informal, becoming almost narrative in the way of giving almost full liberty to the interviewee in terms of discussing one's opinions on the subject. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 81-82; Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 100-101.)

In this study the author has deemed best to use semi-structured interviews, which have elements from both structured as well as unstructured interviews. A semi-structured interview lays the outlines of topics, issues and themes that are prepared before the interview but liberates the interviewer to change ordering or wording of the questions. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82.)

Since the study's topic is set to acquire information about the public funding and support of esports in Finland, it was deemed right by the author that the questions were

done beforehand ahead of the interviews. To make sure the interviewer has the possibility of probing more in-depth answers, the interview is informal by nature and thus, semi-structured interviews were the best possible style to conduct interviews. Given the time constraints of both the author and the interviewees, the interviews were conducted by email.

### **Structuring and planning the interviews**

Following the thoughts of Gauri and Grønhaug, when preparing for an interview, the interviewer must firstly analyse the research problems at hand, understand what kind of information is required and who could be the best one to provide it. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 102.)

The questions asked during an interview should be in line with the research questions because a researcher solves research problems with the material provided by the interviewees. However, a researcher must remember that research questions are not interview questions. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 79.)

As time constrained the author's ability to conduct interviews, the study settled on four basic questions that would give light on the research problems at hand. The author contacted many cities regarding the matter in order to attain information from their representatives in this matter as well as understanding their point of view. Questions were sent to The Finnish eSports Federation (SEUL) too with the hope of understanding the community's perspective.

Firstly, the interviewees were asked to present themselves and describe their position at the given organisation. Secondly, they answered questions, which were:

- How would you describe the support (monetary or other) that esports receive in Finland at this moment? (in your answer you can compare Finland's situation with that of other countries)
- If you were a policymaker, why would you support esports? How do you think your own thinking and reasoning differs from that of the current policymakers?
- As a policymaker, what would you hope the esports community to do so that you would understand esports and its benefits better?

- What are the current strengths of the esports community in promoting esports?  
What should be done better?

The questions were sent to 15 individuals and Jyväskylä's Esports Association published the questions on their Facebook page, which had a little over 1000 likes at the time. The Association also tweeted the link to the questions to their over 650+ followers. Nine people answered the questions.

### 3.3 Analysis of the data

Once the author has figured out his / her study's research problem(s), completed data collection and its analysis, the research results should be presented in a logical and consistent way. How the results, data and contents should be presented, depend on the audience. As Eriksson and Kovalainen state, writer must pay attention to the style of writing's suitability for the audience because it is a factor in the successfulness of written reports. Business researches are done for actors in the field of business and academics to read. Business practitioners are mostly interested in the results of the research and how the results can be put to practice. The academic audience usually finds the way the theory is linked and involved to the research more interesting. (Ghuri & Grønhaug 2002, 183; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 280.)

Most likely the readers of this study are esports enthusiasts and corporate leaders who are investing or going to invest in esports. This research is part of the author's degree studies so of course instructors and supervisors will be reading and evaluating this paper.

### 3.4 Research ethics

Ethics are with us every single day of the year and they guide our decisions in all situations and activities in which we must make choices, which will have potential or actual repercussions to someone. One's values and moral principles will affect the way a researcher puts into practice research activities. As such, researchers' ethics and responsibilities is growing ever more important in business studies. (Ghuri & Grønhaug 2002, 18.)

In the past, research ethics have been mainly associated with the gathering of empirical data. Be that as it may, research ethics are inextricably part of the whole research process, from start to finish. Even though not all ethical issues are that obvious, thus prompting publishing of professional guidelines for proper scientific practices, some universally accepted principles in the ethics of research do exist. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 65-68.)

At the very heart of an ethical guideline for researching is the protection of the people who participate in a research. A researcher should make clear to the participants that they take part in the research voluntarily and that they can withdraw from participating at any time. Participants as well as the audience should be notified of the way the data will be used, the study's purpose and its procedures. The participants should not be harmed by the research, for example participating in an interview should not cause negative repercussions for the interviewees. Hence, all personal data, which are obtained through interviews should be kept confidential and the anonymity of interviewees should be respected. When a researcher is going through interviews, he or she should not claim credit for the ideas of the interviewees and the researcher should steer clear from plagiarising other researchers' work. Instead, they should be given acknowledgement. The results of a research should not be skewed towards someone's purpose but instead the researcher must be honest and report the results objectively. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 70-75; Ghauri and Grønhaug 2002, 20.)

### 3.5 Assessment of research quality

#### **Reliability**

As has been defined by Saunders et al., "the reliability refers to the extent to which the data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings". (Saunders et al. 2009, 156). In this study, it refers to repeating the interviews so that the researcher can make sure the data would still be the same. Conducting interviews again was not possible because of time constraints but the author argues that the data would have still been the same. It is very unlikely the interviewees would

have changed their minds in a short period of time. In the long term, results might change as people gain new information.

### **Validity**

Saunders et al. argue that “validity is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about”. (Saunders et al. 2009, 157). In this study, all interviewees knew what they were answering to and what their answers were for. Everybody knew what esports is about and the majority of the interviewees are enthusiastic about the industry so they understood the context.

### **Generalisability**

A researcher must consider if his / her study is generalisable. According to Saunders et al. that means “whether your findings may be equally applicable to other research settings”. (Saunders et al. 2009, 158). In this case, the researcher does think the results are applicable in other studies about esports since the results give insight about the possible directions the phenomenon might be heading and the struggles the industry are facing. Should new industries rise with somewhat similar issues at hand, this study could prove useful.

### **Limitations**

However, this research is clearly of cross-sectional nature since the industry is moving forward rapidly. As a demonstration of the pace, National Basketball Association (NBA) announced their own esports league after the interviews had already been conducted (NBA 2017). A year from this, the answers for the interviews could be different. This study is focusing on the current status and the way ahead of esports’ public funding and support.

## **4 Research results**

Below is a little table summarizing interviewees’, what the author found, main points of their answers question by question. Not all questions had dispersion of opinions. At the end of each group’s answers, the author indicated how many of the interviewees thought this way. Later, in Research results section (from sections 4.1 to 4.4), a reader can find more in detailed answers.

Question / Answers	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<b>The level of support in Finland?</b>	The public support is ahead of other countries in Finland. (3 answers)	The public too slow to react. (2 answers)	Orgs and firms only showing interest. (4 answers)
<b>Why support esports?</b>	Opportunities for businesses, education, youth services and youth. (6 answers)	Esports is booming. (4 answers)	Few policymaker and business leader understand the benefits. (3 answers)
<b>How to understand the benefits of esports?</b>	Esports community should do professional lobbying. (6 answers)	-	-
<b>Strengths and weaknesses of the esports community?</b>	Understanding the digital revolution. (6 answers)	Gaining wider recognition takes years. (5 answers)	-

The researcher set out to find similarities between answers and divided them to groups per question. Overall there were nine interviewees that answered the questions. Individual answers were not taken into account. Below is listed some consistencies found in their answers. The answers were put into the boxes to highlight some of the differences the interviewees had to another in their answers.

#### 4.1 The status of the public funding and support for esports as of today

The first question interviewees answered was: “How would you describe the support (monetary or other) that esports receive in Finland at this moment? (in your answer you can compare Finland’s situation with that of other countries)”.

Three interviewees:

Government support in Finland is ahead of other countries and that support is primarily targeted towards the Finnish umbrella organisation of esports called SEUL (The Finnish eSports Federation). SEUL received 60 000 euros as funding in 2013 from the government and by 2017 the amount had risen to 83 000 euros. One of the interviewees criticized SEUL for “burning through [the money] with little to show for it”.



Two interviewees:

On municipality level esports is going forward and the cities are taking small steps in enhancing cooperation and involvement in esports, even though “eSports has become mainstream so fast that I don’t think cities and other public funders have had enough time to react yet.” There was also a lament about rights of the main events being very expensive.

Four interviewees:

In general, it seems “many big organisations and corporations are interested to hear what esports could offer to them and esports has grown to subject in tables of marketing and sales departments of companies.” However, “The monetary support esports currently receives from non-esports-related corporations is very low. Only a few bigger corporations have decided to sponsor esports in Finland.” The viewership numbers and the fan base on Finnish national level is small and thus, Finland’s esports business is reliant of international markets, “more so than some other countries.”

## 4.2 The reasons for supporting esports

The second questions was: “If you were a policymaker, why would you support esports? How do you think your own thinking and reasoning differs from that of the current policymakers?”

Six interviewees:

Esports is the medium through which one can gain access to youth. The segment is often seen as the most difficult one for companies to reach and thus, esports provides great opportunities in that regard. On top of that, marketing in esports is cheap. Not only does it provide opportunities for businesses but also for education sector (sports scholarships should expand to cover esports too) as well as youth services. Through esports, youth services could get access to youngsters who are "at risk" or "being marginalized". Youth themselves can learn a wide variety of skills through esports, e.g. team work and technological skills. Esports can "activate people to be part of something."

Four interviewees:

Esports is a booming area of business and its' publicity increases every year. "eSports is clearly on the verge of something big and it would be foolish not to support it."

Three interviewees:

Probably very few corporate leader and policymaker recognize and understand the benefits of esports.

### 4.3 Understanding the benefits of esports

The third question was: "As a policymaker, what would you hope the esports community to do so that you would understand esports and its benefits better?"

Six interviewees:

Esports community should lobby and meet “face-to-face with politicians and other national officials to improve our influential work.” Esports community should start taking esports more seriously and “that requires the active community to respect esports and work on it as it was any other field.” Esports veterans rather than young people should do the lobbying because their word carry more weight. One way to lobby would be “sending a delegation of policymakers and eSports experts to a major tournament to bring first-hand knowledge to the government about the eSports.”

#### 4.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the esports community

The fourth and final question was: “What are the current strengths of the esports community in promoting esports? What should be done better?”

Six interviewees:

The community is adept at operating on the Internet. Digital marketing in general is excellent. Actors in the esports industry are great at reaching potential customers in an efficient way. “Basically anyone with an internet connection is connected to esports and is able to take part in it by watching, socializing, producing content or playing games.”

Five interviewees:

It takes years of hard work to gain wider recognition and nobody can force you to change your opinion. Knowledge of esports is low in older age groups and “it's going to take the wider public a while to accept [esports] as a legitimate form of competition.” Finland has a strong gaming industry and the big names of gaming (Supercell, Remedy, Rovio etc.) could create a strong platform to promote gaming and esports.

## 5 Conclusions

The wide divergence between the opinions stated by the interviewees stands out from the results. Given that the industry is in its’ adolescence and slowly breaking

into mainstream, the esports actives are bound to have differing opinions on how to develop esports. One could compare some snow sports, such as snowboarding and halfpipe skiing, to esports in terms of how the sports' competitions are being run. For example, world championships are held by International Ski Federation (FIS) but there are other competitions that command respect too, say, X Games. Last year, the athletes had to choose between attending world championships or X Games (The Denver Post 2015) and similar fates might befall esports players later on. Not long ago it was announced that esports is going to be a medal event at 2022 Asian Games in China (The Guardian 2017) so it indeed seems like esports is following the same path. This will quite surely cause more infighting amongst esports people.

## 5.1 Conclusions per research questions

### **What is the current status of public funding and support for esports in Finland?**

The current status is good. Interviewees claimed that Finland is ahead of other countries in terms of public support. In 2013 Finnish government funded esports for 60 000 euros and by 2017 the number had risen to 83 000 euros. Most of the money went to The Finnish eSports Federation Finnish, the umbrella organisation of esports (SEUL). Also cities and municipalities have shown increasing interest towards esports but bureaucracy is hindering them from making drastic moves and the rights to hold main events of esports are too expensive for cities at the moment.

It is also interesting to see that companies and other organisations are wanted to join supporting Finnish esports. In the end, if you truly want to scale up your operations, you ought to lure private money too. In general, this seems to be happening (Figure 7) as the money brands pour into esports fund 74% of the fun. People have evidently understood that the government cannot be the beast of burden but instead they have to lure markets to fund them. This is especially true in Finland, for which trading is of the utmost importance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2015). The population is too low to create big enough market nationally so Finnish esports must look outward were it to grow.

**What would be the justifications for public funding and support for esports?**

Esports poses an interesting opportunity for both Finland's public and private sectors. Esports is clearly a booming area of business. For such an innovative country (Bloomberg 2017) it would be odd if Finland would not be riding the wave when esports hits the home run. Even though reaping the fruits of esports should be relatively easy given Finland's high level of network readiness, the second best in the world (World Economic Forum 2016), policymakers and corporate leaders seemingly do not recognize nor understand the benefits esports could bring them. Businesses could conveniently gain an access to the segment they've always thought so difficult to reach; youth. On top of that, marketing through esports channels is cheap, for now.

For the public sector, on the other hand, esports could be a way to catch up with troubled youngsters more easily than before. Esports could help young players learn skills needed in life (e.g. team work, technological skills) as well as offer them a place and a community where one can be part of something. Finland's much hailed education sector could also find new opportunities in esports and gaming alike.

**What should esports community in Finland do to be more attractive as a funding and support target for the public?**

Esports community should start practicing professional lobbying and meet face-to-face with policymakers. Policymakers would listen better to veteran esports actives rather than young ones. As gaming industry is becoming ever more popular in Finland, esports community should tag together with the big names of Finnish gaming to promote esports and gaming better. Teaming up with the "traditional" gaming industry could open doors for private money. All in all, gaining wider recognition will take years of work and to succeed, the esports community should start treating the passion of theirs more seriously.

## 6 Discussion

Bar a few exceptions, almost everyone of the interviewees answered all questions laid before them so data saturation was achieved faster than expected as same kind of opinions piled up rather quick.

One surprising element of the interviewees' answers was the lack of mentions of potential employment created by esports or esports enhancing Finland's brand. Some countries have already established an image of themselves inside the esports industry as the countries from where most of the talent come from but because of the industry only now slowly breaking into mainstream, Finland definitely should have a decent chance in establishing its brand as a great esports nation. However, achieving that requires Finnish esports players and teams to succeed on the major stages of esports - consistently.

Success and growth go hand-in-hand so triumphant performances on international esports stages would likely create some jobs in Finland. We can learn from what happened in the "traditional" gaming field earlier. Between the years 2012-2015 Finland saw 30-55 new studios being founded per year (Finnish Game Industry Report 2016) and during those years Finnish gaming companies raised about 80 million euros of private investment (Tekes 2016).

Private investment is indeed the medicine Finnish esports desperately needs. Now that Finland is going through austerity measures, it would probably be politically unwise to buy expensive rights to hold main esports events. In other words, attracting private investment is imperative were Finnish esports to grow meaningfully because the public is very unlikely going to support the industry to make a significant difference. In all fairness it would seem weird to see corporations not investing in esports after looking at the numbers and estimates (Figure 1) and therefore, it makes sense what the three interviewees said in section 4.2 of this study; neither the corporate leaders nor policymakers know about this sub-sector of gaming called esports.

## 6.1 Ideas for further research

This study was somewhat limited in terms of the backgrounds of the interviewees. Most of the interviewees were from the esports scene so in order to understand the other side, policymakers and corporate leaders, one should conduct a study, which focuses on their opinions and views regarding esports. In this research the interviewees made claims that the aforementioned people might not understand esports so it would be rather interesting to hear their side of the story. What do they truly know about esports, what would make them support esports (if they do not) and who are “they”?

In the introduction part (1.2) there was talk of how esports would affect Finland’s brand and what kind of jobs would it create. A study about both of the things could help esports community to lobby themselves better in Finland. It would bring new information for policymakers and business leaders alike and thus, could enhance private investment were the results encouraging for such activity.

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