

Regional eSports: growth and barriers

Personnel:

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The convenors of this half-day workshop seek expressions of interest for participation from individuals interested in examining the various regional contexts for eSports practices around the world. Spectatorship and play differ from location to location, with different regions providing unique arrangements of culture, infrastructure, and support for players and watchers alike. Accordingly, this workshop brings together researchers to discuss the national specificities of eSports, especially with regards to barriers for participation for interested spectators and amateur players.

eSports is on the rise. This has been true for the last few years, and 2017 appears to be no different. The popular press and academic researchers have noticed the meteoric rise in both engagement and money entering the area of eSports, with industry reports suggesting sustained compound annual growth of approximately 20% since 2012. A small but significant pool of eSports research has developed over this time, with substantial crossover with research into livestreaming. This research has predominantly focused on the emergence of eSports as a stadium-filling professionalised event, often focusing on the spectacular nature of eSports, and its glossy, high-tech aesthetic. Additionally, a smaller but no less engaged suite of research has focused on the amateur aspects of eSports producing a body of literature that accounts for a wide range of practices, blending with scholarship on livestreaming. While this is important and necessary scholarship, the area has yet to address the diverse national contexts, especially with regards to barriers for engagement.

The global distribution of eSports practices varies by nation, language, and culture. As Liborius and Martin (2016) recognise, a regional perspective on eSports is necessary to account for the variety of practices within eSports cultures. One well-known example of national eSports is the work of Dal Yong Jin. Jin (2010) writes an account of the government support provided for eSports in South Korea, spurring the support for eSports and videogaming more generally within the nation. No other nation has given as much government support for eSports as South Korea, and the various states of communications infrastructure between different nations create different expectations of play and performance.

Additionally, the eSports community is likely far more diverse than current scholarship has currently addressed, especially in terms of the forms of competitive play and the games that compose regional trends in play. Variations in the forms of institutionalisation and different relationships between players, institutions, and sponsors, as well as longer-term histories of sporting are also likely to shape regional expression of eSports. Consequently, the convenors of this workshop are interested in the orientations of "regional eSports": youth-

centric leisure activities navigating across local socio-cultural gaming practices and particular national/institutional infrastructures and their corresponding regional/urban tilts.

The convenors, Marcus Carter (The University of Sydney), Robbie Fordyce (The University of Melbourne), Martin Gibbs (The University of Melbourne) and Emma Witkowski (RMIT University), hope to coordinate up to 20 participants into the formation of an ongoing discussion of the regional aspects of eSports, with an eye to future collaboration in an edited collection.

The emphasis of the workshop will be on discussion, and we invite those interested in presenting material to include an abstract with their submission to the workshop. The convenors will select 6-8 abstracts for presentation during the 4-hour workshop.

Please submit expressions of interest to robert.fordyce@unimelb.edu.au with the subject line "Regional eSports". For those interested in presenting, please attach a 200-word abstract to your submission in Word or PDF format.

Bibliography:

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