



**Call for oral communications – Esports conference cohosted by
Montpellier University (Faculty of Sports Sciences, France) and
Hanoi School of Business and Management, Vietnam National
University (HSB-VNU, Vietnam).**

Towards more professionalized esports practices?

21 & 22 May 2026

Abstract

For the first joint conference organized between Montpellier University and HSB-VNU, we decided to dig into conditions of professionalization and sustainability of esports. In particular, the objective is to gather pieces of work from several different disciplines in order to explore the interests, the limitations and tensions that are connected to the professional structuration of esports. This conference therefore aims to provide a global and critical approach by questioning both the practices of esports stakeholders and the methods mobilized by scholars.

Argumentation

At a time when professional esports clubs around the world are increasingly resorting to fundraising as a new way to fund their activities on both the strategic and operational plan (De Moor et al., 2022), the esports market seems to go through a third period of historical crisis marked by a new diminution of prizes distributed to the players each year during professional competitions since 2022. According to Yong Jin & Besombes (2024), this phenomenon could be explained by a possible current or future explosion from the speculative bubble that might represent the esports market. In particular, this raises the question on the capacity from esports stakeholders to develop themselves within a sustainable manner. According to Nyström et al. (2022), setting up such process need to be done around the necessity to develop a (1) better management of health and inclusion within esports, (2) to improve the structural development of



esports actors and (3) to answer their need for creating less “immature” business models.

In this context, the question for which this conference wants to bring first elements of answer is the following: how primary actors in the sense of Scholz (2019), namely, professional esports clubs and players, game publishers and tournament organizers could reshape their activities to lean towards the development of more professionalized and sustainable esports competitions? To this aim, this call for oral communication is structured around three axis inspired and adapted from aforementioned conclusions belonging to the work of Nyström et al. (2022).

1. Towards a global and inclusive management of players' health and performance for a more professionalized practice.

Since a few years, scientific literature began to seize the question of the management of players' health and performance. Regarding esports athletes health, DiFrancisco-Donoghue et al. (2019) firstly highlighted the need to treat this topic from an holistic perspective, by identifying six axis of development, namely physical therapy, sports medicine, psychology, ophthalmology, nutrition and athletic training. After that, numerous scientific publications demonstrated the interest to look at the management of esports players health (Monteiro Pereira et al., 2022), which rapidly resorted to the emergence of strategic recommendations around specific policies concerning concrete operational interventions (Schary et al., 2022). At the same time, a whole literature facet was builded around esports psychology (Pedraza-Ramirez et al., 2020), stress resulting from that practice (Leis & Lautenbach, 2020) as well as burnout risks (Hong et al., 2023) and coping strategies (Poulus et al., 2024). Besides, esports players health management increasingly require a very structured framework (Hong, 2022) in order to set up specific training sessions aiming to improve players performances (Thillier et al., 2023) and to measure it with precision (Sharpe et al., 2022). Practically speaking, improving esports players management of health and performance might be also connected with the emergence of esports dedicated formations (Jenny et al., 2021; Lefebvre, 2025) and more inclusive spaces (Hayday & Collison, 2020).

2. Towards a more structured development of esports stakeholders activities.



For this second axis, the goal is to demonstrate how a more professional and sustainable esports industry is conditioned by the deployment of specific processus such as esports institutionalization, its juridical framework, its governance as well as communication strategies and crisis management. Regarding the need for esports institutionalization, it was highlighted in several studies, namely in France (Vansyngel et al., 2018) but also at the global scale (Witkowski, 2023). Concretely, esports institutionalization often pertains to the development of national, regional or international associations or federations that seek to play a role in esports structuration (Besombes, 2019). Besides, this also questions the recognition of esports as a sports, notably by public authorities (Abanazir, 2019). In practice, this notion of esports institutionalization is connected to the deployment of governance mechanisms (Peng et al., 2020). For instance, if this esports governance could treat integrity and well-being in esports (Kelly et al., 2022), it also includes tentative from Olympism movement to take over esports for political or image reasons (Abanazir, 2022) or to use it for soft power goals (Joseph et al., 2025; Wong & Meng-Lewis, 2022). In addition, the structuration of esports activities also require the constant development of a legal framework for players contracts (Godefroid, 2021) as well as for esports stakeholders activities on a global scale (Abanazir & Shinohara, 2024). Finally, a more structured development of the esports market also implies to deploy better communication and marketing strategies from its primary actors (Esiri, 2022).

3. Towards the adoption of more sustainable business models for esports structures.

For this last axis, adopting more sustainable business models for esports stakeholders could be put into perspective within five thematics, namely, the need to diversify income streams and funding tactics, corporate societal responsibility processus, novelties in terms of business models as well as strategies leading towards economic sustainability. To begin with, scientific literature towards esports market (Scholz, 2019) recently described esports economy (Karhulahti, 2017; Mangelaja, 2019) as an industry where the main actors cocreate value through physical or online spaces by proposing services for which innovatives processus are increasingly integrated inside entrepreneurial business models, medias, sports, entertainment, culture and consumer commitment (McCauley et al., 2024). In general, if merchandising (Lokhman



et al., 2018) or revenues connected from the exploitation of esports physical stadium (Jenny et al., 2018) constitutes market opportunities for esports actors, they remain nonetheless dependent on the support from sponsorships and fragilized by the important role of publishers (Taylor, 2012). From there, we observe that some esports actors are looking for support from political organizations, notably territorial collectivity when it comes to hosting competitions (McCauley et al., 2020) or getting subsidies. Other perspectives for esports development are besides located in the deployment of touristic offers for esports (Leon et al., 2022), in organizing esports events (Helmefalk et al., 2024) as well as within the intersection of music world (Y. Jin & Yoon, 2021) fashion and cinema world with esports. In this context, studying funding mechanisms of esports actors remain necessary to better understand the evolution of current and future business models (De Moor et al., 2022). In addition, it seems also important to put into perspective this research of more sustainable business models with the need to analyze the deployment of corporate societal responsibilities strategies (Kolyperas et al., 2024) as well as with dispositifs aiming to lean towards more ecological esports practices (Hiltscher & Möglich, 2024).

Proposition

Please send your propositions of communication (title, five keywords and an abstract of 300 words) as well as a short biography of author(s) before 30 March 2026. Please find below an abstract of the conference topics:

Axis 1: Health, performance and players inclusion

1. Mental health and burn-out prevention for professional esports players.
2. Holistic support strategies (nutrition, ergonomics, psychology and training).
3. Gender inequality and inclusion dynamics within competitive spaces.
4. Professional formation and double project for young esports players.
5. Structuration of training environment and innovation in performance monitoring.

Axis 2: General structuration of the esports industry

6. Esports institutionalization: stakes, resistances and compared models.



7. Governance and integrity within esports competitions.
8. Juridical regulation and player contracts: state of the art and perspectives.
9. Communication strategies during crisis and image management within esports structures.
10. Relationships between public and private actors in developing esports ecosystem.

Axis 3: Business models and sustainability

11. Diversification of income streams: merchandising, ticketing, exclusive content, etc.
12. Clubs funding: fundrising, subsidies and public private partnerships.
13. Corporate societal responsibilities within esports business models.
14. Esports tourism and hybridation within other cultural industries (fashion, music, cinema).
15. Towards a sustainable financial autonomy: strategies and organizational good practices.

Each proposition would need to clearly define the research question, methodologies, framework and results. Each communication will be structured around the following format: 20 minutes of presentation and 10 minutes of questions. All proposals will need to be sent to the following email address:

- florianlefebvre@hsb.edu.vn
- eric.perera@umontpellier.fr
- loivd@hsb.edu.vn

Calendar

Deadline for proposal reception: 30 March 2026.

Announce of chosen propositions: 06 April 2026.



Dates of the conference: 21 & 22 May 2026.

Location: Hybrid, online.

Scientific committee

- Axel Bérard, Independent researcher, France.
- Nicolas Besombes, Lecturer, University of Paris-Cité, France.
- Gilles Lecocq, Lecturer, ILEPS Cergy, France.
- Florian Lefebvre, Lecturer, Hanoi School of Business and Management, Vietnam National University.
- Eric Perera, Lecturer HDR, laboratory SantESIH, University of Montpellier, France.
- Robin Recours, Lecturer HDR, laboratory SantESIH, University of Montpellier, France.
- Marwane Simou, Doctor in sports sciences (STAPS), University of Bordeaux, France.
- Duc Loi Vu, Lecturer, Hanoi School of Business and Management, Vietnam National University.

Organizing committee

- Florian Lefebvre, Lecturer, Hanoi School of Business and Management, Vietnam National University.
- Jules Gernigon, Postgraduate student, University of Montpellier, France.
- Wenling Gou, PhD student, laboratory SantESIH, University of Montpellier, France.
- Marwane Simou, Doctor in sports sciences (STAPS), University of Bordeaux, France.
- Duc Loi Vu, Lecturer, Hanoi School of Business and Management, Vietnam National University.

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