



Research Article

**The institutional trajectory of E-sports in Türkiye as a catalyst for tourism growth\*\***

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** E-sports is still in the process of establishing a fully mature theoretical and practical foundation; nevertheless, its rapid growth has made it an increasingly significant area of research interest. In the context of tourism, e-sports events can be conceptualised as tourism products that contribute to the appeal and competitiveness of destinations. Against this backdrop, this study primarily aims to present Türkiye's institutional roadmap for e-sports.

**Methodology:** The Türkiye E-sports Federation's 2025 Strategic Plan was analysed through content analysis using LiGRE. The data-driven coding process identified four main themes -mainly on education, performance, tourism, and institutionalisation- which collectively outline the national-level orientation of e-sport development.

**Results:** The findings highlight the importance of establishing national legitimacy, integrating digitalisation across processes, and achieving standardisation and professionalism in alignment with international benchmarks. These priorities are sustained through educational opportunities strengthened by academic and international collaborations and disseminated within an inclusive framework, while the resulting competitiveness is also leveraged in branding processes.

**Discussion:** Although tourism is not positioned as a central priority, it emerges as a field explicitly associated with e-sport. In this regard, attention is drawn to the tourism-related potential of e-sport events -particularly through international success and event hosting- in enhancing destination attractiveness, international visibility, and destination image.

**Keywords:** E-Sports, E-Sports Tourism, Destination Management, Strategic Planning, Türkiye E-Sports Federation

**Introduction**

The concept of games is often initially associated with a childish activity, commonly framed in terms of frivolity, insignificance, and even superfluity, wherein time may be considered to be spent, at least partially, in vain. From this perspective, it is unlikely to be regarded as an activity warranting significant attention. Naturally, similar characterisations might emerge from a detached viewpoint that observes the phenomenon and event at its outermost layer. However, when examined in relation to its relevant dimensions and historical context, the inferences drawn are expected to diverge considerably from such characterisations. Accordingly, it becomes evident that the game's facets -supporting motor skills, enhancing problem-solving and teamwork abilities, fostering socialisation, and instilling discipline (Petrovska, Sivevska and Cackov, 2013: 881; Lai et al., 2018: 638-639; Blumberg et al., 2019: 9-12)- are made manifest.

In terms of reflecting the relationship between the socio-cultural environment and games, traditional sports, which predominantly focused on physical fitness during the industrial era, can be considered as a useful point of departure. Indeed, one of the values that gained increasing prominence in society -particularly from the mid-19th century onwards- was physical fitness, closely associated with industrial productivity, discipline, and the standardisation of bodily performance (Shephard, 1991). Within this framework, sports may be considered not only as recreational activities but also as practices that, to some extent, supported the development of physically capable individuals in line with the broader demands of an industrialising society. However, in parallel with transformations in dominant socio-cultural structures, these assumptions have gradually evolved

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over time, leading to a reconfiguration of both the purpose and the nature of games and sports. As Wagner (2006: 437-439) emphasises, the transition towards a knowledge-, technology-, and communication-based society has fundamentally altered the underlying dynamics of play and competition. In this context, the increasing electronification of games and sports, coupled with a noticeable shift from an emphasis on physical fitness to mental agility, cognitive skills, and strategic thinking, can be regarded as a significant indicator of this broader transformation. This shift not only reflects changing societal priorities but also highlights the growing importance of digital environments in shaping contemporary forms of participation, competition, and spectatorship within the realm of sports.

In order to clarify the research process and the significance of the findings, a conceptual framework is presented. Within this scope, the concepts of game, electronic game [in this study, the term “electronic game/e-game” is used to encompass all digitally mediated games, rather than interchangeable terms such as “video games” or “computer games,” which evoke the hardware facilitating the game (Wolf and Perron, 2005: 2-3)], sport, and electronic sport/e-sport are elaborated with reference to societal transformation, competitiveness, and tourism. Subsequently, in line with the primary aim of the research, Türkiye’s institutional trajectory/roadmap in e-sports -regarded as one of the destination’s attractive components as a tourism product- will be detailed, providing a concrete and comprehensive depiction.

### Conceptual Framework

Examining the significance of play for humanity within a historical and cultural framework, Huizinga (1980) emphasises that play predates culture and posits that it forms a foundational element in the emergence of culture. As an activity with such an extensive history and deep-rooted connection to culture (Guttman, 2004), play has naturally evolved into a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon. Within this broader context, and focusing particularly on rules, Suits (1967) defines playing a game as:

*“To engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity.”* (p. 156)

Examining play from a structural and experiential perspective, with an emphasis on its engaging qualities, Rowe (1992: 478) defines it as: *“An abstract object (either a sequence or a goal) which is designed to have no instrumental value; the realisation or pursuit of which is intended to be of absorbing interest to participants or spectators.”* Beyond its origins and intrinsic meaning, play has been analysed through multiple dimensions (Kew, 1986; Kriz, Harviainen and Clapper, 2018; Yang and Chen, 2020). Building on these perspectives, sociologist Caillois (2001: 12) categorises games holistically according to the predominance of competition, chance, simulation, or loss-of-control elements: highly competitive games such as football are termed *agôn*, chance-based games such as roulette are *alea*, imitation-focused games such as Hamlet are *mimicry*, and games emphasising rapid self-spinning or loss of control are *ilinx*.

According to Frasca, who emphasises Caillois’s distinction between *paidia* and *ludus* and seeks to clarify it (pp. 229-230), *paidia* does not incorporate rules that explicitly determine winners and losers. This, however, does not imply the absence of rules altogether. Indeed, *paidia* can be associated with rules inasmuch as it implicitly contains certain socio-cultural guidelines that serve as a framework for action. For example, a child assuming the role of a soldier is expected to act in accordance with these guidelines (Jensen, 2013: 70). In contrast, *ludus* encompasses explicit rules that establish clear winners and losers, while still fundamentally incorporating the rules of *paidia* (Eskelinen and Tronstad, 2003: 203).

Games in which winners and losers are clearly determined naturally foreground competition. The fact that e-games can predominantly be classified under *ludus* (Yenişehirlioğlu et al., 2018: 345) underscores the intrinsic intertwining of these games with competitive dynamics. On a global scale, e-games began to gain momentum in terms of competitive development from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. The event organised by Atari in 1980, often regarded as the first e-game tournament, which received extensive coverage in print and broadcast media and attracted over 10,000 participants, provided a significant foundation for this momentum. Subsequently, in 1982, competitive e-games were broadcast as a television programme in the United States, and the widespread attention they garnered reinforced the perception of e-games as sport-like activities while simultaneously fostering professionalisation and institutionalisation (Borowy and Jin, 2013).

Institutionalised e-games, alongside the increasing use of the internet (World Bank, 2022), achieved a certain degree of prevalence, evolving into a global competitive gaming platform (Wijman, 2020). This development

laid the groundwork for the prominence of e-sport (Eaxuela de Administración de Empresas/Business Administration School/EAE, 2022) and ultimately brought e-sport tourism into focus (Yenişehirlioğlu et al., 2018; Dilek, 2019; Electronic Sports League/ESL, 2020).

Due to the term “e-sport,” the suite of activities it encompasses is, at first glance, readily classifiable as “sport.” However, it is evident that a more reasonable assessment requires moving beyond this initial impression and evaluating within the framework of the nature of sport and e-sport. In this regard, the definition of sport (The Britannica Dictionary, 2022) as “a contest or game in which people do certain physical activities according to a specific set of rules and compete against each other” should be considered. Swaminathan and Vaz (2013: 63-64) similarly emphasise physical activity, rules, competition, and individual or team participation in their definition of sport. Furthermore, the importance of institutionalisation is frequently highlighted, alongside the requisite multifaceted and complex athletic skills (Delaney and Madigan, 2009; Summerley, 2019; Oxford English Dictionary, 2025). Building on these foundations, questions have arisen regarding whether e-sport can indeed be considered a sport. Particularly, based on the public claim by e-sport proponents that it should be represented at the Olympics (Gdonteli, 2020; Anastácio et al., 2023), Parry (2019; 2023: 49-50) proposed six logically necessary conditions for Olympic sports and, through comparison, did not categorise e-sport as a sport. This debate has been addressed by numerous other authors as well (Jenny et al., 2016; Rosell Llorens, 2017; Thiel and John, 2018; Parry and Giesbrecht, 2023).

The ongoing debate regarding whether e-sport can be categorised under the umbrella of sport -reflected in various studies presenting differing viewpoints- will be set aside in order to focus on the definition of the concept. Wagner’s (2006: 3) definition, ““e-Sports’ is an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication” as can be observed directly or indirectly in other definitions, has been subject to critique within the context of the e-sport debate. Moreover, the examination of this topic across different disciplines presents a fragmented conceptual picture (Reitman et al., 2019; Pizzo et al., 2022), which in turn may hinder the establishment of a clear consensus on the definition of e-sport (Formosa et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Wagner’s (2006) definition is notable due to its inclusivity and the prominence of its citation. Following the evaluation by Hamari and Sjöblom (2016: 213), the definition they present -“A form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the e-Sports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces”- while less inclusive, has been noted for providing a clearer conceptual picture. Ultimately, competitiveness, organisational structure, and the playing of computer/video/electronic games are consistently emphasised across e-sport definitions (Witkowski, 2012: 350; Tang et al., 2023).

The presented framework concerning the core concepts at the centre of this study aimed to enhance the comprehensibility of both the research process and the outputs emerging therefrom. Furthermore, it allowed for an observation of the extent to which institutionalisation features prominently within the concepts of sport and e-sports. Building upon this, the research process focused on Türkiye’s prospective institutional measures in relation to e-sports, thereby providing a clearer depiction of the direction the country intends to give to the field. In doing so, one aspect of potential tourist mobility associated with e-sports events is also illuminated.

## Method

As global e-sports events continue to expand at an undeniable pace, the primary aim of this study is to provide a detailed depiction of how Türkiye directs e-sports institutionally. In this way, within the context of institutionalization -one of the key factors enabling the sustainable existence of e-sports- the scope and orientation of the relevant framework are rendered more tangible. Consequently, the country’s relationship with e-sports and the manner in which it utilises e-sports as a tool are made more visible. This instrumentalization encompasses the potential tourist mobility generated through e-sports activities, which function as tourism products. Accordingly, the partial institutional foundations of e-sports tourism across Türkiye (under the overarching authority of the Republic of Türkiye’s Ministry of Youth and Sports) are also brought to light. Within this context, the research question is articulated as: “*How is institutional e-sports directed at the national level in Türkiye?*”. In line with this, the study also aims to examine how this institutional trajectory implicitly intersects with tourism, particularly by exploring the extent to which e-sport functions as an emerging and indirect catalyst for tourism-related outcomes.

In order to strengthen the response to the research question and to ensure a more systematic analytical grounding, key concepts were first examined in detail and their relevant definitions were clearly articulated within the scope of the study. Building on this conceptual foundation, the research question was addressed through an in-depth examination of the 2025 Strategic Plan prepared by the Türkiye E-sports

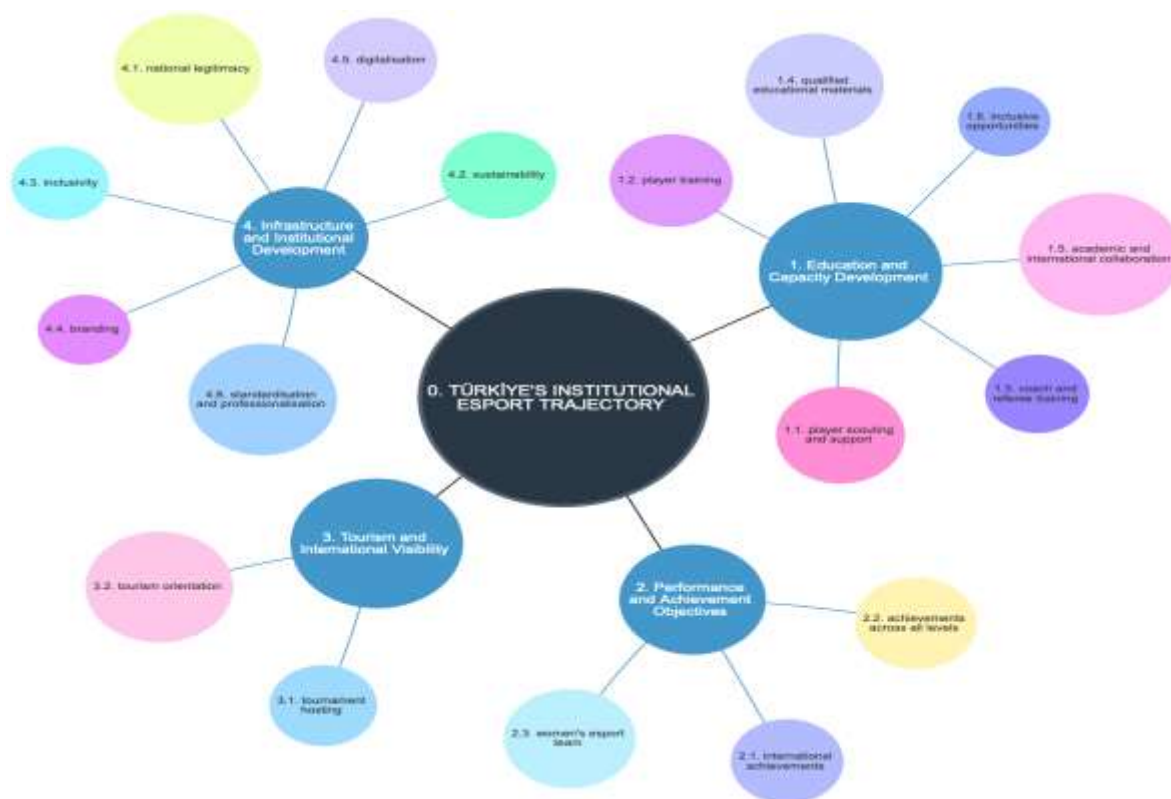
Federation/TESFED (TESFED, 2025b). TEFED, which was established on 24 April 2018 as a federation operating under the Directorate General of Sports Services of the Republic of Türkiye’s Ministry of Youth and Sports, functions as the sole institutional regulatory authority governing the organisation, development, and supervision of e-sports activities in Türkiye (TESFED, 2025a). The strategic plan was subjected to a content analysis in order to identify its underlying priorities, strategic orientations, and institutional logic. This methodological approach enabled not only a clearer illumination of the internal structure and thematic organisation of the plan, but also a more precise delineation of the broader institutional framework.

Throughout the research process, maximum attention was paid to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, with particular sensitivity to enhancing validity and reliability. As noted above, careful consideration was given to the selection of data sources. For the content analysis, LiGRE (Ex-I-Tec, 2025; LiGRE, 2025), a data analysis software developed by Logiciels Ex-I-Tec Incorporation, was employed. Following familiarisation with the data source, an initial draft was developed through preliminary coding. Subsequently, the coding process was finalised using a data-driven approach.

### Findings

Within the overarching theme of Türkiye’s institutional e-sports trajectory, four main themes were established -Education and Capacity Development (ECD), Performance and Achievement Objectives (PAO), Tourism and International Visibility (TIV), and Infrastructure and Institutional Development (IID)- accompanied by a total of 17 codes (ECD: 6; PAO: 3; TIV: 2; IID: 6), which are presented via Figure 1, illustrating the codification tree. The frequency of coding within the themes- particularly IID (25) and ECD (21)- directly highlights the emphasis placed on education, infrastructure, and institutionalisation. Furthermore, examination of the PAO theme reveals that, on one hand, women’s e-sport team is particularly prominent, while on the other, the goal of achieving international success across all levels is clearly articulated. The Türkiye E-sports Federation Strategic Plan also addresses tourism, notably emphasising the hosting of tournaments not only to promote e-sports domestically but also to enhance the country’s international visibility. In this context, the relationship between e-sports activities and tourism emerges as another noteworthy observation.

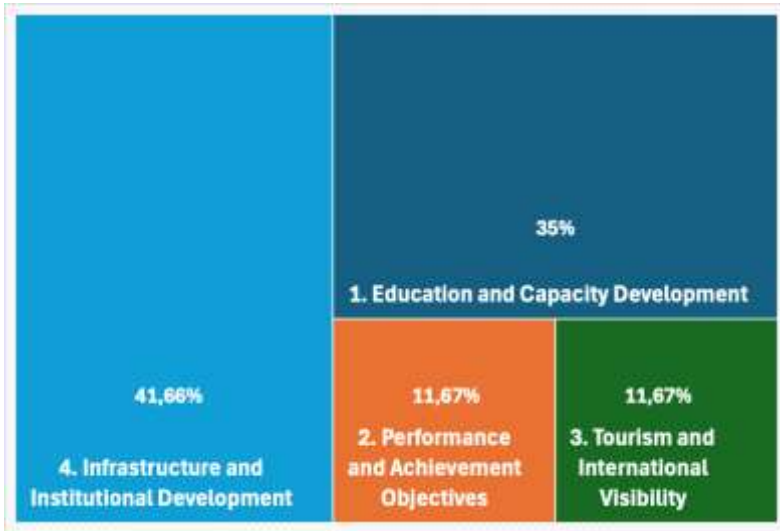
Figure 1. Türkiye’s Institutional E-Sport Trajectory Codification Tree



When examining Figure 2, which presents the proportional distribution of themes, it becomes evident that e-sport in Türkiye does not appear as an immature field, but rather as a structure in which the process of institutionalisation is still ongoing (IID: 41.66%). The second most prominent theme, encompassing both material elements such as infrastructure and resources, and human components such as coaches, players, and

administrators, is ECD. Through this theme, the emphasis placed on implementing the e-sport structure envisaged in the plans through qualified education and human capital once again becomes apparent. The cumulative weight of these two dominant themes (IID and ECD: 76.66%) underscores the importance attributed to developing e-sport in Türkiye on a structured and institutional basis. In this respect, the positioning of performance and achievement objectives at a secondary level, as well as the non-central role of the tourism dimension of e-sport, becomes more comprehensible (PAO: 11.67%; TIV: 11.67%). Ultimately, although an awareness of both performance goals and tourism-related aspects is visible, it is clearly demonstrated that operational priority is given to institutional infrastructure and capacity building.

**Figure 2. Distribution of Themes**



The presentation of code frequencies, as illustrated in Figure 3, renders the details of the themes more visible and highlights knowledge, technical infrastructure, and professional standards (1.4; 4.5; 4.6). In particular, increasing visibility through the achievement of international success, hosting international tournaments, and addressing e-sport as a tourism product through tourism orientation do not currently occupy a central position (2.1; 3.1; 3.2). Nevertheless, the explicit reference to tourism while outlining the institutionalisation projection points to the value attributed to tourism. In addition, it is observed that the broad inclusivity of e-sport and its public legitimisation are also among the aspects that are not overlooked.

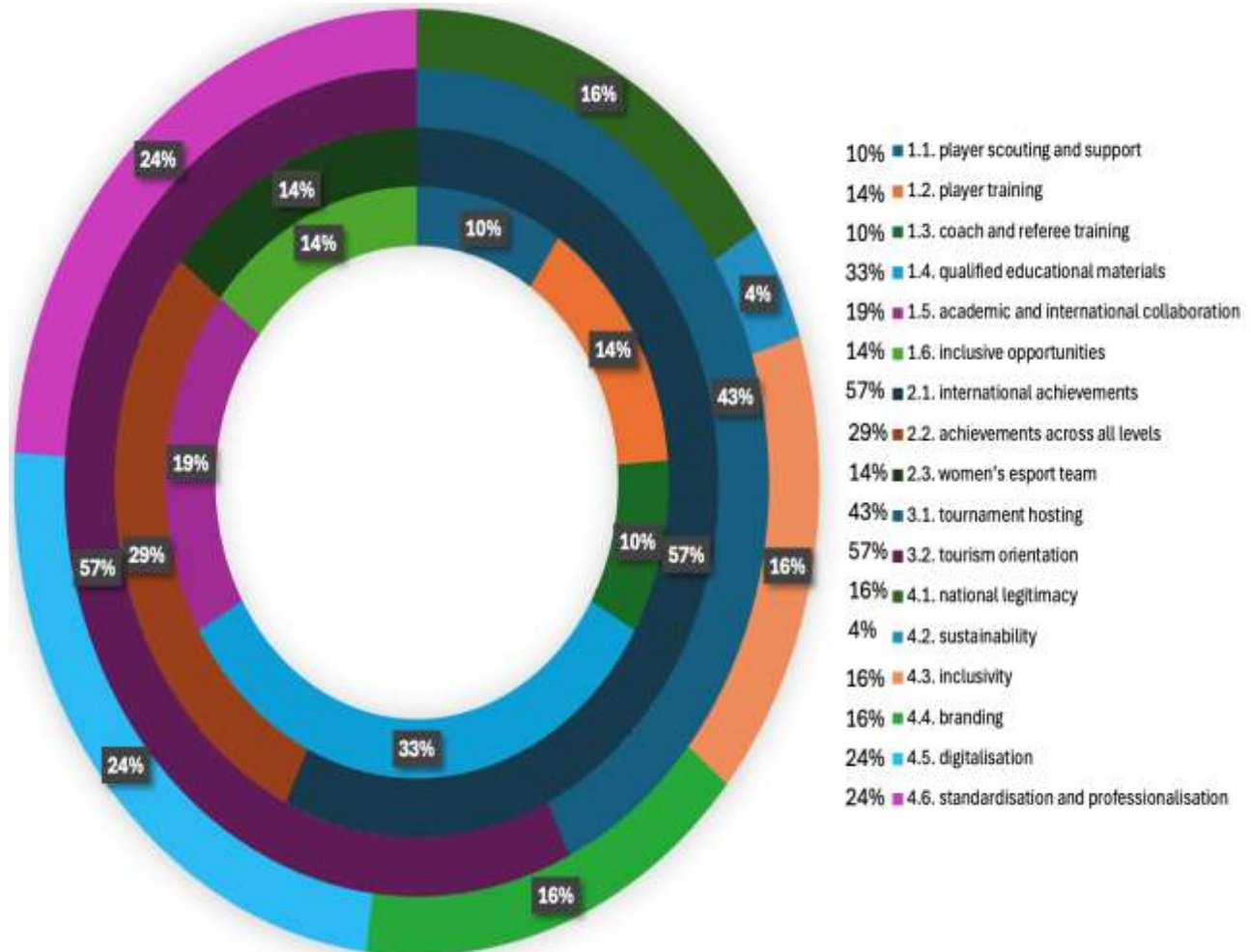
**Figure 3. Code Frequencies**



The proportional distribution of codes within the themes is presented in Figure 4, contributing to a clearer understanding of the relative weight of sub-components within the overall structure. For instance, the importance attributed to qualified educational materials in institutionalisation, the construction of educational

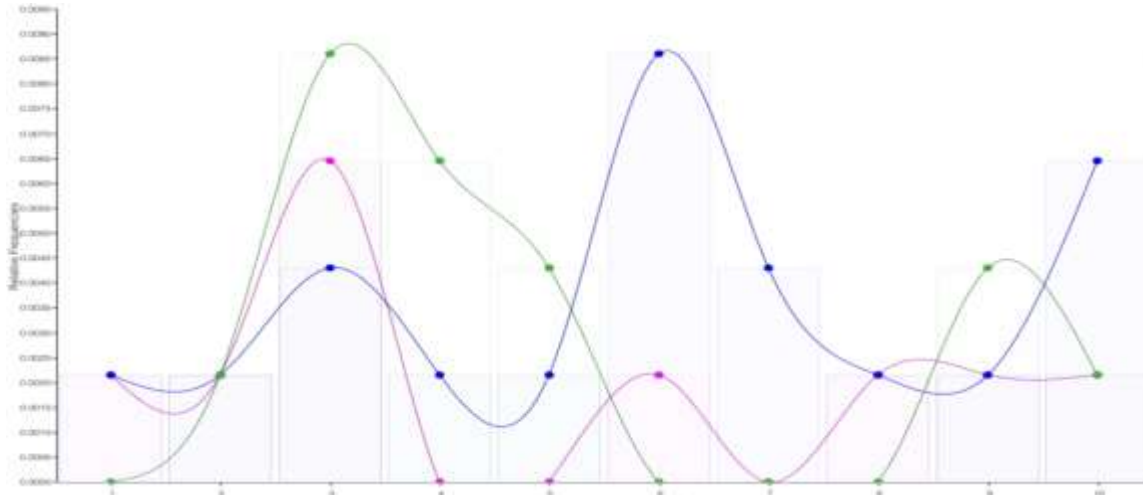
infrastructure, and the process of standardisation becomes apparent. Similarly, the high and closely aligned proportions of the international dimension of e-sport and tourism orientation within their respective themes point to a reasonable degree of interrelatedness. Another notable aspect is the central role played by digital infrastructure and standardisation in the process of institutionalisation. This core element, which inherently supports competitiveness, is considered likely to foster a structure that brings inclusivity and sustainability more centrally into focus in the future. Although not entirely neglected, these aspects -likely to gain broader scope in the coming period- are expected to contribute to the multi-dimensional institutionalisation being developed.

Figure 4. Distribution of Codes



The analysed report is divided into ten equal segments, and Figure 5 visualises the frequency of the words “education”, “international”, and “e-sport” across these sections, suggesting at first glance that “education” is concentrated in the first two quarters of the report, whereas “e-sport” becomes more prominent in the third quarter. This distribution reveals that the institutionalisation of e-sport in Türkiye has been designed with a clear emphasis on education. Considering the more fragmented distribution of the term “international”, it can be inferred that, at the current stage and in the forthcoming process, priority is given to establishing a solid foundation through actions primarily envisaged at the national level.

**Figure 5. Word Frequency Distribution Graph (Green: Education; Pink: International; Navy: E-sport)**



It is appropriate to examine more closely the ECD and IID themes, which occupy a prominent place within the Strategic Plan. In this regard, Figure 6, which visualises the code statistics for the relevant themes, can be utilised. Within ECD, the codes player scouting and supporting, player training, and coach and referee training indicate that the focus is not solely on the education of the existing human resources, but also on ongoing efforts to expand the talent pool (see data quotations/DQ).

DQ-1: “At least once a year, national-level player scouting is conducted.”

It is evident that the plan aims to access the potential human resources -players, coaches, and referees- and to implement them with enhanced quality, targeting the country as a whole to maintain a broad scope. It is also understood that efforts are made to clarify the pathway for realising this potential through standardisation practices.

DQ-2: “Establish e-sports centres across Türkiye to meet the educational and training needs of young people in these centres.”

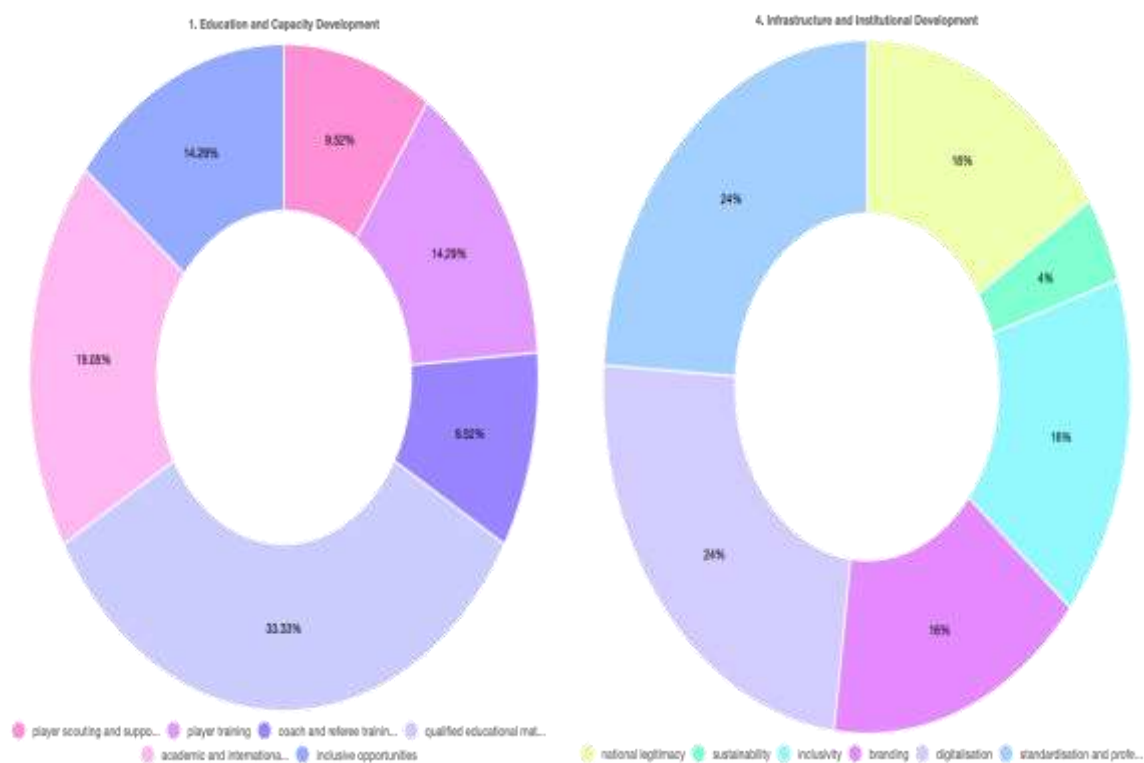
DQ-3: “Organise coach and referee training programmes.”

Within the ECD theme of the analysed plan, the codes *qualified educational materials* and *academic and international collaboration* hold the largest shares, with 33.33% and 19.05% respectively. In addition to engaging with high schools and universities, developing collaborations with individuals and institutions at the international level and utilising these to strengthen educational materials reflects a multifaceted improvement initiative.

DQ-4: “Develop the e-sports curriculum and workshops in cooperation with high schools and universities.”

DQ-5: “Prepare educational content in accordance with international standards.”

Figure 6. ECD, and IDD Themes Code Statistics



The establishment of e-sports centres across Türkiye represents a key factor for ensuring a national standard. In particular, the section of Figure 6 presenting the code statistics under the *infrastructure and institutional development* theme shows that the *standardisation and professionalisation* code, together with the *digitalisation* code, accounts for nearly half of the theme. This indicates that the focus on infrastructure and institutionalisation is not confined to e-sports centres alone. Indeed, considerable emphasis is placed not only on standardising the facilities but also on aligning leagues, educational content, and the overall structure with established standards, taking international benchmarks into account and ensuring professionalisation.

DQ-6: “Standardise all e-sports leagues to elevate them to an international level of competition.”

The analysed plan clearly highlights digitalisation as an important tool for achieving standardisation. Digitalisation is emphasised across fundamental and multi-layered processes such as management, education, and events.

DQ-7: “Digitalise all processes and establish a federation management system to facilitate player and team management.”

Considering the strategic plan as a whole, the relationship between the outlined orientation and sustainability is clearly evident. However, as no further elaboration on sustainability is provided, the relative weight of the corresponding code remains low. In contrast, the codes *branding*, *inclusivity*, and *national legitimacy* emerge as considerably more prominent.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Examining the significance of play for humanity within a historical and cultural framework, Huizinga (1980) emphasises that play predates culture and posits that it forms a foundational element in the emergence of culture. As an activity with such an extensive history and deep-rooted connection to culture (Guttman, 2004), play has naturally evolved into a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon. Within this broader context, and focusing particularly on rules, Suits (1967) defines playing a game as: The central issue complicating the concept of e-sports lies in the “e” in the term. Since e-sports activities primarily take place in an electronic environment, the emphasis on physicality -a hallmark of traditional sports- effectively diminishes. In this context (and considering other markedly distinguishing aspects), the resistance to categorising e-sports within the sport domain -despite ongoing debate- can reasonably be expected. One perspective on the varied interpretations of the concept is offered by Karhulahti (2017), who examines the problematic “e” in the term. In this study, the “e” is interpreted less as “electronic” and more in an “economic” sense, thereby highlighting

the organised and institutional aspects of e-sports alongside its commercial dimension. Indeed, organisation and institutionalisation constitute overlapping elements for both sport and e-sports.

The tourist flows triggered by events based on e-sports competitions [similar to sports competitions (Yamaç Erdoğan, 2023: 186)] give rise to e-sports tourism, providing an additional stimulative effect on the economic dimension of e-sports (Lokhman, Karashchuk and Kornilova, 2018; Yenişehirlioğlu et al., 2018; Çetin and Coşkuner, 2021; Masłowski and Karasiewicz, 2021). Therefore, for the sustainable development of e-sports alongside its impact domains, such as tourism, the level of institutionalisation and the institutional measures undertaken are of critical importance (Besombes, Vansyngel and Velpry., 2018; Abanazir, 2019).

The global increase in e-sports revenues and the rising value of player prizes indicate that e-sports will continue to hold economic significance (Block and Haack, 2021). In enhancing Türkiye's position in this context and in ensuring effectiveness in areas of e-sports not directly related to the economy, the institutional trajectory derivable from TESFED's strategic e-sports plan naturally plays a foundational role. Within the framework of Türkiye's institutional e-sport trajectory, emphasis is placed on securing national legitimacy, integrating digitalisation across all processes, and achieving standardisation and professionalism through adherence to international practices and benchmarks, in order for e-sport to develop on this solid foundation within the country. This is sustained through educational opportunities that are strengthened by academic and international collaborations and disseminated within an inclusive framework; furthermore, performance and achievement objectives are pursued with the support of education, and the competitiveness thereby attained is also leveraged in the branding process. Although tourism does not occupy a prominent position in the report, it remains significant as a field with which e-sport is explicitly associated. Accordingly, the potential of e-sport events—particularly through the achievement of international success and the hosting of events, as emphasised in the report—to be considered as a tourism product supporting destination attractiveness, to extend beyond the boundaries of the event itself through multi-layered tourism interactions, and to enhance international visibility and contribute to destination image, should not be overlooked.

The comparison between e-sports and traditional sports is still ongoing, and no consensus has yet been reached on fundamental issues such as whether e-sports can be classified as a sport. This situation was clearly and concisely outlined in the section preceding the findings. Consequently, the necessity of conceptual studies has been reaffirmed to allow a more rigorous examination of e-sports itself, e-sports tourism from a tourism perspective, or the relationship between e-sports events and tourism. At the same time, the study supports an understanding of how infrastructure and institutionalisation measures have been developed nationwide in a rapidly evolving field such as e-sports, and facilitates inferences regarding similar processes.

In a field such as e-sports, which has yet to establish a clear theoretical and practical foundation at the global level, planning efforts undertaken at the national scale can provide guidance for other institutions and structures when addressing similarly ambiguous situations. In the plan examined in this study, the emphasis placed on education and human resources is evidently capable of informing other areas of activity as well. Furthermore, although not directly related to tourism, the consideration of tourism's multifaceted and inclusive nature in planning demonstrates, through a concrete example, its potential to broaden and enrich the scope of the focal area. Similar initiatives explored in the study suggest that numerous positive potentials, capable of extending beyond the main field of activity, could be integrated into the core structure and realised within the framework of institutionalisation.

**Ethics Statement:** Ethics committee approval was not required for this study because it was based solely on archival research and document analysis and did not involve the collection of data from human participants or animals (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, or experimental studies involving humans or animals).

**Author Contributions:** The author contributed 100% to the study.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares that there is no conflict of interest

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