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REPORT

The 1st M(U)INI eSports Conference: Project Evaluation, Implementation, and Future Improvements

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ABSTRACT

This conference report presents the outcomes of the 1st M(U)INI eSports Conference (MeSC), held on 28 November 2025 at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. The event aimed to establish an interdisciplinary platform connecting faculties of Sports Studies, Informatics, Law, Economics, Social Studies, and Arts to address the fragmented nature of esports research. The morning academic programme featured six student presentations in English and Czech, while the afternoon session at the Czech National Championship in Computer Games enabled direct engagement with professional players and coaches from the partner team SINNERS. Key findings confirm that serious esports scholarship requires integration across legal, economic, psychological, and physiological perspectives. The conference demonstrated that university–industry collaboration, particularly with professional teams serving as "lead users," provides unique research opportunities unavailable in laboratory settings. Tangible outcomes include consensus on establishing an institutional esports platform at Masaryk University and the publication of this collection of student abstracts. Areas for improvement identified include earlier submission deadlines, broader faculty involvement, hybrid delivery formats, and sustainable financing models. The report concludes that Masaryk University has significant potential to become a key node in Central and Eastern European esports research, bridging academic inquiry with professional practice.

Keywords: esports; conference report; interdisciplinary research; university–industry collaboration; Masaryk University

BACKGROUND

The 1st M(U)INI eSports Conference (MeSC) was held on 28 November 2025. The morning programme took place at the Faculty of Sports Studies of Masaryk University (FSpS MU) on the Bohunice campus, and the afternoon programme was hosted at the Brno Exhibition Centre during the Czech National Championship in Computer Games. The event was organised by the FSpS MU under the auspices of the Masaryk University Community Fund (project MUNI/CF/0634/2025). The conference was bilingual, with presentations delivered in both Czech and English.

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

To situate MeSC within the broader academic landscape, it is essential to consider the current state of esports scholarship. The current literature defines esports as a complex, interdisciplinary phenomenon that integrates media studies, computer science, business, sport sciences, sociology, law, and cognitive science (Meng-Lewis et al., 2025). Within this multifaceted domain, professional players operate at the limits of human capacity, balancing the rapid processing of enormous data streams with precise motor control and effective team coordination (Kozachuk et al., 2016). At the team level, studies further show that shared emotions and team cohesion significantly influence collective goals and overall performance in esports teams (Raetze et al., 2025). However, the interdisciplinary nature of esports introduces challenges: its sedentary training and prolonged exposure to stress lead to musculoskeletal problems and burnout, underscoring the need to combine training with physiotherapy and mental health support (Riatti & Thiel, 2022; Tholl et al., 2025).

Beyond its value as entertainment, esports also serve as a "living laboratory" for studying human behaviour in digital contexts. The availability of high-resolution digital trace data and behavioural logs enables researchers to examine cognitive processes and team dynamics with millisecond precision that is not possible in traditional sports (Hendelkens, 2026; Raetze et al., 2025). In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), universities play a crucial role in legitimising esports by serving as guarantors of quality and seriousness; however, studies indicate that synergies across faculties and departments remain insufficient due to institutional rigidity and administrative barriers (Hospodková et al., 2025). For example, the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University (FTVS UK, 2023) has established an academic department of esports and a GSPORT programme that links electronic sports with physical training to upgrade gaming to the level of traditional sports disciplines (FTVS UK, 2023), suggesting a possible model for other institutions.

Currently, despite these promising developments, esports research suffers from fragmentation and lacks unified frameworks; isolated studies within individual faculties fail to capture the holistic nature of the esports ecosystem (Meng-Lewis et al., 2025; Pizzo et al., 2022). To address the absence of a model connecting macro- (governance), meso- (organisations) and microlevels (individuals), scholars have recently proposed the Unified Multilayered Esports Framework (UMEF) (Meng-Lewis et al., 2025). However, effective platforms for rapid knowledge transfer between academia and practice remain scarce, particularly in terms of integrity and regulation (Riedl & Verschuuren, 2025). While universities are widely recognised as knowledge brokers within the Triple Helix model

of university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), newer frameworks suggest that flexible platforms can accelerate innovation and respond to the dynamic needs of the gaming industry (Awasthy et al., 2020). Moreover, academic processes need to overcome institutional rigidity and actively involve students through experiential and work-integrated learning to bridge the skills gap (Hospodková et al., 2025; Jenny et al., 2021).

The aim of MeSC was precisely to address these gaps by establishing the first interdisciplinary platform at Masaryk University (MU) that connects the Faculties of Sports Studies, Informatics, Law, Economics, Social Studies, and Arts. This platform would allow students to present early-stage research hypotheses, share ideas and receive feedback from experts and professional teams. The conference also aimed to destigmatise gaming (Riatti & Thiel, 2022) and promote esports as a tool for developing digital literacy, critical thinking, language, and communication skills, as well as teamwork (Fuentes & Navas, 2020; Hospodková et al., 2025). MU seeks to position itself as another key node in the CEE region, bringing together dispersed disciplinary approaches and contributing to the development of education and research in esports.

The conference was thus conceived as a space for overcoming barriers between faculties, establishing systematic cooperation and promoting knowledge transfer into practice. Its goal is not to produce a mere catalogue of abstracts, but rather to initiate a new model of connection between the university and the professional esports scene—one that reflects the holistic nature of esports while supporting health and fostering economic and social development.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME, PARTICIPANTS AND ACADEMIC SETTING

Turning to the specifics of the event, the conference's morning session was held at the **Faculty of Sports Studies, Masaryk University** (FSpS MU). After the official opening at 10:00, the English-language session commenced with presentations by **Bc. Hong Nhung Nguyenová**, **Danielle Kathryn Langlois** and **Josef Šimůnek**. A brief break followed at 11:15, and from 11:30 the Czech session featured **Mgr. Tereza Poledníková**, **Marek Šimek** and **Jiří Kováč**. The morning programme concluded around 13:00.

In the afternoon, the event relocated to the Brno Exhibition Centre (BVV) for the Czech National Championship in computer games (MČR 2025). There, students showcased their projects at our booth and engaged with professional players and coaches. This interaction provided valuable practical feedback and enabled students to establish contacts for future research collaboration.

The conference drew a diverse audience, with the majority of attendees being students and instructors from sports-related disciplines. Notably, the event attracted distinguished experts from both academia and industry: among the invited guests were **Dr Craig McNulty** (the guest of honour) and **Doc. Ing. Karel Hána, PhD**, **Mgr. Zdeněk Ledvina, MBA**, and **Mgr. Martin Sebera, PhD**.

KEY FINDINGS AND ACHIEVED OUTCOMES

Several key insights emerged from the conference proceedings. First and foremost, the conference confirmed that an interdisciplinary approach is essential for serious esports research. Current

scholarship defines esports as a field that connects sports sciences, computer science, law, economics, and psychology (Meng-Lewis et al., 2025; Reitman et al., 2020). Legal analyses highlight "grey zones" in contracts and the dominance of game publishers, which can lead to exploitation of underage players (Kang & Kim, 2025; Novák et al., 2025). Economic studies show that the resilience of clubs depends on diversifying sponsorship portfolios across industries to weather downturns such as the so-called "esports winter" (Zhu et al., 2025). A psychological and physiological perspective is crucial for identifying burnout and musculoskeletal injuries, which reduce the career span of young players to just a couple of years (Kang & Kim, 2025; Tholl et al., 2025). These insights underscore the need to integrate legal, economic and health-related themes into research initiatives stemming from the conference.

Connecting with the professional scene emerged as another central theme and proved vital for translating knowledge into practice. Theoretical models of university–industry cooperation suggest that involving professional teams as "**lead users**" facilitates access to unique data on cognitive load and motor skills that are difficult to replicate in laboratory conditions (Kozachuk et al., 2016). The professional environment thus functions as a "**living laboratory**" for testing hypotheses and supports work-integrated learning initiatives (Jenny et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). In this context, the partnership with SINNERS (the 2025 Czech Championship-winning team) provides empirical depth to projects and reinforces the feedback loop between theory and practice.

Tangible outcomes of the conference include establishing new contacts and strengthening international awareness of MU's esports activities. Perhaps most significantly, the discussion reached consensus on the need to establish an institutional platform for esports at Masaryk University, modelled on initiatives such as the Academic Department of esports at FTVS UK (FTVS UK, 2023; Hospodková et al., 2025). Research activities are further legitimised by publishing abstracts in peer-reviewed journals, thereby destigmatising esports and affirming its status as a serious academic discipline (Hospodková et al., 2025; Riatti & Thiel, 2022). A tangible contribution is this book of abstracts, which documents the range of student research presented.

As part of the reflective process, participants also identified areas for improvement in future editions. Key recommendations include setting earlier deadlines for abstract submissions and registrations, broadening faculty involvement, and providing structured feedback mechanisms. Evidence from academic matchmaking initiatives suggests that structured mentorship and networking formats significantly enhance participant engagement and help bridge gaps between diverse groups (Gutierrez et al., 2025). Participants also emphasised the importance of assessing the "second-order" impact of shared knowledge on the broader esports ecosystem (Abu Sa'a & Ystrom, 2025; Mitton et al., 2007).

WHAT WORKED AND WHAT CAN BE IMPROVED

Analysis of the conference's course and outcomes highlights several aspects that can be considered successful. Among the strengths, the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary format was evident: involving students and instructors from various faculties fostered the sharing of thematic areas and generated new research questions and collaborative projects. Linking the academic programme

with practice proved equally important – the presence of the partner SINNERS and the afternoon block at the Czech National Championship in Computer Games enabled the immediate application of scholarly insights, data collection in real-world settings, and direct feedback from professional players and coaches. Finally, a further positive outcome was the preparation of a collection of abstracts summarising the student contributions, included in this article.

At the same time, honest reflection revealed several areas that warrant adjustments in future editions. Most notably, organisers note the need for earlier promotion and registration – several presentations were submitted at the last minute, which complicated the organisation and made internal review more difficult. Another step is to broaden involvement across other Masaryk University faculties and partners: for example, the Faculty of Informatics could offer a workshop on data analytics, while the Faculty of Social Studies could organise a seminar on the social and cultural aspects of streaming. A proposed innovation is the introduction of a hybrid format with an online archive, allowing talks to be recorded and made available to those unable to attend in person. It will also be necessary to secure stable financing – future editions will need to seek external sponsors and consider a registration fee for participants from outside MU.

CONCLUSION

The first M(U)INI eSports Conference confirmed that Masaryk University has the potential to become a significant national player in academic esports research. While although the programme took place primarily at the Faculty of Sports Studies, it successfully brought together students and experts across disciplines, engaged the professional scene through its partner SINNERS, and created an open platform for discussing and presenting early-stage research projects. The conference thus fulfilled its stated aim – to demonstrate that esports is a serious subject of research that requires an interdisciplinary approach and collaboration between the university and professional spheres. A list of abstracts is included as part of this article. Looking ahead, we hope that this document serves not only as a record of the pilot edition, but also as a starting point for further initiatives that will strengthen the connection between the academic community and the esports ecosystem, generate new projects and deepen cooperation within Masaryk University and beyond.

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STUDENT ABSTRACTS

Title: Harassment of women in the League of Legends community

Author: Hong Nhung Nguyenová

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Abstract:

Statistics have established that women have largely become part of video game culture, however, as a result of gaming being historically attributed as a hobby exclusive to men, many women still report facing negative experiences, such as harassment and gender-based discrimination (gendered harassment, GH), which may discourage women from active participation, either recreationally or professionally. My research project aimed to explore female gamers' experiences and their responses. A series of interviews (N = 10) were conducted via Discord. The sample size included women, women of colour, and a transgender woman. Reflective thematic analysis (RTA) was employed for the analysis. Results showed that women experience gendered harassment via stereotypes. Most commonly, 'E-Girl' was used as a stigmatising term to insult women. The forms of harassment included verbal attacks, gameplay-related sabotage and threats to women's in-person safety. As for women's responses, women employed three main categories of responses: short-term regulating responses; long-term regulating responses and avoidant responses. Consequentially, harassment commonly led towards their exclusion, worse mental health and heightened self-criticism.

Keywords: toxicity; gendered harassment; responses; female gamers; gaming research

Title: Minigames for Esports Training: Discoveries and Challenges

Authors: Danielle K. Langlois and Simone Kriglstein

Affiliation: (both affiliated with Masaryk University - Faculty of Informatics. Dr. Kriglstein is also affiliated with the Austrian Institute of Technology)

Abstract:

This talk briefly discusses an ongoing PhD project oriented around esports training. Specifically, it is focused on training soft skills via gamification. These "soft skills" include arenas like stress-coping, mental health management, and communication. And since we were covering a wide swath of areas, we decided that a battery of three minigames would allow for a diverse set of interactions rather than one, large unified game. One minigame is a breathing game played on a team of two. The aim of this minigame was to introduce a breathing exercise to two players that could play together, and thus bond through cooperative play. The second minigame was also built around a breathing game, but this minigame introduced a movement component encouraging stretching the body during breathing exercises. The final game is a visual novel oriented around the player engaging in difficult social situations and exploring the costs and benefits of different decisions. These three minigames together we hope will be useful in at least introducing some of these concepts to esports players, and in this talk we discuss the development and user testing process for all three minigames. We will also discuss some emerging results and potential areas for further study.

Keywords: esports; minigames; user testing; mental health; gaming research

Title: Linguistic Challenges in Video Game Localization

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Abstract:

Video games represent a unique multimodal and nonlinear medium where the player assumes an active role in constructing the narrative dynamically. This project focuses on the process of video game localization, a complex procedure at the intersection of translation studies and software engineering, which involves not only linguistic transfer but also cultural, technical and legal adaptation. The research primarily addresses the specific linguistic challenges arising during the translation from English into Slavonic languages, particularly Czech and Russian. The main problem analyzed is the structural difference between the analytic source language and the synthetic target languages with rich morphology. A central research question investigates how translators manage "variables" (placeholders for dynamic values) within the text. In Slavonic languages, these variables often disrupt grammatical agreement, forcing translators to utilize specific strategies such as passive constructions, or altering sentence structure to maintain text functionality. The research also examines the issue of gender neutrality in system texts addressed directly to the player, where the player's gender is unknown. The methodology involves analyzing specific translation solutions to demonstrate that in game localization, the functional aspect of the text and its grammatical correctness takes precedence over stylistic perfection. The outcome highlights that game localization requires a distinct approach compared to traditional audiovisual or literary translation due to technical constraints like text fragmentation and the lack of visual context.

Keywords: video games; localization; Slavonic languages; translation strategies; variables