

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



Balancing Esports Development

The interdisciplinary project “Preparing for the Launching of Esports,” addresses the growing tension between promoting esports and concerns about gaming addiction. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, the aim of the project was to understand the needs and potentials of Hong Kong’s esports sector, communicate with stakeholders about gaming addiction, differentiate between esports and non-esports gaming, and establish a platform for sustainable development knowledge exchange. The project team was comprised of experts from the fields of psychology, sociology, social work, and commerce.



The research activities were multi-faceted. At the micro-system level, cognitive and neurological studies using fNIRS technology revealed significant differences in brain activity between non-gamers and gamers, including esports players. Additionally, an experiential sampling study explored gaming patterns and their association with psychological traits, finding that multiple goal orientations reduce the risk of gaming addiction. At the meso-system level, an analysis of the business ecosystem of Hong Kong’s esports sector was conducted, alongside a survey on gaming expenditures among secondary school students. The business ecosystem analysis highlighted the need for incorporating esports into existing athlete subsidy schemes, while the survey revealed significant spending on games among students, with emerging trends in mini-games and horror games. Qualitative interviews with NGOs, teachers, and counselling professionals uncovered a general lack of understanding about esports and its distinction from other forms of gaming.

Hong Kong lacks a coherent policy on esports at the macro-system level, which is crucial for its development compared to regions like Korea, Japan, and the US. Fortunately, the inclusion of esports in major events such as the Asian Games or the Esports Olympics 2025 is pivotal. The findings highlighted a cultural shift in the socio-political landscape, from negative portrayals of gaming to recognizing youth empowerment. Nonetheless, an indigenous Chinese philosophical perspective highlighted the need to rectify misconceptions about esports and promote its recognition as a legitimate sport.



CULTURAL SHIFTS IN ESPORTS

The establishment of the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (SDKP) has facilitated knowledge exchange and collaboration among stakeholders, including NGOs, educational institutions, and the esports community. It raises awareness about gaming addiction and promotes a balanced view of esports. The platform has also provided valuable resources, such as guidelines for anti-gaming addiction personnel and an online self-assessment tool for gaming addiction, which have been widely adopted by parents and educators.

The project’s outreach activities, including seminars and talks, have engaged a broad audience and disseminated a more informed and nuanced understanding of esports. These efforts have helped to bridge the gap between the esports community and educational and counselling professionals, promoting mutual understanding and collaboration. A “Gaming and Beyond” event was held on September 13-14, 2024; it featured seminars, talks, and an exhibition on egaming development and vtuber culture, attracting around 300 participants on-site and online. It facilitated

collaboration among key stakeholders, including the Esports Association of Hong Kong, the Student Esports Association, and famous local esports players. The event provided a platform for discussing the integration of esports into educational and social frameworks, thereby bridging the gap between the esports community and educational professionals. It also garnered media attention, with coverage in MingPao.

By addressing the psychological, social, and policy dimensions of esports, the project has contributed to a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with gaming. The research findings and outreach activities have empowered young people to make informed decisions about their gaming habits and pursue esports-related careers.



“ *This project has paved the way for a more balanced and informed approach to egaming and esports, addressing gaming addiction, developing stakeholder collaboration, and empowering our youth to thrive in the digital age.* ”

Related Publications and Presentations

Lam, G., & Kuen Wong, O. W. (2024). Cross-country comparison of the esports industry in China, South Korea and Japan. *Sport in Society*, 1-26.

Lam, G., & Wong, O. W. K. (2024). Esports development ecosystem in Hong Kong: An application of a systems thinking literacy approach. *Leisure Studies*, 1-18.

Wai, Fu., (2023). A strange career? Ethnography of professional esports players in Hong Kong. Annual Conference 2022 of Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (Section of Div. 5 APA), University of California Santa Cruz Campus, USA.

Wai, Fu., Lau, H. L., & Wong, O. W. K. (2022). Collision of perspectives concerning esports. Annual Conference 2022 of Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (Section of Div. 5 APA).

Funding: Preparing for the launching of Esports: An interdisciplinary and holistic perspective in prevention of the teenage gaming addiction problem based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model in the era of Esports (UGC/IDS(C)15/M01/20)