

MI KHA PRESENTS:

WORK 4 BREDAGUARDIANS

23-01-2024

''What are the factors that influence female students' (18-25 years) participation in esports or gaming communities around Breda?''

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**25Y3W04SD
MARK STEVENS**

Foreword

Dear reader,

I would like to invite you to join me on a journey into the dynamic world of esports and gaming communities. The focus of this exploration is diversity, with a special focus on the participation of women in the Breda gaming scene.

Breda Guardians is a thriving community for gamers in and around Breda. However, the current gender gap in the gaming industry shows that female gamers still are not exactly fitting in this community. This research aims to fill the gap that still exists within this vibrant community, and I would like to invite you to join me in discovering insights, personal experiences, and engaging in broader narratives to work towards an inclusive gaming community in Breda that welcomes diversity.

I would like to express my gratitude to my internship organisation, Breda Guardians, and my coach, Mark Stevens, for their support and insights.

Sincerely,

Mi Kha

Commercial Economics - International Music Event & Entertainment Studies

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the organisation

Breda Guardians is an esports organisation founded in 2015 by Ruben Been, a lecturer at Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas). This community aims to connect gamers in Breda and the surrounding area, providing a platform for individuals with a passion for gaming to unite and establish a sense of belonging within their local community. In its early stages, the community encountered challenges as their local recognition was limited. However, with support from BUas and the municipality of Breda in 2021, the organisation gained momentum (Breda University of Applied Sciences, n.d.).

Breda Guardians is all about being inclusive and welcoming for both casual and competitive gamers. The organisation focuses primarily on the social aspect of esports, which they do by organising engaging events such as tournaments, workshops and LAN parties to provide a vibrant community spirit while developing skills and encouraging friendly competition (Breda University of Applied Sciences, n.d.).

Breda Guardians collaborates extensively with the program Leisure & Events at Breda University of Applied Sciences, under the guidance of lecturers Jur van de Graaf and Liedewei Ratgers. BUas is a leader in esports education, recognising that gaming is a digital form of leisure and a thriving industry with a global reach of around three billion gamers. Jesse Hoogerman, a third-year Leisure and Event student and community manager, focuses on nurturing the community, handling equipment requests, team schedules, and managing Discord server channels. Luca van der Eng, the event manager, oversees the organisation of events like tournaments, LAN parties, and watch parties, collaborating with Guardians Tournaments and managing live stream productions. Although Hoogerman and van der Eng stepped down from their roles at the beginning of 2024, their contributions to Breda Guardians are highly valued (Uncover Future of Leisure, 2023).

The headquarters of Breda Guardians is located at Breda University of Applied Sciences. It is located in "The HIVE". The facility is equipped with modern equipment such as dedicated streaming setups, high-performance PCs and other consoles like PlayStations and the Nintendo Switch, creating an environment that is suitable for community engagement and esports activities (Breda Guardians, n.d.).

The organisation has competitive teams in popular esports games such as VALORANT, Counter-Strike, Rocket League and League of Legends. These teams act as representatives for the club and participate in various competitions and tournaments, giving members the opportunity to participate in competitive matches (Breda Guardians, n.d.).

1.1.1 Context

In the current gaming environment, it is noticeable that the participation of women in esports communities is still falling behind that of men. The dominance of men in the online gaming world has resulted in underrepresentation of female gamers. The gaming industry shows this gap not only in terms of numbers, but also in the gaming experience itself. This topic speaks to me as a female gamer, because I have personally encountered this issue. This raises questions about the factors that lead to this inequality. A representative of Breda Guardians has also acknowledged that, as a woman, she often finds herself as one of the few women present at LAN-parties or gaming events.

However, there are significant differences in gender representation across game genres. Since the 2010s, women have continued to make up around half of all those playing games. Women are severely underrepresented in genres such as first-person shooters and grand strategy games. It is important to note that there are significant differences between game genres, where women are heavily underrepresented in certain genres. The topic of sexism in video gaming is gaining more attention. Issues such as sexual harassment and the underrepresentation of women as characters in games are being discussed. In some games, genders are stereotyped, with men being hypermasculinised and women being hypersexualized (Women's Representation in Video Games, 2021).

The unequal representation of female students in esports communities is a significant social issue observed in gaming environments worldwide. Research highlights that female gamers often encounter discrimination, harassment, and exclusion, as documented in the study "To Be or Not to Be a Female Gamer: A Qualitative Exploration of Female Gamer Identity" (Kuss et al., 2022). This exclusion not only deprives them of the social, psychological, and recreational benefits of gaming but also hinders industry growth by limiting diversity and inclusivity. It is crucial to strive for gender equality and inclusion in all gaming environments, both locally and globally. Understanding the factors that influence female student participation can help create more inclusive and diverse esports communities, creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued.

This research investigates potential factors for this underrepresentation and proposes practical solutions to combat it. Additionally, create an inclusive environment where everyone, regardless of gender, feels valued and empowered to participate in esports.

1.1.2 Background

The research on women's needs and preferences for participating in gaming communities is lacking. Existing research mainly focuses on women's experiences in gaming, with little attention given to their intentions and behaviour within these communities. This limits our understanding of how women want to engage with and participate in gaming culture.

Additionally, there is a lack of literature internationally that specifically addresses this issue. Studies on women's experiences of gaming and its potential impact are limited even within the English-language literature. Therefore, it is crucial to explore this topic further.

It is essential to understand the impact of gaming on women and their experiences within gaming communities. A game community is a group of people who come together because of their shared love of playing video games. These communities can include players from all over the world or just from a local area. Their primary purpose is to provide support, game updates, and help each other improve their skills (MetaEngine, 2023).

There are two main types of gaming communities. In-game communities exist within specific games, while outside-of-game communities are for all types of games. In-game communities involve chatting, team coordination, and competing in events. Outside-of-game communities often organise gatherings such as LAN parties or run online forums to discuss gaming topics. These communities provide opportunities for gamers to connect with each other and improve their gaming skills (MetaEngine, 2023). Breda Guardians is one of these outside-of-game communities.

Esports

Gaming can be a leisure activity but also an actual sport where gamers have to compete. It is a form of competitive gaming where individuals or teams compete against each other. Similar to traditional sports, esports involve players strategizing, practising and competing in organised tournaments with the goal of winning (Leroux-Parra, 2020).

Esports competitions attract players from different countries, with amateur tournaments taking place around the world. Esports is more inclusive and accessible due to its variety of games and lower barriers to entry. Female players are also featured in major competitions such as Overwatch or Hearthstone, reflecting a shift towards gender inclusivity. Despite women making up 46% of global gaming enthusiasts, their representation among esports professionals remains low (Jbarrus, n.d.).

A few women-only tournaments exist in the esports industry, with the main aim of it being to create a positive and inclusive environment for female participants. These tournaments provide female esports players with extra chances to compete and improve their skills, often acting as a stepping stone to more prominent competitions (Jbarrus, n.d.). Despite the general consensus within the esports community that increased female representation would benefit the industry, female-only tournaments still struggle to achieve the same level of exposure, recognition, and commercial success as male-dominated tournaments. Diane Tran, a professional Counter Strike player for CLG Red, emphasizes the importance of seeing successful female gamers to inspire others. She recounts how seeing an all-women esports team motivated her to pursue her own dreams, illustrating the potential impact of increased female visibility in the industry (Duran, 2020b). However, despite the growing number of female gamers and professionals, female-only teams and tournaments still face significant challenges in gaining the same level of attention and success as their male counterparts.

Types of female gamers

A study about different groups of gamers, like hardcore gamers, casual gamers and non-gamers, highlights the presence, preferences and perceptions of women in this context (Schuurman, De Moor & Van Looy, 2010). The study shows that, compared to hardcore gamers and non-gamers, women are more evenly represented within the group of casual

gamers. Within this group, women make up about half of the respondents of the research about groups of gamers, with an average age of 26 years.

It is noteworthy that female casual gamers prefer specific genres such as casual games, flash games, party games and simulators, in contrast to men who tend to prefer genres such as shooters, racing games and strategy games. The results show that women seem to value clearly defined rules and objectives in video games more than men.

Furthermore, the results show that women in the casual gaming group have a strong tendency to play free games over the internet or on the computer, such as Patience and Tetris. More than two-thirds of female casual gamers consider the computer as their primary platform for playing video games at home, indicating its important role in the gaming behaviour of this demographic.

While casual gamers, both male and female, do not primarily identify gaming as an integral part of their identity as hardcore gamers do, women in this category have similar views on gaming as hardcore gamers and non-gamers (Schuurman, De Moor & Van Looy, 2010). They perceive gaming as undervalued in the media and consider it to be an equal leisure activity, despite their reluctance to identify themselves as 'gamers'.

Hate speech and sexism

Women in gaming communities frequently encounter toxicity, hate speech, and sexism, making them the most targeted group for such negative behaviour (Belskie et al., 2023). This pervasive issue discourages female gamers from participating and contributes to the ongoing gender gap in esports. Additionally, the normalization of toxic behaviours worsens the problem, making it appear as though such behaviour is acceptable within gaming environments (Belskie et al., 2023). In terms of responsibilities within the games industry and the role of government in addressing these behaviours, there is an important dilemma. While some groups within game companies show interest in this issue, commercial interest sometimes seems to conflict with actual measures to combat hate speech and discrimination (Kros, K., et al, 2023). Educational approaches, such as promoting norm change and upstander behaviour, are suggested as possible solutions. Further research into effective interventions, including the use of artificial intelligence for moderation, is recommended as well (Kros, K., et al, 2023).

These findings provide important insights for further research and targeted development of games for diverse audiences within the female gaming community, as well as the diversity of women's gaming interests, genre preferences and relationships to gaming within different groups.

1.2 Problem Analysis

Based on the background provided, it is evident that there are several factors influencing the participation of women within esports communities. They are underrepresented despite comprising nearly half of global gamers, encounter high levels of toxicity and discrimination, and suffer from a lack of research attention. Commercial interests often conflict with efforts to address these issues, which maintains a culture that marginalizes female gamers. In esports specifically, there are barriers to entry and limited visibility which further hinders their opportunities and career options. These factors collectively create an exclusionary environment, limiting women's participation, and negatively impacting their mental well-being.

This study analyses the factors that may affect female students aged 18-25 participating in esports communities in the Breda region. The aim of this research is to understand the factors that influence female students' involvement in esports communities and how to increase their participation. The study will focus on Breda and its surroundings, using a design-based research approach to gain deep insights into the factors that directly influence their participation in esports or gaming activities.

1.2.1 *The aim of the research*

The aim of the research is to find a practical approach that provides a solution to the identified problem. This study will answer the research question **“What are the factors that influence female students' (18-25 years) participation in esports communities in Breda?”** By exploring the factors and thorough understanding of the motives, barriers, and preferences of this target group regarding participation in esports.

The two objectives of this research are the following. First, to identify the needs and challenges female students face when participating in esports communities. Second, to *propose an advisory report* that can help increase the participation of female students in the Breda Guardians community.

This research will not delve deeply into the individual motivations or specific experiences of female students in esports communities, but will use that information as an indicator on their behaviour. The target group, female gamers, will be referenced to individuals who identify themselves as a woman.

1.2.2 *Solution*

The research will result in an advisory report that combines findings from qualitative research methods and stakeholder perspectives. The document will outline findings from the research and propose feasible suggestions for Breda Guardians to increase female student participation in esports communities in the Breda region, aiming to address identified factors and promote a more inclusive gaming environment.

To improve the participation of female students (aged 18-25) in esports communities around Breda, it is appropriate to use qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus groups or in-depth discussions with the students themselves. Such research can provide deeper

insights into the motivations, barriers, experiences, and perceptions of female students regarding their participation in esports communities. Collaborating with esports communities, event organisers, and other relevant stakeholders can provide valuable insights into the factors that influence female student participation in esports.

2. Research type

This chapter discusses the research method, particularly design-based research, and how they are applied in this research. It also discusses the information needs and research strategies, the operationalization scheme as well as the conceptual model.

2.1 Type of Research

Design-based research (DBR) is an iterative approach that addresses practical challenges through the improvement or development of practices. It emphasises collaborative solution design, integrating research and design processes, and valuing insights from practice. DBR produces prototypes and products, aiming for solutions with broader validity through an iterative and creative process (Ontwerpgericht Onderzoek Past Bij Hogescholen, n.d.).

The DOT Framework is a valuable addition to Design-Based Research (DBR). Selecting appropriate methods is critical to DBR, and the DOT framework provides a valuable understanding of different design research methods. Triangulation involves using multiple methods, data sources, or perspectives to validate findings. This approach enhances credibility and reliability by minimising the impact of individual methodological limitations.

There are five research strategies in the DOT-Framework: Library, Field, Workshop, Lab, and Showroom, each serving specific purposes in gaining insights during a project.

- **Innovation Space (Werkplaats):** Explore possibilities through methods like prototyping and sketching to gain insights for improvement.
- **Library (Bieb):** Investigate existing work and guidelines using literature research and trend analyses to inform solution ideation.
- **Field (Veld):** Gather user insights by understanding needs and preferences through methods like interviews and focus groups.
- **Lab:** Test proposed solutions for functionality using methods like usability testing and field trials.
- **Showroom:** Evaluate the uniqueness of the proposed idea compared to existing work; present it to experts for feedback (CMD Methods, n.d.).

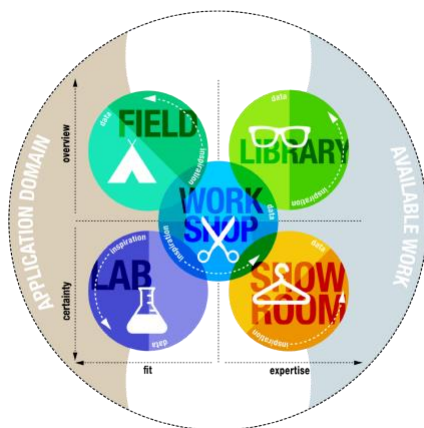


Figure 1: The DOT-Matrix (Source: CMD Methods, n.d)

Domains

Understanding the three domains of design research is crucial for effective project planning. Each domain serves a unique purpose in guiding the development of innovative solutions.

- **Available work (Beschikbaar werk):** Explores existing knowledge, products, and experts, providing general information to support the project.
- **Application domain (Toepassingscontext):** Focuses on understanding users and the specific context where the solution will be applied, offering insights tailored to the project's use.
- **Innovation space (Innovatieruimte):** Investigates possibilities within the solution itself, engaging the target audience and experts for creative exploration and innovation (DOT-Framework - Wikiwijs Maken, n.d.).

2.1.1 Information needs

The DOT-Framework features axes like Overview or Certainty, Fit or Expertise, and Inspiration or Data, which guide methodological decisions. Aligning DOTs with DBRs requires strategic choices, balancing aspects like overview and certainty, fit and expertise, and inspiration and data, which define as:

- **Fit vs. Expertise:** Balancing the relevance of a solution with existing knowledge.
- **Overview vs. Certainty:** Managing the compromise between gaining a broad understanding and testing specific issues.
- **Data vs. Inspiration:** Choosing between objective data-driven methods and creative, inspiration-oriented approaches (DOT-Framework - Wikiwijs Maken, n.d.).

After the identification of the necessary information, an operationalization scheme will be developed. This operationalization scheme will include different research strategies and methods. This scheme will include various research strategies and methods and will serve as the foundation for constructing the conceptual model.

The research methodology used to examine the factors that influence female students' engagement in gaming communities is the DOT framework. This framework considers three essential axes: overview or certainty, fit or expertise, and inspiration or data. This discussion will specifically address the aspect of data vs. inspiration and explain its relevance to the research question. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, this research question is approached using a balance of data-driven and inspiration-driven methods. The framework integrates both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, allowing for a holistic exploration of the factors that influence female students' participation in gaming communities around Breda.

2.2 Primary and secondary information needs

To address the underrepresentation of female students in esports communities, the research focuses on key information needs.

Primary information needs

To understand the dynamics of female students' participation in esports communities in the Breda region, exploring their needs, motivations, preferences, challenges, and experiences is essential. This primary information is crucial for customising interventions that encourage inclusivity within the esports community. The goal is to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for female students by addressing accessibility challenges and enhancing positive experiences, recognizing the potential positive impacts of such an environment.

Secondary information needs

In order to have a comprehensive approach, it is important to analyse global trends through the study of research on women in e-sports. Incorporating successful strategies from other locations will broaden insights, while gathering perspectives from local leaders, educators and gaming industry figures will provide valuable context. Recognizing the potential benefits of increased female participation in the esports community is crucial for developing an inclusive and effective concept.

2.3 Research format and Conceptual Model

The image below visually represents the process of the research. Each colour represents a different stage.

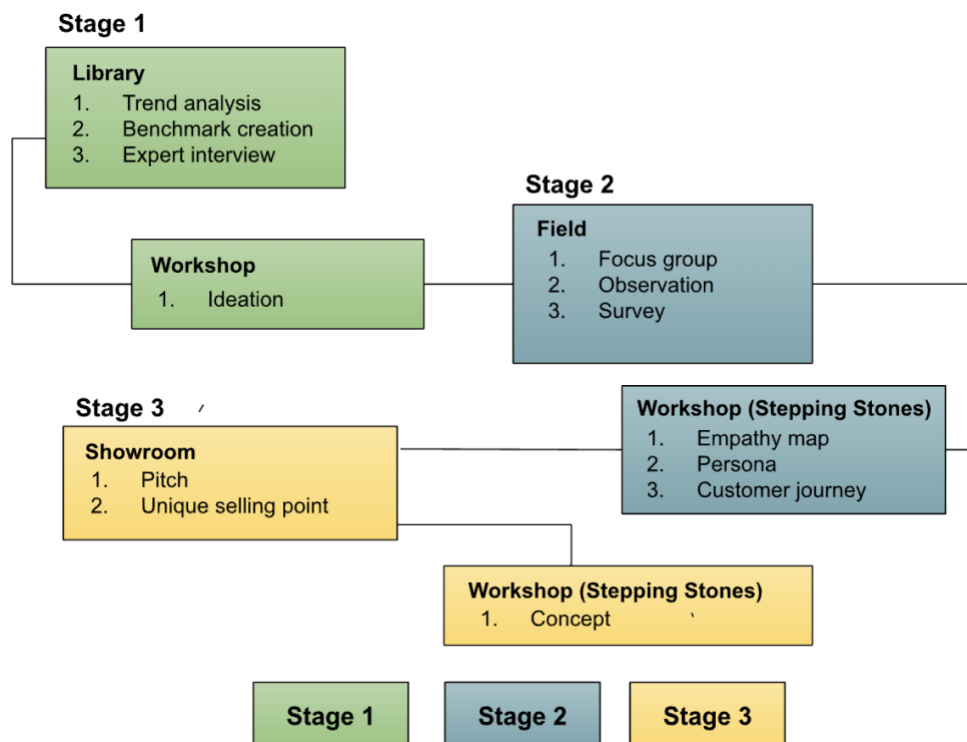


Figure 2: Conceptual model

Triangulation is used as a methodological approach to increase the credibility and validity of research findings by utilising multiple data sources and methods. This conceptual model applies triangulation at various stages to more thoroughly explore the complexities of female student engagement in esports communities.

The research framework for studying the factors of female students' participation in Breda esports communities includes desk research, field research, testing and others. The library stage is the foundation of knowledge, while the field research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The workshop and lab stage provide diverse qualitative data. The showroom stage validates findings through expert input. This approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the research question by combining literature, empirical data, user insights and expert opinion.

2.3 Operationalisation scheme

The operationalization scheme below shows the methods and strategies used for each stage. Each stage is shown along with an explanation of the goals and objectives for each method.

Stage	Axes	Strategy	Research method	Description and goal
Stage 1: Deskresearch				
1	Overview vs. Certainty	Library	Trend analysis	Explore recent trends in esports and gaming communities among young women to gain an understanding of the evolving industry
1			Benchmark creation	Evaluate existing gaming organisations to identify successful factors influencing female students' engagement
1			Expert interview	Gain insights from experts regarding factors influencing female students' participation in esports and gaming communities
1		Workshop	Ideation	The goal is to creatively use the insights from the trend analysis, benchmarking and expert interviews to generate innovative ideas for enhancing

				female students' engagement in esports and gaming communities
Stage 2: Fieldresearch				
2	Overview vs. Relevance	Field	Focus group	Facilitate discussions with female students to identify potential improvements in gaming communities
2			Survey	Utilise survey results to identify patterns and preferences among female students in Breda
2		Workshop (Stepping stones)	Empathy map	The objective is to visualise qualitative findings from the focus groups, interviews, observations and surveys. The empathy map serves as a condensed representation of the female students.
2		Workshop (Stepping stones)	Persona	The goal is to create a representative archetype based on data gathered from focus groups, interviews, observations, and surveys. This persona has key characteristics like their behaviours, and motivations of the female students
Stage 3: Showroom				
4	Overview vs. Relevance	Showroom	Pitch	Concisely communicate the new concept with improvements tied to identified factors to stakeholders and experts
4			Co-reflection	Involve stakeholders and experts in reflecting on the impact and

				potential improvements
4		Workshop (Stepping stones)	Concepting	The goal is to develop the main principles and ideas for the enhancement of female students' participation. This creative session involves prototyping to refine the concept, ensuring it aligns with the identified factors influencing female students' participation

Table 3: Operationalisation scheme

3. Literature research

In this chapter a literature review will be conducted in which the trends of the year will be explored, different events will be compared and various experts will be interviewed.

3.1 Trend analysis

This chapter focuses on the trend analysis. It includes an examination of the current and potential future trends in the videogame industry for the current year.

3.1.1 Introduction

Conducting a trend analysis of the gaming industry can help understand the behaviour of female gamers. This can help identify their interests and attractions towards certain aspects of gaming. Recognizing these factors can lead to predictions about the future direction of gaming and its impact on engagement within the gaming communities.

3.1.2 Method

To conduct this trend analysis, current trends of last year and the prediction of this year are identified. By using a source to identify the trends, there has been looked at other sources to further elaborate these trends to enrich the analysis.

3.1.3 Results

Trends and innovations continue to shape the landscape of the gaming industry. This analysis examines recent developments in gaming, focusing on emerging trends and advancements in gaming, devices and technologies. The trends of this year are mentioned below. For a concise overview of each trend, refer to the appendix, section 1.1.

6. Mobile Gaming
7. Cloud Gaming
8. Social media platforms
9. Esports

Besides the general trends in the gaming and esports industry, examining trends in gaming, devices and innovations is also essential for a comprehensive understanding about gaming. By focusing on these advancements alongside broader trends, there will be broader insights gained about the technological shifts shaping player experiences. The trends that have come up are:

6. Console gaming
7. Gaming innovations
8. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)
9. Mobile gaming

This shows that gaming technology is constantly evolving, with advancements in console gaming and the integration of AI to enhance the immersive experience. Together, these trends demonstrate the gaming industry's dynamics, addressing diverse player preferences and stimulating continuous innovation (Porokh, 2023).

3.2 Benchmark creation

This chapter focuses on the benchmark creation. It includes an analysis of three events that want to focus on engaging female gamers.

3.2.1 Introduction

This chapter is looking into the diversity promotion in esports through female gamer participation, analysing these three initiatives: the VALORANT Game Changers Championship, Intel Challenge at IEM Katowice, and GIRLGAMER Esports Festival. The aim is to identify effective inclusivity strategies by examining event logistics and strategic approaches, contributing to the gender diversity discourse in esports.

3.2.2 Method

To increase the engagement of female student gamers in gaming communities, an assessment of events or organisations with similar aims and objectives was undertaken. Three different events or organisations were identified, all of which focused on providing a safe environment for female participants or creating a supportive space for their competitive involvement to demonstrate their skills. After analysing each event closely, important elements were combined to identify strategies for a potential concept.

Information was gathered from a variety of sources, including established esports articles, official event websites and a documentary video on YouTube showing the behind-the-scenes of the Game Changers tournament.

3.2.3 Results

After analysing each event and organisation, the strategies used by each event to engage the target audience are summarised and organised in the table below. For further details on the benchmarking process, refer to section 1.2 in the appendix.

Game Changers (Valorant)	Inter Challenge (CS:GO)	GIRLGAMER Festival (Organisation)	Ally's Women Open (Rocket League)
Exclusive focus on female gamers	Platform for women's CS:GO teams	Gender-exclusive event with clear rules	Promotion of gender equality
Innovative engagement initiatives	Online qualifiers in multiple regions	Promoting women in esports via social media	Enhancing visibility and engagement
Fair tournament structure	Fair competition structure	Targeted promotions for engagement	Supporting amateur and semi-pro players
Collaboration with the Valorant community	Collaborated with ESL, Intel and AnyKey	Effective social media strategy	Led by an all female team
Led by an all female team			Collaborated with Ally

Table 4: Benchmarking key elements

The Game Changers, Intel Challenge, GIRLGAMER Festival, and Ally's Women Open all share a common goal of promoting inclusivity and diversity in esports, particularly for female gamers. Each event strives to create a supportive and empowering environment for women to showcase their gaming skills, free from discrimination and harassment. These events use strategies such as fair competition structures, engagement initiatives, and effective social media promotion to increase participant engagement and community involvement.

All four events are committed to providing a platform exclusively for female gamers. Creating gender-inclusive spaces is essential for addressing the gender disparity prevalent in traditional esports competitions and empowering women in the gaming community. These events promote diversity and challenge existing stereotypes and barriers to entry in esports by providing environments where all gamers feel valued, respected, and safe to compete. Additionally, both Game Changers and Ally's Women Open are run by all-female teams, demonstrating an intentional focus on women's inclusion, not only as competitors but also as leaders in the esports industry. This intentional focus could result in a different approach to promoting inclusivity and diversity in esports.

Collaborating with industry leaders such as Ally, ESL, and Intel, as well as the wider gaming community, highlights the significance of working together to promote inclusivity and effect positive change within the esports community. By partnering with established organisations and utilising their resources and expertise, these events can have a greater impact, reach a wider audience, and advocate for lasting cultural changes in the gaming industry.

3.3 Expert interview

This chapter focuses on expert interviews. It includes insights from their perspectives on the identified problem, its origins, and potential solutions.

3.3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores insights gained from expert interviews to deepen our understanding of the challenges identified in the field of esports and gaming communities. The interviews primarily gather key perspectives from experts to enhance our knowledge of the issues at hand and explore potential solutions.

By using the knowledge and expertise of these professionals, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the behaviour of the target group and to develop appropriate solutions that meet their needs.

3.3.2 Method

The expert interviews were conducted through online meetings using Google Meet. This platform was chosen for its convenience and accessibility. The selection process for experts involved using existing connections within the esports community. For the full interviews with the experts, refer to section 1.3 in the appendix.

Efforts were made to identify professionals who work directly with female players, including professional players in female or mixed teams, coaches who specialise in coaching female players, female managers, and other relevant professionals in the field. The interviewees include *Marina Tognoli*, who currently works as the Operation Project Lead at Chamo Games and previously at Riot Games in the esports and player support department, and *Tanja Reither*, a former esports player for SK Avarosa, brings firsthand competitive gaming experience to the discussion. *Lara Lunardi*, the Head of Creative at SK Gaming, offers insights into creative strategy within the esports industry. Finally, *Lara Clergue* is the Head of Esports at Webedia. She has expertise in esports management.

3.3.3 Results

Gender disparity in workplaces

The interviews revealed several common themes and aligned views among the experts. Marina Tognoli emphasised the disparity in treatment between genders within the industry, when working at Riot, stating, "So women, 'we love women' but below. It's not the same. Women are great and the team as long as they have lower roles and lower income." This shows that gender-based in gaming workplaces should be addressed.

Concerns regarding diversity

Three out of four interviewees mentioned a common concern regarding diversity. Lara Lunardi, as well as Marina Tognoli noted that it is trendy to become diverse. Suggesting that some companies create policies to align with the promotion of women, rather than genuine commitment. Marina stated "They're using our gender for marketing. So they take something that's very sensitive for us, very political, very real. And they turn into a marketing tool." Clergue also exclaimed that she perceives it as forced inclusivity, where they make in-game characters fit into the 'societal norms', even though it does not fit the storyline.

Stigmatization

In the expert interview, Marina discussed the stigma associated with gaming in general and specifically mobile gaming. The expert emphasised the importance of recognizing players regardless of platform or genre. She advocated for a broader definition of what it means to be a gamer, stating, "If women feel like they are comfortable saying, 'I'm a gamer, I play a lot of games... I feel like the games industry would expand.'"

Importance of women's promotion

Besides that, Lara Lunardi, the creative head of SK Gaming, mentioned the importance of women-focused gaming events with "Hosting and participating in women-focused games provide valuable opportunities for networking, skill-building and community engagement." Where she further explained it by stating, "Expanding the scope of women-focussed gaming events and investing in women content creators can inspire future generations of female gamers." In contrast, Lara Clergue finds an all women's tournament unnecessary. She suggested the importance of advertising women along with men, to normalise that gender does not define their skill. Which the former professional player, Tanja Reither also mentioned. She would love to see a female player in a higher tier tournament, among other male players.

Although there is an overall consensus on the importance of diversity and inclusivity, some interviewees expressed different views. For instance, opinions varied on the level of hate towards the gaming scene. Tanja Reither acknowledged this issue, stating, 'But in general, you obviously see that there is hate towards the female scene as a whole,' even though she did not personally experience it.

The interviews provided insights into strategies for attracting and supporting female gamers. One recurring advice was to create welcoming environments that treat female gamers equally. Lara Clergue, an apprentice at Webedia, summed it up, "Make sure people in your team don't have a weird mind about girls and be sure it's safe to welcome girls in your structure."

In addition, the most common answers on how to attract female gamers to esports communities are:

- Treat female gamers equally and create a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- Ensure that there are no biases or stereotypes about female gamers.
- Provide opportunities for female gamers (or mixed genders) to participate in events and initiatives specifically tailored for them.
- Increase interest among females in gaming through effective methods and strategies.
- Encourage organisations to enhance female participation by promoting diversity and inclusivity.

3.4 Conclusion

The literature research indicates that the esports and gaming industry is evolving, particularly with regards to diversity and inclusion for female gamers. Through the trend analysis, benchmarking, and expert interviews, relevant findings were identified, providing insight into the current landscape and future directions of the industry.

The trend analysis revealed that mobile gaming is the most dominant market in the gaming industry. This is due to the popularity of interactive games like Pokémon Go and Fortnite. Twitch still continues to dominate as the largest streaming platform. But short-form videos like YouTube Shorts or TikTok are also relevant for the gaming platform, as they reach a broader audience. For women's esports, games like VALORANT and Mobile Legends have gained the most views last year.

The benchmarking analysis showed that events provide exclusive platforms for female gamers. Some events are even organised by all-female teams. They prioritise fair tournament structures and opportunities for amateur and semi-pro players. It is important to note that investment in these types of events is crucial, just like the investment in events such as Ally's Women Open or Intel Challenge.

Expert interviews emphasised the importance of genuine efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. They warned against the misuse of such initiatives as a mere marketing tool. Empowering female gamers and inspiring future generations was highlighted as crucial, with the expansion of women-focused gaming events. Many interviewees expressed a desire to see more female representation and more female friendly events. Not all interviewees believed that all-female tournaments were necessary. However, they expressed a desire to see more mixed tournaments to demonstrate that female players can compete at the same level as male players.

3.5 Workshop: Ideation

This chapter discusses the idea generation process, including the brainstorming method, its results and the initial outline of ideas.

3.5.1 Introduction

This chapter is about generating ideas or potential solutions to address the research question. The idea will be based on literature research in stage 1, where the trend analysis, benchmarking and expert interviews have been discussed.

3.5.2 Method

To start the ideation process, the researcher organised and facilitated a brainstorming session with male and female employees and interns of Breda Guardians. The session began with a presentation of the initial findings, followed by the question: 'Why are female gamers not joining esports communities?' This helped to gain a better understanding of the underlying issues. The focus then turned to finding ways to increase female student participation in Breda Guardians by addressing the identified factors. The team was asked to come up with ideas individually, which were then sorted based on their relevance and potential solutions. The most feasible idea was chosen as the basis for further development.

3.5.3 Results

To bring more female students aged 18-25 into esports communities, including Breda Guardians, the first thing that was done was to look at the barriers why they might not join. Then, ideas were developed to address each of these reasons. All these factors and suggestions are available to view in section 1.4 of the appendix.

The factors exist out of 8 categories:

1. Inclusivity

The term 'male dominated community' refers to the majority of male gamers who frequently visit Breda Guardians, meanwhile only a few female gamers are present.

The team believes that the lack of female presence in the esports community, combined with the perception of it being a predominantly male environment, might deter women from participating due to potential intimidation, sexualization, and feeling like it's too big of a step to join.

2. Safety

The team is worried that women may feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in a male-dominated environment. This could raise concerns about safety and worsen feelings of discomfort, especially for those who are introverted or have social anxiety.

3. Other priorities

The team believes that women may have limited time due to various commitments and other priorities that may not be in line with esports and may take priority over participation in esports activities.

4. Lack of interest

The team believes that women may not be interested in esports for several reasons, including a lack of interest in the available games, a statistical imbalance with more boys interested in gaming, unawareness of opportunities, and a mismatch between the types of games typically played in esports communities and their preferences.

5. Toxicity

The team believes that women are hesitant to participate in esports due to negative experiences in online gaming. These experiences include toxicity and discouraging encounters. Women prefer anonymity to avoid real-life backlash.

6. Skill development

The team believes that some women may avoid joining esports because they feel like they lack the skills or confidence to play, and fear they will not meet the expected level of skill.

7. Awareness

The team believes that some women might not join esports communities, because they prefer playing games casually with friends rather than competitively. Additionally, they might be unaware of the existence of these gaming or esports communities. Perhaps it could be that there is a lack of targeted marketing towards them.

8. Stigmatization

Women hesitate to join esports communities due to concerns about encountering strange or uncomfortable situations. Perception of esports as taboo also plays a role in the Netherlands, as well as a reluctance to associate with the perceived 'nerdy' stereotype associated with esports.

For the purposes of this research, the focus will be on factors that are realistically achievable and feasible. Factors such as stigmatisation and deep-rooted societal perceptions may require longer-term strategies to be effectively addressed. Breda Guardians does not have enough resources to tackle these factors at this time. Therefore, the focus will be on realistic implications, such as **inclusivity, awareness, skill development** and **safety**.

4. Field research

This chapter focuses on getting to know the target group. This is done by conducting a survey to find out their general preferences and a focus group to gain insights at a deeper level.

4.1 Survey

The survey findings are presented in this chapter. The outcomes and insights gained from the research are summarised here.

4.1.1 Introduction

The aim of the survey was to find out the preferences of the target group. The survey included demographic questions, gaming preferences and engagement, and questions about the Breda esports community. The survey is carried out on a national level, with a section dedicated to Breda to align it with the research question.

4.1.1 Method

The survey involved questions to determine the preferences of the target demographic. The questions covered demographic information, gaming habits and engagement. The survey was shared through various ways, including a QR code in the HIVE (gaming faculty of Breda Guardians), in online female-centric communities on Discord and on the student portal of Fontys. The primary target group are female students of age from 18 to 25 years old. However, there are respondents who also participated outside of this age range, particularly those above 25 years old. There are a total of 105 respondents.

Responses that did not answer the questions were removed manually. All questions were optional, allowing respondents to skip any they preferred. Graphs and tables were created using Excel, typically employing formulas such as UNIQUE and COUNTIF. To access individual responses, tables, and graphs, refer to the attached files. For the survey questions that have not been discussed in this chapter, refer to section 2.1 in the appendix.

4.1.2 Results

The first section is about the demographic information of the respondent. The first two questions were “What do you identify as?” and “What is your age?”

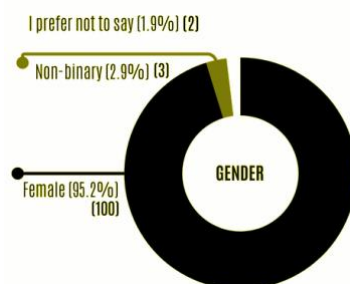


Figure 5: What do you identify as?

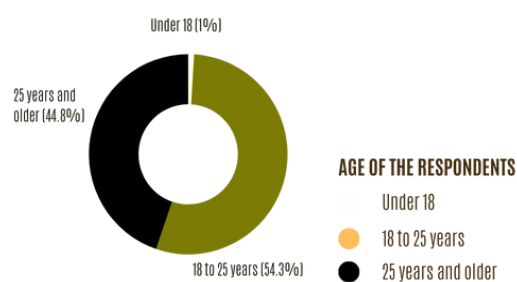


Figure 6: What is your age?

The figures show that 96.2% of the respondents identified as female (100 respondents), with the rest identifying as non-binary; some specified being assigned female at birth. The

majority of respondents (57 individuals) are aged between 18 and 25 years old, which accounts for 54.3% of respondents, with the remaining 44.8% made up of individuals outside of above 25 years old.

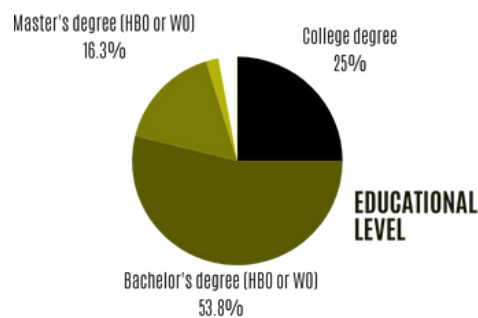


Figure 7: What is your educational level?



Figure 8: In which city do you reside?

55 (53.8%) of the respondents are pursuing, or have pursuit, a bachelor's degree. Besides their educational level, the figure next to it showcases the geographic distribution of the respondents.

WHAT KIND OF GAMER WOULD YOU CLASSIFY YOURSELF AS?



Figure 9: What kind of gamer would you classify yourself as?

POPULAR GAME GENRES



Figure 10: What genres of games do you typically play?

The majority of respondents, 94.3%, consider themselves casual gamers, with only a small percentage, 5.7%, identifying as semi-pro. None of the respondents identified as professional gamers.

When asked about their preferred game genres, MOBA and Shooter games were the most popular, with 37 people selecting each. Examples of these games include League of Legends, Dota 2, Valorant, and Counter-Strike. 36 players chose Battle Royale games, such as Fortnite and Apex Legends, while 34 players enjoy Rhythm and Dance games, like Just Dance.

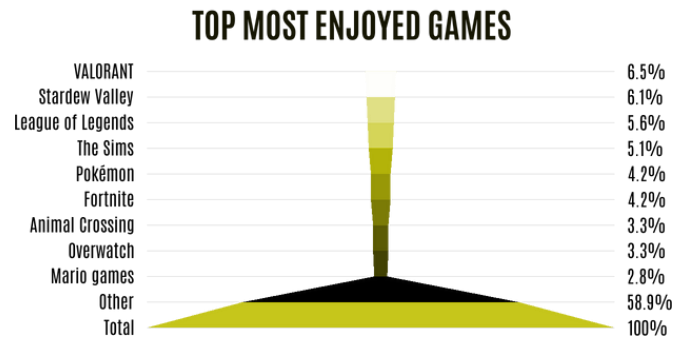


Figure 11: Can you specify which game(s) you enjoy playing the most?

The figure above shows the top 10 most frequently mentioned games. VALORANT is the top choice, mentioned 14 times, accounting for 6.5% of all games listed. Stardew Valley follows closely behind with 13 mentions, comprising 6.1% of the total. League of Legends comes in third, mentioned 12 times, representing 5.6%.

Four out of the ten games in the list (with the tenth being all other games mentioned) are esports games. Among these are games like VALORANT, League of Legends, Fortnite, and Overwatch are notable in the esports scene.

ARE YOU PART OF ANY ESPORTS COMMUNITIES?

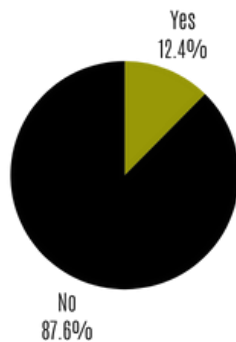


Figure 12: Are you part of any esports communities?

WHICH COMMUNITY ARE YOU PART OF?



Figure 13: Which community are you part of?

In the survey, respondents were asked if they were part of any esports communities. The majority of respondents (87.6%) stated that they were not involved in any esports communities. Only 12.4% reported being part of esports communities. Of those who were part of esports communities, Breda Guardians was the most common, mentioned by 4 respondents, while others were mentioned only once.

It is important to note that 5 of the 6 individuals who identified as semi-professional players were also members of an esports community.

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO JOIN ESPORTS COMMUNITIES?

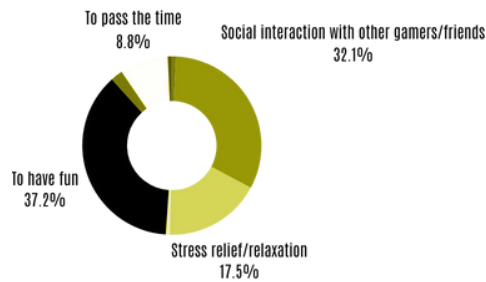


Figure 14: Influencing factors to join esports communities

ARE THERE ANY BARRIERS THAT PREVENT YOU FROM JOINING ONLINE OR LOCAL ESPORT COMMUNITIES?



Figure 15: Barriers influencing participation

The next questions asked about why people join esports communities and what keeps them from joining. The results show that 37.2% join for fun, while 32.1% join for social interaction. The main barriers to joining are lack of skill (34.2%) and lack of time (26.9%).

HOW DO YOU PREFER TO ENGAGE WITH ESPORTS COMMUNITIES?



Figure 16: Most preferred platforms for engagement within esports

73 respondents (61.3%) chose for social media groups to engage with esports communities. These platforms could be Discord, TikTok or Instagram. It is notable that the least amount of people (9.2%) would participate in real-life events.

DO YOU ACTIVELY WATCH ESPORTS-RELATED CONTENT?

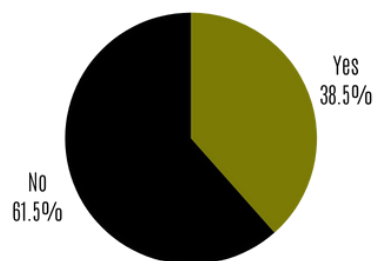


Figure 17: Do you actively watch esports-related content?

TYPE OF CONTENT THEY ENJOY WATCHING

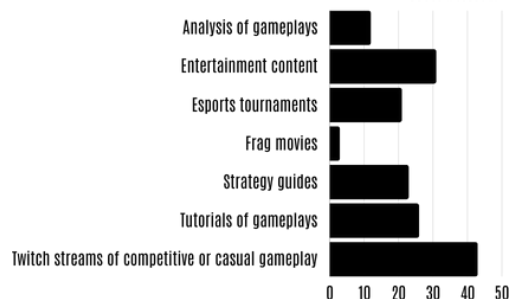


Figure 18: Type of content respondents enjoy watching

61.5% of the respondents do not watch esports-related content, while 38.5% do. The most popular types of content among those who do watch are Twitch streams of competitive or casual gameplay, entertaining content, or gameplay tutorials.

WOULD YOU WANT TO JOIN OR PARTICIPATE AT AN EVENT THAT PROMOTES WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN ESPORTS?

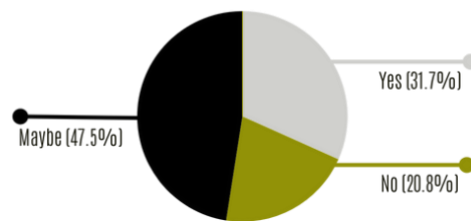


Figure 19: Would you want to join or participate in an event that promotes women's inclusion in esports?

The survey asked respondents if they would like to participate in an event promoting women's inclusion in esports. The majority of respondents expressed interest, with 32 respondents (45.7%) saying yes. However, there were also 21 respondents (30%) who said no, and 48 respondents (24.3%) who were undecided.

4.1.3 Conclusion

Participant demographics

The research findings show key aspects of engagement with participation in esports. Most respondents identify as female, showing that the respondents generally align with the research question. However, there are respondents that participated who are outside of the preferred age range. It is also notable that many respondents are students or have bachelor's degrees, so it could be an idea to collaborate with educational institutions that could offer valuable opportunities for learning and skill development in the esports field.

Gaming preferences

A look at the respondents' favourite gaming genres and titles also reveals a preference for multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) and shooter games. These findings highlight the gaming interests within female gamers. Their top favourite games also include League of Legends and VALORANT, which contributes to the popularity of these genres.

Motivators

The survey reveals why individuals join esports communities. Many join for fun, seeking entertainment and enjoyment through competitive gameplay. Others join for social interaction, finding community and companionship among like-minded gamers.

Barriers

The survey shows that the respondents encounter various problems when trying to enter the gaming or esports scene. Obstacles like lack of skills, time constraints, and limited experience, prevent them from joining communities.

Breda Guardians and the HIVE

The few that are part of Breda Guardians visit the HIVE regularly, usually for the activities like casual gaming and group meetings for social interaction with other gamers and friends. The respondents who are part of the Breda Gaming Community are also familiar with Breda Guardians.

Engagement insights

Furthermore, the local community engagement in Breda's esports community seems to be relatively low as not many people are part of an esports community. Respondents prefer social media platforms such as Discord, TikTok, and Instagram for esports engagement. Not many choose for real-life events, which could link to the question if they would participate in an event that promotes women's promotion. The majority chose 'maybe', which might indicate that online events could be more appealing to join.

4.2 Focus group

The focus of this chapter will be on the focus group, where a summary of the gaming preferences and habits will have been given.

4.2.1 Introduction

The aim of the focus group was to gain a deeper understanding of their gaming habits, preferences, challenges and motivations. This qualitative approach allowed the participants to express themselves freely. It was also able to validate the results of the survey.

4.2.2 Method

The focus group method involved gathering insights from five female gamers. They came from various backgrounds:

- Two students from Breda University.
- Two lecturers, one each from Leiden University and Breda University.
- One intern (student) from Fontys currently involved with Breda Guardians.

Due to scheduling constraints and participant availability, the focus group was split into two sessions: offline and online meetings. Each session had an informal atmosphere which encouraged the participants to express themselves comfortably. Overall, this helped to understand the motives and needs of female gamers in esports communities and what areas could be improved on. For the full transcription with the target group, refer to section 2.2 in the appendix.

4.2.3 Results

Motives

The participants expressed that they would join gaming communities to connect with others who share their passion for gaming. These communities provide a platform for social interaction, forming friendships for people with similar interests.

Some barriers that prevent the participants from joining would be for example social anxiety, which could make it challenging to join new things. There is also a lack of awareness that prevents them from joining. Not many people know about these communities and know how to join them. Negative past experiences, like toxicity online, plays a big role as well. *"I would be excited and anxious, because from one side it is fun to play with new people... My goals would be great friendship, no drama, good time."* - Participant C.

The participants' desires when being in a community are inclusivity and diversity. Where all members feel respected and valued regardless of their gender or skill. In addition, they would be open to opportunities to improve their gaming skills.

Habits and preferences.

For some participants, their gaming journey started at a young age where they got introduced to games by family members or friends. The general motive to play games is relaxation or social interaction. Some play games from time to time, when they are available, while some others could play up to 20 hours a week.

It is noteworthy that most participants started playing through other friends. Some said that they especially like to play with friends, rather than alone. The same applies to going to a gaming event, they feel most comfortable going with a friend.

Esports

A participant acknowledged the existence of gender gap in the gaming industry, and the challenges female gamers face with stereotypes or biases that girls might be as skilled as male gamers. She emphasised the importance that everyone should be given a chance to pursue gaming as a career. In addition, she mentioned that her players (CS:GO team members) get stressed during tournaments. She says that even missing one shot can make them angry. *"They get so stressed even if they miss one shot or something... So no. I wouldn't do it."* This shows how competitive gaming can be very stressful, affecting the mental and emotional health of players in esports teams. Which other participants agreed on, that it might be too stressful to enjoy.

A participant also expressed doubts about pursuing a career as an esports player, viewing it as possibly boring. She did mention that she would consider joining an esports university team if she were to be skilled. But not many of the participants would say that they are good at a particular game. *"I feel like I'm not good enough to play with the esports teams... I don't have any barriers necessarily, with esports specifically, just hoping to be taken seriously."* - Participant V.

Female representation

Every participant agreed that female representation is important in these usually male-dominated communities. *"Female representation is important... Maybe it'll make all women less scared and hostile when it comes to talking to one another."* - Participant V. The participants expressed a desire for a gaming environment where women feel safe, supported, and less likely to experience toxicity and sexism from male players. The participants believed that with increased female representation, women could feel more included, less competitive, and safer while playing games.

Events

Participants proposed hosting events that feature a range of activities and interests, not limited to specific games. These combined activity events would offer a variety of options for community members to participate in, such as playing different games, engaging in physical activities like Just Dance, or enjoying board games with others. This could create a social and engaging environment for community members to come together.

Insights about the Hive

Overall, they perceived The Hive as a visually appealing and well-designed gaming environment, with both positive and constructive feedback. The participants mentioned that it is a clean, professional looking space designed for gamers. However, there were also comments about the space not giving a welcoming atmosphere, because of how the downstairs area is a combination of an office space and gaming area. Some factors would be the bright white lights. Also, some felt that the upstairs area appeared dark and lacked decoration, calling it a "men's cave". In addition, the exterior of the HIVE would be confusing for first time visitors. The exterior doesn't show that it is a gaming space for all, and people may not realise it's open to everyone or free to access.

4.3 Conclusion

The survey found that 96.2% of respondents were female, with 54.3% aged 18-25. Most have or have finished a bachelor's degree. It is also noticeable that 12.4% are part of esports communities. A very small group of the target group are pursuing a professional gaming career or are into competitive gaming. Despite them identifying as casual players, the most mentioned games among them are naturally competitive, such as League of Legends and VALORANT. But it is important to remember that identifying as a casual gamer doesn't mean they will not play competitive games anymore.

People join gaming communities for fun and social interaction, but lack the skills and time. Most prefer social media to real-life events. 61.5% don't watch esports content and 45.7% want to see more women in esports. Besides that, people in Breda don't engage much with local esports, but they're interested in visiting the HIVE.

The focus group discussed their motives and barriers for joining gaming communities, habits, preferences, and views on esports and female representation. They join for social interaction, inclusivity, and fun, but face barriers like social anxiety, lack of awareness, and toxicity. Most identify as casual gamers, yet play competitive games like League of Legends and Overwatch. They prefer playing with friends and suggested diverse events, including gaming and physical activities, and improving The HIVE's welcoming atmosphere. They stressed the importance of female representation to create a safe gaming environment. These results align with the research conducted during the literature phase, confirming the need for inclusive, engaging, and well-promoted gaming communities for women.

4.4 Empathy map

This chapter is about understanding the target group, which is demonstrated through an empathy map.

4.4.1 Introduction

The aim of an empathy map is to understand the thoughts, feelings, needs and behaviours of the target group, female students aged between 18 and 25. They represent the majority of the target group. By using this insight, it could help to create an appropriate strategy.

4.4.2 Method

The empathy map was created by using insights from the focus group and survey. By combining findings from the field research, the model would be more detailed.

4.4.3 Results

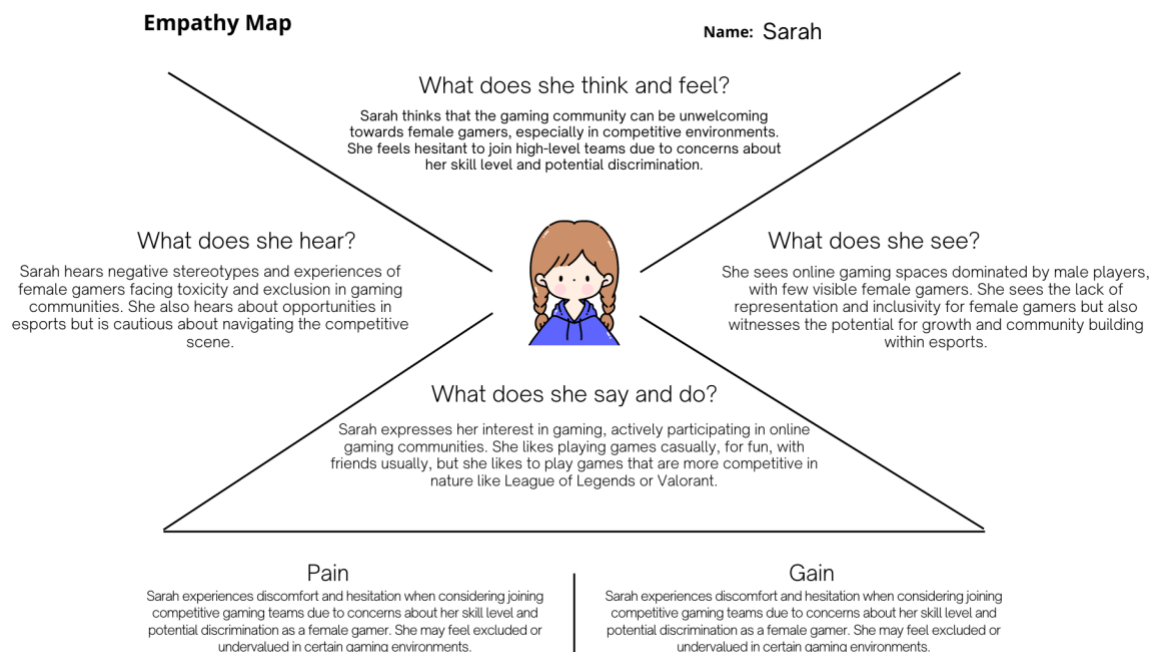


Figure 20: Empathy map

4.5 Persona

This chapter is focussed on the user persona, which is represented in a visual model.

4.5.1 Introduction

The aim of developing a user persona is to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts, feelings, needs, and behaviours of the target group, specifically female students aged between 18 and 25. This persona will be used as an example who to target.

4.5.2 Method

The user persona was created by combining insights from a focus group and survey. By combining the data from field research, the persona model becomes more detailed and representative of the target audience.

4.5.3 Results

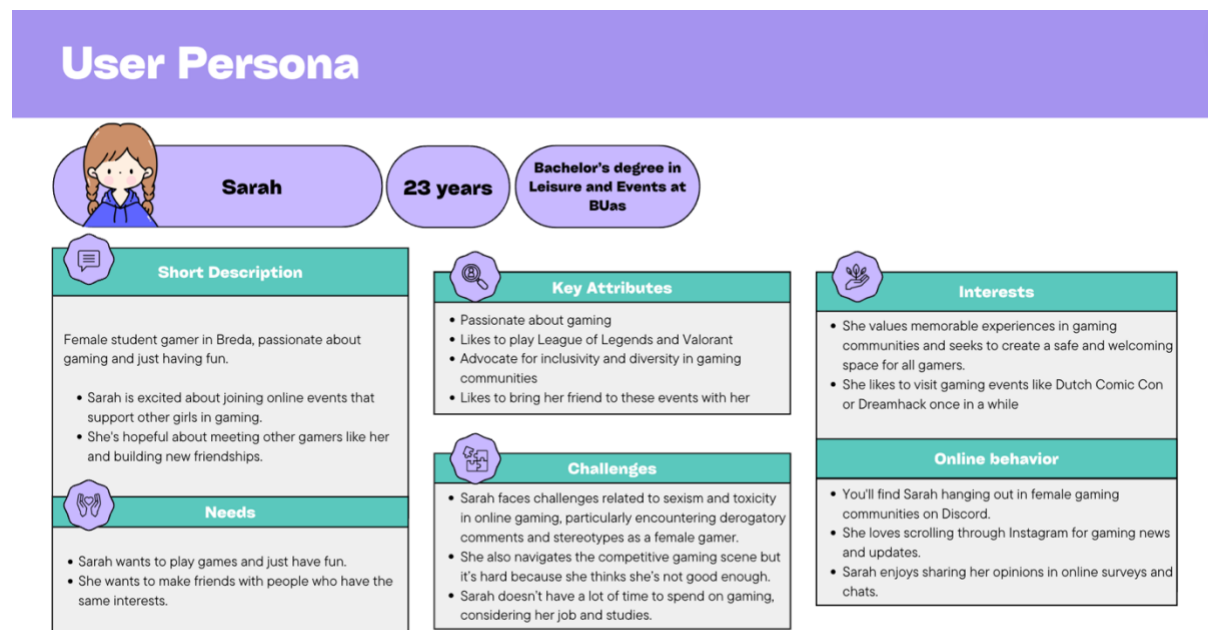


Figure 21: User persona

5. Showroom

This chapter presents the concept to experts, covering the pitch and co-reflection on its feasibility and impact.

5.1 Pitch

This chapter presents the concept pitch delivered to experts, covering its creation, implementation, and feedback.

5.1.1 Introduction

Presenting the concept to experts through a pitch is important for showing that it is relevant and effective. It provides feedback and insights, ensuring that the concept is practical and impactful. This process improves the quality and credibility of the thesis, aligning it with real-world expectations and expert recommendations.

5.1.2 Method

The pitch was presented to two female experts: employees of Breda Guardians who are lecturers from Breda University of Applied Sciences as well. The first expert, Liedewei Ratgers, a lecturer for Leisure & Events students, and the second, Ekaterina Uzunova, a specialist in Research and Project Management for EU projects, reviewed the presentation. The pitch included all concept ideas, highlighting their significance, pros and cons, implementation strategies and resources, and a rough execution timeline. The concept ideas were the *collaboration with the Women in Games Guild*, *collaboration with the Radio Hub*, *Interior and exterior redesign*, and *Gameplay refinement*.

5.1.3 Results

Liedewei Ratgers highlighted that a detailed step-by-step implementation plan was missing in the pitch. The expert suggested a schedule for events, including significant days like Women's International Day to guide future interns. In addition, the expert also recommended connecting with the organisers of Women's International Day events to broaden the audience and include esports topics, potentially featuring female esports representatives. Additionally, it was mentioned to find out if it is possible for Breda Guardians to link with the organisers and include themselves in this event.

Ekaterina Uzunova emphasised that collaborating with the Radio Hub and Charlie could reduce the time burden on Breda Guardians' interns by involving Charlie's students in tasks like scriptwriting. The expert suggested that this collaboration could streamline the process and distribute responsibilities more effectively. The expert also agreed with Liedewei, that the Women in Games Guild collaboration should ensure shared responsibilities, preventing Breda Guardians from shouldering too much work.

Both experts also had questions about these concepts. For the podcast, they wondered if Breda Guardians should try to include other esports teams like Esports Team Twente (ETT). ETT has female teams and their own following, and inviting representatives from their team could increase awareness of the podcast and Breda Guardians.

Both experts agreed that the proposed concepts are feasible and aligns well with the research that has been conducted, focusing on casual gaming and community building rather than competitive gaming, which fits with the target audience's preferences. They particularly were excited about the collaboration with the Women in Games Guild and the Radio Hub, considering it highly feasible and ready for near-term implementation due to existing connections and expressed interest from both parties.

Addressing interior design changes, they acknowledged the difficulty of altering the mixed office/gaming layout. While the vision of separating office and gaming spaces is clear, removing certain desks might lead to underutilization. Regarding player demo reviews, Ekaterina found the idea interesting but pointed out potential resistance due to concerns about revealing strategies. Recording practices could compromise competitive advantage, making this a lower priority compared to other concepts.

The feedback that will be incorporated into the practical approaches includes the key suggestions mentioned below:

- Creating a comprehensive project plan with actions and estimated timeframes.
- Outlining the potential approach of collaborating with the Radio Hub and Charlie to involve students in tasks like scriptwriting.
- Presenting two options in the advisory report: one where an assignment is possible to reduce workload and one where it is not.
- Recommending seeking collaborations with other esports teams, such as Esports Team Twente (ETT), to enhance female representation and broaden the podcast's reach.
- Suggesting exploring alternative forms of player engagement that are less intrusive and do not compromise competitive advantage.

5.2 Co-reflection

This chapter presents the co-reflection session conducted with the expert Sandra Viborg, covering its process, implementation, and feedback.

5.2.1 Introduction

Conducting a co-reflection session with an expert is essential for validating the research findings and proposed concepts. This process provides a critical evaluation from an experienced perspective, ensuring that the recommendations are practical, relevant, and aligned with industry standards. The goal of the co-reflection is to refine the concepts based on expert feedback, thereby enhancing the overall quality and applicability of the research outcomes.

5.2.2 Method

The co-reflection session was conducted with Sandra, a female expert with over a decade of experience in esports and in the game industry. Sandra's background includes content marketing, event project management and social media, having worked with major game studios, publishers and influencers.

During the session, a quick overview of the desk and field research was presented, including survey results, focus group findings and key insights from the literature review. Detailed discussions were held on the proposed concepts: working with the Women in Games Guild, working with the Radio Hub, redesigning the interior and exterior of the HIVE, and gameplay refinement sessions. Sandra provided feedback and suggestions to refine and improve the practical solutions, ensuring their feasibility and alignment with the needs of the esports community.

5.2.3 Results

During the co-reflection session, Sandra provided detailed feedback on the first two ideas in particular: working with the Women in Games Guild and launching a podcast through the Radio Hub. These concepts closely aligned with her expertise in community engagement and media strategy within the gaming and esports industry. The remaining ideas, interior and exterior redesign, and gameplay refinement were discussed briefly as they fell outside her area of expertise.

Attracting new members

Sandra emphasised the importance of attracting new members and highlighted the Women in Games Guild as a promising place to start. She suggested organising workshops, game jams and networking events not only for the guild, but also for local women interested in gaming. These events should cater for both beginners and experienced female gamers, promoting a sense of community and inclusion.

Retaining existing members

To retain existing members, Sandra advised maintaining a consistent schedule of events to keep the community engaged. Regular small events were recommended, along with quarterly "Women in Games/Esports" events featuring influential women in the industry.

These events should address key issues such as inclusivity, safety and skills development to ensure continued interest and participation.

Growing into new areas

Sandra suggested expanding into non-gaming events to attract a wider audience. Events such as paint and sip sessions with a gaming focus could invite non-gamers to explore the community in a casual, welcoming environment. This approach has the potential to generate interest in gaming among women who might not initially consider it.

Sandra also supported the idea of a podcast series to increase awareness of Breda Guardians. The podcast could focus on women in esports and gaming, providing a platform for discussions on inclusivity, safety, and skill development. Featuring successful women in the industry could inspire listeners and foster a local community. However, Sandra noted the challenges of maintaining consistent content quality and dealing with potential backlash from online communities.

Underrepresented gender

The podcast could address the significant underrepresentation of women in esports and the gaming industry. By focusing on this demographic, it could fill a gap in local content and create a space for women to share their experiences and insights.

Content quality

As Sandra pointed out, producing a podcast involves substantial work, including writing scripts, cleaning up audio, and maintaining production quality. This can make it challenging to maintain a consistent posting schedule.

Topic exhaustion

There is a risk of running out of interesting topics or content becoming repetitive over time, especially in a niche subject area. It's crucial to continuously find new angles and stories to keep the podcast engaging.

Audience retention

Retaining listeners requires maintaining high-quality content and engagement. The hosts need to keep the audience interested and invested in returning for new episodes.

The co-reflection session with Sandra emphasised the need for targeted approaches to attract and retain female members in esports communities. Organising inclusive events and using media like podcasts can help Breda Guardians become more appealing and supportive for female gamers. The podcast offers a flexible way to discuss important issues, share inspiring stories, and build a local community, but it requires careful planning to handle potential challenges.

5.3 Workshop: Concept

The practical approaches consist of two collaborations with different groups or clubs within Breda University, along with two additional approaches that are relatively smaller in scope. These are the broad outlines of the approach that will be taken based on the problem identified. The advisory report will elaborate on these recommendations, incorporating the findings of this research. Each recommendation will be thoroughly examined and supported by the evidence gathered during the study, to provide a complete and actionable plan for implementation.

5.3.1 Collaboration with Women In Games Guild

The Women In Games Guild is an association of female students from the games academy, including a representative of the Women In Games Ambassador. They have around 50 members. Viktorija, the current organiser of the guild, mentioned that the guild was created to talk about their experiences as women in the field, especially about the classes they have. The goal of the Women in Games guild is to be a supportive community that helps women overcome any challenges they face in the industry. The challenges can be so overwhelming in the male-dominated industry, and this guild is an attempt to bring positivity to the journey. They also occasionally do activities together, such as having lunch. But nowadays it has become more of a 'complaint group'. At this point, Viktorija mentioned that she wanted to get the guild going again and start by introducing the community to esports. She can see that the option of collaborating (bi)weekly or monthly could be very much possible.

Purpose

- To make more female students aged 18-25 more aware of Breda Guardians and help them feel part of a community.
- Instead of trying to improve their skill in gaming, focus on games where skill is not relevant.
- To encourage female attendees to bring a friend and introduce them to the gaming community.
 - This will increase growth for both Breda Guardians and the Women in Games Guild.

The HIVE/Breda Guardians is not that known in Breda University although it is located there. Members of the Women in Games Guild can share their positive experiences of the HIVE with their networks. This promotion can be effective in raising awareness among students who may not otherwise have heard of the esports facility. Besides that, the members can post about their activities at the HIVE on social media platforms, reaching a wider audience.

Organising events in collaboration with the Women in Games Guild can attract both guild members and their friends, extending the reach of the HIVE. These events can include game nights, workshops, and casual get-togethers.

The majority of visitors to HIVE are male students, which can make it intimidating for female students to join. Female-only events create an environment where women feel more comfortable participating without the pressure of a predominantly male audience. Such events also demonstrate that women are welcome and valued in the HIVE.

In terms of safety, a sense of security is crucial in encouraging women to participate. By creating a safe space with female representation, women could feel safe from any harassment or discomfort they might experience in mixed-gender settings. The Women in Games Guild involvement assures female participants that they have allies and support within the community, further enhancing their sense of safety.

In the survey and focus group, the target group expressed concerns regarding their skill level when joining gaming communities. They fear not being accepted due to their lack of skill. To address this issue, instead of focussing on skill development, the approach is to focus on fun, relaxed, and casual games that do not require any particular skill level.

5.3.2 Collaboration with the Radio Hub

Podcast collaboration together with Charlie from the Radio Hub in Breda University. A podcast series might be interesting for Breda Guardians as well for the target group.

A podcast series could increase the awareness of Breda Guardians. The podcast is part of the Radio Hub within Breda University, with their own students and study. They go live every day, by students for students as their site claims.

Concept

This collaboration will be an inclusive and diverse podcast that focuses on gaming. It is especially important to have female representatives that can talk about different topics related to gaming. This podcast aims to provide a welcoming space where gamers can connect, and listen to experiences of other female gamers where they might be able to relate to. It is possible for this podcast to be broadcasted bi-weekly or monthly. Wouter, the assistant of the Radio Hub, mentioned that they could post the podcast on their hub and page as well.

Purpose

- To increase the awareness of Breda Guardians by utilising the current viewers of the Radio Hub
- To inform students about the various opportunities in esports, from casual gaming to potential career paths, and how they possibly can get involved with the Breda Guardians team
- To discuss topics related to mental health and well-being in gaming, providing support and resources for students who might be struggling
- To strengthen the bonds within the gaming community at Breda University by providing a platform for students to share their stories and experiences.

5.3.3 Interior and exterior design of the HIVE

The interior design of the HIVE could use some improvements. As discussed at the focus group, the current design of the room can cause confusion for some people. They ask questions like:

- Am I allowed to enter this room?
- Is this free to play?

- Can we play games here (while there are people working)?
- Is it an office or a gaming room?

Current layout

The current interior design of the HIVE looks like the images portrayed below. The right image is the same but colour coded. It visualises how the visitors could perceive the space as confusing, since the office area and gaming area are mixed. There is no cohesion and this is what should be fixed. Since Breda Guardians has a low budget to spend on decoration and furniture, this improvement area will be focussed on rearrangement and minor additions.

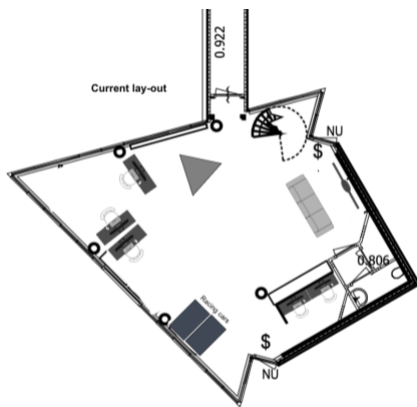


Figure 22: Current lay-out

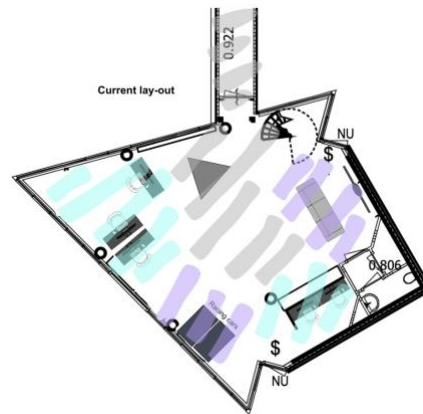


Figure 23: Current lay-out colour coded

Improved layout

In the improved layout, the office space is relocated to a nook, keeping it out of sight when entering the room. This change enhances the clarity and focus of the gaming area.

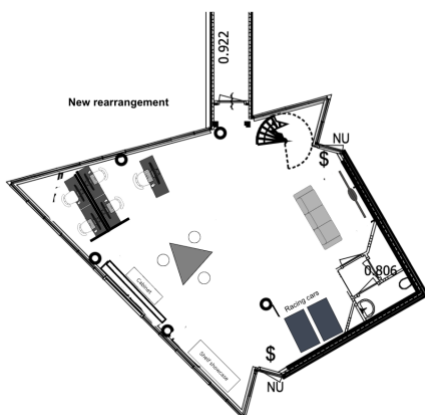


Figure 24: Improved lay-out

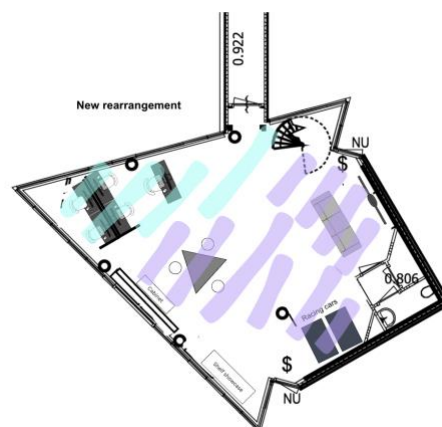


Figure 25: Improved lay-out colour coded

The gaming space now has its own area, making it more cohesive and welcoming. The racing rigs are strategically positioned against the wall right at the entrance, ensuring they are the first thing visitors see, capturing their interest immediately. Additionally, a table

dedicated to board games is prominently placed within the gaming area, making it more noticeable and inviting for board game enthusiasts.

This redesigned layout not only clarifies the purpose of each space but also creates a more engaging and accessible environment for all visitors.

5.3.4 Gameplay refinement

The results from the focus group and survey tell that most of the female gamers do not think their skill is sufficient enough to join gaming communities. Gameplay refinement involves integrating gameplay or demo review sessions into the Breda Guardians semi-professional team training sessions. These sessions use both physical and possibly content-based participation to enhance gameplay skills and promote the organisation.

Purpose

- To improve gameplay skills by analysing footage and identifying areas for improvement.
- To provide feedback from coaches and peers, promoting skill refinement and boosting player confidence.
- To address gameplay concerns raised during field research, ensuring players receive targeted support.
- To create immediate impact during practice sessions with long-term improvements in gameplay strategy and execution through regular review and feedback.

6. Professional product

6.1 Summary impact of the stages

The research question guiding this study was: "What are the factors that influence female students' (18-25 years) participation in esports communities in Breda?" Based on the research conducted in these various stages, several key factors were identified as influential:

1. **Female representation:** The presence of female gamers and role models in esports communities significantly impacts participation. Female students are more likely to engage in communities where they see themselves represented and feel that their experiences and perspectives are valued.
2. **Safety of the environment:** The safety of the environment is paramount. Female students need to feel secure from harassment, discrimination, and toxicity. A welcoming and safe atmosphere encourages greater participation and retention.
3. **Social Interaction:** Opportunities for social interaction play a crucial role in attracting female students to esports communities. They prioritise social connections and seek communities where they can build relationships and have fun with others.
4. **Inclusivity:** Inclusivity is essential for fostering a sense of belonging. Communities that actively promote diversity and inclusivity, ensuring that all members feel welcome and respected, are more appealing to female students.
5. **Equality and respect:** Being treated equally and with respect is a fundamental factor. Female students want to be recognized for their skills and contributions without facing gender-based discrimination or bias.
6. **Lack of Awareness:** Many female students are unaware of existing esports communities. Limited visibility and outreach efforts mean that potential participants may not know where or how to engage with esports activities in Breda.

These factors collectively influence female students' decisions to join and remain active in esports communities. Addressing these elements can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment that encourages female participation and engagement in esports.

6.2 Discussion and implications

This study has generated fresh insights into the factors influencing the participation of female students aged 18-25 in esports communities in Breda. While existing literature primarily addresses issues such as online toxicity, this research explores strategies aimed at attracting and retaining female participants within these communities. This shift in focus was precipitated by the discovery of a notable underrepresentation of female members in specific esports teams, prompting a broader investigation into community-wide engagement tactics.

However, it is pertinent to acknowledge several methodological considerations that may impact the generalizability of the findings. The survey sample included respondents beyond the targeted age group and geographical scope, potentially limiting the applicability of the results specifically to Breda University students and residents of Breda.

Furthermore, challenges in accessing a representative sample from the Breda Guardians community for the focus group underscored the difficulty in obtaining insights from specific esports teams.

Future research initiatives should adopt more targeted approaches, such as conducting localised studies specifically within the University of Breda and its immediate surroundings. This will provide more detailed insights into the factors influencing female students' participation in esports communities in a localised context. In addition, exploring the perspectives of committed members of esports teams, including their experiences and recommendations for attracting female participants, could provide valuable strategies for community engagement and expansion.

In conclusion, this study offers new insights into encouraging female participation in esports communities. Future research should expand on these findings by improving methods, ensuring samples represent the target population better, and investigating specific community dynamics to further our understanding in this area.

GRADUATION THESIS

ADVISORY REPORT



**INVESTIGATING FACTORS OF FEMALE
STUDENTS' (18-25 YEARS OLD) IN ESPORTS
COMMUNITIES**

MI KHA
BREDAGUARDIANS (BREDA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES)

MARK STEVENS
EKATERINA UZUNOVA

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1. Introduction

In the current gaming environment, female participation in esports communities' lags behind that of men, resulting in underrepresentation and various challenges. The dominance of men in this industry also affects the gaming experience for women, not only in online games but also in the field.

At Breda University, the gender gap is evident in the HIVE, an esports room equipped with modern facilities such as streaming setups, high-performance PCs, and various consoles. This facility is intended for everyone, particularly those living around Breda. The specific target group is **female students** of 18 to 25 years old. The esports community at the university, Breda Guardians, especially within the HIVE, is predominantly male, creating an environment that may discourage female participation. To address this imbalance, our goal was to determine the **motivations** and **barriers** that influence female students' involvement in esports. This was investigated through a survey administered among students at Breda University. Based on these findings, interventions aimed at increasing female students' participation in esports were developed and tested.

This report will provide a concise overview of the research findings about the factors influencing female participation in esports at Breda University and propose targeted interventions to enhance inclusivity and engagement within the HIVE.

2. Content and findings: Literature research

The purpose of the library research, encompassing trend analysis, benchmarking, and expert interviews, was to gain an understanding of the factors influencing female participation in esports among the target group of female students aged 18-25. By examining current trends, analysing successful practices from other organisations, and gathering insights from industry experts who have experience with this target group, this research aims to identify effective strategies and interventions to address the underrepresentation of female gamers in the HIVE at Breda University.

This approach makes sure that the proposed solutions are relevant and capable of fostering a more inclusive and diverse esports community, specifically for female students within this age group. This stage was the outline in guiding the brainstorming process toward developing this report. By researching how other practices and organisations seek to unite women, promote female representation, and create safe environments, the study aimed to find sources of inspiration and optimal practices that align with the shared objective. This has made it possible to create strategies that address the specific challenges faced by female students at Breda University, and also contribute to the broader goal of increasing female participation and representation in esports.

2.1 Finding 1: Trend analysis

The trend analysis looks at what games and platforms female gamers like, and how the gaming industry keeps evolving to be more inclusive. This helps understand what female students are most likely to engage with.

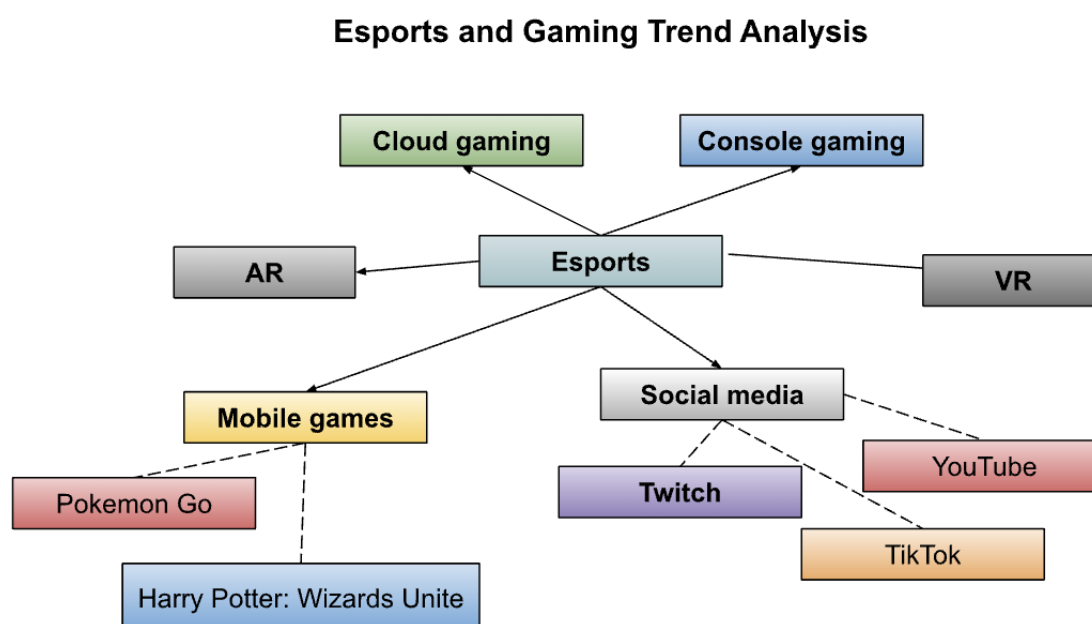


Figure 26: Esports and Gaming Trend Analysis (Source¹: Gaming Market Size, 2022; Porokh, 2023)

There are a few trends that could be valuable for Breda Guardians. In particular **social media** and **console gaming**. The HIVE has the right equipment to create high-quality content for social media. Which is also possible to distribute to Breda Guardian's Twitch channel and YouTube to engage with audiences. Besides that, the HIVE also has consoles like PlayStations and Nintendo Switches, which could help cater to the target audience.

2.2 Finding 2: Benchmark creation

The benchmark creation was conducted to compare similar events or organisations with the same objective, creating a safe space for women and promoting female representation within their community.

The elements proposed below primarily focus on improving female participation in esports through competitive tournament-style events. While tournaments are emphasised as a potential solution, these elements can also be adapted for other similar initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and engagement among female students in esports.

Game Changers (VALORANT) ²	Inter Challenge (CS:GO) ³	GIRLGAMER Festival (Organisation) ⁴	Ally's Women Open (Rocket League) ⁵
Exclusive focus on female gamers	Platform for women's CS:GO teams	Gender-exclusive event with clear rules	Promotion of gender equality
Innovative engagement initiatives	Online qualifiers in multiple regions	Promoting women in esports via social media	Enhancing visibility and engagement
Fair tournament structure	Fair competition structure	Targeted promotions for engagement	Supporting amateur and semi-pro players
Collaboration with the VALORANT community	Collaborated with ESL, Intel and AnyKey	Effective social media strategy	Led by an all female team
Led by an all female team			Collaborated with Ally

Table 27: Benchmarking key elements

The elements where Breda Guardians should make use of are:

- **Gender specific events:** Organising dedicated female only events with Breda Guardians could create a supportive and empowering environment that encourages female students to participate in these initiatives.
- **Organised by a female team:** They understand female gamers and promote female representation in esports management. This also makes esports activities more relevant and appealing to female students.
- **Collaborating with stakeholders:** Work with other organisations to improve Breda Guardians' esports activities. This gives Breda Guardians access to more resources, money, expertise and help to grow and make a bigger impact. This could also include other academies at Breda University or student clubs.

2.3 Finding 3: Expert interview

Expert interviews are valuable to gain qualitative insights into the factors of influencing female participation in esports communities. These experts shared their experiences who have direct experience within the gaming industry, offering contextual understanding and validating findings from the literature research.

The interviews have been conducted with the experts shown below:

Name	Function
Marina Tognoli	Operation Project Lead at Chamo Games Former Riot Employee (Esports and Player Support department)
Tanja Reither (Escape)	Former Esports Player for SK Avarosa
Lara Lunardi	Head of Creative at SK Gaming
Lara Clergue	Head of Esports at Webedia

Table 28: Esports and Gaming

All experts highlighted common themes: the importance of creating a **safe and respectful environment** for female gamers, promoting diverse representation to enhance engagement, and also to give women **more opportunities** in gaming initiatives. Lara Lunardi emphasized **women-focused gaming events** for *networking* and *skill-building*, while Lara Clergue and Tanja Reither preferred mixed-gender advertising and tournaments to normalize women's participation in esports.

In contrast, all experts observed that addressing women's need for representation within the gaming industry is often viewed as a trend. Marina stated *“They're using our gender for marketing. So they take something that's very sensitive for us, very political, very real. And they turn into a marketing tool.”* This highlights the importance for Breda Guardians to uphold these values consistently rather than treating them as a trend, as the challenges female gamers face are ongoing and require genuine intentions. Marina also emphasised the stigmatisation of gaming. She expressed the need to recognise all gamers, regardless of platform or gender, about what it means to be a gamer. Marina stated that if women felt comfortable identifying as gamers, it would help expand the games industry.

3. Content and findings: Field research

The field research was conducted after a literature review to check the findings and get new, relevant qualitative information for this report on female participation in esports. It provides data, identifies specific needs and barriers, and makes practical suggestions for Breda Guardians.

3.1 Finding 1: Survey

The findings from the literature research suggest that conducting a survey among female gamers would provide quantitative validation of identified trends and qualitative insights. This survey could verify the relevance of tailored strategies such as female only events and inclusive initiatives. Additionally, it could identify potential barriers preventing female students from joining esports communities. The demographics of the respondents were the following:



The survey shows a strong preference among respondents for **MOBA** and **shooter games**, followed closely by battle royale and rhythm games, suggesting a preference for competitive and **team-based gaming experiences**. However, despite their preference for these genres, the majority of respondents (94.3%) identified themselves as **casual gamers**. This self-identification as casual gamers reflects an approach to gaming that is characterised by enjoyment and entertainment rather than intense competition and professional aspirations.

The barriers to participation in esports communities were also identified. A significant proportion of respondents cited **lack of skills** (34.2%) and **time constraints** (26.9%) as the main barriers to joining esports communities. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions that include skill-building opportunities and flexible scheduling.

The survey also measured the interest in events to promote the inclusion of women in esports, revealing a *mixed response* from respondents. While 45.7% expressed an interest in attending, 30% indicated a lack of interest and 24.3% were undecided. The disparity in interest levels may be influenced by the survey's finding that only 9.2% of respondents prefer to attend real-life events, instead preferring **online engagement** through platforms such as Discord, TikTok or Instagram.

The survey found that only 10.5% of respondents are members of the Breda esports community. The reason for this is these respondents are affiliated with Breda Guardians or **study in Breda**. However, few mentioned other local esports communities like Dynasty and mCon. When asked about the HIVE, most showed interest in it. Most people who have not visited the HIVE yet, are open to visiting. For the current visitors of the HIVE, they have the same reasons to join esports communities: to have fun and socialise. They do this by playing games and meeting in groups.

3.2 Finding 2: Focus Group

The findings from the literature research and survey indicated the need for deeper qualitative insights into female gamers' experiences and perspectives. To achieve this, a focus group was conducted to explore the motivations, habits, preferences, and challenges faced by female gamers. This qualitative approach aimed to have a deeper understanding of their involvement in esports communities and their views on initiatives like female-only events and inclusivity measures. The focus group participants included Mi Kha (MK), Ekaterina (E), Michelle (M), Valeria (V), and Charlotte (C), who provided valuable firsthand insights into these areas.

Motives

Participants join gaming communities to **connect with others** who share their passion for gaming, seeking **social interaction** and **friendships**. Barriers include **social anxiety**, **lack of awareness**, and **past negative experiences** in online games. They desire inclusive, diverse communities where all members feel respected regardless of gender or skill.

Habits and preferences

Participants started gaming young, **often introduced by family or friends**, and played for **relaxation** and **social interaction**. Gaming time varies, with some playing up to 20 hours a week. Popular games include League of Legends, Counter-Strike 2, and Overwatch 2. They prefer playing with friends and attending events with companions.

Female representation

All participants emphasised the importance of female representation in gaming. They seek a safe, supportive environment, free from toxicity and sexism. Increased female representation would make women feel more included and secure.

Events

Participants suggested diverse events, including **various games** where not only video games like League of Legends or VALORANT were mentioned, but activities like **Just Dance**, and **board games**. They also expressed interest in organising **watch parties** for esports tournaments to foster community engagement.

The HIVE

Participants found The HIVE visually appealing but noted it felt *unwelcoming due to its office-like downstairs area and dark upstairs space*. Suggestions included adding wall art and LED lights to create a more inviting atmosphere, and improving the exterior to *signal* it is an open, accessible gaming space.

4. Solutions

4.1 Collaboration with Women in Games Guild

The first advice is to increase the awareness of Breda Guardians by collaborating with other school clubs, guilds, or academies. Located in the Frontier Building of Breda University of Applied Sciences, Breda Guardians and the HIVE primarily attract BUas students, but many students are still unaware of the HIVE.

Work together with the Women in Games Guild to host bi-weekly or monthly events aimed at female students at Breda University. These events will include casual gaming sessions, social activities, and community-building exercises to increase awareness and inclusivity within the HIVE.

- **Awareness:** The HIVE/Breda Guardians is not that known in Breda University although it is located there. Members of the Women in Games Guild can share their positive experiences of the HIVE with their networks. This promotion can be effective in raising awareness among students who may not otherwise have heard of the esports facility. Besides that, the members can post about their activities at the HIVE on social media platforms, reaching a wider audience.

Organising events in collaboration with the Women in Games Guild can attract both guild members and their friends, extending the reach of the HIVE. These events can include game nights, workshops, and casual get-togethers.

- **Inclusivity** - The majority of visitors to HIVE are male students, which can make it intimidating for female students to join. Female-only events create an environment where women feel more comfortable participating without the pressure of a predominantly male audience. Such events also demonstrate that women are welcome and valued in the HIVE.
- **Safety** - In terms of safety, a sense of security is crucial in encouraging women to participate. By creating a safe space with female representation, women could feel safe from any harassment or discomfort they might experience in mixed-gender settings. The Women in Games Guild involvement assures female participants that they have allies and support within the community, further enhancing their sense of safety.
- **Skill development** - In the survey and focus group, the target group expressed concerns regarding their skill level when joining gaming communities. They fear not being accepted due to their lack of skill. To address this issue, instead of focussing on skill development, the approach is to focus on fun, relaxed, and casual games that do not require any particular skill level.

This measure mainly attracts existing members of the Women In Games Guild and the HIVE. This limits the growth and diversity of the community as it does not reach students who are unaware of or not involved with the guild or the HIVE.

The measure could be effective in the short term. By working with the Women In Games Guild, the events will reach mainly gaming academy students, who are already acquainted. These students can promote the HIVE and Breda Guardians through word-of-mouth, which could increase awareness among their peers.

Also, research shows that community-building activities and peer recommendations are good ways to increase participation and engagement. Similar initiatives reoccurred in the benchmark, where they include the community into organising these types of events. This approach could have a similar effect here. While the immediate impact might be limited to gaming academy students, the measure could generate broader interest and participation through peer networks and social interactions.

The main cost of this project is the time the team spends on it. The money spent is not much since it is self-organised, but it is important to make sure that the team is engaged and that they manage their time well. This will help the event to succeed. By collaborating, Breda Guardians and the Women In Games Guild can achieve a lot in terms of community engagement and inclusivity, with a small amount of money.

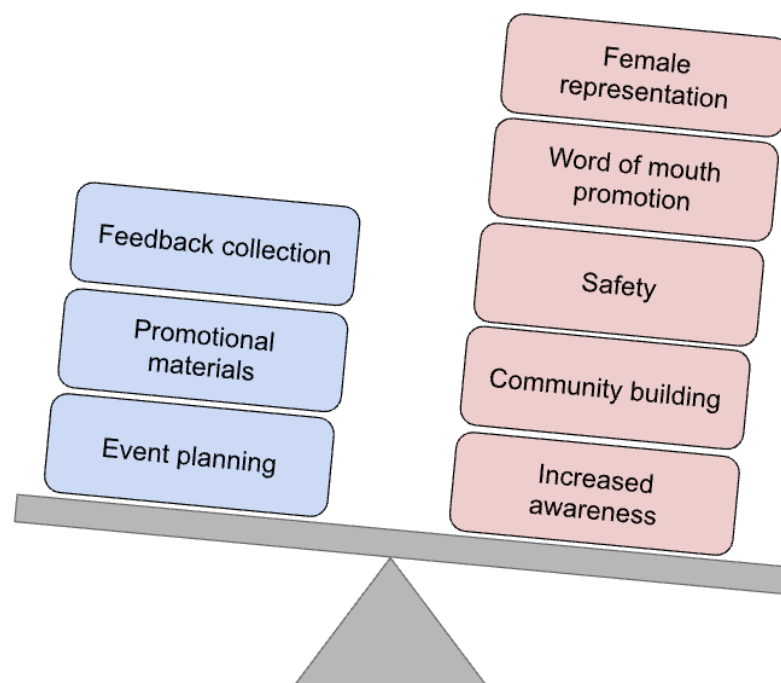


Figure 29: Cost and benefits analysis

An example of this event could look like this:

Name: Restart

Date: 08-09-2024

Time: 13:00 to 14:00

Time	Activity	Description
13:00	Mini kick-off	Brief introduction to the event, setting the tone and expectations for the activities. A short presentation about the guild and a short introduction about Breda Guardians
13:10	Introduction	Participants introduce themselves, share a bit about their gaming interests and experiences
13:20	Party Game (Jackbox)	Engage in a fun and interactive Jackbox game session, encouraging laughter and humour.
14:00	End of Event	Wrap up the event with closing remarks, thanking participants for joining, and sharing any future event details.

Figure 30: Example event 'Restart'



Figure 31: Example poster for 'Restart'

4.2 Collaboration with the Radio Hub

A podcast series could increase the awareness of Breda Guardians. The podcast is part of the Radio Hub within Breda University, with their own students and study. They go live every day, by students for students as their site claims.

- *Awareness:*

The podcast with the Radio Hub will make Breda Guardians more well-known at Breda University and beyond. By broadcasting the podcast bi-weekly or monthly, the initiative ensures that the target audience knows about it. The Radio Hub, which is already well-established and goes live every day, provides an opportunity for reaching a wide audience of students. The podcast episodes will be posted on the Radio Hub's page and social media platforms, reaching more students. This regular exposure will help more students become aware of Breda Guardians, especially those who may not be familiar with the HIVE or its activities.

- *Female representation:*

Including female representatives in the podcast as guests will address the problem of inclusivity within the gaming community. Guests can share their experiences, challenges and achievements in gaming, making the content relatable and engaging for female listeners. By hearing stories from other women in the gaming community, female listeners can feel a sense of connection and belonging, reducing feelings of isolation in a traditionally male-dominated space.

To further enhance the podcast's reach and female representation, Breda Guardians should consider inviting representatives from other esports teams, such as Esports Team Twente (ETT). These teams have their own following and female teams, which can help diversify the podcast content and broaden its audience. Contacting these teams and inviting their members to participate as podcast hosts or guests will promote a more inclusive gaming community.

Time period

Medium term impact (3-6 months)

In the first couple months, the podcast will launch with a series of episodes. These early releases will introduce the podcast's concept, format, and topics. As the series progresses and more episodes become available, listening engagement is able to grow steadily.

The regular broadcasts can play a role in raising awareness about Breda Guardians and the HIVE within the Breda University students. Leveraging the Radio Hub's existing audience, the podcast can extend its reach and expand their recognition of these initiatives among students.

Listeners' feedback gathered from the audience will help with improvements to content delivery, ensuring that future episodes are more engaging and relevant.

Long term impact (6-12 months)

Over the long term, the podcast will establish a reputation. The podcast can establish itself as a primary source of information and discussion on gaming, with a particular focus on the

experiences of female gamers. This will serve to enhance the visibility and credibility of Breda Guardians. Over time, the podcast can create a sense of community among listeners. Female students will feel a greater sense of connection and support, perceiving the podcast as a platform where their experiences and perspectives are valued.

As the podcast continues to produce episodes, its audience will expand, including not only current students but also potentially a broader audience beyond the scope of Breda University.

The enhanced awareness and sense of community will motivate more students, particularly female students, to engage with Breda Guardians' events and activities at the HIVE. This will facilitate inclusivity in the gaming community.

Pros

- The Radio Hub at Breda University is a great place to collaborate. They can help with recording, editing, and ensuring high-quality production values. This technical support makes the podcast look better and lets the Breda Guardians team focus more on content and audience.
- The Radio Hub's channels for distribution and promotion make the podcast more popular. By posting episodes on the Radio Hub, the Breda Guardians can reach a wider audience. This helps to raise awareness of the podcast and its associated initiatives.
- Furthermore, the Radio Hub helps to manage the logistical challenges of organising the podcast. This includes managing schedules, coordinating recording sessions, and ensuring timely publication of episodes. The Radio Hub can help the Breda Guardians team with the logistics, so they can focus on content and strategy.

Cons

- The Radio Hub is a good idea, but there are a few downsides to this project. The Breda Guardians team has to write their own podcast scripts. This takes time and requires input from team members. The team also depends on the Radio Hub for technical support, recording facilities, and logistical coordination.
- Additionally, there is a level of dependency on the Radio Hub for technical support, recording facilities, and logistical coordination. Any delays or technical issues on the Radio Hub's end could potentially impact the podcast's schedule and production timeline, leading to unforeseen disruptions.
- Moreover, aligning the goals and priorities of the Breda Guardians with those of the Radio Hub may present challenges. Clear communication and mutual understanding of objectives are important to navigate these potential conflicts effectively.

To counter the workload for the Breda Guardians team, making the podcast scriptwriting an assignment for Radio Hub students is a viable solution. This approach not only reduces the burden on the team but also provides students with valuable hands-on experience. However, to implement this effectively, a few essential steps need to be taken first, including permission from the Radio Hub. The table below outlines these steps:

Step	Description
Initial meeting	Meet with Radio Hub to discuss collaboration possibilities.
Define goals	Outline the podcast's goals and needs.
Create assignment	Develop a clear assignment for students, detailing tasks and objectives.

Collaborating with the Radio Hub offers several potential benefits that suggest its effectiveness as described above. These include: *increased reach, improved product quality, community engagement and interaction.*

While direct empirical evidence specific to the collaboration between Breda Guardians and the Radio Hub may be limited, these general insights from related research suggest that if the community is included, it is more likely to be attracted and engaged in the initiatives.

Implementing the collaboration with the Radio Hub involves several key considerations in terms of financial, temporal, and resource investments:

1. **Financial Resources:** The financial resources are limited, as students and being part of Breda University, are allowed to freely use the facilities that the Radio Hub has to offer in order to make the podcast.
2. **Time commitment:** Significant time will be dedicated to planning, scriptwriting, recording sessions, editing, and publishing episodes.
3. **Logistical Support:** Coordinating recording schedules, ensuring technical readiness, and planning promotions between both parties require careful organisation and communication.

An example of a podcast episode could look like this:

Segment	Brief	Notes	Duration
Intro	Summary of the content, introduce the host, the podcast and any guests	Guest introduction: title (player, intern, community member), experience and any relevance achievements	3 min
Community spotlight	Invite someone from the Breda Guardians community to be a feature on the podcast.		
Question 1	<i>Q&A or React:</i> Listeners can submit their gaming stories, questions, and suggestions, creating a sense of community and engagement within the podcast.	EX. Question 1: How did you start playing games?	7 min
Question 2		EX. Question 2: How is it like playing [GAME]?	7 min

Question 3		EX. Question 3: What has been your most memorable moment when playing [GAME]?	7 min
Outro	This outro wraps up the episode neatly, encourages listener engagement, and promotes future episodes.		3 min
Recap	Recap of the important outcomes of the podcast		3 min
Closing theme			

Table 32: Example podcast structure



Figure 33: Poster example for Radio Hub collaboration

4.3 Interior and exterior design of the HIVE

The problem with the interior design of the HIVE is its current layout, which creates confusion among visitors. People often question whether they can enter the room, if it's free to play games, and whether gaming is permitted while others are working.

Improvements to the interior and exterior design of the HIVE can alleviate the confusion of the visitors. There are several suggestions for improving the design, for example:

Current layout

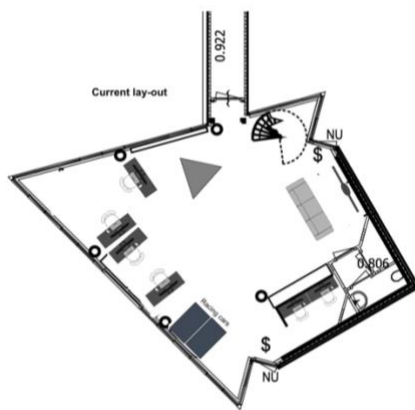


Figure 34: Current layout

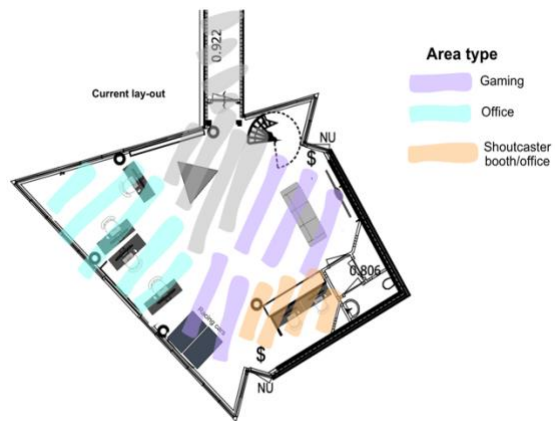


Figure 35: Current layout colour coded

The two desks located on the bottom side of the floor plan, currently serving as shoutcaster booths and workstations for employees and interns, cannot be moved. Presently, this space is underutilized.

Improved layout

In the improved layout, the office space is relocated to a nook, keeping it out of sight when entering the room. This change enhances the clarity and focus of the gaming area.

The table has been relocated to the center of the room to increase visibility and encourage visitor use. The HIVE has a cabinet with board games, but it is currently unnoticed. By placing it centrally and in clear view, it can attract more attention. The shoutcaster booth remains in its current location, but posters could be placed on the divider in front of the booth to clearly indicate its purpose, informing visitors that they can use it or inquire about it.

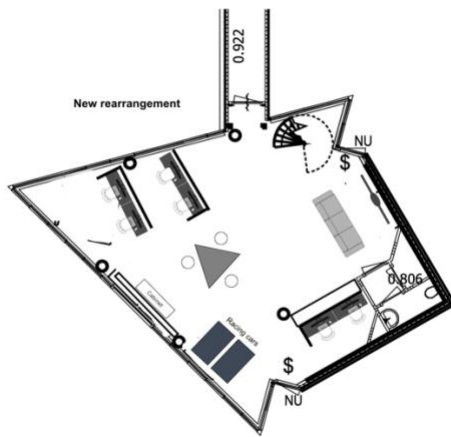


Figure 36: Improved layout

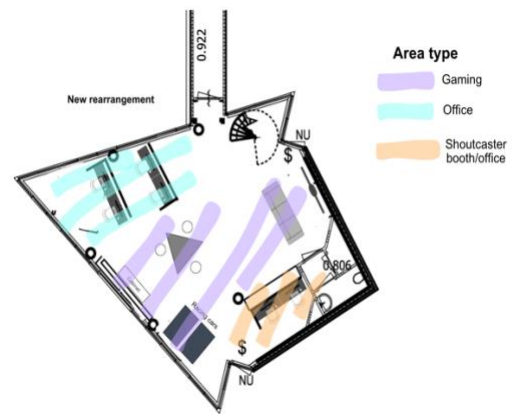


Figure 37: Improved layout colour coded

Entrance banner:



Figure 38: Current entrance banner



Figure 39: Improved entrance banner

Breda Guardians does not have any budget to fully improve the interior and exterior design of the HIVE. Therefore, the redesigns presented above are limited to rearrangements of the existing designs. However, these rearrangements can still provide sufficient improvements to alleviate the confusion of the visitors and thereby can help with the usability of the HIVE.

Based on the field research, the participants' feedback highlighted these issues, indicating a clear need for improvements in the HIVE's interior design to address visitor confusion and enhance usability.

Since there is no budget for a full redesign, the rearrangement is free of cost. Posters, banners, flyers will have minimal cost. Furthermore, the improvements will take limited time to design these materials.

4.4 Gameplay refinement

The idea of gameplay refinement is to introduce gameplay or demo review sessions during Breda Guardians' semi-professional team practices, leveraging both physical and content-based participation to enhance gameplay skills and promote the organisation.

By integrating gameplay review sessions into semi-professional team practices, participants can analyse gameplay footage, identify areas for improvement, and receive feedback from coaches and peers. This proactive approach addresses gameplay concerns raised during field research, promoting skill refinement and confidence among players.

There is immediate impact during practice sessions; over time, regular review and feedback will lead to noticeable improvements in gameplay strategy and execution.

Pros

The proposed measure offers several advantages. Firstly, it enhances participants' skills as well as the team players' skills by providing focused gameplay analysis and feedback, which improves their tactical approach and overall performance. Additionally, creating content from these sessions boosts visibility and engagement for Breda Guardians, demonstrating their commitment to skill development and community involvement. This approach simultaneously promotes gameplay improvement and raises awareness of Breda Guardians' activities and achievements, effectively achieving both goals.

Cons

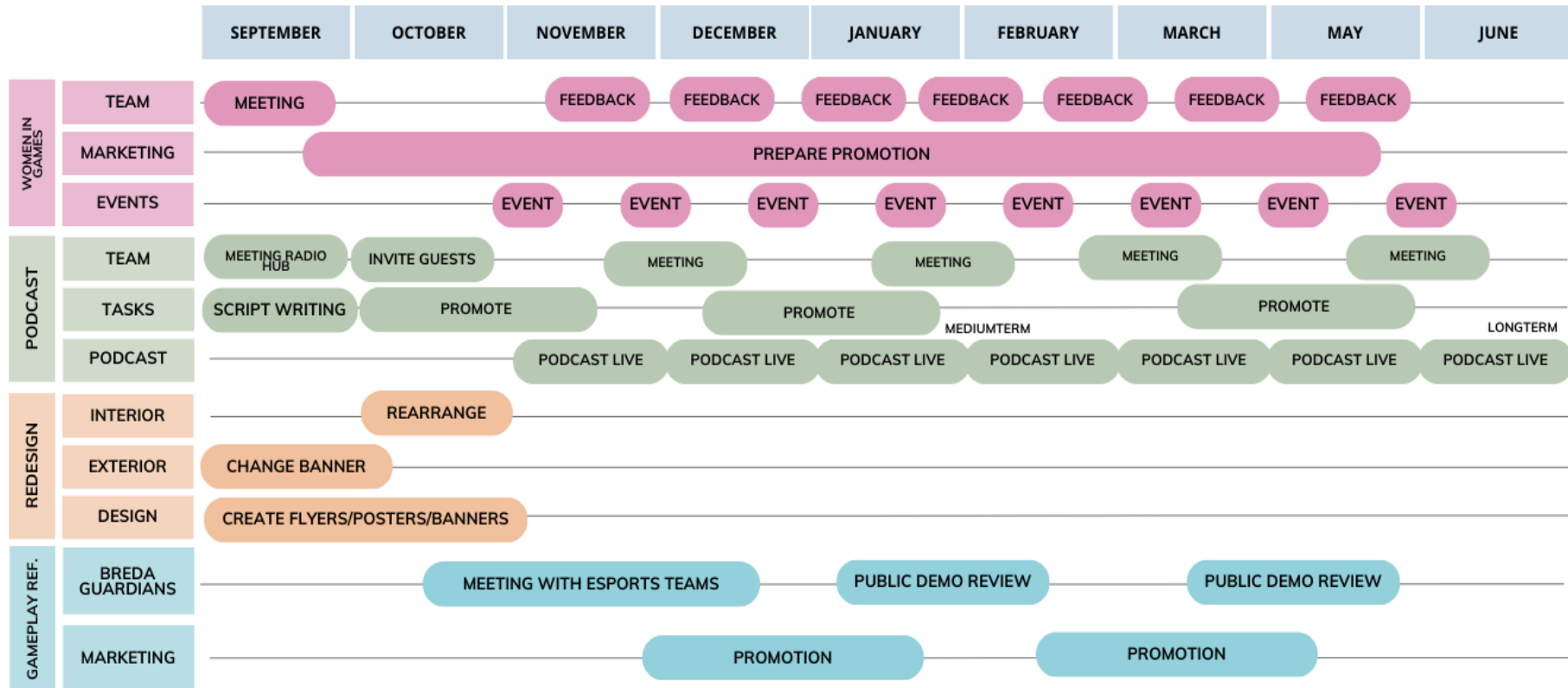
However, the proposed measure has some down sides as well. It is resource intensive, requiring dedicated time and effort from players to review gameplay footage and provide constructive feedback. Additionally, some players might be hesitant to agree into making content creation due to concerns about publicising their own tactics and strategies. Teams often analyse their opponents to optimise performance based on maps, weapons, and other variables. Lastly, the success of this initiative depends on the willingness of players to participate actively.

To address the content creation concern, one potential solution is to focus on analysing professional players or opponents, which can benefit both team players and participants without revealing their own strategies and tactics.

Resources

The proposed measure requires several key resources for success. Firstly, time is crucial, as review sessions need to be incorporated into the current practice schedules, with coordination between coaches and players. Additionally, the participation of various individuals is essential, including coaches, players, and staff who will handle reviewing, editing, and creating content.

Project plan



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1. Literature research

1.1 Trend analysis

1. Mobile Gaming

Mobile gaming, which refers to playing video games on mobile devices like smartphones or tablets. This market is expecting significant growth and holds the largest market share as well of the video game market. Popular titles like Pokemon Go, Harry Potter: Wizards Unite, and games from Nintendo are driving market trends. Furthermore, online multiplayer games like Fortnite and PUBG are major contributors as well to the growth of mobile gaming (Porokh, 2023).

Besides that, advances in technology and the widespread availability of smartphones around the world are fueling the growth of real-money-based games, together with online multiplayer games that can be played from anywhere in the world (Gaming Market Size, 2022).

2. Cloud Gaming

Cloud gaming is an upcoming trend in the gaming landscape. It involves streaming video games from remote servers to the device of the user. Although it is currently only a relatively small part of the market, it is expected to experience a surge in popularity over the next few years (Porokh, 2023).

The innovation of 5G technology can minimise the current problems of online gaming, such as game lag, by providing an improved cloud streaming experience. This is due to the significantly lower latency of 5G compared to 4G. Additionally, 5G devices can support a significant number of devices simultaneously, which will increase the number of gamers and allow developers to deliver an enhanced gaming experience in the online gaming market.

Games are now available across a range of devices, including consoles, smartphones, portable gaming devices, computers, and tablets. Key market players are focusing on launching interactive games to attract younger generations for entertainment purposes (Gaming Market Size, 2022).

3. *Social media platforms*

Twitch continues to be the dominant platform for live streaming platforms, enabling interactions between players and their audiences. The rise of Twitch and YouTube gaming has transformed player-viewer engagement. Additionally, the growth of short-form video platforms, such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts, has had a notable impact on the gaming industry, broadening the appeal of gaming to a more diverse audience.

4. *Esports*

The rise of esports events and multiplayer gaming has caused a significant shift in the world of online gaming. Electronic Arts Inc.'s release of FIFA 22 is a prime example, which received massive engagement with 9.1 million players, with 7.6 million team rosters created and 460 matches played by gamers in the first month alone.

Esports involves competitive gaming competitions at both local and global levels, pitting players of varying skill levels against each other. According to Statista projections, the global esports market revenue could reach 1.87 billion USD by 2025, with China accounting for one-fifth of the market. The leading revenue-generating regions in the esports industry are Asia and North America (Gaming Market Size, 2022; Porokh, 2023).

In terms of women's esports, there was significant growth where in 2023 the total viewing hours of nearly was 15% more compared to previous year. Valorant and Mobile Legends: Bang Bang were the most popular games, together accounting for over 90% of viewing hours. Major tournaments such as the 32nd SEA Games Women's Tournament and the VCT 2023: Game Changers Championship received very high viewerships, while prize distribution favoured Valorant over Mobile Legends. There was a clear disparity between regions, with South America receiving the highest percentage of the prize pool and South East Asia having relatively low prize pools despite a strong fanbase. Although there was some fluctuation in language preference compared to last year, Twitch dominated as the primary streaming platform and English was the most common language (Murko, 2023).

Besides the general trends in the gaming and esports industry, examining trends in gaming, devices and innovations is also essential for a comprehensive understanding about gaming. By focusing on these advancements alongside broader trends, there will be broader insights gained about the technological shifts shaping player experiences. The trends that has come up are:

1. Console gaming
2. Gaming innovations
3. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)
4. Mobile gaming

This shows that gaming technology is constantly evolving, with advancements in console gaming and the integration of AI to enhance the immersive experience. Additionally, VR and AR technologies have opened up new opportunities for interactive gameplay, while mobile gaming continues to dominate with its accessibility and broad appeal. Together, these trends demonstrate the gaming industry's dynamics, addressing diverse player preferences and stimulating continuous innovation (Porokh, 2023).

1.2 Benchmark creation

The results include Valorant's Game Changers, the Intel Challenge of CS:GO and the GAMERGIRL Festival. Two of these are events, while one is an organisation. The analysis aims to clarify the exact nature of each event and the organizational structure that supports their success. The logistical and strategic aspects have been thoroughly analysed to provide a comprehensive understanding of these events.

Valorant

The subject chosen for the benchmarking analysis is the VALORANT Game Changers Championship 2023, an event within the competitive gaming landscape, specifically designed to promote diversity and inclusivity by providing a platform exclusively for female gamers (VALORANT Esports, n.d.).

Strategy Implementation

The VALORANT Game Changers Championship aims to promote diversity, inclusivity, and competitive excellence within the esports community. It focuses exclusively on female gamers to address the gender disparity prevalent in traditional esports competitions. The championship provides a platform for female gamers to showcase their talents, challenging existing stereotypes and barriers to entry. This increases their visibility and ensures that teams from different regions have an equal opportunity to compete on an international stage. Besides that, Riot chose only female staff to work behind the scenes on it (Marina Tognoli, Personal communication, 2024). The competition uses a double-elimination format and best-of-three matches in the opening rounds. Incorporating engaging initiatives such as broadcast drops (claimable gifts for games) in Twitch and watch parties which can boost viewer participation and improve the overall viewing experience. In addition, the strategic alliance with the VALORANT community to organise monthly tournaments reinforces the commitment to developing young talent and promoting community engagement. The VALORANT Game Changers Championship aims to redefine esports by promoting inclusivity, representation, and excellence across gender lines. This is achieved through strategic initiatives (VALORANT Champions Tour, 2023).

The initiatives for inclusivity include:

- Exclusive focus on female gamers
- Led by an all-female team
- Innovative engagement initiatives
- Fair tournament structure
- Collaboration with the Valorant community

Intel Challenge (IEM Katowice)

The subject chosen for benchmarking analysis is the Intel Challenge at Intel® Extreme Masters (IEM) Katowice 2019, an event within the competitive gaming landscape specifically designed to promote diversity and inclusivity by providing a platform exclusively for women in esports (Duran, 2020)

Strategy implementation

The Intel Challenge strategic framework aims to promote inclusivity and diversity in esports, specifically for women. It includes initiatives such as a dedicated platform for women's CS:GO teams to compete globally, showcasing their talent and promoting diversity within the esports community (Duran, 2020).

The tournament also offers online qualifiers in various regions. The tournament includes online qualifiers in four regions: Europe, Asia, North America, and South America. This ensures diverse geographical representation and access to aspiring female gamers worldwide. The competition structure is fair, using a double-elimination format for group stages and conducting matches behind closed doors to create a competitive environment. This allows teams multiple opportunities to compete and advance without external distractions (ESL FACEIT GROUP, 2019).

The tournament benefits from collaborations with industry leaders. ESL, Intel, and AnyKey have partnered to promote diversity and inclusivity in esports. By leveraging the resources and expertise of these leaders, the tournament's impact is increased, reaching a wider audience and driving positive change within the esports ecosystem (ESL Gaming, 2019).

The initiatives for inclusivity include:

- Platform for women's CS:GO teams
- Online qualifiers in multiple regions
- Fair competition structure
- Collaborations with industry leaders

GIRLGAMER Festival

The subject chosen for the benchmarking analysis is the GIRLGAMER Esports Festival, an event that celebrates women's competitiveness in esports. The festival provides a supportive and inclusive environment for female gamers to showcase their skills, free from discrimination and harassment (GIRLGAMER Esports Festival Case Study, 2018).

Strategy implementation

The GIRLGAMER Esports Festival employs several strategies to promote inclusivity for women in esports.

The festival aims to provide a safe space for female gamers to compete comfortably without fear of harassment or discrimination. These rules are enforced to maintain fair competition and ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. To achieve this, it has established rules and regulations that cover player conduct, competition requirements, and disciplinary actions for misconduct.

The festival promotes women's participation in esports through social media and community engagement efforts. It highlights their talent and achievements on a global scale. The GIRLGAMER Challenge offers female gamers the chance to show their abilities online (GIRLGAMER, 2023).

The GIRLGAMER Esports Festival used a social media strategy to increase engagement and brand awareness. The strategy was implemented across multiple platforms, including

Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Targeted promotions on Twitter, which included both paid campaigns and organic content, resulted in a significant increase in impressions and engagement rates. Similarly, customised content on Facebook and Instagram led to notable spikes in post interactions and profile visits. The provided text shows that the promotional initiatives were effective. This is supported by the noteworthy outcomes, including a peak of 548,309 Twitter impressions and substantial growth across other metrics (GIRLGAMER Esports Festival Case Study, 2018).

The initiatives for inclusivity include:

- A gender-exclusive event
- Clear rules and regulations
- Promotion of women in esports

Ally's Women Open (Rocket League)

Ally is a leading financial services company which is entering the esports industry by sponsoring the Ally Women's Open tournament in partnership with the women's esports platform, Radiant. This event is a reflection of Ally's commitment to gender equality and their dedication to distributing media spending equally between men's and women's sports, including esports (Seshimo, n.d.).

The tournament highlights consist out of:

- *The importance of gender equality in esports*: led by an all-female management team, the Ally Women's Open represents a significant step forward in promoting gender equality in esports. The Ally Women's Open is a Rocket League tournament that aims to create a level playing field for all athletes.
- *Visibility*: the tournament will kick off on March 26th and will be aired on Rocket League's official Twitch channel, likely increasing its visibility and viewership. Viewers can earn in-game items through drops during the streams, which enhances engagement (Nordland, 2023).
- *Amateur and semi-pro players*: Ally aims to support amateur and semi-pro players in the Rocket League community through a Community Empowerment initiative (Dshae, 2023).

Besides that Ally has also expanded its collaboration with Rocket League Esports beyond the Ally Women's Open. As an official sponsor of the North American RLCS, Ally's branding will be prominently featured in RLCS broadcasts during the Winter and Spring splits, along with ad placements and broadcast integrations (Nordland, 2023).

Bridget Sponsky, Executive Director of Brand and Partnerships at Ally, emphasises that this sponsorship provides a platform to engage with fans and players while also opening doors for female competitors. Ally's entry into esports aims to promote greater representation and empowerment across all levels of Rocket League competition (Nordland, 2023).

The initiatives for inclusivity include:

- Promotion of gender equality in esports
- Enhancing visibility

Supporting amateur and semi-pro players

1.3 Expert interviews

Contacts

Name	Function	Contact
Marina Tognoli	Operation Project Lead at Chamo Games Former Riot Employee (Esports and Player Support department)	mgtogno@gmail.com
Tanja Reither (Escape)	Former Esports Player	tanja.reither@gmail.com
Lara Lunardi	Head of Creative at SK Gaming	laralunardi@gmail.com
Lara Clergue	Head of Esports at Webedia	@akitau on Discord

Note:

When recording these interviews, my own microphone did not get picked up. So I could only transcribe the interviewee's replies.

Marina Tognoli

[INTRODUCTION]

Well, I'm Marina. I work at a European-based, small studio now called Chamo Games. I worked at Riot Games for nine years. And before that I work for Gravity Entertainment which is a game company.

I have studied and lived in Korea. I graduated in Korea and I'm in the game industry since 2004, like 20 years.

[BACKGROUND & ROLE]

My role is operations project lead. I deal with basically everything that needs to be done to make things work out, you know like if nobody is there to do it, I do it, because we are very new. We the company was founded in September and we have about like 20 employees and we only got like employees now we are like getting funding to to make our game to you know make it happen.

So it's my first time in a small company and it's pretty cool, it's pretty neat, I like! And before that I worked in eSports. I worked at Riot Games game company and worked at Riot in the player support. It was an investigation, and I worked in the investigation department.

I would investigate hackers, fraud and chargeback in credit cards, things like that as well as the usage of elo boosting and elo jobs. That brought me closer to pro players because they would refer with that and some of them would do that in their spare time which is illegal.. so they got banned.

So I moved to eSports after after six months in player support I was already assisting in eSports but then one year after I joined Riot I was officially put in the eSports department and in the eSports department I started as a player manager and then I was promoted and I became a competitive operations when I left.

Before that in 2004 I worked for Gravity. I was a game master. It was like my first job in the game industry, and it was amazing. I loved the game, that's why I kept applying for the

company they finally hired me. And it as someone who played the game to be able to be game master, it was like a dream and it was very chill, because I would do the night shift because you have to have game masters in line for 24 hours so I would do the night shift which was also great because it was just me and the whole company.

[BACKSTORY ABOUT MOTIVATION]

And then after that because I would - I was, I am Brazilian I'm half Brazilian half Italian, so I have the Italian passport and the Brazilian passport. So at the time I was living in Brazil with my mom and I met a few Korean people who were technicians from Gravity and then I talked to them because I was not into getting to college and stuff because, I was like I was its a waste of time I just want to work like normal work and play games because I was a huge gamer like I don't want to work from nine to five, it's stupid just want to work half time and play games it's enough for me.

So I was like that. But then after working at Gravity I met the people in Korea who were responsible for making the game run smoothly and talked to them a lot like "what did you do? how did you get this position?" because they were not only working games but they were also travelling the world and helping the region so I was like "this is pretty cool, pretty cool job" and they told me not to do college they told me like yeah college doesn't really matter you should learn languages like learn Korean because at the time 2004 the gaming industry was basically sourcing people from Korea all the time the art was Korean, Square Enix everything from Final Fantasy IX and onwards was Korean made and everything like EA also buying Korean people to get Korean people to do their stuff because it was cheaper at the time and they're they're very talented, like if you there's a game that was launched now there's one guy that made and the game is absolutely amazing. And Koreans don't really spoke English.

It was not very common at the time, so it was a huge like they they told me we only got this position because you can't speak English it has nothing to do with the college and major and so if you learn Korean you'll be able to communicate with Korean artists and Korean developers and then you will be able to get ahead regardless of your major.

[KOREAN EXPERIENCE]

So I was like cool, save money, prepare to go to Korea but then I got I was going to stay there for three months I was very optimistic. I thought I was going to go to Korea for three months and learn Korean. I was wrong, like you cannot learn Korean in three months. It's insane to think that but I thought I could. I don't know where that person went. I'm not that confident anymore. I was at the time but during my process of getting visa and harassing the Korean embassy to go to Korea like how do I go there because it's 2004 there was not much you know there's not much in the internet and stuff but it was not 2004 it was later because that was a long time that's like 2007 or something and the guy was like I called him so much that we became kind of familiar because he knew I was going to call he knew I was going to call I was going to call every week he was like hey Marina we had a scholarship but it's closed you cannot join anymore so sad then he told me everything that is needed like next year you can apply I was like cool so I might apply but I had no patience and overconfidence low on patience now I'm more patience less confidence but okay and I went there to apply for the visa anyways and go for three months because that's the amount of money I had at the time.

And I went there and he saw me he passed by he's like are you Marina I was like yeah he's like you're not Korean I was like I know and he was like you can apply for another scholarship there's time there's three days left I was like what do you mean he's like there's a specific scholarship for foreigners that are not Korean descendants that it ends this week so if you go and you know run and get your shit together and like we can but it's five years

not three months I'm like I'm down like five years free college it's okay even better right so I applied and I did not have all the documents because they wanted TOEFL there was like a lot of things I had no clue that was but then I did a whole bunch of interviews and then they ended up recruiting me even though I had a few documents missing the consulate thought that because I was so like eager to go and like they felt like it was a safer bet to send me than to send other people or more like I don't know maybe they really like my personality.

I think yeah, it's better. I always do well on interviews, you know, job interviews. So that's why I always - they're like, when I joined Riot I didn't want player support, actually I hate player support. But I wanted esports so I need to get myself there first and then I can make it work. I can go to esports and in Korea when I was living in Korea I ended up falling in love with esports. So I started going to the games and watching the games and becoming a fan and it was 2012 or so and esports was like just coming back because it was a big deal in the early 2000s then it bankrupted itself as it does usually now it's bankrupting itself again but not so much, no it's not.

[ESPORTS]

And esports ecosystems are made by funding, and teams don't usually make that money back to the teams, but that's from team to team. There's a lot of teams that can do the money back because they're well managed, but most teams start out as five guys who play games, and then they become a huge team because they win tournaments and they are talented, but they don't know anything about running a team, so it often goes in a way that there's a lot of data that is not, for example, something that Riot did a lot.

Esports has more views than the Super Bowl, this is a common highlight on newspapers and news everywhere. They say, "Oh, it's a world's champion had more views than the Super Bowl, okay if you get the online views of Super Bowl and you get all the streams in the whole world of Riot, sum them up it is more views, but if you take the TV audience of Super Bowl, you cannot even compare, you know." But they do like, "Oh, but the main sentence is Riot stream has more views than the Super Bowl stream, it does." So people, the investors are like, "Oh, it's bigger than Super Bowl, it's not because Super Bowl is on TV in the US, people watch Super Bowl on the TV has nothing to do with streaming, not the same.

They compare and they like, "Oh, we are so like huge numbers, sponsors, blah, blah, blah," and then people go like, "Oh, we cannot miss this opportunity like cryptocurrency shit, you know." They give a lot of money to teams, and the teams don't make them money back, and there's a lot of things in Esports that it's not measurable, a lot of like things that Riot used to deal with is that the budget for Riot Esports was not a budget that had a return, we never knew how much of that money was being wisely invested, they invested a lot in Esports because they wanted to go close to players, they wanted to make the game seem like a serious game to have the reputation of a company that really cares about Esports, so it was all about the reputation of the company getting closer to players, which is a very noble goal, but it was marketing, it was not actually putting the Esports ecosystem on the front of the because Riot basically monopolised the industry, so you don't see other companies doing high level tournaments of League of Legends because the main League of Legends players are stuck with Riot via contract of exclusives, and Riot makes a scale like the contract of the pro player. I don't even know if I can say this because it's like the pro player is exclusive with Riot while Riot has tournaments going on, right, so if a team from Latam, like a Mexico team, gets eliminated first round, cannot play other tournaments while Worlds is not over, so you have until MSI, then you have one month, less than a month, second, like a spring season starts, summer season starts, and then you have Worlds, and Worlds ends in late October, and then late October League of Legends goes on the pre-season, they change everything, and they make the champions there become unbalanced, and there's a lot of things, and then January, the season starts, so the other companies who want to have tournaments of

League of Legends with high tier teams, they have less than a month in May, and they have a month and a half during the holidays in which the game itself is not appropriate for competitive tournaments because the game is unbalanced, they're testing things, they're resetting the queue, and stuff like that, right, so and every tournament Riot has to approve as well, so every person who does tournament outside of Riot, they have to apply and be like, hey, we're doing this tournament, and Riot has to approve, so it's very like not really good for the ecosystem. Valorant is a bit different because there's a lot of tournaments that Valorant is being present in, but League of Legends basically is dying now because Riot decided that we're not making money, let's stop, and now the players are leaving teams, and they don't have anything else because there is no ecosystem because Riot was the only, you know, like the kid that owns the ball and everything, he's like I'm not playing anymore, he takes the ball and goes home, and then everybody's like whatever is the same, so that's one of the reasons I wanted to leave because I was getting frustrated because of that, so that's the story.

[QUESTION ABOUT: DOES YOUR FUNCTION/ROLE TASKS DO SOMETHING FOR WOMEN SPECIFICALLY?]

I have only hired women since I joined. When I joined, I was, for years actually, the only woman in a department. So whenever we would, it's not the only woman in a department of 10 people, I was the only woman in a department of 80 people. So whenever we would do events outside, I always had the room for myself because I was the only woman. So it was great in that sense, I liked it, but you know, I was the type of girl that didn't really care about gender, but I really cared about how women are treated, how can I say? I'm not, I was not the type to be political about it, like, 'Oh, women should, like, we should hire women.' I was not like that. I was like, if you work hard enough, you can get anywhere because I did. So I was like, yeah, it's bullshit, but I was really sensitive about the way women are treated because I have worked as a model in Korea for, I worked five years as a model in Brazil, that's how I saved money to go to Korea, and I, in Korea, I got recruited again, worked as a model there, and made money like that. And it's a very shit profession, to be honest, like, I don't like it. You are treated like something, you're not treated like human, and you see that a lot in the gamer culture. And to be, like, a girl would send, like, a ticket complaining about something, again they'll get her email, they research her online, see if she's hot, these are the type of things that made me really mad, they used to do that a lot, and I started to call that out and be mad about it, the esports guys were not like that, they were older men, they were more, they thought that was bullshit as well, so I felt really welcomed in the team at first.

[GENDER BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE]

[Cut off audio] ..Why Raya has the best payments in that month. I was like, "So what?", but this is not okay. I was like, "why is it not?" Okay, she worked. And she negotiated, and she made that amount of money. It's like, no, but she cannot make more money than like, the boss or whatever. It's like, of course you can because you work for it. What's your issue? Oh, I cannot hear you. And he's like, okay, and then he left. And then I found out that he made a very serious meeting with the managers, they're like the high managers, and talk to them about how this happened. And then they call out the central team or events team just to speak about a contractor who was just hauling players out like, very minor role, you know, they had a whole meeting between leadership to discuss her payment. And then they had the nerve, the audacity to call me and tell me, "Hey, we actually talked with the leadership. And what you did is alright, actually, the central Riot team told us, that's their policy." And I was like, "I was telling you, it was their policy all the time, then you guys, did you guys like went behind my back? To see if I was like, getting money on the outside through my contractors or something like that?" No, we are not accusing. But we verified everything. Yeah, but it's all right, because it's actually policy. And I was like, that's weird. They got so upset that a girl like a 23 year old woman was making more money than they were like, are

the same. They were personally offended about it. And I was like, "Ah, this is a gender issue." Like they're jerks. They are not like, they don't think women are on the same level, they don't think women should be compensated the same as that because they are superior.

So women, "we love women" but below, is not the same. Women are great, and the team as long as they have lower, you know, roles, and lower income. So this is actually super bullshit. And it's something that pisses me off, and I'm more aware of, but it can also ruin your motivation at work. He can make you paranoid about everything, you know, so I'm trying to work on that in this new company. And I hope so too. I'm not in esports anymore.

So in this company, I have a lot. There's a lot of women, and they're very competent. And we have women in power positions, too. Yeah, that's why, in fact, that's one of the reasons I joined because the founders are male. There are two male founders, but they knew about my story at Riot. And they contacted me. And he was like, yeah, like we are trying to do something that's like Riot, because we really want the game industry to get better. And to be more diverse. They specifically say that, I did not get into the conversation saying I want diversity. I did not. I was quiet. But that was important to me. So I was like, checking companies being like, if I'm ready to go through the same shit again, you know, then they were the ones who approached the subject and told me so I was like, I gotta get this. So I got it. And I'm really happy. I joined last September.

[GAMING HABITS AND TOXICITY]

Um, as a woman, I would make a group of friends in the game that are close friends, and I will stick with them for the rest of my life, you know. I don't usually play soloQ with voice on things like that. Just to protect myself. I feel like that's very common among women. My first time experiencing solo queue was in League of Legends. I used to play RPG games like MMR were my favourites. Skyrim things like that, like a story base, quest based world building. That's what I like in games. So I play those types of games usually with like not an obviously female nickname, as well. So people don't know. Or people assume you are a guy. I did it when I was a teenager, after I stopped doing that, and I had a female character. But as a female character, people would often think I was a guy because I played well. Which is also... I was, yeah, I don't really like to play support. I like to play damage dealers. So they'll be like "you shemale shemale," Oh, they would like to be so mad at me, when I like chaos and stuff like that. So I would cause chaos on purpose. I would do like stupid shit. And because I was a Game Master at (?) I was like they never punished me, because I was the one punishing so I could do whatever I want. However, in Riot Games, they were really serious about it. They fired a guy because he was very toxic in game so I could lose my job if I was toxic. It was so hard to do. But I try my best. My friends are pretty toxic. So I was okay with that because I could have my, my toxicity, you know, through them. I was like, Oh, he's getting mad. I was livid and my friends started screaming at the guy like, yeah, come on, let's do this. But I was quiet and I couldn't be toxic so I had to learn how to be nice and not talk. But I would still talk a lot. I would just go around and I was just not toxic. I was like free Nicole's like, walking the line, you know? And player support contacted me a few times like "hey, Marina, you talk a lot, right?" Like, yeah, I do... "Maybe you shouldn't like now." I can't. It's not. But I try my best and, and League of Legends. I would play with a duel, you know, to avoid frustration because I cannot not type. People are like "why pro players got banned because of that? Why prep players blah, blah, blah. Why are they so stupid?" And I always understand them because like, yeah, I get it. I'm just saying like, it's not something you can control when you see something already done. So yeah. And yeah, that's the thing I do. I avoid voices, I avoid female nicknames and have a close group of friends. So when we have to play FPS games, games that are more aggressive. I'm with my team. And I feel comfortable playing badly because I don't play FPS really well. So I feel comfortable not playing really well. When I don't feel so self conscious.

[GAMING AND ITS BENEFITS]

I think everybody plays games actually. I feel like there's a lot of prejudice against people who play cell phone games, like travel town merge games. And I think is bullshit. I love those little games. They're fun as hell, like I'm playing a merge game that's like, it's like it's it looks like it's from the deep web. Like, it's so shit. And I love the little game. Like there's no objective. The only objective is to merge, merge stuff and make cuter stuff. It's fun as hell, I love it. I play every weekend, there's an event and I'm like, on it the whole weekend. No, it's my thing.

First time I finished the event, because you have to finish by blessing the land. It's like you bless the land and the land like I finished in the first time. So like, Yes, this is it. I did. And it was so fun. And I feel like these sort of games, like peaceful games that are organized, help with anxiety. It's like female audiences, but they don't call themselves gamers. Because they play those games. They like oh, they're not real games. But that's a male driven narrative. Oh, you don't, of course, the people who made this stupid farm game are the same guy who studies as much as the guy who's doing Kung Fu strikes with the same discipline is the same. Right? They're doing it. Same amount of work.

You see Animal Crossing. The amount of girls who play Animal Crossing obsessively. I have a few friends who started to play on the pandemic and they're still playing every day like what the hell girl, like enough is enough. You know like you're ready you had all the villagers you don't need more like you rotated all the villagers like, what is my dream village like? You know, but it's amazing. And there are games as well that are really for younger people who are really good for their development like Roblox and Minecrafters make Minecraft shit that is done by 12 year olds and is like this insane. Like how he did that?

So there's a book that I read when I was working at Riot. It's called everything bad is good for you. It's really big. It shows kind of like what if people play games all the time. And then suddenly you're reading books. Because people are like, "Ah, you, you play too many games." And then there was something written in the book that really spoke to me saying, like, these people, they look at that blank page all day, and they see a story, they read a story that's already done, and there's no interaction with the narrative. And the story happens and they have no power over it, they have no action over it. And it's just, it's bad for you, because it's written in it, it makes your eyes tired, and blah, blah, blah, is the same argument, then for games, because games are interactive.

So I feel like women are like, if you consider mobile games, women are already a majority of players right now. And we should be more welcoming to women, especially working markets. Yeah. And like, no marketing, but economics. Women are like, we spend money like we don't, we like to spend for anxiety, you know, like when I buy something I feel better. Like so I feel like it's bullshit to say that women are not gamers and stuff like that, because they totally are like, they're obsessive with like, the games like Animal Crossing and stuff - Skyrim, the amount of women who play Skyrim is crazy they love Skyrim.

[ATTRACTING WOMEN TO COMMUNITIES]

Yeah, I feel like if it's a community that says like, it's for girls, it becomes political, and many girls don't want to join because they think it's marketing or like, they're like, I don't want to say bad things to men, because that's bullshit. Most of my friends are men. So a lot of girls, things like that. But those same girls, they're hesitating to get into new communities, because they would either be over sexualized and hated on and stuff like that. Or they would just not be treated well, right. So there's two possibilities. There's just the possibility that you'll be welcome and you have a blessing but that's not what our experience tells us right? So I feel like the way to attract more women to a specific commute would be to have female

representation. So there's like the mods for example, there are women who are mods and the same amount at least or the person who does the announcements could be a girl like people who are in the position of like, "Hey, I'm here it's safe for me, if it's for me safe it's for you as well." And it would be something that would encourage more women to join and we tend to call other girls to join us to find a cool community that's fun.

[EVENTS INITIATED OR JOINED]

If I organised or joined? Yeah, I did. I did. Many events. When I was for Women in Gaming. Now, Women in STEM professions. I went to - I was not speaking at the event, a friend of mine was speaking and it was a friend of mine who was a female pro player. I have, I was a product lead on game changers, which is female worldwide and I brought the team to work. I consider that a female oriented event or competition.

[GENDER ISSUES IN GAMING AND MARKETING]

There was other like - there were a few like events for women that I joined. I spoke a lot and raised issues and became the issue. And yeah, so like in the corporate world, there's a lot of female or like, at first I joined, because I thought and then when you realise they are doing something so that they can put on a PowerPoint to tell people that they are doing something, it's not they're doing something to do something to solve the problem. They are doing something to tell people that they are doing something so that they cannot be judged because they are doing something. So it's the wrong reason is the same reason why Marvel includes included the that stupid scene on endgame with the women like she's not allowed, like, shut the fuck up. She's like, she's kept in my vote, she doesn't need help. And much less did the whole logistics of what the fuck are you guys doing here? Like, once you come in from the portal a minute ago, like what the fuck, you know? Like, it's bullshit. And you know, they're doing that to manipulate us. You know? So we are like, Oh, my god, "we like women," this is bullshit. And I felt weird when I saw that scene. And only later I realised, yeah, it was being manipulated as a woman. They're using our gender for marketing. So they take something that's very sensitive for us, very political, very real. And they turn into a marketing tool. But meanwhile, the actresses are not being paid enough. The actress is that they have one scene, but you know, Captain Marvel movies shit, because they don't write it well. So yeah, besides me.

[WOMEN EVENTS: WHAT COULD IMPROVE?]

I will talk about both events, I will talk because those were external events. One event was in a university, there was doing this seminar about women in gaming. It was hella funny to me. Because they invite like, you'll know that men made that shit because they invited women to speak who are women in the games, industry, sports and stuff. And they were all pro player streamer, and something like that. These girls are not prepared to answer questions about gender issues. And one of the girls like, when I'm on my period, I cannot even play because if I play, I would just like, oh my god, you know, and my boyfriend knows about it, because my boyfriend is a pro player, right? So I am a pro player as well... But girl, why would you say something like that like? And they were saying shit like that. And at the same time, there was a few guys in the audience, like there was only two guys, and both of them do not fail in making stupid questions. They're like, after you race to the top. "What are you going to do? What will you do for women?" And then there was one person there who knew what she was talking about. She was like, What do you mean, I'm gonna do shit like and what the fuck with everybody. Everybody issues now. It's like, she tried to explain to him and he's like, "Oh, but I don't know." But like, and I was like, laughing so much. It was so funny to me. Because I know like, there's nothing like, it's, it's important, but you have to go through that. You know, like, this guy has to ask a stupid question. And then people tell him, "Hey, your question is very stupid." And then he goes home and researches it. Then he learned.

So if you gotta go through that, but it's funny. It's so funny because it never fails. There's always someone who does, like say something stupid. And I'm not saying just men, like a lot of women do too. Because it's not like a gender issue. Right? It's equality and everybody has - everybody has to say about it, you know, and the *Game Changers* was an event that I really liked. It was really well thought of that Riot made a point of hiring only women to run the events backstage. So usually, on Counter Strike, for example, Did you have an event that was like for women? Wow, it's for me. But then the girls get there. Her manager is a man. The team owner is a man, the coach is a man. Everybody backstage is a man and man, man, man, they don't feel good. They don't feel like we are just here to be the poster. Like it's not really female oriented.

[WORKING TOGETHER WITH MEN / WOMEN]

It's just like a base doing something for children, like you know, but Riot made a point to hire women to do stage managing. Riot usually has a lot of powerful women who leave the company because they don't treat them well. But they get into Riot thinking that they would be treated well. So eventually I keep in there a few places you go. There's a lot of powerful women who have a voice, like do this do that is very vocal about stuff. And I'm backstage, there's a lot of women working. The only roles that were not women were roles that they couldn't find a woman to do. So that was great, in my opinion. Because that's not like if you really want to do something. Of course, raising visibility is important. But how, how many decades? Are we going to raise visibility? Is booking visibility gonna pay my bills? Just, you know, so we had the opportunity to gain women to learn how to do league ups, to learn how to be a referee, to a whole lot of things. And it was awesome. I don't know if they're doing that now. But they did then. And it was like, I have been going to events for nine years. With boys. I was usually the only woman so I was like, I would take eight guys. And them and I travelled together. So when you travel with a bunch of men. I see things you know, like, I think about war, I think about stuff and I'm like yeah, I think I can relate, you know, because like dealing with teenagers on a roll like a trip abroad. is so funny, but at the same time, it's exhausting. Because you have to be the babysitter. Don't fucking - it's fucking COVID - Why are you leaving the hotel not like, it's not like this with girls.

Oh my god, paradise. Paradise. Funny, fun, organised, makeup tips. Everything, shopping together. It's amazing. I would, you know, female lead like tournaments for the rest of my life. They are nice. They're polite. They are punctual, which is something guys are nice and polite too. They're not punctual. I don't know what's up with them. There's something going on. They have like they forget time. You know, but amazing. I love the one thing that was different between the female at like a female tournament and male tournament. It is something that I think a lot of people don't think about and it's really silly food rest because they're short and sometimes their feet don't don't hit the ground. So they need their foot resting on the gaming chair and time for makeup. Boys hate doing makeup. They don't like doing makeup but female players need at least 30 minutes extra prep time to do their makeup, and to take them to the makeup artists, and they would coach their makeup art like oh I don't like that. I like these makeup artists. They were having a blast as well. They love working with the girls because they guys are like "Oh I heard it, I don't like it"

[GENDER REPRESENTATION IN GAMING AND STIGMA AROUND BEING A MOBILE GAMER]

I am a little bit biased. I really love games. I wouldn't say like oh, I'm not satisfied because there's no female representation. If I don't like the plus 1000 armor that's just a bikini, I can just not play the game and play another game, like Last of Us, which has a strong female lead who's not sexualized, right? So there's like you can choose the game you want. So what could change is to.. I feel like this is mainly something that should be done by your department. Yeah, it's department is already doing what they can do. Like, there's a lot of females, like our art directors, who are women. And there's a lot of females who lead our

departments in other companies that make a point of making characters who have substance, either male or female. And I feel like that's what's important.

And I feel like what brings a female point of view, like, because I feel like there's a lot of females playing games, and they don't feel comfortable saying they're gamers. It's because there's a lot of male centric narrative on the pop. It can make people think that, "Animal Crossing is not a real game. Blah, blah, blah is not a real game. You're not a gamer." If you don't play shooting games, you're not a gamer. Like she's eight hours a day on Animal Crossing. She's not a gamer? Like, come on, like, the amount that your level of gamers or the amount of games you play, you know, all the games. Now, if we are, like, take away the stigma, that is also bad for boys. The gamer guy, you know, likes the stigma like a gamer, Fayan is a gamer. Does he look like he lives in the basement and he's fucking dead inside? No, he's a pretty normal person. And if we manage to take that stigma away from men and from women, if women feel like they are comfortable saying, "I'm a gamer, I play a lot of games. I play on my cell phone all day, I play Candy Crush, I don't give a fuck." That's the game I like. I'm a gamer because of that, you know, like, I feel like the games industry would expand. And these silent players would be seen, not just women, men as well. There's a lot of men who are like fathers, and the thing they do is get home and play game. You know, and they don't say their game or they're gonna replay the game every day. You are a gamer, everybody knows. And I feel like the business side, like, let's raise this issue. Let's show that, you know, gamers are cool as well. That's something else trying to do with these parts, you know, with my players making them look really cool. Like they're the guy who plays professionally is not a weirdo. You know, he's like a cool guy who is another athlete I can do anybody else which is true. And yeah, I feel like that was the main issue of newspapers when I started that everybody was like, why are you not playing as part if you're sitting down like shut up? You know, like, shut up. It's it is is fucking cool. You should watch.

[GAMING INDUSTRY DIVERSITY]

People should not feel embarrassed by playing games. It is a main form of entertainment nowadays. It is not something that is niche, it's the main entertainment at the moment. Right? It's bigger than the movie industry. Second thing is that games are truly international. Films industry is dominated by American culture. English speaking. You have the Baldurs Gate last year, was the game of the year. It was made in Sweden. It's not English centric, like it's not. America is not you know, so you have a bunch of games and they are truly like multicultural. And you have the opportunity to bring different points of view. And I'm not only speaking about - I'm speaking about Brazilian, Latin America African, I have an African guy on my team. He has his point of view, immigrants. Everybody can join a gaming and work on it. Because every region has their own talents. And you have people who are very talented in Brazil. Art and concept artists in Brazil are one of the most sought after in the world. Then you have game developers in Korea, who are one of them, like web developers in Korea, and in Japan, you have a whole bunch of people you have in Europe, you have rising of small studios in Europe, that is like dominating right now. And then you have in the US, you have also a lot of small studios that are growing right now. And most of the western game companies are owned by Chinese companies. So it's truly multicultural. Right. So that's something that should be spoken more about. I think it is entertainment, and it's truly global. Everybody has a voice. Yeah, I think that's it.

[WORKPLACE DYNAMICS]

Yeah, but if you want to join the corporate world, you should shoot a shot yourself, it doesn't matter if you're a woman or a man, I feel like it's not so much about being a woman or a guy. It's about being a type of person. Right. So if you are the type of person to speak up to raise issues to talk, you will get backlash for it, even if you're a man. But if you're silent you can be silenced, as well, and that's also bad. So you will feel bad like this. You have to be yourself. Just be yourself. Future reputation as you like, Hey, I do the right thing. I'm a good person,

you know that you're not going to be a bitch and you're not going to be mean. Because you don't need to because you're competent at your job. People will have no choice but to accept you. They have no choice because nobody else can do it and, you know, like, what they're gonna do. They want someone that's good, and they want to get the job done, they will call you. And eventually, like right now, I mean a company that I don't know yet because I'm here for like seven months. I have not been through the promotion stages, like because it's not a corporation. It's a small company. I feel pretty good. Feel like welcome. But I feel like it's a good experience because I've been saying these things, but I was there for nine years. And those nine years worked great, except for a few situations, but it was great. And I loved it.

And the main thing is the people who are supposed to be my equals and treat me equally. They're not nice to me all the time. They were not nice. But I had to deal with a bunch of players, men, a bunch of egos. Men who have really high ego like 300,000 followers and shit like that. And I was so pleasantly surprised because they were also so kind, so nice, and so respectful. Never had a situation that I felt bad. And there was never a situation where I saw them treating other women with disrespect as well. I had a few instances of ex girlfriends contacting me and trying to say bad things about them and giving me sprains because they knew I could punish players right? So they gave me screenshots of them saying bad things to them. Then I go to the player and be like "why this bullshit or she posts this like what the hell man?" I talked to them. And they're like, okay, so I have a lot of hope. Because these guys are the future right? So these guys are the ones who are going to be there eventually. And yeah, I have a lot of hope, because they're really nice.

They are really competent and they don't take bullshit and people are realising that so in the European Riot esports office you have majority of female product managers, for example in esports which is like there was like when I started there was one girl in Europe now it's seven product leads, and two guys, so it's seven women and two men and the two men that are there are the gaps which is a little bit lower than product so you know things are changing so don't be negative. Be positive, you will be the change you know that we want to see eventually.

Lara Lunardi

[INTRODUCTION]

I am Lara, and I am currently the head of creative at SK Gaming.

What that means is I take care of a lot of random creative tasks and oversee the team that creates our videos, our photo assets, social media, etc. So it's a very interesting and fulfilling job, because at the same time that I get to be their head of creative, I also get to work as a content creator, and it's just fun. It's in the gaming space.

Yeah, I've been in the gaming space forever. I got a degree in game development, and I graduated 2017, 2018, I don't remember, sometime around that. A long time ago. And ever since, I have been working in the gaming space, and mostly in the entertainment for eSports part, rather than the development itself. But that's fine. That's what I like the most anyway.

Yeah, so I grew up with my parents being gamers themselves, so it was really natural for me to just come back home from school and play some video games with them, you know, whenever they would come back from work, and that obviously fostered my own interest for my own solo campaigns after, you know, I wasn't playing with them anymore. And in school, you know, all my friends were kind of like the gamers, and guys and girls, always like a good balance. And I knew that I wanted to do something with gaming once I was done with high school.

Now, I grew up in Brazil, so it's not, back then, it wasn't really an option to get a degree in game development. So I asked my parents to, you know, to take me abroad to see if I could try something out in the United States, right? And I got my degree there, and so far, it worked out. Yeah, well, I mean, my role is like, more managerial and creative at the same time.

So we talk to designers or to video producers, I come up with scripts, and we make the productions and we put the content out there, right? And on my own content creation, that's my own thing, I just, I mostly do cosplay and gaming related stuff, so it's pretty creative as well.

[WOMEN IN GAMING]

And when it comes to inclusivity, I think it's like **my own personal agenda**, because very much like you, when I was in university, I faced the same issues. And you know, I was, it was me and another girl that graduated in a class of 17 dudes.

So yeah, you know, like, the discrepancy was already there. And I had, like, witnessed that from, obviously, way before university, but more strongly in university and in, in the working field that I was in as well. So SK was a company that like, had a lot of room for, we trust you to do whatever you want.

So we get to do a lot of cool stuff for diversity, because that's my personal agenda, you know, and they have their own, and they have their own inclusivity programs with telecom, and that's great. But like, **you know, like the mentorships and things like that, that comes from us, right?** And yeah, like the events that we put out, etc. This is all stemming from, from us.

And **SK actually has a lot of women nowadays**, like back when I joined, it was just me and two other women. And now we're eight, I want to say, like, we were like a third of the team. So I think that's pretty healthy.

And not not including the players themselves. So yeah. Oh, definitely. Oh, it's still, it's still difficult, because, you know, at the end of the day, the people making the big decisions, like who do we hire? Or who do we keep? Or who are we going to nurture and give opportunities to? It's still, I would say, like 95% men, right? **And they still have a stigma.** And it's still hard, like, you know, and I'm not gonna lie and say that it's perfect. It's not, but it's like the women that are below them that get to push for better opportunities for marginalised gender, right? And racial inclusivity as well, right? I don't think that mostly the men at the top usually will think about that.

At SK, it's funny, because like our **CEO, I kind of get the vibe that he does care.** And that's nice. Like, he has his own, like, he's had like a women's roster since, I think, 2003 was the first time that they had a women's team at SK, which is really, like, back in the day was unheard of, you know? So I think that's kind of cool. But yeah, it really depends where you go. Bigger companies tend to be more sexist and more brutal when it comes to hiring women.

And they screen them more than they would screen a man, for an example. They will look over their social media, their, you know, whatever kind of note of behaviour that they can get outside of just a job interview and judge you based on that. That's very standard.

So yeah. It's scary. Definitely. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think it's, there are two things, right? Like it's **trendy to be diverse.** So a lot of companies will be diverse just for the, you know, to

join into the 'promotion of women', exactly. And as sad as that is, that still benefits us. Because at the end of the day, these are the people that are going to end up getting a shot anyway.

And at the end of the day, you can take this experience that you got from, let's say, a program or like an internship or like an actual role or playing for a team. And like, there are not a lot of women teams out there and you get to apply this for the future generations. It's like very slow growth.

Just like any gender or, you know, like racial inequality, like it takes decades to actually make progress, unfortunately. And it's not going to be different with esports. It's useful that we have like these, you know, programs that allow us to have better opportunities. But is it enough? I'm not sure, but it is what we have. So we've got to make the most of it, if that makes sense. Does that answer your question?

[EVENTS / INITIATIVES]

I think, I think for teams it is even more difficult than joining the workforce because there are not a lot of opportunities. It's a very toxic environment. The reality of the matter is that both for guys and girls, it's quite toxic.

And because there are not enough opportunities, it can be really brutal because everyone's fighting for that one opportunity. So it creates a very interesting landscape to tread on, right? I think that, let's see, like for competitive, it's like it's hard because you have to be really good. You have to be really excelling. You have to have the right contacts. You have to know, you know, oh, this team is having an open call for a bootcamp. That'll happen, right? Even if it's like lower, lower than, you know, second or third division.

That's where you have to start, which is fine. Like most guys start in like lower divisions anyway. It's just an easier climb for them because they train with each other. They have this whole ecosystem around them. And this is something that the women don't usually have. A lot of guys don't want to scrim with women and they don't want to, you know, like have this professional relationship with them. And that really hinders the progress of how women can progress in the competitive field because ultimately if they train the same and if they have the same opportunities, I don't think there should be any discrepancy. But yeah, it's rough. But there are opportunities more than, I don't know, like five years ago.

[DIFFERENCES IN REGIONS]

That's for sure. Especially in Europe, I would say. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I come from the United States, right? I was there for eight years before I moved to Europe. So over there, the conversation of bringing women into the workforce and into the competitive field had already started a long time before it actually had started in Europe.

I actually remember that this thing with SK having their first female or women's LoL team and having one of the first official competitions done by Riot, that should have happened ages ago. In NA, we had women's team competing in Counter-Strike way before that. And sure, granted, in Europe you had SK and a few others, but compared to, NA was always more diverse and more welcoming, and especially in the workforce as well.

They had inclusivity as the main conversation since 2015, I would say, 2013. When in Europe, I feel like it's much slower and more closed off to the white male trope. You know, I actually don't know. I would imagine that it's because the conversation had not started or been so strong before, but I also get the feeling that European people are a lot more conservative than people in the Americas. And I speak of the United States and Brazil and

South America in general, because this is where I'm from, right? And here, the inclusivity in Brazil is huge, huge. You cannot compare.

We've had women's leagues for years, we've had women in broadcast for years, women in the workforce for years, and it's different and it feels different. But in Europe, I feel like, I don't know, people might be a little bit more conservative. I remember that before I joined a certain company, I was screened and there was an issue with my brand on social media. They were like, oh, you do cosplay, that's kind of weird. We don't know if we want someone who's associated with this image. And this wasn't said to me.

This is something I learned after a roundtable meeting, and I thought that was really weird because there was never an issue back when I worked in the United States, you know? So I think it's these kinds of things. Yeah. Yeah.

[WORK ENVIRONMENT]

I think that the reason why someone joins shouldn't matter, like, as long as they want to and they create a decent environment around them, right? Whether it is because they enjoy being competitive, just like someone who plays sports, right? But I think that the environment still needs a lot of work, and while I don't play in competitive, this is just based on what I know from my players, but it can, like I said, it can be really brutal. And there's an example of this player who is extremely talented. She's an AD carry, and she was actually the first woman to get to play in an ERL.

She made it to a Balkans team. Now she plays at G2, just for context of how good she's doing, right? But she made it to a Balkans league, and she was benched shortly after. And after I spoke to some of her teammates, they mentioned that, you know, the coaching staff never liked that she had so many opinions about the game, and she had so many disagreements about how, you know, bot lane should be played.

But when other players in the team have such disagreements, because it is a team environment, there will be disagreements and fights all the time. This is just normal. She was treated differently.

So it's things like these, I think, that make a big difference. You can find a healthy and good environment from like the bigger teams, like if you're playing with SK, with Mad Lions, with G2, with bigger name teams, they tend to care a little bit more and have a bigger budget to give you a good environment to thrive in. So I think, yeah, if a woman comes to want to play competitively, they should aim to end up in one of these teams, because it will ultimately be what catapults them to a bigger success, I think.

[HOSTING OR JOINING WOMEN IN GAMING EVENTS]

Oh, I'm doing that right now. It's, yeah, I'm doing that right now. It's the first event that I am planning on my own, which is very scary.

But I posted on Twitter the other day, I was like, hey, does anyone want to do like a esports girls night where we like paint and sip wine and talk about, you know, business and stuff. And people were interested. So I'm going to follow through with that.

It should happen around April. And before, I mean, yeah, I catapulted the women's mentorship at SK Gaming, which we took three women to actually mentor for a period of three months and try to, you know, hone in their skills, help them with their portfolios, with their resumes, things like that. Not so much like live events, but more like internships and things like that.

I've always been involved in. Yeah, I have. I have. It was great. I got to attend it last year in Berlin or the year before. I don't recall. I think it was last year. And it was. It was incredible, I mean, it was it was great fun, like the girls will go at each other so hard on stage and then trash talk.

I love the trash talk. I don't know why it was just so entertaining, like the energy that they would bring to the game and the broadcast was just different. And on site, it was just like any other normal gaming event with, you know, of course there were women, but I think the majority of like the days that I attended are mostly men in the audience as well.

And they were there to watch because these girls play good and they were entertaining. And that's what matters. Right. So, yeah, I would I would love to to go to at least like see more in the past. We also did the EQUO Esports Cup last year with SK and Telekom. It was all for League of Legends, though.

So it was also very interesting. You know, it was mostly like the German scene, which is not my scene, but you could tell that it was it was like a positive experience. I guess they had like it was more of like a capacitation event, like they had panels and talks with women before the games got played. So I guess that's nice. But purely competitive, Valorant does it better, I think. Well, I mean, more money, more resources.

Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting how Riot completely neglects League of Legends in Europe, right, and just focuses on Valorant. I think it's because League has too many men working in it, honestly. And Valorant had always had more women. And that just happens when women are in the conversation. Generally, they push for other women.

[FUTURE INITIATIVES]

Yeah, I think so. I think just I think just more events for now before we think about improving them. We need more events and we need them to happen more regularly so women have more opportunities.

Yeah. Not that I know of, not in not in Europe. I haven't found the community here to be very helpful, no offense to the community here. You know, it's just in the United States, I had Girls in Gaming happening all the time, like events all over L.A. for women in tech, women in gaming in Europe. I just don't see that happen. Like in Berlin, especially, there's nothing.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think it's probably investing in more women content creators and giving them the spotlight a little bit more because women content creators, sure, they will have a largely male audience, but there will still be a large women's audience that follows them and is interested in their content.

And they're going to look at these women to be like, oh, OK, this is something I could do or this is interesting. This is something I would like to attend, an event I would like to go to. I don't know, a cosplay I would like to try, a game I would like to play. You know, it's I guess just putting more women out there, generally speaking, attracts more women, making more normal as well. Like back when I started studying gaming, there were almost. Like, no, I'm going to say normie gaming content creators, but now when you look at Valorant, like they're just like pretty girls and they do pretty girl things and then they play Valorant at night and that's their content.

And I find that amazing because the stigma of like being a gamer girl back in the day was so different. And now we can just be, you know, girly girls and be gamers. How crazy is that? Yeah.

Mm hmm. Yeah, exactly. I think if there are any more women looking to enter in this field, I hope that they don't feel discouraged by, you know, the reality of the words that are spoken, that it is a difficult field.

But that doesn't mean that it's impossible and that every woman that joins this work field has the capability of also being a change, you know, bringing in like this force of like allowing other women to enter. So I just hope that there is more sisterhood and less gatekeeping. And yeah, it's already tough out there for women to compete against the men.

[CLOSING]

Women should definitely not be competing against the other women. They should be supporting each other. Yeah, right. Not at all. No, I just hope you're I hope this answers your questions. And if you have anything additional, you can always reach out to me and good luck with your thesis.

And whenever you're, you know, looking for internships, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. If there are any opportunities with SK, I'm more than happy to pass people along. No, you did great.

Thank you. Have a great day. Bye.

Tanja Reither

[INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND]

Yes, I should be ready, hopefully. Ah, yeah, sure. Yeah, my name is Tanja, better known, I guess, in the internet or in the female gaming community as Escape.

I started playing in the female scene actively, I think, since the end of 2015 and until 2022, where I finished or like my contract ran out with SK and then we didn't renew. So basically, I've been playing since or seven years in total. I think competitive in the female scene.

Some months I had a break where I was teamless or I just made a break. But pretty much you can say I've played in the female scene seven years. So, yeah, I have some kind of experience, I would say.

[GETTING INTO GAMING]

I mean, gaming in general, I guess, I had a lot of guy friends, I guess, in my childhood. And so I started to play Pokémon a lot with my brother in my childhood. And then we had like a lot of gaming consoles, right? My mom bought us Game Boys, Nintendo 64 and GameCubes and stuff. So I guess I got introduced to video gaming as a whole in like a pretty early age. But then at some point I started just like playing video games online.

I mean, back then, when I started, I don't know, I can't even remember when I got my first PC, but I would say around like when I was 13 or 12 or 13 years old. And then back then, online gaming obviously was kind of a different direction than what it was now, because even like there weren't a lot of games to play back then as well. And at some point, I just started League of Legends, I guess.

[PLAYING IN A FEMALE TEAM]

And then one thing came to another. And I remember I joined my first all-female team pretty randomly through a Facebook post where I just saw that someone posted in a group. I can't even remember why I was in the group, if it was a female group.

It was 2015, right? So almost 10 years, I mean, nine years ago. But I just remember that I saw a Facebook post that somebody is searching a mid-laner for a project. And yeah, that's how I started my competitive career, because then I made tryouts, I got taken, and then one thing led to the other, I guess.

I mean, I guess there were a lot of reasons, right? I mean, playing since seven years was already exhausting for me, because at one point, I always had the trouble at some point in my career that if you do your hobby as a job, it becomes less and less fun to play, because then you don't see it as a hobby anymore. Because it's not like anymore that you just queue up for a game of League of Legends, because you want to have fun, right? Or you just play casually normal games with your friends. You're queuing up to get better.

So you play solo queue, you play solo queue, then you have obviously scheduled scrims, which for some parts of my career just took completely the fun out of me, I guess, because then it's like 13, 19, you have to scrim. If you want or not, it doesn't matter. You just have to scrim.

And the other reason is since I was doing it so long, I had less and less fun in my career, I would say, which it's just really hard, I would say, to motivate yourself to play solo queue, because if you stop playing solo queue, you get worse, then you don't perform in scrims and your tournaments, you lose even more motivation. And I guess that's what it killed for me, because I remember in my last split when I was at SK, I just didn't enjoy solo queue anymore. I couldn't motivate myself to just play with random people who, if somebody has a bad day, he just rams you down and the whole game is ruined.

And then obviously, I didn't play as much solo queue anymore. Then I got worse. Then I got more frustrated. I let down my team at some point as well. And then at the end, I just had a girlfriend in that year as well. And then I just made my priority.

OK, I just quit it because I can't motivate myself anymore. And for me, it's like I didn't want to be a burden for my team as well in some kind of way that if I'm not motivated anymore, I drag the whole team down. So I just called it quits.

Because the thing is, you don't want to play with someone who is not motivated anymore in soloqueue. And I had some players in my past teams as well who just didn't play solo queue and just drags the whole team down. And I tried my best in SK to keep myself motivated, even if I really had to force myself.

But at the end of the year, I just called it quits and I just didn't want anymore. I mean, I even played tryouts for SK to get in. But I mean, obviously, I can't say what I would have done if they offered me the spot again, honestly. But I wasn't even good anymore. And then I just said, I just call it quits, you know, because I had a pretty long career. In my opinion, I already as well had a successful career.

[EXPERIENCE]

But yeah, that's why I decided, I guess, to quit. I mean, in general, I guess I was a really fortunate player. I never received that much of a backlash because the thing is like, I would say I have a pretty neutral name in the game as well.

So that nobody in solo queue ever saw like SK or something and then, oh, she's female or some other players who are more famous, I would say. For example, they're a lot like Kiana or Tifa or Karina are pretty known names in the scene, I guess. If they queue up for solo queue in their master rank, everybody knows them, right? And they know they're female.

So I guess I never directly faced a lot of hate. More what I've seen in general in the scene is that just Twitch sometimes is full of, oh, why female? And why do you support this? Oh, all female tournaments and stuff. But directly to my persona, never, bless me, or probably I forgot that already.

So it was never that impactful, I would say. But in general, you obviously see that there is hate towards the female scene as a whole, I would say. I mean, it's hard to say because I always say, just give it a shot because honestly, the female scene exists so that players have a safe or should have a safe environment where they can just grow as a player and make the first experiences.

And then maybe even join a full guys team just to get a bit more confidence. So I would say just always go for it. But I can see the point that, for example, younger female players are just afraid of the flame because probably they already get flamed in solo queue and stuff.

But I think it's easier in League of Legends than in CSGO or Valorant, for example, because you don't have this voice chat thing. So if you want, you can just grind undercover. But for example, when you have to talk in tactical shooters like, for example, CS or Valorant, once you push the mic button and everybody hears you're a girl, you get flamed.

[TOURNAMENTS]

And I see constantly on Twitter some clips where people just get flamed due to their gender. Well, yes, I would say because like, I mean, I can say for myself back then in 2015, we had nothing. Honestly, there was no huge orgs. I mean, if you look at it now, right, there is SK Gaming, who is like a big org who supports a female team, G2. There is BIG from Germany as well. There is BDS who has a female team. So there's a lot of really big organizations who already push, not pushes, but like support the female scene. And back then in 2015, we had nothing. We had no orgs who wanted to invest in the female scene.

We had, funniest thing, we had back then more tournaments than now, because back then the ESL had a weekly cup actually, or two weeks, because one week there was on EU West a tournament, a female tournament. And then on next weekend, there was one on EU North East. So actually tournament wise, we had more because we had these weekly cups.

[CAREER OPTIONS]

But in general, like it's now better than it ever was, because as I said, we have more big organisations where you can actually make a career, because now it's even possible to go forward with your career full time. So you can quit your studies, I guess, or basically you should not quit your studies because education will always bring you something. But you don't have to work immediately, for example, and you can make a real career out of it.

And obviously more publicity will always change the way, for example, female things, because they can see, oh, for example, Cultist is a pretty big name and she's really good. I respect her a lot. You'd see as maybe, for example, a 12 year old girl, you see, oh my God, Cultist makes a career. I'm so motivated now. I want to, in the future, join G2 and something. So it really, really helps.

But the other issue I always had with this whole female scene tournament is always like some people just use it and get stuck. And in the end, or like in the end, originally the female team was created back then to support female players, to give them experience, to gain more confidence, but to then later join or even join as a whole female team, to join other

leagues, to just measure them, to not be stuck in this female scene bubble. And I'm like a bit scared that at some point everybody will just be stuck in this, in this female scene bubble.

And that's not what it should be in my opinion, because like female players can show that they're equally to men if the support is the same, but to be not stuck in the female scene and always only play in the female scene. For example, my whole career, I only played in female tournaments. I mean, yes, I played some splits of Prime League, which is the ERL from the German speaking region, but I think I got promoted once from division six to division five and I never reached anything in like a guys tournament or something.

And I think that's a bit bad, I would say. So **there should be more opportunities**, I guess, for females to play in different leagues. And that's what I always said as well, during my career, it's so hard to play in ERL as an all female team, because already the pool of female players is so small that if you really want to have a good team, you need to take players from different countries, right? But if you have a big variety, whatever, you know what I mean? I can't pronounce this word, whatever.

So if you have a lot of players from different countries, right? You can't play in an ERL. For example, we had this thing in SK, we needed three German players, which are able to play in Germany or based in Germany, right? To play in the Prime League. And this is already a big point in roster building, right? So you're already limited to the female pool, and then you have to limit yourself in roster building to have at least three from the same region to play in this kind of ERL.

I think they changed it in France, so that you only need two anymore. But for example, in Prime League, the German league, you still need three German residents. And it's like, it's so hard. And then you just make it harder and harder. And I think if there was just like any kind of ERL or whatever, where you can just play with, it doesn't matter where you're from, it would already help a lot. But it's, in my opinion, in general, a problem that you have this country restrictions for your roster building.

And it makes it so hard in the end to just play, because in the end, at least when I was still an active player, and even I searched up when the last big female tournament was, the last big female tournament was in September 2023, which was the the Equal Esports Cup, if I'm not mistaken. And it's already six months. And since there, there was no female tournament.

And yeah, some teams like SK or something is playing Prime League, and RG2 is playing NLC. But it's, there's nothing else to play. And that was always an issue for the female scene that yeah, okay, we get like two or three big tournaments during the year.

But there's nothing else to play. If you don't have like a team where you can play in an ERL, which is, again, already restricted to you need some, some certain kind of players from countries, right. But I drifted a bit.

I can't even remember what the original question was. I'm just talking. I'm sorry. If I drift too much, just don't hesitate to interrupt me. Me too, no worries. I think so. Because I was saying back then there was no big orgs, etc. So I guess that's why I let there to do my rant about there's nothing to play in the female scene. I mean, I guess it's a lot of psychology factor as well.

I mean, I don't know how it is now. But from my experience, I remember in my childhood, my brother could play anytime. All he wanted, it doesn't matter.

But when I was playing, my mom was like, ah, stop playing, go outside, make friends, go, go study or do something with your life. You can't sit in front of your PC 24/7. So my mom tried to limit myself as well in this regard.

But I don't know if she would, would have done it as well nowadays, if I would be a bit younger, I guess, because like back then, there were no opportunities. I had no paid teams. I think we got back then in my first signing, which was early 2016.

We got picked up by Team YP and we got like 200 euros. But back then, 200 euros. Well, it was the deal. It was the deal. Everybody was happy. And nowadays, for example, when I look back at like 2021 or something or 2022, if someone would have said, yeah, you get 200 euros, I would be like, but it was just different times.

[BARRIERS INTO ENTERING GAMING SCENE]

But I think honestly, it's still a limiting factor that it's still stuck in, in elder generations when they have kids that they don't want the girls that they sit around in the PC. I guess it has something to do with society that, yeah, it's okay when a guy plays 24 seven on a computer, but it's, but it's not okay when a girl does it because the girl should get good education or whatever. So I guess that's maybe still a really good factor.

And probably as well, what I always felt back then is like, I always had the feeling that I can never focus 100% on esports. For example, I work since 2020, 2020, yeah. A full-time job, because otherwise I can't afford living. How should I pay rent from like this four or 500 euros per month I earn from esports? I mean, obviously when you have some organisations like G2, they pay a full-time salary, but there are not many organisations which give you the chance to play for full-time. So I was always like, okay, I can never focus 100% on esports because I have to work. And if I have to work, I have to work eight hours a day.

I can't focus that much anymore, which was also a reason why I quit, because I go to work nine to 17. I come home, I eat, and 19 are scrims. And if I don't have scrims, I have to play solo queue.

But it's just hard. And I think, honestly, that's a limiting factor as well, because if you're a guy, right, you just play out the theory, right? You see, for example, really big names back then like Bjergsen, like Caps, like Jaik or Jankos or whatever. If you reach the LEC, you don't have to worry anymore because you get such a good salary that you don't have to work for your life anymore.

Probably Jankos as well, but if you take the example Bjergsen, who was a really big name, I was a huge fan of Bjergsen back then. He doesn't have to work anymore in his life, for sure. He made millions probably. And that's already more attracting for a guy. If he's like 15 or something, okay, I will quit school. I will focus 100% on esports because if I made it, if I make it, I don't have to worry.

But as a female player, there's no opportunity because, yes, right, you can grind to earn a full-time salary, right? But you probably get even more if you work a 40-hour-per-week job, right? So it's not that attractive to throw everything under the bus and to set all on one card for this 0.1% chance that you actually make it. And that was always an issue as well for me because I could never focus. And I know for a fact that it is a lot of struggles for a lot of my friends back then that some are still studying, some had work and stuff, but you can never have a career where you just finance your whole life.

But guys have, right? Because as well Faker. Faker also never has to work anymore in his life, right? So I think that's kind of a limiting factor I can imagine as well because I faced the same experience or the same anxiety, I guess, that if I quit everything, how should I pay rent, right? It's like I have to go work. Yeah, I mean, women in gaming, these are like, I think it's a French-based thing, right? I'm not sure.

But yeah, I mean, I think they're from France, but honestly, I can't remember. I played so many female tournaments from so many different hosts, I would say. I mean, I can't remember if it was women in gaming in particular, but I played so many tournaments in my life.

Honestly, I can't remember. And at some point, you don't even care. At some point, you just have a manager in your team who keeps track of every tournament which is happening, right? And he just signs up and he just said, yeah, there is this tournament.

Sometimes, honestly, at some points during tournaments, if you ask me, which tournament are you playing? I had to look it up because I can't remember what I'm playing. For me, it's just like, yeah, I'm there. I know I have to play, but what I'm playing? I don't know, man.

[EVENTS EXCLUSIVELY FOR WOMEN]

Yeah, because if you have like, I mean, improved. I mean, in particular, if you ask for women in gaming, I have no clue. In particular, it's always, for every tournament I played, every single time was the same issue.

It's just delays. It's just bad organisations and game delays because their streams is lagging or they have a technical issue. And then sometimes, you just sit there one and a half hours and you just wait for your next game and your whole Saturday is in the trash can because you played two games.

And for these two games, you need five hours to be completed. I mean, I'm looking at my Wikipedia page now. Maybe I played. Did I play Girlgamer Hunters, Lacroix Permanent, or yeah, Equally Sports Rising Events. It doesn't look like I played somewhere there. No, I don't think so. Or if so, I can't remember anymore. I mean, that sounds so arrogant or something. If so, I can't remember anymore.

But it's like, if you play seven years, you know, it's like, I can't remember every single tournament I've played, right? I mean, it's really hard, I guess, to just, if you have no contacts to them and then some kind of groups, I guess, it's like really hard because I do think for the majority of students who are like now in high school or whatever, or even start university or whatever, I still think that a lot of them still have stuck in their mind, gaming is for boys, right? I guess what you can do is like in your local city or even in high schools or university, maybe some kind of flyers or some kind of promotions can help to host maybe some female-only evenings, I guess, just where you just let in females. Because I can imagine, I mean, if I ever take me as an example, as a 14 or 15, 16, 17 year old girl whatsoever, I would be scared to go to a gaming bar and there are a lot of guys who know the game better than me and I just want to get into gaming, but there are, I imagine this gaming bar or whatever is full of guys, I just go and embarrass myself, right? So maybe it's a good step to print out some flyers and make advertisement for, hey, on Saturday from 12 till 18, we host a female-only gaming school or whatever and we introduce you to a different variation of games, because there is a, I always say this, there is a video game for anyone, it doesn't matter the gender, it doesn't matter the age, I would already like five games for my mom, for example, pops in my head, there's a video game for everyone, but it's just like so hard to advertise it to them because it's like not everybody has to play League of Legends, not everybody has to play CSGO, for example, Stardew Valley, it's a really popular farming game, right? Females probably

dominate this category, because it's just cozy and just chill and they don't feel pressure or whatever, but a lot of guys are playing Stardew Valley as well, right? I don't wanna like say anything, but there is a game for everyone, but it's just so hard to get to the young women, I guess, because I'm pretty sure, as I said, gaming is for boys, it's probably still stuck in a lot of heads and probably when they think about gaming, they, I don't know, because I'm a gamer, so I know it's different, but maybe they think about World of Warcraft or some role-play games with shitty graphics from the 2000s or something, you know, or they think about Modern Warfare or some shooters on the Xbox, right?

And there's like, ah, no, I don't like video games, but there are so different kinds of video games, so yeah, probably maybe if you have a school or something, maybe just go there and like hand out some flyers, I guess that's the best tip, or maybe make a group or something, and as I said, maybe host some female-only days, I guess, because if I would have seen in my city or something, like, I mean, I would have never gone out of my house, because I'm an introvert, but maybe I would have been more interested if I see, ah, there's females only, and like, we introduce you to some games and stuff in a pretty chill and safe environment, maybe that would help to attract more females to come.

[FUTURE CHANGES/SUGGESTIONS]

I hope, and I've said this for some years, I really, really hope to finally see a woman in a tier 1 esports title in a tier 1 esports tournament. For example, a girl in the LEC, a girl in a CS team which plays at the major or other tier 1 tournament. I think it's possible.

It should be definitely possible, because if they get more support, they will. And if the thing is like, it will, it will some kind of snowball, because if there are a girl in the LEC, a lot of girls, I guarantee you, they'll see, oh my God, finally someone made it into the LEC. I can do this as well.

I will put everything in my dream now. I will stop studying or stop doing my work and just go all in and try to get better at the game and make a living out of it. So that's what I want to see.

And I want to see for the future, because still a lot of my friends are still playing in teams and play in the female scene, there has to be some kind of more tournaments. Because as I said, the last big female tournament was in September 2023. And there is, as far as I know, I mean, I'm not that active anymore in the scene, but as I said, I still have a lot of friends in the scene.

There is no major announcement. There's nothing to play in the next month at least. So it's like, there's nothing to play.

And if there's nothing to play, you're not motivated to grind, because what's the purpose? Why would you play like, okay, you have fun and you like scrimming or whatever, but it's like always a different feeling if you have something to train for. So what I want to see is that maybe the Rioters should do something like they did for Valorant with the game changes. Maybe they should do something for League of Legends as well.

Maybe that will help, but female esports need something to play, need something frequently to play, because then they can get better. Because as from my experience, scrimming makes you a bit better. But what you really, really learn is in tournaments, because then everybody is giving 110%, right? And then you can really, really learn something and get something from the game.

Because from my experience, if you lose scrims, it's like, ah, unlucky, whatever, who cares, right? It was just scrims, like nobody cares, right? But if you lose a tournament, at least for me, there was a year, 2022, where I got like six times in a row, I think, in every tournament, second place. Every single tournament we played, we got second place. And then you sit there at the evening, you log off from Discord and you lay in your bed and you're like, what could have done better? What could I have done better, right? But you never have this after scrims, right? So that's the thing.

We need more tournaments, I would say. And probably, what I was always saying as well, which is pretty hard to organize, but maybe with Riot Games help, it's better. Like tournaments isn't the solution.

It's not even the solution if you have every month, even one tournament, sorry, for one weekend. Because yeah, okay, you played two days, seriously, right? And then you just wait two months again, and then there's the next tournament, right? There has to be some kind of league. For example, like the LEC or like LCK, you have every week a scheduled play or a scheduled cup or whatever.

And then you have a point system and the BS6 go to playoffs and then they fight over playoffs over a longer period of time, because then you're longer motivated, you get more practice. And probably it's even better for viewerships if it's getting streamed, because like, yeah, it was always cool to get streamed like for one best of three in one weekend. But if you have really a league, you can build up stories like they do in the LEC.

They have some different segments every week for different teams, they even have a podcast. And if you have a league, you can build stories, then you get more viewerships, then you get more hype, and then more investment will come into the league because you go bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger. And then more investment, better opportunities for the female, more can go for a full-time career.

The overall level changes even more because more full-time female players means that the level of play gets higher, higher, higher. Because if you have like six teams or something who are all full-time and just play League of Legends all day long, they will get better. Eventually the level will get better.

If the level gets better, better female players come. Maybe then they even play in first division ERLs, for example, the Prime League or LFL, LPL in Spain or whatever they are even called. And then maybe someone even plays in the LEC, but I guess, yeah, more and more investment from Riot Games and more tournaments will probably help.

I mean, obviously, it's always easier, because obviously, I can sit there, we need more tournaments, we need a league, and that's the solution. But obviously, it's not that easy. But I think it would be probably a good direction.

[CLOSING]

I was not prepared for this. I always remember this awkward thing when you have a job interview and then the company says, do you have questions for us? And you sit there and be like, I was not prepared for this, you know, so no, I have no questions, but I think it's really cool what you're doing in the Netherlands, I guess it was, if I remember correctly. It's always cool to see people who are investing in the female scene or in women and try to help them.

So I don't have a question. I just want to wish you the best of luck and hope that you can attract more female players for your project. Yeah, sure. It would actually really interest me, how it goes, how it goes, yeah. So, yeah, please, please update me. It would be it would be a pleasure to know.

Thank you. No worries, always, if you have more questions or whatever, I will I always also talk to two friends if they're interested, but one is in the hospital, the other one is busy because they're at the boot camp, but I still try to send more people your way. So you can probably talk to an active member because probably you can even give you more insight how it is now than I am.

I can only speak from like 2015 to 2022. So maybe there are some changes, which I don't even know. I'm probably only talking bullshit now.

It could be a possibility, but at least it was so in my active time, it was like I said. Oh, yeah. So, yeah, if you have still some questions, just shoot me up on Twitter.

I will try my best to respond in a good amount of time. So, yeah, I wish you best of luck and thanks for interviewing me and giving me the chance to explain my world or my experience, I guess. So, yeah, thank you.

Lara Clergue

[INTRODUCTION]

Q: Can you introduce yourself briefly?

Hello, I'm Lara Clergue! I'm 22, French and currently live in Paris for my work. I had to move out to Paris really recently actually, in last November because I'm still a student in XP School, which is named "the international school of gaming and esports" and I had to find an apprenticeship to keep going with my master degree. Which is a 5 years diploma. I found it in Paris and it was such a huge opportunity, once in a lifetime, that you cannot refuse legit!

Q: What is your name and role at your organisation or company?

I work as an apprentice head of project in esports team at the society named Webedia. I don't know if I should explain what Webedia is, because it's kinda known, but it's basically the biggest society making esports in France, and they also manage talents like big big YouTubers and influencers. We own the division 1, 2 and 3 of France, LFL, division 2 and Nexus Tour. The esports team works with Riot obviously along many other important game industries such as Capcom when they ran the Streetfighter League, or Com2us since we are running Summoners War league as well.

Follow up Q: How did you become involved in the gaming community or industry?

Since I've been playing video games and interested in them since I'm young, I obviously developed a huge interest in video games, but not esports at first. And I only liked games. Even though I played a lot of sports and extra activities such as singing in choirs, a lot of dance, basketball, tennis, bla bla bla, I only ended up liking gaming.. Which is not true actually, I like basketball but my cardio is shit and my ankles are bad AF, so I ended up stopping. When I finished high school, I figured it was time to study and find a university so I could find a job but it made me panic so much. I liked anime and manga as well, and since I was like "I'm not good enough of a player to be a pro, it was pointless to even try, once again I wasn't really into esports at that time so I didn't realise all the work behind events and all. I ended up choosing a Japanese-English university since I love speaking English and I wanted to learn Japanese and I was like "I'll just be a translator!" After some time only I realised university wasn't for me, because I didn't have enough determination to work on my

own and I dropped out. I didn't even go to uni anymore. I failed my first semester's exams. I didn't even check the results actually and stopped going to the second semester. And then, thankfully, I had a girl coming over to my birthday that I did not even know, that was studying in this esports and gaming school XP School. So she made me visit, I passed the entrance test and I ended up where I am. I'm in my 4th year of study right now and in an apprenticeship in Webedia!

Q: How long have you been involved in gaming, and what initially attracted you to it?

I'm playing video games since I'm a kid. Or more like, I'm involved to it since I'm a kid. My big brother, who's 11 years older than me loved gaming on like World of Warcraft. But we were not really close to each other so I didn't get involved in video games thanks to him, but thanks to my dad actually! I remember us playing Tomb Raider Angel of Darkness on PS2. My dad was printing out solutions, he was playing and I was reading, telling him where to go and what to do if we were stuck. I remember placing chairs in front of TV and asking him to come play so I could watch haha. And when he wasn't here or didn't want to, I was playing instead but only doing the same chapter and only the start: The red serpent. Why? Because there were no enemies around at the start of the level and I was scared to shoot enemies, it was making me panic to not know how to aim correctly haha.

Then I grew up a bit, made my first online friends on Skype and we played Minecraft on some multiplayer servers and in the end, they went on League of Legends and I just followed and now I'm addicted. League player since 2015 and still that day haha.

[EXPERTISE]

Q: What responsibilities are associated with your position?

FQ: and what about particularly regarding gender diversity or inclusivity? If not, that is fine too!

In my work, I'm helping my two superiors to run our major projects/products which are the Division 1 named the LFL and the Division 2. So basically, since start of the year, we - we are 2 apprentices - and made a powerpoint for the owner conference which is a conference with all team's owners from division 1 to recap all 2023 numbers, tell them what we plan for 2024 like the offline events and such, and also what is changing according to Riot like the rules for example. Then we did the same powerpoint for division 2. Hmm, we passed a lot of bills as well, we setup the thing called "Media Day" which is the days where the players and coach are coming over Webedia to make the content that will be used for the whole split like makeup, photos, shooting into video ([example](#)), making some small funny content that will be published on our [Twitter](#), TikTok and all, and of course we were there during the offline event which is the LFL Days. 2 days of competition offline, in the south where people come over to cheer in a big place and we were in charge of helping everyone possible, and I had the task to bring the players to the area of the Meet & Greet where players are here and fans can come over to talk and to take pictures with them. I had such a blast and to be honest I loved doing this so much!

About the second part of the question, I'm not sure I am personally doing anything regarding the inclusivity? Ah yes, we organised also, for the first time last year, something called "La Coupe des Etoiles (Cup of Stars)" which is a tournament only for women. I didn't get to work on it, especially because I arrived in Webedia in October and everything was already finished to be prepared, but I got to stay with the girl team the day of the event (since the final was offline) and bring them up on stage and all.

Q: In your opinion, what role do gaming communities play in the lives of gamers?

Gaming communities as in games communities? Like how League players affect each other? It could be different depending on the people. Like either you're someone who cares a lot about people online and then others affect you, you develop true friendship or even

relationships with people and it's beautiful. Or you're someone who doesn't really care and uses games to distract yourself so you just play, and it's whatever you know? Lives of gamers and led on by many things, could be the game, the people, the community, the updates of their favourite games to be honest. I don't really have an opinion on this sorry hahaha.

Q: How do you perceive the current state of gender diversity within esports and gaming communities?

Well, nobody can say that the current state of gender diversity is like good or women and men in esports or gaming are even because that would be wrong. To be honest I think many girls are playing video games, but only a few are represented online as influencers and all. I certainly think there are more women than we think even if it's far from being even with men obviously.

Is it a good or a bad thing? To be honest, I think neither. I know people tend to make gender diversity a huge topic but, as a woman, I don't feel the urge to be around more woman because, man or woman, we have the same hobbies the same passion and I feel as interested speaking with woman about video games than man. I have a girl in my workplace that is a journalist and she's so cute and kind. We got along really well and I'm happy about it but I got along with all my coworkers even if they're all boys. I'm legit the only girl in the esports project part and I don't mind! No actually, I'm lying, a girl joined us last week and she is very sweet haha.

FQ: It naturally depends on the person of course, but what do you think about it generally or objectively? Do you think every girl would think like that or it might be different?

Oh I see, the current state.... Hmm, well I think it depends of the people you meet obviously. There are really ass people who will be stuck in 2000 and be like "Uh, go back to the kitchen make me a sandwich," probably because he's frustrated and sad in his life. I encountered a guy on Valorant one day, I asked him if he did on a round and since I was a girl, he was like "it's a girl I will do the opposite she says." Important to be precise, he's French too and I knew it because of his accent, but I kept speaking English because French tilts me. I legit said one round "lets go A and be quiet like don't make sound running," and he went to B running just because I said something and he didn't want to follow my calls, because I was a girl. He also was flaming me in French, expecting I couldn't understand. In the end I just asked him if he has been raised by 2 men, or if his mom was a trans because there's no way he speaks to his mother like that? Like, it was crazy to me.

Yeah, I had a few go back to the kitchen, dirty 120kg support player, egirl and bla bla bla, but I also made amazing encounters, friends that I have for years now and even some I deeply loved. It really all depends on people you meet and to be honest, trash people and their comments makes me laugh more than hurting me, it's just funny to me they're so sad in life they have to flame a girl on video games. So I don't mind it really. But yeah, if you ask me, If a girl was to join a local community of League, there could have 3 kind of people. Those who are normal humans and treat her as any other player, those who are thirsty and are like "oh my god, a girl gamer so sexy," and then people will think she's shit because she's a girl and look down on her. So, I don't really know. I'd join a local community because I'm proud of my elo, of my level on the game and I'm not ashamed. But if you're a bit insecure and aren't sure about it maybe some comments could make her feel uncomfortable so yeah... It's hard to say, she could have some or not at all, it's a 50/50 really. It doesn't depends of her but more of the people in the community

[EVENTS / INITIATIVES]

Q: Have you organised or attended events specifically for female gamers?

Oh well as I said earlier I attended to the finale of La Coupe des Etoiles (the star cup) which was our/Riot's first official League of Legends tournament that was only for girls..I think? I'm not sure about this info but well let's say it was... The finale was in between BDS Valkyries and GO Aurora and I was in charge of BDS's team. I don't know if you know but for example, the support of BDS Valkyries is Evalunna, the league streamer which is so beautiful. I simp haha. I had such a blast, it was my first real event since I arrived only some weeks before at Webedia and it was so nice to have important responsibilities and all, meeting everyone behind the scenes and also to lead my team on stage. At the end of the event, the manager of BDS Valkyries even thanked me deeply for all I did during the event for them and I was really happy about it. They were all so sweet and I think the manager of GO didn't especially thank my friend, the other apprentice.

Q: What aspects of these events were successful, and what could have been improved?

To be honest I don't know? The thing that could've been improve was the organisation because the tournament was announced legit some days before the start of it, **so not many teams managed to pull out a all girls roster**, they didn't have enough time. And that led that, in the tourney, many matches were "free wins" since there were not enough teams. It was a bad timing for the whole society, it was in summer so many people were in a break and only one was in charge of everything so it was kinda rushed but this will be improved if there's another star cup so that's nothing to worry about.

On the event itself, there were not any problem I think. There were a lot more fans here to cheer the girls than I expected to be honest, and that was so nice. Only thing, I'd love to give some hand warmers to the girls on stage haha because it was so damn cold since it was mid November, the room was giant and freezing and their hands were cold so it's not the best to play a finale. So INVESTING IN HAND WARMERS would be the only thing I'd change or improve for now!

Q: Are there any programs or clubs aimed at making girls feel more welcome in gaming?

Yes! Thanks to Riot asking Webedia to make girls' tournament and more girls' things overall, all biggest France structure started to build their own girls roster to attend those tournaments. Since they know it's something that will develop more in the near future, they want to be ready with girls that are ready to perform. We have BDS with BDS Valkyries. I will link you their roster [announcement](#) because it's so good, Team GO with GO Aurora, Team Vitality with The Rising Bees and I'm pretty sure other teams will try to build a roster if any more girls tournaments are announced. It's not the case yet so I can't say for sure, but those girls are already training in French division 3, the Nexus Tour, and competing so we will see I guess.

[STRATEGIES]

Q: What are methods that have been demonstrated to effectively increase interest among females in gaming?

Well in gaming itself I don't know? Pretty skins, characters you can refer to? I know studios such as Ubisoft for example, with Tomb Raider. They said they wanted to make Lara bisexual or lesbian in their new game I think? I don't know if it's true and to be honest, I don't really care but they're trying to include new or other mindsets which is nice I guess. I'm kinda on the defensive because, if course it's very nice to include new communities, to attract new people and all, **but it shouldn't be the first thing that you announce on your future game, iif it's true once again, because it really sounds like "Look look we are so cool! We are making Lara lesbian, look!"** The gameplay? Nah, I don't know but look she's lesbian. Lara is an adventurer, who cares about who she sleeps with you know? I feel like it's FORCED just to fit the new norms which are to include those communities.

Same with Disney for example? It's not gaming field but it's the same. After the Johnny Depp drama, they said they wanted to make one last Pirate of the Caribbean's movie with a girl as the main character. But, no? I don't know if the Pirates of the Caribbean is Johnny Depp? You wouldn't go on the Simpsons with other main character that aren't the Simpsons, no? Like he is the pirate. He legit made this whole movie, this whole saga and they want to change the main character by a girl? I don't know if it's because of the drama or they already planned that first but in both cases I think it's a shit decision and I'll 100% not go see him. Johnny Depp is really funny character, whatever he did or didn't do in real life, he's an amazing actor and IS the MAIN character of this movie. It makes no sense of changing it just to be inclusive. Make a new saga with a girl as a main character? That is cooler than "destroying" a saga like this. I don't know it's my opinion and I can totally get if it's not shared but well...

Back to the topic, I said in the gaming itself but if we talk about esports, I think the methods are mainly to create an healthy and a bit ecosystem of tournament that is as competitive as regular competitions such as LFL or division 2 so it shows "hey it's not because we're girls that we are low or that our competitions are less taken seriously" you know. And since Riot is really into it and want to develop feminine competition, it pushes teams to create feminine competitive roster and all

Q: And what about your personal experience?

My person experience? Hmmmm.... I mean, I think it's nice to develop this kind of thing and girl ecosystem but maybe it's weird to hear from a girl but I don't think it SHOULD be necessary. What I mean is that playing with girls just because it's girls and we want to promote girls is sad. Of course in regular sports, it's normal to part guys and girls because of the physical condition and all. But in esports? I don't think women's brains are dumber or are slower than men's ones to play video games. I'd support much more mixed esports than exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine esports. I think it would be nice to see mixt teams, with both guys and girls and it would promote much more, in my opinion, the girls' because it would show "Look, they all equal." But I don't think it will - it can happen because yes, there're more high ranking players as guys so they don't take girls if they can't have a solid roster full of girls. And if its added to rules and forced into teams to have at least 1 girl per team it'll just be worse cuz they'll be forced to take one and she might be blamed or whatever like yeah...

Q: What actions can gaming groups, schools, or leaders take to ensure girls feel welcome in gaming spaces?

I think they should make advertising including both woman and man. I'd give away the perfect example to me ([shows videoclip](#)). Like in this clip, we can see the girl is training hard and has the level to compete vs the guy and that's just so much more interesting than just showing girls, because they're girls but not finding a point to it you know? It's obviously my opinion, and we could also go on by advertising only girls with girls tourney and all of this, but what works for me is to feel equal and not put at the top of the scene just because I'm a girl but show that anyone who's worth it is welcomed, boys, girls, trans, bi, lesbians, I don't know, anyone really. Nothing matters as long as you're a hard worker and you're here for the same purpose as a pro player or man.

[FUTURE / RECOMMENDATIONS]

Q: What changes do you hope to see in the gaming industry regarding (professional) female gamers?

Hmm, more women advertised alongside men, to prone equality and diversity. They can keep going with girls tournaments because it's not a bad idea and yeah, even if I think mixed tournaments would be better, girls won't maybe find their place in male roster. Too much drama, girls are hard to coach and to lead so alongside guys it could be hard too. Coaches

are mainly male and if they make rude comments because that's their way to function then maybe they could feel offended and lead to dramas too. So yeah I think that women's tournaments are interesting and I hope, in the near future, they'll be bigger with more teams and even more professional. And more badass challenger girls advertised.

The fact that many journalists and analysts, at the world's championship desk for example, are women already show that there are professionals that are really interested in esports and understand the scene more than anyone. These figures are really beneficial for all girls.

Q: Based on your expertise, what advice would you offer to organisations seeking to enhance female participation in gaming communities?

Hmmm wdyw by that? Like which advice I'd give to structures to welcome more women? Hmm, be humans? Hahaha, to be honest, it's the best advice. Make sure people in your team doesn't have a weird mind about girls and be sure it's safe to welcome girls in your structure. Treat them equally than any other player, yes maybe don't "you suck dick bro" because that could be taken wrong, but create this sisters atmosphere where they feel comfy and treated the way they should. And yeah, I don't know much more to be honest, because I already feel included enough since I work in esports and I didn't feel forced to join with like advertising and all? I sent my application to 300 persons, and got meetings and got accepted alongside another guy who is now a friend and all so yeah.

1.4 Workshop: Ideation (Brainstorm session)

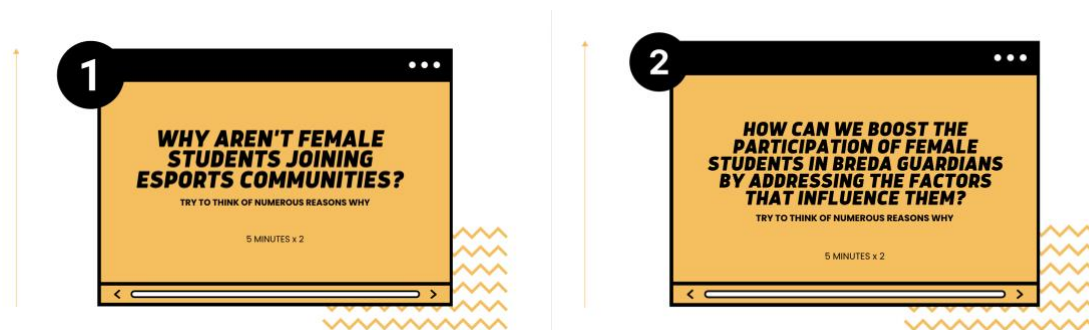


Figure 40: Ideation slides

- **Questions (factors):** Why aren't female students joining esports communities?
- **Answers (suggestions):** How can we boost the participation of female students in Bredia Guardians by addressing the factors that influence them?

1. MALE DOMINATED COMMUNITY (INCLUSIVITY)

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	Not many other females who are in community
NOTE 2	Uncertain if there will be other woman as its is a male world
NOTE 3	Could be intimidating as these communities are often populated by mostly boys
NOTE 4	Sexualization

NOTE 5	A male world, so a step too big to join
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1 [7]	Content focussed on female players
NOTE 2	Show/platform to the females already in the community
NOTE 3 [1-5-6]	Create opportunities and events for only women
NOTE 4	Organise 'girls only' nights/evening/afternoon
NOTE 5	More female members → less one sided
NOTE 6	Look into different sports what they do to boost this woman soccer
NOTE 7	Make a fun lil girls' corner where girls only can play
NOTE 8	Community hour with this topic to include more women

2. SAFETY

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	A room full of men be scary
NOTE 2	Not feeling welcome
NOTE 3	Question of safety?
NOTE 4	They don't feel safe, or think they are not safe
NOTE 5	Being introverted or social anxiety
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1	Write consequences for misbehaviour
NOTE 2 [5]	Set clear boundaries

3. OTHER PRIORITIES

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	No time
NOTE 2	Different interests

NOTE 3	Other priorities
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4. LACK OF INTEREST

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	Lack of interest
NOTE 2	No interest in the games that are available
NOTE 3	Statistically there are more boys interested in gaming than girls, let alone interested in esports
NOTE 4	Not interested as unaware of opportunities
NOTE 5	The games they like to play are not there, or not shown in communication
NOTE 6	The type of games played in esports communities are not the usual games they play?
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1	First gaming then esports, make the scope bigger
NOTE 2	Community events inclusive → make not only esports LANs, but also game nights
NOTE 3	Organise outgoing events (more social), Worlds, VCT Finals, game nights, watchparty

5. TOXICITY

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	Past experiences in-game → scared that could happen IRL
NOTE 2	Discouraged by online experiences
NOTE 3	Toxicity in games
NOTE 4	Would rather be 'invisible' anonymous online
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1	Punish toxic behaviour → Tom situation

6. SKILL ISSUE

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	Doesn't have the skill or is not good enough
NOTE 2	Feeling not skilled enough
NOTE 3	Afraid they are not good enough
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1	Workshops
NOTE 2	Make a mentorship program to improve skills
NOTE 3	Offer workshops
NOTE 4	Create tournaments for women alongside mixed tournaments (chess)
NOTE 5	Female teams or mixed gender → ETT doing that for Valorant
NOTE 6	Think about Guerilla marketing actions
NOTE 7	Host 'practice along' sessions, where for example they can practise vs the teams and get tips
NOTE 8 [1-7-4]	Put on games girls like a bit more, like Overcooked or Mario games to make the step to join easier

7. AWARENESS

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	They only want to play games for fun with friends. Not competitively
NOTE 2	Not aware that there are communities
NOTE 3	No marketing targeting them to join
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1	Internationalisation at home with both male and female examples

NOTE 2	Do awareness campaigns/events showcasing opportunities
NOTE 3	Have a female ambassador promote
NOTE 4	Invite social innovation and create an assignment focussed on attracting girls
NOTE 5	Cooperate with Bress and promote in multiple lessons they have there
NOTE 6	Cooperate with BUAs clubs
NOTE 7	Host laidback tournaments, e.g. ARAM 2v2 tournaments (and maybe female only?)
NOTE 8	Use moments to fit in: • Inclusivity • Week + game • Week + well being • Week + International women's day
NOTE 9	Make the female players team captain
NOTE 10	Search for a women's team in your communication
NOTE 11	Promote Breda Guardians on site with a follow up in the HIVE
NOTE 12 [2-5]	Anonymous question box → suggestion box with different topics each month and then Radio Hub show discussing → work more with Radio Hub + YouTube → (podcast) post videos on YouTube

8. STIGMATIZATION

FACTORS	
NOTE 1	The fear that people are weird..?
NOTE 2	Esports is still 'taboo' in the Netherlands
NOTE 3	It comes across as 'nerdy' and they want to identify with that
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	
NOTE 1	Advertising and hosting more female or mixed competitions to normalise it
NOTE 2	Higher-ups take it more seriously → less stigma

NOTE 3 [ALL]	Make a documentary about this topic
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2. Field research

2.1 Survey

The following questions and graphs are about the Breda esports community. The answers consist of 14 respondents who have some sort of connection to Breda's esports community.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A PART OF THE BREDa ESPORTS COMMUNITY?

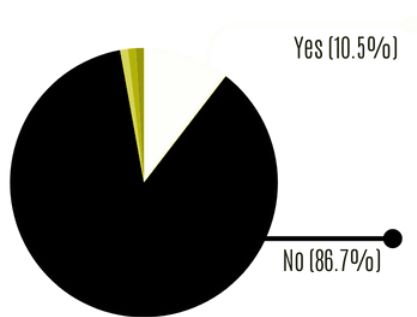


Figure 41: Being part of the Breda esports community

WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO THE BREDa ESPORTS/GAMING COMMUNITY?

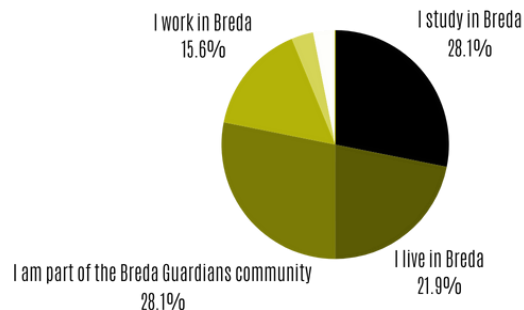


Figure 42: Connection to Breda esports/gaming community

Just 11 individuals (10.5%) of the total respondents are members of the Breda esports community, which is only a small portion. Among these individuals, the majority are members of the Breda Guardians community or students studying in Breda.

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE LOCAL ESPORTS COMMUNITY BREDa GUARDIANS?



Figure 43: Breda Guardians awareness

ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY OTHER LOCAL ESPORTS COMMUNITIES IN BREDa?

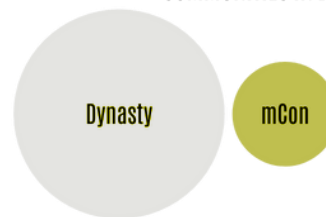


Figure 44: Awareness of other local esports communities in Breda

All 14 respondents are aware of Breda Guardians, while three mentioned Dynasty and one mentioned mCon as other esports communities they know of.

HAVE YOU EVER VISITED THE ESPORTS SPACE THE HIVE (THE HOMEBASE OF BREDa GUARDIANS)?

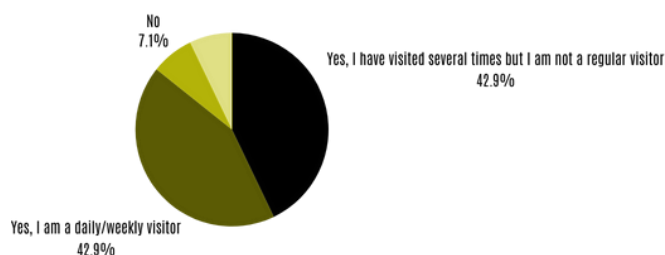


Figure 45: Visiting the HIVE

IF YOU HAVE NEVER VISITED THE HIVE, WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN VISITING?

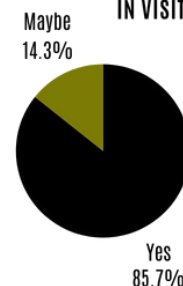


Figure 46: Respondents interests in visiting the HIVE

The majority of respondents have visited the HIVE either daily, weekly, or multiple times. Of those who have not visited, 6 out of 7 respondents (85.7%) expressed interest in visiting the HIVE.

The last couple questions are about the reasons why respondents visit the HIVE.



Figure 47: For what purposes do you visit the HIVE? Figure 48: What activities do you perform when you go to the HIVE?

Similar to the other question about why respondents would join esports communities, the same reasons were given for visiting the HIVE. To have fun and to have social interaction with other gamers and friends. The activities that are mostly performed here are casual gaming and attending group meetings.

2.2 Focus group

Focus group transcription

MK: Okay, so let's start with introducing ourselves. Shortly, like, what would you describe your overall experience with gaming, like, what are you, like, what's your job, what is your hobby, etc.

MK: Okay, so who wants to start? Or shall I start, maybe? Yeah, sure. Okay, so I'll start. So I'm Mi Kha, and I'm 21 years old, and I like to play League of Legends, if I had to pick a game that's more esports-related, but otherwise I play, like, very casual games, you know, like farming games, and I play a lot of mobile games, actually, like, I'm more on my phone, I think, than I play on my laptop. And besides that, I like drawing, you know, I like graphic design types of things.

E: And you're pretty good at it.

MK: Thank you. So that's it, surely, for me. And what about you, maybe? (referring to M) M: Okay, sure. MK: Because you're a new person.

M: Of course, I'm Michelle, I'm 25, and I met Mi Kha on the internet.

E: Oh, really?

M: We were both designers. Volunteers for a website for designing. And then we started talking, and then we met up once, I think. Or maybe twice. Yeah, twice. So, yeah, we actually met online, and we also played a bit of League of Legends together. So I think, if I had to say, esports games, also League of Legends, the only thing that I play that really pertains to those kinds of games. Other than that, I usually play, like, RPGs, or JRPGs, mostly, on my PlayStation. And I also have some Switch games. But lately, I've been more into drawing as well. So I also draw a lot.

E: Pretty similar interests.

M: Yeah, a lot of the same. E: That's nice. MK: Yeah, true, actually.

M: Same music taste as well, at some parts.

E: And what did you study?

M: I studied psychology, and I did a master's in cognitive psychology. So that was more about applying psychology to the working field. So we did some design of psychology, but also improving human performance in practice. So how can you make sure people function better at their jobs and everything? Make sure they don't make mistakes? And how can you influence the environment? And how can you influence the person? But I wasn't being a therapist, mostly. Just, like, research in the field.

E: And do you continue this now? Or are you really fully stopped with practising?

M: No, I really... I finished my master's, I think, four years ago now, or three years or something. And now I am a web designer. So I kind of use those things from psychology in my work.

E: Yeah, maybe just to introduce myself as well, just what I do in BUAS. I have been working in BUAS for four years now. I am mostly working on European projects as a project manager, currently leading one bigger one in the Academy for Built Environment and Logistics, because I graduated there. So my background is not at all in eSports. It's really transport-oriented background. And I'm currently still finalizing my master's in Radboud up and doing, again, on transport topic. But I have been working with the Breda Guardians now for two years. Also, I am lecturing in the Academy for Leisure, where we have the sports and esports study.

I also do some lecturing in my other academy. And from next year, from September, I will be joining the Academy for Games. So I'll be officially on contract there, where I'll be a research project manager and producer for different, mostly technology-oriented projects, like dealing with artificial intelligence, virtual productions, and this kind of matter.

So that will be my new role. I don't know what will happen with Breda Guardians and my role in it afterwards. So next week, I'm having a meeting to clarify those details with my manager in the Leisure.

M: OK. And what's your name? I didn't know.

E: Ekaterina, I'm sorry. I forgot. And I'm 26. I'm still a bit slower, much slower than the masters.

M: Nah, it's fine.

E: It takes me some time, because I also work full-time. So it's challenging.

M: I can understand. Yeah, I wouldn't have been able to do it so fast if I had to work full-time.

E: It's difficult.

V: I'm Valeria, I study Creative Business at BUAs, I'm a second year fast track student. I am a casual and competitive gamer. More competitive if anything. I got interested in gaming because of the community. I have many close friends who I met through games or gaming communities like the guardians. I have many memorable experiences and moments in games. I clip them all. It's either my friends being stupid and pulling something crazy or ridiculous. Or having deep and connecting conversations with my friends while we game. Gaming is relaxing, fun, and a reason for me to socialise. Men in the gaming community are very open, chill, and authentic. Those are the friends I go for and we help each other through everything. So in a way it is a form of support. I game every day, rarely ever alone. Either with my boyfriend, my friends, or both. I have many friends I call and talk with and game with daily. In the future, I hope to keep making new connections and keeping my old connections strong. I love the people I'm surrounded with. In terms of esports, I hope to get better and participate with a fun team and maybe evolve into a career. Not as an esports player but part of that community.

C: My name is Charlotte and I am a student at BUAS. In my free time I game from time to time so I guess that qualifies me as a casual gamer. Sometimes I even like shoutcasting a game here or there. Whenever I game it varies each week. Sometimes I play couple of hours a week, other it can go up to 20ish.

MK: OK, then let's go to the next question, which is, what motivated you to play games? Actually, what got you interested in it? I remember for me, it's that my best friend, she used to play a lot of League of Legends, and she always said, come play with me. And I was like, no, I'm not a gamer. I always rejected her. But at one point, I was like, OK, sure. And then I played it together with her. And then, from then, I guess.

M: League was your first game?

MK: Yeah, League was my first actual game.

E: But when you were a kid, did you also game?

MK: I played on the DS, you know, back in the day, with Pokemon. We didn't have a PlayStation, but we had a Wii, and I played Wii Sports and stuff. Not really gaming, but it was a game. So that's it for me.

M: OK, I think it's also gaming, right? Because I think my first game was when I was four years old. My dad would play Tomb Raider with me. That's kind of... He would cover my eyes when he was shooting. So that was my first game. And then I always played games, I think, just also on my Nintendo DS. And we did have a PlayStation, I think PlayStation 2 and 3. So I used to play a lot of RPGs on there. And then, I think when I was 14, there also was a friend who played League of Legends. And then I started as well.

MK: Me at 14 as well, I think.

M: Yeah, that's like the age of League. And then, I don't know, I was never really... I'm still not really good at it, because it's just really... (MK: I am not good either) You are, though. You're way better than me. Yeah, she is good. I am not.. But I don't play League.

She is good. And then there was a guy I wanted to... Impress? Yeah, impress. (E: Oh, he's your current boyfriend?) Yes. And then I was like, come, we can play League together. So then I got addicted. And then, I guess, that's how I started.

E: That's a really cute story. (MK: Yeah. How about you, Ekaterina?) With me, it comes from a really young age. So when I was younger in Bulgaria, having this PlayStation computer is actually a luxury when I was a kid, right? So many households didn't have, but my parents were already quite technological people. So they just bought me these big screen PCs, you know, the fat ones. Really. That's the one that we had for many years. And I started playing with games that my father motivated me to play, actually. So it was shooters.

M: Like my dad also. (E: Yeah, it was shooters mostly, but also... Wow. GTA Vice City, right? San Andreas, the old school.)

MK: I played GTA on a DS as well. (M: What, on a DS?) Yeah, on a DS, (M: I remember. My parents didn't want me to play GTA.)

E: Yeah, same. But they didn't know anything about GTA world, so they were like, okay, fine. And my father was making me play Max Payne, CS 1.6 as well with my cousins. We played a lot in the childhood. A lot of games. I don't even remember the names of all, but I played a lot. And then when I came to the Netherlands, I started hiding my university depression with gaming. Relatable. So I played, I was addicted to Fortnite for like three, four years. Oh, Fortnite. Yeah, and then my ex-boyfriend, he was always watching CS tournaments. Oh, CS Go and... Yeah, CS Go. He was really watching a lot of tournaments and playing himself. And from then, like four or five years now, I have been addicted to CS hardcore. And I play it almost every day.

I think when people play CS, they're either addicted or they don't play it. Like, there's nothing in between. Yeah, I'm the first time. Yeah, I'm addicted.

M: Do you also buy the skins and everything?

E: Yeah, on one account now, I'm trying to create an ancient Egypt inventory. Oh, wow. You can use it as like investment, I think. Recently, I invested like 100 euros, 200 or something. But my total investment is no more than 500 euros.

MK: Oh, that's okay. I think for League, for me, it's like 200 euros. (M: Yeah, League for me is also like 200. Maximum. But now I've spent more on other games, so... Yeah, on Honkai.

M: Or Genshin. I didn't spend any money on Genshin. (MK: Me neither.)

C: I got into gaming because of friends who started gaming, as a way to spend time together in a different way. I only started following esports after I joined my university and met more like minded gamers.

MK: Moving on to the next question. Okay, so how often do you usually play games? Like nowadays... You said every day, right? (E: Yeah, you have my answer. I play every day, yeah.) For me, it's like nowadays, I play like maybe like twice a week or something. Like usually only in the weekends, because during the weekdays, I'm too dead. Yeah, it's super tiring.

Especially League, it's quite... You just get tired. But like before, when I was just like still like in my first or second year, because it was like the times of COVID, I had so much free time. And I was like, I played so much League of Legends actually. But now I don't have time, so I cannot play. Yeah. But yeah, basically nowadays, probably like twice a week.

E: But do you wish you had more time to play more or you're fine?

MK: Like for League of Legends, not really. Because it's only fun nowadays if I have like a friend to play with. Because if I play alone, it's just too boring. And like for my mobile games, I just play on my phone, you know. It's all like things I can do alone. So that's what I do.

M: I think I play a lot of random ass games. Because I was addicted to GeoGuessr for like two months lately. And I also played Mobile Legends, which is actually horrible. I was playing that. So I was playing I think every day for the past months. But before that, I didn't really play at all.

Because I was just reading and doing other things. So I think on average, maybe once a week. If I put the whole year together and divide it.

Because I have those phases where I just fixate on something. And then I do that for a long time. Then I move on.

So I haven't played League in a very long time. (MK: True, but it's also because you don't have PC.) I fixed my PC though.

M: True, now it is. (MK: And now you have the Wi-Fi thing.) Yeah, I have the Wi-Fi thing. I just have to install it so I can play again.

MK: Okay, so for the next question. What role do you think that playing games plays into your life?

C: Socialisation definitely. Personal fulfilment too I think as when I am in the mood to game, and it goes well then it feels fulfilling. I also think it is a fun way to spend time in general, even if I do not socialize, do something else, you know.

M: For me, social aspects. But I actually like playing games on my own. But I don't really make time for it. Or I haven't done that lately.

Because I like playing Final Fantasy and everything. Then it's just relaxation. So social or relaxation, I think.

MK: Yeah, for me as well, I think. I like just having lots of fun with friends. It's very relaxing to do. Because usually I like being on my own. But then if I play games, I like to spend it with someone. So that's a usual thing.

But I think also gaming... I think I was really addicted one time to League of Legends. It was really bad. Nowadays, I try to not play as much games as well. So that's also a thing to have a healthy balance as well.

E: But for both of you, you don't strive to be competitive? And really to rank up and be the best?

MK: No, because I never had... I'm really not that type of person. Because I don't really care about being the best. And I also don't really care about the rank. Although I do like enjoying playing rank. I would say I never have the motivation or drive to become in the top. But it's the same with quizzes or something. If I play against my boyfriend, he really wants to win. I just don't care about that. So yeah, I don't really have that esports mentality. Even if I was really good, I think I also wouldn't do it.

M: I would, I think. But I'm just not good enough. Yeah, I would really train. I would watch YouTube videos of how to play like Ahri mid. And I just can't do it.

I'm just so bad. So I'm like, why is my brain like stunted or something? Did I fall on my head as a child? But I just, I'm not good enough. And my boyfriend is very good.

So when I played with him, we would often get in a fight. Because he would be like, why are you over there? You should have ganked me, blah, blah. And I'm like, fuck off.

Yeah. So that wouldn't work out. So we are a bit competitive.

But I'm not even really competitive. I don't really care to be like a high rank. But I do find it annoying if I spend like half an hour.

And then we lose because of a stupid, dumb mistake of someone, you know? Like how I talk right now. I get a bit toxic.

E: I get it so much.

MK: So relatable. Because if I actually play ranked solo, then I feel like there's some anger building up.

M: Yeah, I just get angry. The heart rate goes up.

MK: Like then I think, I should just stop playing. Like one time, I was grinding ranked. And then I actually dream about ranked, you know? And then I feel like I'm just like... wow I should stop

E: So yeah. This is very hypothetical, but I have the same really. For me, it's the competitive element, right? Because I... So when I was playing, I have been playing casually by myself a lot. And just in one of my games, there was one guy that we became friends afterwards. He's from Russia. And he didn't tell me for a long time.

So we were just friends chatting, etc. And then at one point, he tells me he's actually a professional coach in CS. In Russia.

And he's been coaching one of the best CS teams. (M: Oh, really? That's cool, though.) Yeah, so we became even bigger friends.

And I started to ask him a bit about what's the industry like. Like, can I do it actually professionally? Not as a player, right? Because I always knew that I'm not a good pro player. But just maybe as a coach or manager or whatever.

And he really explained me the details. And then I found the Guardians. It was already here, right? Established that I just joined them. Telling them about my passion and about my interest in it. And since then, since the first moment I joined Red Guardians, that was two years ago. I established the CS team.

And that was back then in collaboration with kind of press, like one coach for volleyball from Bless, who became my player. And then we started going into competitions together. Initially, I wanted to be their coach.

But then I realized these guys are 100 times better than me. How can I be a coach for them? (M: Yeah, I get it.) So at one point, I just decided that I'll be just a manager.

Then I established an academy team for the Guardians. So we made two teams. One academy to learn how to become better, low skill players, right? And then one main team that goes to competitions and is, let's say, much higher level, really high level guys.

And yeah, I've made a lot of changes to the team. I'm their division manager, let's say. I removed the academy team this year.

And now I only have one team that I'm managing. That currently is also going a bit more in the professional direction. So they separated, three guys separated a bit.

And they now play ESEA, which is really the entry to the professional field at CS. Yeah. So next Monday, I have a meeting with all of them to discuss new direction for next year.

If I'm gone, what they will do, et cetera, et cetera. But yeah, that's what I'm doing now. Okay.

C: For skill development, I haven't done anything no. I have asked friends for advice from time to time but not been coached specifically. I do not think I have been a big part of

community engagement. I have shoutcasted or analyzed couple of Valorant matches but I am not sure if that is what you mean.

MK: Then let's talk a bit about your gaming preferences. Although we did talk a bit. Like, what's your favorite game at the moment?

MK: Is it still League of Legends or is it CSGO for you?

M: Well, my favorite game has never really been League, I think. Because I kind of hate it. But it's just a love-hate relationship. Yeah, it's like everybody hates, like... I think my favorite game is either Persona 5 or Final Fantasy VII Remake. I just like Cloud, so...

E: What are these games? Can you tell me a bit about them?

M: Yeah, they're RPGs, JRPGs. You play as a character and you go through a story. And you have this battle system.

Persona 5 has a turn-based battle system. So you pick a skill and then you attack. And then the enemy attacks you.

And that's how it goes. And Final Fantasy VII has more of a real-time-ish combat style. So you really have to be faster, I think.

But they're both not really technically difficult. So that's what I like. You also have games like Dark Souls or Elden Ring or something.

I prefer games that have a bit more of a storyline to it. And nice characterization. And less of the really hard fights.

Because, I mean... Yeah, I just don't really get a lot of enjoyment out of doing the same thing for 15 times. So I think those are my favorites.

E: Are they popular games in general? Do they have a big community of people?

M: Yeah, definitely.

I think they're not super widely known. But still... Final Fantasy, I think everyone basically knows. Persona 5 is a bit more on the niche side.

But there are a lot of people who do know it. But you do have to be a bit into Japanese games, I think. To like it.

MK: For me, I actually don't know what my actual favorite is. Because I like to play a lot of different games as well. And I also wouldn't say that League is my favorite.

Although I think I might play it the most. But I'm not sure. I think like Stardew... Yeah, Stardew Valley is also my top 5. I think I have like that the most hours in my Steam. It's like 2000 or something.

M: Whoa, that's so many. I had like more than that in League. That's horrible.

MK: So yeah, I really love Stardew. (M: That's a lot of Stardew hours.) And I play multiplayer as well. So we would have a farm, and then we would mine. Someone goes fish. And someone goes like to the dungeons. It's like really fun actually. I really love the game. And actually there is a new update. Yes, I have to play it.

M: We should have a farm together.

MK: Yeah, let's have a farm.

M: You don't like the slice of life games? (asked to Ekaterina)

E: Just shooters. I'm just having fun. No, I also played for example games like Assassin's Creed.. (Doyle from the background: You also play Super Mario Kart.) In another universe I like Super Mario Kart.

M: It's fun. And Smash is also one of my favorite games. But I'm also not very good at it.

E: We have a lot of people who play Smash. Yeah, I know. It's so nice. (M: I love Smash. It's so funny.) But yeah, for me it's really CS.

E: Well, I have more than 7k hours in this game. It's not something I'm proud of. No, it's fine. But recently, because I don't have a stable internet connection at home. I cannot really play the professional platform. Typically, if you want to play more professionally, you play there. Which is called Faceit. An external platform that allows you to have an anti-cheat. And then you play not with cheaters.

And currently because Valve doesn't really have an anti-cheat in CS. There's just a cheater in every game that I play. Wow, really? So I rank for a crazy amount of points. Like 17k points. Which is really good for CS. In premier mode to something like 12k.

(M: Oh, because of all the cheaters.) So now I cannot say CS is my favorite game at this moment. In the state that it is right now.

E: That sucks actually. It really sucks. All the community is boycotting. There's videos from all kinds of content creators now being published. That people are stopping playing CS just because of the cheaters. Wow. It's a big problem.

MK: Because we talked a bit about it. But imagine if you were like really, really good at the game. You would go like as a professional player?

M: I don't know. I don't think so actually. Because I don't know.

MK: Or like maybe like just playing professionally at your school for example.

M: I think maybe I would start streaming or something. Just to get money with that. But I don't think. I don't know. If I'm really, really good. I just can't even imagine being that good you know. Then it's probably really nice to do the competition right. At least I assume. So maybe I would. But I don't know if I'd really want to make it my job you know. Because it's quite, I don't know. I think I would be really bored after a while. By doing League for so many times. I already did it a lot. And then you do it just full time. And it's really bad for your wrists and everything. And also unhealthy. So I don't know if I would want to do that.

E: Yeah right. Yes.

M: I want to have more of an active job I think. Where I have to walk or something. Doing something else. But maybe for like two days a week.

MK: Like if someone would ask you from like. Your classmate says join our esports university team.

M: If I was really good I would do that I think. I would like that yeah. But not as a job.

E: And you Ekaterina would you? I'm doing it right. I mean I have a team. I have a CS team that we're meeting.

Like typically twice for practice. But now the past two weeks we haven't met a lot. But typically we do meet twice per week for practice.

And we have tournament matches every Sunday. Oh wow. Yeah.

I am not a player right. So I'm just more there for their support. Signing them for tournaments. Giving them opportunities. Keeping on track what's going on.

MK: But if you would be a player?

E: No. I've been once a sub in one day. One day in the tournament that we used to have in the previous split. I liked it.

And everyone afterwards gave me a lot of compliments. That I was playing really good. So I really found it nice.

But at the same time it's too stressful for me.

M: Yeah it's so stressful actually. I didn't think of that.

E: I think I would be stressed out. I can tell you. I've seen my players when we play for tournaments.

And they're really good. Yeah they're like perfect players. They get so stressed even if missing one shot or something. They start to bang. They start to smash. It's really crazy. So no. I wouldn't do it.

M: I can understand that.

MK: Okay then for the next question. About your own experience. Have you ever been to like a gaming related event or something? Like TwitchCon for example.

M: Like the other... Dutch Comic Con I guess.

Don't know if it counts. But yeah. Like it has some gaming... I actually have a super cool thing. Maybe it's a bit off topic. But I was at the Dutch Comic Con. And then there were Overwatch voice actors from Lucio. And they asked for like people who wanted to play with him on stage. I was like sure. And then they picked me. So I was like on a stage with that man in the team. We sucked so bad. But it was really funny.

And he was just like doing his voice lines. And it was so trippy because we were playing and he heard it so I know. (E: That's really pretty cool.)

It was really funny. That was nice.

E: Do you go every year?

M: I think so. Maybe once a year. Because it's twice a year of course. I usually go once I think.

MK: Would you go to TwitchCon?

M: No I'm not really into any Twitch things. Like streamers? Yeah I don't really... No. I don't really put it on you know. Because my boyfriend he just has Twitch on all day. Or whatever YouTube I don't know. And he does his live while that's in the background.

I don't. I don't like those type of things. I have music on.
And I don't really watch long videos or anything. So yeah.

E: What about you? (Referring to MK)

MK: I don't think I've actually been to an actual event yet. Because you know. Like I really don't like crowded places on stage. (M: This is so busy.)

Yeah so like every time I think I would want to go. I'm like every time like a bit turns off. Like I just don't want to feel like. Like I'm stressed because everyone's bumping into me. Yeah that happens. Like I really hate that.

But I heard there are cute things to buy there. (M: that's true). Like that's my only convincing point. To buy stuff.

M: And the cosplays are really nice.

MK: So yeah that's also pretty cool. But I think I maybe would go once if the time is right for it.

M: You can come with me one time. (MK: Okay!)

MK: And but I've been to in Seoul. Where I did my minor abroad. I went to League of Legends LoL Park. And so it's basically like. Like basically like sort of like the hive. But I guess a bit more high-tech. And I used to go there in my free time. And I play with my group. Like my film group. We played like some games together.

Like League of Legends. We play Valorant. So that's something I did do.

And I also really enjoyed it. Yeah like you have to pay like I don't know. Like 50 cent an hour or something.

E: Oh it is not very expensive.

MK: So yeah. And you can also order food there.

So it's like really like a really nice place to be then. So that's actually the only thing that I really did. And sometimes when there was like an event at that place.

You had like also people who would do like League of Legends cosplays as well. And you can also buy merchandise. I think when there was like some big.

Like a big event. I think like a tournament. And you could also like do like.

If you had for example you scored this much. For like I have no idea with what. Then you could get like free prize or something.

E: Oh okay. But that's if you have a membership there. Or just if you visit or.

M: You have to like. Like you have to make an account. So you just go to the frontdesk and you say.

I want to play here. And then they're like okay. You have this form here.

And then you have basically like your own account to go to a PC and just play there.

E: Okay. This kind of place are really also popular in Eastern Europe.

Well they used to be a lot more when I was a kid right. Everyone would gather in this internet cafes. Oh wow.

It would be like the gathering place for gamers.

M: Yeah we have also one in where I'm from in Alphen aan de Rijn. There's the Esports Game Arena.

MK: Oh really?

M: I don't know if you know it. But I used to go there a few times. Oh wow really? Yeah. It's like it's in the Game Mania building. There's a store. And then next to it is this kind of a place like this. With a lot of PCs next to each other.

MK: Oh wow I didn't even know.

E: The eSports game arena? Do you know who owns it?

M: No. I don't.

I was there pretty often like before Covid I think. That's actually pretty interesting. Yeah maybe I could put you in touch with someone there.

Because I think I know someone who works there maybe. And they also host events. But I don't know if they're still doing stuff.

Probably, because I would just go there and play League as well, and they did pop quizzes with like video game music, it was really fun. And it was also like, they had their own, their own sort of members that would go there and just come multiple times? I think so, yeah. I think you had to pay up front or something, kind of like the Korean thing you just described. Oh, just to play a game. But I'm not sure. Yeah, I think you had to pay if you wanted to use the PCs, yeah, for a couple of hours or something.

And there were also just regular board games. But yeah, there were usually just kids playing Fortnite. That's everywhere, right?

E: In Spain, when I was living in Barcelona, I was going a lot to internet class because my laptop was not that good, and I really wanted to play a lot of Fortnite.

Yes, I would know that, guys, there were kids, 13, 14 year olds, screaming, they're playing Fortnite all day. And I was as well, the same, right? So I was the only one not screaming. (M: Yeah, they would be like, ma'am, did you see my shot over here? I was like, well, great for you.)

Yeah, it's a bit strange. That's actually kind of funny, but also very interesting, actually. Let's see.

MK: So the next question is, are you currently a member of any gaming or esports communities?

M: Yeah, I wouldn't say I'm a member of theirs. When are you exactly a member is also the question. I used to maybe be a member because I visited a lot, but ever since then, I moved to Leiden and I never went again.

E: Well, I am, right? I was also part of Doran's esports, that was the esports organization of Nijmegen, because I was studying there, but I just went once to an event to get to know them and tell them about the Breda Guardians, so it was not like I was an active member or something, but here, of course, I'm two years in management, so it's more like, not a member, but a manager.

MK: Yeah, and for me, I'm also, yeah, like I work here, of course, as an internship, but am I really a member? That's also a question, like I haven't played here even yet, like I haven't played games, so I wouldn't say I'm an esports, like that I'm a member of any game

communities. Maybe back in the day I would be in an online one, like that I would play games with like an online community.

So maybe that's a thing as well, because I live quite far, so it's like not that I can join the club of my own school or something.

C: Breda Guardians counts I think. As I am an online member and often visit the on site gaming area The HIVE. I am only part of a girl valorant gaming discord, DCVS "shoutcaster" from time to time and un-active user of other gaming discords.

MK: Do you have any like first impressions of the Hive, maybe, that you want to share?

M: Okay, first impression. I think it looks really nice, especially with the heptagon (lights) things, or what, I don't know what they're called.

And it looks kind of like very, how do you say, clean and professional, I think with those things (racing cars). I thought it looked a bit like a store, so in a good way, I think. (MK: It's the GameMania).

Yeah, a bit like GameMania, yeah. And when we arrived here, I thought it maybe was like more of an office space, so I didn't know if we were supposed to go in. Yeah, because it's like a... Yeah, it felt a bit like an office.

E: We are in the innovation square, where it's offices for... Ah, okay, yeah, that's how it feels. So I think that, and it looks really cool with the open windows and everything. So yeah.

MK: And upstairs?

M: Yeah, upstairs, I thought it was a bit maybe dark, but that's, yeah, I said to you, it's like a guy's place to me. A men's cave.

E: No, but it's interesting observation, right?

M: That's how it feels to me.

MK: Yeah, I can also agree, for my first visit here, I thought, okay... First of all, I didn't know where I had to be, because I wanted to go to the hive. I looked for it, but yeah, I also knew...

M: Oh, I remember you were texting me on Discord, like, where do I go?

MK: Like, but anyways, I just asked some guy that was at the bench or something, like at the booth. I'm like, you know where the hive is? And he was like, yeah, I can bring you there. But then you already saw me. But anyway, so when we got here, I was like, okay, that's a pretty cool space, you know? Because it was like, the racing cars, it's like pretty, like, it's new, I would say. Or for someone that doesn't really go to these places, it's like, well, there's like a racing car thing.

Yeah, right, it's cool. But I did think, like, it was a bit bland looking. But I've also been to LoL Park, so I guess it's like more decorated there.

So if I had to do the thing where I look at LoL Park first and then here, then I guess it's a little less, but you know, I don't really care much.

M: Yeah, you could have more decorations, maybe, or like posters or anything. Yeah, maybe like more gaming.

Yeah, more gaming vibes. Maybe here, you know, the black casters thing. Yeah, it could be. Or behind on this wall, it's really empty. But you know this, because we use it for casting. So it needs to be cleaned to decorate.

When you're a caster or you have an event here, you decorate with sponsors, posters, etc. So that's why usually it's... Yeah, like wall art or something, that would be cool. But that's kind of difficult to get rid of.

And for upstairs, I thought it was like pretty cool that you have like a lot of PCs. But it was, you know, also like very dark, like not as decorated as well. Like I'd like to see like more lights or something, you know, like more LED lights.

MK: LED lights, yeah. Like to make it more colorful, like a bit more gamer, because now it's just like PC, PC, PC. And I mean, it's not that bad, because if you really want to game only, then it's nice.

For the purpose, I think, yeah. Yeah, for the purpose it's nice, but I am attracted to pretty things. So yeah, it's just a side comment.

So that's basically my first impression of it.

V: I like the space. It's definitely designed for gamers, taking the lighting into account, monitor and gpu type. Only some adjustments can be made like mounting the monitors for optimum space and getting a non blue switch key board for sound. Other than that the vibe is chill, only not very inviting on the outside but it is inviting on the inside.

E: Okay, but that's interesting observations, right? Because I never think even further now that I work here. Yeah, I get that, yeah.

I'm so used to it that I don't even notice, right? But one thing that I've been noticing the past few months, at least since you all started your internships compared to previous teams, is that, for example, also community members have mentioned it to me even, we keep these lights on white now, right? So it really feels like an office space. Yeah, it does. This is office, like kind of an office area, right? But at the same time, for the community, it's not as welcoming as it was before.

M: Because before we always used to have these colorful lights on. And it used to be more lively as well somehow, that's how it felt. And now it feels really like more closed and clinical. Yeah, I get that, yeah. It does feel like office or school lighting. Yeah, like it really doesn't have the welcoming atmosphere.

Homely, yeah. Like it's really cozy or something. Yeah, and I don't really notice it, right, so much.

E: Because I'm always working as well. Yeah, I get that, yeah. But at the same time, once when a person from the community mentioned it to me, I thought, actually, now when you mention it, I realize it as well.

MK: Yeah. Okay, then let's see. Okay, well, for events, I think there's no point asking, you haven't been there.

MK: And I also haven't joined any events outside being an intern. So I also really cannot speak for things that have been done here yet. So I guess I'll just- I know a lot, right? But I think- Yeah, for us, just like a regular visitor, maybe.

E: Yeah, one thing that's interesting is that what we did when I was still about to join Breda Guardians in 2022, there was the CS2 Major, CSGO back then Major, which is the biggest event for the year that happens every year for the game. And it was then, it was a month, and it's like 20k plus visitors for these events. It's really big.

E: So we went as the Breda Guardians team, and I thought that this was a really nice bonding element. But here we've organized a lot of stuff, right? We organize also events if

you're an external and you want to have our space for your event, it's also possible to do it. And we will do it for free, by the way.

MK: Okay, so also when you are here at Breda Guardians, for example, what is your- How do you think the atmosphere would be like here? Like, what do you think that would happen? Like, do you think there's only like men streaming around, like playing FIFA or something?

M: I think for me it's a bit of a confusion, because it feels like half office or something. So I was like, can people just come in here now and just chill here? Because that feels weird, because there's people working. That's kind of a- Yeah, I don't think if I didn't know, I would think this is an office, so I wouldn't really go in, you know? Because it's also because of the location.

Then I think it should be, it would be communicated some way that you know like, this is just a place you can go.

MK: Yeah, I can also agree with that, because with all my projects I've done for school, where we have to do the marketing aspect of having more people here, it's also very important from the things I've learned, that the things of how it looks inside, it's also very important how it looks outside. So I think it can also be more prominent that this is an actual game space.

People can come here, maybe more like, I don't know if it's allowed, but maybe more like, you have a trail or something that leads to the hive, and there's more of those, like a big banner or something that says, it's open from nine to five or something, just come game. You know, it's for everyone, some sort of promotion at least, that you can know. Also maybe at the entrance as well, that it just is more noticeable.

And for here inside, I just really had no thoughts, honestly, of what I had to expect, because I had no clue, but I did think it's probably just guys coming in here, playing FIFA or something. Well, if you come here on a daily basis, right? Majority of people who come, especially for the PlayStation, it's people who play. It's really all for this.

Because when you enter, you look usually at the big screen. You don't know what's upstairs either. It could also be maybe a bit more decorated or something, like up on the staircase as well.

E: Yeah, I agree, I agree. We can put more effort. Also before, we used to have these movable things, like it was not that big, but that you can put like a small banner outside with info about when it's open and stuff like that.

Yeah, like that. This needs to be told too. When I have it all written down, then... No, but we really should take it into consideration.

MK: That's a really good suggestion. Yeah, so let's see. Okay, as a non-member, what would you like to see from, you know, these... from Breda Guardians? Like what would you want to see happening if you were like in Breda? Yeah, if I was a student, whatever, yeah, yeah.

C: I know it is hard to achieve but starting their own online streaming would be interesting to see, for tournaments, et cetera. I also think the community is really nice but it would not hurt to improve the size of the community. It would be fun to have watch parties of tournaments on site, I think an event where lower ranked players can learn from higher ranks would be fun as well and ofc LAN parties.

M: I think it would be cute to have like events, to have like a Smash tournament or like dedicated events. Because, oh, I actually am part of a board game association, a student association. Oh, okay.

I kind of forgot to tell. But that's mostly board games, but we also have a PS5 for sure. I don't know actually, a Switch or whatever there.

And we have, I think, two open nights every week. So then everyone can just come in, all the students. And then we also have one time a month, game day, in which the whole day, you can just come on Saturday and do games.

But there's often also special activities. So then there's, for example, on Thursday, there's a Smash tournament, or we have Mario Kart tournament, League of Legends tournament, I think even once, or LAN party, all kinds of things, D&D night. It's kind of different things. But that's really nice because then, you know, like, oh, there's people coming that want to do the same thing as I want to do. So yeah, I think that's pretty nice. I should ask you, like we have, right? We started doing that.

E: Well, we've done a lot of tournaments, mostly actually the tournaments that are being organized here are from the students that are studying sports and esports bachelors or the minor. And then for this period, it's a bit quiet because they no longer have these assignments. But before December, for example, we had three or four tournaments taking place, like Brawlhalla, FIFA, League, I forgot which I was, nevermind, but also before that. So every year when there's the minor taking place and the specialization, they have the live stream production course that I'm also teaching. They must organize tournaments and they always do it here. Oh, that's really nice.

Yeah, that's a good collaboration for assignments. Yeah, and now we have this every Friday community events online that they just piloted last week, I think. So now they will do it every week.

M: That's on Discord or something? Yeah, that's also what I wanted to say, because I would expect them to have some sort of a Discord where you can just also talk to the members and agree like, oh, I'm coming in this night or something. So you don't want to be here and there's nothing, you know? Yeah, true. So that's, I think, the most important.

MK: OK, then we can go to more of a deeper understanding of how you feel about things. So, for example, how do you feel about when you think about being a part of a gaming or esports community?

V: I was very anxious, but now it's my happy place. But I am worried that I am not good enough for my team.

MK: For me it's more like, you know, I'm a bit more of the shy type and for a physical community, I would say I would be very reluctant to join these type of things because I think it's really hard for me just to talk to other people. But unless if I had like some more moral support, as in I have friends that would come with me, then I would be more comfortable. And if I would enjoy a time like my first time, then I would maybe, you know, do it more often. If I think it's too much, it's too awkward, then I wouldn't go in. So that's my feeling about it.

M: Yeah, I would have the same because I'm not really like shy, but I do get very uncomfortable in new situations with new people and stuff. So I would never go. And actually, the association that I'm in right now, like the board game thing, I also didn't go for a very long time because I was just scared because it also has a reputation at my uni like for nerds, you know.

So I was like, I don't want to be like an outcast again. So I won't go here. And then I got roommates and he was a member of that.

And he just said like, you have to come because you will really like it. I just know it, blah, blah. And after like weeks of badgering me, I said, OK, I will come.

And then it was really nice. So, yeah, I also got introduced by someone who I knew. Otherwise, I would have never gone there.

E: Yeah. So for both of you, you need to be accompanied.

M: Yeah, like, yeah.

C: I would be excited and anxious because from one side it is fun to play with new people. From the other side, you do not know if they are nice yet. I'm excited to see what kind of entertainment can be provided and connections to be made with esports and their community. I don't have any barriers necessarily, with esports specifically, just hoping to be taken seriously. My goals would be great friendship, no drama, good time.

V: I feel like I'm not good enough to play with the esports teams. I play with them for fun but I feel like I'm bad.

V: I visit the Hive and participate in online gatherings and convos on Discord. I like the community. but sometimes due to my rank level I might get excluded and then it sucks a bit. But good friends make up for it later. I'm part of Breda Guardians and I also run my own server. I sometimes join other servers. I used to be part of the Overwatch community. I never got coaching but have close friends in high ranks who give tips in custom games and we mess around to get me better for fun.

M: I think so. Especially to be honest, as a girl, I would not be comfortable like with random guys. I don't know, it's usually just a lot of guys. Because if you have like the first, like the impression that they just only scream like, yeah, why you do this, blah, blah. And I'm like, OK, you know, it's too much like screaming, you know. Yeah, or just looking like, well, it's a girl because that happens sometimes. Everyone's like shocked.

M: Yeah, yeah. I don't like that.
"There's a girl here playing." Yeah. That also makes me cringe.

E: I'm like, OK, well. I would not want that, you know. But that's basically my gaming community, right? The CS community is like this. So I'm very used to it online. Yeah. And that's why for me, when I approach events or when I want to go to external organizations like Dorans, where I told you that I went only once, I basically present myself as a professional. So I never present myself as someone who would be interested to join the community. But more like I'm a professional and I'm here for networking. So I do it in this way that they and then I don't feel awkward.

M: Yeah, that's fair.

E: Yeah. I don't even go out of my house, honestly, if I don't have to work. So I mean, this makes enough, right? Yeah, like it makes sense.

MK: OK. Um, do you have any... Well, I guess we already described it over why we would not join because, you know, people screaming. And for example, I'm also just, yeah, I like to be inside. I don't go out as often either. Like, yeah, I'm just a bit lazy, honestly, in that aspect. That's an introvert, not lazy. Yeah, it's called being more introvert. Yeah, I mean, yeah, as well.

But I feel like a lot of times I get invited, you know, to do stuff and then I just say no. Like, I just say no. But it's a bit bad of me, honestly.

M: No, it's fine.

MK: Well, let's see. Do you have any, like, frustrations that you've had that you maybe want to share that also makes you not want to join these type of, yeah, communities? Because, for example, I have like people, you know, when they flirt with you because you're a girl.

M: Yes. Then I also think, okay. Yeah, I think the biggest thing is that just when you, I would never go on my own because I would be like, and you just know you're probably going to be not in the majority, like as a girl.

(E: Of course, yeah) I think it's always the same. And I mean, that's fine. But there's just a lot of, there's a lot of really nice guys out there who just are nice.

But there's also always like weird dudes. So then that's the thing I would be most reluctant to. Because, yeah, I just don't feel like dealing with any of that.

E: Yeah, like, like through training as well. Yeah. Yeah, for me, I don't know, to be honest. I told you, for me, I just approach it as a professional. And when I tell everyone I'm a teacher. Yeah, they won't do weird things.

That's who I've told this to me already before. Really, that's how I approach everyone. I just tell them I'm a professional.

I work here. This is my role. I'm a teacher, et cetera.

And then there's this wall. A good framing, yeah. And this wall is so high.

They don't, they don't allow themselves to jump over it. Well, I understand that.

M: Well, I had this thing happen when I went to one of the Smash tournaments for the Society Gaming thing.

And I was there with my friends because I have, I know basically everyone there. And there was this new dude and he came up to me and I, you can just sense immediately like. Bad intentions.

Yeah. And he was just like buzzing around the whole time. I was just trying to play and he would be saying very inappropriate things, actually.

And then those kinds of things are just, it makes you really annoyed, so. Yeah, like it ruins just your. Yeah, and just like, fuck off.

Just because I'm a girl doesn't mean I'm interested in you.

MK: Yeah, like I really think flirting is like the first thing to do. Just like, if you want to talk like a friend or something, then just, you know, be normal.

M: Yeah, but he wasn't interested in me as a normal person. He just thought, oh, it's a girl, yeah. You just know that immediately.

E: That's because 99% of their communication with women in their lives has been only online. Probably. Right.

And they go out of control when they see in person. No normal social things.

MK: Okay, well, how would your most optimal dream gaming community look like? Yeah. Let me think for a second. If I was to think about it, I mean, I'm not sure. Like, if it was like really my dream and I could just, you know, do whatever I want with it, for example, if this was my space, I would make it look, first of all, like very cozy.

Like the interior, I would really make it very, like, you know, that you feel happy when you walk inside. Basically, like cute colors, you know, you have like those, like the, how do you call it? Like, like the loose, big chairs. Yeah, I know what you mean.

I forgot, but yes, I know. And then, you know, like maybe like plushies. Like the cute gaming plushies or like a big Snorlax, so that would be really cool.

And then I would also just, you know, have like, I mean, if there were just like no girls really, or just not that many, what would I do? Honestly, I have no idea. (M: Your dream place just has girls). Like my dream place, it would just be that, you know, you know, that they are all just vibing, you know, they're having fun.

(M: Respectful.) Yeah, respectful, you know, really cute. Like I can't not really explain it, but I can see it in my own vision that, you know, like it's colorful and it's also for everyone.

Like, it's not that it's like all pink or something, you know, but something where like both girls and guys can just have their, also their own space that they can enjoy. So for example, like maybe some private room. Oh, yeah, let me explain.. Not extreme, but like, imagine if you want to do just dance or something, it might be awkward to like dance in public.

M: That's my perfect place.

E: That's true. That's true. You're right.

MK: So yeah, like something like that.

C: Everyone having fun, non toxic and uplifting environment where you are not discouraged to play games you like because of other people. Have on site events to encourage connections and community building.

M: Yeah, I think I have a good idea too now for my dream thing. It would be pink, honestly. Like I don't care.

And like with a cloud, a cloud couch thing. That would be cute. Like a dream vibe, you know, a dream.

And then I think there should really be like separate things indeed. So like you have this corner for more serious, competitive things with PCs and then just dance and maybe a board game area. And it would have to be in a central place because I don't feel like traveling very far.

So it would have to be in Utrecht or something like close to the station. And like in the ultimate dream, you could have like a badge which says like, I am taken and they just donut and talk to me. That's my dream.

Like your own custom badge. Is that a good one? Yeah, like for the dating aspect, because I do not want it. So and maybe like pronoun badges and stuff.

I want it to be inclusive and cute, like LGBT flags. That would be a good place for me. Yeah.

E: Okay. For me, one and most important thing for me has always been that there's international people. So a lot of the organizations that I have been having an interest as a student when I was doing a study here was were 99% with Dutch people.

And I'm an international. I mean, if I go to a Dutch environment with only Dutchies and they discuss their Dutch stuff, no offense, right? But I mean, I just don't feel welcome. I understand.

I think also a lot of people will just switch over to Dutch often. Yes. Right.

I see that because we also have international members at our society and it just happens a lot that people will be like, oh, are we all Dutch now? And then they just start talking Dutch. And then of course, if someone they don't feel welcome to come over. If you have someone just wanting to join, they will not join.

Yeah, it's true. Yeah. So for me, you know, this one most important aspect.

And then the other one is to be a lot more like decorative and to have more space. So I feel like the space that we have now here is too small. I feel like it would be nicer if we have a bigger space because yeah, I just feel it's too small.

M: Yeah, you can maybe do something. You said it was for castings or something? That part of the area. This is quite a big place where nothing like visible is happening.

E: Yeah, but typically also it's for the interns, right? Yeah. So the Doyle and Mi Kha usually they have a spot there. In case I don't. So these spaces, it's interns typically. And here. So this.

M: Yeah, then you don't have much room left. Yeah. So we are quite limited.

M: Yeah. It's also a bit of a weird shaped space. So that makes it more difficult.

MK: Like sticks out or something. Okay, for the next question. I just want to check Mikko because.

E: Yeah, I might need to go. Do you have a lot of left?

MK: I will have to do like create something after this. I have like a few questions related to that. And then maybe I can make it quick for you.

Yeah. Okay, then you can answer these. Okay, how does your day look like as a game? Just on how you are on a regular day.

E: So I work, right? I work a lot. I'm overworked. So I just work is my first priority. And whenever I have leftover time, which is only in the evenings, usually after 11 until 3 in the morning, I game. Okay, so that's basically. Okay. Then next. Are there some. People that influence you on like playing games, for example, that.

MK: For example, if you don't want to play games and you have a friend that says. Let's play a game now. Do you have someone that has that impact on you?

E: No, nobody can convince me to play if I don't want to play.

E: And if I want to play, nobody can convince me not to play. Okay, okay. Yeah, okay.

M: Very direct. Oh, okay. Then.

MK: What's your most important or maybe fun. Fun. Most fun experience that you've had in a like in a community or maybe in an event.

E: Oh, it's definitely the major. The CS2 major in Antwerp. Just experiencing life. What's the audience like of these big events, right? Esports events. It's really for me. This was. I'll never forget it. It's my top three life experiences. Okay.

MK: And now I will speed through the questions about you as a female gamer. Speed through the questions.

E: Yeah, sorry, really.

MK: Okay, as a female gamer, what are your struggles? Like, is it like the crazy men?

E: 'Go to the kitchen woman.' I mean online when you play CS. If they know you're a girl. Every game and I'm not exaggerating. Every game. Make me a sandwich. Go back to the kitchen woman. You're shit and I'm the best, right? I'm always top fragging or something. So it's always the same comment and they even kick me sometimes.

C: Sexism definitely. Meaning toxicity against female gamers in game. I have not encountered it with BG but in game while playing with other people definitely.

V: In the gaming community, online at least, there is a lot of sexism. Not only from men, but also women and even the game client itself. I was told to go to the kitchen, and do dishes by men. and I was told to kill myself for trying to bond with girls in games. And I got a ban for saying "suck my clit" to a man who told me to suck his dick. He got no warnings or bans. Or my guy friends. but I got a year ban for saying "clit".

M: Wow, that's so fucking dumb.

E: CS is the most toxic of all. It sounds very toxic, yeah. Much worse than League. Much worse than even Dota. Overwatch or whatever. Overwatch or much Valorant is not even comparable, right?

MK: Okay. Do you feel by way of female representation is important?

E: Of course. Of course.
No. I'm honestly like tired of playing with guys only. I need my girl homies. So more girls would make you feel more safe. Of course, 100%. Like, yes. It's my dream.

C: I think it is. It would not only make me feel safe but also experience less toxicity hopefully and more support. They would have probably encountered the same experience as I have.

V: Female representation is important. And I feel like I would love to game with more girls, but only if they aren't toxic. Last time I played with a girl I was nice to, she was mad and toxic for absolutely no reason. I think without male sexism, females can feel less in a competition and more safe in the games that they play. Maybe it'll make all women less scared and hostile when it comes to talking to one another.

MK: Okay, let me see. In your opinion, what steps would be necessary for these type of communities to improve on that aspect?

V: I think really cracking down on sexism from men. Women get tense in games because of male abuse. If there is no abuse and women can have pure fun, then they can feel safer, express joy, strategies, and anything they want with one another without feeling fear. I have reported men who were sexist, told me to kill myself, slit my wrists. I reported also women who told me to slit my wrists, that nobody wants me, etc, without me provoking them. Just because I wanted to befriend. And all those reports were not taken care of at all. And on top of that I received a ban for saying clit. there is no protection for women, and no strong consequences for sexism and bullying. Only certain words. A dream gaming community would be where everyone can play happily and safely.

E: It's really what we've been trying, right? I mean, which you to brainstorm and think about.

We are not yet actively doing it, but I feel like more events that are not also marketing-wise targeted at only gamers of a particular game. For example, if you're Valorant gamer, CS gamer or whatever. But more community events where different stuff are happening.

And there's a few different interests or activities that are happening. But if you're not a CS gamer, then you can be interested to play Just Dance or play board games with someone. So combined activity events for the community.

MK: Do you think there's enough opportunities for female gamers to become in the professional scene, for example?

C: It is getting better with Game changers tournaments etc but I think it could be so much better. I believe esports in one of those sports where there should not be a division between female and male gamers if their skill level is the same. I think people should play together in higher ranked competitions and not divide.

E: Right, I don't know about the other games so much. CS is really limited. Going into professional CS, as a girl gamer, currently there's only separate gender tournaments. It's really weird actually. Yeah, so like, that's a good matter. Women's tournaments, etc. But also, I've told you this before, just, and that's a fact, yeah? Because girls going into esports is a phenomenon that's happening the past few years, like two, three, four years has been going on more intensively. Before that, it was not something like as common as it's become now. So also, this means that the field, the amount of people, girls playing, and their skill level is not yet that good, just because of the time that they have not been involved for 10 years like guys or 20, right? We have been for five years more involved.

So it will take us probably five more years to become at the level of guys or something, that we can really go into mixed gender tournaments. So I can say no, nowadays, if you're a girl, I wouldn't say you should do this full time. I would not advise it as a career.

MK: Yeah. Okay, then that's it. I won't take your time.

E: I have a meeting now with for the call. Oh, okay. Because we want it's the deadline is 29th of April.

So if we want to go into the call, we'll have basically one week to write it out and be like four or five pages, but I don't know how much. So I need to align with the professors and the PhD researchers from the other universities, how we can write it. Okay, so good luck.

MK: Okay, then let's finish a bit of the questions. Okay, walks through a typical day or week in your life as a gamer.

C: During the week I will probably play a bit from home and also go to BG gaming area and play with better PCs. I like engaging offline but more often it happens online as distance to the esports facilities and availability and opening times plays a big role.

M: Usually I have work, then I get off work, then I cook, then I eat, and then I do a workout. And then I will play a game, usually with a friend or something from maybe eight to like 12. If we are into the game or eight to nine or something.

So yeah. And if I'm doing a game on my own, then it could be like a whole day off. It's Saturday or something.

I could play for the whole day. Oh, okay. That hasn't happened lately.

MK: Yeah. I also actually play at late. I think this is like a pattern as well.

Because if I play, I play around maybe when I'm home. And it's really usually because I have to go eat then. And after eating, maybe I'll go shower, maybe like, like, I'm just gonna do some gaming.

But then it's like a really like, I think nine or something like I play usually around like nine or 10. And depending if I have to do something the next day or after, then I play until like late. Like 1am, 2am.

M: Yeah, I haven't done that in a while. But I do draw until like 3am. So it doesn't matter.

MK: Me too actually sometimes with designing. So it's fine. It's fine.

MK: Okay, then what are the steps that you have to take into consideration when you want to join a gaming community?

M: For me location and price. And I guess also the people that are going there.

MK: So like, imagine if you were a Breda student, right? It's like free to play here.

M: So I would come here I think with like a friend if we don't have anything to do on a break or something. Yeah. Okay, so the friend is important.

MK: Yes. Same actually. Okay, then do you have also like a group or maybe some like, like person that can influence you on when you want to play games or not?

V: My close friends, my boy friends.

M: Yeah, I think so. Because when Alexander, you know, he would ask me like, do you want to play Mobile Legends? And I would be like, sure. I will play it. But I would never do it on my own.

MK: Did you know that like in esports views, it has like the most views together with Valorant. But I think that's just like more.

M: And also you influence me when you want to play League. Because I'm influenced very easily. Actually, if someone's like begging, please play, I would say okay, okay.

MK: Yeah, me too. If I have like nothing to do, then I'm like, okay, yeah, why not? Okay, then.

Okay, well, you haven't had any interaction with Breda Guardians? (M: No.) Okay, let me see.

C: Very, I was an intern couple interns ago so I got to learn a lot there is about BG and now I try to hop by and support as much as I can. And for their activities, yes, it was nice as I have friends from the community too so we has the chance to hang out. I love the community building and growth that can be seen each semester and year. I appreciate the want to be bigger and better each time.

V: I'm very familiar with Breda Guardians and its activities. I participate in the weekly gatherings, its fun. I like the openness and chillness of the guardians. It's easy to talk to people, you can play whenever, with whomever. For improvement, some people are a little tense and love drama. And there was a time I was getting flamed for something that I didn't

do, I assume it was a misunderstanding, but it took a bit long for the admin to tell that girl to stop talking and posing drama. it escalated and she kept talking negatively towards and about me even after the warning, when I didn't say or do anything. Luckily the admin knows me and he saw what happened and I was not at fault. But it took long for it to be settled down. Also there is a girl who I heard keeps leaving her cigarettes' buds at the hive, you can't smoke there, I think they need to give her a warning or kick her out because it's dangerous and with no windows in place it really smells.

The community atmosphere within Breda Guardians is chill for the most part. I am able to bond and interact with a lot of guys there. The women there are a little hostile though so I only have a few friends who are female there. It's easier to interact with guys than girls, I hope that changes though.

C: I have been to different gaming events but never participated as a player in a tournament as my skill level is not that high. Events like Dreamhack, gameforce and seen events happening for Breda Guardians. It has always been a great experience as meeting like minded people is exciting and I can engage in conversations about the same topic.

MK: Do you have any fun experience that you had in like a gaming event or like something?

M: Yeah, like the thing I told about Overwatch. I think that one is the yeah. Like the most fun part? Yeah, definitely.

MK: Okay, then some questions about you as a female gamer. Yes. Okay, as a female gamer, what have you experienced that cost negative?

M: Um, just a lot of cussing out League of Legends.

Because I guess the way I type is kind of feminine or something. And then sometimes I would maybe say one thing and some dude would catch up on it. I would be like, are you a girl? Just a constant question.

Like, are you a girl? And of course, I play Lux and stuff. So everyone's like, she is a girl.

Like, it's very obvious.

And then yeah, they would have dumb comments. Actually, the worst thing that happened to me, it was a very emotional moment. I was playing Overwatch.

And I think there was something about Jojo. I don't know what was it. But maybe I said something or someone said something about Jojo.

And I was like, oh, I'm watching like season five. And they spoiled it for me in the comment. Like, what the fuck? I was actually annoyed.

I was like, wow. And they're like, you should go back to the kitchen.

And I was like, I'm sorry? That actually was a horrible. And like, it's actually true.

Yeah, it was true. Sad. And my boyfriend, he said it was my fault.

MK: Why?

M: So he's like, you shouldn't provoke them. Like, I just said one thing.

MK: He's cancelled again.. Well, okay. Well, let's see. So we're having more female representation.

M: Yes. Okay. I think so.

I think I really like watching the videos of Lili Pichu with Pokimane. Like very long time ago. Because I don't really watch streams.

But I would watch their YouTube videos sometimes. And I think I thought, actually, I was kind of misogynistic, I think because I was like, oh, they're just like girls. And I was just so ingrained, you know, the misogyny and myself because of the gaming.

I'd be like, they cannot be that good, you know. And then I watched their videos. They were good. And I just was jealous and annoyed. That was bad. So I think it's good if there's more representation.

Because even as a girl, you will be like, at least I was like, just negative towards them, which is super stupid. Yeah, I wasn't a hater like outwardly. But I would think hateful thoughts, which is so stupid.

And now I don't. But yeah, I think it's good if we just see it's normalized. Yeah, like a rare occasion where a girl games and is good at it.

MK: Like, I also think there are things that I really enjoy when I scroll through my social media, like through my TikTok or something, or I don't know, Reels, whatever, or YouTube shorts. Because I sometimes get like some of those, if they play games. And then it's like the girl who is like beefing with other guys.

Like those things that really makes me like, I really like the type of content. That they are rude back, you know.

M: Oh, I understand.

M: Like, fuck you. We are not just here to be like silent and share everything. Like that type of representation is also nice to see.

MK: I get it. Like I really like the beef and that they get quiet. Just shut them up.

Yeah, true. Because, yeah, they need to hear it. Yeah, it's true. Yeah. And if I see it somewhere, I'm like, that's nice. At least one person got shit on.

MK: Okay, then let's see. Okay, what steps can these types of communities take to make it more inclusive?

C: Not sure. I believe game developers should make sure they have reporting systems and keep them up to date and punish those who go out of line – men or women. I think gaming communities should just look out for any trouble makers within their communities and have some sort of reporting system as well. Make sure that people on the other side take these matters seriously.

M: Yeah, I think also what Ekaterina said, like make sure there's just enough to do for everyone. Because of course there's going to be girls who like CSGO or League of Legends, but I guess it would also be very nice to have like an Animal Crossing event or something.

Where naturally, I think more girls were gravitating to, you know. Even though everyone can play everything, of course. I think still that would be nice.

MK: Like, here's my cute island.

M: Yeah, and also just to decorate it a bit more. Because I don't know if this is really stereotypical for me, but I feel like girls appreciate like a nice room. Like, that's me. At least I do and I'm a girl.

MK: Yeah, me too.

MK: Yeah. Okay, then. Okay, let me see. Do you feel there's enough opportunities for female gamers to, you know.

M: Yeah, I'm not really knowledgeable about that. So, I think Ekaterina said more important things about it.

MK: I have no clue. Me neither. I also have no clue.

M: But I do know that they probably have no chance because of, you know, the gender gap. And that they just. And that they probably say like, no, girls can't be good enough.

MK: Yeah, right. Yeah. And yeah, you know, it could be true. Maybe not, you know. But still, at least give them a chance. So, yeah, I guess.

M: Maybe not. But maybe if you're really into gaming, then that could be your job. I feel like just like the average person.

MK: Okay, what are your main goals or desires when you want to join a gaming community?

V: Playing well with my team. Bonding and winning together. If the people I know and vibe with go, then I go. Unless it's getting drunk in a pub. I'd rather have a cozy night together or something. So I host some cozy get togethers too.

M: I guess, for me right now, I wouldn't really have it because I already have. It sounds a bit stupid, but I have enough friends.

Like, I just don't need anyone. So, I guess my goal would be to have to make friends, I think. If I didn't have them, just to make friends and do some nice activities.