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## A CONCEPTIONAL RESEARCH ON DETERMINING THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF ELECTRONIC SPORTS EVENTS: E-SPORTS TOURISM<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

E-sports events drawing attention by being demanded are recently considered as one of the travel motivations. As any sports organization's touristic draw, in a similar way, organized e-sport events are coming into prominence as one of the touristic draw factors. When growing numbers of organized international e-sports events and 380 million global e-sports viewers according to 2018 data considered, touristic potential of e-sports events could be easily understood. In line with these subjects, e-sports events are approached as one of the alternative tourism products and the importance and necessity of comprehensive researches discussing the term *e-sports tourism* by examining e-sports activities within the tourism paradigm is emphasized.

**Keywords:** Electronic game, electronic sports, e-sports tourism

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## ELEKTRONİK SPOR ETKİNLİKLERİNİN TURİZM POTANSİYELİNİ BELİRLEMEYE YÖNELİK KAVRAMSAL BİR ÇALIŞMA: E-SPOR TURİZMİ

### Özet

Zamanla değişim gösteren seyahat etme motivasyonları arasına son zamanlarda gördüğü talep ile dikkat çeken e-spor etkinlikleri de eklenmiştir. Herhangi bir spor organizasyonu için gerçekleştirilen turistik katılıma benzer şekilde, düzenlenen e-spor etkinlikleri de birer turistik çekim unsuru olarak ön plana çıkmaya başlamıştır. 2018 yılı verilerine göre küresel boyutta e-spor izleyici sayısının 380 milyon kişiye ulaşması ve dünya genelinde giderek daha yaygın bir şekilde düzenlenen uluslararası katımlı e-spor organizasyonlarının sayıca artması dikkate alındığında, e-spor etkinliklerinin turizm potansiyeli daha iyi bir şekilde anlaşılabilir. Bu gelişmeler doğrultusunda e-spor etkinlikleri alternatif bir turizm ürünü olarak ele alınmış ve e-spor faaliyetlerinin turizm paradigması ile incelenerek *e-spor turizmi* kavramına dair yapılacak kapsamlı araştırmaların önemine ve gerekliliğine vurgu yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Elektronik oyun, elektronik spor, e-spor turizmi

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout history people have participated in travel activities for various reasons. While previously they used to travel on purposes of work, health, visiting relatives and relaxation which are more narrow-scoped compared to those of today, now with the support of factors such as increase in revenues, progress in transportation opportunities and spread of foreign language knowledge (Zengin, 2009: 39-49) transnational touristic trips are had even for tasting the foods prepared by famous chefs. It can be stated within this context that numerous travel motivation potential for people left its narrow-scoped structure behind in time and has begun to take a specific form focused on particular interest. Accordingly it is observed that tourists involved in mass tourism activity have turned from traditional tourism products to alternative ones (Kılıç and Kurnaz, 2010: 40; Lansing and De Vries, 2007).

Concept of sports tourism, one of alternative tourism types and a reflection of thousands of sports organizations held in the world every year (Deery et al., 2004), has been extending the grounds for a while, which it found in literature. Electronic sport (e-sport<sup>3</sup>) has started to spring into life in the tourism industry as a new travelling motivation. That is to say, similarly to the touristic activities performed for a football organization, e-sport activities<sup>4</sup> organized have also begun to be a primary source of motivation for performing tourist activities at certain levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Though electronic sports are not agreed yet to be accepted as “sports”, the term being used as electronic sport (e-sport) has become widespread. (Rambush et al. 2007; Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011; Yuri, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Turkey League of Legends 2015 Season – Winter Final held at Volkswagen Arena-Turkey on 04.04.2015 with the participation of Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club (BJK) breaking a new ground among the other world sports clubs by organizing a professional e-sports team (Kaya, 2015; Milliyet, 2015a) and League of Legends International Wildcard Invitational held in Turkey on 25.04.2015 in which seven professional e-sports teams will compete to take part in the League of Legends Mid-Season Invitational to be held in May in the United States of America (VWARENA, 2015a; VW ARENA, 2015b) can be held up as an example of e-sports activities organized in Turkey.

Tourism industry having a considerable share in the global economy, its contribution to balance of payments (Mathieson and Wall, 1982) and its capacity of moving economic development from industrialized provinces into the country with its qualification of contributing to the elimination of economic imbalance among the regions (Öztürk and Yazıcıoğlu, 2002: 2) lead countries to make efforts on benefiting from the opportunities that this industry is capable of providing (Algan, 1995: 83). For this reason tourism competition increasing among countries and even cities has paved the way for the formation of different kinds of tourism. Countries and cities aiming at generating economic income out of tourism have used ever means available such as historical, natural, cultural possibilities and focused on developing touristic destinations by trying to create new attractions (Hacıoğlu and Avcıkurt, 2008: 385).

It is possible to say that e-sports organizations available to performed without a need for considerable infrastructure investment can be considered as a significant element for touristic attraction in future for destinations to prefer tending towards alternative tourism types and will bring in huge acquisitions for the destinations<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, considering the fact that reactive activities are important factors on achieving a healthy social structure through people's physical and mental recovery, gathering and strengthening the social ties (Mason and Cheyne, 2000) and healthy individuals (Zengin, 2009: 249), it can be said that e-sports activities play an important role capable of healthy development of social relations (Horzum, 2011: 58).

### **1. Sports Tourism and Electronic Sports Event**

Sport is an important means which provides individuals with physical, mental, emotional and social development, improves their knowledge, skills and leadership capabilities (Sunay and Saracaloğlu, 2003: 43) and at the same time unites people with different languages, race or religion on earth as part of a universal culture. It is apt to describe today's sport as a complement of activities performed to positively affect people's mental health in addition to its physical benefits and to provide social and ethical acquisitions (Yalçın and Balcı, 2013: 27).

In previous years researchers dealt with sports and tourism concepts each as a separate phenomenon. With the increase of sportive activities and interest by masses in these applications, it has become hard for these concepts to diverge from each other. Thus these two concepts have started to be associated with each other in recent years (Chirilă, et al., 2014: 52). Individuals should be involved in a touristic movement to take part in sportive activities on the global basis. In this context it seems that a notable relation exists between the sport and tourism activities.

Sports tourism can be described in such a way that individuals leave their homes and travel to take part in sportive activities as a participant or a spectator (Schumacher, 2003: 17). Sports tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism types in recent years<sup>6</sup>. Despite this development, sports tourism is not a new touristic movement. On the contrary, it is known that people travelled in 776 BC to take part in athletics organized to honour Zeus (Gibson, 1998: 157). First of all for such travels, people should have a free time to make use of. Activities performed to spend free times are usually considered as recreative activities. While recreational activities,

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<sup>5</sup> Employment that can be provided for 500 thousand people in near future on Turkey basis by means of electronic games and relevant sectors and a possible added value of 20-25 billion dollars that can be created through country promotion over electronic games can be considered as examples (Güler, 2015: 17).

<sup>6</sup> When considered as tourism of private interest, sports tourism can be accepted as one of the fastest-growing tourism types. It can stated that sports tourism will considerably contribute to the economic developments of local authorities, provinces, regions and even countries and their becoming tourist destinations (Alexandris and Kaplanidou, 2014: 125).

an important factor for forming tourism, may include various purposes, sports-based activities are also one of them.

Considering the concept of sports tourism, three factors to take into account come into prominence. These are to take an active role in games, to support the activity participants and to visit the venues where those activities are held (Öztürk and Yazıcıoğlu, 2002).

Events considered within the context of sports tourism (Olympic Games, World Cup, etc.) are also important for the promotion of countries. Researches show that 88 per cent of 110.000 international visitors arriving at Australia for Olympic Games revisited Sydney as tourists afterwards. Another research conducted among the American participants coming to Australia for Olympic Games reveals that these people made plans to spend their future trips in Australia (Neirotti, 2003: 12).

Fourie and Spronk (2011) state that there is a substantial increase in the number of tourists coming to countries within the framework of various sport organizations held in North Africa (International Rugby Board (IRB) Rugby World Cup, the 1996 African Cup of Nations, the 2003 International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup, the 2007 World Twenty20 Championships, the 2009 Indian Premier League (IPL), the 2009 British and Irish Lions tour, the 2009 Confederations Cup, and the 2009 ICC Champions) and sportive events may constitute the primary tourism revenues for the region with these organizations becoming perpetual.

According to the researches carried out during the sports organization held in Hungary in 2006, 66% of participants and 85% of the spectators are composed of individuals coming from abroad with the sole purpose of these organizations (average staying time from 5 to 7 days)<sup>7</sup>. Another result of the research revealing the importance of sports tourism is that more than 75% of the participants and spectators indicated that they were thinking of attending the organizations to be held in coming years again (Rédei, 2010: 7).

Technological developments have had an impact over the sports as over every other field and contributed to the formation of new concepts. One of these developments is e-sport. E-sport can be described as a sport requiring both physical and mental efforts, which a person/people on the far end of the world can play electronic games (e-game<sup>8</sup>) meeting another/others at the other corner of it on the internet or people from all around the world come together and play e-games through comprehensive e-sport organizations.

The concept of e-sport has both physical and mental benefits compared to other sport types. These can be sorted as follows (Zone e-Sports, 2012);

- Execution on the computer environment (virtually),
- Not requiring huge financial resources in terms of new installation and equipment compared to the traditional sports,
- Existence of opportunity all over the world to perform this sport,
- Open to play individually or in a team,
- Requiring equipment special to its nature.

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<sup>7</sup> While 15% of participants and spectators stayed at 5-star hotels, 57% preferred 3- or 4- star ones.

<sup>8</sup> It is considered more suitable to use the term of "electronic games" for all electronic-content games including all instead of the ones that can be used both for each other and for specifically apart from each other as "video games" and "computer games" with reference to the physical equipment on which the game is played such as video game systems and computers (Whitlock, 2004: 6-7; Wolf and Perron, 2005: 2-3).

While sports tourism may mean an activity requiring different types of participation in huge organizations, they can also be activities carried out individually. Hence, trips organized individually or in small teams for sports such as rafting, skiing or sky diving can be considered as tourism activities. It can be observed that e-sports activities gaining more importance in time and tourism movements performed in this direction tend towards becoming a mass activity rather than an activity of small groups and are expected to keep this development trend accordingly.

## **2. Origin of Electronic Games and Electronic Sports Tourism**

Before speaking of electronic games, it will be more proper to deal with the concept of game. It is seen that games are considered under two main topics in literature. These are *paidia* and *ludus*. While *paidia* in Greek means “childish, child plays”, *ludus* implies “game, competition, game of chance, theatrical play” (Eren, 2009: 18). As it is also clear from the descriptions, the way some games are played are determined by some certain rules regarding winning or loss. That kind of games are called *ludus*, and the ones with no rules but regulatory codes are named as *paidia*. Chess can be an example for *ludus* games, whereas a child imitating a plane by spreading his arms like the wings can be considered as an example for *paidia* games (Frasca, 2001).

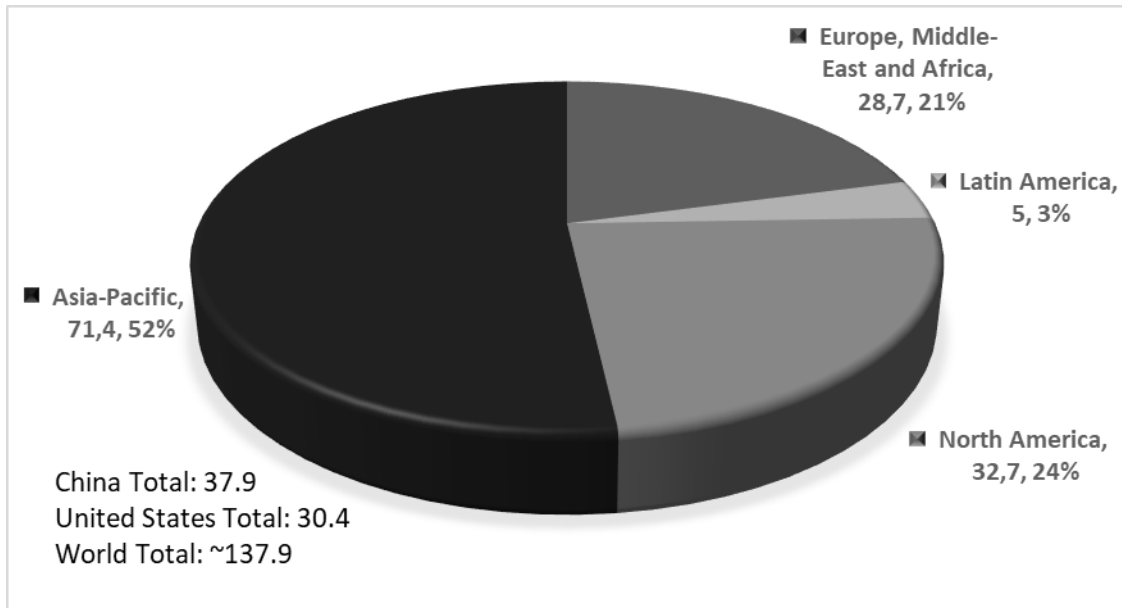
Considering e-games within the context of *ludus* and *paidia* games, though it is possible to consider some of them as a kind of *paidia* games, it is supposed that it will be more proper to qualify them generally as *ludus*-type games which are subject to certain rules and have win-or-lose eventuality.

The first e-game device in history is known as Cathode Ray Tube Amusement Device (Anderson, 1983). The trademark for this device including a single game was registered by the American Patent Office in December 1948 (Patent No: 2455992) (Ponggame, 2015). Later on Alan Turing, and a team in which he was involved designed Ferranti Mark I in the laboratories of Manchester University and produced a program capable of simple chess moves. The capacity of this program was not sufficient for a whole chess game but only had the capacity to calculate simple moves (Lavington, 1980).

Though the origin of first electronic games dates back to 1960s, the first e-games were commercially launched in 1970s. Spacewar! completed in 1962 is considered as the first modern e-game (Graetz, 1981) whereas Computer Space produced in 1971 was gained a place in the market as the first commercial e-game. After a year the first game system available for use at home (external game console), The Magnavox Odyssey in 1972, was put on the market. In the same year the game called Pong developed by Allan Alcorn and launched by the Atari company became the first popular e-game.

Personal computer usage that became widespread over years continued extending the sphere of influence of the e-game world with the contributions of the elements developed for computers such as processing power and artificial intelligence and the increase in game types (Yılmaz and Çağıltay, 2004; PongGame, 2015; Wolf and Perron, 2005). These developments contributed to the e-game industry to achieve significant volumes in economic terms (see Figure 1). According to Gaudiosi (2012), an author of Forbes Magazine, it is stated that income from the game industry will also increase considerably in the upcoming years.

**Graphic 1.** 2018 Global Games Market<sup>9</sup> (billion \$)



**Source:** Designed according to the source Newzoo, 2018<sup>10</sup> as cited in Wijman, 2018.

The fact that electronic games today can be played on various environments such as mobile phones, tablet computers, laptops, game consoles, etc. proves to what extent this industry has grown. E-games touching our lives in early ages and in different fields have brought along the emergence of serious gamer masses. Competition brought about with this situation paved the way for the emergence of e-sport concept.

The concept of e-sports signifies a type of sports which is performed through an e-game played between professionals basing on organization and competition and requires both physical and mental efforts (Zone e-Sports, 2012; BBC, 2015). Intensifying interest in e-games over time, internet usage becoming widespread and the increase in time spend by people for online socialization have accelerated the development of e-games and this situation has set the stage for the formation of applications and organizations by means of which gamers will be able to compete with each other over e-games<sup>11</sup>.

International e-Sports Federation – IeSF which has set the international standards for e-sports with the purpose of supporting the growth which e-sports has globally achieved and of ensuring that possible variations will contribute to rather than damage the integrity of e-sports was founded in 2008. The number of members for the federation starting its operations with 9 member countries has reached up to 42 and the interest showed in the e-sport activities organized by the federation every year since 2009 has increased in time, as it is also seen on the table below (IeSF, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Updated at April 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Newzoo, (2018), Global Games Market Report: April 2018 Quarterly Update, newzoo.com/globalgamesreport.

<sup>11</sup> It is known that there is a positive correlation between the increasing interest in e-games and the increase in the importance attached to e-sport applications. The e-sport events organized have improved and grown in time so much that with international participation they can be compared to today's professional sports organization within the limits of certain criterions.

*A Conceptual Research on Determining the Tourism Potential of Electronic Sports Events:  
E-Sports Tourism*

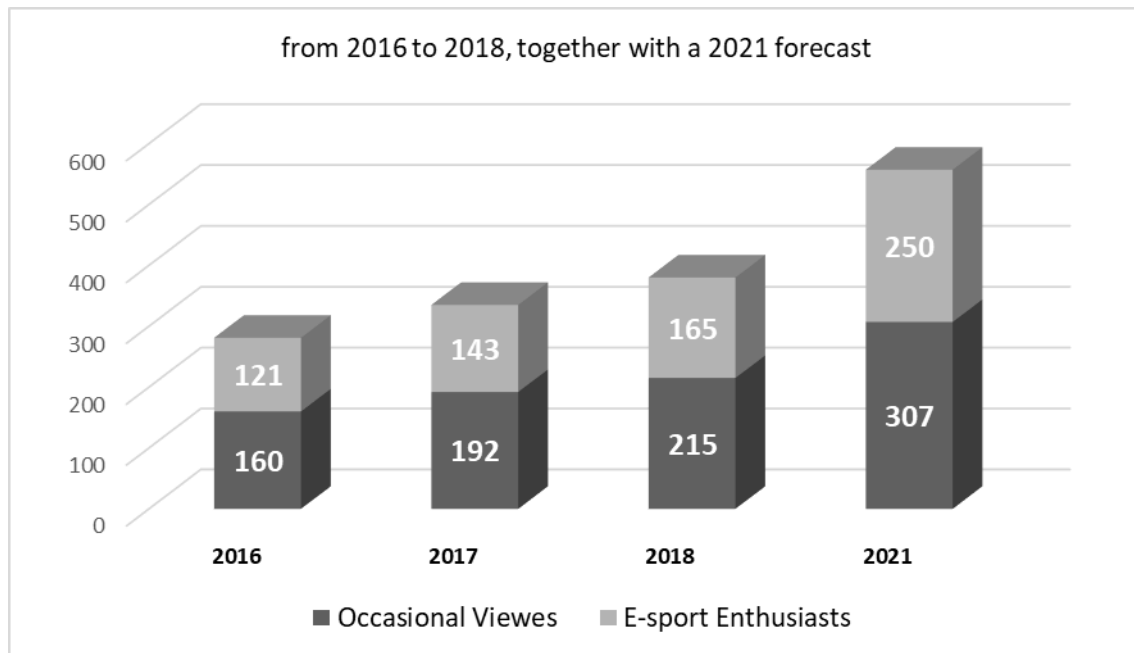
Organization	Period	e-Game	Participation	Location
IeSF 2009 Challenge	10.12.2009	WarCraft III	120 participants from 20 countries	176-28, Hwanhji-dong Taebaek-si Gangwon-do, O2 Resort/SOUTH KOREA
	14.12.2009	FIFA Online 2 <u>Exhibition:</u> Alliance of Valiant Arms – A.V.A.		
IeSF 2010 Grand Final	28.10.2010 01.11.2010	FIFA Online 2	350 participants from 33 countries	1676, SanKyuk-Dong, Bukgu, Daegu, EXCO/SOUTH KOREA
		WarCraft III		
		<u>Exhibition:</u> Alliance of Valiant Arms – A.V.A.		
		Grand Chase		
		Home Run Battle 3D		
IeSF 2011 World Championship	08.10.2011 10.11.2011	FIFA Online 2	400 participants from 40 countries	300-1 Unheung-dong, Andong, Gyungbuk/SOUTH KOREA
		Alliance of Valiant Arms – A.V.A. <u>Exhibition:</u> To be announced		
IeSF 2012 World Championship	02.10.2012 06.10.2012	StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty	400 participants from 45 countries	Cheon An Samguri Park/SOUTH KOREA
		Tekken Tag Tournament 2		
		Alliance of Valiant Arms – A.V.A. <u>Exhibition:</u> Screen Golf		
IeSF 2013 World Championship	01.11.2013 03.11.2013	<u>Men:</u> League of Legends	300 participants from 45 countries	Calea Piscului Nr. 10, Sector 4, Bucuresti/ROMANIA
		Alliance of Valiant Arms – A.V.A.		
		<u>Women:</u> Tekken Tag Tournament 2		
		StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm		
		<u>Exhibition:</u> Not specified		
IeSF 2014 World Championship	12.11.2014 16.11.2014	<u>Open for All:</u> Defense of the Ancients 2 – DotA 2	400 participants from 46 countries	Baku Crystal Hall, Baku/AZERBAIJAN
		StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm		
		HearthStone: Heroes of WarCraft		
		Ultra Street Fighter 4		
		Tekken Tag Tournament 2		
		<u>Women:</u> StarCraft 2: Heart of the Swarm		
		Tekken Tag Tournament 2 <u>Exhibition:</u> Not specified		

**Table 1.** International e-Sports Federation e-Sports Events (2009-2014)

**Source:** Created using the sources IeSF, 2009; IeSF 2010; IeSF, 2011; IeSF, 2012; IeSF, 2013; IeSF, 2014.

In addition to e-sport events organized by the International e-Sports Federations, other e-sports activities with award pools exceeding one million dollars such as StarCraft II World Championship Series – StarCraft II World Championship (WSC), League of Legends Championship Series – League of Legends Championship (LCS), The International (TI), which have international participation and attract large masses, are organized and also new ones emerge (Twitch, 2014). For example, according to Newzoo (2015a) providing the service of market research and consultancy focusing completely on the e-game industry on the international level, globally 205 million people are considered as e-sports viewers (Newzoo, 2015b: 4). E-sports audience can be categorized as occasional viewers<sup>12</sup> and e-sports enthusiasts<sup>13</sup> and their number increases by each passing year significantly as can be seen on the graphic below (Pannekeet, 2018):

**Graphic 2.** E-Sports Audience Growth (million people)



**Source:** Designed according to the source Newzoo, 2018<sup>14</sup> as cited in Pannekeet, 2018.

League of Legends World Championship organized in 2013 was followed 32 million online viewers<sup>15</sup>. It was recorded that this number was three times more than the viewers of the championship in 2012 and outnumbered the spectators following the NBA (National Basketball Association) finals (BBC, 2015; Custer, 2014). The interest taken in the e-sports events has gone beyond the on-line scale and started to make it attractive to be present on-site where the event is held like the tourism activities performed for watching football, basketball or other sport events. The fact that Sangam Stadium in Seoul at which the 2002 Football World Cup semi-final match was played hosted 40 thousand viewers for the 2014 League of Legends World Championship event can be regarded as an example. If we are to give an example out of South Korea that can

<sup>12</sup> “People who watch professional e-sports content less than once a month” (Newzoo, 2018: 12).

<sup>13</sup> “People who watch professional e-sports content more than once a month” (Newzoo, 2018: 12).

<sup>14</sup> Newzoo, (2018), Global Esports Market Report.

<sup>15</sup> To ensure that all the viewers are invited to watch the event on-site, a space wider than what 350 Wembley Stadiums (a capacity of 90.000) would provide will be needed (Warr, 2014; WembleyStadium, 2015).



be qualified as the center of e-sports events, it is proper to say that 11 thousand people participated in the e-sport event held at a basketball arena in Seattle in 2014 (BBC, 2015). It is also known that League of Legends Champions League – Turkey Grand Final held at Ülker Sports Arena<sup>16</sup> (Istanbul) in 2014 was participated by 10 thousand people – tickets were sold out in a week- and another e-sport event held on 08.08.2015 received similar-level participation, tickets for which were sold out on the same day they were put up for sale (Kreatif Fabrika<sup>17</sup>, 2015a; Milliyet, 2015b). The attraction level being a part of the e-sports events remarkably increasing year after year. In 2017, with 46 million unique viewers<sup>18</sup> the most online watched e-sports tournament in history took place; Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) World Championship that drew 173 thousand people (approximately 60 thousand more people than the last year) to the stadium event and surrounding festival held in Katowice, Poland (Elder, 2017).

Activities performed within the framework of e-sports and the displacement mobility in this context prove that e-sports can be regarded as a touristic activity. Consequently, as in any of sports organizations, e-sports teams and their followers as tourists travel between cities or countries for organized e-sports competitions and events (IeSF, 2014) and thus perform a touristic activity. All the elements which those e-sports followers need such as travel, accommodation, catering and recreational activities share similarities with those of tourists involved in other touristic activities. With computers and internet gaining more space in everyday life with each passing day, it can be argued basing on statistics that there is an increase in demands for tourism products in terms of e-games and this increase will continue<sup>19</sup>. In this regard, it is considered as a necessity for the development of tourism literature that the mobility created as part of e-sports should be regarded as a tourism paradigm and examined as a type of tourism and that researches on e-sport tourism should be further improved and the concept should be revealed more comprehensively.

### **Conclusion and Assessment**

The motivation factors behind people involving in the tourism industry as tourists differ greatly from each other. E-sport organizations are only one of the motivation elements continuing its development. Improvement speed of technology and decrease in the costs of electronic devices have enabled that computers and that kind of devices can be used more widely in daily lives. This situation has led to an increase in usage and demand of electronic-based activities (e-mail, e-book, e-game, etc.) and also contributed to the development the aforementioned motivation element.

It is known that games which have huge importance for individual development preserve this importance to a different extent for people in following ages. Being interested in football in the development period, for example, can lead to being interested in football or similar sports activities either actively or passively in the following periods.

Socialization and competitive relations developed through games are partly replaced by e-games today. The fact that borders are removed and the world is making progress in the

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<sup>16</sup> Total construction site is 67.000m<sup>2</sup> and it has a capacity for 15.000 people (Ülker Sports Arena, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Kreatif Fabrika is a digital creativity agency producing internet projects, mobile products and social media content (Kreatif Fabrika, 2015b).

<sup>18</sup> 35% more viewers from the last year and surpassed the previous record of 43 million unique viewers of the League of Legends World Championship of 2016 (Elder, 2017)

<sup>19</sup> It is stated that there are more than 20 million people in Turkey who are interested in e-games and the country takes the third place in the World ranking in terms of time spent playing games on computer (Güler, 2015: 13-14).

globalization process every day has transformed the interaction and game-playing among people physically close to each other's residences (same neighborhood or city in a broad sense) into a possibility of online games played on electronic platforms among people physically far away from each other (different countries and even different continents) and this situation has become one of the realities of today. Professionalization of some people interested in e-games during this period has brought e-game events into a competitive environment on the international arena and this development is followed by e-sport teams, e-sport matches and e-sport spectators.

Like the sport organizations held, also the e-sports organizations can be a primary source of motivation for thousands of people in accordance with its own followers to arrange touristic travels. Moreover, examining the relevant statistics, it is possible to say that this development has a great potential. Considering this, it is considered as a necessity for the development of tourism literature that the mobility created as part of e-sports should be regarded as a tourism paradigm and examined as a type of tourism and that researches on e-sport tourism should be further improved and the concept should be revealed more comprehensively. It is desired that tourism researchers should make researches on e-sports, examine these events in terms of tourism, regard them within the framework of alternative tourism types and contribute to the development of relevant concepts and applications.

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