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The History of Open-World Video Games: A Timeline from 1976 to 2023

La historia de los videojuegos de mundo abierto: Cronología desde 1976 hasta 2023

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Abstract

This article analyzes the evolution of open-world video games from their origins to 2023, establishing a chronology that contextualizes their development in relation to technological advancements and industry trends. By examining the release pace, the study explores the progression of the open-world model and its consolidation across different console generations. A comparative approach is employed, linking the evolution of these games to hardware capabilities. Verification criteria were applied through the analysis of specialized sources and player discussions to ensure the coherence of the selected titles. The results indicate that the expansion of open-world games has been strongly tied to platform power, although it also reflects shifts in industry preferences. The recent decline in release frequency suggests a potential transition in their design and consumption.

Keywords: game design, game evolution, open world, video game history, game studies

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la evolución de los videojuegos de mundo abierto desde sus orígenes hasta 2023, estableciendo una cronología que contextualiza su desarrollo en relación con la evolución tecnológica y las tendencias del sector. A través del análisis del ritmo de lanzamientos, se examina la progresión del modelo de mundo abierto y su consolidación en distintas generaciones de consolas. El estudio emplea un enfoque comparativo, cruzando la evolución de los videojuegos con las capacidades del hardware. Se han aplicado criterios de verificación mediante el análisis de fuentes especializadas y comentarios de jugadores para garantizar la coherencia en la selección de títulos. Los resultados indican que la expansión de los mundos abiertos han estado fuertemente ligadas a la potencia de las plataformas, aunque también refleja cambios en las preferencias del sector. El reciente descenso en su ritmo de lanzamientos sugiere una posible transición en su diseño y consumo.

Palabras clave: diseño de videojuegos, evolución del videojuego, mundo abierto, historia de videojuegos, game studies.

1. Introduction: The open-world video game

From its earliest days, video games have demonstrated a clear narrative vocation. Early classics such as Space Invaders (Taito, 1978) or Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo-Creative-Department, 1985) already tried to tell stories, whether about an alien invasion or the abduction of a princess, using the limited resources available to the first titles. As the decades passed and the generations of consoles and platforms evolved, productions became progressively more complex, seeking to innovate in-game mechanics and storytelling.

In this constant search for new ways of interacting with the player, a trend emerged that granted greater agency, autonomy, and the ability to intervene within the video game universe, thus giving birth to open worlds. These titles moved away from linear experiences, in which the objective was simply to overcome a series of challenges in a predetermined order. Instead, open worlds were presented as a proposal that balanced the player's freedom to explore and develop their interests within the game while maintaining a narrative or objective structure to maintain coherence and gameplay direction.

Jesper Juul (Juul, 2005) explains that video games operate at the intersection between structured rules and fictional worlds, where the player's agency is the axis that articulates the experience. In open worlds, this balance is key, as the player has the freedom to set his or her own goals within the boundaries of the designed system.

This type of video game, far from being an experimental model or a passing trend, has established itself as one of the most influential proposals in the evolution of the medium and the industry over the last few decades. Its growing popularity has led many of the most emblematic sagas to adapt to this model, integrating explorable worlds and offering new forms of gameplay that allow players to interact with the environment in a freer and more meaningful way.

This article analyzes the trajectory of open-world video games from their first manifestations to their consolidation as one of the predominant designs in the last decade, in which many of the most successful and highest-budget titles have adopted this approach. To this end, a chronology is presented detailing the publication figures of these video games and their evolution over the years. The results also show a close relationship between the design of open worlds and the technological power of the platforms on which these games are developed.

The open-world model has been one of the most influential trends in modern video game development. Its evolution has transformed the way players experience exploration, narrative, and interaction within virtual worlds. However, despite its relevance, no academic study has to date systematized the evolution of this design model in a detailed chronological framework, relating its advances to technological progression and changes in the industry.

Previous studies on video games have addressed various aspects of the open world, such as its impact on player immersion (Zimmerman & Salen, 2003) or its relationship with agency and interactivity (Juul, 2005). However, few works have attempted to draw a precise chronology to understand how this model has been consolidated over nearly five decades. This gap in the academic literature calls for research that systematically compiles and analyzes open-world video games from their earliest manifestations to their current development.

In addition, the rise of other design models, such as roguelike, battle royale, and hero shooters, has led to an apparent decline in the popularity of open

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worlds in recent years. Therefore, this research documents not only their history but also their possible stagnation and the reasons behind this evolution in the industry. With this work, we will provide a reference for both researchers in Game Studies and designers interested in understanding how open-world principles have evolved and what factors have conditioned their expansion and transformation over the years.

2. Materials and methods

The chronology of open-world video games has been based on the definition of this type of game proposed in the doctoral thesis Open World Video Games: Definition, the Rationale of the Principles of ludonarrative Design, and Proposal of Analysis (García, 2023). Thus, it is understood that an open-world video game offers a systemic and emergent game experience whose non-deterministic design places the player and his or her possibilities of action at the center of the experience, allowing substantial variations between games. It is not a genre but a design model that can be applied to video games of different genres, such as action, role-playing, or adventure.

The game's design is not structured in discontinuous levels or phases and favors freedom of transit, including backtracking. Its objectives promote the exploration of a wide scenario, which is a container space for other points of ludonarrative interest. Although often confused, an open world is not the same as a sandbox. While the open world offers a broad setting with objectives that can be approached flexibly, a sandbox emphasizes player creativity in a space without a predefined structure of progression, allowing experimentation with its systems without narrative or design constraints.

In narrative terms, the environment plays a key role in the construction of the story, functioning as a display medium that invites the player to actively discover the narrative elements. The player is expected to become an inhabitant of a plausible world populated by artificially intelligent characters who are often integrated into the story through personal micro-stories. The script allows the coexistence of two narratives: one designed by the developers and another emergent one shaped by the player's decisions, which enables a unique narrative experience in each game.

Careful design of the player experience through an interaction system is critical to the creation of meaningful play. To generate instances of meaningful play, the experience must incorporate not only explicit interactivity but also choices that are relevant within the context of the game, which implies that the player's decisions have a tangible impact on the development of the game (Zimmerman & Salen, 2004). This ability to choose is fundamental within the structure of open worlds, as it allows each game to be unique and different from the others.

Finally, immersion, which plays a fundamental role in open worlds, does not depend solely on the graphical quality or the size of the setting. According to Zimmerman and Salen (2004), immersion is not an inherent property of the game or the medium but is the result of the interaction between the player and the game. This emphasizes that true immersion arises from the player's experience of interacting meaningfully with the virtual world beyond the aesthetic aspects of the game.

Based on these definitions, lists of video games have been compiled that span from the earliest titles to the end of 2023. According to the same thesis, Grand Theft Auto III (DMA-Design, 2001) is considered the starting point of the modern open-world video game, i.e., the first title to fully incorporate all the elements we associate today with this game model. However, although titles prior to Grand Theft Auto III do not fully fit the current definition, it is possible to observe

characteristics and evolutions that influenced the development of the open-world concept, so they have also been included in the chronology.

The compilation of the video games included in this study was carried out through progressive search and verification of diverse sources. Initially, lists published in specialized media and websites that published articles on what they considered to be the best open worlds in history or from specific eras or platforms were consulted (Byrd & Greenbaum, 2023; IGN, 2023; MacReady, 2024; Pursey & Sammut, 2024; Sawyer & Sammut, 2024; Stubbs, 2025; Vandal, n. d.). We also used the "open world" tag on the Steam platform to identify relevant titles (Valve, n. d.) and reviewed gamer community forums where lists of open-world games have been shared (DaLejd, 2023; ShouldIbuythisgame, 2024), allowing us to identify lesser known or discussed titles within the community.

For cases where doubts arose as to whether a title met the definition of open world, an additional verification process was carried out. This included consulting specialist reviews and player feedback on forums and discussion platforms, examining aspects such as world structure, degree of freedom of exploration, and game progression. If a title did not meet the principles set out in the definition used in this study, it was discarded from the final list.

From this initial base, the selection process was expanded through a more detailed analysis of the sagas and development teams identified in the first searches. In many cases, the lists consulted included only the most recognized installments of some franchises, which led to further research into the evolution of these sagas to include earlier, later, or related titles. Other games developed by the same studios were also explored, as they have often applied similar design principles in different projects. This approach allowed us to discover and incorporate a wider variety of titles that, although not always the most representative within the open world model, have contributed to its evolution and expansion.

To ensure the consistency and validity of the selection, each game was evaluated according to the definition of the open world established in this work. Since there is no unified and universally accepted database of open-world video games, this selection may be subject to certain limitations. While multiple sources have been consulted and consistent evaluation criteria have been applied, it is possible that some titles have been left out or that the selection reflects, to some extent, the availability of information from inaccessible sources. Nevertheless, the aim of this chronology is to provide as complete a reference as possible within the possibilities of the field of study.

Thus, we take as a starting point Colossal Cave Adventure (Crowther & Woods, 1976) in the mid-1970s and continue with various text, graphic and role-playing adventures on computers over the following years. Subsequently, the console generations of the following decades are covered, until finally reaching the last sixteen titles counted from 2023.

In total, 372 video games have been analyzed, classified both by their year of release and by the generation of platforms on which they were released. In some cases, games have been released for multiple platforms over time, but to get a more accurate picture of their impact each year, the original launch platform was considered. For example, Minecraft (Mojang, 2011) was initially released for PC, and although it later expanded to other consoles, it is counted as a PC game due to its original release on this platform.

Likewise, when a title has been originally released for platforms of different generations, it has been considered the most recent among those offered at the time of release, as it represents the current generation and the one that offers an optimized gaming experience. Cross-generational games for more current consoles often incorporate enhanced functionalities, such as improved graphics capabilities, reduced loading times, and additional features that enrich the player's experience. Although the titles are available on older platforms, the focus has been on the most recent generation, as it better reflects current trends and technological advances.

To facilitate the understanding of this chronology and the list of games, the research is based on

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the commonly used classification of consoles by generations. This classification groups the platforms according to their technical capabilities and technological advances, which makes it possible to establish the distinctive characteristics of each generation.

Although there are several studies on console generations (Juul, 2020; Persson & Medin, 2009), and the dates may vary slightly, most agree in identifying the fundamental characteristics of each:

- First generation (1972-1980): Consoles with pre-installed games that could not be interchanged. Their graphics were simple, based on dots and lines—featured consoles: Magnavox Odyssey and Pong.
- Second generation (1976-1992): Introduction of cartridges as a format to store games. 8-bit graphics and more complex sound. Featured consoles: Atari 2600, Intellivision and ColecoVision.
- Third generation (1983-2003): More complex controllers and 8-bit graphics with advanced sound. Featured consoles: Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), Sega Master System, and Atari 7800.
- Fourth generation (1987-2004): More advanced chips for 16-bit graphics with improved animations and visual effects, as well as stereo sound. Featured consoles: Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES), Sega Mega Drive (Genesis) and TurboGrafx-16.
- Fifth generation (1993-2006): 32-bit and 64-bit processors that enabled the transition to 3D graphics and the use of CD-ROM as a storage format. Featured consoles: PlayStation, Nintendo 64 and Sega Saturn.
- Sixth generation (1998-2013): Consoles with processors that allowed 480p resolutions and three-dimensional graphics, in addition to the adoption of DVD as the physical format. This generation also marked the beginning of online gaming and the first download services—featured consoles: PlayStation 2, Xbox, Nintendo GameCube, and Sega Dreamcast.
- Seventh generation (2005-2017): High-definition graphics, with resolutions ranging from 720p to 1080p. Expansion of online functionalities, networked games, additional content downloads, and digital games. Featured consoles: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii.
- Eighth generation (2012-present). Introduction of 4K resolutions, virtual reality, cloud gaming, and game subscriptions. Development of hybrid consoles that combined the functions of a desktop and a handheld. Featured consoles: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Wii U, and Nintendo Switch.
- Ninth generation (2020-present). They support high resolutions and frame rates, enabling gaming up to 4K and 60 frames per second. Incorporate ray tracing and the use of high-speed SSD storage that enhances the user experience. Expansion of subscription services and cloud gaming. Featured consoles: PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X, and Xbox Series S.

There are a few exceptions to this generational classification. Firstly, computers, due to their ability to be constantly updated with the latest technologies, cannot be pigeonholed into any specific generation but have accompanied all generations from the beginning. Secondly, handheld consoles, which have traditionally had lower technological power than desktops, although included in the same generations, have not been as prone to the emergence of open worlds. Nevertheless, in order to provide the most complete representation of open-world video games, this research has sought to include all relevant titles, including those fundamental to handheld consoles.

3. Results and discussion

Open Worlds published by year

Based on the previously established criteria, the search and analysis of open-world video games has resulted in a list of 372 titles. These are distributed in an increasing manner from their beginnings to the present day, reflecting the development and evolution of this design model. The numbers of releases are detailed in Table 1:

Tabla 1: Open world publication by year.
Source: Own elaboration.

Year	Number of games	Year	Number of games
1976	1	2002	8
1979	1	2003	7
1981	1	2004	9
1982	2	2005	10
1983	1	2006	13
1984	1	2007	7
1985	1	2008	14
1986	2	2009	13
1988	2	2010	13
1989	1	2011	13
1990	1	2012	12
1991	1	2013	12
1992	1	2014	20
1993	2	2015	14
1994	1	2016	16
1995	1	2017	25
1996	1	2018	24
1997	2	2019	23
1998	1	2020	22
1999	8	2021	15
2000	4	2022	22
2001	7	2023	16

The distribution shows a limited production of open-world video games during the first decades, with one or two releases per year and periods without outstanding novelties. However, from 1999 onwards, titles were considerably increased, reaching a first peak of eight games. This change is closely related to the arrival of the sixth generation of consoles, and the advances achieved thanks to a greater mastery of fifth-generation technology laid the foundations for the emerging design of these games.

Although the growth in the production of open-world video games can be seen since 1999, the most significant change occurred in 2001. This year marks the real turning point when open-world videogames ceased to be a simple exercise to show off the capabilities of consoles and consolidated as a genuine trend within the videogame industry. From then on, developers began to see this type of design not only as an innovative option but also as a way to offer deeper game experiences with a greater focus on player freedom.

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This trend is clearly linked to the release of Grand Theft Auto III and its immediate success. The title not only defined the open-world video game model as we understand it today but also inspired a wave of titles that sought to replicate its success. Games such as Saints Row (Volition, 2006), Mafia (Illusion-Softworks, 2002), The Getaway (Team-Soho, 2002), as well as some established franchises that veered towards this model, such as Jak II: The Renegade (Naughty-Dog, 2003), Driver 3 (Reflections-Interactive, 2004) or The Simpsons: Hit & Run (Entertainment, 2003), were some of the examples that followed in this wake, showing the lasting impact of the Grand Theft Auto III proposal.

The 372 video games counted have been published over 47 years, from 1976 to 2023, resulting in an average of almost eight titles released per year. However, given the uneven distribution of releases and the lower relevance of the first decades, it is observed that if we discard these early years and calculate the average from 1999, the year in which open-world video games began to have a significant impact, the figure rises to almost 14 titles per year. If we focus on the last ten years, the average number of releases between 2013 and 2023 rises to nearly 21 open-world games per year.

The distribution of open-world video games would be graphically represented in Figures 1 and 2. In order to improve readability, the graph has been divided into two parts, one from the origins until 1999 and the other from 2000 to the present:

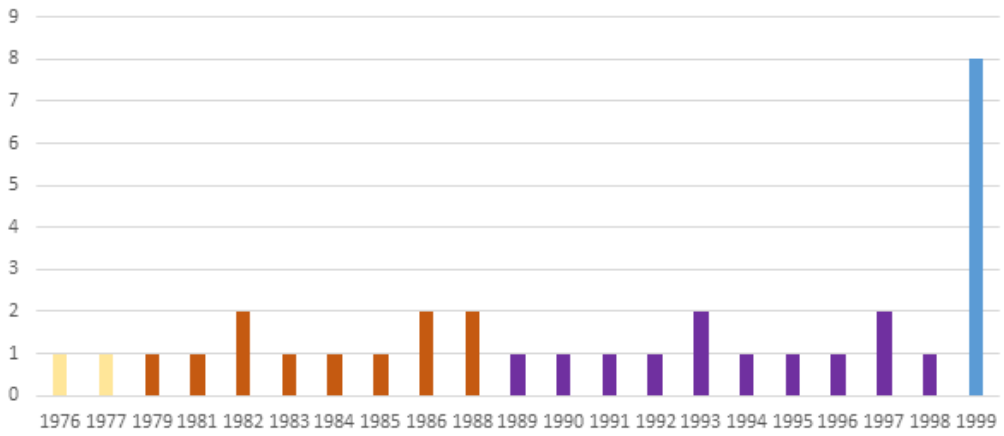

Figure 1: Open worlds published by year (1976-1999).

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1 shows a scarce production of open-world games until 1999. During the first decades, the video game industry was dominated by fast-paced, control-demanding genres such as platformers, arcade games (linked to arcade machines and their short-game dynamics), and fighting games. Open-world games did not enjoy the same popularity due to technological limitations, and design preferences focused on more linear and straightforward experiences.

Prior to 1999, the years with the highest number of open-world game releases barely reached two titles. However, that year, the figure rose to eight thanks to the first Dreamcast titles (the first console of the sixth generation), such as Shenmue (Sega-AM2, 1999) and Crazy Taxi (Sega-AM3, 1999), as well as the major productions that marked the end of the PlayStation life cycle, such as Grand Theft Auto 2 (DMA-Design, 1999) or Driver (Reflections-Interactive, 1999).

From 2000 onwards, the rise of desktop consoles, which surpassed arcades in popularity, encouraged the creation of more narrative and extensive titles. These platforms made a more leisurely and detailed design possible, where concepts such as freedom of exploration and interaction

in open worlds took center stage. Figure 2 shows the evolution in the number of open-world titles published per year, highlighting a gradual and significant increase since the beginning of the new millennium, reaching its peak in the second half of the last decade:

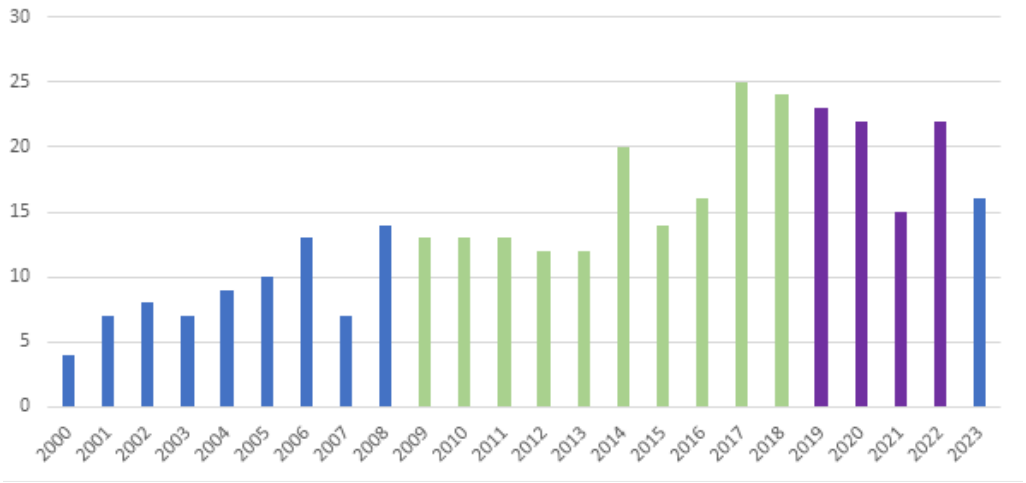

Figure 2: Open worlds published by year (2000-2023).
Source: Own elaboration

The figure shows a clear upward trend in open-world game releases from the beginning of the millennium to the present. However, some occasional setbacks seem to be related to the generational shifts of consoles. For example, in 2007, developers shifted from working on the sixth generation of consoles to focusing on the seventh generation, which caused a slight pause in releases as teams had to adapt to the new technologies and capabilities of the seventh generation. In 2006, titles were released for both generations, but in 2007 most productions were focused on the seventh generation, which explains the decrease in releases in that year.

A similar pattern occurred in 2013, with the switch from the seventh to the eighth generation. That year, many games were released intergenerationally, i.e., they were available for seventh- and eighth-generation consoles. However, in 2014, eighth-generation exclusive releases increased significantly, reflecting studios' adaptation to the new consoles and their enhanced capabilities. This generational transition explains, in part, the one-off declines in releases as developers took time to adjust to the new platforms.

However, the decrease in titles in 2021 seems to be linked not only to the generational replacement of consoles but also to a significant external factor: the global crisis caused by COVID-19. This situation limited work in the industry across the board, forcing numerous releases to be delayed to later years (Sirani, 2021). This also explains the high number of open-world games released in 2022, one of the years with the highest number of such titles in history. This period brought together both games originally planned for 2022 and those that had been postponed due to the pandemic.

Launches by technology generation:

Looking at the chronology of games in terms of console generations, interesting patterns emerge. Until 1983, all open-world video games were developed exclusively for the PC, and that year marked a turning point with the release of Elite (Braven & Bell, 1984), a title that, although it came to PCs, was also adapted for third-generation consoles, such as the Nintendo Entertainment System. Two years later, in 1986, The Legend of Zelda (Nintendo-EAD, 1986) was released exclusively for consoles of the same generation. With the exception of a few notable titles, such as The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the

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Past (Nintendo-EAD, 1991) for Super Nintendo (fourth generation) and two other games for the fifth generation, most of the open worlds until 1999 were tied to the PC.

From Colossal Cave Adventure to 2023, 77 PC-exclusive titles have been counted, representing 21% of the registered open-world games. However, from the sixth generation onwards, a significant change in this trend was observed. Since 1999, console releases grew steadily, reaching their peak during the eighth generation, which accumulated a total of 118 titles, equivalent to 32% of the total.

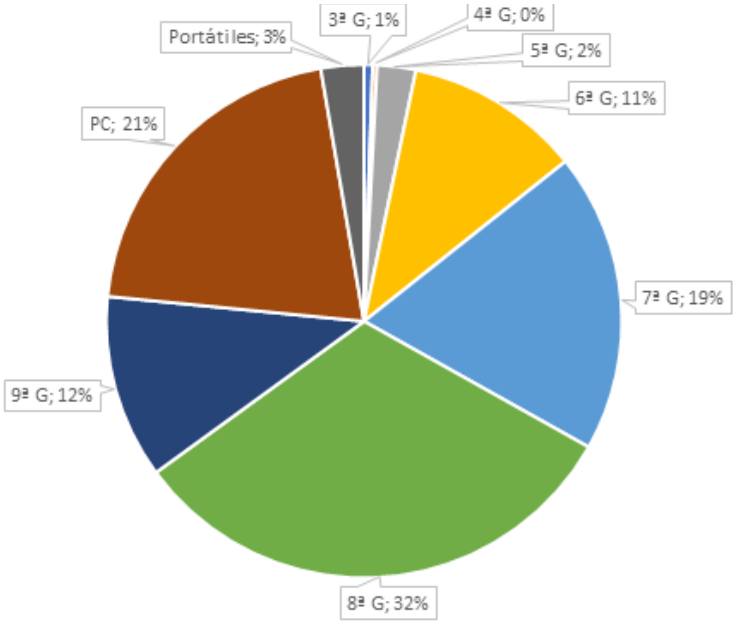

Figure 3: Open worlds published by technology generation.

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3 shows how each generation's percentage of open-world titles has increased. This phenomenon reflects both the growing interest in this type of video game and the advancement of the technological capabilities that make them possible. The ninth generation, represented by consoles such as PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X/S, shows a lower percentage because it is still in the middle of its life cycle. It is possible that, in time, releases in this generation will equal or surpass those of their predecessors, although the pace of production seems to have slowed in recent years.

Lastly, the number of releases for portable consoles is minimal. The most notable are the last two installments of The Legend of Zelda (Breath of the Wild (Nintendo-EPD, 2017) and Tears of the Kingdom (Nintendo-EPD, 2023)) for Nintendo Switch, a hybrid console with both portable and desktop features.

Portrait of the open-world video game over the years:

a. 1980s: The first steps of the open world

In the 1980s, the open world concept was still rudimentary and limited by the technical capabilities of the platforms of the time. Most video games did not offer the freedom of exploration we associate with today's open worlds, but some of their early features began emerging. While not "open worlds" in the modern sense, these titles allowed players to explore a non-linear world with some freedom of action. In the 1980s and up to the mid-1990s, the Ultima saga (Garriot & Systems, 1981) stood out, which, thanks to its first

eight installments, progressively developed ideas on how a story could be designed within an open and explorable world.

This type of game introduced the idea of large maps. However, restrictions were evident, mainly due to hardware limitations such as memory or graphics power, resulting in small and rather limited worlds. Despite this, players already experienced a sense of exploration without a fixed path, laying the groundwork for future developments.

b. 1990s: Expansion and Experimentation

During the 1990s, open-world video games began to take more defined forms thanks to the progress of technology, especially with the advent of 3D graphics and greater technological capabilities of consoles. Here were born the first examples of truly open-world games, with large maps and more freedom of action.

A key milestone was The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall (Bethesda-Softworks, 1996), which at the time offered a gigantic map, albeit very primitive in terms of design and gameplay, as it featured a huge geographical expanse, but simple gameplay by later standards. This type of game put the emphasis on exploration, but the missions were still largely linear.

c. 2000s: Consolidation of the Open World as a Core Concept

In the 2000s, open-world design was consolidated with flagship titles that offered much more polished and richer gameplay. Games such as The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind (Bethesda-Game-Studios, 2002) and GTA: San Andreas (Rockstar-North, 2004) pushed the boundaries of exploration even further, integrating more complex stories, more detailed worlds, and more complex systems of interaction and progression.

Advanced technology enabled the creation of more detailed and dynamic maps. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (Bethesda-Game-Studios, 2006) and Fallout 3 (Bethesda-Game-Studios, 2008) incorporated more realistic graphics and more complex gameplay systems, including player decisions that affected narrative and world development. In turn, the arrival of Assassin's Creed (Ubisoft-Montreal, 2007) marked an innovation in using the open world by integrating historical exploration of vast urban environments within a fluid gameplay system that combined action, stealth, and interactive narrative. This evolution of the concept allowed the open world to be recognized not only as a space for exploration but also as a platform for dynamic and organic storytelling.

d. 2010s: Innovations in Interactivity and Complexity

The 2010s brought the open world to maturity, with examples of games that redefined what could be achieved in these spaces. The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (CD-Projekt-Red, 2015) and Red Dead Redemption 2 (Rockstar-Games, 2018) are two of the most prominent examples of how narrative, gameplay and world design were integrated in a coherent and detailed way. These games offered vast maps with environments that were not only large in scale but also deeply detailed and full of life.

During this decade, there was also a major step towards interactivity and reactivity of the world, with systems that allowed for greater immersion, from day and night cycles to dynamic story changes based on the player's decisions.

In addition, titles such as Minecraft (Mojang, 2011) and No Man's Sky (Hello-Games, 2016) featured open worlds that relied on procedural generation, allowing players to experience infinite worlds unique to each game. This marked a shift in the conception of the open world, not just as a fixed representation but as a constantly evolving universe.

e. The 2020s: Realism, Immersion, and Expansion of Technical Capabilities

The 2020s have been marked by the ambition to create even more realistic, immersive, and detailed worlds, taking advantage of the capabilities of next-generation consoles and high-performance PCs. Games such as Elden Ring (FromSoftware, 2022) have continued the

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tradition of vast and complex worlds but with an emphasis on free exploration and environmental narrative, leaving the players to discover the story for themselneedingthe need for a fixed narrative.

Open-world design has been enriched by the introduction of worlds that react more realistically to player actions. Developers have also begun experimenting with more complex AI systems, creating NPCs that interact more consistently with players and with each other and help bring these worlds to life.

4. Conclusions

The remarkable number of open-world video games released between 1976 and 2023 demonstrates the great interest this design model has generated among players and developers. This interest is closely linked to the technological evolution of the platforms, especially their power. Since its inception, the computer has been the natural territory of open worlds, thanks to its ability to outperform contemporary consoles. In the earliest games of this type, prior to Grand Theft Auto III, many of the fundamental features of open-world design were already present, albeit in a more rudimentary form. These titles were developed exclusively for the PC for decades, prioritizing the most powerful computers capable of handling three-dimensional graphics. Likewise, most of the open worlds released for consoles have also been available for PC, consolidating their position as the main platform for this design model.

The relationship between the power of platforms and the rise of open worlds is evident. As consoles have advanced technologically, the number of such titles has grown significantly, especially in the eighth generation, which reached the highest numbers. This growth has also reflected a preference for desktop consoles and PCs, with handhelds relegated to an almost anecdotal role. Although the Nintendo Switch, as a hybrid console, has been home to some outstanding open worlds, its limited performance compared to desktop consoles has restricted the number of releases for this platform, especially against PlayStation 4 and Xbox One during the eighth generation.

The current figures for the ninth generation should be interpreted with caution, as these consoles are still in the middle of their life cycle. However, the pace of open-world releases has slowed compared to the previous generation. This decline could indicate a shift in consumer and development trends, with the open-world model becoming less popular compared to other design models and genres, such as roguelikes, battle royales, and hero shooters.

One of the factors that could be influencing this decline is player fatigue with open worlds. In recent years, there has been a growing debate about how a high reliance on map markers and repetitive mechanics has turned exploration into an exercise closer to systematic icon collection than true immersion in the game world. As noted in multiple reviews (CaptainBinky, 2020; Henley, 2022), many open-world games have ceased incentivizing organic exploration and natural interaction with the environment, reducing their appeal to a structured formula prioritizing efficiency over experience. This exhaustion may be driving both players and developers to seek alternatives that offer fresher structures and are less reliant on conventions established in the previous decade.

The rise of online multiplayer games, such as battle royale and hero shooters, has considerably impacted this trend. Both genres have gained increasing popularity in recent years (Powell, 2023; Schwarz, 2024; Wawro, 2016), not only among players but also among developers, who have bet on mechanics that favor competitive

interaction and teamwork. These titles, characterized by intense and dynamic matches, have captured the public's attention for their ability to offer unique experiences in each session and their progression structures that keep players engaged in the long term. By offering a survival experience combining strategy, exploration, and action, battle royale games have won over mass audiences and competitive gamers, creating a global phenomenon that has transformed the online gaming landscape.

On the other hand, hero shooters, which focus their gameplay on characters with unique abilities and a strategic team approach, have brought a renewal within multiplayer games. These games have encouraged competition through specific roles within the team, which has allowed for greater variety and depth in matches. The popularity of titles such as Overwatch (Blizzard-Entertainment, 2016) or Valorant (Riot-Games, 2020) has consolidated this subgenre, capturing an audience that seeks intense action and the need for cooperation and strategy. Their success has been reflected in steady growth in active players, frequent updates, and large-scale events, consolidating them as benchmarks in online gaming.

Although these genres are not new, their growing popularity in recent years has redirected interest toward different game experiences, where replayability and active participation are key factors. Thus, both battle royale and hero shooters have occupied an important space within video game development, partially shifting the focus away from open worlds. The gaming community and streaming platforms, such as Twitch and YouTube, have helped to amplify this phenomenon, contributing to the global expansion of these titles and, more importantly, to their integration into popular culture.

As for the roguelike phenomenon, originally linked to indie developments, this growth has transcended to a larger dimension (Gailloreto, 2020): major game developers have also adopted roguelike mechanics in big-budget titles such as Diablo (Blizzard-North, 1997), Minecraft (Mojang, 2011) and Dark Souls (FromSoftware, 2011). These additions have helped roguelike elements, such as random level generation and permanent death, to be integrated into AAA games, further popularizing this type of gameplay. By mixing these features with other genres, developers have been able to capture the interest of a larger player base, which has contributed to the rise and expansion of the subgenre in the industry. Examples of this include high-budget titles such as Returnal (Housemarque, 2021), published by PlayStation's in-house development teams, which bet on the roguelike format, demonstrating its growing popularity even in more commercial games.

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