SPORTS VIDEOGAMES. A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS IN SPAIN (1980-2015)

VIDEOGAMES ESPORTIVOS. UMA ANÁLISE RETROSPECTIVA A PARTIR DA ESPANHA (1980-2015)

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ABSTRACT

This text is part of a broader study whose main objective is to establish an overview about sports videogames in the Spanish context, examining their origin, history and evolution until the current moment. It examines a variety of the most representative sports games created in Spain by different companies since the late 1980s until 2015. The data sample comes from a selection of 10 games, corresponding to the most representative Spanish video game developers. Based on the results obtained we will contribute to the emerging field of sports videogames academic research with this specific analysis of phenomenon in Spain.

Keywords: Sports videogames. Spain. Platforms. Developers.

RESUMO

Esse texto faz parte de uma pesquisa maior cujo principal objetivo é estabelecer um panorama geral sobre os videogames esportivos no contexto espanhol, analisando sua origem, história e evolução até o momento atual. Metodologicamente, se analisa uma seleção de videogames esportivos com maior representatividade criados na Espanha por diferentes empresas desde o final dos anos 1980 até 2015. A amostra dos dados provém da seleção de 10 videogames correspondentes as empresas mais significativas da Espanha. Os resultados obtidos neste estudo contribuirão para maior reconhecimento da investigação acadêmica sobre videogames esportivos.

Palavras-chave: Videogames esportivos. Espanha. Plataformas. Desenvolvedores.

1 INTRODUCTION

In studies about videogames, the sports genre is rarely addressed and there is an absence of academic studies about the issue, "that game studies seem to miss out on sports videogames is utterly ironic since a recurring question in sports philosophy in the relation between games and sports" (Linderoth, 2013: 15). On the other hand, the videogame sector in Spain has been growing. It is the country with the fourth highest spending on digital leisure in Europe, making videogames Spain's largest leisure and entertainment industry.

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In general, electronic entertainment companies have been created that have developed products related to sports content. In general, electronic entertainment companies have been created that have developed products related to sports content. During 2014, according to data from AEVI (2016), videogames were the leading audiovisual and interactive leisure industry in Spain. In 2013, consumption in the videogame sector reached 996 million euros, a 6.8% growth over the previous year (Checa, 2009). In terms of software for consoles, the traditional games were the market leaders, led by action and graphic adventure games, followed by those sports and race-rally games.

2 OBJETIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This text is part of a broader study whose main objective is to establish an overview about sports videogames in the Spanish context, examining their origin, history and evolution until the current moment. To do so, it examines a variety of the most representative sports games created in Spain by different videogame companies since the late 1980s until 2015. A qualitative methodology was used to conduct the study, based on content analysis (Bardin, 2002). Also, this research is supported from a game studies perspective that acknowledges a diversity of approaches and ways of understanding artifacts, individuals, industries and cultures. As an initial part of the study, a comparative analysis is conducted of ten games (see Table 1) from the sampling based on their structure, characteristics and sports components. The data sample comes from a selection of 10 games, corresponding to the most representative Spanish video game developers. This text presents only the analysis of one.

Table 1 - General game from the selected games

Title & Developer	Release Year	Platform	Player options	Genre	Type	Sport
Fernando Martín Basket Master Dinamic Software	1987	Amstrad Commodore Spectrum MSX PC (1990)	Individual Multiplayer	Sports Game	Arcade	Basketball
Perico Delgado Maillot Amarillo Topo Soft	1989	Amstrad Spectrum MSX DOS	1 player	Sports Game	Simulation	Cycling
Olympic Games´92 Opera Soft	1992	PC	Individual Multiplayer	Sports Game	Arcade	Track & Field
PC Fútbol Dinamic Multimedia	1992	PC (MS-DOS)	1 player	Sports Game	Management	Football
UEFA 2000 Virtual Toys	2000	Gameboy	1 player	Sports Game	Arcade/ Simulation	Football
Pro Rally Ubisoft	2002	PlayStation 2 Nitendo Gamecube	Individual Multiplayer	Sports Game	Racing	Rally
Rafa Nadal Tennis Virtual Toys	2006	Nintendo DS Wii	Individual Multiplayer	Sports Game	Arcade	Tennis
Repsolypf.com Exelweiss	2006	Online	1 player	Sports Game	Advergaming	F1 Moto GP
Motion Sports Ubisoft	2010	Xbox 360	Individual Multiplayer	Sports Game	Kinect	Multi-sport
Sports connection Ubisoft	2012	Wii U	Individual Multiplayer	Sports Game	Arcade	Multi-sport

The instruments of analysis used include the observation, description and interpretation of the content analyzed together with a review of the scientific references (Juul, 2003; Consalvo, 2013; Sales and Zimmerman, 2004). The material selected is organized in 5 categories: title; release year; platform; type of sport; description. This will allow understanding the general features and tendencies that broadly characterize this sector as well as its specific elements in the sports genre.

Thus, the paper analyzes the most representative characteristics of a set of contents analysis will explore the Spanish market for sports games. Based on the results obtained we will contribute to the emerging field of sports videogames research with this specific analysis of phenomenon in Spain.

3 THE BEGINNINGS: "THE GOLDEN AGE"

Videogame activity began in Spain during the 1980s. This period would later be characterized by the specialized media as "the golden age". It was during this time that unprecedented and highly productive activity began in the sector. In parallel, the international industry was taking its first steps. Both in Spain and in the rest of the world this first decade would generate future creators in this new sector of the industry.

This first phase brought 8-bit personal computers to the realm of domestic consumption (Spectrum, Amstrad, Commodore 64 and MSX) and with them interactive games. The main platforms in Spain were ZX Spectrum and Amstrad, each one with different models. The long-term continuity of the 8-bit systems allowed the first Spanish companies time to develop and create games that met the interests of users. In fact, in the mid 1980s, the Spanish market for 8-bit systems was the second largest in Europe, behind only Britain. The first production in Spain was conducted by companies from throughout the country, which developed their own games and at times purchased the rights to games produced by smaller companies. Among the first group of developing companies, four which focused on the production of sports content can be highlighted: Dinamic Software, Zigurat, Opera Soft and Topo Soft (Pérez: 2015).

Dinamic Software was founded in 1983, and was the most outstanding company. Its sports games included: *Video Olimpic* (1984) a game that simulated track and field events; *Rocky* (1985) a boxing game whose title related to the movie hero of the same name "Rocky" Balboa; and *Fernando Martín Basket Master* (1987) a basketball game, based on a star Spanish player at the time. The latter game was a great sales success and allowed the company to generate other products, whose strongest commercial appeal was to link the games to Spanish sports stars. Other products followed in this line: *Aspar G.P. Master* (1988), a motorcycle game based on the pilot Jorge Martínez Aspar, who ceded the rights to his image and name; *Michel Fútbol Master Super Skills* (1989), which was based on a well-known football player and simulated football matches.

Zigurat was the second of the Spanish companies that developed and distributed 8-bit videogames. These included a series of sports titles linked to competitions and once again current stars: *París-Dakar* (1988) about this rally; *Emilio Sánchez Vicario Gran Slam* (1989) a game created around the Barcelona tennis star; *Carlos Sainz. Campeonato del Mundo de Rallies* (1990), which was based on a

type of simulation in the skin of the Madrid-based pilot; *Sito Pons 500cc Grand Prix* (1990), a videogame about the world motorcycle championship with Sito Pons, based on different modalities.

Opera Soft was another of the leading companies in this phase. Its titles included a broad repertoire of sports games, and it even created a specific Brand: Opera Sport. Two of the titles stand out because of the popularity of their characters: *Ángel Nieto Pole 500* (1990), which was based on this star motorcycle driver; and *Poli Díaz Boxing Simulation* (1990), which was an alternative to the boxing game developed by Dinamic. The company also developed *Golden Basket* (1990), a basketball videogame; and games linked to large sporting events: *Mundial de fútbol* (1990), associated to the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy with different modalities of entertainment and simulation; *Jai Alai* (1991), the first videogame to simulate this Basque sport and which included most of the rules of this game; and *Olympic Games´92* (1992), a sport simulator that arose around the Barcelona Summer Olympic Games in that year.

The fourth company linked to this 8–bit phase was Topo Soft. Its games included four related to sports: *Emilio Butragueño Fútbol* (1988), which joined the trend mentioned to use the name of a sports star to boost sales. This was a football simulator based on the well-known player from Madrid. It attained such success in sales (100,000 copies) that it led to a second; *Perico Delgado Maillot Amarillo* (1989), which was also based on the success of a current motorcycle pilot, whose name and image was associated to the videogame company. This game sought to recreate motorcycle driving through different types of steps. *Drazen Petrovic Basket* (1989) was a simulator type videogame that was created about the best European basketball player at the time. Finally, *Olimpiadas 92: Atletismo* (1992) and *Olimpiadas 92: Gimnasia Rítmica* (1992) were two games that rose at the roots of the Barcelona Olympic games, which offered new graphic developments using the digitalization of real people and an unprecedented pallet of 256 colors.

The technological change from 8-bit devices to 16-bit devices (computers and consoles) became the main obstacle to the continuation of Spanish production along with the lack of adaptation to the increased production costs of the new market. For this reason the Spanish software industry that arose in the 1980s underwent a decline. A crisis occurred, caused by the low prices of software that weakened the studios, leaving them more fragile and vulnerable to macroeconomic changes. Moreover, illegal copying increased with the use of 16-bit platforms, proving to be the biggest impediment to Spanish software development. In addition, programming in this new system was much more complex, impeding participation by Spanish studios. In this new context, some of the companies mentioned developed more sports games, although the results were not up to expectations, which led to a crisis phase. The shift from 8 bits to 16 bits was more of an imposition than a desire of the Spanish companies. As a result, production weakened.

4 SECOND PHASE: THE 1990S AND SIGNS OF A CERTAIN RECOVERY

The beginning of the 1990s produced the first signs of improvement in Spain's videogame sector. While most of the nation's companies had disappeared, new ones arose and others re-established

themselves after a break in activity. Among these companies can be highlighted Dinamic Multimedia, founded by three members of the previously mentioned Dinamic Software. It produced various titles with a sports theme. *PC Fútbol* (1992) was a videogame about the management of a football club and led to a broad range of versions. Years later this game became the company's main product, and had record sales in Spain. In 1996, the company decided to export the game to Italy, leading to *PC Calcio*, which achieved good results. Another important title was *PC Basket* (1993), the first of a series (until 1997), which included a database of teams with Spanish basketball players together with a simulator of this sport. The release of these sports titles would allow Dinamic Multimedia to resurge in the market, which became dominated by high technical requirements. In late 1996, the company was converted into a distributor and published the Multi Sports 97 pack, which combined three games (*PC Basket 4.5*, *Actua Soccer* and *Speed Haste*). One approach to its distribution and sales was to offer the videogames for sale at newsstands at very low prices.

In the mid 1990s, Spanish production was multiplying, among other companies stood out Digital Dreams Multimedia (DDM), which since 1995 had been producing games in mass and presenting strong competition to Dinamic Multimedia. Some of the sports titles it published generated a certain polemic for being in a style and format similar to those of the competition: *PC Liga* (1995), *PC Rally* (1995) and *Virtual Tennis* (1996). Later DDM would publish *World Wide Rally* (1997), an automotive simulator.

5 THIRD PHASE: 1998 UNTIL TODAY

This last section will discuss four companies (Pyro Studios, Digital Legends, Virtual Toys and FX Interactive), which served as a bridge between the irregular Spanish production of the 1990s, inherited to a large degree from the successes achieved in the previous decade and the following phase between the late 1990s and the new century, which some came to call "the second golden age of Spanish software" (Rodríguez: 2003). To do so, we will discuss the main productions with a sports theme.

In relation to Pyro Studios, which was based in Madrid, while most of its titles were in the war and shooting genre, in 2003 it merged with the Spanish company Play Wireless to create Pyro Mobile and became a multiplatform developer. Among its titles stand out the production of various sports games, especially those for mobile devices: *Sports City* (2008)*, Fitness City* (2012) and *Super Soccer Club* (2015).

Meanwhile, Digital Legends, founded in 2001 and located in Barcelona, produced a few sports games among its titles. In 2006, it developed *Soccer Fury*, a sports game for PCs in collaboration with the Korean company NCSoft. Like the previous company, Digital Legends had been specializing in the development of content for mobile devices. In the sports theme stand out three games related to the Adidas brand: *Micoach Soccer* (2011), a game about training, with users guided by the experienced Spanish football star Xavi Hernández; *Micoach Basketball* (2012) and *Micoach Tennis* (2012). Another sports title was *Icebreaker Jockey* (2011) developed for the British company Natural Motion for IOS and Android.

Virtual Toys is another Spanish company that stood out in this period. Born in 1995, the Madrid based company had intense activity producing for portable consoles, including sports titles, of which

we highlight three: *UEFA 2000* (2000) developed for Nintendo's Game Boy console; *Rafa Nadal Tennis* (2006) for Nintendo DS, which is a tennis simulator based on the Spanish tennis star; and *VT Tennis* (2010) for Nintendo DSI. One of the keys to the company's success has certainly been its ties with leading brands and products.

The fourth Brand, FX Interactive, is a company created in 1999 by the founders of the previously mentioned Dinamic Multimedia, with more than 30 years of experience in the sector. FX not only produced its own titles but also did so for other studies. The company was divided into two departments. FX Edición was responsible for the purchase and localization of products from other companies and their placement in the market, and FX Studio, a developer of its own videogames. Among its own products one sports videogame can be highlighted: *FX Fútbol* (2013), which followed the style of the mythic *PC Fútbol* by Dinamic Multimedia. This was a game in the sports manager subgenre, with strong acceptance among gamers. FX Interactive has published sports titles such as *Football Generation* (2006) for the Italian studio Trecision.

In addition to these four companies, it is interesting to mention some smaller studios that develop sports games. The first is Ubisoft Barcelona, a company that is an affiliate of a French group. This studio developed a number of outstanding videogames since 1998. One was *Pro Rally,* which was first developed for PC (2000) and later for Playstation 2 and GameCube (2002). This is a racing videogame that contains up to 48 tracks and licenses of 20 car models. Another was *My Fitness Coach* (2008) for Wii, which is a virtual trainer that allows users to personalize exercise routines. There was also *Motion Sports* (2010) for Xbox 360, which was one of the first games released with the Kinect movement detector device, in different activities such as skiing and U.S. football; and *Sports Connection* (2012) for Wii U. This is a multisport game that includes the most popular sports.

Another company in this group is Enigma Software Productions. This is a medium size company that was born in 1993 and based in Madrid. It stands out for having collaborated with Dinamic Multimedia in the production of the game *PC Fútbol 2002* (2002). It also developed *Pro Soccer Cup* (2002), published before the World Cup of that year, which is a 3D game with eight cameras during the games.

Finally, there is Exelweiss, a company born in Valencia in 1996. Although it was born as a services company, it also published games for PC. They include sports games such as: *Shin Chan Sports* (2008), which was based on the Japanese animated character who can participate in four sports. The company also developed racing games including *Scalextric* (2007), the official game of this brand for mobile phones; and *Repsolypf.com* (2006), a promotional game for racing known as *advergaming* (Ramos, 2012). These games serve as an advertising platform for the portal of petroleum companies.

6 ANALYSIS: *FERNANDO MARTÍN BASKET MASTER*

In this section, we will describe the characteristics of the first of ten video games referred (see Table 1). This game was created in 1987 by the Spanish developer Dinamic Software, which was part of the first productions of the industry in "the golden age". After *Video Olimpic* (1984) and *Rocky* (1987), *Fernando Martín Basket Master* is the third specific sport game genre created.

The product was released in 1987 for the platforms: 464 Amstrad CPC[2], Commodore 64 (developed by Imagine Software), Sinclair ZX Spectrum, MSX and, in 1990, for PC. It is considered as one of the best basketball videogames of 8-bits age. At that time, the Basketball lived a golden age in Spain after the Olympic silver medal in Los Angeles 84 and the fourth place in the FIBA World Championship 1982.

It was the period of sports stars associated with video games like *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* or *Dr. J and Larry Bird Go One on One.* The first intention of Dinamic Software, was create Spanish first major sucessful product selling associated with an elite athlete. At first, the company wanted to create the game also with another great Spanish player of the moment, Epi, but finally for economic reasons it was only Fernando Martin.

Among the players who stand out in the selection there was one, Fernando Martin, who was especially current (Esteve, 2012). As a result, it was one of the first games in Spain to implement a practice that was already common at that time in other countries, to sign a familiar face to give his image for the product.

Definitely, the game is based on Spanish basketball player Fernando Martin, a popular Spanish basketballer in the eighties. He is considered one of the best Spanish basketball players ever. Martin was the first Spaniard who played in the NBA (Portland Trail Blazers), in 1986, and he was the second European to play in this league. It was one of the first economic agreements between a Spanish gaming company with an outstanding athlete for the transfer of rights.

Regarding its content is a simple "one-one-one" basketball videogame. The game is arcade-like, featuring a 1-on-1 game, but no tournaments, with an only single game, and one player against the computer or two human players. The main focus of the game is on pure action. Here, just choose one- or two-player game, and ready. The difficulty level can be toggled with two options ("amateur" or "NBA"), but the game is much more complete when you play against other gamer.

Regarding the structure of the game it takes place in two parts of five minutes. About the rules, actions that correspond to the game allows gestures basketball sports: shooting 2 and 3 points; slam dunk; theft of the ball; free shots; plugs; rebounds. Game on violations contemplated are: field behind; personal foul in defense or attack (maximum 5); double; outside. In addition, there is an information panel in which the following values are displayed: number of personal fouls; energy (what speed will depend on the player due to fatigue); marker; chronometer; proximity indicator ball.   In relation to the rules described, there are also tactical aspects of the game. They are basically six: cover the ball; dribbling; cover the area; ball caps and interceptions; shooting distance; fatigue and energy. In this way, reviewing the components described a level of product specialization with the sport, directed mainly for basketball fans.

In relation to controls, they are very intuitive: there was a bar charts at the bottom of the screen help you adjust the strength of the shots. However, the realism level is kept to a minimal (e.g. the ball always bounces to the same height regardless of the throw strength). Thus, the most significant elements of this game are great gameplay, graphics and details such as the repetition of actions with slow motion. Thus, when a "slam dunk" made in the game the replay in slow motion and magnified view

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² Edition chosen for this study.

is presented. The graphics were similar to the games of the moment, highlighting the animation fans each time were getting into a basket and the movement of the network. Graphically, it should be noted the very successful four-color version for Amstrad CPC

The match started with a jump ball in a somewhat peculiar since appeared bouncing the ball in the middle of the track and both players in each respective area. In short, the gameplay was quite successful. The great success made long been one of Spain's best-selling video games for a few years. Thus, the game was exported from Spain distributed by British company Imagine Sotware, but its title was changed to *Basket Master*. *Fernando Martín Basket Master* was one of the pioneers of sports video game genre in Spain. Its influence was notable for the further development of other titles, both developed by the same company as others. There is no doubt that the international successes of Spanish sport, especially at the individual level, contributed to create videogames associated with sports stars, articulated through this new form of entertainment.

7 FINAL REMARKS

After reviewing the evolution of the videogame sector in Spain, focusing on the sports genre, we highlight some first conclusions:

The so-called "golden age of Spanish software" would establish the bases of an industry in which sports contents were present since the beginning. In this first phase are found the first examples of the videogames associated to a number of Spain's great stars in various sports.

The current phase of the videogame sector in Spain has been especially driven by mobile devices (IOS and Android), embracing sports contents, and companies have reached an excellent position that allows them to maintain sustained quality production. In this sense, the internationalization with alliances to other important companies is allowing greater international projection of Spanish production.

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