

Press release

Games

17/1/2020 – 13/4/2020

Just a few decades ago, video games were considered nothing more than a techy gimmick. Gaming is now one of the world's top leisure activities. The National Museum Zurich is now devoting an exhibition to this remarkable phenomenon.

In the space of a few decades, video games have evolved from a techy gimmick at North American universities to a global industry. Between 2016 and 2019, revenues in this still young sector increased by around 22 billion, to just under 123 billion US dollars, making it more successful than the Hollywood film industry.

Today, around 2.5 billion people play these games. That's one third of the world's population. The fascination with video games started in the United States in the 1950s. William Higinbotham made it possible for the athletically challenged to play tennis from the comfort of their sofas. The physicist's 'Tennis for Two' was the world's second video game, and marked the real beginning of the industry's development. By the 1970s, games had become a credible economic factor. The electronic games found their way into the living room, and were marketed as a family activity. Video games were also catching on in the public sphere. In amusement arcades, they became serious competition for the pinball machines that had been popular up to then. A golden era had dawned: the age of the arcade game. In restaurants, in shopping centres and at airports, people could play games such as 'Pac-Man' and 'Space Invaders', and many a youngster gambled away his entire pocket money on the popular games.

A decade later, the first LAN parties were held. Gamers met in groups and connected up their computers via a local area network, so they could play together. Sometimes these groups filled entire halls. At the same time, the computer industry developed mobile devices, enabling people to play online

and when they were out and about. In the new millennium, video games were finally combined with virtual reality. This complete immersion in the worlds of fantasy play was a completely new experience.

With the rise of video games to become a serious global economic factor, the downsides also became apparent from an early stage. Many games operate with a reward system that can be earned by playing a lot, or bought for money. That creates a problem for young players in particular, and in some instances gambling legislation has been violated. The survival game 'Fortnite' is currently the subject of particular criticism. In autumn 2019, parents in Canada brought a class action lawsuit against the manufacturer, Epic Games. The group's accusation: the game was knowingly programmed to make adolescents become addicted. The verdict hasn't been handed down yet.

But gaming is like almost everything in life: it's about finding the right balance. The new exhibition 'Games' at the National Museum Zurich traces the fascinating history of the video game, and invites visitors to play for themselves in a setting typical of the time. With that said, let's play!

If you have any questions, please contact:

Alexander Rechsteiner | Communication | Swiss National Museum.

T. +41 44 218 65 64 | Email: alexander.rechsteiner@nationalmuseum.ch