

# Problematizing Positive Biopolitics in Digital Games

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My aim is to map different aesthetic, mechanical, narrative and performative game elements related to positive biopolitics, understood as community building or democratic governance (Esposito, 2008; Prozorov, 2019). I will present a matrix of biopolitical markers (significant game elements related to the governance of life) (Kłosiński, 2024) focusing on positive biopolitics, especially in regards to biopolitical governance in ecogames (Raessens, Werning, Farca, C Beke, 2024).

Traditionally, the intersection of games and biopolitics is perceived through a prism of negativity, focusing on the thematic underpinnings of racism, destruction, death, societal control, and surveillance, as highlighted by scholars such as Savaş (Savaş, 2022), Dyer-Witheford C Peuter (2009),

Rutheford C Bose (2013), Christiansen (2014), Kattenberg (2015), Lenkevich (2021), Piero (2020), Väliaho (2014), Kerr, Paoli, and Keatinge (2014), and Egliston (2020). While there is a noted exploration of resistance to these biopolitical aspects within game studies (Zhu, 2018, 2023), the discourse lacks an engagement with the concept of positive biopolitics. This includes the exploration of how games might engage with the governance of populations towards the ends of community building, the dialectical balance between community and immunity (Esposito, 2017), and a constructive approach to reproduction (Mills, 2011).

My aim is to propose a new outlook in biopolitical game studies that underscores the potential of video games as a medium for fostering positive biopolitical discourse and practices. To do so, I will analyze three game models (Majkowski, 2019): *Terra Nil* (Free Lives, 2023) and *The Wandering Village* (Stray Fawn Studio, 2022), and *Surviving the Aftermath* (Iceflake Studios, 2021), map their biopolitical markers and discuss how their biopolitical patterns intersect with the ecogaming themes such as regenerative play (Farca, 2024), new fuel economies (Frelík, 2022, 2024), cli-fi dynamics (Möring C Schneider, 2024).

I will focus on the selected games because of their engagement with problems of life governance and politics of care (Ruberg C Scully-Blaker, 2021). In each of these game models players care for a different thing: planetary biomes and environment in *Terra Nil*, relationship between community, and the living being it travels on in *The Wandering Village*, and community and its impact on the environment in *Surviving the Aftermath*. These games also differ when it comes to problematization of life: from environment, through interspecies symbiosis, to community life. A comparative analysis of these titles and their preferred aesthetic, performative and narrative elements, presented in the form of biopolitical maps, might show how their paradigms differ in execution of visions of positive biopolitics. This in turn allows for a better understanding how games balance positive and negative aspects of biopolitics and reveal dominant modes of representation concerning governance and care for digital life.

My ultimate goal is therefore a problematization: identifying, describing and producing a map of problems which expands the current field of studies in game biopolitics.

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