Playing With People's Lives: How city-builder games portray the public and their role in the decision-making process

Abstract:
City-builder computer games are an integral part of the city planning profession. Educators structure lessons around playtime to introduce planning concepts, professionals use the games as tools of visualization and public outreach, and the software of planners and decision-makers often takes inspiration from the genre. For the public, city-builders are a source of insight into what planners do, and the digital city's residents show players what role they play in the urban decision-making process. However, criticisms persist through decades of literature from professionals and educators alike but are rarely explored in depth. Published research also ignores the genre's diverse offerings in favor of focusing on the bestseller of the moment. This project explores how the public is presented in city-builder games, as individuals and as groups, the role the city plays in their lives, and their ability to express their opinions and participate in the process of planning and governance. To more-broadly evaluate the genre as it exists today, two industry-leading titles receiving the greatest attention by planners, SimCity and Cities: Skylines, were matched up with two less-conventional games with their own unique takes on the genre, Tropico 5 and Urban Empire. Several issues in these games' portrayals emerged. The games evaluated typically offered a flawed range of options for dissent with little variety or authority, do little to address social issues and disempowered groups, and poorly portray residents as developed characters. Tropico 5 was an exception to every one of these conclusions, while Urban Empire distinguished itself often as well. The two poorest showings belong to the two games used most often by planners, SimCity and Cities: Skylines. This implies that the planning profession must better educate itself on the full range of games available, a need to take a similar approach to these games as with books published for a general audience, and the ample opportunity for more research in this crucial but neglected facet of planning.
City management games or general management games on the other hand let you manage everything, whether it’s a city, a business or any kind of system. It is also very similar to strategy games, but the main difference is that in city builder games or management games your success is not physical survival, but more financial survival. The main goal is to make money and reach your goals. Most city building simulators have a sandbox mode meaning you can build with an unlimited budget and don’t have to worry about balancing your finances. Politics are playing a major role in the game and can work against or for you, whether it is trade, revolts or military actions. But ultimately, you are the major and the choice of how to rule is up to you. To make the role-playing teaching approach more productive, teachers should lead students towards greater levels of involvement in the process. 28 the American biology teacher, volume 57, no. 1, January 1995. Student involvement in the planning, implementa-tion and assessment of role playing helps to counter some of the difficulties of teaching this method (for more ideas about assessment, see Appendix 2). How-ever, the planning that role-playing teaching requires and the difficulties that may
arise entail forethought by instructors. Citizens represent support for specific groups and public concerns, and the news team tests and summarizes the communities' arguments with pertinent questions.