H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

SimCity 2000. Maxis.

Reviewed by R. Eric Petersen
Published on H-Urban (June, 1994)

<cite>SimCity 2000</cite> is the latest version of the popular computer simulation that allows you to build and manage your own city (<cite>Simcity Classic</cite> was the earlier version).[1] The player, who assumes the role of mayor, starts with a piece of terrain–complete with hills, valleys and running water–and a certain amount of money. Selecting from a range of options that include different types of public utilities, transportation systems, municipal services, zoning rules and taxation policies, the player builds a town that can grow from a collection of houses around a small factory, at a sleepy crossroads to a bustling megalopolis, which is populated by millions of simulated citizens, the "sims." <p> While retaining much of the whimsy and humor of the earlier version, there are many new features that make the program a more realistic simulation of an urban environment than its predecessor. Gone are the "one size and shape fits all" commercial, industrial, and residential zones. In their place is a flexible system that allows the user to set the size and density of those zones. Instead of taxing industry, commerce, and residents at the same rate, the game allows independent assessment across the zones as well as the ability to set rates differentially among specific industries. The player is also responsible for the establishment of a range of facilities and services, including police and fire services, roads, rails, recreational outlets, health and welfare provisions, and, in an attempt to create an educated "sim" citizenry, a university system. <p> In addition to the public opinion poll that was the primary tool of evaluation in older versions, there is now a newspaper that pops up to trumpet your achievements–and your setbacks–as a municipal leader. In the classroom, the game can be an effective way to get undergraduates into the fold, in a range of urban planning, politics, policy, and design courses. <p> The simulation is accessible, easy to play and can be a real eye opener when, despite city wide blackouts, the "sims" won't allow the construction of a new power plant in their back yards. The basics of problems like traffic control, the establishment and maintenance of a viable economic base, decisions on whether to pay for more police or teachers and the results of attracting pollution-intensive industry to a city can all be explored with the game. <p> While there are real choices about which policy choice to take in the simulation, the outcomes are only superficially explored. Furthermore, they are plumbed more for their entertainment value than their contribution to the viability of the urban environment. Tax changes are met with riotous cheers when they are lowered, and with rioters, if they are raised too high. A lack of employment opportunity leads to stories of the "sims" selling their body parts to raise cash. When pollution levels get out of control, an ecologically correct spaceship lands to blow up the polluters and sow the landscape with electricity-generating windmills. <p> While these and other issues get some attention, the game completely ignores other issues. The "sims" will rise in opposition to a new power plant or water treatment facility in the neighborhood. Yet the picket signs stay holstered no matter where you put the new highways or airport. Installing the water system is as easy as changing to the underground map and dragging the pipes from the pumps to wherever they are needed. No streets are torn up, traffic continues to move and the "sims" don't complain about having their lives upturned. Once the water lines are in place, there is no accommodation for getting sewage and water back to the treatment plants. There are protests about what facilities go where, but there is no complaint when the oldest buildings in the city fall to the bulldozer to make way for the new mall or drive-in movie. All of this plays out against a background devoid of the important social questions of race, ethnicity and class which profoundly affect seemingly simple technical issues in the real world. <p> In the end, <cite>SimCity 2000</cite> is an improvement over earlier versions of the software. Nevertheless, like its predecessors, it still deals with urban problems and challenges at too superficial a level for the simulation to make the leap from an engaging diversion to a serious tool. It may work to pique the interest of those who are new to the study of cities. But for those who are further along in their ideas of what a city is and

how it works through the ages, SimCity 2000 is just a game. <p> Note: <p> [1]. <cite>SimCity</cite>, the original version, was made for DOS machines about eight years ago. Despite being black and white and slow-moving, it was very popular. By the time Maxis had gotten around to producing Windows and Mac versions, the game had won dozens of industry awards and was selling at a fast pace. The color version of the software, which also corrected a few bugs found in the original and allowed the application to run on faster machines, was re-christened <cite>SimCity Classic</cite>. Both "versions" do the same thing and play the same way. <cite>SimCity 2000</cite> is the second generation of the concept, but the third version of the software released to the public. <p>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: R. Eric Petersen. Review of , *SimCity 2000.* H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. June, 1994.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=15172

Copyright © 1994 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.