MultipliCITY Playtest Report

Team Members: Ororo Munroe, Cecilia Reyes
Section: Tuesday 12:00P – 01:45P (TA: Toni Morrison)
Game Name: MultipliCITY
Team Name: Acorn
Playtesters: Buffy Summers, Willow Rosenberg, Tara Maclay
Playtest Session: Jack Baskin Lounge, 1/1/1901 @ 1:00PM

Did players understand all the rules from the outset? Were any rules difficult to interpret or remember?

Events, event sheets, and the phase of each turn when events are triggered were initially difficult to interpret from the written rules and provided materials. The temporal organization of the game, with alternating phases of district placement (player action) and city events (system action) could've been better explained in the rules or reinforced through the organization and illustration of event sheets.

What were some interesting choices players faced at particular moments in the game?

Each player has the option of removing a tile from the city map (called *urban renewal*) instead of placing three at the beginning of each turn. This is a hard option to take, because it seems like only one action, rather than three, and thus feels like sacrificing more agency for less. Moments when players contemplated this were interesting, and usually centered around the possibility of opening-up blocked-in tiles, or renovating significantly negative areas for the particular player.

What were some longer-term strategies players attempted during the game?

Long-term strategizing, while difficult in the first and only playthrough, involved arranging tiles such that in the next few turns, it would be difficult for one's opponents to add tiles to their benefit or your detriment. There was much peering over the city space to see the incentivized situations of other player-interest groups, to also prevent unintentionally benefitting them with one's tile placement. For example, the Community Organizers, facing many negative and few positive conditions for their Events, often placed tiles with the goal of blocking-in an Affordable Housing tile with neutral neighboring tiles, to prevent Business from placing Industrial tile neighbors, which both benefit Business and harm Community Organizers. Real Estate, on the other hand, eventually placed Residential tiles in a way that branched outward from the central city map, in what resembled suburban sprawl after the fact, because their Events incentivised Residential tiles near other Residential tiles, while dissuading other types of adjacent tiles, like Industrial or Infrastructure (Services tiles, which would be beneficial, were entirely placed and blocked-in within the first few turns).

What was the outcome of the game? What other outcomes seemed possible?

Initially, it seemed like any one of the disparate urban planning interest groups could acquire the most points before the end condition. This may have been primed by the presentation of the game as a model of urban planning in which multiple parties are making significant contributions. At least one player assumed this would imply more cooperative play or at least complex conversations about planning actions. There is also a general expectation that competitive multiplayer games offer a balanced playing field for each participant. This expectation of balance was roughly upheld for the first half of the game, gradually shifting in favor of Business. There was a short moment, lasting less than a full round of turns, when Real Estate and Community Organizers surpassed Business in points, and successfully prevented some of Business' point-gathering conditions by manipulating the city map. This was extremely soon (within a turn or two) flipped in favor of Business, leading to a decisive victory on the order of about double the points of either Real Estate or Community Organizers.

For each player, when did they feel most or least engaged in the game?

Near the end of the game, when it was clear that Business would have the most points by far, the other players, even when placing tiles, felt definite lack of control. The resulting aesthetic felt like "going through the motions," enacting a predefined script which made a strong statement, but was meant to be listened to, rather than interacted with. As with other unbalanced play scenarios, the player in power still felt engaged, and interested in calculated tile placement for maximum reward.

Do any of the players think something different about the game's theme, based on having played?

For those players who have interacted with some version of SimCity, knowing that MultipliCITY was a reaction to its quality of single-player play in an urban planning model (attempting higher accuracy to the multiplicity of real-world, modern, city-building interests) the lack of balance among those interests was a surprise. The system suggests, through the disproportionate benefits to Business, that urban planning actually does have an essentially single mastermind (or hive mind) who reaps the most accessible rewards, takes the smallest penalties, fears the least in providing unintentional benefit to other parties, and has the most freedom of choice in self-serving action (or placement of district tiles).