Civic education using Sim City video game

Previous compulsory steps / Prior students' knowledge	None
Learning objectives	How to live in a town by building one. How to respond to the needs of others. How to act in society.
Subjects	Politics and law, citizenship, social sciences, civic education.
Recommended Age	15-18
Material needed	PC or iOs Android device
Sequence duration	4 hours (2 hours in class and 2 hours of homework)
Individual or group activity	Individual homework (play time) and group activity (course and debrief time)
Skills developed	Critical thinking, social skills, cultural skills, empathy
Comparison of game time and study time	1 hour civic education course, 2 hours of play, 1 hour debrief and discussion
Price range of the game	20€<
Similar games to use with the approach of the sequence	Cities Skyline
Tips to make the sequence more inclusive	There might be students with no access to a PC or iOs/Android device at home so you might want to prioritise them playing in class.
Tips for a shorter duration of the sequence	If there are any students familiar with the mechanics of the game, ask them to briefly explain them to the rest of the class.

Step by step: how to implement the sequence

Sim City is a series of video games based on building a city, originally designed by Will Wright. The first game from the series was published in 1989 by Maxis.

The game aims to improve people's knowledge about citizenship and what it means to lead a city. Sim City is divided into more titles, but the player acts as a major actor in most of them. The player chooses where and what to build, learning to think strategically in advance.

In this game, you also need to listen to what your citizens are complaining about and find a solution.

Cutting the costs

To cut the cost of implementing this sequence, you can purchase and install the game on an accessible school computer and give enough time for students to play the game. You can also create a registration form to make sure they can come at different times.

- **Step 1: Giving social background (1 hour, optional)**

Explain to your students that they will play a game about citizenship, social life and decision making. Talk with them about aspects of their own social lives and what they could improve. Give a civic education course and focus on developing social skills and even leadership skills, knowing they will play the role of a mayor in the game. Explain to them how a city works from the inside in order to help familiarise them with the game. Talk about the needs of a city and its citizens and do a brainstorming session about what they would do if they were the mayor in real life.

- **Step 2: Students play the game at home (2 hours)**

- **Indications:**

On the first levels, especially, you receive help to build your village and indications as well.
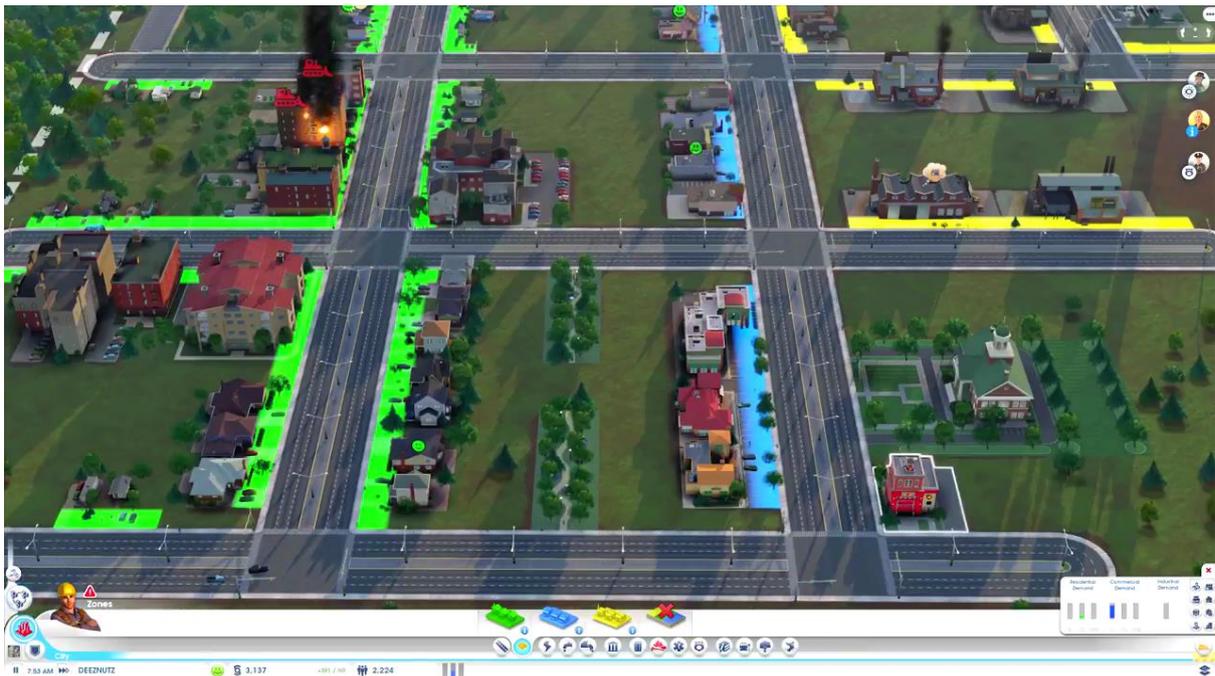

Image 1: Sim City 2013. (Source https://gamefabrique.com/games/simcity/)

- **Exploring the game:**

You need to pay attention to your citizens and to their needs. Two important parts of your city are the density and the wealth. Providing the increase of those parts, you will assure your citizens happiness.

The city is divided into residential zones, for residents and commercial - industrial zones, for workers. Those zones are updating constantly when the characters are happy, and their needs are satisfied. Otherwise, the zones will degrade or become abandoned.

Image 2: SimCity. (Source: https://www.ea.com/games/simcity/simcity?isLocalized=true)

- **Step 3: Debrief and discussion**

Ask the students what they learned while playing the game and ask their opinions about the skills they think they gained. Then, start a debriefing session about their experience as mayors. Analyse the advantages and disadvantages of being a leader. Review with them the events of the game in an objective way.

Ask your students to explain the choices they made and why. Even if these choices have limited impact on the plot, it can be interesting to debate points of view (i.e., they build 3 factories and decided not to sell the products and instead use them for their own town). For choices that had a bigger impact in the game, ask your students what the consequences of their choices were, and make them compare these consequences and choices with one another.

Finally, you can ask more open-ended questions such as:

- If you found yourself in the position of a leader, what would you do? How would you act and why?
- Do you think is important, as a mayor, to care about your citizens? Why?
- How do you think a citizen should act in a town or city?

Getting the game:

https://www.ea.com/en-gb/games/simcity/simcity-buildit

References:

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IGN (April 15th, 2013). Zone Density & Wealth. SimCity Wiki Guide. Available at: https://www.ign.com/wikis/simcity/Zone_Density_&_Wealth#What.27s_the_Difference_Between_Happiness_and_Wealth.3F

Image sources:

Image 1: SimCity 2013 https://gamefabrique.com/games/simcity/

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