Polder

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Indietopia
Lübeckweg 2
9723 HE Groningen

Justin Krogman

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Overview

Polder is a real-time strategy-building game where the player's primary goal is to settle new villages across the North of The Netherlands and build them up to prosperity. A church acts as the central point of every village and the player must work to develop and defend it from a litany of hazards and natural disasters while efficiently managing resources and funds.

The game begins in the 11th century A.D. and will advance roughly fifty years further in time throughout each level or scenario. As time advances, villages will continue to change in style to reflect building methods, materials, and architectural styles of that respective time period while the churches will remain the same to reflect the strong roots in culture and values that they provided to their communities.

The core gameplay loop takes place over the course of two different gameplay modes that roughly represent a “round-based” system. In each mode the player focuses on different aspects of either building or maintaining their village.

Gameplay Modes

Build Mode: This mode focuses on the distribution of collected resources as the player works to strategically build up their village to produce both happy citizenry and an efficient local ecosystem to continue the production of resources and funds for the community.

The player begins the mode in each level or scenario by first building a mound and a church from their starting resources in a defined area. After the church has been built a small community automatically begins forming in the surrounding area depending on the construction of the church, the configuration of this community will change. A counselor “Grand Maester” character starts each level with a prediction after the initial community has been established. Based on the described prediction the player will have an inclination for how to best spend their resources for the upcoming turn. This mode plays in a “paused state” where time does not advance within the game world.

Play Mode: This mode is focused on the player managing their community as citizenry works to develop the structures and village as designed by the player in the "Build Mode". During this mode time counts down to the end of the round and the player must effectively manage their community to ensure its survival against diminishing resources, natural disasters (forest fires, floods, lighting, heavy rain, heavy wind), and other randomly generated hazards based partially on the prediction from the "Grand Maester" character. This mode plays in an "active state" where time advances within the game world and events are actively ongoing.

Target Audiences

1. The portion of the Dutch population that currently engages with casual games, with specificity to those already interested in churches or the history of Dutch land reclamation using polders.
2. Overall casual gamers that are currently fans of games such as Townscaper, Bad North, or From Dust.

Goals

Gameplay Goals

1. Feel empowered to shape the games hexagonal tiled landscape however you see fit to ensure the survival and prosperity of your civilization.
2. Clearly visualized interactable objects and building pieces through coloured object highlighting and/or systemic colour designation that is consistent across all structures and levels.
3. Build and maintain structures easily through dragging and dropping pieces directly from the user interface onto landscape tiles, as well as through the construction of the villages central church.
4. Witness the evolution of the Dutch population over time through a variety of levels and scenarios that advance in time as the player progresses through the game. Later scenarios require a greater application of player skill in order to be successfully completed.

Internal Goals

1. Fun and engaging entertainment experience for a majority of users that follows industry standards and best practices for casual games.
2. Players learn about the development of churches in the North of The Netherlands and are more engaged with their current development.
3. Players learn about modern uses that churches fulfill in order to benefit society and develop an improved view of churches in the North of The Netherlands.

External Goals

1. Launch Indietopias first commercial game under the new BV branch and expand the company's portfolio.
2. Further develop and improve practical skills as Unreal Engine artists, designers, and developers to a more professional level.
3. Promote ourselves as creatives and create excellent portfolio work to showcase to future clients and investors within the games industry.

Specifications

Gameplay

- The primary perspective of the player is a top down/ isometric view on PC and consoles, and an overhead flying view in virtual reality. The player will experience a feeling of epic proportions and absolute control over their civilization as they play through the game and exercise their will on the surrounding landscape.
- A core aspect of the game are two hands with which the player shapes the land, digs rivers, and makes mounds. On PC and console this is visualized through the mouse cursor and interaction prompts, in VR this is visualized as the players actual hands.
- The primary setting of the game is the North of The Netherlands. Landscape, language, and topography are all key thematic guidelines. The North of The Netherlands history should be explored, but also the core history of The Netherlands as a whole. Polders and land reclamation from the North Sea and

surrounding coasts plays an important thematic and gameplay role (“Polderen” to reclaim land).

- Intuitive controls for shaping the landscape such as by tapping a tile to raise the ground on it or by swiping to lower it. Additionally, the player can place their hands together to create mounds and collect resources by drawing lines around tiles. By utilizing both hands the player can dynamically build rivers, canals, or hills into the surrounding landscape.
- An evolving landscape that will change over time based on Dutch culture such as holidays that are celebrated by villagers and can produce cosmetic changes to the community, as well as through seasonal changes based on the climate of The Netherlands.
- There is a limited user interface in general to promote a minimalist visual style. In VR this is visualized mainly through interaction prompts via object highlighting or colour coding. On PC and consoles this is represented through a more traditional user interface with items such as a building menu that can be minimized to maintain a minimalist theme.
- The church, the level areas, and all buildable pieces are divided and placed into hexagonal tiles. Tiles are divided based on terrain type and resources available, some tiles and segments of levels/ scenarios are much more valuable than others. Some tiles can give passive bonuses to villagers or structures built on top of them.
- Manage resources and funds as the player sees fit to promote multiple play styles and replayability value within each level or scenario. Balance how you divide these resources between a central church and your surrounding community to effectively develop your civilization while mitigating natural disasters and conflict.
- Natural disasters occur in relevant areas of game levels such as forest fires in wooded areas, floods near coasts and canals, and potential attacks at strategically attractive or resource rich areas.
- Building and upgrading of buildable structures and churches is performed through a tier based system. When a structure is initially built onto a tile, it will begin at Tier 1 and can be upgraded to Tier 3 through the spending of additional resources and funds.

    - Example Tier 1: The church is a rudimentary building and doesn't attract many visitors to the village. There are fewer possible residents for the village and a greater chance for a “helpless situation” to occur.
    - Example Tier 2: The church has a sundial which allows the player and village to determine the time of day, the current calendar day, and as a result determine a rough timeline for upcoming events based on the “Grand Maesters” predictions.
    - Example Tier 3: The church is fully established and prepared for a variety of situations. A full sundial, a church bell to distribute warnings for disasters and attacks, and an organ to provide passive area benefits are some of the more advanced features that can be unlocked. Many residents of the village can take shelter from attacks and natural disasters in churches at Tier 3. Additional upgrades will not increase the tier of the church, but will allow more residents to take shelter and will increase the passive area bonus from the organ.
- Through the development of churches players will be able to significantly improve the living conditions and amenities available to villagers and enable additional functions for managing and mitigating crises.
    - Example: If a church has been built on the western side of a level and has been upgraded to Tier 3 to unlock the “church bells” it will be able to distribute an early warning to the player and villagers if there is a disaster or attack incoming from the surrounding western region.
- Dutch mythology, folklore, technology, and period specific trends are some of the primary sources of inspiration for additional gameplay materials and overall worldbuilding. Examples are things such as Ravens, “White Wives” (mists in the fields), The “sacred tree”, “Wierde” and “Terpen” (mounds), grain storages, “Sarries Huts” (Northern Dutch tax collector huts), farms and farmhouses, water holes and more. Subjects and styles change and develop over time based on what was fashionable or acceptable at the time period of the level or scenario.
- As each level or scenario is completed, the final layout of the level with the fully developed village is saved as a diorama that the player can revisit and view at any time through the main menu of the game. Players can revisit these dioramas to see their progress and how they successfully developed each village in their previous gameplay sessions.

Technical

- The game will be made in Unreal Engine at either version 5 or 5.1 based on the results of preliminary technical research regarding stability for virtual reality and required third party software.
- Additional tools or software that may be required are the “Landmass”, “Volumetrics”, “Water”, and “Niagara Fluids” plugins from Epic Games or the “Advanced Framework Core” from Human Codeable.

Possible Milestones

I. Minimum Viable Product

The core gameplay loop of a single scenario is present with some placeholder assets and functions still present. The game is playable and testable and the core vision of the game and experience are present.

II. Developed Prototype

A more advanced prototype with a large majority of gameplay features and functions developed to an acceptable level of polish for public testing.

Concept Art

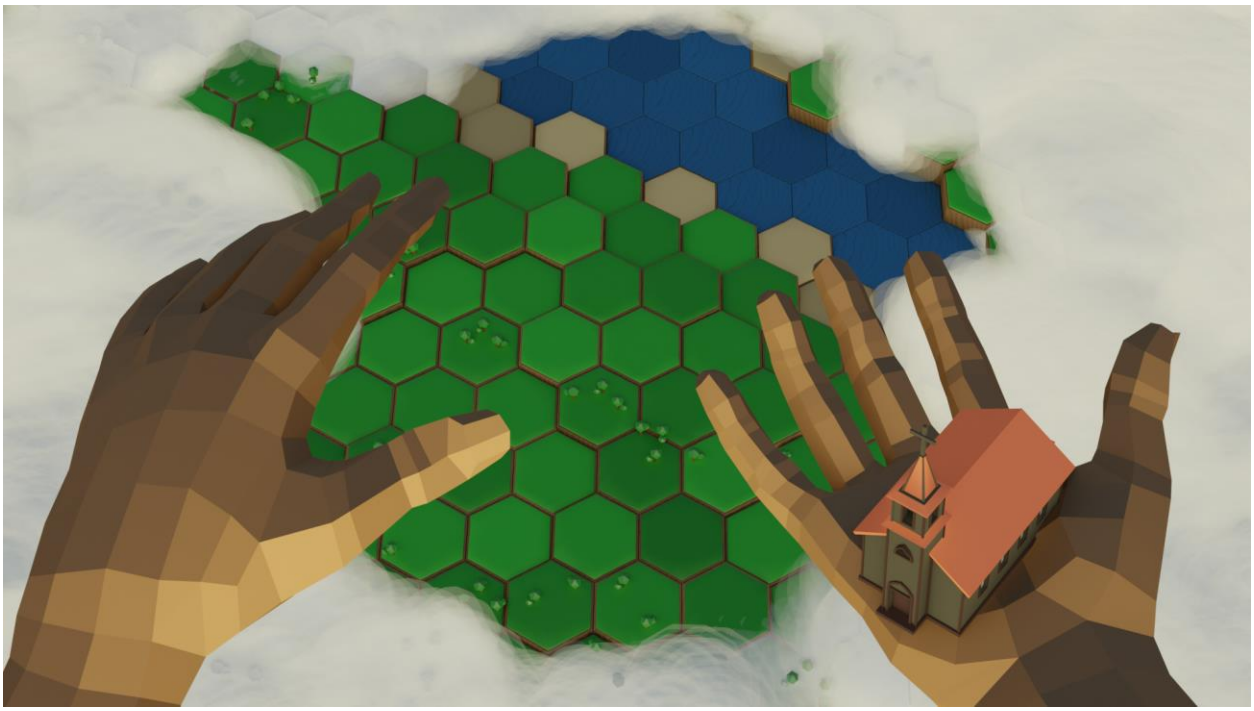

Figure 1 - Player view of holding a church over an undeveloped landscape

Figure 2 - Player view of holding a church over an undeveloped landscape

Figure 3 - Player view of the landscape after church placement

Figure 4 - Representation of a more developed village