

Role of Housing System in MMORPG (Multi Massive Online Role Playing Game)

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Abstract

Housing in MMORPG (Multi Massive Online Role Playing Game) expresses players' personality and confer joy of having players' own place. Housing system is not just a place to rest but also to customize the character and personality of a player. Even if the player has logged off, his housing remains in game world and keep exposed to other players. But more importantly, it is related to significance and connection between players and game. Eternity, customizing, limitation of space, additional use and map changes are some of the characteristics of housing system. Some suggestions are made to improve game environment; significance, space, personalization, hubs, access and introducing urban planning. Housing system is continuously evolving and can offer everlasting joy to players with its indigenous characteristics.

Keywords: *MMORPG Game, Housing System, Game Design, Game Architecture*

1. Introduction

Housing in game is contents that players can build and decorate. Housing is not just developing character but expressing the player's personality and confer joy of having player's own place. In some games housing itself is the goal of the game and in others building and having housing would mean having a place to rest and store. Even when logged out, unlike other characters, house remains a game in which players feel comfortable and satisfactory when back to the game. Housing on MMORPG(Multi Massive Online Role Playing Game) is the system where players build their housing, own and decorate. In games other than MMORPG there is no severe competition or shortage of land but it is impossible to show the player's achievement to others. One of the most played games is Ultima online and in games like this players can buy lot, build a house, and buy and store things. What is done to the house remains in the game and is exposed to other players. In many games, housing has been offered but has not been very popular because of the limit on the amount of land. Land with good location is dominated by early players and priced too high. In this study, various housing systems were studied to examine current characteristics. Housing systems of Games like Ultima online, GranAtlas online, ArcheAge and Eternal City were analyzed. Related research on housing system applied to MMORPG appears in Chapter 2. Characteristics of housing system are scrutinized in Chapter 3 and suggestions are made in Chapter 4. The conclusion will be appeared in Chapter 5.

2. Related Research

There are a variety of cases that applied the housing system to MMORPG. Ultima online is the first and perhaps one of the most well-developed applications. GranAtlas online and ArcheAge would be good examples of applications of the housing system. None-MMORPG

Games like The Sims or Fallout3 have well-developed housing systems. Space available for housing is limited and competition for good location is severe. Urban planning is not applied to games yet but it can solve many of housing issues. Every lot has its own purpose and scale. Zoning regulation is the key structure of urban planning.

2.1. Multi Massive Online Role Playing Games

2.1.1. Ultima Online

Players build housing on Britannia continent. Housing works as private space for player and storage where items are stored. Players buy deed from real estate NPC(Non Player Character) to build their house. With the expansion package 'Age of Shadow' players can design everything - basement, entrance, wall, door, window and roof. Thanks to the housing system, players with the same nationality or occupation can gather together. The house is a place to rest and to sell items. NPCs sell items to other players. One of the benefits of Ultima online is shopping visiting many housing.



Figure 1. Screen Shot of Ultima Online[9]

2.1.2. GranAtlas Online

Housing is divided by two categories; personal housing named Apaltamento and guild office. Aplatamento is an instanced space, something like an apartment where players can reside. Players can decorate and furnish the inside, expand space, store items and have standby secretary. The Guild office is located in cities of Europe. It cannot be decorated inside but shops can be operated.



Figure 2. Screen Shot of GranAtlas Online[10]

2.1.3. ArcheAge

ArcheAge offers a diverse housing system. More developed graphic, up-do-date contents, high degree of freedom, and a variety of furniture make players feel like they are in a real world. In ArcheAge, players have the opportunity to actually own property located out in the game world. Housss and farms are not instanced, meaning they are visible to anyone passing by; they have a real location, like “across the road from Windshade Village” or “on the south coast of Villanelle” Documents are needed to build a house and can be obtained from merchants residing at residence area on every continent. Once a player decides where to build, he can choose preferred type of house from document. A variety of houses are provided;

- *Small: 16x16 meters
- *Farmhouse: 24x24 meters
- *Medium: 24x24 meters
- *Large: 28x28 meters
- *Mansion: 44x44 meters

Dimensions described above are common in real construction site. Players can choose any of these by their need and affordability. ArcheAge gives players a sense of reality. It diminishes the gap between a game and the real world by constructing housing, decorating interior and offering ownership. Procedures to trade ownership between seller and buyer are similar to real world, too.



Figure 3. Screen Shot of ArcheAge[11]

2.1.4. Eternal City

Housing sale events are often offered on the official homepage. Applicants who won the lottery are granted the right to buy houses. The amount paid for it is lower than value and the player who won the lottery can earn money by selling it. The system of trading housing is similar to real world. Seller earns money from trading and he can buy another house with better location. In Eternal city, the trading system reflects that of real world, thus induce capital gain issues.



Figure 4. Screen Shot of Eternal City[12]

2.2. Zoning

Zones consist of five major categories: residential, mixed residential-commercial, commercial, industrial and special. Each category can have a number of sub-categories, for example zone of residential has 3-4 types of sub-categories in which maximum height and ceiling height of each floor, floor area ration and availability of basement *etc.* As shown at Figure 5, land use is distinguished by colors and every zone has its own purpose and regulations.

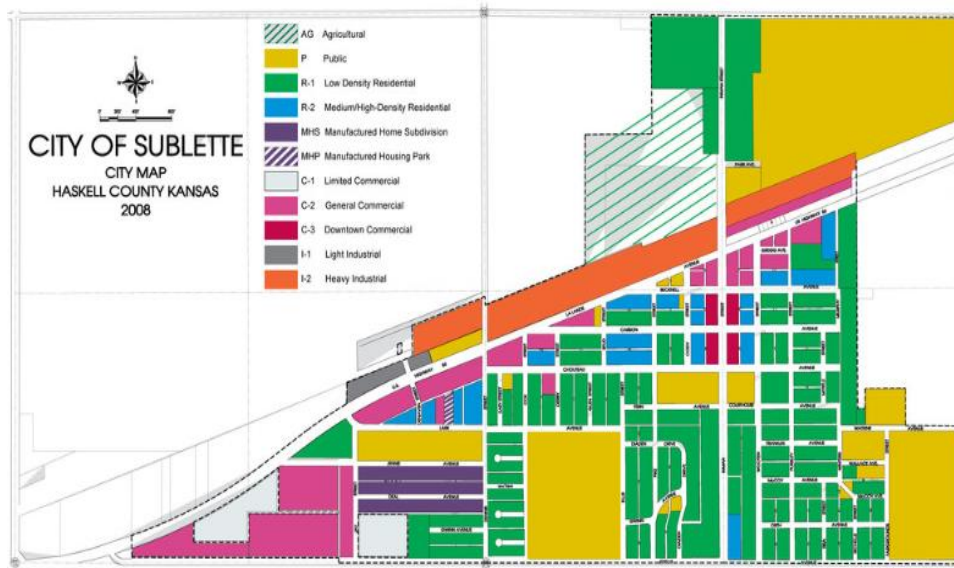


Figure 5. Sample of Zoning Regulation[13]

3. Characteristics of Housing System

3.1. Eternity

If players log out from the game, the date remains in the game and the player and the game are disconnected. But in games with the housing system like Ultima Online and Eternal city online, the house remains in the game even after the player has logged off. The House in the game is exposed to other players and it can be attacked and admired by them. Exposing players' housing would be a good reason why players come back to game and check the status of their own asset. Housing connects the player and game forever unless the operator terminates the game or the system is accidentally shut down.

3.2. Customizing

Characters express their function and role by their appearance and customizing the character means more than just to show-off themselves. When facing another character, the player can judge his or her taste and personality by appearance. But expressing one's character is limited because the ways of decorating is restricted. The housing system has a variety of ways to express the players' preference; from the outside-approach, shape of land, garden, platform, building style, building structure, materials, window; from inside- interior style, floor finish, wall, door, stair placement and finish, furniture, and etc. By using these, the player can distinguish and customizing him/herself from others.

3.3. Limitation of Space

The location where many of players want to build their own housing is almost the same with a stream ahead and a hill to the back. But the perfect location is dominated by players who are from the initial stage. It's possible to have spacious and good location in a different space but players cannot share it with other players and it works only for the player himself. It's against MMORPG's prerequisite.

3.4. Additional Use

In the beginning stage, housing was used as a chatting place or for storage but nowadays it is developed as a store and communication center. Players hire Non-Player Characters(NPCs) who maintain the building and earn money. Through these activities players add value to the housing. Partner Characters work related to housing with wide range of data base and artificial intelligence. Even when logged out, they maintain housing and earn money. By repeating these kind of labor, they upgrade the value of housing. Thus proper take advantage of Non-player characters and partner characters would make housing more efficient and valuable.

3.5. Map Change

As housing increases or decreases, the map changes. These are big impacts that every player can notice what differences are made compared to the map of their last visit. But the new location of the housing should be connected seamlessly with the existing land. The easiest way to supply housing would be providing another space that can be plugged into but that would not be accessible to other players. And it would not appear on the map.

4. Suggestion for Housing System

Housing system of MMORPG initiated by Ultima Online has developed continuously ever since. Items which players own and abilities of characters represent players' status and especially having houses are effective ways of showing off players' social standing and express their-self. Having a beautiful and huge house with a terrace and garden decorated with expensive materials and furniture are good ways of expressing players' ability and taste. Housing system will be evolved in many ways. Some of them would be significance or meaning of housing, limited space, personalization, hub, access and introducing urban planning.

4.1. Significance

While many MMORPG are trying to make players' housing more effective, it seems as though they need to create more significance or meaning. An analysis on why people want to spend time in their own housing, how deep their desire is to show off their housing and their aesthetic value should be considered in the development process.

4.2. Space

There is not enough space to build housing for many players who want to have their own house. The suburbs would be an option but many players do not want their house in the city and effective demand is not high enough. Planning a housing zone or leasing system for abandoned houses would be a more effective way to absorb the housing demand.

4.3. Personalization

Players have their own preference, so they want to design houses by themselves. The design site should be flexible and should not offer the same types of houses. They should have many options to choose from. Every site is unique. Location, slope, shape, access and neighborhood are some of the aspects which distinguish one site from another. Once the site is decided, players begin to build. They choose the platform, wall, painting, windows, furniture and carpeting etc. Desire to be different from others results in unique housing. If needed level expansion is available.

4.4. Hubs

Housing becomes hubs for activities like shop, gathering, and trade in general. Traditional purpose of housing is to rest. But as game world is getting complicated, the use of housing is expanding continuously. Available space for storage is another reason why players want to have housing of their own. NPCs work as clerks helping players shop and trade. Function of housing keeps evolving.

4.5. Access

Access is one of the most important aspects to choose housing in real world. Many MMOPRG offer a variety of lots but housing system is quite different. Players of Ultima Online can build anywhere on map while players of Dark Age can only build on the housing zone. Instance housing is available in Everquest 2. Creative ways to connect housing to fields like in the air or down to the ground would be a good alternative to solve the restricted stock of land.

4.6. Introducing Urban Planning

The housing system should be developed according to urban planning. In the real world, every single house is under the strict regulation of architectural and urban standard. Zoning is the base map of all building activities and the system should be introduced in the gaming world. Games like Dark Age of Camelot are good examples of introducing urban planning system into games. Housing zone of Dark Age of Camelot is just for housing and no other purpose of building would not be permitted. While a number of MMOPRG which applied housing system are increasing, games which have zoning regulation are still few. Applying detailed sub-categories to housing zone would make space more efficient and help to preserve public order. Proper urban planning covering entire map could be the key to a successful housing system.

5. Conclusion and Implication

Many MMORPG are now providing a housing system. The housing system is not just for rest and storage but also represents players' character and personality. More importantly, it is related to significance and eternity. Even if the player has logged off, their house remains in game world and exposed to other players and keeps changing eternally. That is the reason why players want to own housing. Players have their own aesthetic values and eager to design housing reflecting their taste. Players want to have meaning or significance while playing game, but space available for housing is limited. Establishing zones for housing and systems like leasing would be some of good options to solve those kind of problems. Every site has its own uniqueness; location, slope, shape, access and neighborhood. Which make housing more attractive and engage in

games. Uses of housing could be diverse compared to past. Access could be one of the most important aspect of choosing housing in games. Because of limited space, creative ways to connect housing to field are needed. Introducing urban planning to games would make game world more efficient and upgrade the lever of public order. If the entire map is arranged by urban planning, housing system could be more attractive to all. The housing system can offer everlasting joy to players with its indigenous characteristics

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