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Betaville

The Vision of Betaville – The new urban sculpture

Our vision of the new urbanity is the smart city, a city where you wish to live in, a city of art, a city designed by its inhabitants, for their dreams and their daily life. Betaville is a tool for the next step in such a mass participatory urban design and development reality.

We have been inspired by connecting the idea of participatory design with social dynamics using the web, offering a mass player infrastructure for cultural expressions of live, architecture, city-textures, urban art, live-style, from group-design to ecological living.

Our goal is to offer a mobile-stationary AR environment for smart cities – or such where citizens would like to change it into one. The Betaville system allows the participation of citizens and local groups in the local urban development from a very early stage on. We develop different types of interactivity and access, that accumulates the engagement of users to an new sort of urban sculpture.

Alternative planning proposals will be transparently available. As a continuous test and art place – as a new function of a “sustainable” Web. In cooperation with artists, developers and researchers from Europe, North America and Asia, Betaville tries to realize this vision: a hybrid open source environment where everybody can follow – even change – the ideas concerning urban development, urban art, or a decentralized infrastructure.



A Scenario in Betaville – Participation in different environments

In Alphaville, a fictitious city, an old factory has been torn down. The vacant area is to be revived in the near future and the city hall constitutes an official planning board. In order to take into consideration its citizens' demands for a livable city as well as potential interests of authorities and technical restrictions, the public administration is interested in the active participation of other parties in the decision and development process. Therefore, Betaville could be used. It configures the real estate in the virtual system.

Bob likes to actively take part in the planning process about his vicinity. As he is interested in a mixed use of the area, he uses the functionality to incorporate 3D models of a town house as well as a small shopping mall with space for different shops. Alice gets to see Bob's proposal on Betaville and adds a kindergarten that she finds essential for a vivid quarter. After releasing her ideas in Betaville, her friend Carol also wants to participate in the redevelopment of the area. Equipped with her mobile device, Carol inspects the area and uses Betaville's mobile client for 3D on-site-visualizations of the different planning proposals on her mobile screen. With these authentic impressions in mind she realizes the long distance from the housing area to the kindergarten and changes the proposal directly on her mobile by positioning the kindergarten closer to the housing area. Back at home she realizes a lack of green space and substitutes the shopping mall in Bob's design by a small park.

Members of the community, local authorities, or even potential investors now have the chance to refine and extend the development branches created by Bob, Alice, and Carol, to rearrange the proposals or even to create new branches. Furthermore, every member of the community has the chance to participate in online discussions about the published ideas, to comment or just to vote for or against it – at home on the web or mobile at the very site. At multi-touch tables small groups can meet and collaborate in real life, discuss alternative proposals, create and manipulate new ideas and visualize.

Betaville – First in New York

The first implementation of Betaville is planned for Battery Park, the open green space at the tip of Manhattan opposite the statue of Liberty: intensively used, contested by a bewildering assortment of stakeholders.

First level: aggregation and sunshine– by providing for embedded links to various agents, documents, and proposals already in place, the online world makes it possible for anyone wishing to seriously address this oddly contested and liminal environment with a full and interactive picture of the situation. Second level: a visualization environment in which it is possible for an artist, a citizen, or in fact anyone with internet access anywhere in the world to make sense of the web of functional and qualitative constraints and possibilities for place-making in context.

Third level: playing in an environment that will really support ongoing ad-hoc local discussion of possibilities for change, from something as concrete and immediate as the siting of a new work of sculpture to more complex long-term deliberations.

Fourth level: collaborative deliberation and creation. Each proposal will be accessible through a link embedded in the master model, and will carry its own discussion threads and version history. Anyone with a idea they think is worth considering/developing can initiate this process by uploading a model, in the spirit of the open-source protocol of a “request for comment”.

A real city is in perpetual “beta”: unfinished, and in need of direct engagement by the broadest possible coalition of stakeholders. Betaville provides a new kind of “magic circle”: the radical plasticity of any urban environment is now a creative opportunity, rather than a constant threat, to individuals and local communities – a higher form of collaborative creative play in a game with real stakes.