PlastiCity: 2004 - 2006, Bradford and Manchester/ UK

PlastiCity - A Multiplayer Urban Planning Game

The project will create a gaming environment for single or multiple users which will allow players to reshape Bradford city centre according to their own, or a shared, vision.
The game can be considered a 'serious' game insofar as it is based on careful research into the City Council's planning, the history of 'cities of the future', The City Centre Masterplan, and the wishes and demands of the local population. However, our intention is that the game should firstly and foremostly be fun to play. To this end, it is our intention that the game will contain additional playful elements (subgames) which will add to the playability, longevity and relevance to Bradfordians of the game experience.

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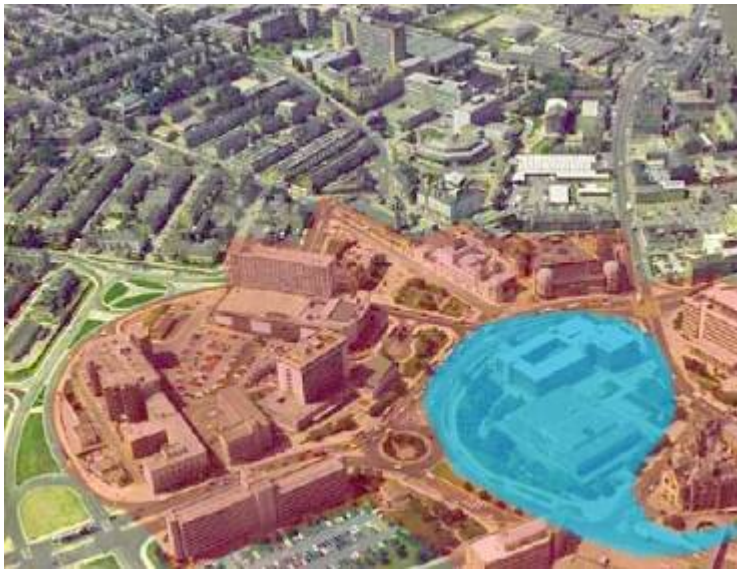


Bradford City centre. The red zone is the core region containing the Townhall and the Museum of Film, Photography and Television. The blue zone marks the area for a possible lake.

We intend to carry out the developement of the game based on a research into history of urban planning and a history of dreams about cities and urban life. The project will be carried out in 2 work phases.

The project started in 2004 with an investigation into planning aspects, research into current, past and possible future urban developement and into the history of visions of “cities of the future“ (Charles Fourier, Le Corbusier, Fritz Lang, Sci-Fi, Computer Games, Archigram).

Phase1: Modeling and texturing of a core region of the Bradford city centre. (Red Zone) including the Masterplan’s proposed ’Bradford Bowl’ and city centre lake (Blue).

Project phase 1 will result in a prototype of the final game, with realistic architectonic models, basic gameplay and a set of tools (’guns’ or ’wands’) which will enable players to manipulate the size and shape, retexture and erase existing buildings and architectural features, and create new ones from a limited catalogue.

Towards the end of this phase we will be able to determine whether the final game will be playable on any reasonably specified domestic pc, or whether it will require highly specified, dedicated gaming machines. This determination will play an important role in shaping how the final game will be presented to the public; whether through online and CD distribution to end users, a touring roadshow of hi-spec machines, dedicated exhibition or a city centre installation. Our preferred option (and reasonable expectation) is for the former; we would rather create a game module which can be plugged into any of the 7,000,000 domestic pcs worldwide running ’Unreal Tournament’.

Phase2: In close contact with Will Alsop we will design specific ’possible buildings’ and urban planning strategies for the game. This might include the ’Alsop Gun’. The Alsop Gun will only work on certain, marked urban features and will trigger a spectacular pre-scripted sequence of events, destroying old architecture in a ’controlled explosion’ and growing new features based on the Masterplan. At this stage we would consider the scale of the Phase 1 map in terms of its viability on a typical domestic pc, gameplay and the imaginative possibilities which might arise from extending the map.

Phase 2 will also implement culturally specific and age/ gender-specific gameplay elements, will model different player pawns (avatars) and create an interface for the game which is easy to use, fun and rich in the possibilities for interaction and collaboration. Various trigger points – shops, booths, significant real or imagined buildings and institutions - will allow players to explore and experiment with aspects of their own identities ’on the fly’.

During this phase we hope to introduce a driveable vehicle or vehicles and to explore the possibility of pre-scripted traffic on roads.

One example of the opportunities for collaborative gameplay we wish to include is allowing for an increase and decrease of the level of water in the Bradford Bowl. The implementation of this feature will allow players, by agreement, to flood or drain the city centre. it will also imply changes in the usability of the city – players will have to swim, rather than walk, run or drive; some areas will become harder to reach, and new areas such as rooftops will be accessible for the first time.

Another example of a solo or collaborative sub-game might be the incorporation of a simple stepping or dancing game into the paving of Centenary Square. Players come across a single, lit paving slab in the Square. Curiosity piqued, they stand on it. This triggers a sequence of two slabs lighting, accompanied by musical notes. They run across the square to copy the sequence, which in turn triggers a more complex sequence, and so on.

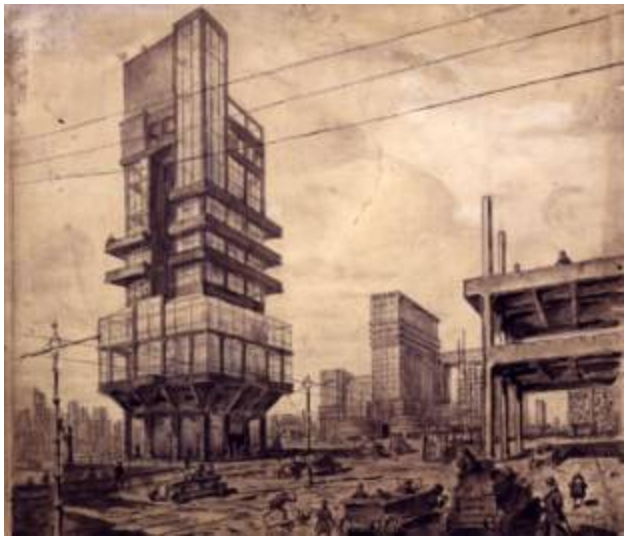
We regard it as important to implement effective in-game communication between remote multiplayers. This could be through typed messages, which would be easy to implement and universally available, or through direct spoken communication, which would demand that players were equipped with microphones and speakers or headsets.

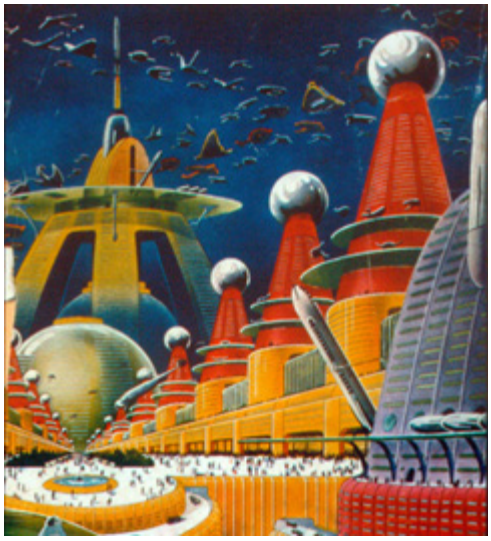
A key element of the project will be establish a mechanism to harvest data about the decisions people make in creating their own, personal Bradford. This will be easily implementable if the second option of dedicated 'Personal Bradford' gaming computers is used, though we believe it may be possible to implement an email-based data reaping system for the distributed model. Data obtained would be used to create a persistent, evolving, 'Democratic Bradford' based upon the mean of the collected data. This would be publicly available to explore, singly or in groups of up to 16. We hope that it will serve to provoke debate about Bradford's existing and future urban planning.

Cities of the Future

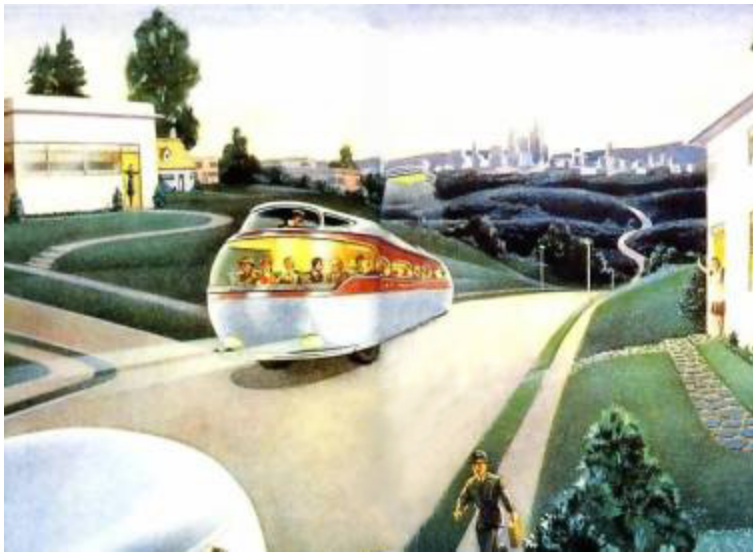
An investigation into "cities of the future" will provide us with problems and decade specific desires of the inhabitants and the artists.

Compare the visions of Russian artist L. Rudnev dating from 1927 (left) with American dreams of the 1950ies (right)

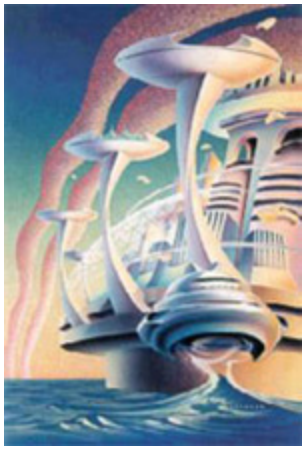




and 1960ies.



Science-fiction iconography, and childrens' drawings will be investigated to collect an inventory of dreams, fearful or hopeful projections and take particular care to keep the range of gender-, ethnic group- and age-specific wishes and desires open.



supported by the
Adelphi Research Institute

Lightwave/ Bradford