“Watch Out! The eyes of the city”: design and implementation of an artistic virtual environment during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games

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The purpose of this paper is to outline the design methodologies and practices implemented for the establishment of the large scale interactive installation project “Watch out! The eyes of the city” that was developed as part of the interactive installation projects of the Olympic games of 2004 in Athens.

“Watch out!” is an interactive installation project that allows passers-by an open air environment to communicate via box-like interfaces and internet or SMS messages with a large community of participants both in situ and in networked places. The installation was envisioned by Maurice Benayoun in 2002 and was first presented in Seoul (Corea). The Athens 2004 version was re-designed to integrate the new context requirements (for more information refer to www.watch-out.net site where one can find a photo gallery from the Athens 2004 installation showing sample interactions with some of the 300,000 visitors encountered during the 2 weeks event).

The article presents a framework and a coherent method for design in an organizational context within the media design tradition for the construction of virtual environments that support the management of large scale interactive media projects that involve real-time interactivity with the spectators/users. It also illustrates the technical requirements behind the technological innovation. The analysis of these requirements outline the characteristics of the communication sub-system development for the supporting team and the real-time graphics processing and streaming technology for the interaction with the spectators/users. In addition we describe a fusion of web-interface technologies implemented to control the communication/feedback from the spectators/users that used mainstream mobile communication technology to interact with the system. Finally we describe the digitization sub-system that converts the user interaction to motion picture.

Each of the main activities is illustrated by an example sub-system analysis taken from the project and the article concludes by summing up the main points.

The project was presented during the Olympic games of 2004 in Athens and was designed with collaborative virtual environment characteristics in mind.