City tours by mouse click

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The residents of Strassfurt can take a virtual tour of their city by mouse click. Credit: Fraunhofer IFF

Cities have to come up with creative ideas to attract investors. Specially developed software provides support and sends interested companies on a virtual tour of an industrial park. Residents can use the tool to explore their city as well.

The residents of Stassfurt in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, are lucky. They are able to voice opinions about construction plans even before redevelopment commences. This is made possible by software from the Fraunhofer Institute for Factory Operation and Automation IFF in Magdeburg, which represents open lots, individual buildings, neighborhoods and even complete industrial parks true-to-scale and photorealistically in virtual 3-D projections.

The researchers from the Fraunhofer IFF have created a 3-D scenario specifically for Stassfurt. Mining caused the downtown to sink. A lake with recreational zones was laid out in and around the pit. The bank zone is going to be expanded now and the residents of Stassfurt have already been able to stroll through the new layout virtually. »We created the terrain model based on two-dimensional and additional elevation data from a laser scan. Afterward we combined the lots with digital photographs taken on site and integrated the thusly created 3-D building models in the virtual environment,« explains Andreas Höpfner, a research manager at the Fraunhofer IFF.

Municipalities, cities and districts intend to use the new software for more than urban planning. The program will also be employed for regional marketing to attract potential investors for instance. On a virtual excursion, they may switch locations and their view of the 3-D model - to an industrial park for instaance - at any time and interactively retrieve supplementary information on open lots, lot sizes, prices, maximum construction heights, soil quality and distance by mouse click. When necessary, real estate master data is interactively uploaded from a real estate database. Siting factors such as the companies based in the area are important to investors. »Our software can even be used to retrieve background information on local companies, thus enabling investors to find out if potential partners are based at a location. No other virtual reality software can do this in this way,« says Höpfner. The Fraunhofer IFF created a 3-D model of Piesteritz Agro-Chemical Park for Lutherstadt Wittenberg, which can be used as a marketing tool. The city models will be exhibited at the Internationale Handwerksmesse in Munich on March 3 to 9, 2010 and at the International Building Exhibition in Saxony-Anhalt in April.

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