

# ArcheoTales

## Experiencing Archaeology in a Digital and Playful Way

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While the demands of museum and exhibition visitors for digital knowledge transfer are increasing, it remains burdensome for many exhibition operators to create digital offerings. ArcheoTales makes this easier with a simple mobile app in the style of Scavenger Hunts, where a chat guides visitors through the exhibition and invites them to interact.

Museums and cultural institutions are subject to digital change. And so are the needs and expectations of visitors. For them, the focus is on the experience – a combination of performance and content – and cultural institutions face the challenge of adapting to this new media consumption behaviour and offering high-quality digital programmes and content. There is an awareness of the necessity to develop information and communication technologies in the sector: 70% of museums plan to use digital guides on visitors' devices in the future, while 46% of museums plan to use digital gamification elements (Museum Booster, 2021). Hence, shifting cultural and educational experiences into digital space is a palpable way to communicate and exchange knowledge interactively. And this is where ArcheoTales comes in. As an information and communication tool, it represents a contemporary digital mediation format that supports cultural institution operators in making the leap into the digital age.

But what is ArcheoTales about? ArcheoTales is an online application designed to facilitate the playful transfer of knowledge about archaeological and cultural heritage sites. It works as an interactive scavenger hunt that is intended to explore archaeological remains.

After onboarding to the ArcheoTales mobile app and choosing a specific exhibition site and hunt, users usually follow instructions that come in a chat-like style. The dialogical orientation of the app is an essential innovative component, allowing both users and cultural sites to learn from each other. However, sticking with the user, the primary task is to correctly answer the questions posed in the chat. To do so, users might be invited to provide answers to different types of questions. They may be asked to share a photograph or to write a free text. For knowledge questions they might be invited to choose and tick the correct answers. According to the answers given, visitors can pursue an individual course. There is not a single pathway to success, but multiple ones. Repeating the question answer situation several times, content is queried and knowledge is deepened. According to the target audience, the chat flow of each scavenger hunt can be adapted in tone, style and difficulty.

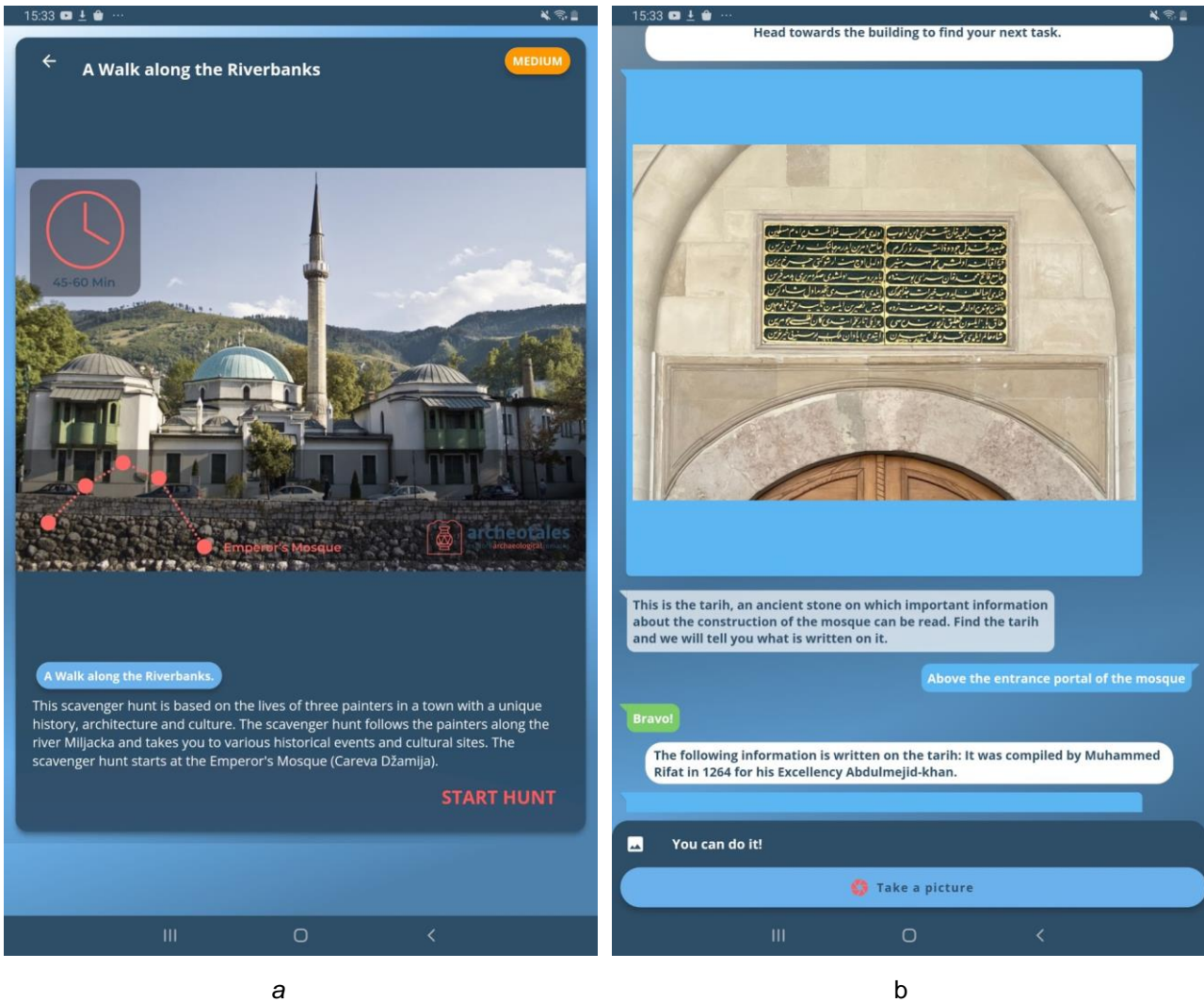


Fig. 1. ArcheoTales App a) Site Selection: A Walk along the Riverbanks, Sarajevo; b) Chat Flow (© Oikoplus)

With ArcheoTales, operators of historical, archaeological and cultural sites, but also cities or tourism agencies, send their visitors on a journey of discovery that allows them to explore the surroundings and learn about history, archaeology and culture in a fun and innovative way. This shifts the role of learning about objects (rather than objects) and strategies for discovering information (rather than the information itself) (Roy Hawkey, 2004).

Allowing the user to explore and to interact with heritage at one's own pace also enables the best possible, individualised acquisition of knowledge. Another key feature of the app is the detachment of the user experience from the classic exhibition space. ArcheoTales might guide the visitors through a classic exhibition scenario, but it also offers the possibility to connect the experience with outdoor sites or even to take it into the public domain. ArcheoTales transforms the user's smartphone into a potentially ubiquitous archaeology and/or heritage guide using gamification to immerse visitors in heritage presentations.

ArcheoTales meets all the requirements and key characteristics that, according to Murphy et al. (2015) make for an engaging and effective learning experience: tasks and challenges are tailored, they are clearly defined so that the user will understand what to do. The user also receives feedback and distraction is minimised. Ultimately - and this is a big advantage - ArcheoTales is not just about learning and generating knowledge, but about creating digital experiences and lasting memories

connected to tangible cultural and archaeological heritage. In our vision, people who complete a hunt take their impressions and insights home and share them with family and friends. They tell them about the treasures they have found in the museum and if they have forgotten a detail, they can always look it up again.

Targeting small and medium-sized heritage site operators, the application acts as a sharing platform that is used by multiple sites and museums around the world. This makes it possible to keep costs low for operators and free of fees and in-app purchases for users. Building on a shared approach, users completing a hunt learn about other interesting hunts in the regions. Hence, ArcheoTales supports the cross-promotion of small sites. Having finished my hunt at the Iseum in Szombathely, why not do another one at the respective city museum? Finally, the application is meant to allow all sorts of heritage institutions that tie with state-of-the-art mediation formats and link online and offline museum experiences. In this sense, ArcheoTales are another important brick in making museum and exhibition experiences more sound, holistic and approachable to new audiences at reasonable cost.

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## Conflict of Interests Disclosure

We herewith confirm that no financial or personal relationships with other individuals or organisations, such as sponsors, have biased or influenced our work.

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