

Beyond Historical Narratives: Gaming as a Gateway to Cultural Heritage and Urban History of Turin

Rosa Tamborrino & Pelin Bolca | Italy

Abstract

Cultural heritage, essential to pass on from generation to generation, necessitates engaging the younger demographic in learning experiences that extend beyond conventional historical urban narratives. In this context, the gaming industry has the ability to carefully recreate the fine details of architectural and urban history of historic cities, making it a powerful and interactive tool for sharing knowledge about cultural heritage. Through virtual navigation and exploration, players gain a profound understanding of the sense of place within these settings.

To this end, a treasure hunt game was developed and implemented in Turin by customizing existing tools. The aim was to uncover the multi-layered urban history of the city by interconnecting its various elements into a playable system grounded in tangible and intangible heritage values. The game contents were structured in collaboration with the National Cinema Museum of Turin, the Historical Archive of Turin, and MuseoTorino, with a specific focus on exploring the potential of digitalized historical data to promote Turin's urban history and heritage, as well as facilitate the widespread use of digital collections.

The game mechanics involved a series of questions encompassing multiple-choice queries, identifying perspectives from real-space photographs, comparing historical images to current situations, matching architectural elements, and locating historical spots within the city through geospatial instructions. Furthermore, an itinerary was carefully designed in the historic city center, divided into different stages that could only be unlocked by correctly answering questions embedded with QR codes. The game was customized to be adaptable, addressing the needs of a diverse range of participants, ranging from newcomers to the city seeking introductory information and citizens lacking local knowledge, to professionals seeking a deeper understanding of Turin's history and heritage as part of their advanced learning experience.

The initial iteration of the game took place in 2019 as an ice-breaking activity during the third edition of the international summer school, "Cultural Heritage in Context: Digital Technologies for the Humanities," organized by the Department of Urban and Regional Studies at Politecnico di Torino and the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at the University of California. Subsequently, a condensed version of the game was played in 2020, involving a larger number of master's students who were also residents of Turin. Finally, the game's contents were further enriched and re-experimented during the fourth and fifth editions of the international summer school, with participants from diverse cultural backgrounds and different parts of the world.

Consequently, this paper presents the mechanics of the game, the incorporation of historical aspects, and the system diagram. The chronological progression of the experiment will be outlined,

accompanied by a framing of quantitative and qualitative observations. Lastly, the paper will discuss the overall pros and cons derived from the international and local participants' collective experiences.

Keywords: gamification, cultural heritage, collaborative participation, urban history, Turin.

References

Champion, E. (2023). *Playing with The Past: Into the Future*. Springer Nature.

Champion, E. (2016). *Critical gaming: Interactive history and virtual heritage*. Routledge

Tamborrino, R. R. M. (2014). *Digital Urban History. Telling the history of the city in the age of the ICT revolution*. Università di Roma 3-CROMA.