



MED GAIMS

GAME DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - ACTIVITY 3.2.2 WP3 ITALY

1. Description of Destinations and Sites

Background information

With its 44,000 inhabitants, Alghero is the 5th largest city of Sardinia. It is the island's main harbour town, home to Fertilia airport and one of its best-loved cities for the popular walkway along the port's bastions and the gorgeous natural bay that flows into the emerald sea. The shoreline is some 90 km long and known as the Coral Riviera, home to a major colony of the finest coral. Red coral is more than just a valuable local product for Alghero: it is an expression of the culture and tradition of the town, as reflected in the name. Craftsmanship and high-value business is tied to this extraordinary product. Crossroads of cultures and landing point of many populations over the centuries, in addition to the beautiful beaches, crystal clear sea and unspoiled nature preserved as Regional Park of Porto Conte, Alghero preserves an ancient history, protected by the imposing walls that still today, despite their partial demolition, embrace the city. Numerous populations and civilizations have taken turns at inhabiting this corner of land facing the Mediterranean Sea. After the great and clever Nuragic population, others such as Phoenicians, Byzantines, Romans, Pisans and Genovese have landed on these same coasts seeking new trade routes and leaving important signs of their passage in the numerous archaeological sites in the area.

Fondazione Alghero act as a main player in the cultural and touristic development of the city of Alghero. On behalf of the City Council, Fondazione manages the cultural heritage and museum system in Alghero, working closely with tourism stakeholders in order to promote an integrated cultural and touristic offer of the territory. Thanks to MED GAIMS, Fondazione has had the opportunity to experiment new actions/products in order to tackle several structural problems which still affects a balanced development of touristic economy such as seasonality issues, audience development, increasing tourism flow in low-season.

Among the cultural sites managed by Fondazione, five of them have been selected in two destinations to be enhanced through games applications. Destinations in Alghero refers to two different parts of its territory: the urban area, represented by the historic city centre, and the natural/environmental area located in the north west area of the city, towards the end of the gulf which embraces the town. The two destinations offer different experiences of Alghero territory:

- a historic centre full of charm and history, characterised by the clear imprint of Catalan domination on the historic architecture, a centre of services, entertainment and shopping
- the nature and marine reserve, characterised by the presence of the Porto Conte Regional Park, an area offering breath-taking natural and marine scenery, including archaeological sites, beaches, trails and outdoor activities



Destinations

- 1. City Centre:** The centre of Alghero is made up of two parts: a historical part, characterised by predominantly Catalan architecture, and a modern part. The part generally considered most interesting by visitors is the historical one, characterised by narrow cobbled streets, the Catalan architecture of several religious buildings, such as the Duomo, and the presence of the main museums (the Archaeological Museum and the Coral Museum) and ancient coral workshops, symbol of the city and its economy linked to the sea. The historical centre is surrounded by an imposing fortification, which has remained practically intact and which characterises a pleasant seafront walk. A sturdy and safe shelter in northern Sardinia, the fortress of Alghero represented for the Catalan/Aragonese Crown the key to communication between the Island of Sardinia and Catalonia. The entrance into the historic centre took place through two doors: Portal Reail (current Porto Terra) and Porta a Mare (current Porto Salve). Even today, in spite of partial demolitions, the walls continue to be a strong place of identity.
- 2. Natural/Marine reserve:** the area located outside the city centre is characterized by a great variety of environments of high naturalistic and historical interest. It encompasses two parks, the Porto Conte Regional Park and the Capo Caccia-Isola Piana Protected Marine Area distinguished by their great variety of settings and for their profusion of floral and faunal species which are of particular scientific interest. Inside it includes the state forest "Le Prigionette", a part of the Geo-mining Park of Sardinia, the SCI (Site of Community Importance) Capo Caccia and Punta Giglio. Here the blue of the sea and the green of the landscape draw unexpected paths between the signs of ancient and large civilization. An infinity of paths where archaeology and history coexist in enchanting and uncontaminated landscapes: Domus de Janas art the Necropolis of Anghelu Ruju, Nuragic culture in the Archaeological Village of Palmavera, phoenix traces, Roman villas emerge from the Mediterranean scrub.

Sites

Five sites have been selected in the 2 destinations described above and they are part of the cultural system directly managed by Fondazione Alghero. Together with the Neptune's cave (the most visited site in Sardinia), the five sites are the main 'must-see' sites in the city's cultural offerings.

Through their collections and their identity value, sites represent the whole history of Alghero, from its foundation to the present day. Both this feature and geographical location of sites contribute to foster a whole experience of the territory from the city center to the outside area.

City Fortification: Alghero is one of the few Italian cities that have preserved their walls and towers intact. Today its bastions, dedicated to great explorers – Columbus, Pigafetta, Magellan and Marco Polo, have become a fascinating and pleasant walk in front of the sea. Alghero was built between 1102 and 1112 by the Doria family, and its first fortifications were raised a few decades later. By late 13th century, it was increased, while during the Aragonese domination no substantial modification was made to the city, and it preserved its Genovese plant with 26 towers. Fortification is composed by seaward walls and eight 16th-century city towers plus 11 along the coast. The Porta Terra tower was the Porta Rejal, the entrance to the city when you arrive from outside. The San Giovanni tower was the “middle tower”, while the Sulis is famous for the gruesome night battle that took place between 5 and 6 May 1412: a few Alghero inhabitants opposed the troops of William III of Narbonne. It is named after a Cagliariar tribune, Vincenzo Sulis, who stirred up public upheaval in the late 18th century, condemned and then sent to prison for over twenty years. The urban perimeter also includes the towers of San Giacomo, of Polveriera (the armory) and of Sant'Elmo, named after Erasmus (Elm, in Catalan), the sailor saint. Among the 11 along coast, worth to mention the Torra Nuova which today hosts the museum of the writer / pilot Antoine De Saint Exupéry and his main character, The Little Prince



City Archaeological Museum: the Museum houses the oldest evidence of human habitation in the area, from the protohistoric period to the Nuragic era and Phoenician and Roman times. The exhibition focuses on three themes that are of particular significance for Alghero and the surrounding area: the sea, local lifestyle, religion. The museum is located on Via Carlo Alberto, in the heart of the old city. It is housed in a building that was recently restored, having once been the site of a monastery complex connected to the Church of San Michele.

Coral Museum: the Museum is housed in an Art Nouveau villa in the centre of the city. It tells about this precious living organism through a fascinating journey into the marine ecosystem, analyzing the scientific aspects that characterize it and telling the story of its use which is deeply related to economic development of coral fishing and artistic craftsmanship.

Archaeological Park: Crossroads of cultures and landing point of many populations over the centuries, in addition to the beautiful beaches, crystal clear sea and unspoiled nature, Alghero preserves an ancient history, which tells about numerous populations and civilizations have taken turns at inhabiting this corner of land facing the Mediterranean Sea. After the great and clever Nuragic population, others such as Phoenicians, Byzantines, Romans, Pisans and Genovese have landed on these same coasts seeking new trade routes. The archaeological park located in the nature/environment area outside the city centre is the evidence of such history and it is made up of the following sites: Neptune's Grotto, Roman Villa of Sant'Imbenia, Nuragic site of Sant'Imbenia, Nuragic village of Palmavera and Necropolis of Anghelu Rujù.

Reasons for Selecting the Destinations & Sites

There are several reasons behind the choice of the two destinations and sites and related game experiences in Alghero:

- the need to **strengthen** and **consolidate** the concept of a **single cultural and environmental system between the historic centre and the area outside it**, which in fact represent two sides of the tourist's experience: that of urban exploration and experiencing the historic and commercial city, and the open-air experience in nature. In fact, this represents a strategic objective in the tourist promotion and enhancement actions carried out by the Foundation, which recently took concrete form with the creation of the pass *Alghero ticket*, a tool that offers the possibility of visiting 12 cultural sites located in the historic centre and the park area and that brings together several key partners in the area. In this direction, the games should reinforce and constitute an additional product that enriches the experience offered by the single ticket;
- Most of the selected sites, especially the museums, despite their great historical and cultural value, **do not reflect a satisfactory and sustainable flow of presences compared to the touristic flow in Alghero**. The need to innovate the offer and combine new products capable of bringing together different audiences is evident: in this sense, the games represent a unique opportunity to experiment new actions for audience development
- **seasonality:** Alghero, like most maritime destinations, suffers from the seasonality of flows. The need to strengthen tourism in the low season is closely related to the destination's ability to plan and offer multiple experiences for different targets. The 10 game system implemented thanks to MED GAIMS constitutes a formidable opportunity to promote the territory outside the months of mass tourism (July-August), promoting a slow experience that sees the tourist as a spectator-actor of the game dynamics, able to acquire knowledge of the territory visited through unique experiences;
- **young generations and citizens:** another aspect taken into account is the need to bring young people and citizens themselves closer to cultural heritage. The former represents a strategic audience to build on school tourism and for bridging on the digital gap that characterises most cultural sites in Sardinia.



Bringing them closer to the heritage through a language they are familiar with, that of games, represents a unique opportunity. As far as citizens are concerned, although the project targets tourists, we believe that it represents an opportunity to bring permanent tourists (citizens) closer to their heritage and make them frontline ambassadors with particular regards to domestic/regional tourism.

2. Game Development

Challenge

Following the choice of destinations and sites, Fondazione, like the rest of the partners, worked on the main challenge of the project related to the design and development of the 10 games. What kind of games? Analog or digital or both? What story do we tell? What kind of interaction is generated by the game and what information is linked to the interaction between the tourist and the site? How can the game be linked to other tourist experiences? Which type of visitor we wish to attract?

How will the 10 game experiences coexist and how will they be accessed by tourists?

What values, meanings, image of Alghero do we want to convey through the games?

How is the game useful in prolonging the visitor's stay in the area or helping them remember the destination even after they leave?

These are just some of the main points on which we have questioned and challenged ourselves both through partnership meetings and through specific meetings organized with the involvement of operators in the tourism and cultural sector, informed about the Project and involved in the brainstorming process, historians, game designers.

Sites and Games – Play Alghero

The design phase was certainly one of the most challenging and definitely the most important phase of the whole process.

In the case of Alghero, first of all, it required an important consideration on a **general strategy** to be implemented in the medium-long term, seizing the opportunity of MED GAIMS as a starting point of a process of innovation and digitisation of the cultural and touristic offer, aimed to evolve. Considerations which have become increasingly necessary in view of the radical change in our way of life over the last two years due the Covid-19 pandemic.

The result of this process is the aim to turn **Alghero into a Playable city** where the act of play becomes a key resource for the social, cultural and touristic growth of the city, capable of conveying, through gamified experiences at the selected sites selected, key urban values such as its history, identity, traditions and to enhance the welcoming soul of Alghero.

Therefore, games developed internally and externally (thanks to a financial contribution made available in the framework of the MED GAIMS project) have been designed to answer to these specific objectives:

- to promote new connections, physical and/or digital, between the cultural heritage and the urban space of reference
- to create a network between cultural sites by proposing playable experiences before, during and after the visit to the city
- to innovate ways of connecting and interacting between heritage, permanent and temporary citizens.



This is how the **Play Alghero strategy** has been conceived: it represents the creative framework and the communicative backbone of the implemented game system. The city itself becomes the core of the storytelling behind each game experience.

Within this strategy, the main factor considered in the development of the games was to ensure a variety of experiences combining analogue and digital elements, using different platforms (video games, digital graphic novels, interactive installations and AR techniques) and active urban exploration tools such as gamebooks or role-playing modality initiatives.

In the same way, particular attention has been paid to the target audience, especially families, which is particularly strategic for Alghero, and to young people, a target that is currently far from Alghero's heritage and that we intend to approach through games.

Finally, a third factor taken in account is the economic sustainability of the games and the possibility of linking them to other products/experiences available such as the Alghero ticket card ¹promoted by Fondazione. Games will be part of the cultural offer promoted and conveyed by Alghero ticket. A pay for games option will be also considered.

Methodology

The design process has seen the involvement of several professionals in the field of game design/development and experts in the field of history and culture. The role of the game designer is a crucial one, as he/she has the task of reconciling the various creative instances proposed by Fondazione in an effective logical game framework, evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of the action in relation to the objectives to be achieved, the targets, the technology to be used, cost of the game and future operational and maintenance costs, the business model to financially sustain game operation after the end of the project.

Main stakeholder involved is the Municipality of Alghero, and in particular the Tourism and Culture Department, which has taken part in the design process and in the final choice of the games. Several stakeholders from local cultural and tourism sector have been involved in a consultation phase.

In the development phase, some games have been developed with the participation of the group of citizens of the Municipality project "Cittadinanza attiva"² directly involved in the building process of an analogic game, the Playful itinerary. This project foreseen the installation of urban games in several spot located in the city centre and other touristic sites in Alghero. Urban games recall traditional games of Alghero, traditional games in general such as hopscotch using colours, symbols and shapes connected with Alghero's culture and identity. During project implementation, the group of Active citizenship (Cittadinanza Attiva) has been directly involved as part of the

Games developed externally have been chosen following the phase of public events such as Hackathons and Creative labs in October and November 2020. Winning games have been chosen at the end of a 2-day event that incorporated one-on-one mentoring sessions with the participating teams, as well as included training sessions on diverse topics to help participants hone their ideas. At the end of the second day, teams got the opportunity to pitch their ideas in front of a pre-selected jury that evaluated the games based on pre-set evaluation criteria. The jury was composed by experts in the field of Game design and business plus representative of cultural and tourism sector in Alghero. Before the events, several meetings were held with private sector actors such as game designers and developers at regional level to explain the subgrant scheme and strategy behind Alghero Playable City.

During the development phase, subgrantees have been continuously supported during the design process in order to ensure that games were consistent with the overall strategy, avoid overlapping themes/dynamics

¹ <https://www.algheroexperience.it/en/alghero-ticket.html>

² The project, born in 2016 and promoted by the Alghero's city council, encourages volunteering and collaboration of citizens in respect of public assets and provides for a discount of 50% of municipal taxes.



between internal and external games and among external games themselves, and ensure a balanced distribution of experiences across the various sites involved.

Game testing sessions have been conducted during the project through open days initiatives dedicated to tourists and citizens. Input generated by this phase was crucial to polish and refine games before the final release.

3.Solution

The main challenge we face is to bring games to life, to communicate them, to bring the user closer to these new experiences and to assess their sustainability in the long term.

Under the Play Alghero strategy, in order to face these challenges, we are providing these solutions/tools:

- **Play Alghero communication system:**
 - an immediately identifiable dedicated visual identity designed to accompany the entire playful experience on the territory, starting from the airport a visual identity
 - a dedicated website in which potential users can find information on the game system and each game experience
 - dedicated merchandising and digital tools to be used in social networks
- **Playful itinerary:** this is one of the 10 game experiences conceived as an itinerary of playful urban installations where history, local culture, health and STEAM get mixed connecting the city and its tangible and intangible heritage. The itinerary has two dimensions: a mainly tangible one, set in the city through the game stations. A second one, intangible recalling elements of memory (the traditional games) and symbols of local culture.
The itinerary also has a dual function: on the one hand, it is purely recreational as part of the ten game experiences available, and on the other it constitutes a communicative backbone, immediately tangible, that communicates the entire system and the message that you can experience Alghero and play with the city. Located in different spots around the city, it connects the different cultural sites selected into the project with other special touristic places of the city, increasing the overall impact of the initiative.

