

## A Guided Tour of *Amerigo*, an Interactive Mobile Storytelling Platform for Digital Heritage

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This short paper introduces *Amerigo*, a mobile platform for interactive storytelling and digital heritage.

First conceived in 2013 and awarded initial funding by NWO in 2015, *Amerigo* is currently being developed as a standalone app for mobile devices and is slated for release in late 2019. In its current iteration, the project aims to bring to light the little-known historical and cultural connections between the contemporary urban space of Groningen and the early modern Americas, the Caribbean, and Atlantic Africa (Greene and Morgan 2009). It provides this view into the past through the means of a “serious game” that employs techniques of interactive digital storytelling and locative media not only to provide location-specific content about these historical connections but also to engage the users in a quest to discover aspects of this history on their own (Bogost 2007; Farman 2014). The user’s decisions and interactions with characters within the story determine what the user encounters and where the story leads. These choices also determine what the user learns about this history and how the user relates to the space of the city (Lynch 1960, 1972, 1990). The centerpiece of *Amerigo* is this interactive digital storytelling structure, but the builders of the application, a software company that specializes in mobile tour apps, are also developing navigation tools and virtual “objects” that users will engage via augmented reality visualizations. These visualizations will also allow users to explore faraway sites or to view historical images of contemporary urban locations through the “viewfinder” of their mobile devices.

*Amerigo* is more than an innovative application for sharing stories about the past. Its larger goal is to become a platform for research and valorization that links together various actors and institutions up and down the knowledge chain. As a platform for the production and distribution of historical and cultural research, *Amerigo* will enable scholars and students to connect to archival collections and resources; to conduct collaborative research and teaching; and to share their research directly with the public. As a tool for the study of digital heritage, *Amerigo* will also allow members of its consortium to study how different audiences move through the space of the city, how they engage with the interface as well as the curated content, and how they connect with one another through the application (cf. Poole 2018; Hagedoorn and Sauer 2019). It

is here in this last area—measuring and testing how users interact with a digital heritage platform linked to a real urban space—that we foresee having the most significant impact in the digital humanities.

In short, we will offer in our presentation a brief review of the paths we have taken (and the dead-ends we have met); explain aspects of the design and how we decided upon them; and discuss the application’s current state of development. We aim, as well, to have an early version of the application ready for testing by the time of the conference. We are very eager to receive critical feedback and advice from attendees in all of these areas.

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