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	D1.1.6 Digital Innovation Toolkit
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Introduction

This guide is designed for tourism agencies, cultural organizations, and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who are interested in developing innovative and engaging literary tourism experiences. Drawing on the lessons learned from the Interreg NPA N-LITE project, this toolkit provides a roadmap for leveraging immersive technologies to bring stories to life, attract new audiences, and create sustainable economic growth in the tourism sector.

This guide will walk you through the entire process, from understanding the fundamentals of literary tourism to the practical steps of developing, launching, and marketing your own immersive experience.

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1. The New Page – Literary Tourism In The Digital Age

1.1 Understanding Literary and Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, which focuses on a region's arts, heritage and cultural fabric, accounts for an estimated 40% of all global tourism¹. It is a powerful driver for attracting visitors and enhancing a destination's global appeal.

A significant and growing niche within this is literary tourism. This form of tourism caters to visitors who travel to experience the places connected to authors, literary works, or literary traditions. It is about transforming a reader into a tourist, allowing them to step into the landscapes that inspired their favourite books and authors.

These "literary places" - create emotional connections for visitors. The goal is to move beyond static displays and create authentic, memorable experiences.

1.2 The Role of Immersive Technology

While traditional literary tourism relies on physical landmarks, museums, and guided tours, the digital age presents an unprecedented opportunity to deepen visitor engagement. Immersive technologies like Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and location-based games are no longer the stuff of science fiction; they are accessible tools that can transform how stories are told.

Why use immersive technology?

- **Deeper Engagement:** Technology can overlay historical or fictional context onto the real world, allowing visitors to see a landscape through an author's eyes or interact with characters from a story.
- **Accessibility:** Digital experiences can bring literary worlds to visitors who may not be able to access remote physical locations or can serve as a "teaser" to inspire a future physical trip.
- **Attracting New Audiences:** Interactive games and digital content appeal to younger, tech-savvy demographics, broadening the audience for literary tourism beyond traditional enthusiasts.
- **Business Development:** By creating unique, tech-driven products, tourism SMEs can differentiate themselves, create new revenue streams, and contribute to the destination's reputation for innovation.

The N-LITE project is built on this premise: to explore and implement these technologies to accelerate the growth of literary tourism businesses across the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) region.

¹ <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/cultural-tourism/market-potential>

1.3 Bridging the gap between culture, arts and technology

The journey to creating the immersive experiences described in this toolkit began not with coding or animation, but with conversation. In the early stages of the project, a series of workshops were held across the partner regions—Finland, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, and the Faroe Islands. These events served as the crucial first step in bridging the gap between the rich, traditional worlds of literary and cultural heritage and the dynamic possibilities of modern digital media.

The primary goal of these sessions was to demystify immersive technology for the people who act as custodians of local culture. Attendees included a diverse mix of stakeholders: museum curators, small business owners, educators, theatre professionals, and gallery managers, town and municipal experts working in the domain etc. For many, terms like "Augmented Reality" or "motion capture" were familiar only as buzzwords. The workshops provided a hands-on environment where these abstract concepts were transformed into tangible tools. Participants were shown demonstrations of how a smartphone could reveal hidden layers of history on a city street, or how a VR headset could transport a user into a mythological landscape. This practical introduction was vital; it shifted the perspective from viewing technology as a threat to traditional storytelling to seeing it as a powerful new vessel for it.

Beyond the technical demonstrations, the workshops focused on the changing nature of audience engagement. Discussions centered on how modern visitors—both local youth and international tourists—consume content. The groups explored the idea that digital innovation does not replace the physical experience of a heritage site but rather enhances it, offering new entry points for audiences who might otherwise remain disengaged. By seeing examples of successful digital tourism, stakeholders could visualize how their own local stories might be adapted to captivate a tech-savvy generation.

The sessions then transitioned from learning to creating. The latter half of each workshop was dedicated to collaborative ideation. Here, the deep local knowledge of the cultural stakeholders met the structural framework of game design. Participants were encouraged to "think like a game designer," asking not just what story they wanted to tell, but how a player would step into that story. They brainstormed gameplay elements—deciding whether a user would solve a mystery, collect digital artifacts, or unlock narrative chapters by completing mini-games that are part of the narrative, culture or local identity. The outcomes of these collaborative sessions were the seeds of the pilot projects presented in this toolkit.

Below is the checklist to help prepare the workshops:

Phase	Action steps	Focus area
Phase I.		
1. Recruit a diverse group	Ensure attendance from all relevant stakeholders: museums, schools, local businesses, independent artists, theatres etc. A mix of technical skill and local knowledge is essential.	The people
2. Secure the right space	Choose a location that facilitates movement and collaboration, ideally with access to the technology (VR headsets, AR setups) for hands-on testing.	The environment
Phase II.		
3. Demystify the technology	If possible, start with live, hands-on demonstrations. Do not rely on presentations alone. Let participants physically try the tech (VR, AR, motion tracking) to understand its potential.	The technology
4. Shift the audiences perspective	Showcase successful examples of digital tourism. Discuss <i>how</i> modern audiences (especially youth) consume content, focusing on engagement and new entry points, not just preservation.	The audience
Phase III.		
5. Focus on the story's core	Guide participants to choose a clear, strong cultural narrative (e.g., a legend, a historical event). Ask: What is the core emotion we want the user to feel? You can let participants choose freely to ideate, or set a few themes grounded in local culture, art or history.	The narrative
6. Define player interaction (gameplay)	Immediately transition from <i>what</i> the story is to <i>how</i> the player interacts. Brainstorm gameplay mechanics: solving a mystery, collecting items, making moral choices, or exploring.	The experience
7. Generate rough blueprints	The goal is not a finished product, but a set of rough ideas. Encourage sketching, flowcharts, and simple written concepts for potential games or digital trails.	The outcome
Phase IV.		
8. Choose	Now it is time to choose what game to create. Depending on resources, choose one or more games, and continue working with the stakeholders and developers.	Beyond the first workshop
9. Development	This is the longest part of the process, depending on the scope of the game, it will take many months to develop the final experience. Engagement between the developers and the stakeholders is crucial during this period to help support the developers: game music, reference visuals, narration, story elements, testing.	Towards the final product

The following sections provide examples from the N-LITE game development projects, with each country describing their own experiences. Following that, we delve deeper into development, choosing the right platform, and preparing for the game launch.

2. Case studies from the N-LITE Project

This section presents examples from the N-LITE project. Five unique experiences were developed that showcase stories from the regions. All of the games were created following the same collaborative process. The local teams worked with game developers to outline the stories, characters, design the story worlds, capture the character motions, and implement mini games.

2.1 Finland

Description

In order to understand the significance of the chosen elements for the Finnish game, it may be useful for the reader to know that Finland was a part of Sweden for about 600 years before it became part of the Russian Empire in 1809 and declared its independence in 1917. The Kajaani castle, which is pictured in the Finnish game, was built in the early 1600s, and its ruins remain in Kajaani to this day. Upon completion, the Kajaani Castle became the northernmost stone castle in Europe. The castle was seen as a good place to deport prisoners to due to its remote location. However, the castle was destroyed in 1716.

A significant part of the cultural heritage of the Kainuu region, and the whole of Finland, is the Kalevala, national epic of Finland. It was compiled from old Karelian and Finnish oral folklore and mythology by Elias Lönnrot in the early 1800s on both the Finnish and Russian sides of the border. In Kainuu, you can walk the same paths once taken by Lönnrot, visit historic buildings where he spent time and learn about his life and work, and experience firsthand the landscapes that inspired the Kalevala.

The Finnish story in Tale Smiths jumps between two perspectives chosen for their local cultural and literary significance. The overarching objective of the game is to free Johannes Messenius from imprisonment. Johannes Messenius was a Swedish historian, who was accused of and imprisoned for treason and sent to Kajaani Castle in the early 1600s. During his imprisonment in Kajaani Castle he wrote about the histories of Sweden and Finland. His work on Finland is possibly the oldest comprehensive description of Finnish history that has survived to the present day. In the game Messenius is portrayed reading tales from the Kalevala.

The stories inspired by the Kalevala are the second perspective in the Finnish story. The national epic tells the adventures of legendary heroes, creation myths, and magical quests, forming a cornerstone of Finnish cultural identity and heritage.

The Ideation and Design Process

On the annual Kalevala Day, on the 28th of February 2024, the N-LITE project arranged a technology workshop in cooperation between the two regional partners, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) and the Regional Council of Kainuu.

The event was free of charge for all participants, and the invitation was distributed via multiple channels. Participants of the workshop included local students, actors, city guides and literary enthusiasts for example.

The technology workshop began with a visit to the game laboratory at KAMK, where the staff of Clever Simulation Entertainment explained their operations, as well as shortly described the project goals and the work plan. They also showcased some technical solutions available and their suitability for the purposes of the N-LITE project to awaken discussions and to answer questions from the participants. They also had a chance to test the technologies in practice.

During the workshop the participants were asked to discuss and develop their own ideas in groups and present them to the crowd. The project staff had prepared a structured framework to guide the workshop activities. These ideas were then developed to the final game concept over time by the KAMK project team. In addition to the Kajaani castle and the Kalevala, other ideas and elements from the workshop were incorporated in the Finnish pilot, such as the scenery of the local nature and the Siberian jaybird, which is the official regional bird of Kainuu. This way the game was built to reflect the environment, nature and cultural heritage of the region.

Video testimonials

[Interview with Miina and Liida](#)

The Game

The game's story progresses through tales from the Kalevala. The tales are of the heroes of Kalevala, called Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen, and Lemminkäinen. They set out on a daring quest to steal the magical artifact called the Sampo from the land of Pohjola. The Sampo is a mythological item that produces endless wealth and prosperity. The player can join this quest through the digital storytelling experience. The player's objective is to collect Siberian jaybirds flying through the tales. By collecting three jaybirds from each three tales, the player receives the letter of release and frees Messenius from his imprisonment.

2.2 Sweden

Description

The starting point for our work in developing a story for the digital game experience was a desire to highlight Sámi places and cultural creators.

The idea for the story, *Geávrrie* ("drum" in Ume Sámi), emerged during a workshop in April 2024, when cultural creators Anna Nutti Wiandt and Sara Ajnnak met for the first time. They immediately connected over the Sámi drum that was on display at the Ájtte Museum in Jokkmokk. The drum

originates from the Ume Sámi region but was seized and removed in the 18th century, and has since been part of the collection at MuCEM, a museum in Marseille, France.

The drum's history and its connection to the region became the starting point for a creative journey through archives, landscapes, and the inner worlds of the cultural creators Anna and Sara.

The Ideation and Design Process

During the workshop in April, the structure of the story was created and, together with partners from KAMK, the cultural creators also sketched out which game elements could be included.



Photos from RVB ideation workshop in Ammarnäs, April 2024

Using photogrammetry, we aimed to recreate the drum in high detail for the game. After obtaining permission from MuCEM to photograph the drum and use the images for this purpose, we brought Ájtte Museum in Jokkmokk into the process.

The project group, together with the cultural creators, visited Ájtte, where the photography was carried out as the drum was carefully removed from its stand. Several hundred photos were taken from every angle, and with this material, the developers at KAMK were able to produce a fully accurate digital replica of the drum.



Photography session at Ájtte museum to the left, digital copy of the drum to the right.

Motion capture was used to recreate the characters' movements, facial expressions, and dialogue. In preparation for this, the story was translated into Ume Sámi, which is classified by UNESCO as one of the most critically endangered languages in the world.

During the recording sessions, the creators participated together with young students studying Ume Sámi in school, supported by teachers and the library in the municipality of Sorsele. The recording was led by KAMK.



Motion Capture in Sorsele, February 2025.

During the Sámi Summer Week in Ammarnäs 2025, we carried out a beta test of the nearly finished game experience. The testing took place at the library, where school students and the general public were invited to try it out. The event served as an opportunity to identify bugs and gather suggestions for improvements, which were then addressed by KAMK ahead of the final launch in autumn 2025.



Beta testing in Ammarnäs, June 2025.

Video testimonials

[Interview with Anna Nutti Wiandt and Sara Ajnnak](#)

The Game

The story takes place along the river Vindelälven and follows a protagonist who discovers a broken drum in an attic. The drum has lost the power of its traditional symbols after being away from Sábmie

for many years. It is up to the player to complete various tasks to restore it by learning about and performing elements of different traditions and crafts.

In the first chapter, the player repairs the bag that holds the drum by weaving a ribbon with the correct pattern. In the second chapter, the player creates a joik, which is incorporated into the game's soundtrack and has been specially composed and produced by Sara Ajnnak for the N-LITE project. In the final chapter, the player marks a reindeer calf.

Once all the tasks are completed, the drum's power is fully restored.

2.3 Norway

Description

Since the Hamsun Center is the Norwegian partner, it was natural that our contribution to the *Tale Smith's* project would be based on the works of Knut Hamsun. Hamsun is not only one of Norway's most significant authors in a literary-historical context, but also a writer who continues to captivate new readers, generation after generation.

When it was decided that the Norwegian contribution would be based on the works of Knut Hamsun, several ideas were presented. Hamsun's works span several decades and is wildly varied in themes, style and subjects. His most famous works include the proto-modernist novel *Hunger* (1890), *Mysteries* (1892), *Pan* (1894) and the Nobel price-winning novel *Growth of the soil* (1917) Ultimately, the decision was made to adapt one of Hamsun's short stories, as this would allow for the story to be adapted in its entirety, allowing for the full scope of the epic narrative to be included.

The decision was made to adapt the short story "The call of life". This story was deemed suitable for adaptation, as it presents a clear narrative, and a mystery that would lend itself to gameplay. The story centers around a young man wandering about in 1890's Copenhagen. One night he encounters a woman wearing a mourning veil. The woman invites the man home, and he spends the night with her. Upon waking the next morning, he finds the dead body of an older man lying in the next room. He heads to a café where he resolves to find out who the dead man was. He asks for today's paper and seeks the answer in the obituaries. Finally, he discovers that the old man was the husband of the young woman he spent the night with.

The story ends thus: "I sat for a long time and pondered. A man marries. His wife is 30 years younger than he. He contracts a lingering illness. One fair day, he dies. And the young widow breathes a sigh of relief."

The Ideation and Design Process

As the result of a workshop held in the spring of 2024, it was decided that we would be going forward with "The call of life". The concept was developed further until the game concept was sent to the

developers in Kajaani by the end of May. The script adaptation was written by Alvhild Dvergsdal, head of research at the Hamsun Center.

Video testimonials

[Interview with Alvhild](#)

[Interview with Erling](#)

The Game

Hamsun's short story has been animated by the team in Kajaani, and has been artfully rendered in a style reminiscent of detective noir movies. The game also features original music composed by artists Erling Ramskjell and Svein Schultz.

As the animation plays, the short story is narrated in its entirety. The main gameplay element consists of interactive elements that pop up. These are distinguishable by their colour (the rest of the animation is monochrome). By interacting with these elements, the player is given clues that can help them solve the central mystery, that of the identity of the corpse.

2.4 Ireland

Description

Following a competitive open call in May, the Western Development Commission (WDC) partnered with the Rathcroghan Visitor Centre to tell the story of Rathcroghan's Cave of the Cats (Oweynagat), long described as Ireland's "Gate to Hell" and a portal to the Otherworld. The legendary site is one of Europe's richest mythological landscapes with over 240 archaeological sites. These include Stone Age tombs and royal burial mounds, great ringforts and places of ceremonial inauguration. Perhaps most impressively, the great warrior Queen Medb ruled all of Connacht from her home at Rathcroghan.

Rathcroghan was selected because of its deep cultural and mythological significance. It represents Ireland's storytelling tradition and provides a rich backdrop for exploring how modern technology can enhance visitor engagement. By choosing a rural heritage site, it also highlights that innovation and creativity can thrive outside of major cities.

The Ideation and Design Process

A workshop held in the spring of 2024 focused on the introduction of immersive technologies (VR/AR/MR) to tourism and culture stakeholders and the potential use in their work. Local stakeholders participated and learned the potential of the technologies. The second part of the workshop focused on ideation and development of concepts for the local stories that will be part of

the ‘immersive experience platform’. Local partners and stakeholders were engaged in the conceptualisation and planning of the extended reality experience platform

The Game

The script follows Fiachrae, a young noble attending the great Samhain gathering at Rathcroghan in 374 AD, where he is welcomed into the festivities, rituals, and storytelling of the Connacht tribes. After drifting into a vivid dream filled with mythic visions - duelling giant bulls, an idealised Rathcroghan, and a monstrous boar - he wakes to face a series of initiation trials. These challenges include navigating charging boars, proving his skill from a speeding chariot, and venturing into the dark, dangerous cave of Uaimh Chruachain to retrieve a token from the Otherworld. Guided by prophecy and threatened by supernatural forces, Fiachrae ultimately returns with a raven’s feather, earning the acclaim of the gathered host and an ornate sword as his final honour.

The story is rooted entirely in the landscape, mythology, and archaeology of Rathcroghan, one of Ireland’s most significant royal and ceremonial complexes. Fiachrae’s journey takes place during the Óenach, the great seasonal gathering historically associated with the site, and many of the events draw directly from Rathcroghan’s lore: the sacred mound and its temple, the nearby earthworks like the Mucklaghs, and the legendary cave of Uaimh Chruachain - long regarded as an entrance to the Otherworld and linked to the Mórrigan. The script weaves in episodes from the Táin and other Connacht traditions, including Queen Medb, the Brown Bull of Cooley, and the royal residence of Cruachan Aí. Each scene is designed to immerse players in the physical setting and mythic heritage of Rathcroghan, showing how its landscape shaped ritual, storytelling, kingship, and belief in the “thin places” between this world and the next.

2.5 Faroe Islands

Description

As William Heinesen was an internationally well known author and artist with origin from Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, it was clear to us, that we would include his stories in this project.

The story in our part of the Tale Smith’s project is a hypothetical situation between William Heinesen and a fictive grandson. However, the storytelling and the elements in the game is with inspiration from some of Williams’ work, such as:

- *Laterna Magica*
- *The Lost Musicians*
- *Den Dunkle Sol (a collection of poems)*

The significance of this game element lies in the fact that the house where William Heinesen lived and wrote many of his novels is the same house that KAMK has recreated for this project.

Additionally, we have an original Faroese song in the game called ‘*Vøgguvísa*’ from the album ‘*Tornið við heimsins enda*’. It is a project by Ólavur Jacobsen, Oddur Jacobsen & Jóhann Petur Andreassen. The music was composed from artworks by William Heinesen.

The Ideation and Design Process

The development of the game began in spring 2024 with a creative workshop where participants brainstormed concepts for the project. Three different game ideas were developed, and one was initially selected. However, as the project progressed, it became clear that William Heinesen’s presence, legacy, and artistic universe needed to be part of the experience, and the fact that it could be centered in and around Tórshavn. This realisation led us to shift away from the original workshop idea and move in a new direction centered around Heinesen’s life and work.

To do this respectfully, we asked for permission from William Heinesen’s son, *Zacharias Heinesen*, to use his father’s works and the setting of *Williamshús* in the game. Once permission was granted, scriptwriter, *Esther á Fjallinum*, developed the game’s manuscript. We then carried out motion capture sessions with a young boy and with Esther performing the roles of the grandson and William Heinesen.

In the final stage, we organised a youth workshop where participants rehearsed and recorded the song featured in the game, which was later professionally produced in a studio. This collaborative and iterative process shaped the game into a creative tribute to William Heinesen’s artistic world.

The Game

The storyline in the game follows a fictive grandson, Viðar, as he visits his grandfather, the Faroese writer and artist, William Heinesen, at his home, *Williamshús*, which is the house that William Heinesen lived in together with his wife and children.

After arriving on a cold day, Viðar steps into the warm, cluttered house filled with books, paintings, a piano, and materials for silhouette art. William is busy writing down a new idea, and Viðar begins exploring his grandfather’s shelves. One of the books, *Laterna Magica*, glows in his hands, and as he opens it the player turns a few pages and is briefly taken into a scene from the novel—a lonely woman in an old kitchen watching a black cat on the rooftop under the full moon.

Back in the house, Viðar hears piano music and follows it into the large living room, where William is playing *Vøgguvísa*. A luminous painting above the piano draws the player deeper into a poetic, magical moment, accompanied by Viðar’s soft voice.

The story concludes with a quiet, intimate scene: William and Viðar sit together cutting silhouettes. Viðar, struggling with the craft, watches his grandfather cut out houses, people, and trolls with practiced hands. Curious, he asks how to cut out a troll, and William demonstrates step by step. Viðar tries it himself and proudly shows the finished troll. William praises his work with a warm smile before gently reminding Viðar that it’s getting late and his mother will worry.

3. From Page to Platform – A Practical Guide to Development

3.1 The Business of Literary Tourism

Before diving into technology, a solid business strategy is essential. Success lies at the intersection of three key elements:

1. **Passion:** What literary heritage or story are you passionate about sharing? Your enthusiasm will be the driving force behind the project.
2. **Market Viability:** Who is your target audience (e.g. the culture curious tourist), and what are they looking for? Is there a genuine need and desire for the experience you want to create?
3. **Excellence:** What will make your experience unique, memorable, and high-quality?

Know your tourist:

It is crucial to understand your potential customer. For example, literary tourists are not a monolithic group.

1. **The Motivated Literary Tourist:** This person chooses a destination specifically for its literary connections. They are enthusiasts seeking deep, authentic, and immersive experiences related to an author or a story they love. They will plan their trip around your offering.
2. **The Incidental Tourist:** This person discovers your offering while visiting the destination for other reasons. They might be a general cultural tourist, a family on holiday, or a business traveller. They are drawn in by a fun, accessible, and interactive activity rather than a pre-existing literary passion.

Your game design, narrative depth, and marketing must consider both groups. An experience that is engaging for the incidental tourist can serve as a gateway, turning them into a motivated one, while still providing the depth that enthusiasts crave.

The Importance of Data

Even on a small project, gathering feedback is vital. From the start, think about how you can collect information from your users. App store reviews, simple online surveys, and social media comments can provide invaluable insights into what players enjoy and where you can improve. This data is essential for making informed decisions and ensuring the long-term success of your experience

3.2 Connecting to the Tourism Ecosystem

Your game or immersive experience does not exist in a vacuum. It is one part of a visitor's overall journey and should be designed to connect with and enhance the local tourism landscape.

Create a Destination Focus

Think about how your experience fits within the broader story of your destination.

- Does it connect to key landmarks, museums, or walking trails?
- Can local businesses, such as cafes, bookshops, or hotels, be integrated into the experience or marketing?
- How does your project align with the destination's "brand" or key message being promoted by local tourism agencies?

A successful experience adds value to the entire destination, encouraging visitors to explore more widely and stay longer.

Embrace Partnership and Collaboration

Building relationships is one of the most effective ways to ensure your project reaches its audience. Connect with:

- **Local and Regional Tourism Bodies:** They can help promote your experience through their official channels.
- **Accommodation Providers and Tour Operators:** They are in direct contact with visitors and can recommend your game as an activity.
- **Other Cultural Institutions:** Museums, libraries, and heritage sites are natural partners for cross-promotion.

3.3 Choosing Your Technology: Understanding Extended Reality (XR)

“Immersive technology” is a broad term. Here are the main types to consider:

1. **Augmented Reality (AR):** This technology overlays digital information—such as text, images, 3D models, or characters—onto the user's view of the real world, typically through a smartphone or tablet.
Example: A visitor points their phone at a historic building, and an AR overlay shows how it looked in the 19th century, along with quotes from a novel set there.
2. **Virtual Reality (VR):** This involves creating a completely artificial, computer-generated environment that a user can explore. VR requires a headset that blocks out the external world.
Example: A VR experience that allows a user to "walk through" a fantastical setting from a mythological saga.
3. **Location-Based Experiences (Games):** These are often mobile apps that use location tracking to trigger content or gameplay elements when a user reaches a specific physical location. This is a highly effective way to create interactive walking trails and tours.
Example: A game where visitors follow a map to different locations in a town to unlock chapters of a story, solve puzzles, and meet virtual characters.

3.4 The Development Cycle: A Step-by-step Approach

The process of developing experiences should be done as an iteratively. The ideation process - refining what the game is, how it works, working with developers in building the game, and testing it with audiences - is a process of constant improvement. **It is recommended that the process includes both developers and creatives from the beginning, to design the game collaboratively.**

Step 1: Ideation.

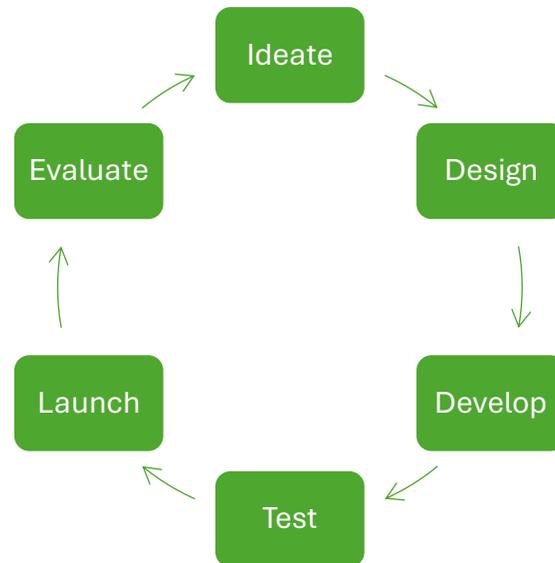


Figure 1 Key phases of the development cycle

Start with your story. What key locations, characters, and plot points can be turned into an interactive experience? Workshop ideas with local stakeholders, historians, and creative professionals.

Before you design, think deeply about the player. What do they want? How will they find and engage with your experience? Map out their entire journey:

1. Awareness: How will they first hear about your game? (e.g., tourism website, hotel flyer, social media ad).
2. Consideration: What will convince them to download and try it? (e.g., compelling screenshots, an intriguing story).
3. Engagement: How easy is it to start playing? Is the experience intuitive and fun?
4. Retention: What will make them come back or recommend it to others?
5. Advocacy: How can you encourage them to share their experience online?

Decide how users will access your experience. Will it be a mobile app for smartphones, a web-based experience, or something for dedicated VR headsets? Think about how and where the users engage with the game. The **Game Design Canvas** is a valuable tool to facilitate the ideation and game design steps.

Step 2: Game/experience design

Map out the players' journey. What will they do? What is the goal? How will they progress? This is where you design the puzzles and challenges in the game, the narrative flow, and overall structure of the experience.

Step 3: Asset Collection and Development

Gather your raw materials. This includes text, historical images, new video footage, and audio recordings of narration, music, or soundscapes. These are critical elements of the development process.

Often times, these materials need to be sources in collaboration with stakeholders and require permission for use. For example, recreating artistic work in the game, or using pieces of music.

Step 4: Testing

Plan with the developer for testing prior to the completion of the game. This allows for feedback and improvements before the game is completed. The scope of testing is dependent on the project: it can be done with the project team, the relevant stakeholders, or even with the public through events.

- **Internal Testing:** This is the first stage, conducted by the project team and developers. The goal is to catch major technical bugs, check that core features work as intended, and ensure the experience is stable enough for others to test.
- **Stakeholder Testing:** Involve your key partners—representatives from local tourism bodies, cultural institutions, or historical experts. Their feedback is invaluable for ensuring the content is accurate, the tone is appropriate, and the experience aligns with the overall destination brand.
- **User Testing:** This is the most critical phase. Test the experience with people who represent your actual target audience (both motivated and incidental tourists, if possible). This can be done formally in a controlled setting or more informally at a public event to gather real-world feedback.

What to Test For?

When gathering feedback, look beyond just "bugs." Focus on these key areas:

- **Functionality:** Does the app crash? Do all the buttons and interactive elements work correctly on different devices (e.g., various Android and iOS models)?
- **Usability (User Experience - UX):** Is the game easy to navigate? Is it immediately clear what the player is supposed to do? Are the instructions simple and easy to understand? Do players get stuck or confused at any point?

- **Engagement and Fun:** Is the story compelling? Are the puzzles or challenges enjoyable and at the right difficulty level? Do users feel motivated to continue and complete the experience?
- **Technical Performance:** Does the app drain the device's battery too quickly? Does it require a constant, high-speed internet connection that might not be available in all locations on a tour?

This feedback is not criticism; it is essential data that allows you to refine the experience before the final launch.

Step 5: Launch

As the game nears completion, it is time to plan the launch. Launching means more than simply publishing the game. The audience and stakeholder need to be informed and know how to access the game.

See the section **Launching the game** for more on how to prepare and execute the launch.

Step 6: Evaluate

Once your experience is launched, the development cycle is not over; it simply enters a new phase. The evaluation step is where you measure the success of your project against the goals you initially set. This involves analysing both quantitative data, such as the number of downloads, active users, and ratings on app stores, and qualitative feedback from user reviews and social media comments. This information is the most valuable resource you have for understanding what resonates with your audience and what needs improvement.

The insights gained from this evaluation are critical for planning the future of your project. They will directly inform your decisions about bug fixes, new content updates, or potential feature enhancements. This learning process closes the loop of the development cycle, feeding directly back into the "Ideation" and "Design" stages for the next iteration of your experience. By consistently evaluating and learning, you ensure that your product remains relevant, engaging, and continues to meet the evolving needs of your visitors.

4. Publishing and playing a game

There are multiple ways to publish a game online. The greatest difference is if the game will be published for smartphones, computers, or other platforms. For smartphones, the two most used application stores are the Google Play Store for Android devices, and the Apple App store for iPhones. On computers, most games are released on Windows, with several platforms for publishing games.

Note! Instructions for getting the app and setting up your account are based on the current versions of the app and platforms like the App Store, Google Play, and Steam. These steps may change as new updates are released. Similarly, fees and terms and conditions are subject to change.

4.1 Smartphones

The mobile gaming market is a behemoth, with billions of potential players. To tap into this audience, you'll need to navigate the two major app marketplaces: the Google Play Store for Android and the Apple App Store for iOS.

The Google Play Store (Android)

Google's platform is known for its open nature, which can make the initial publishing process more straightforward.

- **Getting Started:** To publish on the Google Play Store, you'll need to create a Google Developer account. This involves a one-time registration fee of \$25.
- **The Process:** Once your account is set up, you can upload your game's application package (APK or App Bundle). You will need to provide various details, including your game's title, description, screenshots, and content rating. Google's review process is largely automated, which generally leads to a faster turnaround time for your game to go live.
- **Financials:** Google Play takes a 15% cut of the revenue your game generates until you reach \$1 million in annual earnings. After that threshold, the revenue share for Google increases to 30%.

Creating a Developer Account

Publishing on the Google Play Store requires a developer account. This process involves a one-time fee and agreeing to Google's developer policies.

Requirements:

- A Google Account.
- A valid credit card to pay the registration fee.
- You must be at least 18 years old.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. **Sign in to your Google Account:** Navigate to the Google Play Console sign-up page and log in with your existing Google Account or create a new one.
2. **Complete Account Details:** You will be asked to provide information for your developer profile, including a public developer name, a secondary contact email address, and a contact phone number. This information will be used to contact you about your apps and will be visible on the Google Play Store.

3. **Agree to Terms:** Read and accept the Google Play Developer Distribution Agreement. This is a legally binding contract, so ensure you understand the terms.
4. **Pay the Registration Fee:** A one-time registration fee of \$25 is required. Payment is made via credit card. This fee is used to help prevent the creation of spam accounts.
5. **Complete Your Profile:** Once payment is confirmed, your account will be created. You will then need to complete your developer profile with any remaining required information before you can publish your first application.

Creating a Player Account

A player account is simply a standard Google Account, which is required to download apps from the Google Play Store and is integrated with Android devices.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. **Open Device Settings:** On an Android device, go to the "Settings" app.
2. **Navigate to Accounts:** Scroll down and select "Accounts" or "Users & accounts."
3. **Add Account:** Tap "Add account" and choose "Google."
4. **Create or Sign In:** You will be prompted to sign in with an existing Google Account or to create a new one by tapping "Create account."
5. **Follow On-Screen Instructions:** If creating a new account, you will need to provide your first and last name, date of birth, and gender. You will then choose a username, which will be your Gmail address, and create a password. You may also be asked to add and verify a phone number for security purposes.
6. **Agree to Terms:** Review and agree to Google's Terms of Service and Privacy Policy to complete the account setup.

Apple App Store (iOS)

Apple's App Store is a curated marketplace, known for its strong monetization and dedicated user base.

- **Getting Started:** To publish on the App Store, you must enroll in the Apple Developer Program, which has an annual fee of \$99.
- **The Process:** Apple has a more stringent and manual review process. You'll need to submit your game for review through App Store Connect, providing detailed information and ensuring your game adheres to Apple's strict design and content guidelines. This manual review can take longer than Google's automated process.
- **Financials:** Apple's standard revenue share is a 70/30 split, with 70% going to the developer. However, for developers earning less than \$1 million per year through the App Store Small Business Program, this split is a more favorable 85/15.

Creating a Developer Account

Publishing on the Apple App Store requires enrollment in the Apple Developer Program.

Requirements:

- An Apple ID with two-factor authentication enabled.
- Personal information for identity verification (e.g., legal name, address, phone number).
- If enrolling as an organization, you must have the legal authority to bind your company to legal agreements and may need a D-U-N-S Number.
- A credit card to pay the annual membership fee.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Visit the Apple Developer Website: Go to the Apple Developer Program enrollment page.
2. Sign In with Apple ID: Sign in with the Apple ID you wish to associate with your developer account. If you do not have one, you will need to create one first. Ensure two-factor authentication is enabled for this Apple ID for security.
3. Submit Your Information: Fill out the enrollment form with your legal name, address, and phone number. This information must match the details associated with your credit card.
4. Select Your Entity Type: Choose whether you are enrolling as an "Individual" or an "Organization." Enrolling as an organization provides the ability to add other developers to your team.
5. Review and Accept the Agreement: Read the Apple Developer Program License Agreement and accept the terms.
6. Pay the Annual Fee: The membership fee for the Apple Developer Program is \$99 per year. You will need to complete the purchase using a valid credit card. Your membership will automatically renew annually unless you cancel it.
7. Confirmation: You will receive a confirmation email from Apple once your payment has been processed, and your membership is active.

Creating a Player Account

A player account for the App Store is a standard Apple ID.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Open the App Store: Launch the App Store application on an iPhone, iPad, or Mac.
2. Access the Sign-In Screen: Tap the profile icon or the "Sign In" button.
3. Create New Apple ID: Select the option to "Create New Apple ID."
4. Enter Your Details: You will be prompted to provide an email address (which will become your new Apple ID), create a strong password, and select your country or region.
5. Agree to Terms and Conditions: Review and agree to the Terms and Conditions and Apple's Privacy Policy.
6. Provide Personal Information: Enter your name and date of birth. You will also be asked to set up security questions for account recovery.

7. **Set Up Payment Information:** You can add a payment method (credit/debit card, PayPal, etc.) for App Store purchases, or you can select "None." A payment method is required for non-free apps.
8. **Verify Your Account:** Check your email for a verification link from Apple. You will also need to verify your phone number. Once verified, your Apple ID is ready to use.

4.2 Computer

Major Distribution Platforms

These platforms are the go-to for most PC gamers, offering massive visibility and a robust set of tools for developers.

- **Steam:** The largest digital distribution platform for PC gaming, Steam is often the first choice for developers. To publish on Steam, you'll need to go through the Steam Direct program. This requires a \$100 fee for each game you wish to distribute. This fee is recoupable once your game generates at least \$1,000 in revenue. Steam's revenue share is generally 70/30 in favor of the developer, with the potential for a more favorable split at higher revenue milestones.
- **Epic Games Store:** A major competitor to Steam, the Epic Games Store has gained traction with its developer-friendly revenue share. The platform offers an 88/12 split, with the majority going to the developer. The submission process involves creating a developer account and going through a review process.
- **GOG (Good Old Games):** GOG is known for its focus on DRM-free games, meaning players own the game files outright. The platform has a curated approach to its catalogue, so not all submissions are accepted. Developers interested in publishing on GOG need to submit their game for consideration. The standard revenue share is 70/30, like Steam.

Self-Publishing Platforms

For developers seeking more control and a direct relationship with their players, self-publishing platforms are an excellent choice.

- **itch.io:** This platform is a haven for independent game developers. itch.io is known for its flexibility and open nature. There are no upfront fees to upload your game. The platform operates on a "pay-what-you-want" model for revenue sharing, with a default of a 10% cut to the platform, but developers can adjust this, even setting it to 0%. This makes it an incredibly accessible option for new developers.

Steam

Creating a Developer Account (Steamworks)

To publish on Steam, you must become a Steamworks partner.

Requirements:

- A Steam account that is in good standing.
- Personal or company bank account information.
- Tax information
- A payment method for the product submission fee.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Visit the Steamworks Portal: Navigate to the Steamworks partner sign-up page.
2. Sign In: Log in with the Steam account you want to be the administrator for your game.
3. Complete Digital Paperwork: You will be guided through a series of steps to provide your legal name, company name (if applicable), address, and bank account information for payments.
4. Provide Tax Information: You must complete a tax interview. This involves filling out the appropriate tax forms electronically.
5. Pay the Product Submission Fee: A fee of \$100 is required for each product you intend to release on Steam. This fee, known as the Steam Direct Fee, is recoupable. It will be paid back to you in the first payment period after your product has grossed at least \$1,000.
6. Identity Verification: Your personal and bank information will be verified by Valve, which may take several days. Once verified, you will be granted access to the Steamworks backend to set up your game's store page and upload builds.

Creating a Player Account

A standard Steam account is required to play games on the platform.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Download the Steam Client: Go to the official Steam website and click "Install Steam."
2. Launch the Installer: Run the downloaded file to install the Steam client on your computer.
3. Create a New Account: Launch the Steam client and click on the "Create a New Account" button.
4. Enter Details: Provide a valid email address and your country of residence. You must also complete a CAPTCHA and agree to the Steam Subscriber Agreement.
5. Verify Email: Steam will send a verification link to the email address you provided. Click this link to continue the account creation process.
6. Choose Account Name and Password: Once your email is verified, you will be prompted to choose a unique Steam account name (this is your login name, not your public profile name) and a secure password.
7. Complete Setup: Once you've chosen your credentials, your account is created, and you can log in to the Steam client.

Epic Games Store

Creating a Developer Account

Publishing on the Epic Games Store requires an Epic Games account and involves submitting your game for consideration.

Requirements:

- An Epic Games account.
- Information about your game, including a playable build.
- Company and tax information for payment processing.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. **Create an Epic Games Account:** If you don't already have one, create a standard Epic Games account on their website.
2. **Access the Developer Portal:** Navigate to the Epic Games Store developer portal ("dev.epicgames.com/portal") and sign in.
3. **Set up Your Organization:** You will need to create a private organization within the portal. This involves providing company details and tax information.
4. **Submit Your Game:** To get your game on the store, you must submit it for review. The platform is curated, though it has become more open. You can start the process through your developer portal dashboard.
5. **Review Process:** The Epic Games Store team will review your submission to ensure it meets their quality and content guidelines. If approved, you will be able to set up your store page and prepare for launch. There is no upfront fee to publish.

Creating a Player Account

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. **Visit the Epic Games Website:** Go to the Epic Games Store homepage.
2. **Click Sign In:** In the top right corner, click the "Sign In" button.
3. **Choose Sign-Up Method:** On the login screen, click the "Sign Up" link at the bottom. You can sign up using an email address or by linking an existing Google, Facebook, or console account (Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo).
4. **Provide Information:** If signing up with email, you will need to enter your country, first and last name, a public display name, your email address, and create a password.
5. **Agree and Create:** Agree to the terms of service and click "Create Account."
6. **Verify Email:** A verification code will be sent to your email address. Enter this code to complete the setup process.

GOG.com

GOG.com (formerly Good Old Games) is a digital distribution platform for PC games known for its strict DRM-free philosophy, meaning players own the game files outright without needing a client to launch them. The platform has a highly curated selection of both classic and new games.

Creating a Developer Account

Unlike platforms with open registration, GOG uses a curated submission process. There is no standard "developer account" to create upfront. Instead, you submit your game for consideration, and an account with developer portal access is granted upon acceptance.

Requirements:

- A playable, near-final build of your game. GOG rarely considers games in the very early stages of development.
- A standard GOG player account for communication.
- A clear and unique value proposition for your game.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. **Create a Standard GOG Account:** First, ensure you have a regular GOG.com account, as this will be your primary point of contact. (See player account creation steps below).
2. **Navigate to the Game Submission Form:** Go to the "Submit your game" page on the GOG.com website. This form is intended for developers to pitch their games to the GOG review team.
3. **Complete the Submission Form:** Fill out the detailed questionnaire about your game. You will be asked for information such as:
 - Game title and genre.
 - A link to a playable build (e.g., via a password-protected itch.io page or a cloud drive).
 - Links to any existing store pages (like Steam) or press materials.
 - Your development studio's details.
 - A description of what makes your game unique and why it is a good fit for GOG's DRM-free, pro-consumer audience.
4. **Await Review:** After submission, the GOG team will review your game. This is a manual, human-led process that can take a significant amount of time. There is no guaranteed timeframe for a response.
5. **Gain Portal Access (If Accepted):** If GOG decides to release your game, a representative (usually a Product Manager) will contact you directly. They will then grant your GOG account access to the GOG Developer Portal. This portal is the backend where you will manage your game builds, store page, and finances. There is no fee for submitting your game or for publishing on the platform.

Creating a Player Account

A player account is required to purchase and access games from the GOG library.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Visit the GOG.com Website: Navigate to the GOG.com homepage.
2. Access the Registration Page: In the top menu bar, hover your mouse over "Sign in" and then click the "Create account" button from the dropdown menu.
3. Enter Your Credentials: On the registration page, you will need to provide:
 - A public username.
 - A valid email address.
 - A secure password.
4. Accept Terms and Sign Up: Check the box to confirm you are 16 or older and that you accept the GOG User Agreement & Privacy Policy. Click the "Sign up now" button to complete the process.
5. Optional: Download GOG Galaxy: While not required to download game installer files, GOG offers the GOG Galaxy client to manage your library, friends, and game updates in a way similar to other platforms. You can download it directly from the website.

itch.io

Creating a Developer Account

A standard itch.io account can be used to publish games.

Requirements:

- A valid email address.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Visit the itch.io Website: Go to the itch.io homepage and click the "Register" button.
2. Choose a Username and Password: Select a username that will be part of your profile URL. Provide a password and a valid email address.
3. Agree to Terms: Agree to the platform's terms of service.
4. Confirm and Customize: After creating the account, you can immediately begin creating project pages for your games via your Dashboard. It is highly recommended to set up your tax information under the "Tax identity" section of your account settings before you start selling games to ensure proper payment processing.
5. Set Revenue Share: On the payment configuration page, you can set your desired revenue split. The default is an "open revenue sharing" model where itch.io takes a 10% cut, but you can adjust this percentage.

Creating a Player Account

The player and developer accounts are the same on itch.io. The steps are identical to those listed above. Once an account is created, users can both download/purchase games and upload their own projects.

5. Launching the game

A great product is only successful if people know it exists. A strategic launch combines digital marketing with real-world events to build excitement and drive adoption.

5.1 Pre-Launch: Building Anticipation

- **Create Your Message:** Develop a clear, compelling message. What is your experience? Who is it for? What makes it unique?
- **Build Relationships:** Connect with local tourism bodies, hotels, tour operators, and media. Provide them with information and previews.
- **Online Presence:** Secure your social media handles and create a simple landing page or website. Post "behind-the-scenes" content to build a following. Use relevant hashtags and engage with cultural and tourism accounts.
- **Press & Media:** Prepare a press release. Consider offering early access to journalists, bloggers, and influencers in the travel and culture space.

5.2 The Launch

- **Physical Launch Event:** Host an event at a key location featured in your literary experience. Invite partners, stakeholders, media, and the public. Offer live demonstrations and have staff on hand to help people download and use the app.
- **Digital Launch Campaign:** Push your message out across all your channels. Use a mix of organic posts, paid social media advertising targeted at tourists visiting your area, and email newsletters to your pre-launch subscribers.
- **Cross-Promotion:** Work with your partners (hotels, museums, visitor centres) to promote the launch on their channels and in their physical locations. Ensure local visitor centres are equipped with flyers and information.

5.3 Post-Launch: Maintaining Momentum

- **Gather Feedback:** Encourage user reviews on the app stores. Monitor social media for mentions and respond to user feedback and questions.
- **User-Generated Content:** Run a contest or campaign encouraging users to share photos or videos of their experience online. This creates authentic social proof.
- **Keep Content Fresh:** Plan for updates. Can you add seasonal content, special events, or new chapters to the story to encourage repeat engagement?
- **Measure Success:** Track your key metrics: number of downloads, active users, user ratings, and media mentions. Use this data to refine your marketing and future development efforts.