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Nevola, Fabrizio, project lead. Hidden Florence. Other

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The immersive experience offered by Hidden Florence feels like travelling back in time as you walk—smartphone in hand—through the streets of a city centre whose urban landscape has changed very little over 500 years and whose buildings and walls still preserve the memory of what the town used to look like. The voiceover of a Renaissance guide does a very good job at drawing the user's attention to overlooked remnants of the past that have survived among the cars and shops, and at explaining what these places once meant for the people of the time. For example, the user is taken to Piazza San Martino and asked to look at a hole in the wall of a small church, something most tourists and passersby would probably never notice. Here, a fascinating tale unfolds of how the hole had been put there by the Confraternity of the Buonuomini (good men) of San Martino for the purpose of collecting donations for the "shamefaced" poor, needy artisans, and impoverished citizens who were too ashamed to beg and wanted to remain anonymous—at least in theory.

Hidden Florence is a locative app that allows users to walk around Florence in the company of a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century guide. The project was created in 2013–14 by the architectural and urban historian Fabrizio Nevola (University of Exeter) with the help of social historian David Rosenthal (University of Edinburgh) and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK (AHRC), the University of Exeter, and the HEFCE Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) for Open Innovation. In more recent stages of the project, contributions have included those of several distinguished Renaissance scholars including Nicholas Terpstra (University of Toronto) and Sharon Strocchia (Emory University). The app was developed by Calvium, a British software company that specializes in mobile and web apps, and is available for both Androids and iPhones. It can be downloaded free of charge on Google Play and the AppStore.

The original version of Hidden Florence only included two walks, both of which are led by the cheerful woolworker Giovanni around 1490. A member of the lower classes in a city whose economy largely depended on textile production, Giovanni provides a non-elitist view of the Renaissance

and leads us around an everyday Florence peopled by craftsmen and tavern keepers, prostitutes and market sellers. In the most recent version, launched in 2019, the app offers six different walks, each comprising six to nine stops, with each stop accompanied by a two-minute-long audio track. All the walks are in English, but two are also available in Italian. The user can follow the route on the map and stop at a given location where they can listen to a vivid illustration of what that specific place once was and how people experienced it centuries ago. For most of the walks the perspective is that of "history from below" (the other voices are the weaver Marietta, the policeman Ercole, and the widow Niccolosa), but one of the guide-characters is none other than Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, the *pater patriae* and the most powerful man in Florence in the mid-Quattrocento.

One of the app's most important features is the combination of the modern Google map and the Renaissance map so that users can move effortlessly between past and present with GPS technology. The older map is an incredibly accurate depiction of the streets and squares of late sixteenth-century Florence, drawn up in 1584 by the Olivetan monk and grand-ducal cartographer Stefano Buonsignori, the same that was used for the DECIMA project at the University of Toronto. Through a careful process of geo-rectification, the old map has been superimposed over the modern one by creating historic tiles for the city areas covered by Hidden Florence's walks. And even if looking at the map is a crucial part of the interactive experience, the app encourages people to take their eyes off their screens and focus on the surroundings. Every stop features something to look at, which means that the digital interface does not isolate users from the surrounding space but helps to immerse them in it by creating a different kind of relationship.

The scholarship behind the app is extremely sound and the research underpinning the digital product has been done by some of the leading scholars in the field, with a wide range of different expertise, including not only architectural and social history, but also cultural, religious, and gender history, history of medicine, and history of violence. Users who are interested in knowing more can obtain further details by listening to the audio track in the "Discover More" section associated with every stop. And as if that were not enough, the website connected to the app (hiddenflorence.org) provides additional texts and lists of further readings for every walk. The website also

makes it possible for people without a smartphone to enjoy Hidden Florence through maps and audio commentary that can be downloaded.

The app works extremely well: it is very intuitive, its usability and design are excellent, and its navigation is easy and fast. If a weakness can be found, it is that the app does not comply with FAIR principles. The technology behind Hidden Florence is not open source and its code is proprietary and not publicly available. The software is not interoperable: as it was developed by a private company, neither data sharing nor semantic exchange are possible. This, however, does not diminish the quality of the product itself and its innovative scope. As a matter of fact, the most interesting aspect of the app is its successful combination of high-quality scholarship, digital technology, and public engagement. The stories told by the woolworker Giovanni, the weaver Marietta, Cosimo the Elder, and the others are reliable, believable, and enjoyable all at the same time, and this would not be possible if they were not a good mix of education and entertainment, reality and fiction. The app's narratives draw on primary sources but go beyond them, offering the user a fictional reality made up of situations that did not happen but could very well have happened, where imagination is confined by the boundaries of a framework based on historical evidence. The project's conceptual approach and some of the challenges the contributors faced are now explained and discussed in a number of publications.[1]

The success of Hidden Florence is supported by the numbers (more than 5,000 downloads on Google Play with an average rating of 4.8/5), by the awards it has received, and by the creation of two spinoffs, also developed by Calvium and released in 2019. One is Hidden Florence 3D (only available for iPhone or iPad), which has a similar name but is totally different. Using augmented reality (AR), it reconstructs the demolished church of San Pier Maggiore and can be enjoyed either in the Florentine street where the church originally stood or in London's National Gallery where a reassembled fourteenth-century altarpiece from the church is on display. The other one is Hidden Cities (hiddencities.eu), short name for the HERA-funded research project PUblic REnaissance: Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present. This project created five apps using the same model as Hidden Florence, with walks in five European cities (Deventer, Exeter, Hamburg, Trento, and Valencia). And this creative adventure is not over yet: Calvium is now offering a modular set of

1. Nevola, "Microstoria 2.0"; Nevola and Rosenthal, "Locating Experience"; and Nevola, Rosenthal, and Terpstra, *Hidden Cities*.

features to produce similar locative apps with the Hidden Cities template, and one more project, Florence 4D (florence4d.org) has already been started.

All in all, this is a very innovative and original digital product, and an effective example of how historical research can be put at the service of entertainment, and how entertainment can be based on professional historians' work and on written and material primary sources. The app is also replicable, and the application of the Hidden Florence model to other European cities is in itself a demonstration of its success, also on the technological side. Last but not least, it cannot be stressed enough how the app does not isolate the user from the surrounding world but rather enacts a multisensorial experience in which the electronic device is the key to a better understanding of the place we are in and its hidden past.

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