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Cultural tourism, reviving the beloved choose your own adventure (/aq-blog/5053-cultural-tourism-reviving-the-beloved-choose-your-own-adventure)

15 Jul 2015

Why be a tourist when you can be a secret agent? Or run through the streets of a new city to escape a zombie apocalypse? Emily Craven talks about the Story City App and the potential impact on cultural tourism...

Have you ever read a story and wish you could be in it? Calling the shots, helping the good guys (or bad), choosing your adventure? The Story City App (http://www.storycity.com.au/), a cultural tourism initiative, makes you the hero of your own story, giving you the chance to take part in your own adventure in cities across Australia and (potentially) the world.

Public spaces can be hard to activate 24/7, and unless you're an iconic city like London, getting international or even domestic tourists visiting your city and conveying to them its unique experiences can be a struggle. However, new mobile based technologies are providing exciting and innovative ways to experience and explore a new city or your home town. Story City is one of these initiatives.

Story City came about from my intense desire to take part in the stories I was reading, and my frustration at the limited opportunities available for emerging writers to get a foot in the door. If there were no opportunities I was going to make them!

Story City is a digital storytelling experience that puts you in the story. It combines fictional choose-your-own-adventure style stories with physical locations in public spaces, allowing the fantasy to become 'real' to a reader. A mix of cultural tourism and adventure, each story is created specifically to highlight the beautiful or intriguing parts of a real-world site and to appeal to and excite a young, tech savvy audience. The idea is to bring real-world locations to life, whether they be cities, attractions, or world heritage areas, converting an ordinary, everyday space into an adventure filled wonderland. This type of storytelling is called locative literature, stories told in the actual place they are set.

Each story starts at a specific location in the city, or heritage site it's set in and then branches off into dozens of different locations around the area (all within walking distance). Which ones you visit will depend on the path you pick through the adventure. When the app detects you are in the right location it unlocks the next part of the story. Each story happens in the location that you are standing and can be enjoyed by listening to the narrated audio or reading the story on screen.

Technology has come far enough along that I haven't had to beggar myself to create Story City. Originally the project was run with QR codes on posters scattered around Brisbane. This is still an effective and cheap way to set up your own location based stories and events as QR codes are free to generate. However, there is a caveat. Using QR codes means your installations have to be monitored daily to replace vandalised or missing posters, and the event can only run for a short time due to limited permissions granted for poster placement by a Council or State Government. This is why I made the move to apply for the Brisbane City Council Innovation Award (http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community/grants-awards/arts-history/innovation-award); creating a geo-locative app is a terribly expensive business but it gave me the freedom to run my events anywhere, 24/7, giving audience participation and accessibility a huge boost.

The massive reaction we've had from the participating public has made the long development process worthwhile. Every time we run a new event in Australia, whether it be this year's Brisbane City Council Street Reads (http://streetreads.com/) set to go live in Brisbane in September, or the new Story City Gold Coast experience set to go live in December thanks to a Regional Arts Development Fund (http://cultural.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/regional-arts-development-fund-10081.html) from Arts Queensland and the City of Gold Coast, we get more and more people joining the Facebook page (Story City FB (https://www.facebook.com/StoryCityAdventures), Street Reads FB (https://www.facebook.com/BrisbaneAdventure)), posting photos of their adventure, signing up to the newsletter or sharing news of a favoured story with a friend. We will regularly get an organic reach on Facebook of three to four times the number of likes we have on our pages.

I chalk this down to two things, one that we get new local writers, artists and musicians working on every project which creates a strong local ownership of each set of stories (even though the initiative itself is nationwide). Secondly, by attaching readers emotionally to place with a unique story, it leaves them with intense memories not only of the event, but the joy they felt in a particular city. Shared experiences and personal association (made all the more stronger with story) are what drive revisits, word of mouth recommendations, and ultimately, people coming to a specific place because it is the only location that they can get that unique experience.

Cultural tourism is what sees crowds descend on Brisbane for a David Lynch exhibit, or on Melbourne for a Tim Burton one. Story City has shown you don't need a headliner to drive that cultural tourism train, all you need is local artists telling stories that compel tourists to come and experience a place for themselves.

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Emily Craven is an author, speaker, innovator and the creator of the Story City GPS app. Emily was the first person in the world to create real-life choose your own adventures and is the winner of the Brisbane City Council Innovation Award for her innovative storytelling projects. Emily has spoken to teenagers and adults across Australia (keynotes, workshops and masterclasses) on ebooks and digital/multimedia storytelling. She was previously the Digital Producer for if:book Australia and QLD Writers Centre and has been featured in Money Magazine, Channel 7's 'The Great South East' and in various newsletter articles. You can find out more about her at www.storycity.com.au (http://www.storycity.com.au/)

Story City (http://www.storycity.com.au/) works with councils and organisations across Australia to produce projects for their town using their local talent and stories. As well as producing location based choose-your-own-adventure style narratives they have been commissioned to create nature walks, historical stories, treasure hunts and city tours, all delivered via the Story City App. You can download the free Story City App now on the Android App store (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details? id=au.com.storycity.storycity) or the Apple App Store (https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewSoftware? id=972223741&mt=8).

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Gerald | 29/03/2016 | 01:50 AM

Totally agree with the you, Emily! The problem is that promising app's for geolocation and navigation are neglected due to lack of promotion. Such apps should be promoted with services where real users can review and install your app. God bless you!

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