

# ***Shakin' the classroom***

## *Spreading alternative knowledge sharing methods*

### **Please briefly explain the knowledge sharing method/approach/tool.**

What are the main processes? What are the expected outcomes? In what ways does that method bring change or represent an alternative to existing or dominant knowledge sharing settings and methods?

Contemporary museums tend to represent their collection in both professional and approachable way, so that the widest audience can reach it. The curatorial and PR practices include even engagement of artists or visitors to create animated GIF pieces (Graphic Interchange Format) from photographs and reproductions of works from the collections. At the beginning of 2014, Tate Britain launched an open call for 1840s GIF Party, inviting people to create GIF out of the early XIX Century Collection. Apart from the fact that this project promoted the collection in a new and popular way, it also preserved selected GIF animations at the Tate's website, making them visible as any other work in the online collection.

Since 2013, Europeana has organized an annual competition GIF IT UP which challenges people to reuse digitised cultural heritage material to produce unique animated GIFs and share them online. Apart from that, initiative Museum GIFs creates GIF animations of artworks in New York City museums including MoMA, the American Museum of Natural History, Metropolitan, Studio Museum in Harlem, High Museum, Museum of the Moving Image, Harn Museum of Art, The Jewish Museum, Brooklyn Museum, NY Carlsberg Glyptotek. But these GIFs are made only of already exhibited artworks. New York Storefront for Art and Architecture extensively uses animated GIFs in PR practice, but also as a form of documentation of events, organising from time to time GIF themed parties.

Richard Balzer's museum of optical toys and proto-film devices contains not only information about the collected items, as well as detailed drawings and diagrams from the XIX Century that explain their functioning, but also animated GIFs that demonstrate it.

### **In which way is this method alternative?**

How does it try to bring change or represent an alternative to existing or dominant knowledge sharing settings and methods?

When talking about their project and competition GIF IT UP, Europeana emphasized that the competition is "also helping audiences to learn about image licensing in an interactive and fun way." Apart from that, this method enables users/participants to get familiar with open digitized archives, in active, even performative way. By manipulating images instead of only looking at them, users experience them in different way and learn about the origins and historical context of particular images. Application of this method, if well organized and/or curated, will preserve information about the source images along with their animated GIF versions.

### **If possible, please briefly explain the context in which the method has been developed.**

Who were the main actors? What were the main reasons/motivations/inspirations behind the creation? Which previous developments have influenced it? If relevant, in what ways did the method/tool develop or change over time or in different locations/contexts?

Animated GIF (Graphic Interchange Format) was created in the late 1980s for purpose of transferring and storing digital animated logos within cyberspace. Although considered now to be a low quality format, at the time of its creation, this "eight-bit file format introduced the amazing spectacle of 256 colour images to be won over the thin lines of dial-up connections" (Fuller, 2012). It is an upgrade of GIF format from 1977 that could transfer a single picture only, but nevertheless represented a miniature technical revolution. Static GIF image was invented "to provide a graphic format that can support colour images, as result of addressing the shortcomings of the previous

Run-Length Encoding (RLE), the first graphics compression algorithm, capable of only supporting black and white” (Chiarini, 2015: 130).

The type of GIF that could withstand multiple images, and is known today as animated GIF, was transferring files since the beginning without impoverishing their quality. It is based on LZW (Lempel – Ziv – Welch) algorithm whose main characteristic is lossless compression. This means that “if you compress an image with such a technique and expand the file again, the image outcome is in every detail and bit identical to the original, non-compressed image” (Miano, 1999: 12, quoted in Schiet, 2012: 65). From today's perspective it is seen as a poor image because it is not suitable for transferring high definition digital photographs, significantly reducing their resolution and colour spectre. However, contemporary technologies overcame this issue and animated GIF started to embody animations of higher image quality.

Animated GIF is no longer used for file transfer, which was its initial purpose, but it remains extremely popular digital media in a wide context of contemporary visual culture.

### **In your opinion, what kind of settings and participants is the method best suited for?**

E.g. age, educational level, cultural and professional background, etc.

Animated GIF, especially if used to revitalise images of cultural heritage, is very easy to make – all digital tools are accessible, approachable, free and easy to use. For that reason, this method can be used both by educational institutions, as well as by institutions which have educational aspect (museums, archives etc.). It can be applied through workshops, various competitions and contributions carried out through open calls, as part of student presentations, even lectures. Since GIF can embody any information (images, diagrams, statistics, texts), it can be used in relation to not only cultural heritage, but also natural preservation, design, medicinal history, and many other disciplines. It is probably more appealing to students and professionals from the area of graphic design and visual arts, but since it is easily used and created, it finds its place across many discourses.

### **Are there any limitations?**

Are there any requirements or limits in terms of location, number/profile of participants, tools and devices, time constraints and other? Are there certain skills, sensitivities or relations that need to be developed or assumed for the method to be successfully applied? Are there any contexts for which this method is not best suited?

Application of animated GIFs to reanimation of cultural heritage (or anything else for the matter) can be used by help of any electronic device, though online sites or installed apps/programs. Therefore, there are no limits to location or a number or profile of participants, which projects like Europeana's GIF IT UP demonstrate. In terms of technology, availability of internet is important if the participants are using online engines to create GIFs. There is also an issue of copyrights and whether images can be used for further manipulation in GIF format. This method may be very challenging (and possibly inappropriate) in relation to Holocaust studies, images of victims, images of violence and so, but it can be also used appropriately in these contexts if the moderator/lecturer is carefully directing the whole process. Since GIF can easily trivialize presented themes and issues, and often has humoristic aspect, one has to be careful not to create unwanted meanings and feelings.

### **What are your experiences with the method?**

In case you have tested or experienced the method beyond its primary environment, what are your experiences? Would you change anything or suggest further development?

Since 2014, I am curating the long-term curatorial and research project GIF: Visual Practice as Critique through online collection and series of exhibitions, workshops, screenings, theoretic

writings and spoken word programmes, in cooperation with both regional and international institutions. The project is dedicated to systematization, preservation, exhibiting and presentation of animated GIFs related to spatial issues and architecture in the broadest sense. It aims to position animated GIF within the context of new media art and to revalue its position in certain stages of curatorial process, such as documentation and presentation of events and museum collections of architectural models. As such, the project connects cultural heritage to new media, as well as artists, activists, associations, collectives, researchers and all those who are using this free and easy-to-make format.

### Testimonies

If possible, please provide any testimonies.

Animated GIF (Graphic Interchange Format) is widely popular type of visual communication. Its shortness, small size, blitz-like appearance, ephemeral character and endless repetitiveness make it suitable for presentation of changes in global and everyday reality. For this reason, a growing number of visual artists are turning to this digital format that is generally trivialised and used for entertainment. In contrast to similar media – time-lapse photograph and stop-motion film – animated GIF has no status of a documentary media since it allows montage and manipulation to a greater extent. As it appeared at the same time when World Wide Web and Internet, cyber space is animated GIF's natural environment within which it can become viral and easily lose authorship, original context and quality. However, this capacity to make a compressed visual material widely available, as well as attractiveness of a moving image which it allows, resulted in animated GIF to become a frequent segment of online presentations. Since it is suitable for documentation of an object from different angles and the process of its construction, animated GIF is used by institutions that focus on preservation and presentation of cultural heritage.

### Additional materials

If possible, please provide additional links, literature, instructions and/or other relevant content.

Competition GIF IT UP by Europeana <https://gifitup.net/> <https://pro.europeana.eu/page/gif-it-up>

Jankov, Sonja, catalogue for the exhibition GIF and Cities, Gallery Podroom, Cultural Centre of Belgrade, 9/2-9/3/2017 [https://www.academia.edu/31542673/GIF\\_and\\_CITIES](https://www.academia.edu/31542673/GIF_and_CITIES)

Project GIF and Architecture: Visual Practice as Critique (curator: Sonja Jankov)

<https://gifcritique.wixsite.com/gifcritique>

list of additional bibliography (bottom of the page)

<https://gifcritique.wixsite.com/gifcritique/about>

Jankov, Sonja, "Animated GIF and Architecture," in: Ružica Bogdanović (ed.), *Going Digital: Innovation in Art, Architecture, Science and Technology in Digital Era* – book of proceedings, Belgrade: STRAND – Sustainable Urban Society Association, 2018, 171–182

Tutorials:

Getting creative with stickers & effects – make your first GIF (Europeana)

<http://blog.europeana.eu/2017/10/getting-creative-with-stickers-effects-make-your-first-gif/>

Playing with colours – make your first GIF IT UP entry (Europeana)

<http://blog.europeana.eu/2017/10/playing-with-colours-make-your-first-gif-it-up-entry/>

How to make a GIF from a series of photos (Europeana) <http://blog.europeana.eu/2017/10/how-to-make-a-gif-from-a-series-of-photos/>

Make a GIF from a vintage video (Europeana) <http://blog.europeana.eu/2017/10/make-a-gif-from-a-vintage-video/>

Gif-making online workshops (DPLA) <https://pro.dp.la/events/workshops#gifs>

How to make a GIF using free software (DigitalNZ) <https://digitalnz.org/blog/posts/how-to-make-a-simple-animated-gif-with-free-software>

How to make an animated GIF from a stereograph (DigitalNZ)  
<https://digitalnz.org/blog/posts/how-to-make-an-animated-gif-from-a-stereograph>

How to make an animated GIF using Gimp software <https://digitalnz.org/blog/posts/how-to-make-an-animated-gif-from-a-stereograph> + screencast (DigitalNZ)  
<http://www.screencast.com/t/iKD5my0piB>