

ANIMATED GIF WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDIES OF ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

Abstract

The paper examines animated GIF beyond its use within social media networks, where it most often serves as a form of digital communication. It presents GIF's capacity to critically react, give political and social commentary, and intervene in the public debates. In the first part, we analyse the GIF within the wider context of new media and digital arts, both as a format and a tool that can be used in teaching practices, presentation and dissemination of scientific results, preservation and promotion of different types of heritage, such as visual, architectural and intangible cultural heritage. In the second part, we present the empirical research on GIF, carried out in the form of a short extra-curricular course realized in collaboration with the Academy of Arts in Split, and which resulted in the exhibition of GIFs created by 21 graduate and postgraduate students who attended the course.

Key words

animated GIF, art education, architecture, heritage, new media, digital art

Introduction

GIF (Graphics Interchange Format)² is a low-bandwidth short sequence of images, displayed continuously in a loop, without sound. It was created in 1987 by CompuServe engineer Steve Wilhite, and it became widely popular after 1995 when Netscape Navigator introduced a loop to its structure. The

1 jankovsonja@gmail.com; ORCID 0000-0003-3420-6130

2 Both singular and plural forms GIF/GIFs have been used in the paper, as well as in the quoted sources. While GIF refers to the digital format, GIFs refer to works made in that format.

loop made GIF very attractive to creators of early websites where animated graphics attracted the attention of potential users.³ The flickering aspect of GIF was mostly used in advertising, and soon became one of the favourite formats used by internet artists. Over time, it gained the status of digital and new media art, and found wide application as it is available without licensing, can be easily made by anyone, and can be quickly distributed owing to its shortness and small size.

With the help of social media technologies, GIF became vital medium for digital communication, often used to supplement text communication. Disseminated through social media's "GIF keyboards" and built-in search engines, GIF became a response option, "a *readymade* expression, prefabricated and easy to acquire and use" (Wiggins 2019: 148). Within social media, GIFs are "delivering breaking news, telling stories through photo-journalism, and enabling new ways to express emotions" (Bakhshi et al 2016: 575), they are part of private chats, forums, digital diplomacy, online corporate marketing campaigns, "blending humour, irony, and social commentary through in-jokes and parodies, often serving as tools for identity creation and community engagement" (Gutiérrez-Ujaque, Degen, Bonastra 2025: 3). Since the widest application of GIF is within social media, it was mostly researched from the perspective of communication and media studies. Fiona Westbrook approaches GIF from the optics of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and genres, as a form that persons use to express themselves. She distinguishes two categories of GIFs: "emotive forms, which convey emotional responses and display the poster's stance; and co-speech forms that share complex thoughts" (Westbrook 2023: 16). However, she considers only the use of existing GIFs, not the possibility of creating new GIFs to express oneself.

This paper focuses on GIF as a format that brings many creative possibilities to everyone, especially to students of arts and architecture. Unfortunately, teaching practices rarely mention GIF, and only in passing, within wider curricula about digital media. For example, the International Technological University within its Digital Arts program includes many subjects, some of which include teaching on GIF, such as the Basic Image Manipulation, Motion Graphics, and Animation, but they are approaching GIFs from technological point of view. Similarly, the School of Digital Arts of the Manchester

3 To see animated GIFs made for early websites, go to the *GifCities* project by the Internet Archive, launched in 2016 as collection of over 4,500,000 animated GIFs extracted from the early web hosting service GeoCities whose users built over 38 million custom web pages from 1994 to 2009: <https://gifcities.org/>.

Metropolitan University approaches digital media from the perspective of technological know-how. As a result, students encounter GIFs usually within social media, as already existing creations, instead of creating their own GIFs within their research process and/or to present their projects.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that animated GIF is an easily made format that can enable undergraduate and graduate students of arts and architecture to express their critical thinking in aesthetic and communicative manner, and as such, be used more often within their practices. The paper results from the research carried out using desk research and empirical research methods. It presents the main characteristics of the GIF format – its critical capacity, application in architecture, heritage, and teaching practices – bringing together insights by specialists in information science and technology, audiovisual media, digital humanities, culture and media studies, education, and architecture.

Furthermore, the paper brings results of the empirical research in the form of a short extra-curricular course at the University of Split, Croatia, where animated GIF, its history and characteristics were introduced to students of two faculties who were asked to make GIFs related to a depicted building from 1970. The course was realized after finding out that GIF is currently not a part of any graduate or postgraduate curricula in Croatia. The Academy of Arts in Split includes six departments,⁴ none of which are primarily focusing on digital and new media arts. Academy of Arts in Zagreb has study programs in Animated Film, and New Media, that include digital arts, but not GIF in particular. The course resulted in the exhibition of GIFs that took place in the gallery located in the very building on which the GIFs were based on, thus enabling both students and audience to experience the GIFs in a new way and see the building through the lens of digital art.

Creation of new GIFs during the course, rather than the use of existing ones, is in line with Lev Manovich's theory of *postmedia aesthetics* in which "emphasis shifts to users' capabilities and users' behavior" (Manovich 2014: 85). It is also in line with Geert Lovink's critical approach to new media, claiming that people are reclaiming the internet – instead of being used by the internet, everyone striving to use the internet by boosting their "plat-formativity" (2022: 98). Lovink also notices that the "social media have grossly neglected the development of democratic decision-making software" (2020: 115), while

4 Design of visual communications, Film and video, Sculpture, Conservation-restoration, Fine culture and fine arts, Painting.

the global reaction to new media is “the endless repetition of the R&D-introduction-resistance-hype-acceptance loop” that can be cut off by building in “feedback loops on social, political, and cultural levels” (Lovink 2002: 166). The creation of GIFs is at the same time democratic, and a way to develop critical thinking and create aesthetic work.

Key characteristics of GIF and its application beyond social media

Animated GIF has been defined in many different ways, which shows that it has been applied in many different areas. It is the representative of new media “because it exists in a perpetual state of repetition and renewal” (Bering-Porter 2014: 187). According to Gabriele Prosperi, GIF is “an artistic format, an informational or educational tool, a communication or linguistic element” (2019: 270), while the *GIF culture* is “behavioural crossroad of contemporaneity, both in terms of re-use of creative contents and of demystification of current facts” (*ibidem*: 287). For Kate M. Miltner and Tim Highfield, one of the crucial characteristics of GIFs is demonstration of cultural knowledge, along with the performance of affect, and the relationship between polysemy, decontextualization and repetition (2017: 4).

From the aesthetic point of view, today GIFs occupy an ambivalent, almost paradoxical position. On the one hand, they are a treasury of culture, since digital media has particular capacities to remediate and repurpose television, film, photography, painting, drawings, print. In that process, digital media, including GIFs, are not disrupting culture as external agents, they “emerge from within cultural contexts” (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 17). Digital arts are even similar to high brow modern art, because “[w]ith their constant references to other media and their contents, hypermedia ultimately claim our attention as pure experience” (*ibidem*: 54). On the other hand, GIFs are part of the current culture, which Caitlin Jones describes as the culture of “total image saturation— with *saturation* meaning the sheer volume of images existing on the web almost completely dissociated, or ‘abstracted,’ from their original context, form, and meaning” (2015: 138). In such a context, even when digitizing already existing excerpts from television, film, photography, painting, drawing, print, GIFs are radically abstract (*ibidem*: 139). If the viewers are unaware that a GIF remediates and repurposes earlier media or work, its meaning can go unnoticed. Luckily, new search engines and new AI tools easily discover both the source of decontextualized GIFs and explanation of

their content, so lost references are often found later, but only if the original description, authorship and other data are uploaded with the GIFs.

Several authors emphasize the capacity of GIFs to critically react to aspects of contemporaneity and issues in societies that need improvement and/or solutions. Animated GIFs “often offer sharp political and social commentary that function as a coping mechanism for living in absurd modern times” (Reyes, Kaepfel, Bjorngard-Basayne 2018). They often use humour to achieve that, since the “GIF format seems particularly suitable for expressing nonsense scenarios, to intervene in the public debate with satirical commentary, and to produce downright funny effects” (Marmo 2016: 83). Their loop, which can be understood as means for achieving humour and irony, is also enabling their political-critical aspect that is based on “the understanding of the aesthetic apparatus as a notion that allows us to provide political answers to the questions of our time, which seek to transform or disrupt officially agreed-upon value systems” (Abbruzzese Abaján 2022: 305). GIFs, like memes, are “not always representative of an ideological practice,” their “function is to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence a discourse” (Wiggins 2022: 69).

The critical aspect of GIFs makes them also useful in discussions about usurpation of public spaces, architecture and architectural heritage. Almost aggressive swiftness of GIFs becomes “a good allegory of rapid spatial changes and quick decisions being made without anticipation of problems that they might cause in the long term” (Jankov 2017: 76). GIFs about architecture are “specific interpretations and a critical act” (Jankov 2018: 172) that have “capacity to present complex concepts, regardless of their shortness and imperfection” (*ibidem*: 180). They also help in democratizing public space because, as Davide Tommaso Ferrando notices, “[w]hile the urban sphere is being progressively privatized, images become more and more *public*, as they belong to everybody and to no one at the same time. On social media, (architectural) images become Commons” (2017: 5). Since GIFs can embody time-lapse and ‘before and after’ photographs of architecture, blueprints, computer graphics, drawings, diagrams, charts, texts, they are very suitable to present many facts, ideas, opinions, and proposals related to architecture, architectural heritage and politics of space.

Animated GIFs have been also used within teaching practices on several occasions. GIFs have been incorporated into article analysis assignments by Jamie Henthorn, because they showed to be one of the ways to “make analysis

feel less formal, and they provide students with another way to conceptualize their reactions to a text” (Henthorn 2023: 13). Having freedom to insert them at any place and to use already existing GIFs and make their own, the students used GIFs to reinforce the content of the article, to punctuate their reactions to the content they are analysing, or to present and share through GIFs their process. GIFs stopped students “from overthinking the assignment and injected a degree of fun,” (*ibidem*: 14), helping them to “remember key pieces, essential to writing that might take place over weeks” (*ibidem*: 12).

When used within Higher Education framework, students viewed GIFs positively, “due to the benefits of developing personability of the lecturer as well as strengthening the learner experience” (Hayes, Fatima 2024: 165), but their overuse “could be viewed as unprofessional or a distraction from the learning content” (*ibidem*: 168). Several authors argue that GIFs should be used in online learning and teaching because they foster approachability, sett the right tone, and capturing attention (Tracey, Taylor 2025) In addition, they showed to “provide a novel and powerful avenue to explore the experiential landscapes of cities in ways that are inclusive, engaging, and methodologically innovative within the field of children’s geographies” (Gutiérrez-Ujaque, Degen, Bonastra 2025: 2).

Apart from being present within debates about politics, public space, and other public interest topics, as well as used within teaching methodologies, GIFs have been also used in the context of presentation and dissemination of scientific results, and within practices of preservation and promotion of different types of heritage. As both specialist and non-specialist audiences can be reached through GIFs, they are very helpful as animated data visualization in many scientific areas, including the research about heritage. However, as Colleen Morgan and Nela Scholma-Mason notice, most academic publications cannot accommodate GIFs, which “threatens to relegate an incredibly useful format for communication to unarchivable marginalia” (2017). Mostly, they remain bound to websites, and social media networks, where they can present scientific results, but where they can also present heritage outside the scientific context. Since GIFs are often made of materials from visual archives (photographs, films, slides, videos), they “must be understood and perceived as a product and symptom of an era and as a means that creates a sort of democratization of the use of visual heritage” (Tongiani 2017: 70).

Apart from GIF’s positive relation to material archives, its positive relation to intangible cultural heritage has been also noted in academic research. UN-

ESCO has recognized intangible cultural heritage as living heritage that includes oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social uses, rituals, and festive events, knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, knowledge and techniques linked to traditional crafts. UNESCO has also recognized key threats that jeopardize its conservation: declining participation, declining interest among young people, advanced age of practitioners, few practitioners, loss of meaning, insufficient transmission, interrupted transmission (UNESCO, 2003, cf. Flórez Torres 2020: 52). As an approachable format that can be transmitted widely, and that is used by many young people, GIF can also contribute to overcoming these threats. It is a type of image that “thanks to its characteristics, allows for the transfer of elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage, turning it into a tool that provides new ways to preserve and disseminate it” (Flórez Torres 2020: 84).

Because of these multiple capacities of GIFs to be critical and educational in many areas, while at the same time leaving a lot of space for creativity, we argue that undergraduate and graduate students should become familiar with it, especially the students of arts and architecture. For this reason, the remaining part of the paper presents objectives, implementation, and outcomes of extra-curricular course on animated GIF that was specifically designed by dr Sonja Jankov, research associate, in collaboration with doc. art. Lana Stojićević, and carried out at the Arts Academy in Split, Croatia, over the period of ten days (April 7–16, 2025). The course was *site-specific*, but it can be tailored to fit different academic communities and different (architectural) heritage.

The extra-curricular course on animated GIF

Course objectives and tasks

The course had several goals: 1) to present multiple semantic and technological capacities of the GIF format to students; 2) to teach students to use various free tools to make GIFs; 3) to motivate students to explore creative potentials of GIF, relevant to their artistic or architectural research practices; 4) to teach students to express critical thinking through aesthetics of GIF; 5) to indirectly educate them about the designated modernist architectural complex. By connecting the education on animated GIF and modernist architectural heritage, the course was educational in several areas. Inspiration behind it was in Geert Lovink’s recommendations for teaching new media in

the arts and culture context – study programs in new media should “turn the student into a master of new-media language” (2011: 136), new media should be “taught from a variety of perspectives across a range of disciplines” (*ibidem*: 149), new media artistic practices need “not so much financial resources and state-of-the-art machines, but an inspiring environment in which students and staff, often assisted by outsiders, can create work” (*ibidem*: 151).

Course structure and implementation

The course was structured through public program and program designed just for students. The lecture, analytical presentation of selected GIFs about architecture, and a guided walk were open both to the interested students and to the public, while only previously registered students could take part in hands-on workshop, discussions, consultation sessions, and the exhibition of created works. The organizer was the Arts Academy in Split,⁵ as host institution for the residency supported by the Culture Moves Europe individual mobility program of the Goethe Institute. The exhibition of created works took place in a partner organization, the gallery and co-working space Prostor/Culture Hub Croatia, which is located in one of the largest residential complexes in Split – the so-called “Wall of China” by architect Frano Gotovac (Split, Croatia, 1928–1990). Based on the previous research of the course instructor and her curatorial work with architecture and GIFs, this residential complex was designated as the main subject about which the students were to make their animated GIFs. For this reason, the course was also open to the students of the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy.

The “Wall of China” complex is an interesting topic for several reasons. It is a historical testament to the socialist building policies that provided high-quality, affordable living space to thousands of workers, as well as a good example of urban policies that provided enough green areas around residential complexes and good connection with other urban contents (schools, medical facilities, sports and leisure areas, shopping districts, etc.). It is a great example

5 This course would not have been possible without cooperation and amazing organizational skills of doc. art. Lana Stojićević, Arts Academy in Split, who was directly involved in two months long preparation, promotion and realization of the whole event. The author of this text is very grateful to PhD Miona Miliša, the Dean of the Arts Academy in Split, for support and agreement with the Academy as hosting institution, to the team of Prostor/Culture Hub Croatia for providing the exhibition space and PR services, as well as to Goran Radošević, Department of Architecture from the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy in Split, for his help in moderating with students, video editing, providing high-quality images for the students, and for the documentation of the event.

of modernist architecture, embedded in local identity, yet it is relatively close to the historic area of Diocletian's palace. It was built by the country, society and politics that are now defunct, and it stood the test of time from the socialist federal state, the post-socialist transitions, to the context of the European Union, while all these social and cultural changes left marks on it.

It was designed by a local architect Frano Gotovac, who was actively engaged in architectural practice from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1980s. His oeuvre includes different types of buildings – a polyclinic, a school centre, a department store, a stadium and residential buildings. His expression is characterized by strict rationalist principles at the beginning of his career and explorations in modernist forms that resulted in voluminous buildings with rich plasticity in his later career. In all his buildings, he applied an original approach to facades and fronts, based on a structural and analytical method, which is also the case with the “Wall of China” complex that has dynamic orthogonal elements covering its facades. The whole complex consists of two 150m wide, ten stories high blocks, positioned parallel to each other at around 70m distance, while a third block is positioned perpendicularly, “thereby creating larger pedestrian and green areas between the buildings” (Perković Jović 2010: 156). The whole complex is, therefore, a good example of providing open spaces around residential buildings, but it is also interesting from the artistic point of view with its wide facades covered in orthogonal segments into which terraces and windows have been inserted.

The theoretic part of the course provided insights into the history of GIF format, as well as its relation to proto-filmic devices, and early explorations in the moving image. It presented the capacity of the animated GIF format to embody different techniques of visual and fine arts (drawing, photography, stop-motion animation, collage, film inserts, graphic communications, other forms of digital art), since “one of the most fascinating features of the GIF is precisely its abolition of the boundaries between different kinds of images” (Marmo 2016: 80). This part included analysis of several GIFs from the long-term curatorial project *GIF and Architecture: Visual Practice as Critique*,⁶ which were selected based on their aesthetics, relation to modernist architecture, and technology of making.

6 The project was launched in 2014. It initiates creation of new GIFs through educational sessions and curated exhibitions, but it also gathers and presents already existing GIFs that address politics of space, public space, social housing, history of architecture, theory of architecture, GIFs that are documentation of exhibitions, interventions and art in public space, architectural models, interior and product design, modular toys, new construction concepts and elements,

The students were familiarized with the “Wall of China” complex through the guided walk, after which they were gathered in a classroom to discuss their initial ideas and get feedback from doc. art. Lana Stojićević from the Arts Academy, Goran Radošević from the Department of Architecture from the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy, and the course instructor. We were also available for online and onsite consultations while the students were making GIFs, for which they had several days.

The students were instructed to use different techniques and processes to make GIFs, such as animating multiple static images (using EZGIF platform) such as photographs of drawings, buildings, models or anything else, adding already existing small animated GIFs to a static image (using GIPHY, Instagram or Facebook tools), adding glitter or other animated effects to flat surfaces of static images. The use of AI and free software for special effects was given as a possibility, but the preference was given to making GIFs from multiple static images in reference to history of animation and proto-filmic devices. This approach also gave students the opportunity to work on paper and photograph different stages of the work and animate it into a GIF. The students were also instructed not to use photographic material found online because of the potential copyright issues, but to create their own photographs, use photographs made by Goran Radošević specifically for the course, and/or architectural drawings and renderings that are in public domain.

Learning outcomes

Even though the students were familiar with the GIF format from social networks, this was their first use of the format in relation to their artistic or architectural practices, becoming by the end of the course *prosumers* of GIFs. While around 30 people attended the lecture, presentation and the guided tour, 21 students took part in the exhibition of 36 works: Tomislav Akrap, Marija Bare, Marija Ivanišević, Viktorija Ivelja, Jelena Jurčević, Hana Kalebić, Lora Lautar, Ante Šimun Medić, Manuela Mikulić, Josipa Nedjeljko, Đina Radulj, Marina Rebić, Petra Sente, Noa Sikirić, Katarina Šimunović, Ivana Škrobić, Antonela Šoda, Josip Šoša, Leonora Ugrin, Roko Vidović, and Lara Zelić.

GIFs used within PR practices, or in forensic architecture. For the description of the project, and the GIFs it presents, see its website: <https://gifcritique.wixsite.com/gifcritique>

Most of the students embraced the critical aspect of the GIF format to address weak spots in public space that they had noticed. Tomislav Akrap created a GIF in which air conditioners and satellite dish antennas proliferate to the extent that every flat has them, despite the fact that it is somewhat difficult to install them on the facade.⁷ Josip Šoša printed an archival photograph of the building from 1971, when it was finished. He then used paint thinner to erase some parts of the building and manually drew new flats and terraces which in the animation looked as if they were popping like mushrooms. With this contrast between mechanical image of the building and manually drawn new structures, Šoša visually presented the difference between the planned, state funded and professional building, and residents' private expansions of their living space. His critique is directed to the wide problem of uncontrollable and malignant spreading of private space on the account of the public, which is a problem that goes beyond the Mediterranean, or even European borders.

In his GIF Ante Šimun Medić also turned to the proliferation of residential space, but within popular tourist sites. He inserted the expanded "Wall of China" complex into the Diocletian's Palace in Split, a very popular tourist destination, built in 293 AD, and listed in 1979 by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Diocletian's Palace is now a place of numerous shops, restaurants, cafes, and other tourist attractions, while many flats have been renovated and turned into apartments and hostels. By inserting the "Wall of China" complex into the 17 centuries old protected structure, Šimun Medić ironically pointed out how popularity of a site can drastically change it due to unsustainable politics of space and development, led by profit-led interests.

Negative aspects of development and expansion of cities have been also addressed by Dina Radulj who in her GIF criticized the proliferation of cars in cities and the lack of parking spaces for them. The cars in her GIF are moving both horizontally and vertically on the facade, in all directions, while there is also a tow truck that removed one improperly parked car on the facade. Leonora Ugrin and Marija Bare also focused on the facade, in particular on the windows and terraces, where the private and the public meet. Ugrin used a photograph of the building, cut out the blinds and moved them so that they show tenants who are unaware that passers-by can see them. Bare used semi-transparent tracing paper to make several layers of drawings and sever-

7 For Akrap's GIF and several other selected GIFs created during the course, see the article "Arhitektonska baština u GIF formi," *Vizkultura*, April 30, 2025, <https://vizkultura.hr/arhitektonska-bastina-u-gif-formi/>

al smaller elements in shape of clothes on terraces that she moved and photographed in every position, animating later those photographs into a GIF.

Several students connected the “Wall of China” complex to Chinese culture, or to popular culture in Croatia, such as the songs or images of Dino Dvornik, who had been living in the complex for some time. Some inserted a 1985 photo portrait of the architect Frano Gotovac by Jadran Babić or images of Pink Panther to criticize breaking of a side facade to build an additional window and install an air conditioner. Others emphasized the aesthetic features of the orthogonal facade elements, by adding colours to images of them, so that they became similar to Burberry pattern, or by transforming the buildings into pixelized animated graphics. Hana Kalebić created, perhaps, the most artistic GIFs, including several GIFs in which she combined her drawings and blueprints of the building, combining them into an animation in which everything seems to be swimming. She also created GIFs that are miming the aesthetics of “Good morning, pleasant coffee” cards on social networks, using the images of the “Wall of China” complex to present that good neighbourly wishes and customs originating in real space are moving into cyberspace thanks to online connections.

Combination of digitized hand drawings and digital technologies resulted in high aesthetic value of the GIFs created by students. Additional aesthetic layer was created by the loop that is one of the main features of the GIF format. As Lev Manovich notices, loop is characteristic both for nineteenth century proto-filmic devices and early digital movies that share the limitations of storage, but also for programming and computer games that heavily use loops of characters’ motions (2001: 265). However, Manovich does not see loop as an aftermath of technical limitation, but rather “as a source of new possibilities for new media” (*ibidem*). In GIFs, a loop can be a presentation of an endless process, or absurd situation, of concepts like a Möbius strip, it can serve as an engine, or as a bridge between different narratives. In the GIFs created by students, the loop serves to create an illusion of endless flow – either as a serene scene (coffee with neighbours) or as a constant problematic occurrence (proliferation of graffiti), disco effect (in reference to a pop singer who lived in the complex), humorous situations, or as recurring reminder that critical usurpation of public space still exists and needs solving.

The diversity of topics and techniques used by the participating students shows that the course, apart from providing specific skills of making GIFs, covered a broader range of topics including architectural history, spatial pol-

itics, or digital literacy, whose main components are technical skills, information literacy (the ability to locate, evaluate, and use digital information critically and responsibly), communication skills, ethical awareness, adaptability, creative production (Granowski 2025: 126). The course also provided the students with the reference of participating in the group exhibition, as all the GIFs were edited and exhibited in Prostor/Culture Hub Croatia. At the opening, the students gathered and presented shortly their GIFs to each other and to the audience, in particular, how they made them, what they presented and why they depicted that topic/issue.

Conclusion and recommendations

Through the course, the students mastered several skills: 1) expressing both artistic and critical thinking through GIFs; 2) creating GIFs from various media (drawing, photography, stop-motion animation, collage, film inserts, graphic communications, other forms of digital art); 3) creating GIFs using free online tools; 4) creating GIFs related to architectural heritage; 5) preparing GIFs to be presented publicly (online and in a gallery setting); 6) using loop as aesthetic and semantic element in their works. On theoretic level, the students learned about: 1) history of animated GIF and its relation to beginnings of cinema and to new artistic practices; 2) various applications of the animated GIF in the area of arts, architecture, PR practices, criticism; 3) history of the designated architectural complex; 4) challenges the modernist architecture is facing today; 5) aspects of digital literacy related to copyright of online images. The learning outcomes also include experiential skills (inter-sectorial experience, presentation and communication, research and project work). The diversity of such outcomes testifies that the GIF is a very suitable format to cover several topics and teach several skills, while at the same time being interesting, humorous and easy to make.

The silent, looping, easily disseminated, expressive, low-bandwidth GIF is a digital format which gives many possibilities. Creators can make it from a scratch, using their own material, or they can make it from already existing digital material, such as archival footage, photographs, film clips, renderings, charts, etc. GIF is very suitable for art students to experiment with short animations made from analogue techniques that are later digitized and animated into a GIF, but also to experiment with digital art. This is a way for them to work in digital format that does not include complicated technique or long-time learning, as well as to experience the aesthetics and

critical aspects of short moving digital media. For students of architecture, GIF provides a space for critical engagement, but it can also be helpful in presenting and promoting their ideas and projects. For audience, GIFs can be educational, informative, funny, provoking, engaging, and supportive; they often bring something that can't be expressed in verbal communication. For all these reasons, animated GIFs are a more suitable form of expression and communication of ideas than some classical artistic media or architectural modes of presentation.

Since GIFs can be easily made using free online digital tools, it is highly recommended that undergraduate and postgraduate students are engaged with them more. Short courses like the one held in Split raise awareness in young people about things that can be communicated using visual format, but also equip them with skills in using GIF further in their practices. Such courses can be adapted to different topics and to students of different disciplines, but in the process, it is recommended to follow several steps that were applied in Split: 1) choose a wider topic, so that the course connects participants from different disciplines; 2) provide good quality digital photographs or other digital material specifically for the course, free of copyright restraints; 3) gather participants and have an open discussion about possible ways to present their ideas in GIF format; 4) remain available to provide technical help in making GIFs and professional help regarding the topic/issue addressed in the GIFs; 5) at the end of the process, gather all authors to describe their works and the process from the initial idea to the final work; 6) in the first online publication of the newly created GIFs, include the names of the authors and the description of the context of their creation, so that they can be sourced back when they spread over the internet; 7) if participants are students of arts, include aesthetic evaluation of works.

If the course was to last longer, or become an accredited study program, it would allow each student to practice different techniques of making GIFs. It would also offer a wider perspective of relation of GIF to other new media art and to the theory of new media. Additionally, the longer period would allow for a growing database of students' GIFs and cooperation with similar educational institutions in the country and abroad, through presentation, exhibitions and lectures of visiting professors from various disciplines, so that more topics could be addressed in this format. Since GIF is widely applied in different areas, it would be also appealing to students of communication and media studies, journalism, data management and statistics, management. Furthermore, GIFs can be used in team building, audience building, promo-

tion of scientific results, as well as in many other areas that are yet to discover the positive aspects of this format. As such, GIF remains an inspiring format to be explored and used even beyond the undergraduate and postgraduate studies, but the first step in this process would be giving it more focus within higher education.

Bibliography

- Abbruzzese Abajián, M. (2022). La insubordinación del GIF: obsolescencia, repetición y silencio en la globalización mediática (The Insubordination of the GIF: Obsolescence, Repetition, and Silence in Media Globalization). En: Javier Alejandro Camargo Castillo, Roberto Domínguez Cáceres (editores), *Departituras y senderos de los estudios humanísticos*, (285–309). Ciudad de México: Bonilla Artigas Editores.
- Bakhshi, S., Shamma, D., Kennedy, L., Song, Y., de Juan, P., Kaye, J. (2016). Fast, Cheap, and Good: Why Animated GIFs Engage Us. In *CHI '16: Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (575–586). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858532>
- Bering-Porter, D. (2014). The automaton in all of us: GIFs, cinemagraphs and the films of Martin Arnold. *Moving Image Review & Art Journal (MIRAJ)*, 3(2), 178–192. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/miraj.3.2.178_1
- Bolter, J. D. and Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. The MIT Press.
- Fan, Y. (2022). Analyzing the semiotic nature of GIFs: visual nominalization and visual telicity. *Language and Semiotic Studies*, 8(3), 45–65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/lass-2022-2004>
- Ferrando, D. T. (2017). Gifs on the Wing. On the current condition of the architectural image. *COCA. I international conference on architectural communication*, 17-19 June 2017. Digital proceedings. Madrid, ETSAM, UP.
- Flórez Torres, A. (2020). Cultural Loop: el GIF animado como herramienta artística para la preservación del patrimonio cultural inmaterial en la era digital (Cultural Loop: The Animated GIF as an Artistic Tool for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Digital Age) – MA thesis. Valencia: Universitat Politecnica de Valencia.
- Granowski, A. (2025). The Aesthetic Components of GIFs in Online Instruction Analyzing GIFs in Help Center Instruction Based Articles. *Advances in Literary Study*, 13, 125-136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2025.132010>

- Gutiérrez-Ujaque, D., Degen, M., Bonastra, Q. (2025). Using GIFscapes to examine young people's affective experiences of urban spaces. *Geoforum*, 160. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104231>
- Hayes, B., Fatima, S. (2024). "A language we understand": Students' perceptions of emojis, memes and gifs in higher education teaching. *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, 5(3), 154–177.
- Henthorn, J. (2023). Using GIFs to Position Students as Scholars. *Prompt: A Journal of Academic Writing Assignments*, 7(1), 11–21. DOI: 10.31719/pjaw.v7i1.94
- Jankov, S. (2017). Animated GIF as a method for Documenting Architecture. *Interkulturalnost*, 13, 71–79.
- Jankov, S. (2018). Animated GIF and Architecture. In Bogdanović, R. (Ed.), *Going Digital: Innovation in Art, Architecture, Science and Technology in Digital Era*, (171–182). Belgrade: STRAND – Sustainable Urban Society Association.
- Jones, C. (2015). Lorna Mills: visual art, images & animations. In: Jennings, G. (Ed.) *Abstract Video. The Moving Image in Contemporary Art* (138–144). Oakland: University of California Press.
- Lovink, G. (2002). *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*. The MIT Press.
- Lovink, G. (2011). The Battle over New-Media Arts Education: Experiences and Models. In: *My First Recession. Critical Internet Culture in Transition* (133–156). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Lovink, G. (2020) Requiem for the Network. In Gansing, K. and Luchs, I. (Eds.), *The Eternal Network: The Ends and Becomings of Network Culture* (pp. 102–115). Institute of Network Cultures.
- Lovink, G. (2022). *Stuck on the Platform. Reclaiming the Internet*. Amsterdam: Valiz.
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The Language of New Media*. The MIT Press.
- Manovich, L. (2014). Postmedia Aesthetics. In Kinder, M. and McPherson, T. (Eds.), *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities* (80–97). Oakland: University of California Press.
- Marmo, L. (2016). Looping, Laughing and Longing: The Animated GIF in the Contemporary Online Environment. *Comunicazioni sociali*, 1, special issue: *Snapshot Culture: the Photographic Experience in the Post-Medium Age*, edited by Adriano D'Aloia and Francesco Parisi, 78–86.
- Miltner, K., Highfield, T. (2017). Never Gonna GIF You Up: Analyzing the Cultural Significance of the Animated GIF. *Social Media + Society*, 3(3), 1–11. DOI: 10.1177/2056305117725223

- Morgan, C., Scholma-Mason, N. (2017). Animated GIFs as Expressive Visual Narratives and Expository Devices in Archaeology. *Internet Archaeology*, 44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.44.11>
- Perković Jović, V. (2010). Stambene zgrade arhitekta Frane Gotovca na Spinutu u Splitu. *Prostor*, 18(1/39), 152–165.
- Prosperi, G. (2019). Digital Communication in a GIF Culture: The Graphic Interchange Format as a Behavioral Crossroad of Contemporary Paradigms. In Dogan, B. O. and Ünlü, D. G. (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Examining Cultural Policies Through Digital Communication* (268–292). DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6998-5.ch013
- Reyes, M., Kaepfel, K., Bjorngard-Basayne, E. (2018). Memes and GIFs as Powerful Classroom Tools. December 12, 2018, accessed June 6, 2025, <<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-with-technology-articles/memes-and-gifs-as-powerful-classroom-tools/>>.
- Tongiani, S. (2017). Distorsioni spazio-temporali: dalle GIFs animate a ritroso. *Studies in Philosophy of Literature, Aesthetics and New Media Theories*, special issue: *Remediation: Art, Technology and Humanity*, edited by Ester Fuoco, 3(1-2), 63–85.
- Tracey, A., Taylor, E. (2024). Three reasons you should be using GIFs in online learning and teaching. August 6, 2024, accessed June 6, 2025, <<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/teaching-matters/three-reasons-you-should-be-using-gifs-in-online-learning-and-teaching/>>.
- Vizkultura, „Arhitektonska baština u GIF formi“, 30. 4. 2025, poslednji put pristupljeno 23. 6. 2025, <<https://vizkultura.hr/arhitektonska-bastina-u-gif-formi/>>.
- Westbrook, F. (2023). How to Analyse Emojis, GIFs, Embedded Images, Videos, and URLs: A Bakhtinian Methodological Approach. Profiling Emerging Research Innovations. *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 8, 1–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/23644583-bja10042>
- Wiggins, B. (2019). *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality*. Routledge.
- Wiggins, B. (2022). Memes and the media narrative. In Chaoqun Xie (Ed.), *The Pragmatics of Internet Memes* (64–84). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

ANIMIRANI GIF U KONTEKSTU OSNOVNIH I POSTDIPLOMSKIH STUDIJA UMETNOSTI I ARHITEKTURE

Apstrakt

Rad se fokusira na animirani GIF, njegovu istoriju i karakteristike na osnovu kojih je postao medij digitalne komunikacije, ali i prepoznat kao vid novomedijske umetnosti. GIF-u se u radu pristupa kao mediju koji ima kritički, edukativni i promotivni kapacitet, te se koristi u javnim debatama o različitim temama, u edukativnim procesima, u promociji naučnih rezultata ili različitih vidova nasleđa, uključujući vizuelno, arhitektonsko i nematerijalno kulturno nasleđe. Kako edukacija o animiranom GIF-u nije deo osnovnih ni postdiplomskih programa studija, studenti ga susreću kao gotov produkt i koriste u komunikaciji na društvenim mrežama, umesto da kreiraju GIF-ove za potrebe svojih istraživanja i projekata. Sa ciljem da se takvo stanje promeni, na Umjetničkoj akademiji u Splitu je aprila 2025. organizovan kurs o animiranim GIF-ovima, kako za studente Akademije, tako i za studente Fakulteta građevinarstva, arhitekture i geodezije. Kurs je obuhvatio nekoliko faza – predavanje, analitičku prezentaciju odabranih GIF-ova iz dugogodišnjeg projekta GIF i arhitektura: vizuelna praksa kao kritika, šetnju kroz arhitektonski kompleks „Kineski zid“ Frana Gotovca u Splitu, radionicu, diskusije, konsultativne sesije i izložbu nastalih radova u galeriji Prostor/Culture Hub Croatia koja se nalazi u kompleksu „Kineski zid“. Rad zaključuje da je, spajanjem edukacije o animiranom GIF-u i arhitektonskom nasleđu, kurs bio edukativan u nekoliko domena i omogućio učešće na izložbi studentima koji su se prijavili. U radu se prepoznaje da bi slični, specifično kreirani kursevi mogli biti od interesa studentima medija, novinarstva, menadžmenta i drugih disciplina, kao i da se GIF-ovi mogu koristiti u procesu razvoja publike, promocije naučnih rezultata, te u mnogim drugim oblastima koje nisu obuhvaćene osnovnim i postdiplomskim obrazovanjem. U radu se iz tog razloga daje i nekoliko preporuka koje se mogu uzeti u obzir pri kreiranju novih kurseva o GIF-ovima.

Cljučne reči

animirani GIF, umetnička edukacija, arhitektura, nasleđe, novi mediji, digitalna umetnost

Received: 25. 6. 2025.

Accepted: 13. 10. 2025.