

Searching, Learning, Gaming - Engaging students with Europeana's digital archives

*Cristina Ioana ROIU*¹,

*¹Library of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, Romania
crissroi@gmail.com*

Abstract

Mass digitisation of the collections held by cultural institutions -galleries, libraries, museums, archives, have made available a huge amount of historical, cultural, informational resources in digital format, which are more and more used in educational activities. This paper describes some innovative non- formal educational activities developed around the Europeana1914-1918 archive between 2014-2018, where searching in big digital archives, gaming and improving the digital skills were key aspects.

Keywords: digital archives, non-formal education, gamification, digital skills

1 Education in big digital archives times -general context

In the last decades GLAM institutions worldwide have massively digitised their' collections to increase access to these collections, to offer multiple services and to engage audiences with this digital content.

Therefore, at present time a plethora of cultural digital resources is available to be used by cultural lovers, professionals, researchers, people from creative sectors or education.

From the perspective of students and teachers, it is well known that cultural heritage has a crucial role to play in education as digital collections can provide multiple perspectives on historical, scientific, and cultural developments across Europe and beyond.

In order to bring these sources of knowledge to every learner, educator or educational organisation and to explore the pedagogical potential of the digital cultural collections, GLAM institutions(galleries, libraries, archives, museums) have been continuously developing educational activities in collaboration with the educational sector.

The main challenges when dealing with such a huge number of digital items are usually associated with:

- What collections should be used?
- How to use them in education in order to maximize the impact of educational activities?
- Which new patterns and models in education are needed?

2 Europeana and the educational uses of its' collections

With its' more than 57 million digital items, Europeana - Europe's digital platform for cultural heritage is one of the major players within the digital cultural heritage sector worldwide.

Trying to achieve its' main aim -to empower the cultural heritage sector in its digital transformation, Europeana develops expertise, tools and policies to embrace digital change and encourage partnerships that foster innovation.

But in the first place, Europeana's activities and projects make it easier for people to use digital cultural heritage for education, research, creation and recreation.

During the last 10 years, Europeana's projects and digital collections involved multiple innovative educational activities and enabled successful collaborations between sectors like GLAMs and education (or creative industries and education).

Educators in Europe and worldwide frequently use Europeana's digital collections as they come from trustful sources and many items are free to reuse for educational purposes.

3 The Europeana 1914-1918 project and its' educational activities in Romania

Prior to the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War and all the way through the end of 2018 we have witnessed a great interest and a rediscovery of the First World War times everywhere in Europe and worldwide.

Media and editorial productions, exhibitions and thousands of cultural and historical events and projects were dedicated to describing this historical event that changed the whole world in a dramatic way.

Within this plethora of projects and events dedicated to WWI the Europeana 1914-1918 (1) project was special, as it brought a different approach to describing the Great War times and to cultural history, linking people's own stories to the official histories of the war.

Europeana 1914-1918, which has become with the years the most successful Europeana project in terms of public engagement - has been launched in 2011 with the first Community Collecting Day held in Germany.

Originated in a 2006 University of Oxford's idea, the project aimed at collecting letters, family objects, photos and other memorabilia dating from WWI time privately held by Europeans in order to be digitised and then added to the Digital Archive Europeana 1914-1918.

During the time, this WWI Europeans'Archive gathered more than 10,000 interesting family stories most of them unpublished before and more than 100,000 digitised pages in text, image or audio format.

By bringing together in January 2014 this dataset with two other digital archives built during the Europeana 1914-1918 Collections Project (400 000 WWI items digitized from the collections of some of the most important European libraries) and Europeana EFG 1914 (collecting in digital format 660 hours of films and audio-visual materials from WWI times) it has been created the greatest digital Archive dedicated to WWI worldwide).

3.1 Europeana 1914-1918 and the 'School Otherwise Week'Workshops 2014

Even from the beginning of the Europeana 1914-1918 project major institutions like British Library tried to create educational materials using this impressive digital archive. In this way, the British Library's educational website (2) designed in co-operation with history teachers offers very interesting learning resources dedicated to WWI .

The team who coordinated the first Collection Days in Romania has also organised in April 2014 in Bucharest a series of workshops and meetings regarding World War One and Europeana 1914-1918 Archive during the 'School Otherwise Week's non- formal educational program.

At these activities a lot of students and pupils took part, where the 'Ion Neculce', 'Gheorghe Lazăr', 'Ion Luca Caragiale' National Colleges and the 'Titu Maiorescu' Secondary School have been involved [3].

Searching together with their' teachers through the Romanian documents of Europeana1914-1918 archive ,but using also the English and French digitized

memorabilia, the students from 9 –12 grades have tried to recreate the atmosphere of those times and select some stories or characters that impressed them.

They have written essays about these stories or characters and produced Power Point presentations which were presented to their' colleagues during the workshops.

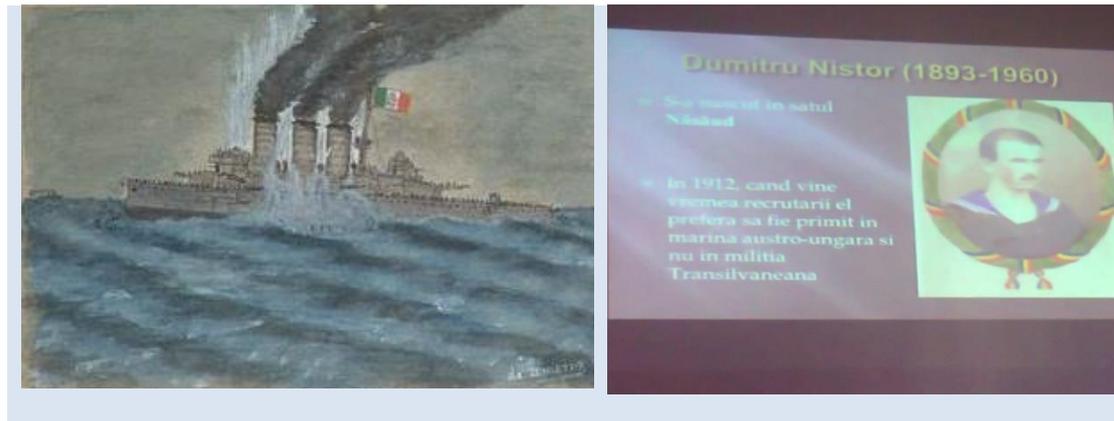


Figure 1. Images from the ppt presentation of Dumitru Nistor's life

The students tried to describe not only the historical perspective on the events but also to emphasize the human reactions to those events. In this way, the subject of their essays focused on some important historical characters, personal stories or some interesting topics (4) :

- The Story of Dumitru Nistor
- Queen Maria of Romania and the First World War
- Artists in wartime
- Children in wartime
- The moral support of the home families for the soldiers
- Medals and medals recipients in The Great War
- The story of Iuliu Bologa
- A story about the Romanian Scouts

Some conclusions after these workshops:

The students loved to learn about WWI from personal diaries or documents: these memorabilia have the power of a testimony, there is a visual impact and also the storyteller's personal feelings' impact.

The students improved their ability to search in a big digital archive looking for multiple digital formats: text, image, audio, audio-visual and multilinguistic material.

They have also improved their English and/ or French knowledges and learned how to make a good Power-Point presentation.

The students' abilities to create links between different stories and topics and to place an event within a global context have also been improved

From the teachers' point of view, the Europeana 1914-1918 archive contains first hand resources of exceptional documentary value, because they come from the descendants of the people directly involved in the war like the officers, the soldiers and their families.

A History teacher from the 'Ion Neculce' National College described the Europeana 1914-1918 Archive from the historian but also from the teacher point of view:

'It is all about a lived history, where scientific information goes hand in hand with sensitivity, the sense with the sensibility.

Every piece of historical information is filtered by the personal experience of the storyteller so that objective and subjective, general and particular are melting together in a multifaceted view.

The perspectives on the events are dramatic, heroic and tragic. War has created special and unusual situations at which people reacted in unexpected ways. Values and attitudes like humanitarianism, dignity, tolerance, critical thinking are to be remembered above all.'

3.2 Europeana 1914-1918 and Gaming-type activities for students- 2018

Four years after the above described workshops, the Romanian Europeana 1914-1918 team and students and teachers from the 'Ion Neculce' College in Bucharest have developed together other interesting activities , in the special context of the 2018 year: marking 100 years since the end of WWI and the Great Union of Romania.

The series of workshops were intended to present important facts about WWI and the importance of the year 1918 for Romania in innovative ways using mainly game type activities.

In the first workshop students learned how to use the Kahoot application on their phones and then watched a series of videos highlighting important WWI events and context.

A competition tested their First World War related knowledge using the Kahoot application: questions and answers alternatives were displayed on a shared screen while students answered on their devices.

The students firstly divided into three work groups answered the questions related to the WWI theme during the time allocated by the Kahoot application. At the next stage they competed individually, the whole event being extremely appreciated by the students.

The presentation of the Europeana1914-1918 digital Archive -mainly the Romanian held items has concluded the workshop.

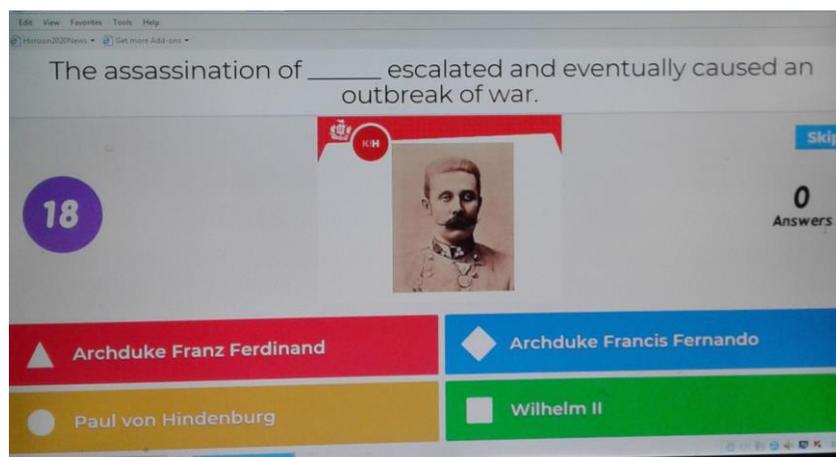


Figure 2. A Kahoot Question from the competition

It is well known that Kahoot! is now used by many teachers to present the content in a more engaging way, to deepen understanding, increase class participation and improve how much information students actually remember. By combining slides with quiz and poll questions in a kahoot, one can provide additional explanation and context to a topic or a new piece of material.

All in all students enjoyed this interactive session where the already held WWI knowledge was completed by new data about Romania's situation at the end of the War, the situation on the front, the movement of the troops and the situation of the families left at home. The materials used - diary pages, photographs, stories and family documents as well as films from the First World War time had a special impact on students.

The Second Workshop –Searching Europeana1914-1918 archive and Creating GIFs

With the launch of the famous GIF IT UP competition in October 2018 the students and teachers of the 'Ion Neculce' College and the Romanian Europeana team had the opportunity to collaborate again.

GIF IT UP - an annual online competition, organised by Europeana, Digital Public Library of America, Trove and DigitalNZ, challenges people to use digitised cultural heritage material to produce unique GIFs (animated images) and share them online.

GIF IT UP is also supported by GIPHY, the world's largest library of animated GIFs.

Participants must use the openly licensed paintings, photography and texts digitised in Europeana Collections and the digital libraries of the other organisers to create, submit, and share striking new GIFs. While the competition has an appeal to all culture lovers, encouraging students to make GIFs in educational contexts offers young people an opportunity to animate and engage with cultural heritage.

The 2018 GIF IT UP edition had a special section dedicated to World War One to mark the end of The Great War.

In this context, during the second workshop students learned to produce GIFs and also learned about copyright and what images can be used from the digital collections of the organizing institutions.

The practical exercises offered the opportunity to search again in Europeana 1914-1918 image archive and select interesting images to produce GIFs. In this complex process of browsing the digital collections, students also learned a lot about historical events and the general WWI context and have improved their knowledge of foreign languages while also having fun.

Many of them submitted their creations online and felt the responsibility and pride of taking part in a famous online competition. One of the students received the public choice award for her GIF in the 2018 competition.



Figure 3. Anamaria Şune's winning GIF of the GIF IT UP 2018 People's Choice Award
<https://giphy.com/gifs/gifitup-gifitup2018-XHKvHPrpfCcn4x5az3>

Following this workshop, these kind of activities were considered an excellent form of engaging young people with the digital cultural and historical content of Europeana.

4 Conclusions

The potential for the use of digital cultural heritage in education is widely acknowledged, but it doesn't happen just by providing access to the material. Sources need to be selected, contextualised, and (crucially) become part of learning activities for students.

Big archives like Europeana 1914-1918 being pan-European, can offer a global image on the events allowing the students to see them in a larger context and to better understand the traumatic experiences faced by all Europeans during World War One no matter which side their governments were on during the conflict.

The informational resources are trustful and comprehensive offering a multilingual, multiformat and complex digital archive where particularly the image and audio-visual resources are very attractive for students.

The activities associated with students' personal searching in Europeana1914-1918 are a good example of integration of exploratory approaches to learning, strengthening students creativity and retention.

New technologies offer multiple opportunities to engage student learning in new ways, one of these potentials for motivating students to learn being gamification (or game-based learning).

The growing popularity of gamification in education resides in its potential to foster motivation, behavioural changes, friendly competition and collaboration in different contexts [5].

Gamification in the above presented cases is associated more with gamefully experiences rather than introduction of game design elements in a systematic design of learning processes.

Raising interest for such an important topic like the First World War, followed by an engaged attitude from the students was one of the major successes of these activities.

During the above described activities students learned not only important historical aspects, but they understood what copyright is, have improved their digital skills and the ability to successfully search in big archives.

Adaptability and interdisciplinary approaches to learning are keys in the new eLearning environment and GLAMs with their (now) impressive digital collections have an important role to play in shaping new patterns and new models in education.

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