

GOING OPEN BEING GLAM



Summer evening on Skagen's Southern Beach (cropped), by Peder Severin Krøyer, Public domain, via Europeana, from Skagen Museum

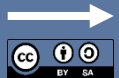


WHAT IS OPEN ACCESS

Generally speaking, in the field of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM), the notion of “open” or “open access” stands for making available online material and digital reproductions of their collections with as few copyright restrictions as possible.

Most professionals agree that digital reproductions of public domain works should remain in the public domain.

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WHAT A GLAM CAN OPEN

Open access can be applied to different kinds of content a GLAM could be responsible of:

- 1/ Digitized works in the public domain;
- 2/ Works and original content under copyright, whose author has given permission to share with as few copyright restrictions as possible;
- 3/ Original content produced by the GLAM itself;
- 4/ Metadata produced by the institution.

HOW TO GO OPEN

“Open data and content can be freely used, modified, and shared by anyone for any purpose”

Open Definition
by Open Knowledge Foundation

According to this definition, some Creative Commons licenses are more suitable for Open Access policies than others. CC BY and CC BY SA are perfectly fit for the purpose, as well as CC0 or the Public Domain mark, and Rights Statements which indicate there is no Copyright underlying the work.

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THE BEAUTY OF OPEN ACCESS



Irises (cropped), Public Domain, via Europeana, from Rijksmuseum

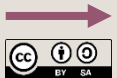


COMPLYING WITH THE MISSION

As long as the mission of GLAM is to protect documents, artworks and remains of the past to be shared with the public and delivered to future generations, adopting open access policies should be a natural decision for cultural institution, although not always easy and fast.

Here are some of the benefits of open access to cultural heritage.

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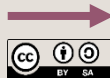


MEET YOUR AUDIENCES

Releasing online digital reproductions of works collected by an institution is important to show the world its real value. It helps attracting new visitors to the museum, but also finding new supporters and donors, which are beneficial for the life of any GLAM.

The Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam, on the «Rijks Studio» section of its website, makes it easy to find and download high definition images of its collections. The information available there is useful both to prepare a visit and to study the work.

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GET PEOPLE ENGAGED

At the beginning of the Pandemic, when museums were closed and people were – in the best-case scenario – getting bored at home, the Getty Museum launched a challenge that had a great impact all over the world. Thousands of people tried to recreate at home some masterpiece of its collections, starting from reproduction available online and shared via social media.

As of today, this is one of the best case histories of the added value (in creativity, leisure, but also relief) that sharing art online can bring.

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SHARING TO STUDYING

Making digitized works accessible online is not only a matter of marketing or social media strategy. It also helps increasing research around collections and collaborations between researchers and institutions. This is the reason why Wikimedia Italia has been helping GLAMs, especially smaller ones, to release online their collections.

Using Wikimedia Projects, a PhD student from Corea could find information from Italian archives, minimizing movements and exploring many more opportunities.

THE COST OF OPEN ACCESS

The White Apple Tree (cropped), by Antanas Samuolis, Public domain,
via Europeana, from Lithuanian Art Museum



MANY CHALLENGES TO FACE

Developing and applying open access policies comes with a cost, which often requires a shift in the point of view and an accurate evaluation of the risks of this decision.

GLAMs do not just fear digitization and its costs, but more often are concerned by the changing in business model they would be asked to face, or by liability issues linked to the use of the works they could release to open access.

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WHO PAYS FOR THAT

GLAM is an umbrella term for many kind of institutions very different, in terms of seize, annual budget and business models. Many GLAMs fear that opening their collections will bring to a decrease in the number of visitors, or in the income generated by licensing reproduction rights.

Of course any change will have some consequences, but, as the director of the Museo Egizio of Turin [admitted](#), often having a person on the payroll to oversee copyright matters is more expensive than the amount of money collected per year in this way.

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MISUSING THE WORKS

Once a digitized work is released, many GLAMs fear that it could be misused, with no space for them to have any control over it.

With works in the public domain, it is actually not up to the GLAM which host it to decide how or by whom these can be used. At the contrary, GLAMs can suggest guidelines on how their works should or should not be used, publicly disagree with harmful adaptations of their works, and, on the top of that, educate their audience about the work, to avoid not respectful uses.

PICTURES ON SALE

A similar approach should be taken even against websites that sell images of artworks in the public domain. A GLAM could fear that, releasing its own reproductions on the web with any restriction, as open access definition requires, it will foster such bad practices.

Despite these website being respectful of the law, as long as they sell pictures of woks in the public domain, GLAMs should invest in placing themselves as a primary source of information and high quality images, offering a public and reliable service.

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MAKE THEM FREE

Faun and Nymph, by Edvard Weie, CC0,
via Europeana, from Statens Museum for Kunst

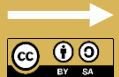


KNOW THE COPYRIGHT STATUS

Once an organization decides to digitize its collection, or part of it, some preparatory work is required.

It is a good practice to clarify the copyright of every work at the time of the acquisition. If it is still unclear when the digitization process starts, that is the right moment to check if somebody could claim any copyright over the work. When the author is unknown, the copyright status could be hard to define, with potentially sensitive legal consequences.

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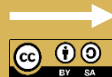


CONSIDER THE LOCAL LEGAL CONTEXT

Copyright laws depend on territoriality, not only to decide if a work is in the public domain, but also if a digital reproduction of this work should be considered as copyrighted.

For example, although many prominent voices insist on the point that digital reproductions of public domain works should be not protected by copyright, in Italy these kind of works are protected for 20 years. That is something to consider if you are an Italian GLAM.

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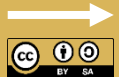


CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS WITH CARE

Anyway, if the GLAM is the responsible of the digitization, it will always have the opportunity to decide how to release its own reproductions. An Italian GLAM could apply a CC0 to its digitized works, to dedicate them to the public domain.

Otherwise, the Public Domain Mark will work to highlight the status of a work in the public domain, reminding the people what they will be allowed to do with that. It is important to add the machine-readable layer to the work released online.

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LOOK UP AT THE BEST

You should always explain your open access policy to the public, which will benefit from the digitized collection online. Many institutions have already made an excellent work in defining and sharing their policies, which could be taken as example in producing your own.

The Rijksmuseum opted for a very straightforward [presentation](#), while the Getty Museum, beside the general [presentation](#), also elaborated some [FAQ](#), which could always be useful to re-users.

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