Growing an international Cultural Heritage Labs community

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'Cultural Heritage Labs' in galleries, libraries, archives and museums around the world help researchers, artists, entrepreneurs, educators and innovators to work on, experiment, incubate and develop their ideas of working with digital content through competitions, awards, projects, exhibitions and other engagement activities. They do this by providing services and infrastructure to enable, facilitate and give access to their data both openly online and onsite for research, inspiration and enjoyment.

In September 2018, the British Library Labs team organised a 'Building Library Labs'' international workshop. The event provided the opportunity for colleagues that are planning or already have digital experimental 'Labs' to share knowledge, experiences and lessons learned. The workshop, which attracted over 40 institutions from North America, Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa, demonstrated a clear need and enthusiasm for establishing an international support network. Within 6 months, a second international workshop was organised at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen in March 2019. In total we have brought together some 120 participants and an even wider community of around 250 people online. Some have been sharing their experiences in setting, using and running innovation labs, but there was a sizeable group of attendees who are planning to set up such labs and need advice and support in how to do this.

The aim of this short paper is to present the journey and development of the International Labs community and outline our future activities.

The principle of the network is that by fair sharing and 'paying forward' our expertise, knowledge and experiences, the group hopes to ensure that organisations don't have to 're-invent the wheel'. Organisations can learn from each other and enable collaboration across borders through their digital collections, data, services, infrastructure and practice. This we hope this will result in building better digital 'Labs' for their organisations and their users and help to further open up data and services for everyone.

People are the essence of the international Labs network. From the results of an initial global Building Library Labs survey, including 40 responses from 23 countries, there was significant interest from the wider cultural heritage sector, beyond libraries. With currently 250 people, from over 60 institutions, based in over 30 countries affiliated with the network, a solid set of communication tools were needed. The network has a shared Google drive, a mailing list and a Wiki, as well as an active WhatsApp group, a Slack channel and meets regularly via Zoom.

With two successful events behind us, and plenty of enthusiasm and willingness to continue activities further, we now looking to the future. Planned activities include: a booksprint to capture significant knowledge and expertise within the Labs network serving as a reference guide for people wanting to build their own lab, populating our wiki and creating a global directory of Cultural Heritage labs. Further regional and international events have and are also being organised. In less than a year, the Labs network has come a long way, and this is only the beginning!

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In September 2018, the British Library Labs team[1] organised a '*Building Library Labs"* international workshop[2]. The event provided the opportunity for colleagues that are planning or already have digital experimental 'Labs' to share knowledge, experiences and lessons learned. The workshop, which attracted over 40 institutions from North America, Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa, demonstrated a clear need and enthusiasm for establishing an international support network. Within 6 months, a second international workshop was organised at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen[3] in March 2019. In total we have brought together some 120 participants and an even wider community of around 250 people online. Some have been sharing their experiences in setting, using and running innovation labs, but there was a sizeable group of attendees who are planning to set up such labs and need advice and support in how to do this.

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[1] British Library Labs started out as an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funded project in 2013, to support and inspire the use of the British Library's digital collections and data in exciting and innovative ways, through competitions, events and collaborative projects. From spring 2019, the British Library Labs is funded by the British Library. For further information, see: https://www.bl.uk/projects/british-library-labs
[2] https://blogs.bl.uk/digital-scholarship/2018/09/building-library-labs-around-the-world.html
[3] https://blogs.bl.uk/digital-scholarship/2019/02/the-world-wide-lab-building-library-labs-part-ii.html

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[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay_it_forward

[5] https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/building-library-labs We would like to particularly acknowledge the work of Nora McGregor from the British Library's Digital Scholarship team here.

[6] Labs Network Google Drive: https://goo.gl/S299zC - as of 27.4.2019, there are 85 contributors to this collaborative folder.

[7] http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/LIBRARYLABS.html - as of 27.4.2019 there are 138 people subscribed to the mailing list.

[8] Labs Network Wiki: https://wikis.fu-berlin.de/x/xQAxNw This wiki was kindly set up by Martin Lee and is hosted by his institution, the Freie Universität Berlin. Access can be requested by emailing mahendra.mahey@bl.uk

[9] To be added to the Labs Network WhatsApp group, send your international mobile phone number to Mahendra Mahey at +44 7871287026.

[10] https://buildingglamlabs.slack.com

[11] Since the first Labs network event in September 2018, there have been 3 'virtual' meetings of the network 23 October 2018, 13 November 2018 and 1 February 2019. The next meeting is being scheduled for late May 2019, followed by regular meetings every 2 months.

[12] At the time of writing, a possible source of funding and a location for the Labs Network Booksprint is being finalised. If secured, it is expected that the Labs Network Booksprint would be facilitated by Booksprints (https://www.booksprints.net/), a New Zealand company with their Headquarters in Berlin. Based on the concept of a team of 15 people, having 5 days to create a book from scratch. While the writing team are sleeping, another team in New Zealand and Australia, would be undertaking the editing,

directory of Cultural Heritage labs[13]. Further regional and international events have and are also being organised.[14] In less than a year, the Labs network has come a long way, and this is only the beginning!

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proof-reading and illustrating the fruits of the writing efforts. At this stage, it is anticipated that the Booksprint would take place in near the end of 2019.

[13] Associate Professor Milena Dobreva-McPherson, Research Assistant Somia Salim and Research Fellow Fidelity Phiri are the team at University College London Qatar working on the International Labs network in close collaboration with Mahendra Mahey, British Library Labs Manager.

[14] In March 2019, a dedicated session about the Labs Network was held as part of the Arts, Humanities and Cultural Data Summit and DARIAH Beyond Europe International Workshop at the National Library of Australia in Canberra: https://www.humanities.org.au/special-event-1903/. A key outcome of this event was to instigate a Australaisian regional node of the Labs network. In May 2019, a second labs event on *Experimenting in the Digital Research Lab: a hands-on introduction to using digital collections for digital humanities research* will be held at the Royal Library of Belgium as a pre-conference workshop to the international Digital Access to Textual Cultural Heritage (DATeCH) conference: http://datech.digitisation.eu/programme/workshop/. Publishing and reusing Linked Open Data in Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs): opportunities and challenges by María Dolores Sáez, Pilar Escobar, Gustavo Candela, Manuel Marco-Such and Mahendra Mahey for 'Musaccess-Madrid 2019', 4 April, 2019, http://www.musacces.es/, presentation slides here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1IJmdDNHWuUCI-odok0f0DWuPTxz6JyqpWa5o-_q9Zkg/edit#slide=id.p

A 3rd International Labs event is current in the early stages of planning, which will be potentially held at the Library of Congress, Washington DC in late Spring 2020.