

*The Future Functions of National Libraries*  
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I want to begin by thanking very warmly my colleague Janne Andresoo for inviting me to deliver this presentation.

Canada did not establish its national library until 1953, which is very late compared with national libraries in the rest of the world.

You can therefore imagine how honoured I am to be invited to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Library of Estonia.

I am all the more pleased to be here since, in my country, Estonia is very often given as an example of forward-looking developments.

Canadians are so envious of Estonia's digital government that I am sure the Estonian tourism industry's revenues have skyrocketed because of the number of Canadian public servants coming here to learn from your initiatives.

With that in mind, I set out to prepare this presentation, being careful to avoid suggesting that I had anything to teach.

My only intent is to share my vision, mindful that it may not resonate with those of you whose realities happen to be quite different.

Many of our recent initiatives at Library and Archives Canada – LAC for short – only make sense if we keep in mind the tremendous democratization of knowledge we have seen in the wake of digitization.

At one time, only graduate students, faculty and researchers visited national libraries.

These days, thanks to the Web, anyone and everyone – not only from our own countries, but from anywhere in the world – has total and unimpeded access to our documents.

This has awakened an appetite for knowledge that we frankly find difficult to satisfy.

The long-standing distinction between a national library and a public library has blurred over the past 25 years, and the unprecedented traffic we are seeing today at places such as the British Library and the Bibliothèque nationale de France are but two examples of that manifestation.

Over the past four years, LAC has plunged head first into this movement by bringing itself physically closer to public libraries.

That is why, last November, we moved our Vancouver offices that used to be located in a technology park in a remote suburb, to the premises of the Vancouver Central Library, which, as its name suggests, is located right in the heart of that Pacific Coast city.

This shift has already borne fruit, not only in terms of attendance, but also in terms of the receptiveness of our employees towards their new colleagues and clients.

And when it comes to breaking silos and blurring borders, what could possibly be more symbolic than our project to relocate our public services to a new facility that will be shared with the Ottawa Public Library, as of 2024.

The only limitation to this project, which amounts to a wedding between a national library on the one hand and a public library on the other, will be that of our imaginations.

If I am right in thinking the movement to break down the barriers between national and public libraries started at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believe that the past few years have seen another shift in the tectonic plates.

And that is a redefinition of our relationship with our clients, or users, if you happen to prefer a less commercial term.

The service models developed by Amazon, Google and especially Wikipedia are encouraging our clients to digitize, transcribe, translate, label and describe our documents, thus becoming more partners than clients, even though this is leading some of our colleagues out of their comfort zone.

I understand that librarians and archivists may be concerned about seeing the *hoi polloi* engage in operations that were once their exclusive domain.

Nonetheless, I believe that the experience with Wikipedia and its reliability demonstrates our users' ability to self-regulate and self-correct.

So, if there is some truth in what I am saying, I propose to address the future functions of national libraries today by exploring a certain number of activities in which LAC is involved that one does not generally associate with national libraries.

In no way I want to imply that we in Canada have a monopoly on any of those functions ... quite the contrary.

If LAC stands out in any way, it may be in terms of the number and variety of its initiatives, rather than the originality of any one of them considered individually.

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I would like to explore these initiatives with you by grouping them under the two themes I raised at the beginning of the presentation.

First, the ones that touch on the willingness of national libraries to welcome more users, and second, the ones that are the consequences of the new role played by those users.

## 1. Willingness to welcome new users

National libraries are increasingly used – both physically and virtually – by the public at large.

For instance, in 2017, the Bibliothèque nationale de France experienced a very significant 14% increase in attendance.

This is not uncommon, and in fact, the same thing happened at the British Library.

I quote from of their recent documents:

The more screen-based our lives, it seems, the greater the value of real human encounters and physical artefacts; activity in each realm feeds interest in the other

Indeed, the more people use the Web to access our collections, the greater their appetite for visiting our actual physical spaces.

What can we do to satisfy our readers' appetites? One thing, of course, is to introduce tools that provide greater access to our collections through digitization.

All over the world, memory institutions recognize the importance of making their collections available online.

And they are busily developing strategies to make this happen as fast as they can ... working together, as well as with the private and non-profit sectors.

In February of 2015, the Council of Canadian Academies published a report entitled *Leading in the Digital World: Opportunities for Canada's Memory Institutions*.

In this report, the Council challenged memory institutions to work together to meet the digital expectations of Canadians.

So, LAC did a survey of some of the major digital initiatives going on around the world.

Europeana, naturally, and Gallica, and the great work of the National Library of the Netherlands.

And of course, the Digital Public Library of America.

The DPLA is a unique nationwide collective that works towards a shared goal of bringing the riches of the nation's cultural heritage organizations to a broad public.

A portal of discovery.

The DPLA brings together a collection of over 16 million items from dozens of hubs and thousands of contributing institutions.

The success of the DPLA is due largely to its network of partners, and their willingness to come together to achieve a common goal: maximizing public access to shared history, culture and knowledge.

The DPLA model was very much top of mind when we created Canada's National Heritage Digitization Strategy (a.k.a. NHDS).

The NHDS was announced in June 2016, and it is based on the best practices we saw in other countries.

It was developed by Canada's major memory institutions: large public libraries, academic libraries and archives, provincial archives, national associations of archivists, librarians, historians and museums.

The idea is to coordinate our approach to digitizing the hundreds of collections found in Canada's memory institutions.

Its scope includes access, discovery and preservation.

And the strategy covers both published and unpublished digitized material from archives, libraries, museums, galleries, historical associations and other memory institutions across the country.

Our steering committee includes organizations from across the cultural and academic sector, such as the Internet Archive, the Canadian Museum of History, the Writers' Union of Canada and numerous universities.

As of August 2018, 65 organizations had pledged their intent to partner with us.

We have received initial funding of 1.1 million Canadian dollars from the private sector.

I take a special pride in the way the NHDS works as a co-op, because it is my belief that LAC should not view the ecosystem of memory institutions as a hierarchy.

On the contrary, I like to think of the national library as a link in a chain, rather than a pharaoh at the top of a pyramid.

And the Steering Committee of the NHDS is a good example of this.

The strategy was developed initially by a 21-member steering committee that is currently chaired by the chief librarian of Queen's University, one of the member institutions.

LAC is a member of the steering committee, and one of our employees acts as corporate secretary, but I do not chair the committee, and LAC is only one player among 65 others.

Needless to say, a co-operative system such as the NHDS only makes sense if its members do their own digitization to feed into the platform.

For LAC, our greatest digitization initiative to date has been the digitization of our First World War personnel files.

These files are a major resource for genealogy and historical research, but the original paper documents are thin and fragile.

So, our staff diligently took the Canadian Expeditionary Force files, digitized them, and put them up on our website.

We started in 2014, with box number one and we finished in August of this year after going in order all the way to box number ten thousand, six hundred and eighty-six!

All 622,290 files are now online. Some 32 million images!

In order to digitize so much material quickly, our technicians took scanners designed to handle double-sided cheques at high speeds, and adapted them to scan fragile documents, photos, and unusual formats such as medical records and pay slips.

LAC was the first institution in the world to use BancTec scanners for heritage conservation, and I am very proud of this achievement.

Technology has also allowed us to participate in the dialogue of reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Back in 2001, LAC created the Project Naming program.

The idea was to digitize and identify Inuit individuals and communities seen in historical photos from our collection.

Many had remained unidentified for decades.

The goal was modest – to digitize and identify 500 photographs within the year.

But Project Naming took on a life of its own.

Since 2001, we have digitized over 10,000 photographs and are still going strong.

Some 2,500 people and places have been named.

People like Martha Kasudluak (*ka-sood-loo-ak*) from Inukjuak (*inook-jew-ak*), Nunavik, whom we see with photos of herself at three different ages.

And so many others.

Families have been reunited.

Identities recovered.

And mysteries solved.

All of this information, along with the images, is available on our website.

I am very proud of the fact that last December, Project Naming won the innovation award at the eighth Francophone libraries' Livres Hebdo Grand Prize in Paris.

We also embarked last year on a project to preserve and enhance Canada's Indigenous languages and cultures.

We were allocated 14.9 million Canadian dollars (10M€) by our government to develop two ambitious initiatives in consultation with the communities themselves.

As a result, we will digitize LAC records that contain First Nations, Inuit and Métis-related content such as treaties, photographs, and Indigenous language dictionaries and lexicons.

Acknowledging the importance of language as an integral part of Indigenous culture, we will also offer support and expertise to Indigenous communities as part of their efforts to preserve and revitalize First Nations, Métis and Inuit languages.

The focus here will be on oral histories and recordings.

As part of these two initiatives, LAC will also create jobs for Indigenous people in locations across Canada.

And LAC has already gathered a unique Advisory Circle of leaders and knowledge keepers who will guide us to implement these initiatives in a way that is culturally appropriate.

Another component of our relationship with the general public, of course, is the use of social media, which today uses a lot of space in the everyday existence of libraries of all types including national libraries.

At LAC, we use social media extensively to promote our collection and to spread the word about our events, our partnerships and our programs, as well as the services we offer.

The cornerstones of this approach are awareness, engagement and collaboration.

As of October 1st, our institution had 59,825 subscribers on its French and English Facebook pages, and 62,600 followers on Twitter.

And we also use Flickr, YouTube and Instagram.

Social media enable us to develop organic content that resonates with our audiences and in turn, showcase our conferences, exhibitions and many services.

We also use social media to highlight elements of our collection.

Every day, we highlight two or three documents that tie in with current events.

Consider the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation in 2017:

for each day of the year, an event that took place on that day at some point in Canada's history appeared with the hashtag #OnThisDay,

- including Alanis Morissette reaching the top of the charts,
- women in the military gaining the right to vote,
- and Nelson Mandela visiting Ottawa.

A post that exceeded our wildest hopes happened on April 1, 2016, when we made the military record of James Howlett, a.k.a. Wolverine, available online.

As it turns out, James Howlett had quite the military career before he met Professor X!

And according to our records, he was gravely wounded in action many times and gained a reputation as a gritty survivor.

Of course, I am just kidding.

These are not real papers or authentic documents. But using Wolverine's fake file for our April Fool's joke was our most popular social media post ever.

We got 160,000 likes on our Facebook page, nearly 24,000 comments, 50,000 shares, and in total, we reached over 6 million people!

We were on TV and made the front page of Reddit, and in addition to the Canadian media, the story was

picked up on Forbes.com and even *Entertainment Weekly*.

Of course, we conceived that stunt to allow us to shine a bright light on the digitization of our First World War personnel files that I mentioned previously.

Recently, we used humour again to showcase our facilities.

On May the Fourth, 2018, Star Wars Day, we aimed to reach new clients “in a galaxy far, far away.”

So, we published a photograph of me and Lord Darth Vader! The caption read that the Galactic Empire, plagued by a series of data breaches, had unilaterally declared that once built, our new preservation facility would become the permanent repository of all future Death Star plans.

Needless to say, we went viral again and, in the process, drew attention to Phase 2 of our Preservation Centre, soon to be built next to our main one in the suburbs of Ottawa.

Let me say a few words about this new building that is due to open in 2022. In 2011, LAC undertook a comprehensive review of its infrastructure needs.

The storage of the collections was then spread over 22 facilities, corresponding to 236,000 m<sup>2</sup>, spread over 10 Canadian cities.

At the opening of Phase 2 of our Preservation Centre, through the optimization of our conservation spaces, our collection will be stored in 5 facilities representing half of the 2011 ecological footprint.

## *2. New roles of users: from clients to partners*

Now I want to turn to the new roles our clients – or users – are playing.

To illustrate the paradigm shift brought on by making relying and trusting our clients, I would like to start with the example of our DigiLab, a client-focused innovation, which we started in March 2017.

DigiLab allows us to engage with our clients and to completely disrupt traditional approaches to using our collections.

Thanks to DigiLab, clients can now choose their own digitization priorities.

As long as they are not covered by copyright, they scan the material themselves, using state-of-the-art equipment.

We provide the equipment free of charge in exchange for our users sharing their efforts with the broader community by leaving us with digital copies of the materials they research.

In its first year, DigiLab hosted over 30 client projects, which enabled 29,755 pages of textual material and 9,164 images to be digitized and made available to the public.

They digitized things like records that track the rain, thunder and lightning over Ottawa in the 19th century, which will contribute to research in climate change.

First World War correspondence.

Reconnaissance maps from the Second World War.

Hundreds of photos of labourers seeking relief at work camps throughout Canada during the Great Depression.

The performance of Shakespeare's plays in Canada.

And some fascinating shots of Ottawa from the 1920s and 30s

These are just some of the exceptional materials that are now accessible through the DigiLab.

Another example of the active role played by our clients is our Co-Lab, an initiative launched just a few months ago.

We started exploring the crowdsourcing path a few years ago, in 2016.

In June of that year, the Manitoba Métis Federation celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Seven Oaks, a battle that marked the emergence of the Métis Nation.

To support the commemoration, LAC invited the public to transcribe the Coltman Report.

The report was handwritten in 1818 by William Coltman, a prominent lawyer at the time.

To this day, it still is one of the key documents in the history of the Métis Nation.

The entire report, some 534 pages, was transcribed by members of the public in less than a month.

The pilot project was such a success that we invited the public to transcribe another document: Lady Macdonald's diary.

Lady Macdonald was the second wife of our first prime minister and her diary is a fascinating first-hand account of the earliest days of the new Dominion of Canada.

Not only does it offer a window on her daily life, it also gives us a vivid insight into the political culture of the new nation.

We put the diary up on June 29, and it was completely transcribed by August 22, in only 25 days.

Based on these successes, last April we launched the Co-Lab, thanks to a software we developed in-house.

It is an easy-to-use tool that allows the general public to transcribe, tag, translate, and describe digitized records and manuscripts found in our collection.

We placed four sets of records online, and within less than a month, the correspondence between a former prime minister and a minister of defense, and the love letters of another former prime minister to his fiancée, have already been fully transcribed, and are now completely searchable, making them available to all.

To present yet another function highlighting the relationship with our clients, I would like to quote my former colleague Alberto Manguel, the well-known author who was then the Director of the National Library of Argentina.

In January of 2017, I invited Alberto to give a conference in our Ottawa location.

He concluded his remarks with the following thought, and I quote:

A national library can, I believe, be a sort of creative workshop, and a place in which material is stored for future readers to find clues in order to imagine better worlds.

A “creative workshop” and a preservation site.

These are indeed the twin poles of a national library's mandate.

Because the position of libraries in the creative ecosystem cannot be reduced to the functions of collecting and preserving works.

We are also present at the beginning of the creative chain, providing inspiration, and material even, to artists of all disciplines – not just authors and poets, but also videographers, musicians, painters, theatre directors and video game creators.

When put in a position where we have to prove our value in the court of public opinion, and justify the investments we receive, this aspect of our presence in the world of cultural industries should not be dismissed.

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I want to finish with one more initiative that we undertook over the past year.

We decided to actively engage in asserting the importance of libraries and archives in combatting the spread of fake news, or disinformation.

Even though it has been proposed that the phrase “fake news” should be abandoned, no one can deny that the topic of so-called fake news is prominent at the moment.

So, call it what you will, the phenomenon of misinformation or disinformation is so prevalent that I do not believe librarians have the luxury of staying on the sidelines in this debate.

With so many resources at our disposal, we have a duty to help our fellow citizens see things clearly.

And frankly, I think we are in a good position to help.

Whereas people look more and more to the media for support of their biases, for “affirmation rather than information,” to quote the vice-president of news at Google, libraries are still perceived as places where one can find information that is authentic.

According to a Pew Research Institute Report published last August, 78% of adults feel that public libraries help them to find information that is trustworthy and reliable.

And that figure goes up to 87% among millennials.

Because of that, libraries are key to underpinning a healthy democracy, and that suggests to me that we are well positioned to work with the media – social or traditional – to help fight fake news.

We launched a series of round tables across Canada. We have held five so far, and one more is scheduled for the fall.

Our objective is to get organizations like Facebook Twitter and Google to understand that national libraries are prepared to work with them upstream to help define the algorithms that will detect fake news at the speed of social media postings.

Our aim is also to issue a public reminder of our existence and of our relevance regarding an issue that is central to the future of our societies.

These are a few of the initiatives we took over the past years.

I really look forward to discussing them with you.

Thank you.