

Data collaboration without borders: bringing together people, data, and compute in the ZMT datalab

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Creating data collaborations that are both effective and equitable is challenging. While there are many technical challenges to overcome, there are also significant cultural issues to deal with, for example, communication styles, privacy protection and compliance to institutional and legal norms. At ZMT Bremen, we had to address the central question of “How to build a good data collaboration with our tropical partners?” while also dealing with the restrictions of the pandemic, which laid bare the digital divides that separate us. In 2020, the ZMT datalab (www.zmt-datalab.de) was born out of the search for an answer. The datalab is a data platform that brings together people, data and compute resources, with a strategy to not just share data but to share work, and without borders. Here we present the design principles and considerations to navigate the conflicting incentives that go towards building a datalab that is both open and effective.

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