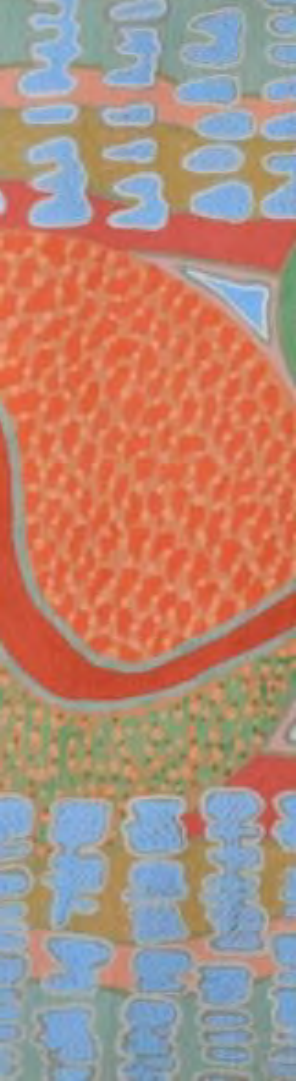


Decolonising Information Retrieval Research

Damiano Spina
damiano.spina@rmit.edu.au

School of Computing Technologies, RMIT University
ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S)
Centre for Human-AI Information Environments (CHAI)

ADM +S ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society

RMIT UNIVERSITY

CHAI

Maculelê Song

Eu sou um bom menino, minha mãe soube-me educar

Pisando em terras alheias, eu piso bem devagar



I am a good boy, my mother knew how to educate me

Stepping on foreign lands, I step very softly

Je suis un bon garçon, ma mère a su m'élever

*En marchant sur des terres étrangères, je marche très lentement**

Son un bon dròlle, ma maire m'a sauput educar

*Petant en tèrras estrangièras, peti plan doçament**

**Automatic translations, Google Gemini*





Information Retrieval on Country

by Treahna Hamm (Firebrace), Yorta Yorta

admscentre.org.au/information-retrieval-on-country

Positionality Statement



Positionality Statement

- I was born in Indigenous land (Gününa Küna/Puelche & Querandí land, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina)



Positionality Statement

- I was born in Indigenous land (Gününa Küna/Puelche & Querandí land, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina)
- I live in Indigenous land (Wurundjeri & Boonwurrung Country, Naarm/Melbourne, Australia)



Positionality Statement

- I was born in Indigenous land (Gününa Küna/Puelche & Querandí land, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina)
- I live in Indigenous land (Wurundjeri & Boonwurrung Country, Naarm/Melbourne, Australia)
- I am
  - Non-Indigenous
  - Computer Scientist
  - Information Retrieval Researcher
  - Capoeirista (Afro-Brazilian art form)



Warning



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Some of the content in these slides may be culturally sensitive.



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Please feel free to step out, take a breath, or disengage at any point if the material becomes heavy. No explanation needed.



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It is also incomplete and it is based on my own (limited) experience:

I am just at the start of this journey!



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I am just at the start of this journey!

If you want to walk this journey together, want to help me improving this material, or you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me: damiano.spina@rmit.edu.au



Decolonising Research

When Indigenous people become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms. (Smith 1999, cited in Zavala [1, p. 59])

Smith, L.T. (1999). Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples. New York: Palgrave.
Zavala, M. (2013). What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 2(1), 55 – 71.



Decolonising Research

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- Decolonisation: Create brave/culturally safe spaces for Indigenous knowledges and perspectives

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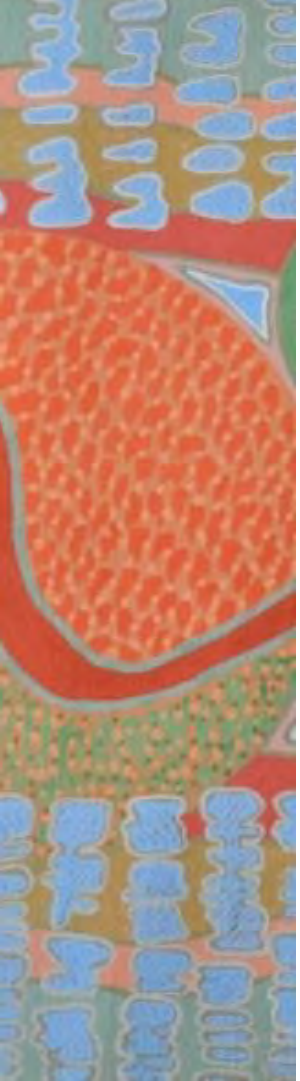
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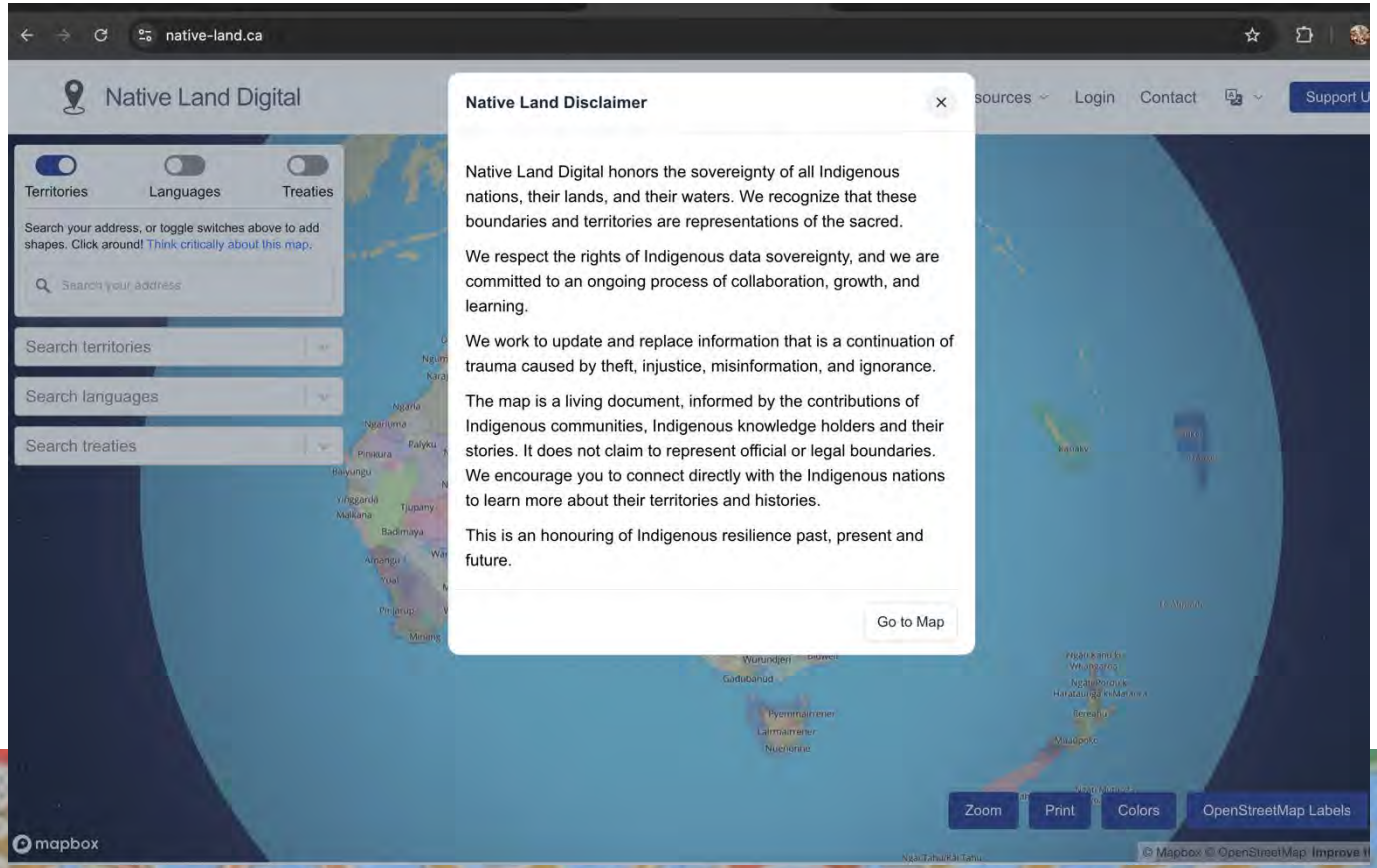


Decolonising Information Retrieval Research

Should We Care?

Why?

We Do IR on Country More Often Than We May Think



https://native-land.ca/maps/native-land

SIGIR2026
20-24 July
MELBOURNE | NAARM
AUSTRALIA

Emancipatory Information Retrieval

Towards Critical IR Theories and Practices

Bhaskar Mitra (he/him)
Independent Researcher
Tiohtià:ke / Mooniyang / Montréal, Canada



Download these slides

My relevant research themes:

Emancipatory Information Access **AI & Society**

Exposure Fairness and Transparency in Information Access

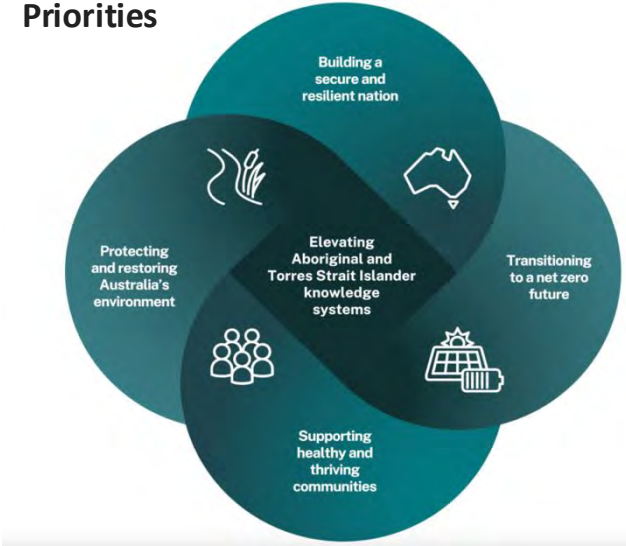
bhaskar-mitra.github.io @bmitra.bsky.social bhaskar.mitra@acm.org



Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

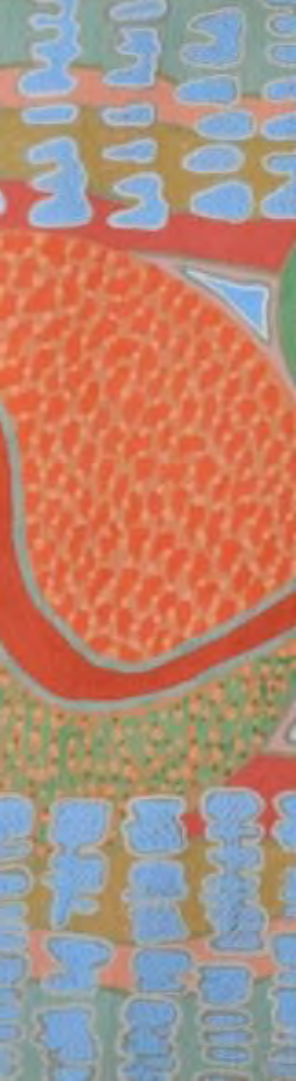
(in Australia)

The National Science and Research Priorities



https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/national-science-and-research-priorities-2024





Decolonising Information Retrieval Research

What Can We Do?

Tackling IR Problems



Tackling IR Problems

- “IR for Good”



Tackling IR Problems

- “IR for Good”
- Create resources, tools, knowledge that benefit communities



Tackling IR Problems

- “IR for Good”
- Create resources, tools, knowledge that benefit communities
  - Language revitalization

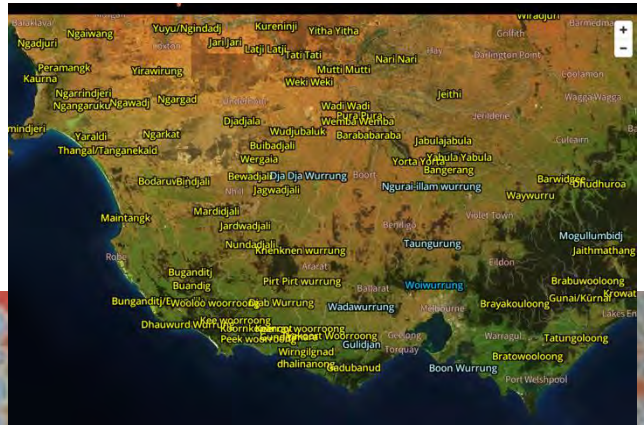


Tackling IR Problems

- “IR for Good”
- Create resources, tools, knowledge that benefit communities
  - Language revitalization

FIRST LANGUAGES AUSTRALIA · Gambay





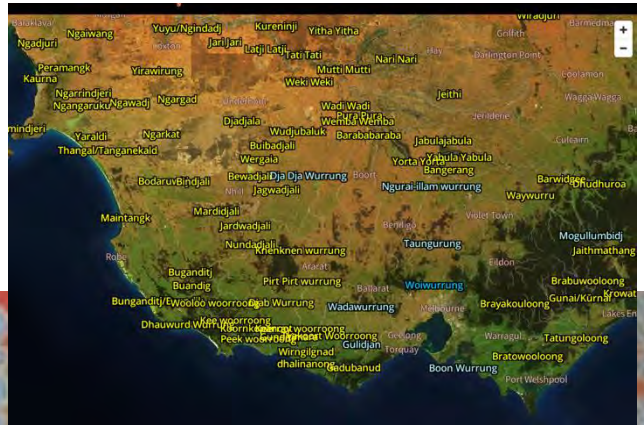
https://gambay.com.au/?language=Woiwurrung

Tackling IR Problems

- “IR for Good”
- Create resources, tools, knowledge that benefit communities
  - Language revitalization
  - AI Literacy

FIRST LANGUAGES AUSTRALIA · Gambay





https://gambay.com.au/?language=Woiwurrung

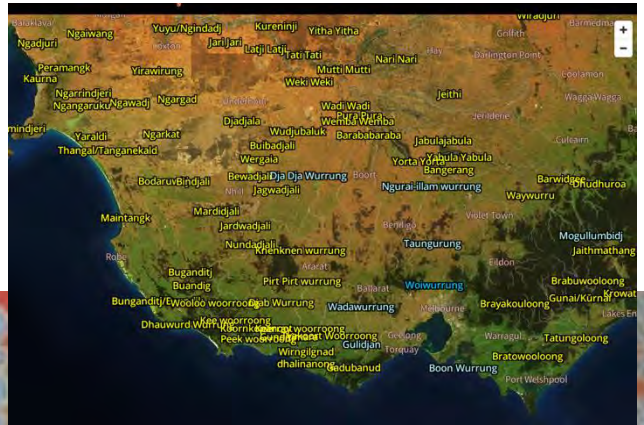
Tackling IR Problems

- “IR for Good”
- Create resources, tools, knowledge that benefit communities
  - Language revitalization
  - AI Literacy
- Advance IR with Indigenous knowledges

FIRST LANGUAGES AUSTRALIA · Gambay

https://gambay.com.au/?language=Woiwurrung





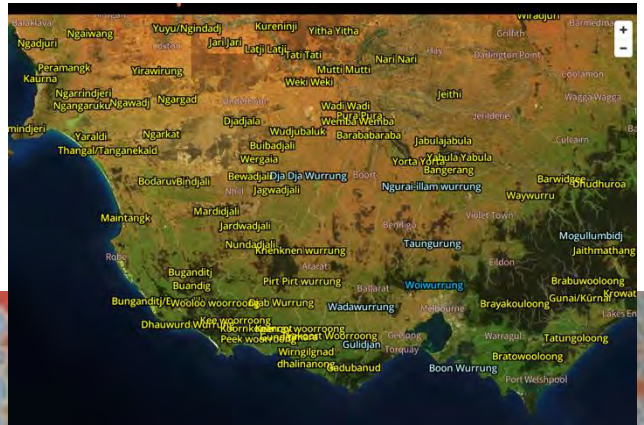
Tackling IR Problems

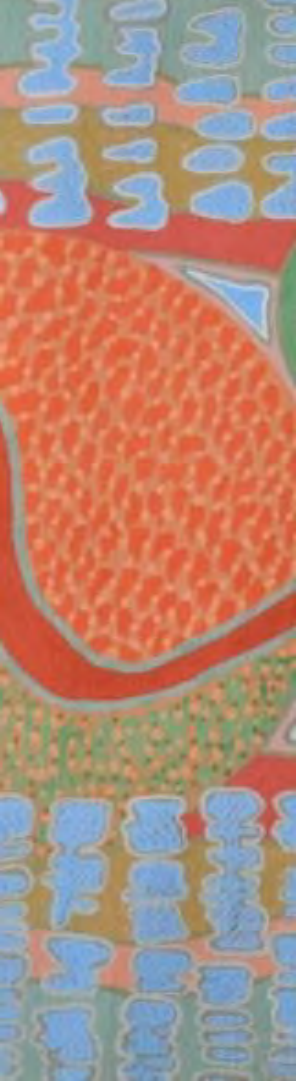
- “IR for Good”
- Create resources, tools, knowledge that benefit communities
  - Language revitalization
  - AI Literacy
- Advance IR with Indigenous knowledges
  - ”relevance”, “information need”, ”satisfaction”, “knowledge protocols”, “lore”

FIRST LANGUAGES AUSTRALIA · Gambay

https://gambay.com.au/?language=Woiwurrung







Decolonising Information Retrieval Research

How Can We Do It?

Capoeira Song



Quem quiser andar ligeiro, nessa vida ande só

Mas se tu quer chegar longe, acompanhado é bem melhor

Whoever wants to walk fast in this life, walk alone

But if you want to go far, accompanied is much better

Qui veut marcher vite dans cette vie, qu'il marche seul

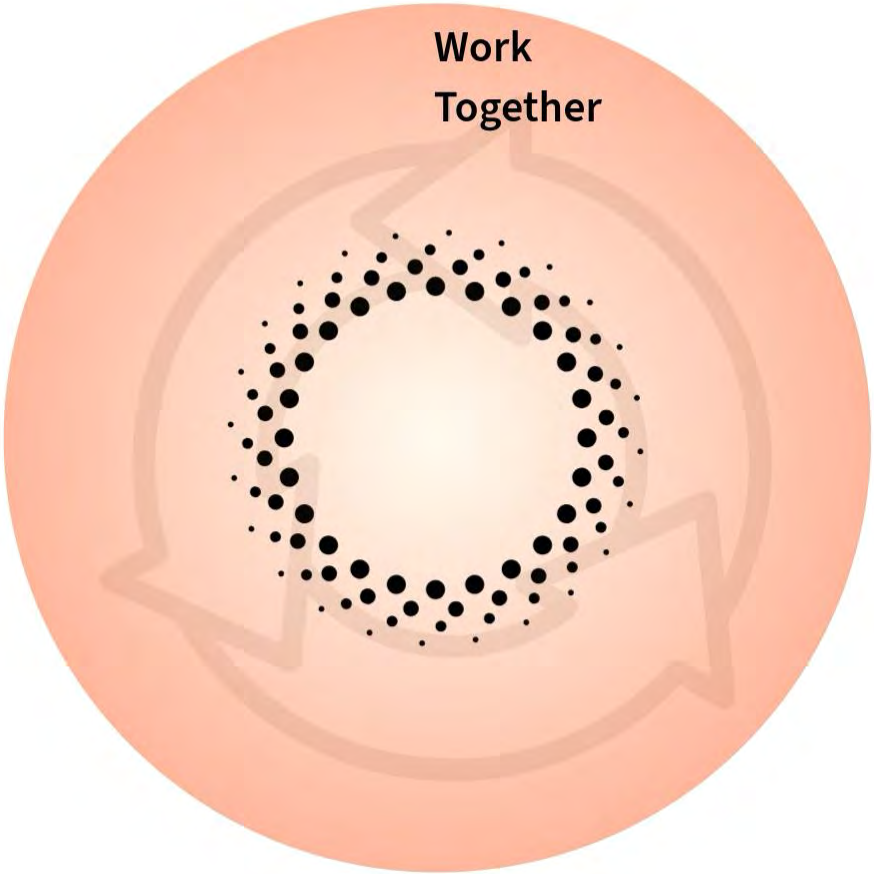
*Mais si tu veux aller loin, accompagné c'est bien mieux**

Qui vòl caminar lèu dins aquela vida, que camine sol

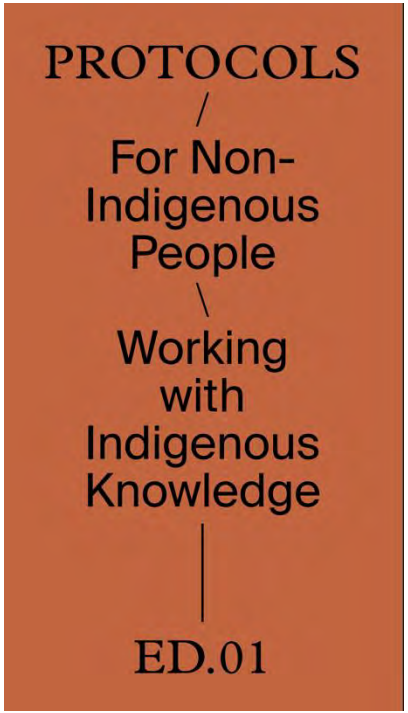
*Mas se vòls anar luènh, acompanhat es plan melhor**

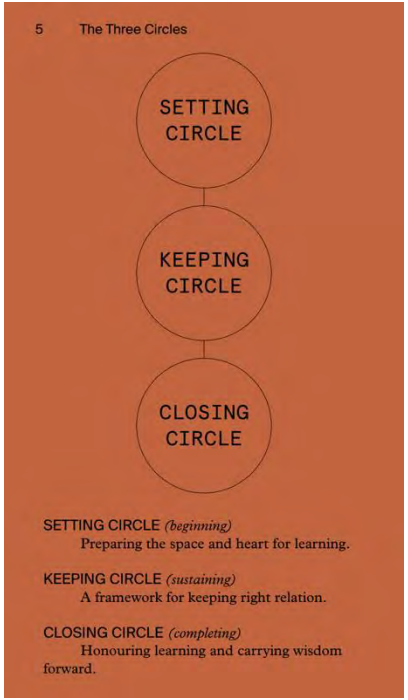
**Automatic translations, Google Gemini*

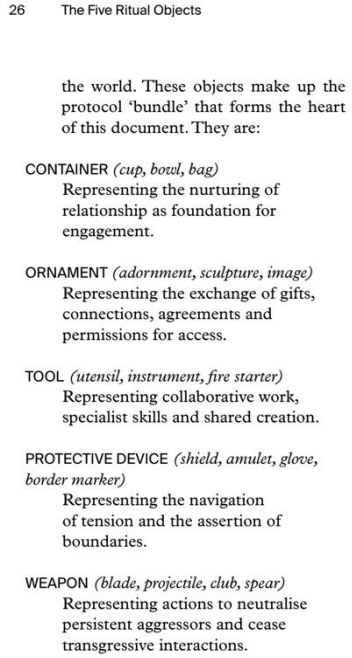



Work
Together

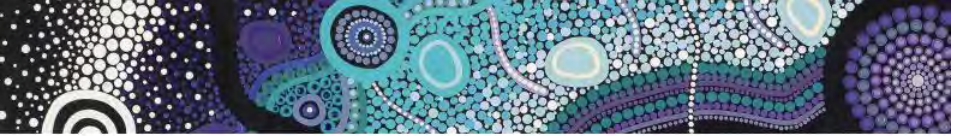
Protocols for Non-Indigenous People Working with Indigenous Knowledges







https://drive.google.com/file/d/10PoLKOEmx6J3odVP38q_bywaenRjvqWX/view

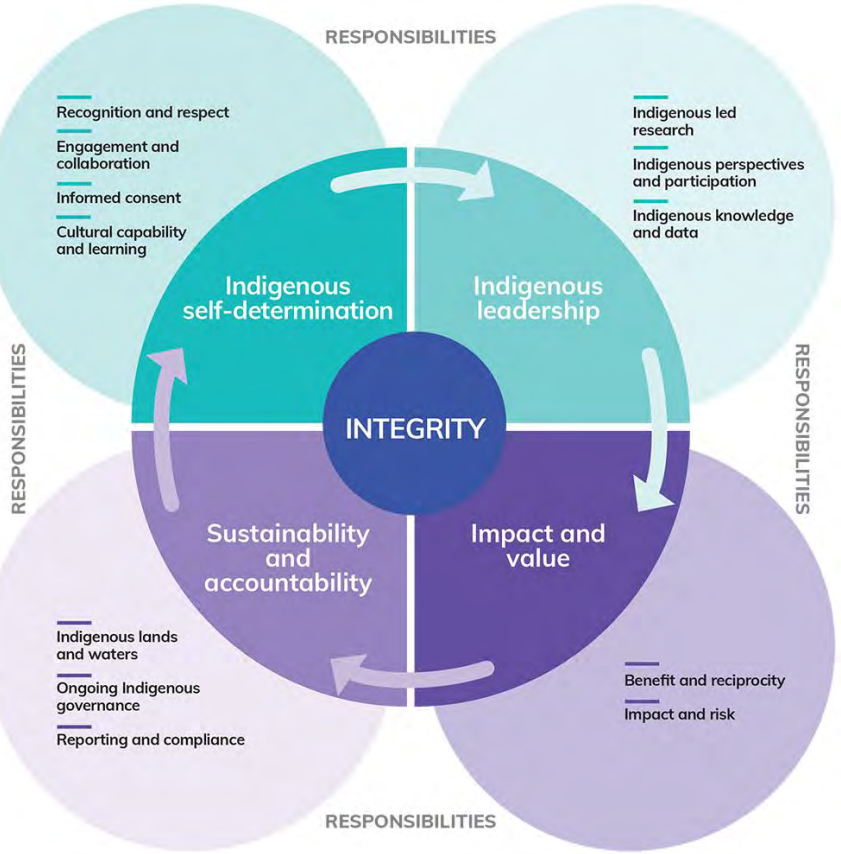


AIATSIS

AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this document may contain sensitive information, images or names of people who have since passed away.





https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/code-ethics

Maiam nayri Wingara



Indigenous Data Sovereignty
Indigenous Data Governance

The 2018 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit delegates asserted that in Australia, Indigenous peoples have the right to:

- Exercise **control** of the data ecosystem including creation, development, stewardship, analysis, dissemination, and infrastructure.
- Data that [are] **contextual** and disaggregated (available and accessible at individual, community, and First Nations levels).
- Data that [are] **relevant** and empower[s] sustainable self-determination and effective self-governance.
- Data structures [and ecosystems] that are **accountable** to Indigenous peoples and First Nations.
- Data that [are] **protective and respect[s]** our individual and collective interests.1

https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/mnw-principles

TE MANA RARAUNGA

Māori Data Sovereignty Network

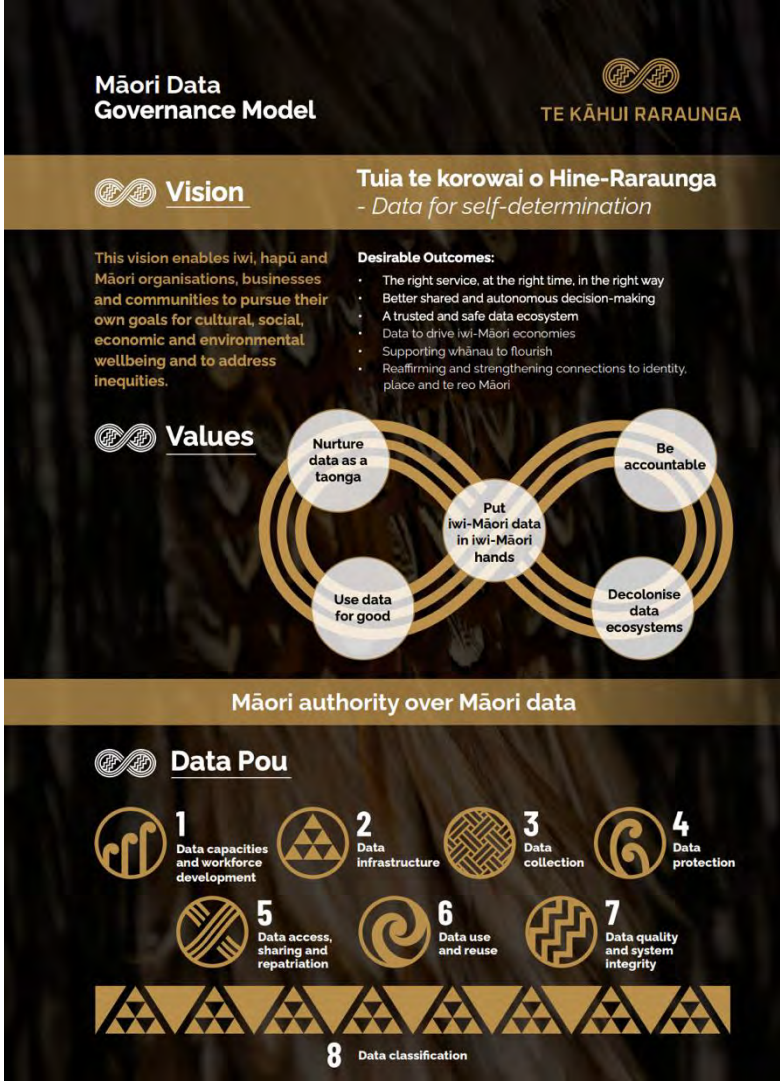
Principles of Māori Data Sovereignty

Brief #1 | October 2018

Principles of Māori Algorithmic Sovereignty

Tikanga in Technology

Dec 2023



https://www.temanararaunga.maori.nz/resource-hub-copy

Co-Participatory Design: Not Only for Decolonisation

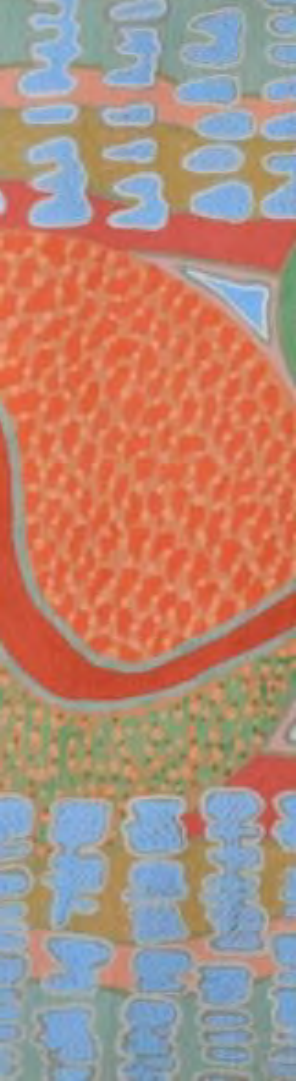


Spina, Pera & Landoni. 2026. Building Good Together, Step by Step: Co-Participatory Design for Information Access. *RecSoGood at ACM RecSys'26.* damianospina.com/publication/spina-2026-building/

Progress toward the SDGs doesn't require grand gestures
… it needs small, shared steps that add up



Spina, Pera & Landoni. 2026. Building Good Together, Step by Step: Co-Participatory Design for Information Access. *RecSoGood at ACM RecSys'26.* damianospina.com/publication/spina-2026-building/



Decolonising Information Retrieval Research

What Do Baby Steps Look Like?

Expose Indigenous Knowledge



Do we have permission to access, use, and share it?
What's the *Purpose*?
Who is *Benefiting* and how?

PhD Course - Responsible AI from the Lens of an Information Access Researcher

damianospina.com/teaching/responsible-ai/



Group Activities - 4 Groups:



Marram (Kangaroo)



Gurrborra (Koala)



Warin (Wombat)



Dulai wurrung (Platypus)

https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Aboriginal_Country_Completed/Wurundjeri/Wurundjeri_Language



Customised AI-powered chatbot for Open Day (SCT)

A conversational ~~agent~~ conversation starter:

- Opportunities and limitations of customised AI-powered chatbots, e.g., Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) systems
- Evaluation framework and guidelines on how to test solution built in-house
- Walert means “possum” in Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung languages: significance of possum skin cloaks for the Traditional Custodians of Country

Demo available at: https://bit.ly/walert

RMIT UNIVERSITY
RACE Hub



Information Retrieval on Country

by Treahna Hamm (Firebrace), Yorta Yorta

admscentre.org.au/information-retrieval-on-country

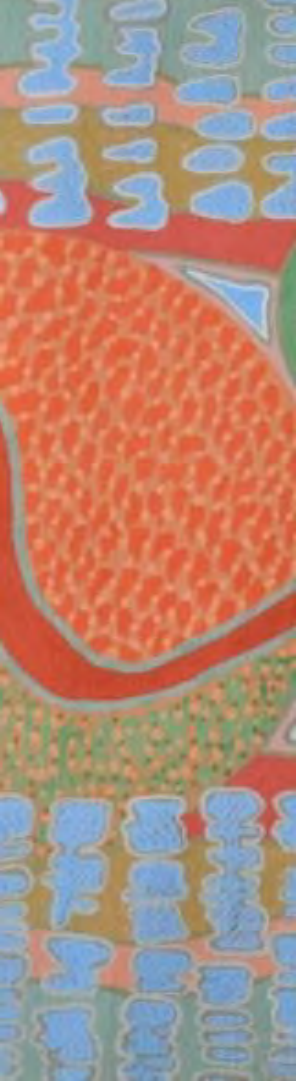
Territorial Acknowledgement – SIGIR 2021

Before going fully virtual, SIGIR 2021 was planned to be located in Tiohtià:ke, also known as Montréal, and the island is called Mooniyang in Anishnabemowin. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is situated on unceded Indigenous lands and traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka and Anishnaabe Nations. We, the organizers and the conference attendees who are based in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, recognize the Kanien'kehá:ka nation as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we stand. Tiohtià:ke has historically served as a meeting place for many First Nations. Today Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We again welcome our diverse group of attendees from across the world to join us virtually and to simultaneously acknowledge their own physical location and share their respective land acknowledgment, using tools like https://native-land.ca/.

(We are grateful for the technological acknowledgement from The Feminist Media Studio and the territorial acknowledgement from Université Concordia which we consulted and heavily derived from for the above acknowledgment.)



https://sigir.org/sigir2021/technological-acknowledgment/



Decolonising Information Retrieval Research

Does The Future Look Bright?

SIGIR Low Resource Environments



SIGIR Low Resource Environments



10 extended abstracts
Ethiopia, Malawi, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Tanzania
India, Philippines, Italy, and The Netherlands



SIGIR Low Resource Environments

SIGIR 2025
Padova
ITALY

10 extended abstracts
Ethiopia, Malawi, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Tanzania
India, Philippines, Italy, and The Netherlands

SIGIR2026
20-24 July
MELBOURNE | NAARM
AUSTRALIA

14 extended abstracts
Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe
India, Nepal, Vietnam, Australia, Ireland





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50
SIGIR 2027
International ACM SIGIR Conference

SIGIR Low Resource Environments

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AUSTRALIA

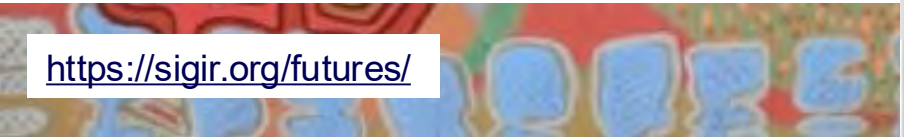
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50
SIGIR 2027
International ACM SIGIR Conference



SIGIR Futures



https://sigir.org/futures/

First Round of Futures Activities

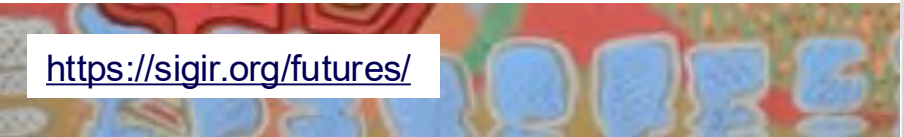
Futures began with a Call for Proposals (CFP) and a September 2026 deadline. Selected activities will take place in 2027, aligning with the 50th anniversary of the SIGIR conference. **After SIGIR 2027, we will shift to a standing CFP, enabling Futures to continuously surface and support emerging directions in IR.**

The Futures activities selected in this inaugural round are as follows:

- **IR Futures for Africa: Shaping the Future of Information Retrieval in Africa.** Organizers: Catherine Chavula, *University of Strathclyde*, Josephina Muntuumo, *Namibia University of Science and Technology*, et al.
- **Forum for Pitching Research Directions to the SIGIR Community.** Organizers: Evgeniy Gabrilovich, *Microsoft* and Marc Najork, *Google DeepMind*
- **Verifiable Scientific Information Retrieval: Positioning IR as the Epistemic Backbone of Autonomous Science.** Organizers: Tirthankar Ghosal, *Oak Ridge National Laboratory*, et al.
- **Defining a New IR Playground: Open IR Research Questions Not Solved by LLMs.** Organizers: Jaap Kamps, *University of Amsterdam*, et al.
- **Realizing Public Information Access Platforms: Or How We Seize the Means of Retrieval.** Organizers: Bhaskar Mitra, *Independent Researcher*, et al.
- **Beyond Hyperscale: A Research Agenda for Resource-Aware Generative IR.** Organizers: Oleg Zendel, *RMIT University*, et al.

More details on these activities will be shared in due course.

SIGIR Futures



https://sigir.org/futures/

First Round of Futures Activities

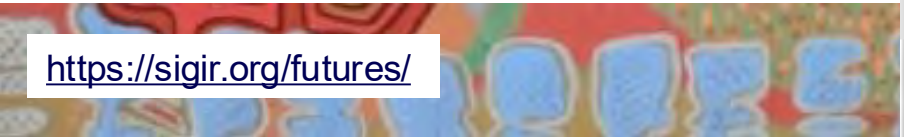
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Futures began with a Call for Proposals (CFP) and a September 2026 deadline. Selected activities will take place in 2027, aligning with the 50th anniversary of the SIGIR conference. **After SIGIR 2027, we will shift to a standing CFP, enabling Futures to continuously surface and support emerging directions in IR.**

The Futures activities selected in this inaugural round are as follows:

- **IR Futures for Africa: Shaping the Future of Information Retrieval in Africa.** Organizers: Catherine Chavula, *University of Strathclyde*, Josephina Muntuumo, *Namibia University of Science and Technology*, et al.
- **Forum for Pitching Research Directions to the SIGIR Community.** Organizers: Evgeniy Gabrilovich, *Microsoft* and Marc Najork, *Google DeepMind*
- **Verifiable Scientific Information Retrieval: Positioning IR as the Epistemic Backbone of Autonomous Science.** Organizers: Tirthankar Ghosal, *Oak Ridge National Laboratory*, et al.
- **Defining a New IR Playground: Open IR Research Questions Not Solved by LLMs.** Organizers: Jaap Kamps, *University of Amsterdam*, et al.
- **Realizing Public Information Access Platforms: Or How We Seize the Means of Retrieval.** Organizers: Bhaskar Mitra, *Independent Researcher*, et al.
- **Beyond Hyperscale: A Research Agenda for Resource-Aware Generative IR.** Organizers: Oleg Zendel, *RMIT University*, et al.

More details on these activities will be shared in due course.



Indigenous Australian Datathon

The development of AI literacy within the Indigenous community is a key driver in the development and uptake of AI within regional and remote communities. The Indigenous Australian Datathon offers a unique opportunity to develop smart, community-centric solutions that can reshape understanding and future directions for Indigenous communities. By bringing together subject matter experts, innovators, design thinkers, and data scientists, the datathon promises to foster collaboration and create connections that will endure long after the event is over.

https://indigenousaustraliandatathon.com/

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Sage Journals

Original article

Knowers and others: Indigenous representation in search (and answer) engines

Tegan Cohen

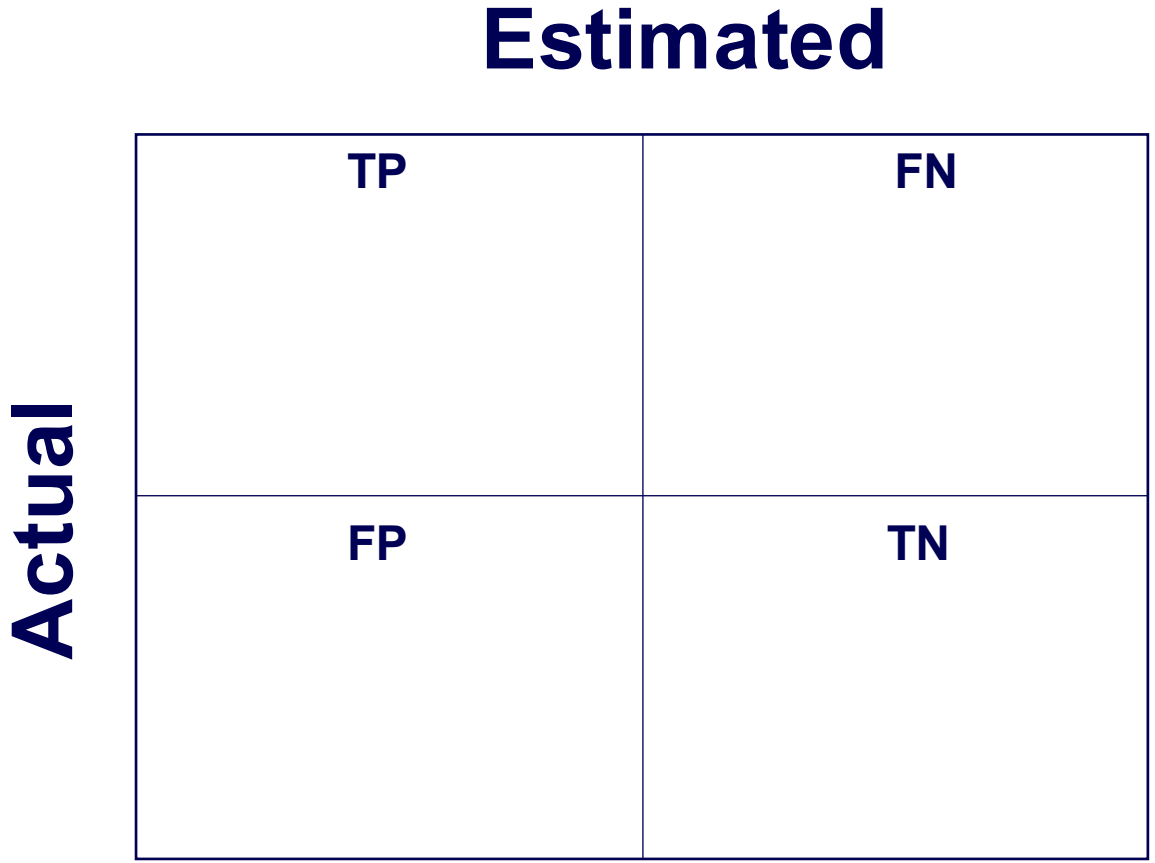
Abstract

Aboriginal knowers and knowledges have historically been sidelined in accounts of 'authoritative' information about us across a range of knowledge institutions. This epistemic exclusion catalysed struggles to self-represent and counter dominant images and stories, critically reread histories, and reframe the way issues that concern us are understood and discussed. Google is a powerful epistemic actor. Through design choices, Google can facilitate self-representation or reinforce the authority claimed by others to represent Aboriginal peoples. The integration of large language models into search systems is reshaping how users encounter and engage with information online, raising urgent questions about online visibility and representation. What representations are prioritised in Google's direct answers? Which knowers are treated as authoritative? What does this mean for Indigenous representation? This paper contributes to the empirical basis for reflection on these critical questions with a case study of Google AI overviews. Using thematic and close textual analysis of a corpus of question-direct answer pairs, the study offers insights into how AI overviews reinforce or accommodate challenges to dominant discourses, and more generally how ubiquitous, everyday applications of AI are affecting Aboriginal self-representation. The article argues that the shift to AI-generated search results severs links between knowers, knowledge and context in different and subtle ways, with serious implications for Indigenous representation, rereading and reframing.

Keywords

search engines, Indigenous representation, AI

Cohen, T. (2026). Knowers and others: Indigenous representation in search (and answer) engines. *Media International Australia*, *0*(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X261484730


Estimated
Actual
TP
FN
FP
TN

Estimated

Actual

TP	FN
Indigenous-led / Co-Designed IR Research	
FP	TN

Estimated

Actual

TP **Indigenous-led / Co-Designed IR Research**	**FN**
FP	**TN** **Racism**

Estimated

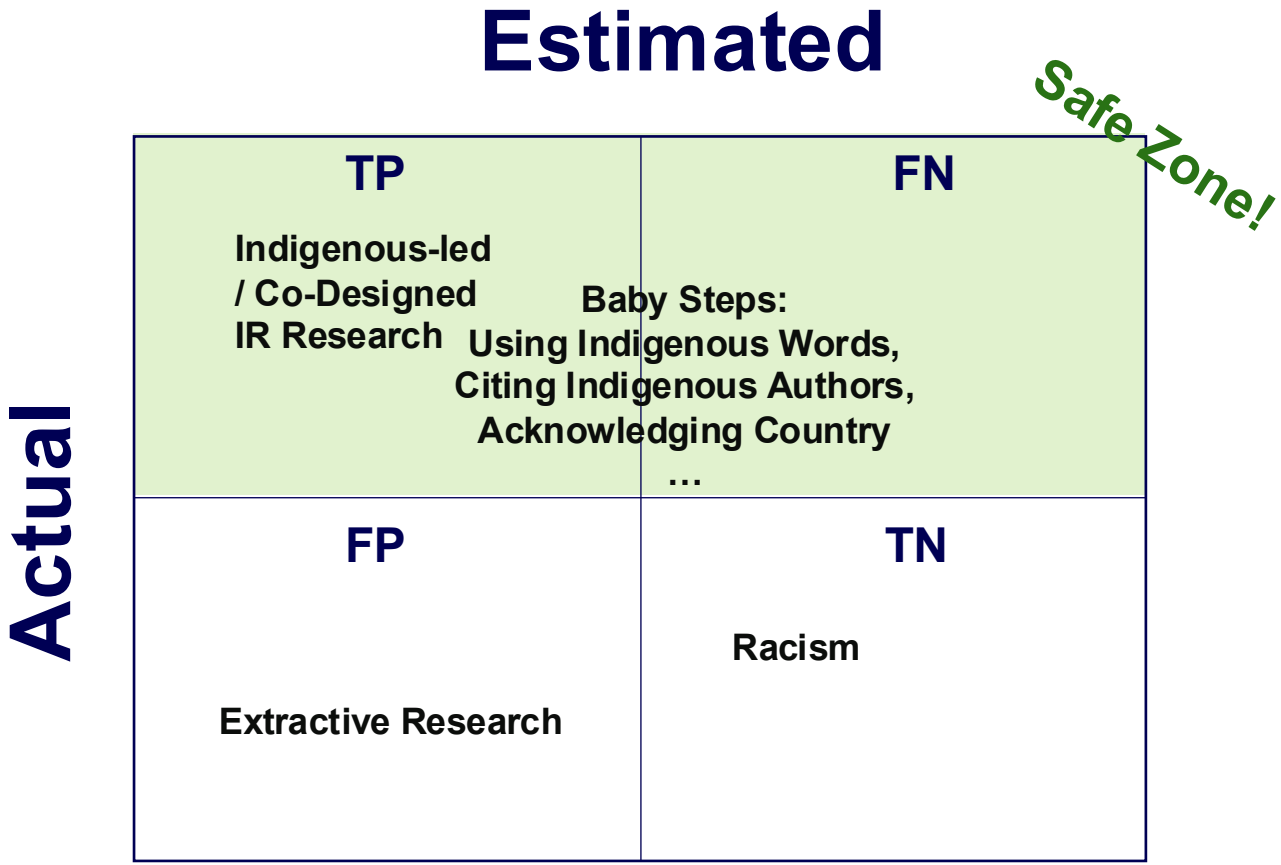
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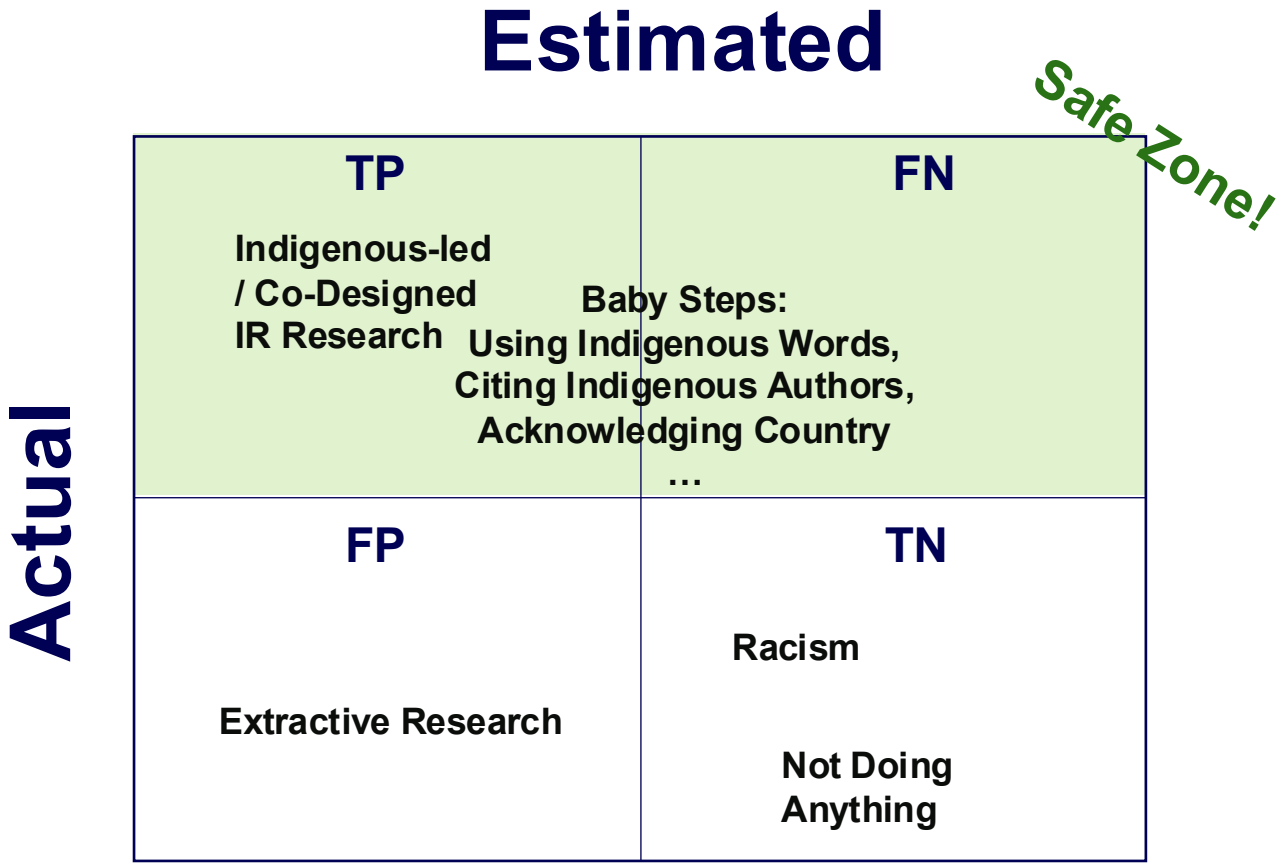
TP Indigenous-led / Co-Designed IR Research	**FN**
FP Extractive Research	**TN** Racism

Estimated

Actual

TP	FN
Indigenous-led / Co-Designed IR Research	Baby Steps: Using Indigenous Words, Citing Indigenous Authors, Acknowledging Country …
FP	TN
Extractive Research	Racism

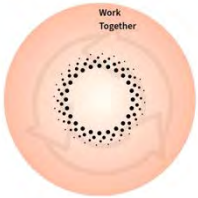

Estimated
Safe Zone!
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Indigenous-led
/ Co-Designed
IR Research
FN
Baby Steps:
Using Indigenous Words,
Citing Indigenous Authors,
Acknowledging Country
…
FP
Extractive Research
TN
Racism


Estimated
Safe Zone!
Actual
TP
Indigenous-led
/ Co-Designed
IR Research
Baby Steps:
Using Indigenous Words,
Citing Indigenous Authors,
Acknowledging Country
…
FN
FP
Extractive Research
TN
Racism
Not Doing
Anything

Estimated

Safe Zone!

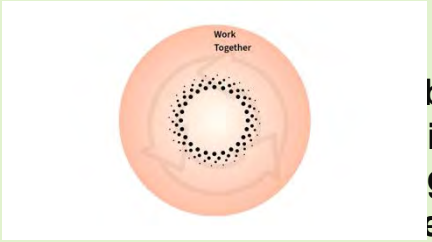
Actual

TP	FN
Indigenous-led / Co-Designed IR Research	Baby Steps: Using Indigenous Words, Citing Indigenous Authors, Acknowledging Country …
FP	TN
Extractive Research	

Estimated

Safe Zone!

Actual

TP  by Steps: igenous Words, genous Authors, edging Country …	**FN**
FP Extractive Research	**TN** Racism Not Doing Anything

Samba Song



Adeus, Adeus / **Boa Viagem /** Eu vou-me embora / **Boa Viagem** / …

*Goodbye, goodbye / **Safe Travles** / I'm going away / **Safe Travels** / …*

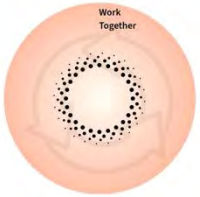
*Adieu, adieu / **Bon voyage** / Je m'en vais / **Bon voyage** / ...**

*Adieu, adieu / **Bon viatge** / Me'n vau / **Bon viatge** / ...**

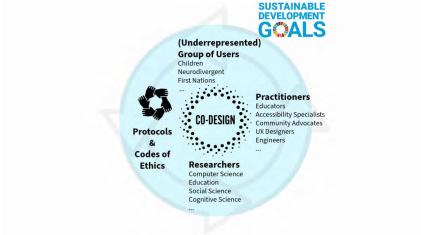
**Automatic translations, Google Gemini*



Decolonising Information Retrieval Research



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ADM +S ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society

RMIT UNIVERSITY

CHAI

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Some Mistakes I Made So Far

- **Recording of didgeridoo/yidaki & berimbau to acknowledge Wurundjeri & Boonwurrung Country**
  - **Clapsticks, possum skin drums, and voice are used in Kulin Nation**
- **Using Indigenous words without explicit permission (who is benefitting?)**
- **Not checking sensitivity of questions in a form to register an Indigenous artist at my organisation**





10. Modern Slavery

Under the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act (2018) large entities with over AU$100 million in annual consolidated revenue must prepare an annual Modern Slavery Statement.

Are you obliged to report under this Act (or an equivalent)? *

Please select...