Societal in scale and translocal in conception: Can the information and documentation professions rise to the challenge?

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Societal grand challenges and the archival field

- What kinds of proactive interventions can the profession make to help to resolve far-reaching, large-scale, interacting and complex challenges facing the world today? e.g.,
  - Climate change
  - Community sustainability
  - Deteriorating democracies
  - Global health and welfare crises
  - Inter-ethnic conflict, continuing oppressions and failures to thrive that are legacies of imperialism, colonialism, militarism, etc.
  - Mass migration

- Archival expertise is often undervalued or overlooked in these contexts, but archivists themselves may not envision how and where the might usefully apply their expertise

- Critical need for more archivists and other information professionals to engage. What would that take?

Nature of these challenges: trans-local and societal

- Not contained within national or regional borders

- A mix of causes, collateral effects, unintended consequences and impossible choices

- Can develop over centuries or can be invisible from afar until it is too late

- Potentially affect everyone while no one party or field has the ability to resolve them.

Nature of these challenges: Information and evidentiary issues sit at their heart

- Information, data and records creation, management, policy and ethics can be both contributing factors as well as part of solutions, but are under-recognised in both respects.

- Invoke contested and inflammatory social constructs such as evidence, accountability, identity, memory, power relations and trust
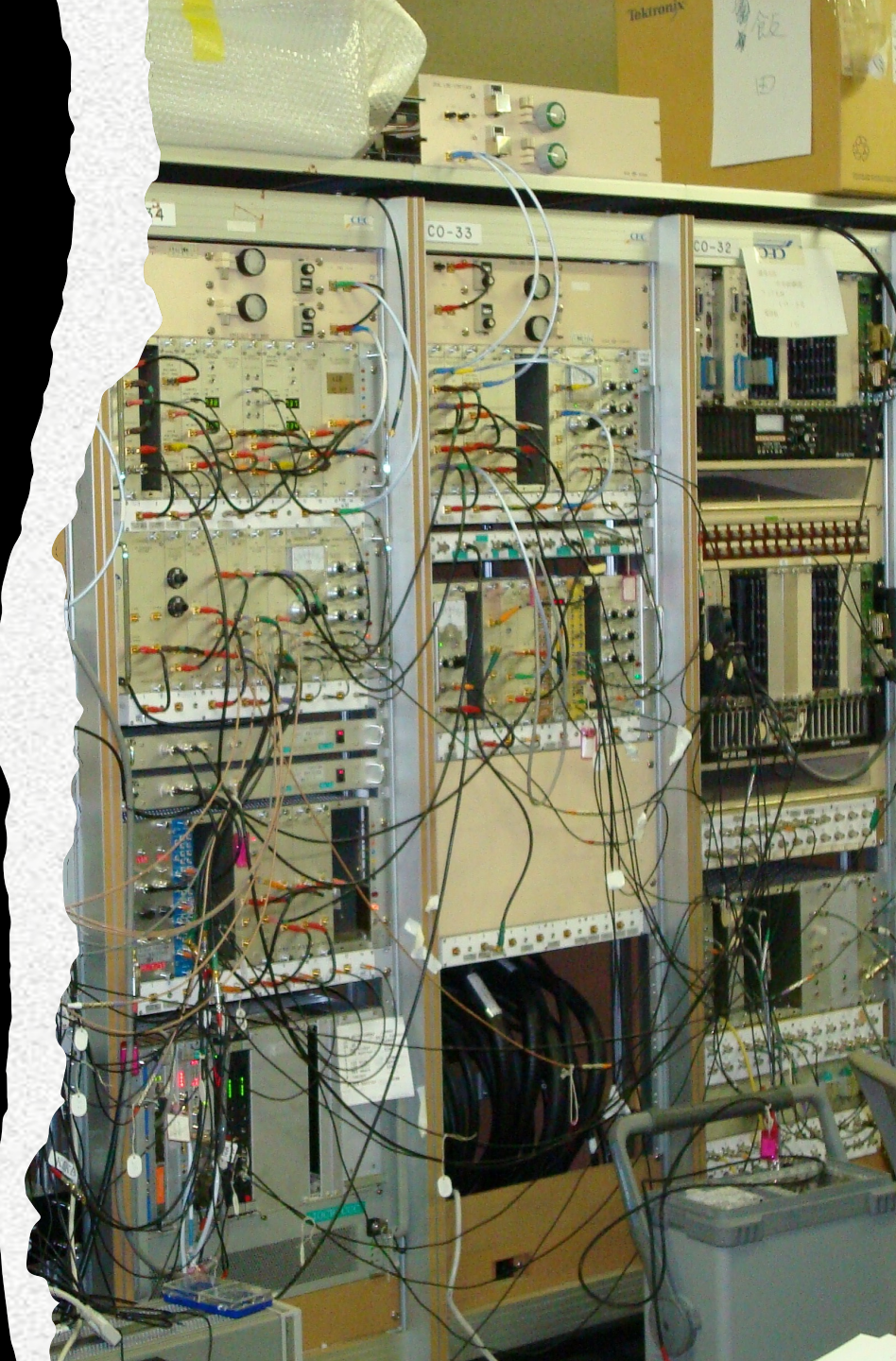
Setting a grand challenges R&D agenda for the recordkeeping and archival professions

- 2011 keynote by Prof. Sue McKemmish to the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI)

- 2014 AERI international working group

"Recordkeeping is a fundamental infrastructural component of administrative, economic, scientific, technical, clinical, educational, governance systems, and accountability and evidentiary functions. … it is also integral to key societal processes such as cultural and community sustainability, identity formation, reconciliation and recovery, and remembering and forgetting. However, the fundamental relevance of research and development in archival studies and recordkeeping more broadly to societal grand challenges has not been widely recognized."

Approach

- Outline the need for such research and development by the archival field

- Illustrate, by examining several grand challenge areas, where such research and development could make important contributions

- Provide examples of the kinds of macro and micro R&D that might be pursued by archivists and other professions who work with records
  - Decompose grand challenges into constituent problems
  - Identify at which scale it might be most feasible and effective to intervene
  - Consider what other skillsets might be needed and which field might provide them.

Examples

What kinds of recordkeeping or documentation infrastructures and standards are needed to substantiate the existence of man-made global warming to various publics and governments?

How can recordkeeping systems and records management support the security and efficiency of global, inter-dependent transportation systems or supply chains?
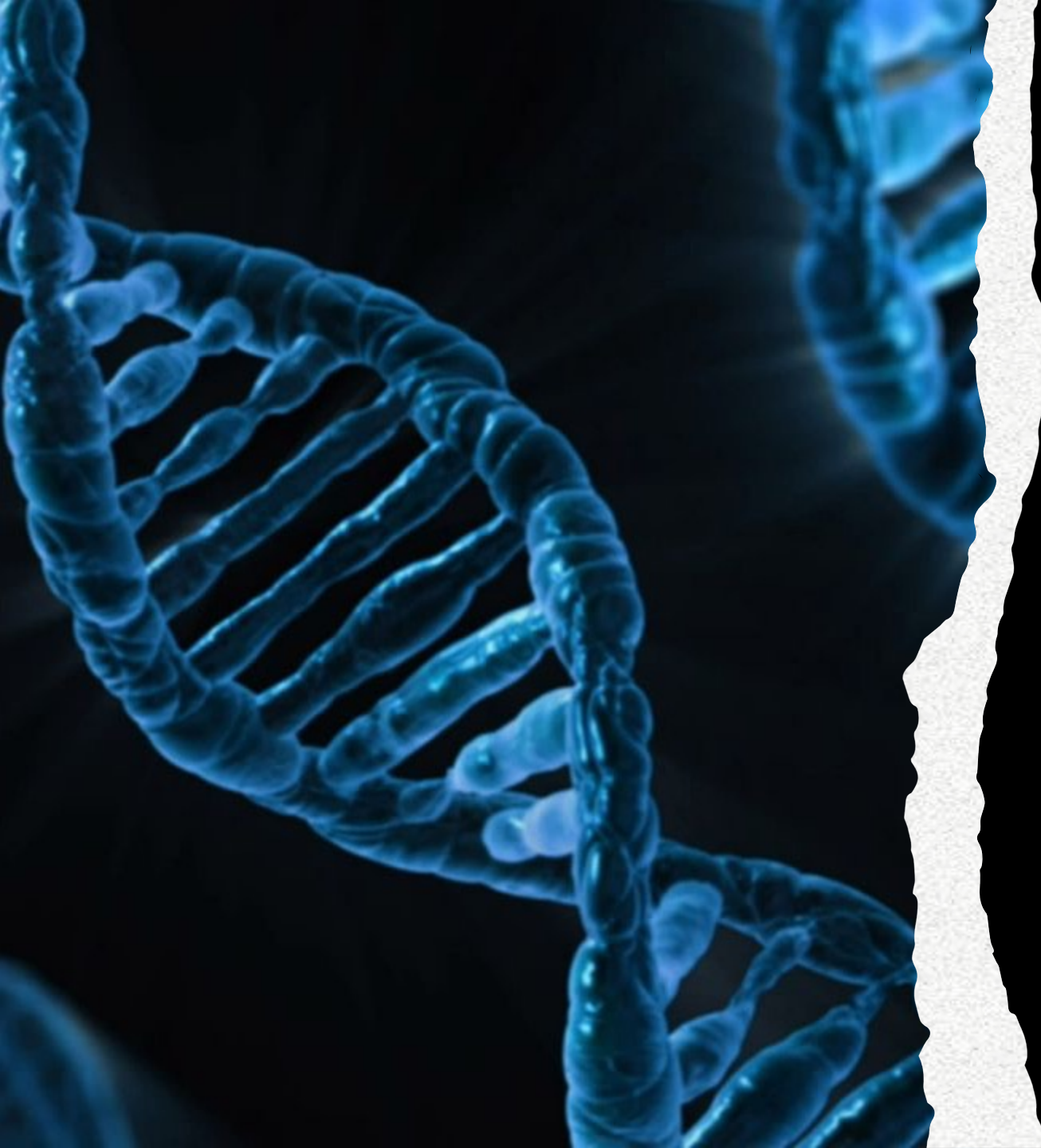
How can corporate records contribute to environmental justice?

How can we build pluralized systems that support flexible ontologies and multiple ways of understanding natural resources

How can archival infrastructures be built to best support needs of survivors of human rights abuses and their families?

How can records documenting the past be used to inspire contemporary social activism and imagine new futures, ideas, and identities?

Could archival photograph collections revealing environmental change support corporate training on minimizing environmental impact?
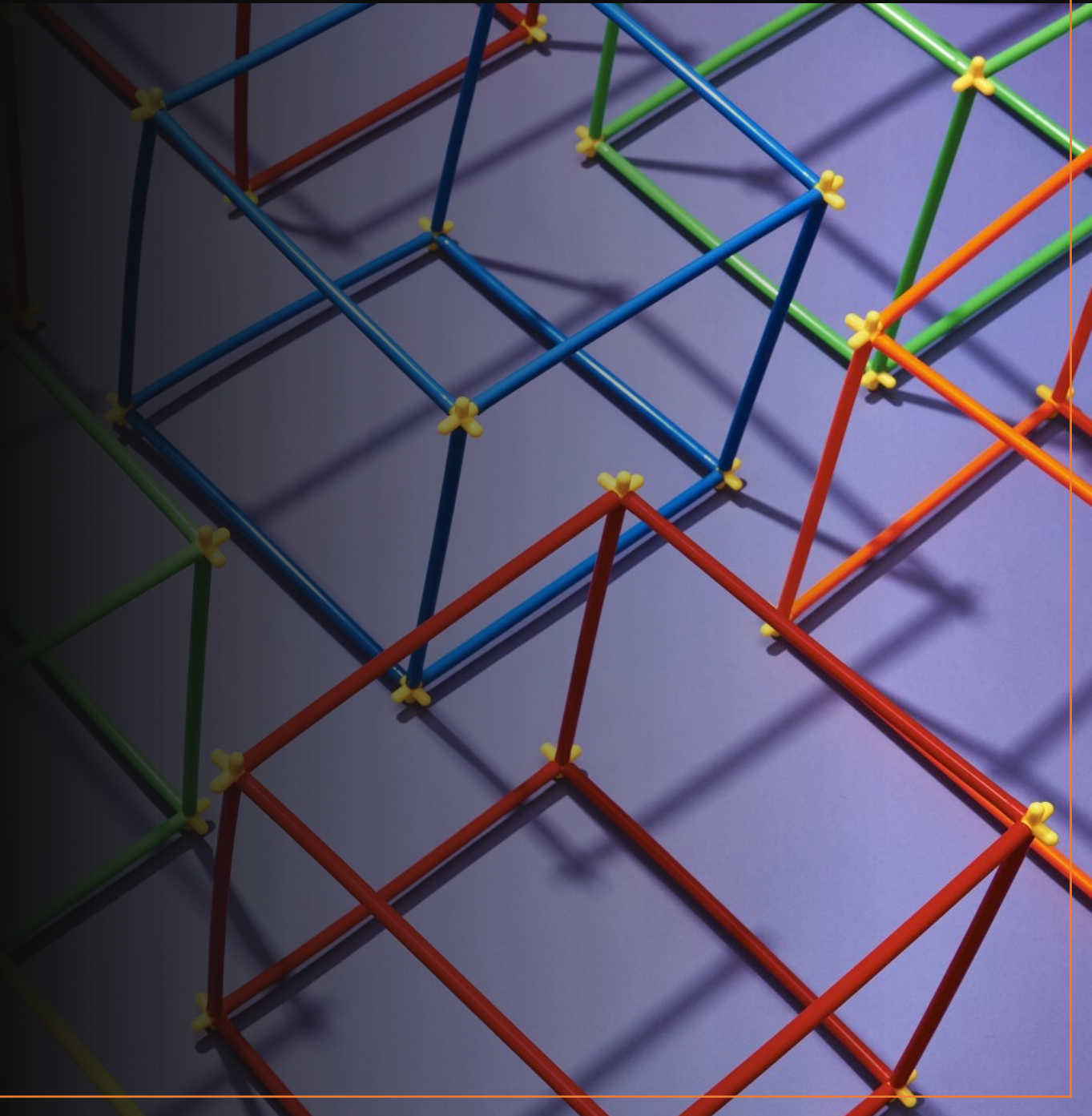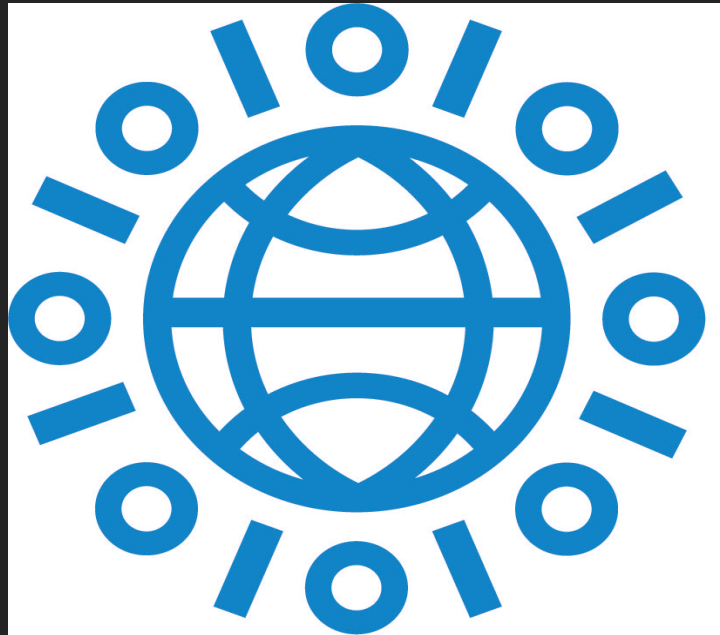
Archival professional challenges

- Can a new, non-aligned form of archival infrastructure be developed as an external source of compliance and accountability? What impact might this have upon professional identity and ethics?

- What kinds of interplay are there between scientific and cultural records, e.g., DNA matching and birth certificates? Property records and satellite mappings? How does this affect conceptualizations of the archive, "truth," and the record?

- How can recordkeeping policies, technologies and practices intervene in local and global challenges associated with people, data and systems that cross jurisdictional borders?

Need to engage with information challenges has increased exponentially since 2014

- Mass displacement and migration crises have affected large regions of the world – focus on documentation across borders; widespread creation and sharing of bio-based data for security, identity and aid purposes

- Global Covid-19 pandemic increased dependency on information systems and heightened concerns around mis- and disinformation

- Information, information systems, social media platforms and metadata of all sorts increasingly directly and explicitly employed, undermined, stolen or destroyed by bad actors.

Rights in Records in Displacement and Diaspora network (RRDDn):

- Aims to inspire, coordinate and support activities relating to records and recordkeeping, memory and repair, and archives and information technologies and services in and over time and space, across geographies and generations.

- Recognizes that records, documentation and information technologies are used both to increase and to block the agency of those who have been displaced or are in diaspora, and to assist or prevent their ability to actualize their human rights.

- Seeks through the activities of its members, to promote the rights of individuals and peoples to create, keep, carry, access, use and share records, documentation and information technologies.

Refugee Rights in Records Project
(Project leads: Anne Gilliland, Kathy Carbone & James Lowry)

Surfacing the roles that records, the data they contain, and the recordkeeping purposes, systems and processes that produce and manage them, play in asserting, securing or denying refugees' fundamental human and personal information and data rights
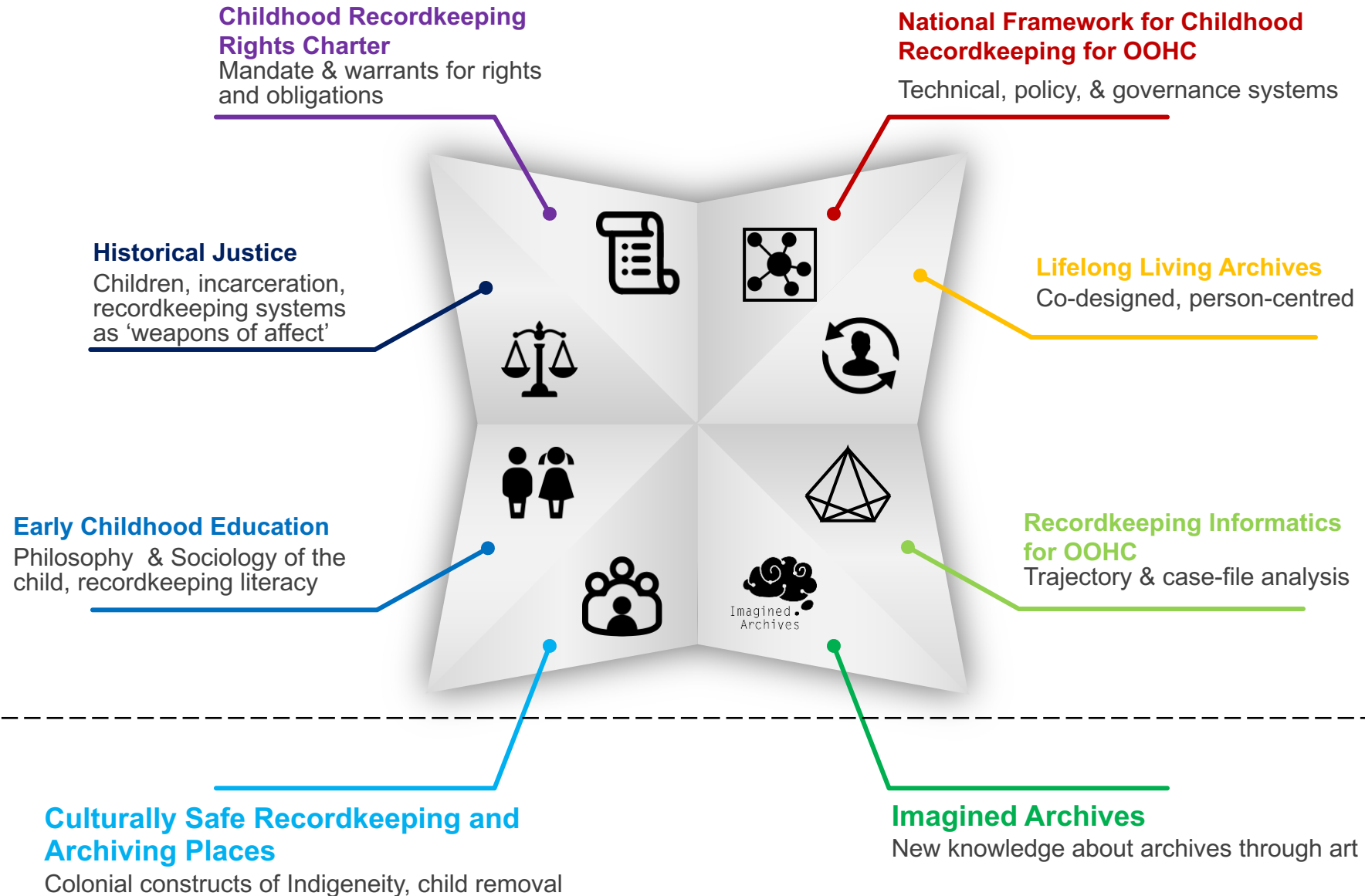
Working to ensure that records, the data they contain, and the recordkeeping purposes, systems and processes that produce and manage them, support refugees in asserting and securing their human and personal information and data rights

Refugee Rights in Records Framework

- Rights to have a record created
- Rights to know
- Rights regarding access to records expertise
- Cultural, self-identity and family rights in records
- Rights to respond and to annotate
- Rights to refuse and delete
- Accessibility, reproduction and dissemination rights
- Rights to be consulted
- Personal recordkeeping rights

Rights in Records by Design

Childhood Recordkeeping Rights Charter
Mandate & warrants for rights and obligations

National Framework for Childhood Recordkeeping for OOHC
Technical, policy, & governance systems

Historical Justice
Children, incarceration, recordkeeping systems as 'weapons of affect'

Lifelong Living Archives
Co-designed, person-centred

Early Childhood Education
Philosophy & Sociology of the child, recordkeeping literacy

Recordkeeping Informatics for OOHC
Trajectory & case-file analysis

Culturally Safe Recordkeeping and Archiving Places
Colonial constructs of Indigeneity, child removal

Imagined Archives
New knowledge about archives through art

MONASH University

Refugee Rights in Records activities

Refugee Rights in Records Framework
Human-centered mandate & warrants for rights and responsibilities

Archival Best Practices for Meeting Refugee Needs
Recordkeeping system design, appraisal, description, preservation and access

Historical and Border Justice
Weaponized information technologies, recordkeeping systems, and documentation requirements, records for reparations and (re)settlement, historical legacies of displacement

R-Archive
Co-designed, community-centered digital community archive on the Blockchain for Rohingya documents

Refugee and Migrant Education and Advocacy
Records, recordkeeping and information literacy, archivists as records experts in juridical proceedings

Human Security Informatics
Rebalancing technological, infrastructural and theoretical engagements with a specific focus on the human and humanitarian needs and interests of affected communities

Culturally and Gender Safe Recordkeeping and Archiving Places
Indigeneity at borders, child/family separation, women's rights in recordkeeping, self-identity and classification
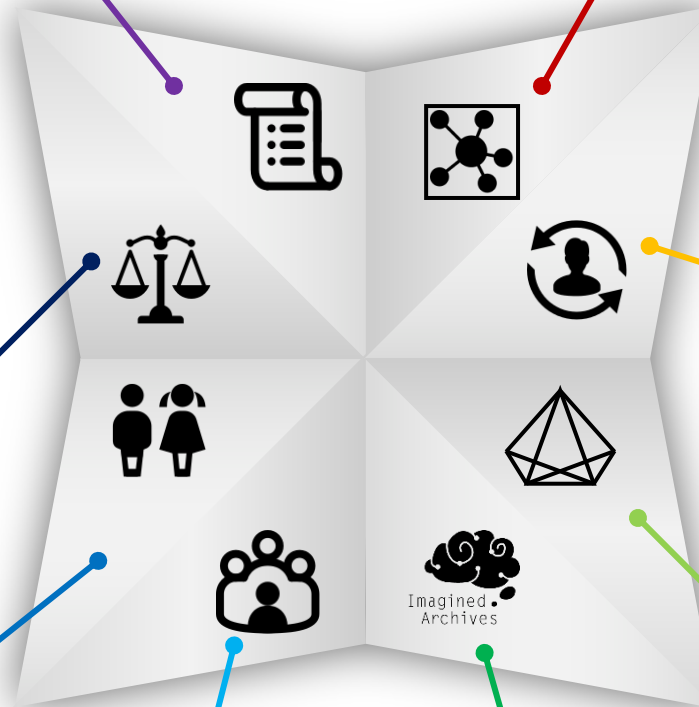
Amplification Project:
Amplification Project: Digital Archive for Forced Migration, Contemporary Art, and Action

Imagined Archives

RECORDS & RIGHTS IN DISPLACEMENT & DIASPORA

Archives, Cultural Memory and Climate Change In Micronesia

Project lead: Melissa Taitano

- Anticipating Indigenous Pacific Islander climate refugees

- Learning from traditional knowledge about the sea and navigation

- Working with Arctic Indigenous communities also facing climate change challenges

- Identifying where archival and Indigenous epistemologies meet and diverge

What do the information fields need to tackle for themselves?
Scale, translocality and recognition

- Local regulatory and funding frameworks that closely specify mandates, roles and qualifications of archives and archivists in ways that do not envisage, promote or resource these kinds of engagements

- Inadequate professional infrastructure expertise and will to grapple with emerging information and recordkeeping problems that cross jurisdictional, sector, cultural, community, linguistic and other boundaries

- Lack of professional preparation – educational and experiential – in translocal work, collaboration, policy

- Lack of coordination with other information professions

- Getting a place at the table.