

Beyond the Blank Page

Building Your Power BI Inspiration Repository

© Diana Ackermann| Data Viz Diana

Data Grillen – 2026-05-21

SOUND FAMILIAR?

You see a great report page. Then what?

Screenshot it	→	*Lost in your saved pictures*
Save the post	→	*Buried under 500 other saves*
Email it to yourself	→	*Archived and forgotten*
Bookmark the link	→	*The link is dead six months later*

What if you had **one place** to save, study, and reuse every design that inspired you?

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THE TRAP

No system holding what you see & decide

1

Learning doesn’t stick.

Screenshots, saves, bookmarks. Future-you never finds them & don't learn from good patterns.

2

You can't explain your own choices.

"It felt right" is the answer when the stakeholder asks why.

3

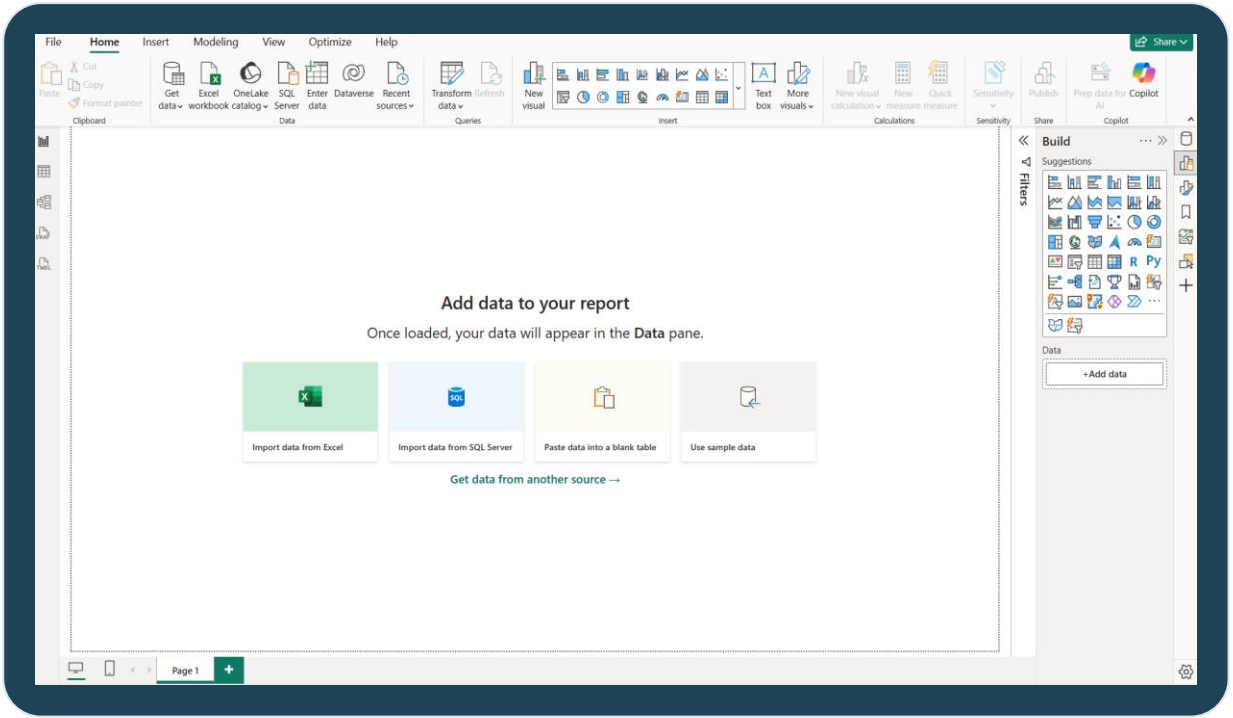
Every new report starts from zero.

No reference, no patterns. Takes longer and leads to poor design.

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THE TRAP

Without it, this is your Monday morning.



20 minutes searching for that one reference.

Rebuilding a layout you've built before.

Second-guessing choices you can't explain.

The report ships. It just took twice as long.

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THE SHIFT

We were never taught how to talk & reflect about design.

That is what this talk is about.



THE SHIFT

You don't need to play guitar to say a song moves you.

Music

You don't need to play the instruments.

You don't need to compose.

You CAN say what you like and why.

Report Design

You don't need to be a designer.

You don't need to study UX.

But can you explain WHY something works?

THE SHIFT

When you can talk about your design, you stand out.

- You look like you've thought it through
- You're confident and focused
- You respect people's time - you can explain it clearly
- You stand out from technically better developers

Especially relevant for freelancers and consultants.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Three things make a design good.

1

It solves a problem

The design addresses a real need.

2

It’s easy to use

People can find what they need without help.

3

Everyone supports it

Stakeholders buy in because they understand & trust it.

Articulating Design Decisions, 2020, Tom Greever

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THE FRAMEWORK

To get from blank page to great report, you need two things.

LOOK OUTWARD

X-RAY Method

Learn from what others built.

LOOK INWARD

Design Decision Log

Document why you built what you built.

Both go into one place: **your Inspiration Repository.**

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PART ONE

The X-RAY Method

Learn from **every report** you see.

Decode what **works**, and why.

Build a vocabulary.
Extract patterns you can reuse.

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Credit: Alli Torban - Chart Spark / Data Viz Today Podcast (Episode 83)

The X-RAY Method

X — e**X**cited

What did you find exciting about this report?

R — **R**ules

What rules or best practices does it follow?

A — **A**narchy

Where does it break the rules intentionally?

Y — **Y**ou

Where could you use these techniques?

Questions? Click the info icon below to learn how to use this dashboard

Climate Intelligence Overview

EXECUTIVE MONITORING SYSTEM

FILTERS APPLIED | CATEGORY Scientific Milestones | PERIOD Post-War Era (1945-present)

CO_2 EMISSIONS

5.27

Tons Per Capita

Period Average (1945→2024)

+127.2%	+1.0%	+0.4%
PERIOD CHANGE (1945→2024)	ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	LATEST CHANGE (2023→2024)

TEMPERATURE

+0.04°C

Temperature Anomaly

Period Average (1945→2025)

+1.02°C	+0.5%	-12.5%
PERIOD CHANGE (1945→2025)	ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	LATEST CHANGE (2024→2025)

SEA LEVEL

-29.4 mm

Sea Level Rise

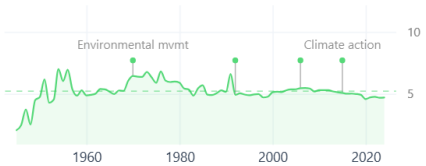
Period Average (1945→2020)

+172.9 mm	+1.4%	+8.2%
PERIOD CHANGE (1945→2020)	ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	LATEST CHANGE (2019→2020)

CO2 Analysis

Great Acceleration period | 4 key milestones marked

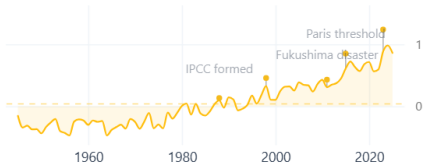
View Details >



Temperature Anomaly

Accelerating warming trend | 5 key events marked

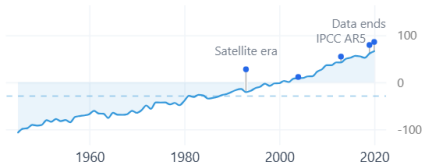
View Details >



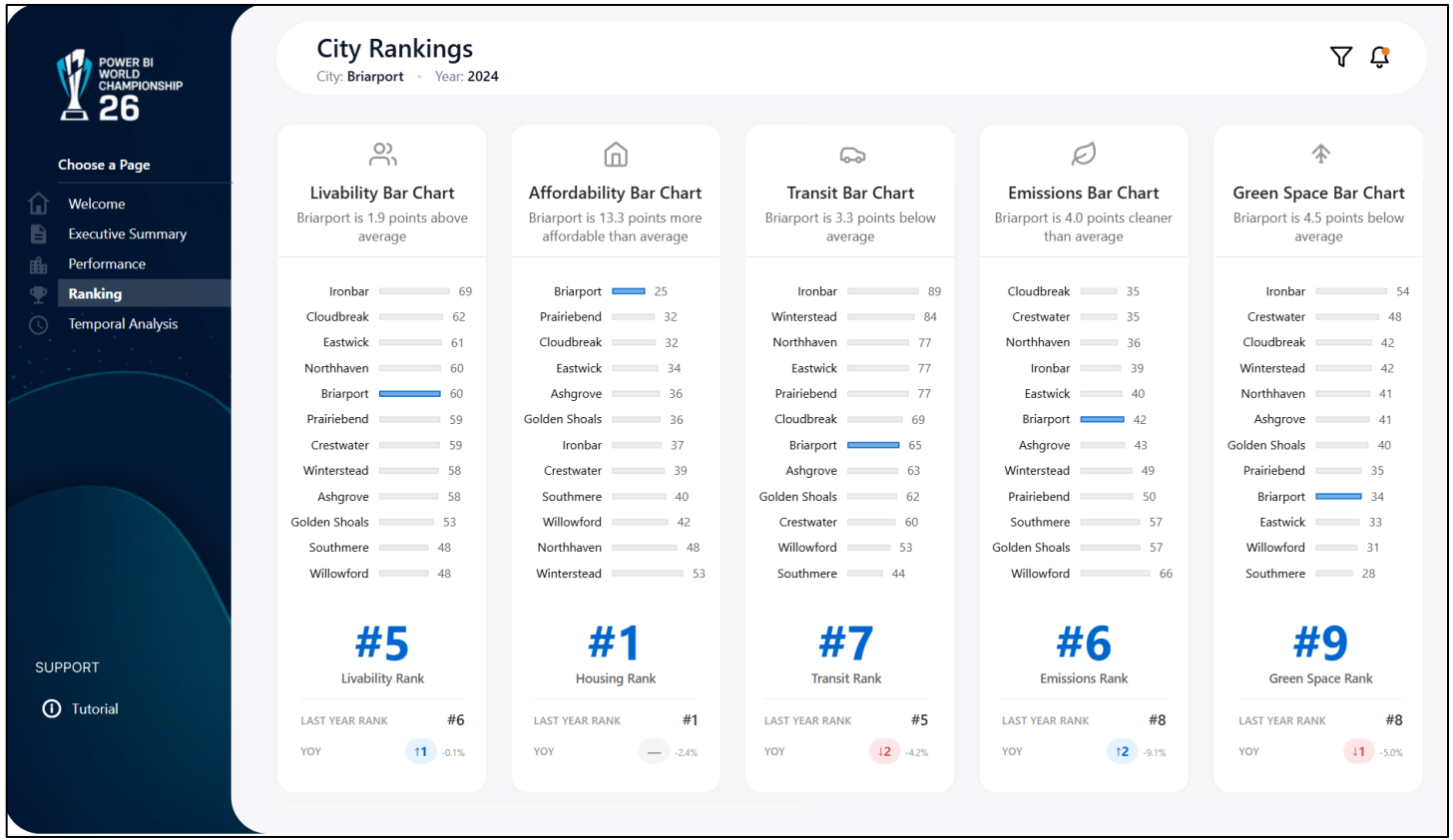
Sea Level

Accelerating rise period | 5 key events marked

View Details >



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Emissions Index *(Lower is Better)

About the metric:
The Emissions Index measures a city's environmental impact. Indicates air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Explore:

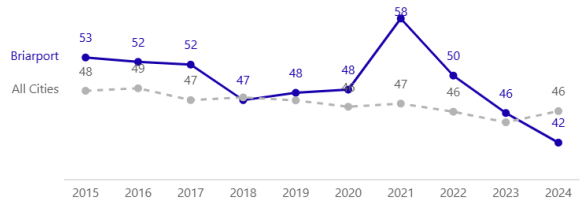
- Transit Score
- Housing Affordability
- Green Space %
- Emissions Index

Home

Briarport Avg Emissions Index
49,50 vs all city avg 46,74

Overall Rank #8 out of 12
Needs urgent attention

A turning point after 2021: Briarport's emissions index shows rapid improvement



Scenario Analysis & Strategic Actions

This section explores how changes in key metrics could impact city rankings and outlines strategic actions to drive measurable improvement.

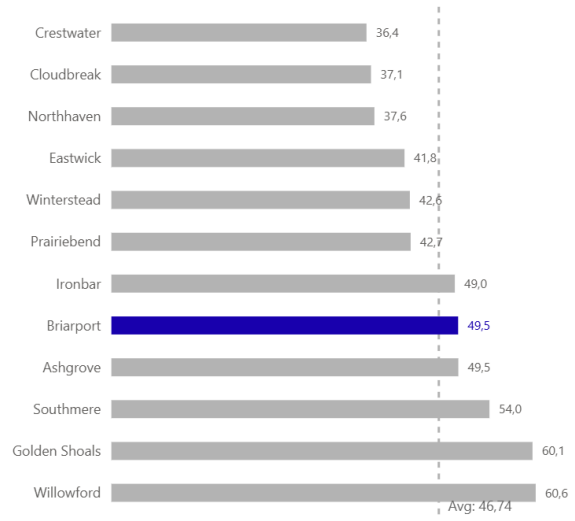
What-If?

Policy Suggestions

Briarport vs Peer Cities

Rank Trends | Metric Overview | Detailed Overview

Brairport's Avg Emissions Index is at Rank #8



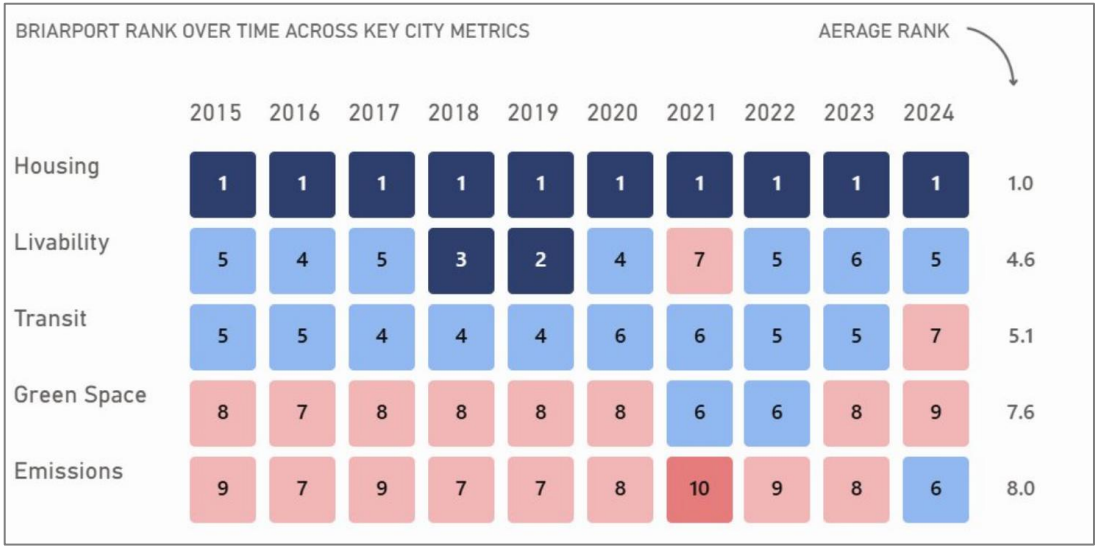
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Technique: Multi-Level KPI Card



Found in: XRAY entry #01 (Climate Intelligence) • **Documented in**: Techniques / Card Design Patterns

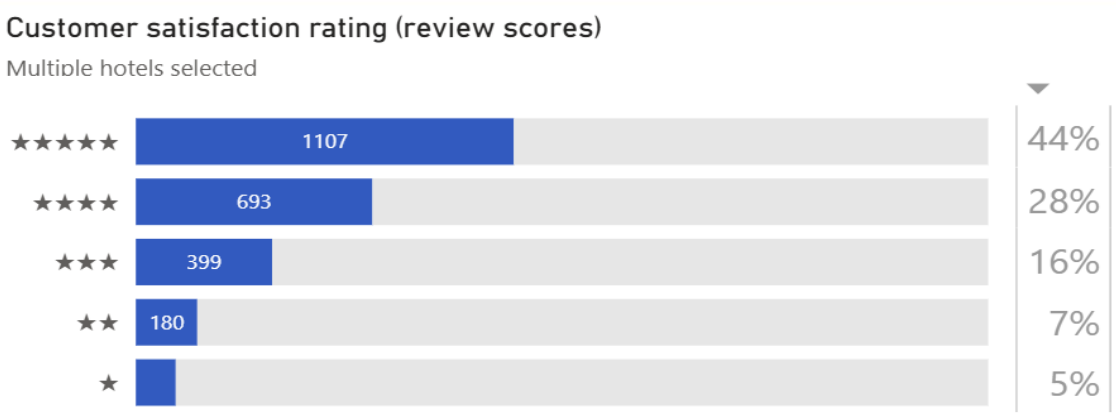
Technique: Ranking with a heatmap



Found in: XRAY #5 (Strengths & Weaknesses) • **Documented in**: Techniques/ Chart Composition Patterns

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Technique: Total Bar



Found in: XRAY entry #10 (Hotel Ratings) • **Documented in**: Techniques / Chart Composition Patterns

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THE TURN

You can now analyze any report you see.

But when your stakeholder asks:
"why did you build it this way?"
Can you answer?

PART TWO

The Design Decision Log

You make **50 design decisions** per report.

You forget **49 of them** by next week.

Write them down.

DESIGN DECISION LOG

What goes in each entry

PROBLEM

What wasn't working, or what question needed answering?

CHOSEN

What you decided.
Be specific: name the visual, the layout choice, the DAX pattern.

WHY

Your reasoning. Write it as if you're explaining to the stakeholder.

ALTERNATIVES

Optional. What else you considered and why you didn't pick it.

DESIGN DECISION LOG

Write down what you didn't choose.

The alternatives you rejected make it much easier to:

1. **Explain your reasoning**
   Stakeholders trust decisions with context, not just conclusions.

2. **Respond to pushback**
   "I considered that - here's why I went another direction."

3. **Revisit with fresh eyes**
   Months later, your future self will thank you for the notes.

Stakeholder conversations become collaborative, not defensive.

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DESIGN DECISION LOG

Before you design, understand who you're designing for.

Says
"I need all the data on one page."

Does
Only looks at the report Monday mornings for 2 minutes.

Thinks
"If I can't see everything, something might be wrong."

Feels
Anxious about missing something important.

The real need is not "all data on one page."

It's confidence that nothing is missed.

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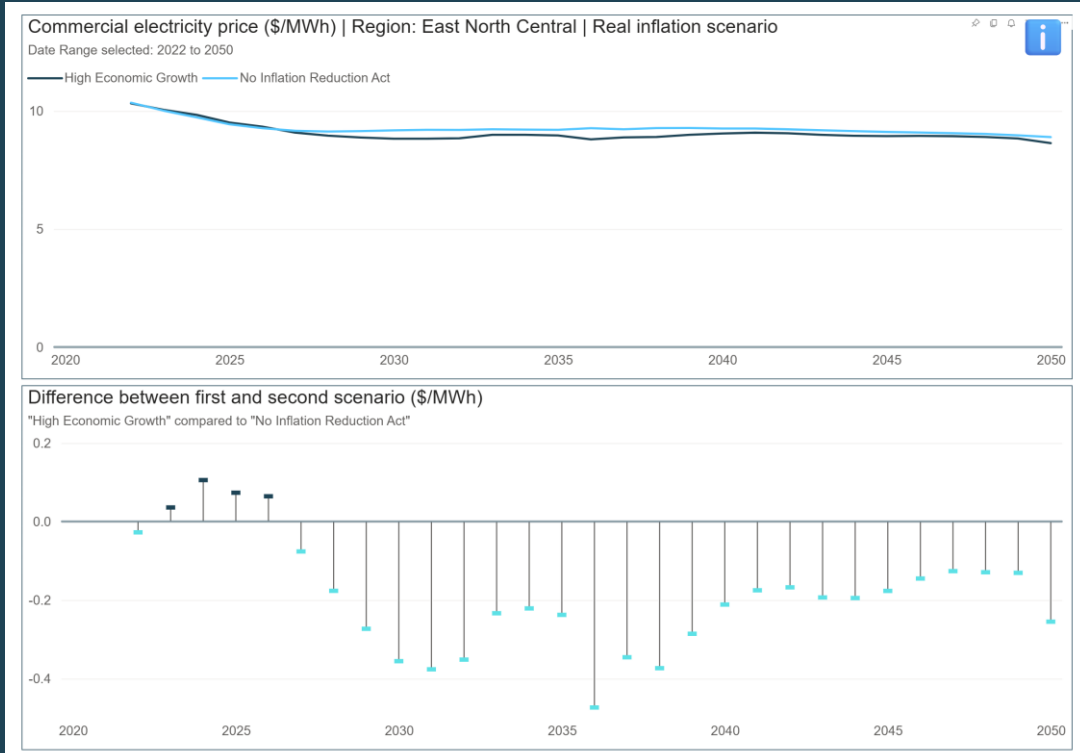
DESIGN DECISION LOG

Can you describe your report to someone who can't see it?

If you can't say it clearly, the design might have a problem.

DESIGN DECISION LOG

Showing deltas directly



DESIGN DECISION LOG

Showing deltas directly

PROBLEM

Two scenario lines on the same chart. Users mentally subtracted values to figure out the gap.

CHOSEN

Lollipop charts for scenario deltas. The line length IS the delta. Dynamic conditional formatting on values (blue shades, no red/green). Instruction text when fewer or more than two scenarios are selected.

WHY

The connecting line makes the gap the primary visual element. The eye reads the gap before reading the individual values.

ALTERNATIVES

Grouped bar chart · Separate delta column in a table / tooltip only

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PART THREE

One Place for All of It

A method only **compounds** when you keep it.

Two halves, **one repository**.

Where it all lives.

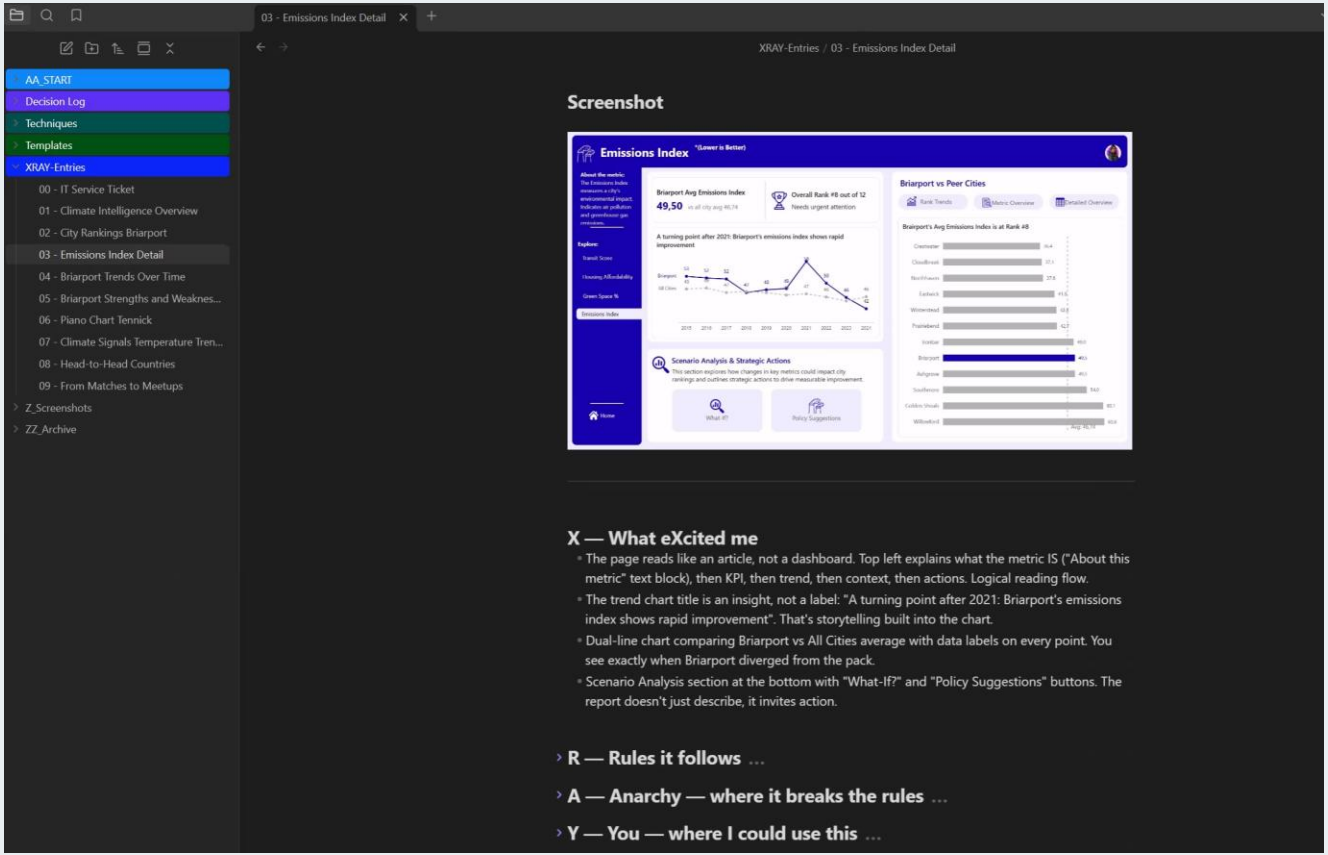
THE REPOSITORY

Your Obsidian Vault

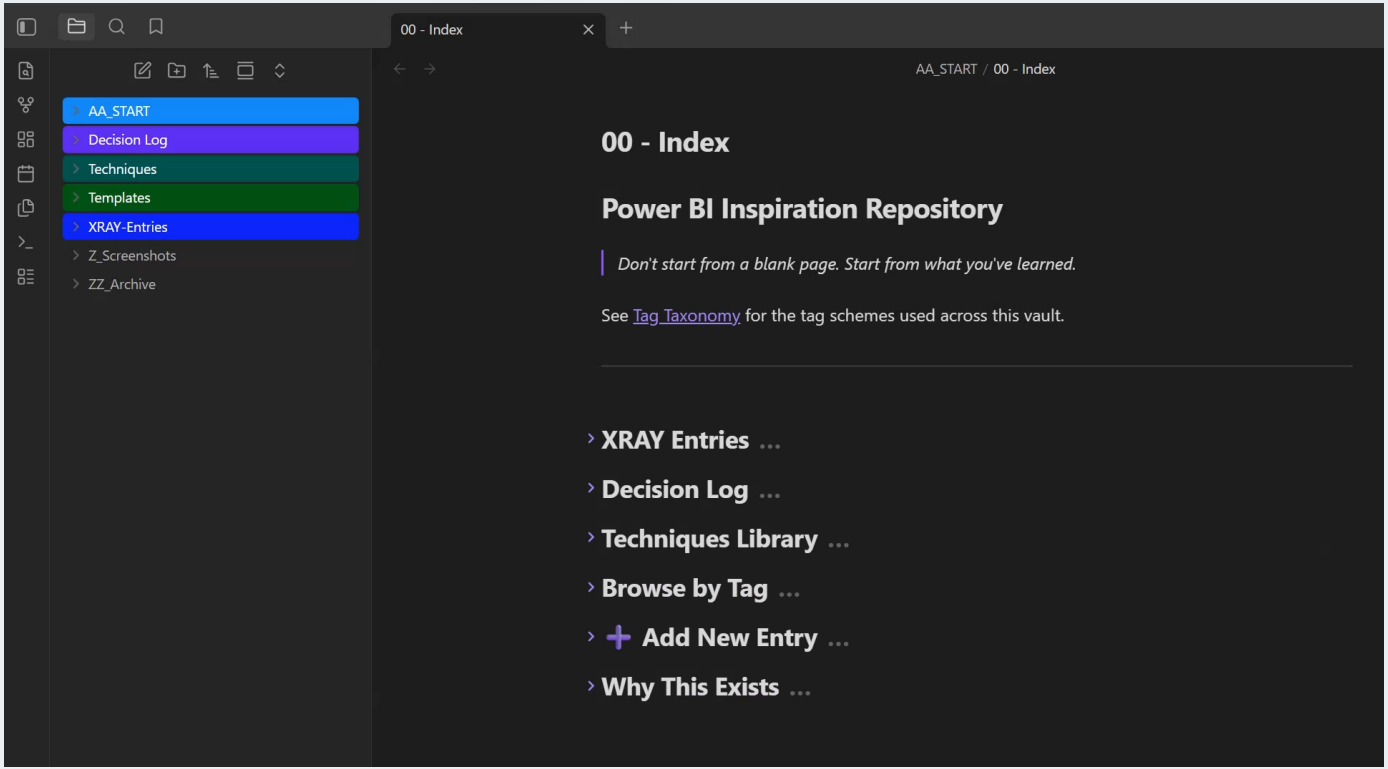
Where all of this lives: your Inspiration Repository.

→ Obsidian demo

VAULT DEMO

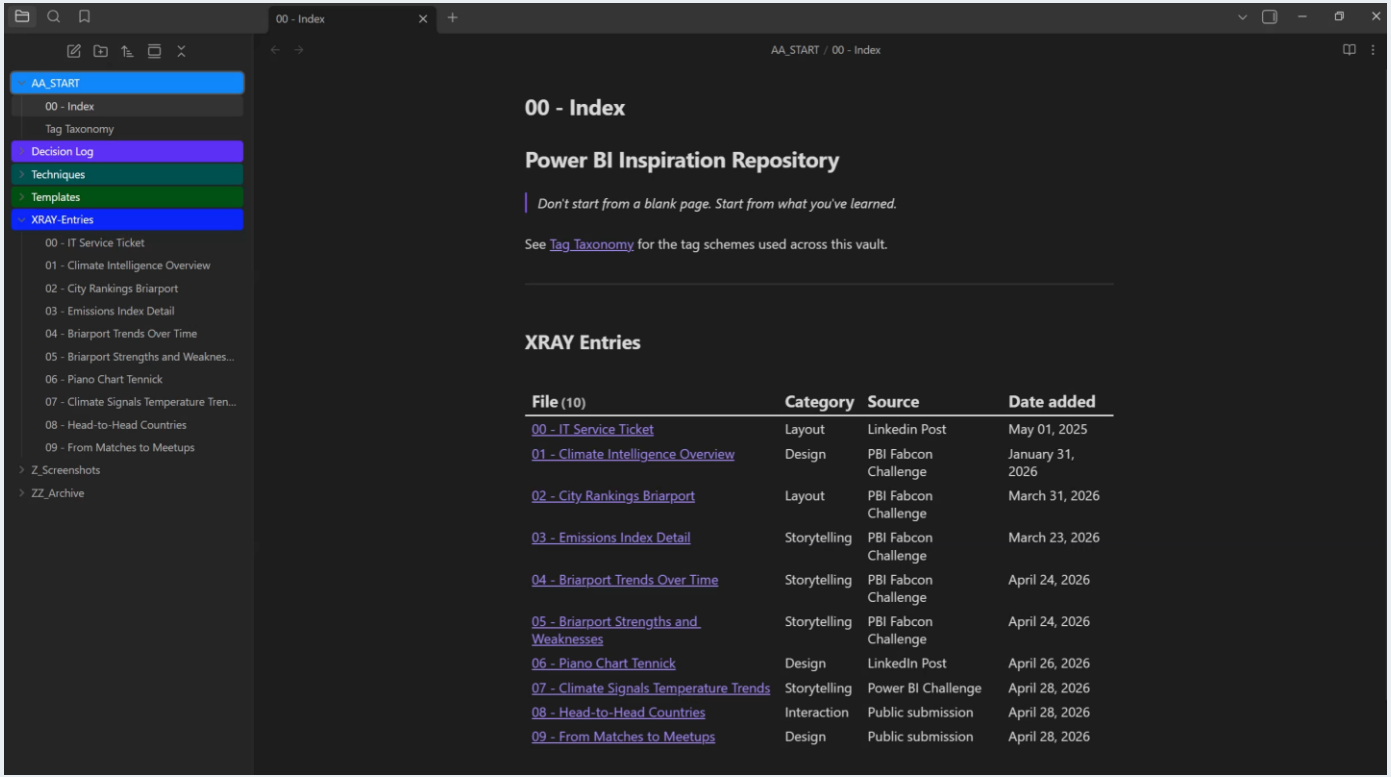

03 - Emissions Index Detail
AA_START
Decision Log
Techniques
Templates
XRAY-Entries
00 - IT Service Ticket
01 - Climate Intelligence Overview
02 - City Rankings Briarport
03 - Emissions Index Detail
04 - Briarport Trends Over Time
05 - Briarport Strengths and Weaknes...
06 - Piano Chart Tennick
07 - Climate Signals Temperature Tren...
08 - Head-to-Head Countries
09 - From Matches to Meetups
Z_Screenshots
ZZ_Archive
XRAY-Entries / 03 - Emissions Index Detail
Screenshot
Emissions Index
"(Lower is Better)
Briarport Avg Emissions Index
49,50
Overall Rank #8 out of 12
Needs urgent attention
Briarport vs Peer Cities
A turning point after 2021: Briarport's emissions index shows rapid improvement
Briarport's Avg Emissions Index is at Rank #8
Scenario Analysis & Strategic Actions
X — What eXcited me
The page reads like an article, not a dashboard. Top left explains what the metric IS ("About this metric" text block), then KPI, then trend, then context, then actions. Logical reading flow.
The trend chart title is an insight, not a label: "A turning point after 2021: Briarport's emissions index shows rapid improvement". That's storytelling built into the chart.
Dual-line chart comparing Briarport vs All Cities average with data labels on every point. You see exactly when Briarport diverged from the pack.
Scenario Analysis section at the bottom with "What-If?" and "Policy Suggestions" buttons. The report doesn't just describe, it invites action.
R — Rules it follows ...
A — Anarchy — where it breaks the rules ...
Y — You — where I could use this ...

VAULT DEMO



The landing page: all entries, technique library, tags. One place to start when facing a blank page.

VAULT DEMO



The landing page: all entries are updated automatically (dataview plugin)

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Templates ready for including more X-Rays or Decision Logs

XRAY Template

Properties

category	Empty
source	Empty
createdby	Empty
dateadded	mm/dd/yyyy

+ Add property

{{Title}}

Tags
See Tag Taxonomy for the full list and rules.

Purpose:
Dominating visuals:
Storytelling elements:
Design choices:

Screenshot

X — What eXcited me

R — Rules it follows

A — Anarchy — where it breaks the rules

Y — You — where I could use this

Decision Log Template

Properties

project	{{project name}}
date	{{date}}
category	Layout | Design | Storytelling | Interaction | Data Model | Performance
status	decided | revisiting | rejected

+ Add property

{{Decision Title}}

The Problem
{{What wasn't working or what question needed answering?}}

Chosen
{{What you decided. Be specific: name the visual, the layout choice, the DAX pattern.}}

Why
{{Your reasoning. Write it as if you're explaining to the stakeholder.}}

Alternatives *(optional, use when you genuinely weighed options)*

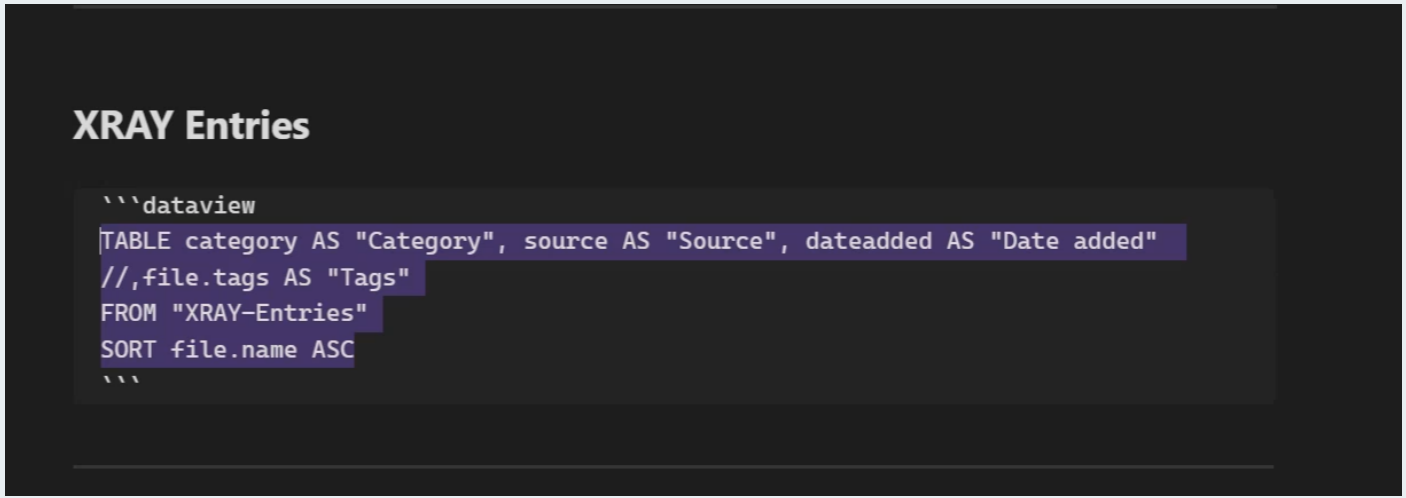
{{Option name}}
{{Why you didn't pick it.}}

{{Option name}}
{{Why you didn't pick it.}}

Stakeholder Context *(optional, use when the user's behaviour drove the decision)*
- **Says:** {{what they asked for}}
- **Does:** {{how they actually use the report}}
- **Real need:** {{what they actually need, which may differ from what they said}}

Result *(optional, fill in after implementation)*

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The landing page: all entries are updated automatically (dataview plugin)

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Browse by Tag

XRAY Entries

Purpose: #p/overview · #p/detail · #p/comparison · #p/scenario · #p/executive-summary · #p/pure-storytelling
Dominating visuals: #v/small-multiples · #v/heatmap · #v/line-chart · #v/bar-chart · #v/kpi-cards · #v/matrix-table
Storytelling elements: #s/insight-titles · #s/narrative-panel · #s/annotations · #s/dynamic-subtitles · #s/conditional-formatting · #s/visual-hierarchy · #s/delta-vs-previous
Design choices: #d/color-coding · #d/dark-background · #d/editorial-type · #d/direct-labels

Techniques

Type: #t/layout · #t/formatting · #t/navigation · #t/storytelling · #t/chart

Decision Log

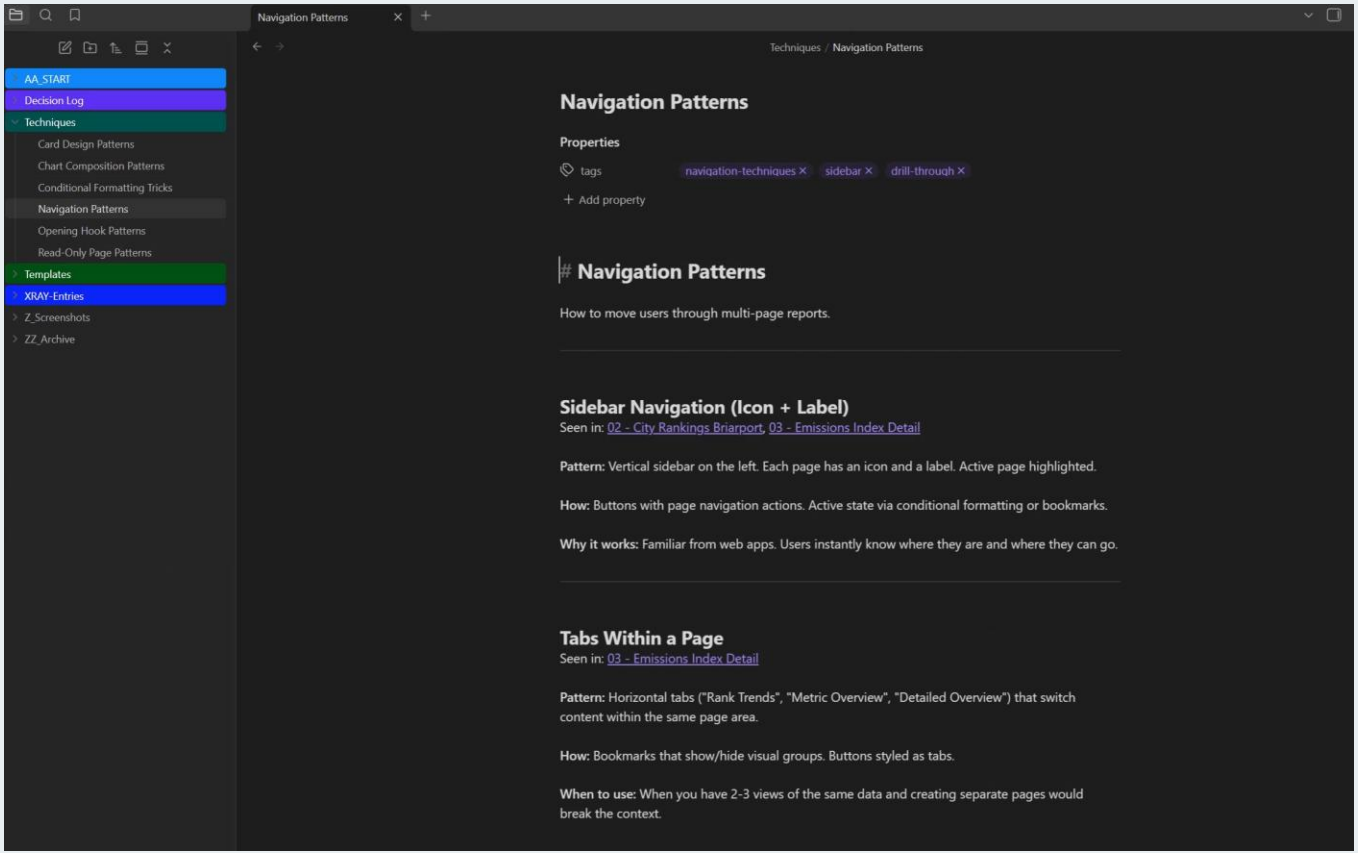
Decision area: #a/layout · #a/navigation · #a/data-model · #a/performance · #a/styling · #a/measure-design
Stakeholder pattern: #u/daily · #u/weekly · #u/ad-hoc · #u/one-time
Decision type: #dt/one-page-vs-multi · #dt/aggregation-grain · #dt/what-to-cut · #dt/tooling-choice

Browse by Tag: leeds you to relevant entries you should explore

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VAULT DEMO

Patterns extracted from multiple entries. DAX snippets ready to copy. Cross-linked back to source reports.



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THE WHOLE TALK IN ONE LINE

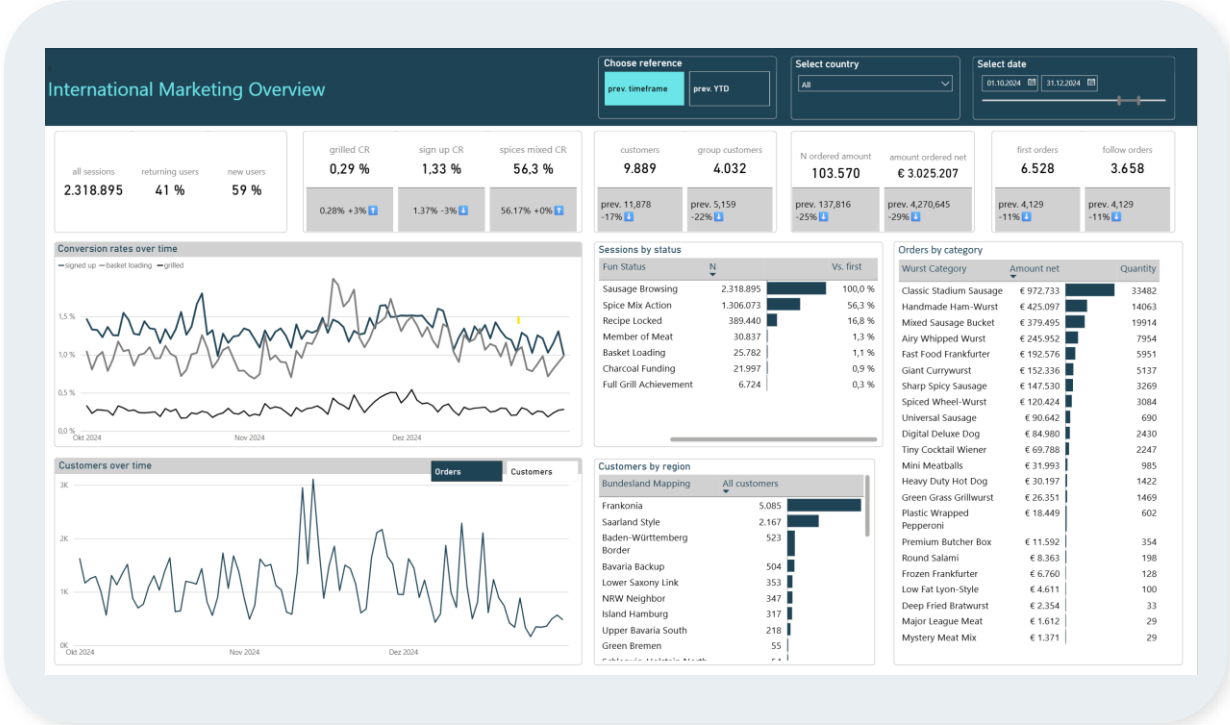
You do not need to invent. You need to notice.

Pick one. Copy it. Ship it.

Remember the start

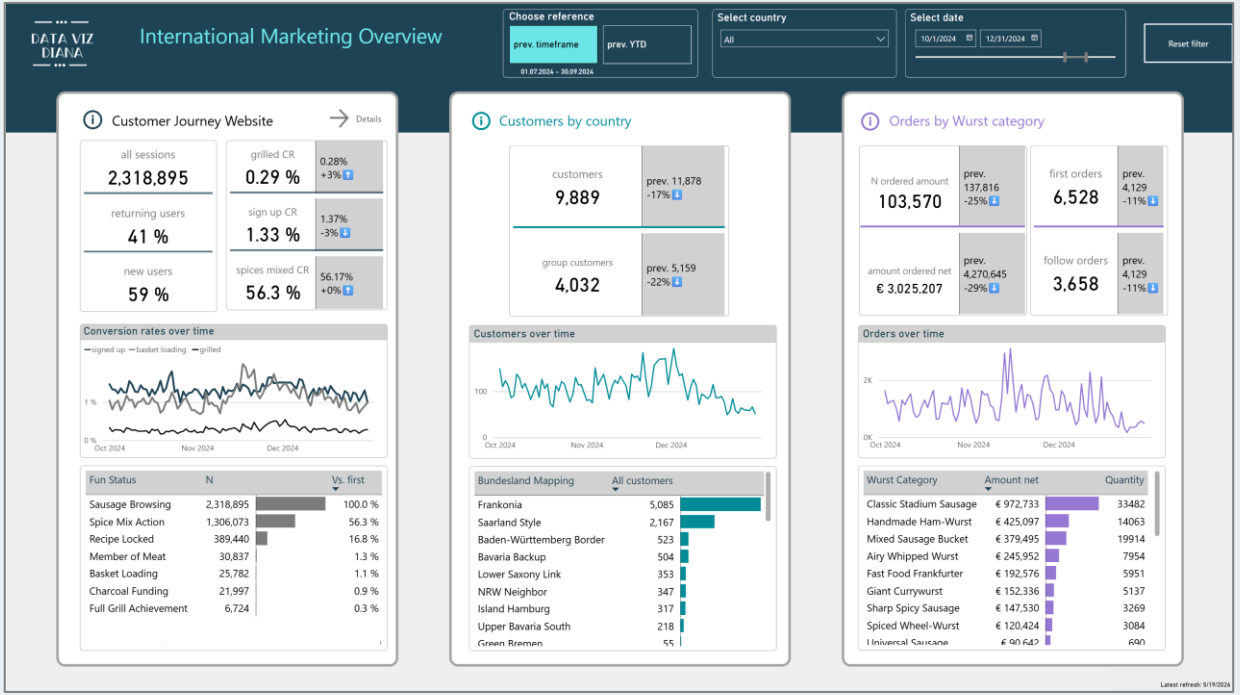
Don’t start with a blank canvas





Start with an inspiration





YOUR NEXT STEP

Start your repo this week.

You don’t need 100 entries. You need one.

1. Pick one report you admire
2. Screenshot it
3. X-RAY it (X, R, A, Y) – 5 minutes
4. Save it in Obsidian (or Notion, or OneNote, or a folder)
5. Do it again next week

The tool doesn’t matter. The habit does.

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You started this talk staring at a blank canvas.

Now you have:

- A method to learn from every report you see (X-RAY)
- A framework to explain your own decisions (Design Decision Log)
- A system that grows with you (your vault)

The blank page is not blank anymore.

Credits & Resources

XRAY Method

Alli Torban — Chart Spark (book) / Data Viz Today Podcast, Episode 83

Design Decisions Framework

Tom Greever — Articulating Design Decisions (book)

Community and other inspiration works

Thank you!

Diana | DataVizDiana

www.linkedin.com/in/diana-ackermann/

www.datavizdiana.com

