How do you measure Real World Impact?

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COHERENT DIGITAL

BIBLIOMETRICS AND RESEARCH IMPACT COMMUNITY

BRIC 2023

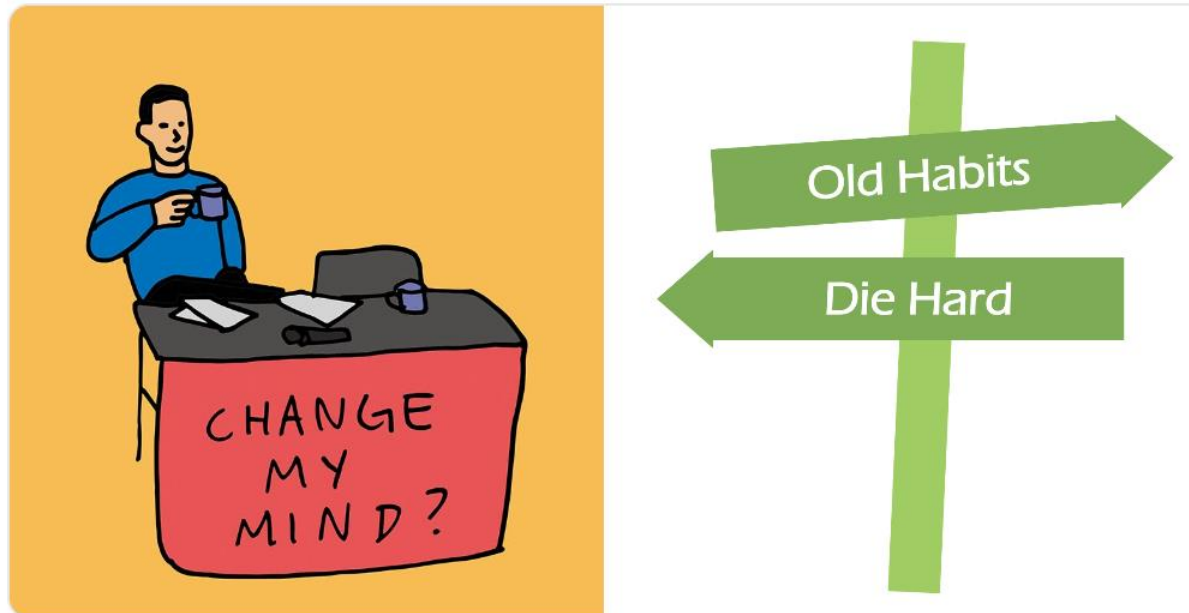June 7th & 8th, 2023 | St. Paul's Univesity, Ottawa, Canada

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Bonjour Hi! (Yes, I'm in 🇨🇦)

It's time for another scholcom ThreadTalk.
This time, it's all about IMPACT.

Specifically, How Do You Measure Real-World Impact?

Thanks to BRIC 2023 for inviting me to create this ThreadTalk
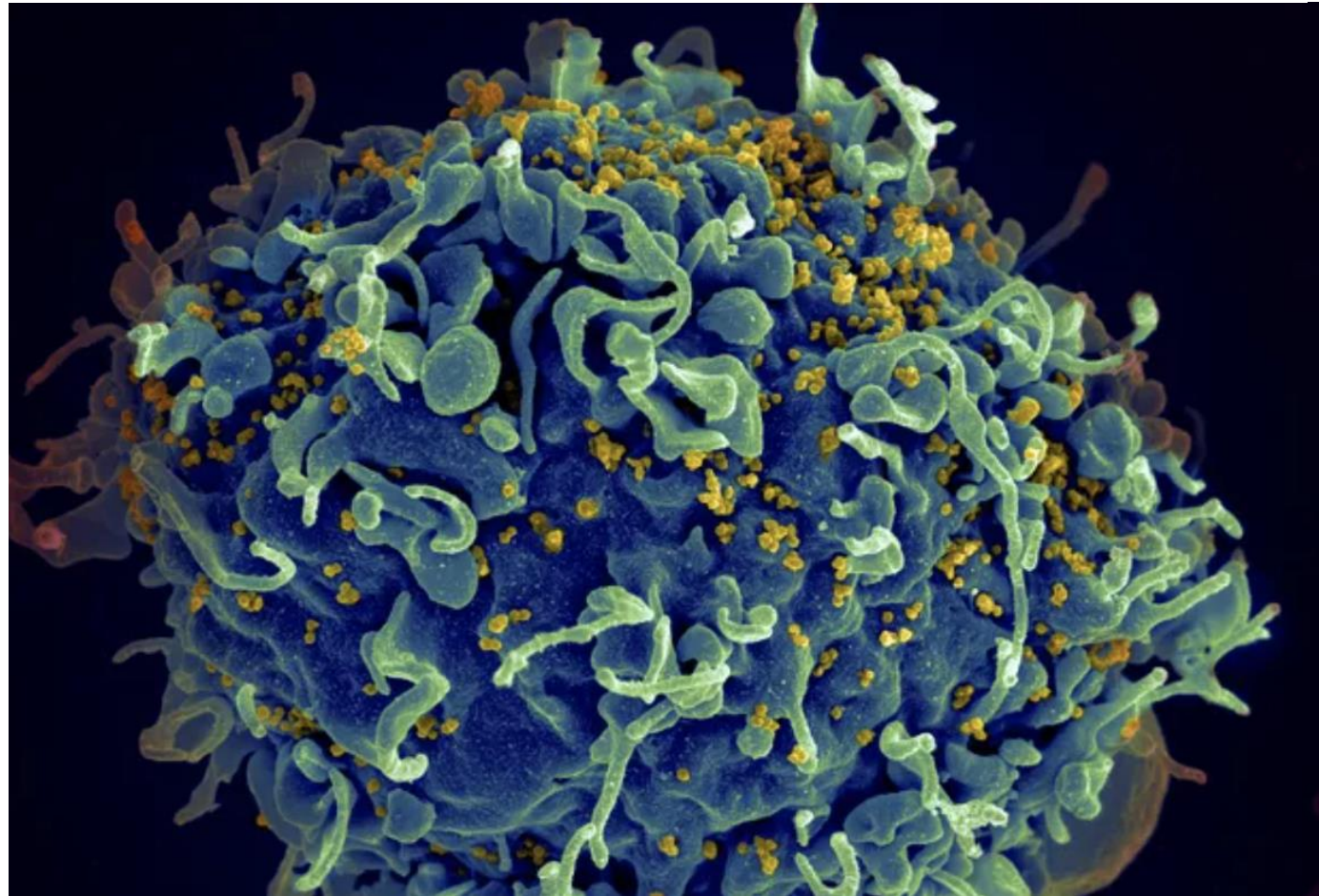
#BRIC2023

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So, how do you measure Real World Impact (RWI)?
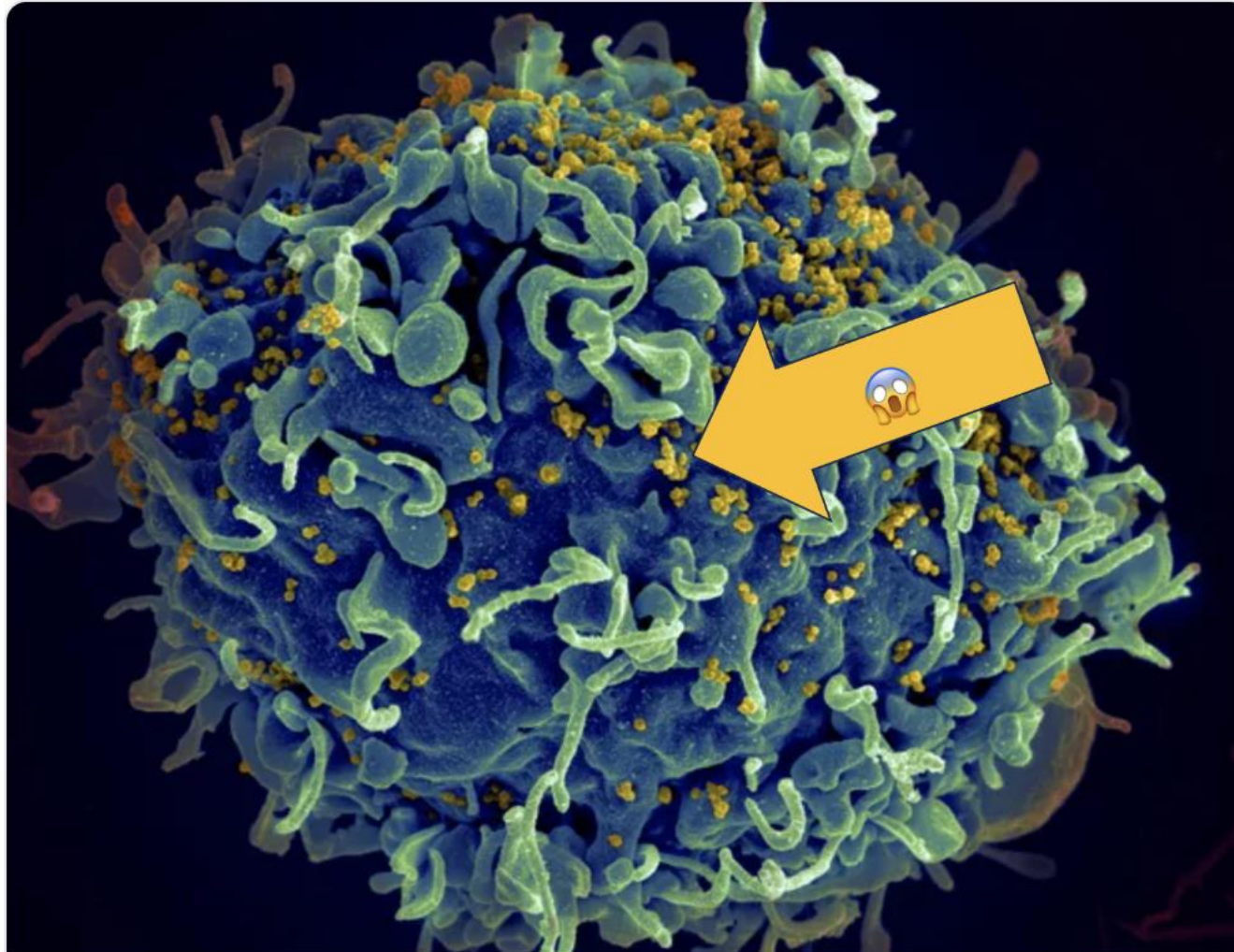
Let me tell you a story.

Any microbiologists in the house?

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Well, you should be worrying about the yellow bits 😱. They're virions budding out of an infected T-Cell. T-Cells are a key part of your immune system. Once the virions mature, they infect more T-Cells, depleting their function. Losing your T-Cells 🔜 AIDS.

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HIV emerged in Africa in the 1980s. By 1998, 1% of southern Africa's population had caught HIV, >90% would die within 3 years b/c their immune systems couldn't fight infections.
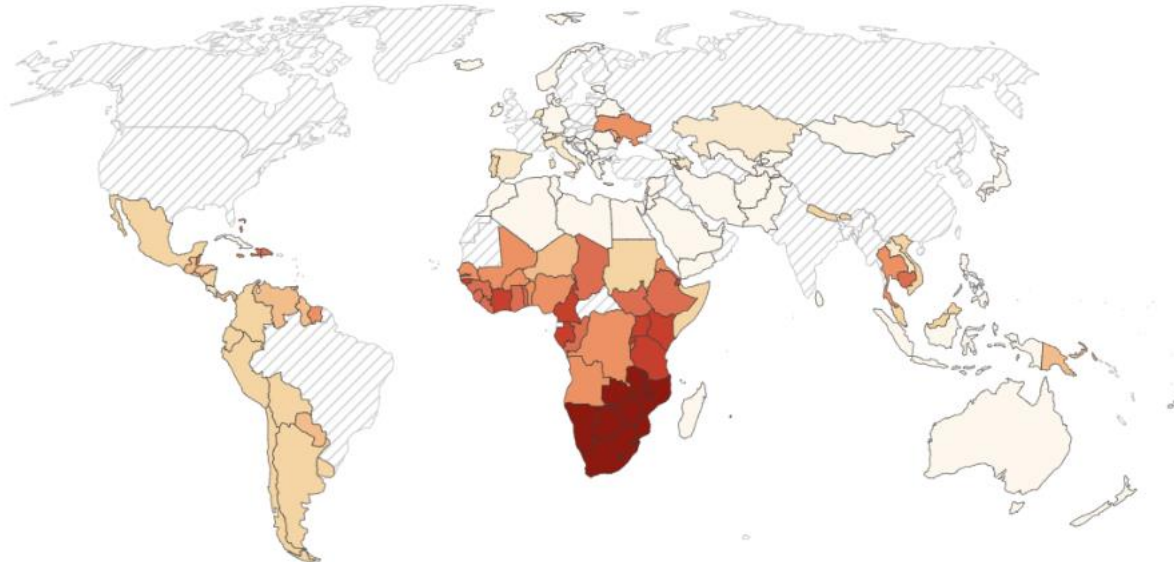(Perspective: at its peak in Jan '22, 1% of Canadians had Covid-19, >90% would recover.)

Annual new cases of HIV, 1998

The number of new HIV infections among the uninfected population aged 15-49, expressed per 1,000 uninfected people in the year before.
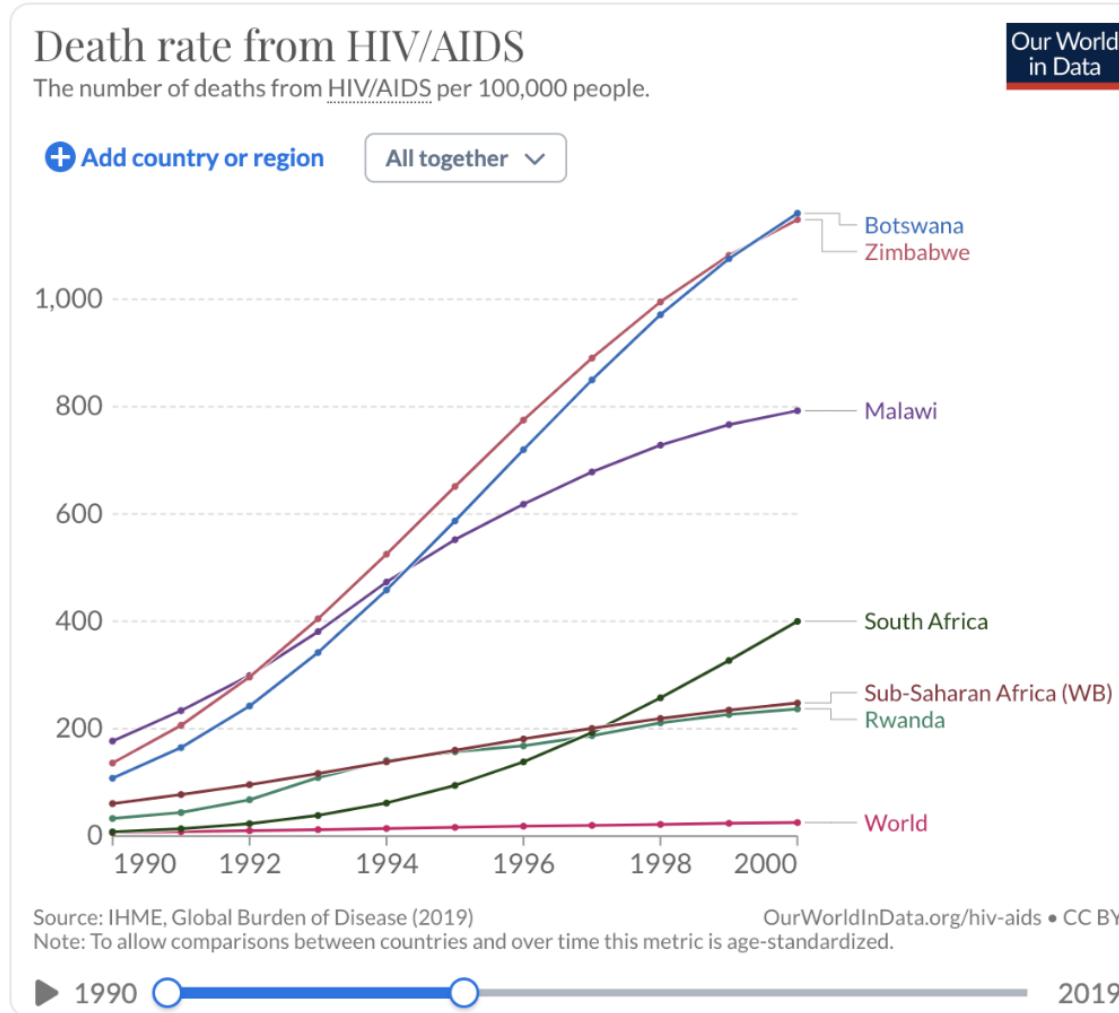
Our World in Data

World

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The @WorldBank started supporting countries affected by HIV/AIDS in 1986, spending ~$55MN/yr to 1996. But, despite this support, by end 1990s, death rates were climbing, fast.

Death rate from HIV/AIDS

The number of deaths from HIV/AIDS per 100,000 people.

Our World in Data

⊕ **Add country or region**   All together ⌄

- Botswana
- Zimbabwe
- Malawi
- South Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa (WB)
- Rwanda
- World

1,000
800
600
400
200
0

1990   1992   1994   1996   1998   2000

Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2019)   OurWorldInData.org/hiv-aids • CC BY
Note: To allow comparisons between countries and over time this metric is age-standardized.

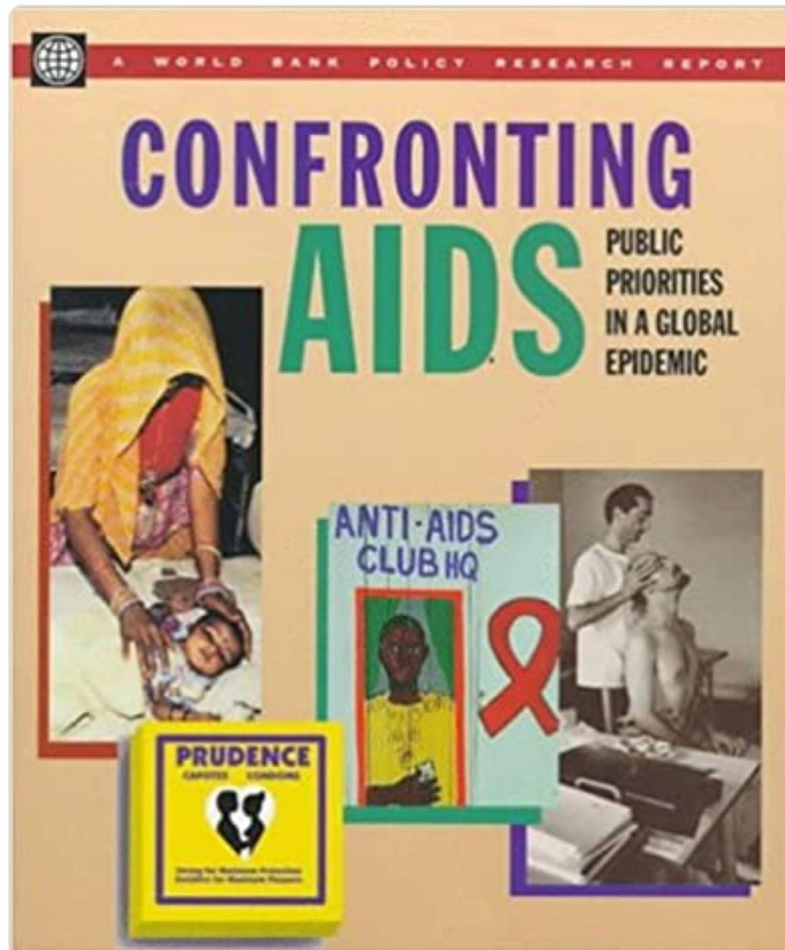▶ 1990   2019

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In 1997, with @OUPAcademic, @WorldBank published
"Confronting AIDS: Public Priorities in a Global Epidemic".
It proved to be a game-changer.
Why? Because someone at the Bank flew to Seattle and gave a copy to
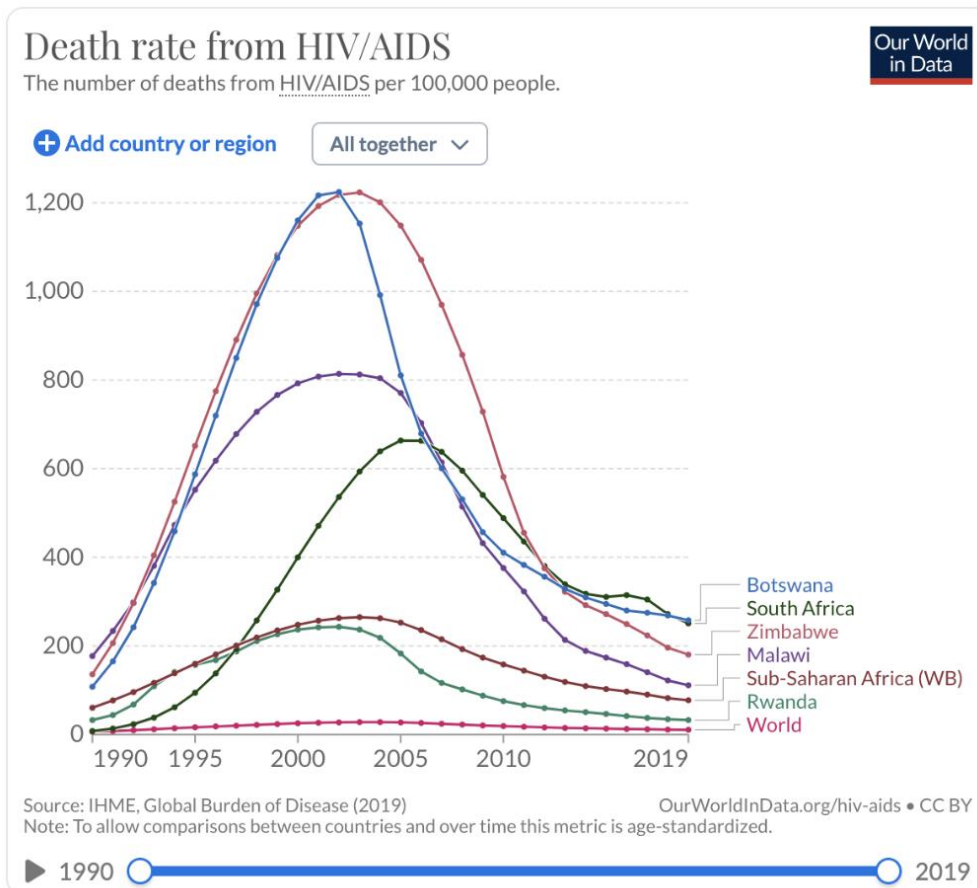Bill Gates . . .

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. . . after which the Bill & Melinda Gates Fdn started funding the fight vs HIV/AIDS.
In 1999, @gatesfoundation gave $25M to vaccine research & since 2000 it's given $5BN ➡️ HIV projects incl $4BN to the @GlobalFund.
The fight is being won.

Death rate from HIV/AIDS
The number of deaths from HIV/AIDS per 100,000 people.

Our World in Data

➕ Add country or region   All together ⌄

1,200
1,000
800
600
400
200
0

Botswana
South Africa
Zimbabwe
Malawi
Sub-Saharan Africa (WB)
Rwanda
World

1990   1995   2000   2005   2010   2019

Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2019)   OurWorldInData.org/hiv-aids • CC BY
Note: To allow comparisons between countries and over time this metric is age-standardized.

▶ 1990 ⚪━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━⚪ 2019

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It took me 2 hours to compile this Impact story . . .

First take-away: Telling Impact stories takes time and effort.

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Here's another Impact story.
In 2012, OECD published this . . . (full disclosure, I was then Head of
OECD Publishing). https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264060111-en

OECD Review of
Telecommunication Policy
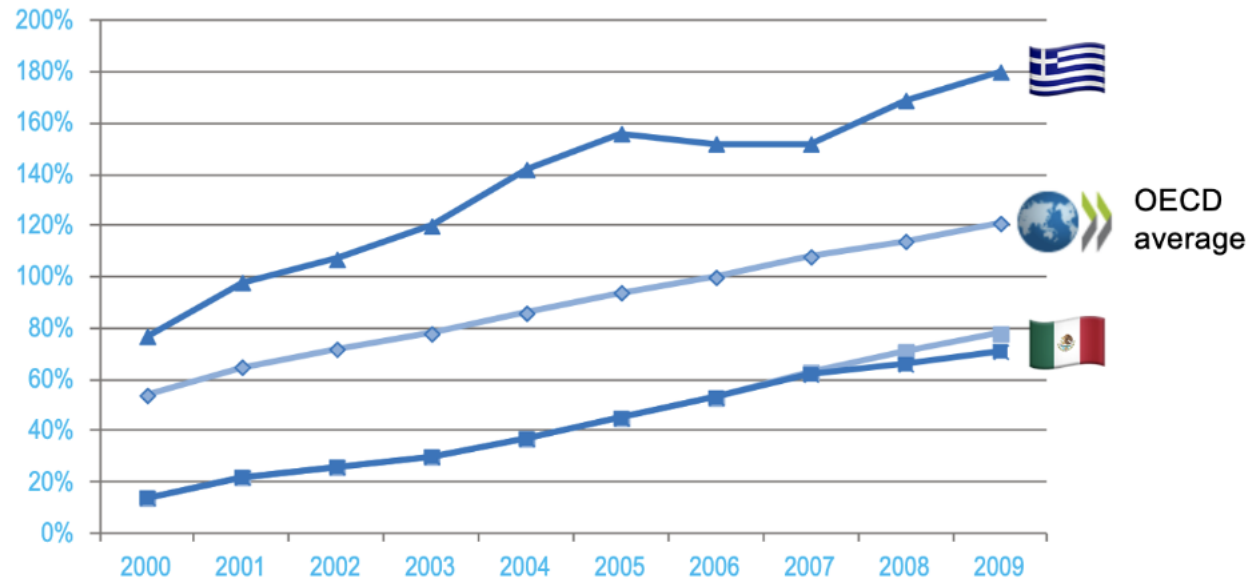and Regulation in Mexico

OECD

Toby Green tames wild content at Coherent Digital @TobyABGreen
At the time, when it came to having access to mobile phones, Mexico
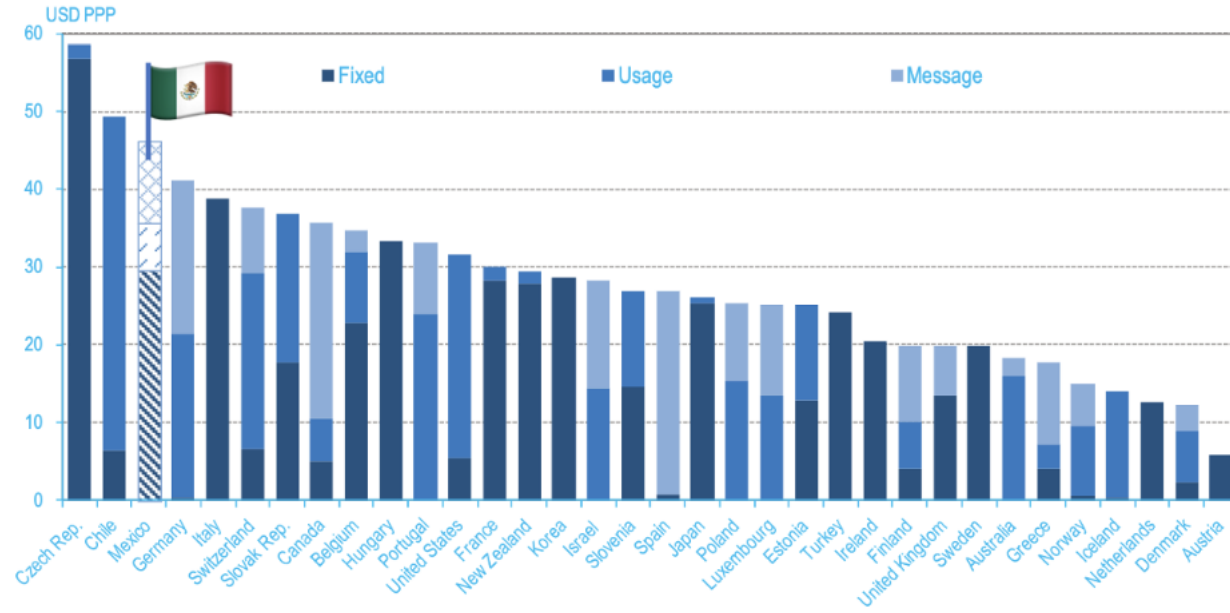was bottom of the class . . .

Figure 1.2. **Mobile subscriptions per capita: Mexico compared to the other OECD countries**

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. . . not least because prices were among the highest.

Figure 1.9. **OECD 100 calls mobile basket, February 2011, VAT included**

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OECD's 2012 report made 31 recommendations for change, and by 2017 Mexico had implemented 28. Prices fell, mobile access, especially among the poorest grew fast.

'It feels like a gift': mobile phone co-op transforms rural Mexican community

In indigenous communities like Nuyoó, where almost every family has members who have migrated for work, low-cost phone calls are seen as an essential service
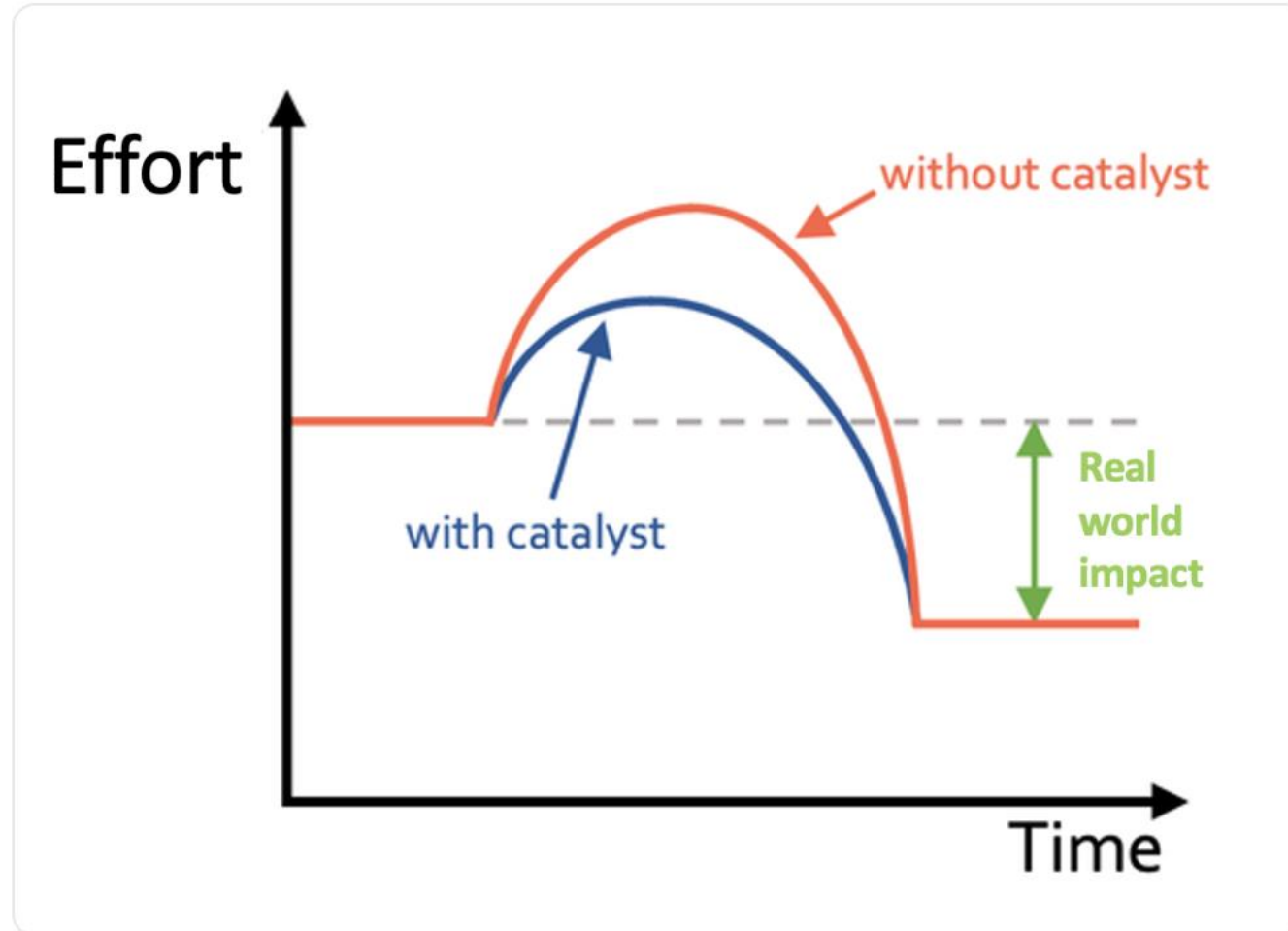
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Again, Real World Impact - but was it just because OECD published a report?
Change is hard. 🇲🇽 Mexico's govt knew what they had to do, but faced resistance from the Telcos. The policy environment was ripe for change, the report was the catalyst to make it happen faster, easier.

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2nd takeaway: Real World Impact (RWI) doesn't happen just because someone publishes a report or paper . . . the environment needs to be ripe for change.

. . .
Which is why bibliometrics (mentions, downloads and citations) alone =/= Impact. RWI is 'way more complex than that.

Source: https://www.casalini.it/retreat/2023/presentations/evans.pdf

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I recently completed a project for @UNHumanRights (better known as OHCHR). They wanted to know whether their publications were making an Impact.
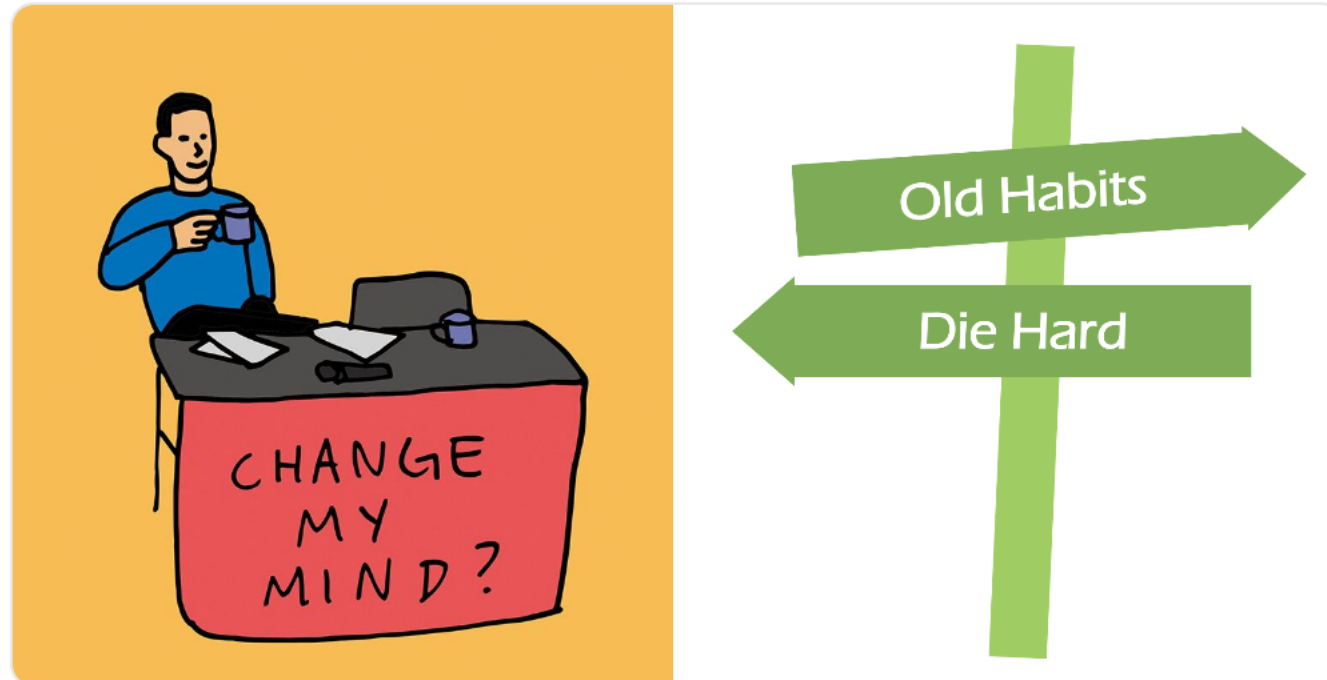
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I asked: what's your definition of Impact?

They told me it could be summed up by CHANGE . . .

➡️ to practices, frameworks, policies & law

➡️ in audience minds

➡️ in the way people work

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However, the data they used to measure Impact was:
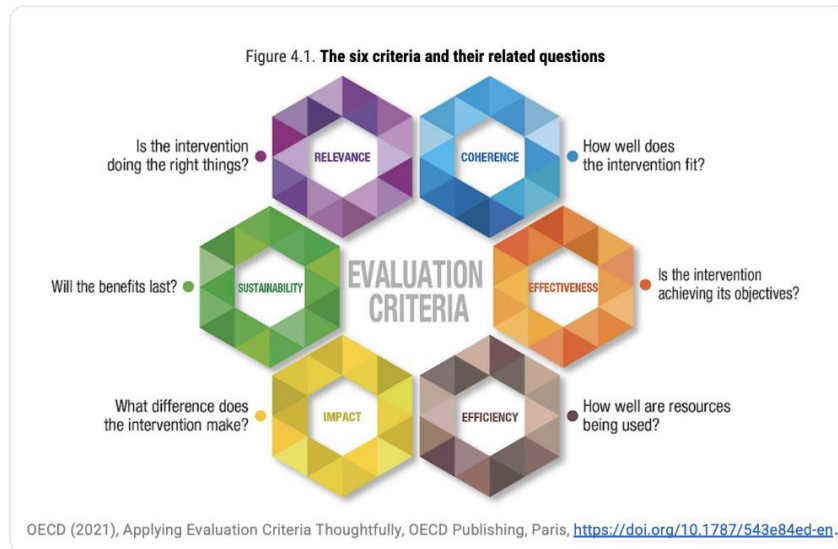➡️ Downloads
➡️ Mentions
➡️ Citations
🙀

The other tool they used was . . .

➡️ Evaluation forms/feedback 👏

Now, which of the above can help understand the Impact they sought? 🤔

Figure 4.1. **The six criteria and their related questions**

Is the intervention doing the right things? — RELEVANCE

COHERENCE — How well does the intervention fit?

Will the benefits last? — SUSTAINABILITY

EVALUATION CRITERIA

EFFECTIVENESS — Is the intervention achieving its objectives?

What difference does the intervention make? — IMPACT

EFFICIENCY — How well are resources being used?

OECD (2021), Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en.
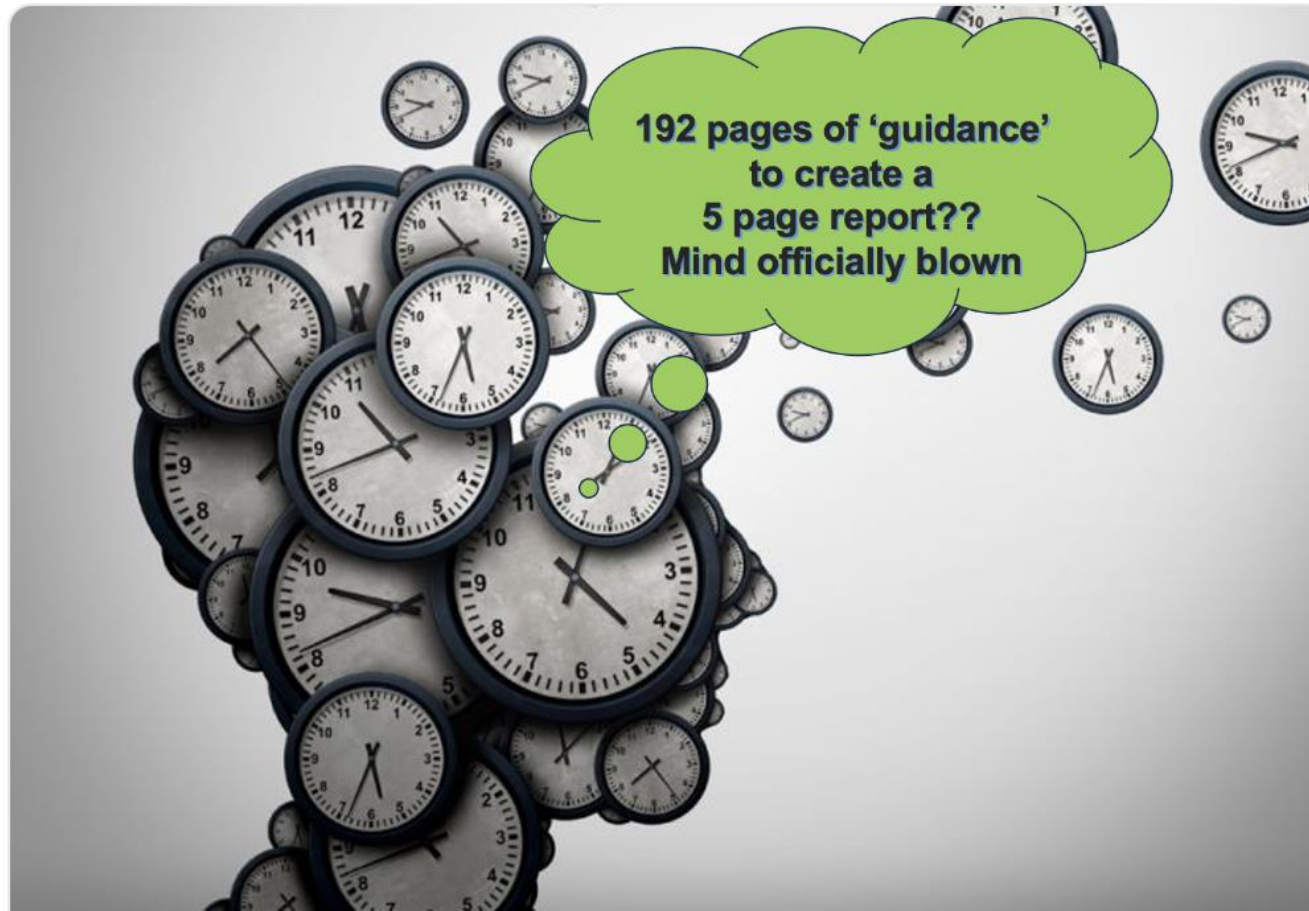
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Change is also central to UKRI's Research Excellence Framework Impact definition:
'change to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, environment/quality of life, beyond academia'.
(REF2021's guidance ran to 192 pages 🤯 Submissions had to be <5 pages)

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@Oxfam has learned that "evidence alone does not 🔜 improved
outcomes. . . . lack of demand for/use of evidence by decision-makers is
an issue. Policymakers are not rewarded for innovation & they lack the
capacity/incentives to use evidence." https://bit.ly/3MIPTx3

FROM POVERTY TO POWER   PODCASTS   ABOUT   SUBSCRIBE   🔍

How is evidence actually used in policy-making? A new framework from a global DFID programme

November 1, 2017   By Duncan Green   🐦 📘 ✉️

Guest post from David Rinnert (@DRinnert) and Liz Brower (@liz_brower1), both of DFID

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Nudging policymakers in the right direction is hard. The solution, says
Andrew Westbury, from Berkeley's Center for Effective Global Action
@CEGA_UC is "Don't Disseminate, Co-Create". ie work with
policymakers, stakeholders, local reseachers on projects.
https://bit.ly/3WOF5SL

DON'T DISSEMINATE, CO-CREATE: REFLECTIONS ON CONNECTING RESEARCH WITH POLICY

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So, third takeaway: to achieve Impact we should be looking for deep engagement with (sometimes reluctant) policy makers and local stakeholders. https://bit.ly/43yN3S2
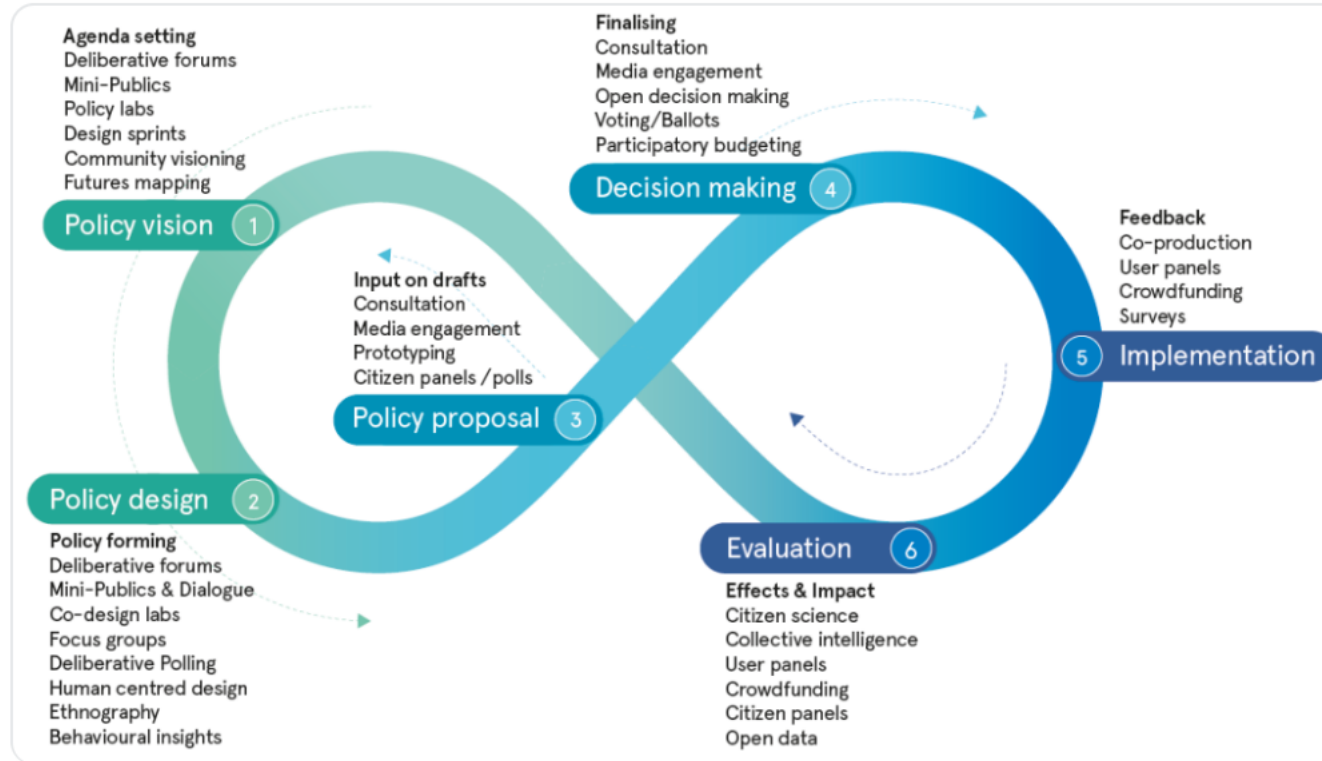
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To illustrate, let me tell you another OECD story.
But first, it's important to know that at that time OECD had a two-point
evaluation scale: efforts were judged either:
➡️ a 'success' or
➡️➡️ a 'great success'
(spot the difference 🙄)

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The OECD wanted to inform & impact the Brexit vote in the spring of 2016. OECD's number-crunchers did their thing and produced a paper which forecast Brexit would be "a persistent and rising cost" to UK households, like a particularly bad regressive tax. Tl;dr 👎👎👎👎👎

THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF BREXIT: A TAXING DECISION

OECD ECONOMIC **POLICY PAPER**

April 2016 **No. 16**

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OECD's comms team (of which I was a part) unleashed the Secretary-General at a press conference c/o LSE, with various big-wigs in attendance.
All the heavyweight journos were there.
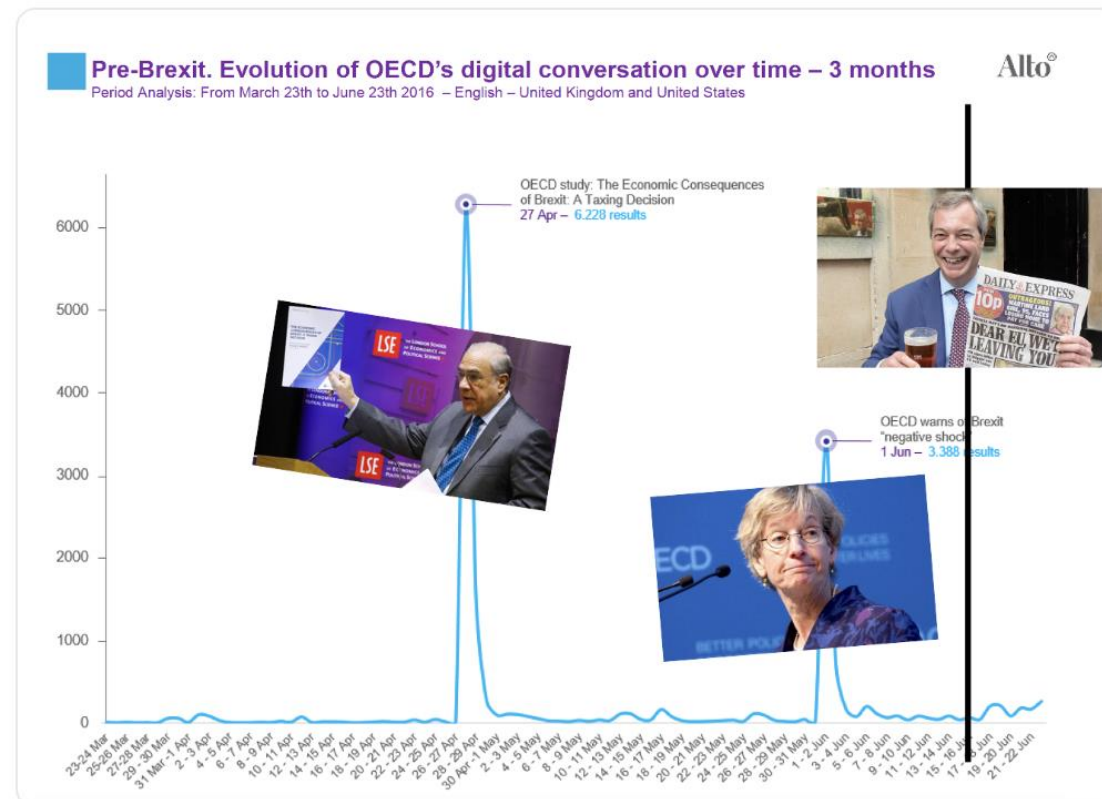It was 3 months before the vote.

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Media coverage was extensive & OECD's 'digital conversation' (aka social media chit-chat) spiked.

Back in OECD HQ, the effort was judged a 'great success' (as was a later follow-up).

So, it was a bit of a disappointment 😱 when the results came in . . .
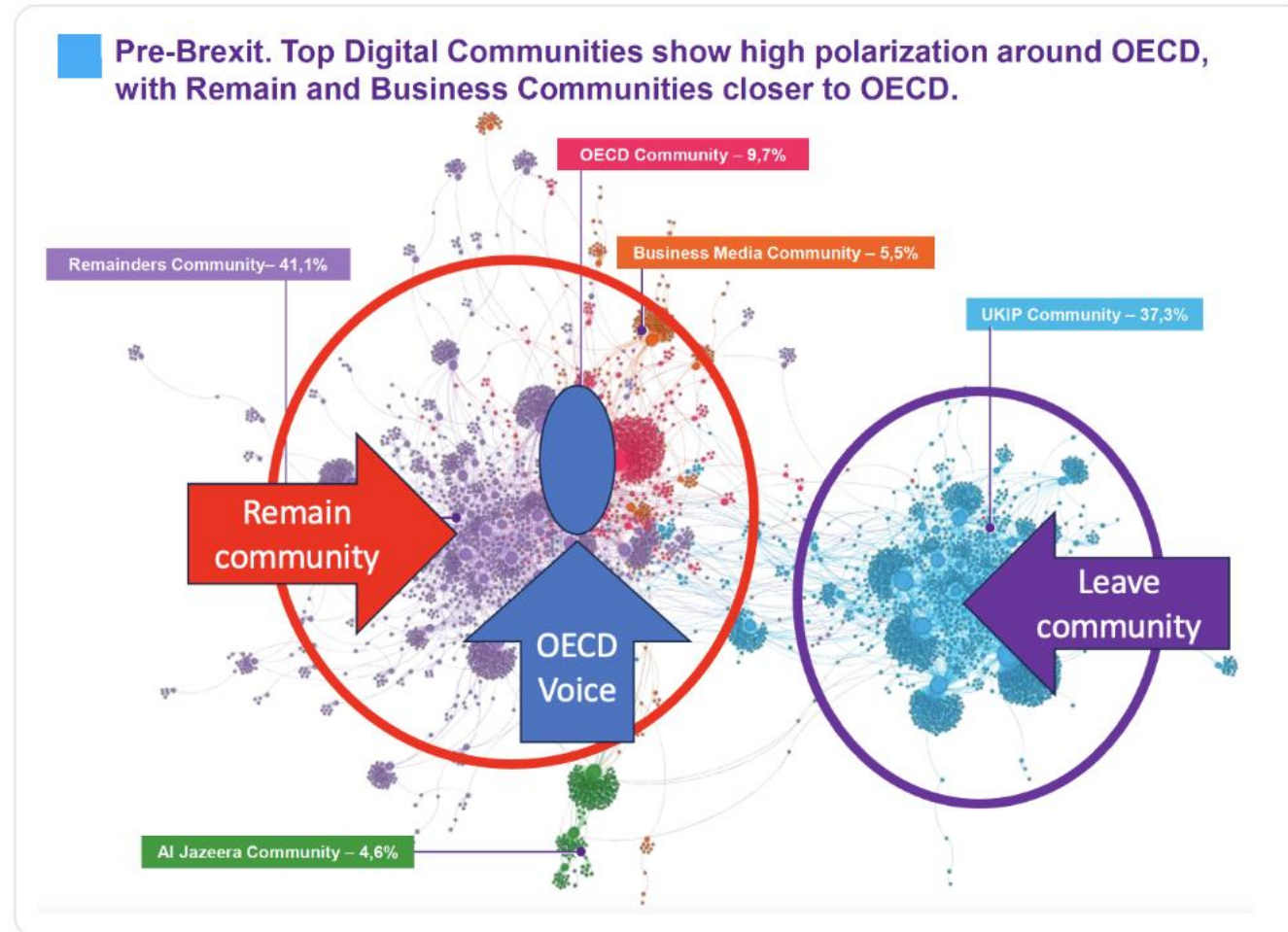

Pre-Brexit. Evolution of OECD's digital conversation over time – 3 months
Period Analysis: From March 23th to June 23th 2016 – English – United Kingdom and United States

Alto

OECD study: The Economic Consequences of Brexit: A Taxing Decision
27 Apr – 6.228 results

OECD warns of Brexit "negative shock"
1 Jun – 3.388 results

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This chart shows what went wrong . . . we forgot about the stakeholder environment.
That 'successful' digital conversation took place among a subset of the Remain choir, the 👎👎👎👎 message never got close to the Leave community.

Pre-Brexit. Top Digital Communities show high polarization around OECD, with Remain and Business Communities closer to OECD.

OECD Community – 9,7%

Business Media Community – 5,5%

Remainders Community– 41,1%

UKIP Community – 37,3%

Remain community

Leave community

OECD Voice

Al Jazeera Community – 4,6%

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It got worse.

Before the vote, for every pro-Brexit message citing OECD there was one anti-Brexit message citing OECD, a 1:1 balance.

After the vote, OECD's voice among Brexiteers doubled as they cheered (or was it jeered) that "OECD was wrong" "OECD is one of liar experts."

■ **Post-Brexit. OCED was 2 more times mentioned in Pro-Brexit arguments than in Anti-Brexit arguments**
Period Analysis: From June 23th to December 23th 2016 – English – United Kingdom and United States

2 : 1

Pro-Brexit messages   Anti-Brexit messages

| OECD delegitimized	OECD authority reference
• "OECD predictions were wrong" • "OECD rectifies" • "OECD is one of liar experts"	• "Brexit is bad for economy" • "Tax haven route won't work" • "UK joins Greece at bottom of wage league"

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Further analysis showed that ALL of OECD's digital engagement before the vote was squarely among the Remainers.

Question: how often did the OECD's Secretary-General try to speak/engage with Nigel Farage et al before the vote?
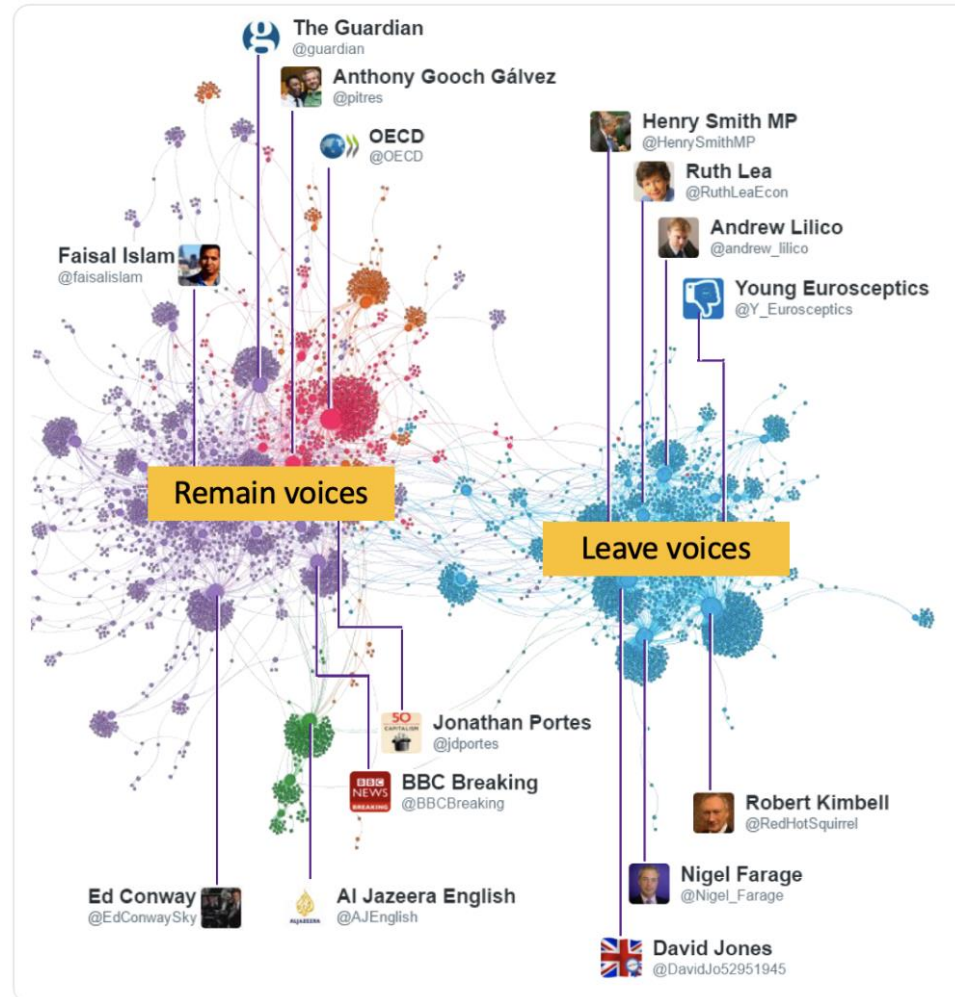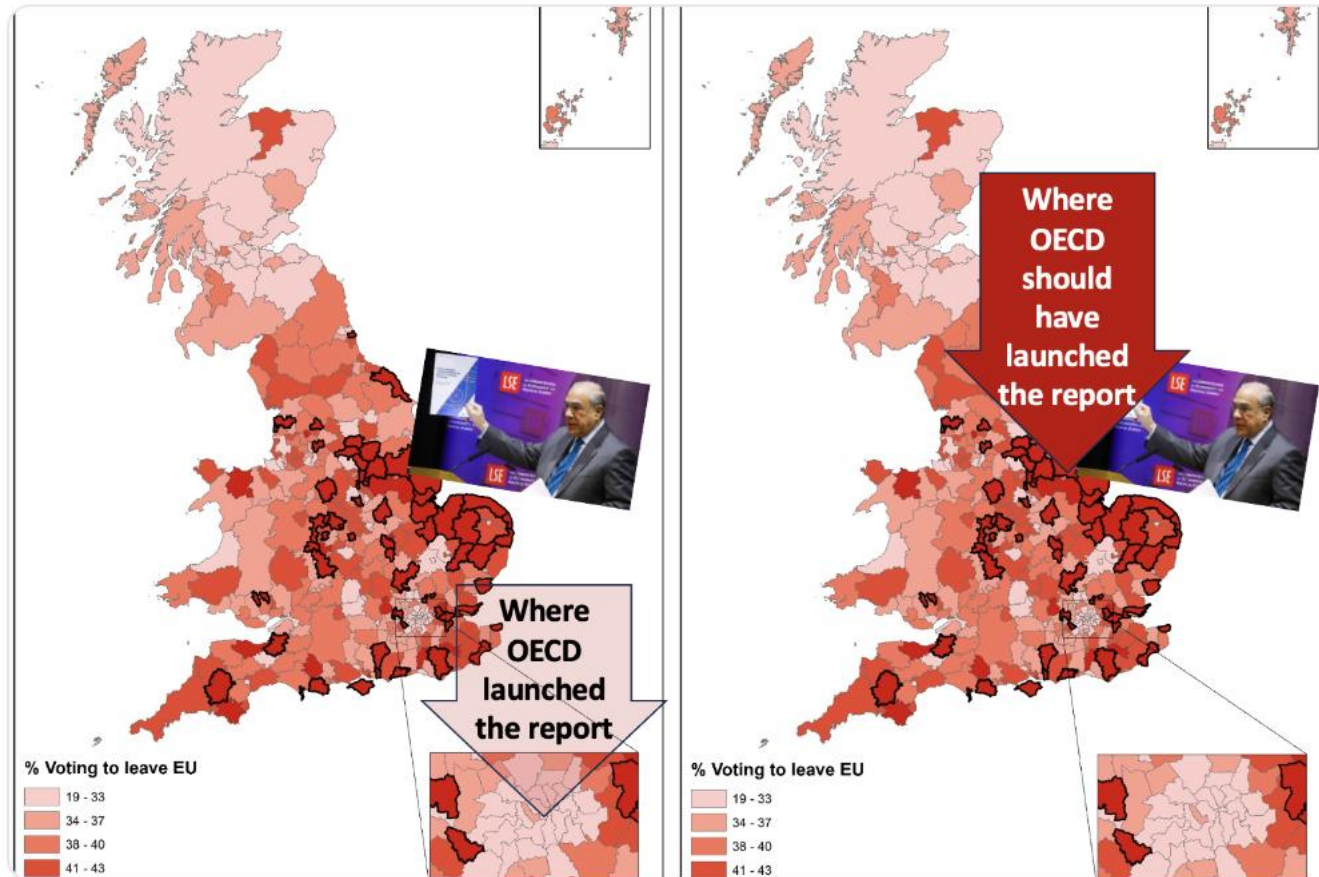
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BTW the paper had ,000s of media/social ➡️ mentions & ➡️ downloads &
➡️ citations >260.
But desired Impact was zero b/c the OECD wasn't thinking about the
Impact Environment (place & people), just its research results. We were
telling, not engaging https://bit.ly/3IXtpay

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OECD could take lessons from CEDIL.
Est'd in 2017, funded by UK Aid, CEDIL developed and tested innovative
approaches to impact evaluation and evidence synthesis in low-income
countries.
(The project ended this year, it's archived on @policy_commons.)

Cedil | Centre of
Excellence
for Development
Impact and Learning

Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning

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For Real World Impact CEDIL advises an Engagement and Evidence Use
Plan https://bit.ly/42rAPJQ:
1️⃣ consider the social environment (legal, political, business, media)
2️⃣ direct interaction (meetings, events, webinars)
3️⃣ focus efforts on high power/interest stakeholders

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When reporting, CEDIL noted that managers/funders *EXPECT* to see
your outputs:
research reports & plain language briefs
events/presentations
advisory gp meetings
websites where outputs are shared
with associated visitor & dissemination data

. . .

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. . .

they *LOVE* to see mentions in:
• policy documents/laws
• programme design and/or budgets
• funding decisions
• guidelines & strategies
• monitoring and evaluation systems

. . .

How wonderfully bureaucratic.

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. . . but they only *LIKE* to see:
• citations
• mentions in media & social media
• invitations to discuss the study
• qualitative stakeholder feedback (that effort was a 'great success'!)
. . .

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Remember REF's requirement for a 5-page report submission? CEDIL's
equivalent is called a Story of Change. Which makes sense because
there are a lot of characters in each Impact story - the researchers, the
stakeholders, the policymakers and those whose lives will be improved.
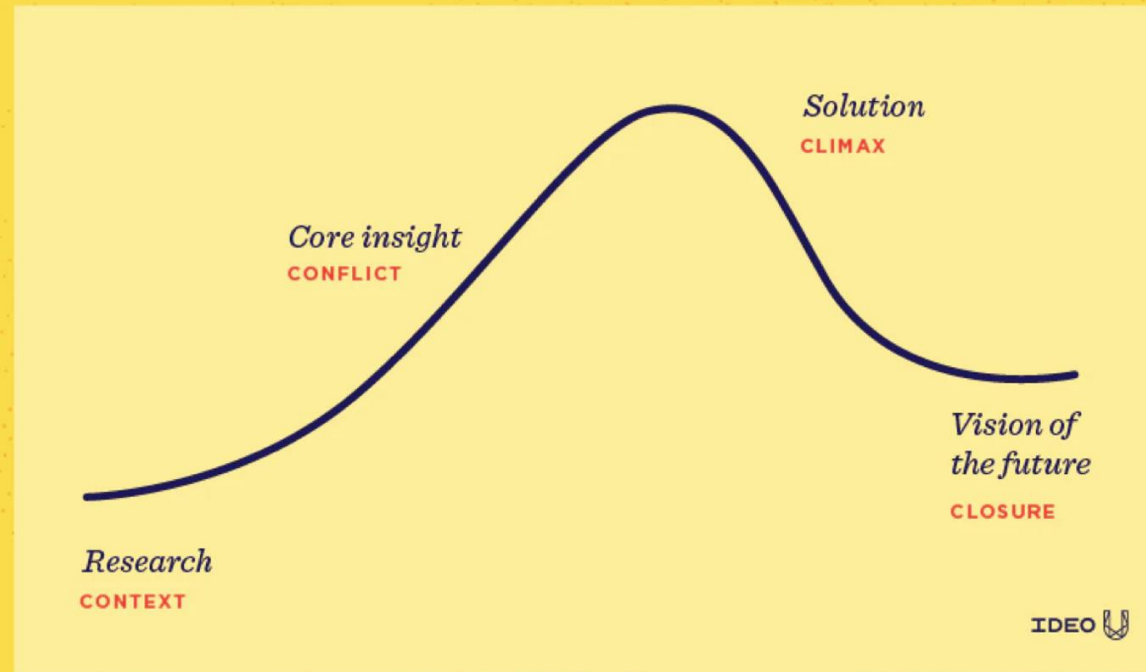
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So, to achieve Real World Impact you need:
➡️ great research in context with the environment
➡️ co-creation with policymakers & stakeholders

and then the way you 'measure' is by telling a great story!

& your citations, mentions etc are really just nice to have . . . 😉

I'm glad to have a chance to tell my story.

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In my career I've worked on both sides of a 'Looking Glass'. On one side
(perhaps the 'real-world' side) research is published in journals and
books (academia). On the other, research is posted as papers and reports
(thinks tanks, NGOs, cities, governments etc), #greylit

Toby Green tames wild content at Coherent Digital @TobyABGreen
On the 'real world' side, content is professionally captured, published and
preserved by a publisher-librarian 'complex' as this poster from
@STMAssoc illustrates. The 'fantasy' side content, #greylit, appears in
the margins on a beach (but the scale is all wrong).

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That #greylit is so undervalued and misunderstood shows that NGOs etc
could learn a lot from academia about how to publish etc. (Hence the
need for my latest project, @Policy_Commons, which captures &
preserves #greylit to scholcom standards '🏑') https://bit.ly/3Xvz4Kr

Policy
Commons

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Topics
3,388

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But when it comes to Real World Impact, the looking glass is reversed.
NGOs etc's very existence depends on their ability to achieve, measure &
report RWI. I believe academia could learn a lot from their experience -
and their stories.

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I hope you've found this ThreadTalk helpful. Thanks to #BRIC2023 for the opportunity.
Now, over to you!