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# 2016 Latin America Think Tank Summit Report: Creating New Ideas for the Future of Latin America: The Think Tank 5.0

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## **Disciplines**

Latin American Studies

## **Comments**

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HOSTED BY:



# 4° ENCUENTRO LATINOAMERICANO DE **THINK TANKS**



2016

## **Creating New Ideas for the Future of Latin America:**

### The Think Tank 5.0

James G. McGann  
University of Pennsylvania, [jmcgann@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:jmcgann@sas.upenn.edu)



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# How to Bridge the Gap Between Knowledge and Policy?

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# Latin American Think Tanks Share their Experiences

Countries across Latin America face similar difficulties and challenges to development, including corrupt governments, insecurity, a lack of transparency, and economies that could be significantly more innovative. Additionally, like much of the rest of the world, Latin America is currently experiencing the rise of populism within our democratic processes, adding significant uncertainty to the outlook for our countries.

Within this context, Ethos hosted the 4th Latin American Think Tank Summit, inviting more than 50 Latin American organizations, along with additional organizations from Europe, Asia, and the United States, to Mexico City to discuss the issues relevant to Latin America as a region.

Within this context, we shared our experiences working on development issues, and opened a dialogue regarding the challenges that we face as organizations. How can we communicate our research and ideas more effectively? What can we do to have a greater impact on public policy? How can we increase fundraising? How should think tanks be collaborating with each other? These were just a few of the questions that were discussed during the event.

The Summit was marked by days of intense debate and learning for everyone involved. Maybe we don't have all the answers, but we do have a lot of ideas about how we can improve our organizations, and the role that they will play in the era of post-truth politics that we are currently facing.

We are inspired by the international leadership shown by the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program (TTCSP) and the University of Pennsylvania in organizing this event annually. As hosts of the 4th Latin American Think Tank Summit, Comexi and Ethos are proud to join this effort, and we are motivated to continue to grow and strengthen this network of think tanks to encourage constant learning and improvement.



**José Luis Chicoma**  
Executive Director  
Ethos Laboratorio de Políticas Públicas

# The Importance of the International Think Tank's Dialogue

Today, more than ever, the international dialogue among think tanks, becomes relevant. Today, more than ever, ideas, values, proposals need to be discussed beyond borders. Today, more than ever, solutions to the shared problems of the world, and Latin America and the Caribbean face, need a wider consensus to be effective and have long term impact.

In a context where corruption, insecurity, poverty, organized crime, gender inequality, lack of transparency, uncertainty, tension between global and local tendencies, increasing populism and where the rules of international governance are at risk, think tanks are meant to play a key role to highlight and propose new routes and solutions to this reality.

COMEXI hosted in Mexico City the 4th Latin American Think Summit where our colleagues from more than 50 institutions from the region and friend observers from Asia, Europe and North America gathered to discuss not only the relevant topics above mentioned, but also to strengthen the dialogue among us. In an international context where problems are shared and transcend geographical and political frontiers, innovative and collaborative answers are needed.

Think Tanks are becoming key international actors in the world order we are living. As those organizations where policies, politics, public opinion and ideas intersect, their activities, actions and impact ought to be discussed. We need to think about ourselves and share experiences, best practices and actions that can help us develop our work in accordance to the challenges we are facing. We have to think about the realities that surround us, but also, about our own structural and organizational objectives within this contexts.

We recognize the effort and impact of the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program (TTCSP) of the University of Pennsylvania, presided by James McGann, to strengthen this international dialogue and to gather, every year, think tanks from all over the world in this fruitful interchange of ideas. For COMEXI and Ethos it has been an honour to join this effort in such an important historical context, and to collaborate in the strengthening of a key network of think tanks with international impact.



**Claudia Calvin-Venero**

COMEXI

Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales México

# Think Tanks as Catalysts for Ideas, Innovation, and Action

States are relying on institutions as sources of complex policy resolution more than ever before. Policymakers and their staffs are just too busy to be aggregating reliable data and analysis on their own, and with the rapid advancement of technology complicating economic and social issues in every region, they have turned to think tanks to not only assist, but advise. This reflects the importance of the think tank in modern civil society as both a center of research and a purveyor of policy. And it reflects the significant impact of emerging economic and political changes that have made ripples on both global and local scales. The need for sufficient resources to make sense of and properly mitigate these changes is crucial.

Through open, directed dialogue and collaboration amongst research organizations, we can seek to prepare ourselves for change. We can build off of each others' ideas and promote each others' work so that our institutions may run more efficiently. We can help each other answer questions while forming and introducing different perspectives. This decade has established an unprecedented international stage for idea-making and policy floating, and the spotlight is free to shine on any institution or state that is finding success, regardless of political affiliation, economic capability, or geographic location. Not individually, but collectively, we will help usher modern civil society through the tribulations of change into the fertile ground of a new globalized, connected world.

There's been an effort to form a transnational think tank community that began over four years ago. A lot has happened since then. The new political world is in need of think tanks that are faster, better and smarter. If we all strive together, we can help raise the standard of the modern think tank that will result in improved general welfare of the public. A rising tide lifts all boats. Within a year, TTCSP will have published a set of 'basic principles' guidelines to help think tanks meet management, tech, policy, and financial challenges in the coming political transition.

# Think Tanks as Catalysts for Ideas, Innovation, and Action

These principles include:

1. Assuring QII: Quality, Integrity, Independence
2. Diversity and Innovation in the Think Tank Workplace
3. Bridging the Gap Between Research and Policy
4. Exploring new Sources and Strategies for Resource Procurement
5. Identifying Ideas for Innovation in all Facets
6. Harnessing Technology for Research and Public Engagement

I would like to thank all of you and the institutions of which you are representative, on behalf of myself, the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program, and the University of Pennsylvania, for attending this wonderful event and contributing to the important dialogue. We must remain committed to maintaining this dialogue and stay focused on our mission to serve the public. Good luck!



**James McGann**

Director TTCSP

University of Pennsylvania-United States



# How is Latin America Solving Chronic Problems? Transparent Governments, Crime Prevention, and the Rise of Populism

## Working to Achieve Transparent Governments

Over the last few decades, political corruption and lack of government transparency have emerged as two of the most prevalent crises in Latin America. The proposed solutions to corruption and transparency are as varied as the causes themselves. Some scholars argue that lack of public awareness and involvement are to blame for rampant levels of corruption. Others believe that ideological polarization, public distrust and income inequality are the major factors that breed corruption in the government.

Given recent developments in Brazil and Venezuela, transparency and corruption have re-emerged as two of the most important issues in the region. With the pronounced disconnect between the public and the government, this is an opportunity for think tanks to act as bridges between these two groups. Think tanks can propose legislation for the governments to enact. It is important for a neutral and objective entity to act as the source for the initiatives, given how some politicians may be biased or have their own personal interests at the forefront. In addition, think tanks can form networks with public organizations--both local and national--to help educate and inform the public about the state of corruption and the think tanks' legislative proposals.

“With the pronounced disconnect between the public and the government, this is an opportunity for think tanks to act as bridges”

Mexico's “3 de 3” (3 of 3) Law has been passed with the purpose of regaining public trust through substantive commitment by government officials. “3 de 3” requires Mexican politicians to disclose publicly their personal assets, tax returns, and possible conflicts of interest. Given the fact that vulnerable populations are the biggest victims of corruption practices, they will also be the largest benefactors from anti-corruption laws.

To deter corruption, there are a myriad of available options aside from think tanks' legislative proposals. One unique option is to have governments focus on inequality and poverty reduction policies. It is imperative that the government do as much as it can to help diminish this gap.

Given the fact that vulnerable populations are the biggest victims of corruption practices, they will also be the largest benefactors from anti-corruption laws.

Another option is to have think tanks monitor the connection between donors to political campaigns and the lawmaking trends of receiving politicians. In this regard, a proposal has been made for the “Law of Access to Information,” which would help in tracking the sources of campaign finance. A parliamentary commission for the transparency of public budgets has also been introduced.

There are still significant obstacles that might hinder anti-corruption efforts. One major obstacle is the slow pace of institutional change. The combination of economic instability and civil unrest in



some Latin American countries has stagnated the lawmaking process. Lawmakers are busy focusing on large-scale infrastructure issues, making it difficult to draw attention to anti-corruption legislation.

Think tanks observe that the long-term solution is to start from the ground up by engaging with the public first and then moving to government engagement once a strong coalition is built with the public.

### **Crime Prevention and Security**

Latin America carries around 9% of the world's population, yet it is responsible for one third of homicides that take place in the world. While security spending has increased among Latin American countries, investment in think tanks has also increased. Governments have acknowledged the crucial role that think tanks will play to help resolve this issue.

Historically, the participation and involvement of think tanks has been crucial to the creation and development of a civil society. Some scholars have advised for more knowledge to be divulged to the public and international communities through think tanks and other international organizations. Demands for development have also been introduced where organizations like the World Bank and the

IMF could provide security funding, since public expenditures have been shown to be insufficient.

“Historically, the participation and involvement of think tanks has been crucial to the creation and development of a civil society”

In regards to the best measures to tackle security in the region, the most popular solutions are proactive rather than reactive. Currently, the focus of Latin American countries --- and especially El Salvador --- has been on helping the region's youth through policies of prevention. These prevention policies are primarily privately funded due to lack of government action. Think tanks have started to work locally with councils on developing ways to help youth in the region. These councils have helped construct soccer fields and provided other outlets for disadvantaged youth. For example, in the “Plan for Prosperity” program, think tanks are developing local outreach programs.

The incarceration system presents it obstacles to resolve. Prisoner rehabilitation has not been a success due to the tremendous overcrowding of prisons in Latin American countries and the lack of space in rehabilitation programs, which causes previous criminals to flood back into society.

Latin American think tanks are also conducting studies on violence both in macro and micro environments. Local actors and organizations are solely involved in conducting such inquiries because there is a lack of trust in the federal and own local authorities. Governments have at times restricted access to information to the effect that people are naturally looking for institutions that can provide more transparency. On the other hand, there is a fear among the communities themselves where some spokespeople are controlled by crime gangs.

A major criticism of crime prevention is that it takes a much longer time to solve. Prevention measures are usually done in a trial and error method as there is no panacea to violence that plagues many different regions of Latin America. Due to the lack of social organization, weak policies of control and institutional weaknesses, crime prevention is much easier said than done. To date, more than 200 different programs have tried to combat violence and promote crime prevention but many failed to become successful. In addition, the most significant factor behind crime in Latin America is the lack of opportunities for growth of the nations' indigent and growing income inequality between the rich and poor.

### **Brexit, the Colombia Peace Referendum, and Trump: Democratic Processes Impacting the World, and the Role Think Tanks Will Play**

Regional political issues can have global ramifications. Stemming from Brexit and the Colombian peace referendum, the U.S. Presidential Election was the next part of an international political pattern of populist tendencies, a pattern that has emerged over the last few years but which has only now garnered serious international attention.

#### **Brexit**

It has been commonly argued that the unexpected result of the Brexit Referendum, which resulted in Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, was a result of an unstable British political and social environment. Under pressure from members of parliament in the midst of a rise in influence of the right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party, former Prime Minister Cameron proposed an in-out referendum on Britain's EU membership. "Out" won narrowly, brought over the edge by a coalition of a politically

frustrated middle-class and an anti-globalization leaning rural community. The Brexit result represented the beginning of international populism gaining spotlight at the world stage.

The relationship between Britain and the EU member countries has been severely complicated, especially in terms of economic agreements and free movement of people. New tax codes will have to be written in Britain to compensate for trade deficits, and there's a possibility 35,000 jobs may be lost. Although there were obvious negative political and economic consequences to the decision that may present themselves in the near future, there were also consequences that made the decision paradoxically positive. In the European Union, Britain had been in strong opposition to passing progressive reforms. Britain was one of the stronger forces within the trade union, and its influence could usually shape the policy path of Western Europe. With Britain's departure, there should be less pushback against progressive reform action, resulting in a reform policy waterfall for the remaining countries, which could affect many facets of international trade relations from refugees to currency.



“Think tanks must act as independent counselors that process information for the general audience, advocating for fact-based and unbiased information.”

## Colombia

After decades of conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government, a peace deal had finally been reached. The peace deal stressed six points: rural development for countryside farmers; political participation for the FARC; remedies for the victims of the conflict; a solution to the drug crisis; a termination of the conflict; and how the deal would be implemented. This deal was reached after years of consistent negotiating between the FARC and the Colombian government, and the finalized deal was rendered for a vote of ratification by the citizens of Colombia. Those supporting the peace agreement desired to end the decades long bloodshed through sincere forgiveness and reconciliation, while those opposing its ratification were against impunity for FARC members and were uncomfortable with giving them political power (in accordance with the agreement, the FARC would receive a number of Congressional seats automatically).

The agreement was struck down by the narrowest of margins, a crushing defeat for both relations with the FARC and liberal

progressives hoping to bring Colombian politics into the mainstream. The peace referendum result was seen as concrete evidence of the international ripples of populism, with a conservative group of voters becoming motivated and united under a series of slogans and simple rhetoric that played to their unrequited feelings politically.

## Trump

The result of the U.S. election shed light on issues that had been ignored previously in the American political sphere. For a forgotten group of Americans, there was a lack of belief in the possibility of social mobility, the “American Dream.” President-Elect Trump tapped into the feelings of this constituency to ignite a historic political movement, rebelling against the political establishment and creating an upswing of nationalist fervor based on rhetoric and grand promises. Donald Trump came on to the political scene as a wildcard with no political experience, and came out as not only a frontrunner backed by a major political party (although not unanimously), but a candidate who had a chance to beat the Democrats’ Hillary Clinton. Trump signified the frustration of American voters who





have had it much harder than the previous generation economically. Through constant echoing of issues in the media and a transient reminder of “how things used to be,” Trump was able to stir enough fervor against the existing establishment to achieve the biggest political upheaval in the history of modern democracy, ensuring that populism will be an issue that think tanks must address immediately, and make strategies to manage, in the future.

### **Role of Think Tanks**

The role of think tanks will be to help guide democracy through the process of all these tensions. Think tanks must act as independent counselors that process information for the general audience, advocating for fact-based and unbiased information. Think tanks must condemn

the partisan information that plagues the media, and affirm their role as soldiers of objective transnational dialogue.

With the demonstration of dissonance between the reality and the polls, they must ensure the accuracy of the data that is delivered to the public. Accountable public officials and a well-informed public are the bread and butter of liberal democracies in modern civil society, and think tanks must join the effort to protect democracy’s institutions from corruption and political sleight of hand.

“Accountable public officials and a well-informed public are the bread and butter of liberal democracies in modern civil society, and think tanks must join the effort to protect democracy’s institutions from corruption and political sleight of hand.”

# How to Ensure Quality, Independence, and Integrity? New Strategies for Resources

## Building Bridges – Think Tanks Working Together

Building networks among think tanks is not easy, but it is necessary. Networks are established on three levels; national, regional and global. Yet the properties of think tanks are as much an obstacle as distance. Think tanks are often divided by specialization of study, political or philosophical orientation, funding structure, and the degree to which their research orientation or advocacy has a role in networks. In recent years, Latin American think tanks have generally regarded each other as competitors instead of partners, resulting in weakened networks. Due to limited resources and room in the spotlight, there is often little incentive to collaborate. This leaves us with a single question: How can we achieve fruitful, interactive, and unified cooperation among think tanks in Latin America?

“How can we achieve fruitful, interactive, and unified cooperation among think tanks in Latin America?”

Collaboration is not something that occurs naturally; therefore, it is necessary to change not just the relationships but also the mindset within the think tank environment. Working collaboratively will result in think tanks supporting each other, which in turn will help build trust. Think tanks should be using tools to exchange ideas in order to improve collective efficiency. Having a shared objective and clarity in the decision-making process will contribute positively when implementing collaboration among think tanks.

Think tanks in Latin America should focus on building close collaborative relationships on top of networks. This collaboration can be formal or informal. Formally, think tanks can create partnerships for particular research or projects. Successful alliances have included think tanks complementing their strengths, as they become stronger together. One example of informal collaboration are conferences, where think tanks can exchange information easily and without bureaucratic middlemen. A formal collaborative initiative tends to be more productive and longer-lasting, however, and it could be institutionalized and involve contractual obligations.

Although public interest should be the primary focus of any partnership, it is necessary to establish parallel incentives. Think tanks depend on funding to maintain their reputation, and in turn depend on their reputation to raise funds, remain relevant, and expand visibility. One does not procure a donor base with ideas, but with a track record. Generally, a think tank with a highly-regarded reputation fills a niche and makes a ‘brand’ for itself. Therefore, the advantage of cooperation must be clear to be attractive. Think tanks should first demonstrate the benefits of partnering with them. Second, costs for transactions and incorporation can be high, and differences in management and administration procedures can be complicated. Partners must take responsibility for coordinating the process, to mitigate the costs of an association.

The combination of similarity and reciprocity is important and should be observed when building bridges amongst think tank institutions. As previously mentioned, setting up a common agenda or sharing at least similar interests is necessary. Successful think tanks in the United States and Latin America are able to identify and cultivate those connections. Resources are essential for the existence of think tanks and they are also responsible for making networks possible. Donors play an important role in providing funds for think tanks that have shared projects, from which they can benefit doubly. Long-term networks and formal alliances can have high costs, and should be taken into consideration. It is important to set specific, visible initiatives and immediate achievements.

“Having a shared objective and clarity in the decision-making process will contribute positively when implementing collaboration among think tanks”

### **Quality, Independence, and Integrity of Think Tanks**

It is imperative that research is disseminated with a foundation of trust. Integrity is an extension of quality, therefore, it is important that think tanks foster integrity in their research behavior and individual practices. Unlike health research organizations and research universities, robust standard research policies and procedures are yet to be institutionalized on national and global scales for think tanks. Since research practices and protocols vary widely, it is necessary that a model of best practices is created to improve the quality, independence, and integrity for all think tanks, and it is incumbent of think tanks to adhere to these practices.

While most criticism on think tanks focuses on fundraising, otherwise known

as development, other areas of criticism include human resources, privacy, disclosure of conflicts of interest, research conduct, partnerships and affiliations, and quality management. Yet, a holistic view can more fully address the issue of credibility. Many institutions in the world today are undergoing a crisis in credibility. Critics have challenged the independence and integrity of think tanks, fueled by a lack of public trust in their transparency. This is a multi-dimensional problem because think tanks must not only appear to be transparent but must constantly strive for true transparency as well. Think tanks must win the support and confidence of the public. Having correct policies and best practices firmly in place with consistent compliance are perhaps the strongest evidence and defense against obstructive accusations.

Simply revealing donors does not make a think tank transparent, nor guarantees its quality. It is a far more complicated task that spans hiring, research selection, drafting and approval processes, and publication. Peer review and ensuring peer-reviewed references are time consuming but essential steps. Additionally, while think tanks were created to promote ideas, they must make their objectives clear with any publication. Ideas, ideology, and opinions must be clearly separated from research. Any confusion between opinion and analysis will subtract from research quality. Think tanks can and must defend their technical conclusions to society. Further, think tanks must be open to new ideas, which will allow them to earn even more credibility by putting their ideas in doubt.

While absolute neutrality is impossible -- and in fact undesirable -- think tanks must take actions to ensure objectivity. Trust, responsibility, and integrity are difficult to achieve plenary, but it is incumbent upon all think tanks to make that effort.

\*It should be noted that some attendees disagreed with the notion of completely separating ideology, believing that it is within the inherent nature of most think tanks to have a leaning of some kind.

## Think Tanks Fighting Red Tape: Bureaucratic and Political Pressures

Think tanks face bureaucratic obstacles when it comes to publishing research and affecting change in the world. Everyday in Latin America, the competition for resources becomes fiercer as more policy organizations join in the political fray and the pool of resources maintains its limited quantity. Coupled with this general shift, there has been increased scrutiny placed upon donors by authorities, journalists, and the public, which has led donors to withdraw their support. Allegations of conspiracy have been tossed at Latin American think tanks because of their affiliations with international organizations. Some have been accused of being imperialist co-conspirators, as is the case in Venezuela. This informational disconnect emphasizes the importance of a positive relationship with the public.

Some countries have more freedom of speech than others, which could restrict the capacity of think tanks in certain countries. Think tank networks should work as an exchange space with think tanks in repressed regions. Cooperation could be used as a way of expression for those countries that are restricted. For example, if a certain piece of research cannot be published in Venezuela, perhaps it could be published in Brazil and so on.

“Trust, responsibility, and integrity are difficult to achieve plerarily, but it is incumbent upon all think tanks to make that effort.”

Generally, diversification of funding is thought to automatically increase independence, but this is not always true. Whether from mainstream government grants or private donors, funding may come with strings attached, contractually or implied. The expectations attached to a government donation varies among countries in intensity and specificity. Similarly, with donors, it is often the timing

of diversification that is most important. Donors are more likely to ask for something in times of hardship, than otherwise.

Think tanks should never give way to political or financial pressure. Even the smallest concessions betray the other donors who supported a given think tank on the previously defined conditions. As consultants for society, think tanks can never fold to intimidation. If a think tank shows signs of weakness, it is a battle that they are unlikely to win. Think tanks cannot afford to have conflicts of interest and must have transparency regarding methodologies. It is the desire of all think tanks for clear and stable rules that foster respect for autonomy and independence.

“Generally, diversification of funding is thought to automatically increase independence, but this is not always true. Whether from mainstream government grants or private donors, funding may come with strings attached, contractually or implied.”

It is incumbent on Latin American think tanks to seize suggestions and move them forward. Most of what has been said can be placed under the challenge of all think tanks, that they must in the new political economy of think tanks, be faster, better, and smarter. There are several upcoming initiatives that will share best practices to meet the management, technology, policy, resource and human challenges facing think tanks.





# How Can We Use Technology to Increase Public Engagement? Ideas and Innovation for Think Tanks

## Institutional Strengthening and Innovation in Government

Think tanks need to open the discussion on transnational issues, as globalization has drastically changed the political and economic playing field. All are aware of the need for innovation, and the best way in which this has been met is via communication. It is the responsibility of the institution to make sure that messages are substantive and that every suggestion made remains true to the purpose of the research, otherwise the message risks becoming void of real meaning. It is easy to get caught up in communicating in different and innovative ways, while forgetting about the purpose of those innovations— to better communicate the findings of research.

“Think tanks must distinguish between impact and presence, and should give priority to the former ”

The ultimate objective should be to solve problems that arise in each country. Everything that is innovative in terms of technology that could be used to communicate, should not overcome their role as instruments to carry a message. Determining success in terms of number of followers, retweets, and likes is a credible measure of presence. However, it should not be used to calibrate the success of the primary objective, which is to solve problems. It is important to note that the countries in Latin America have not found the right solution to communicate with different actors more effectively and efficiently.

Think tanks must distinguish between impact and presence, and should give priority to the former. It is easy to believe that the name of an institution alone can create an impact just by disseminating research with their letterhead. However, being cited and being reproduced is also a factor of presence, which could shroud the true quality of impact. Deliberating more systematically about what makes a citation or reproduction impactful is important in fostering a serious discussion about the difference between outreach and impact.

In an increasingly complicated policy space and crowded media space, there is intense competition for the attention of the actors that possess the authority to make an impact. This is where the problem arises of subjectively pushing research in the direction of the important political actors. This essentially compromises the credibility of the research and of the institutions that are putting it forth. Generating attention is also evolving as the media space begins to evolve due to innovation, further complicating matters and adding a dimension of time that is important in the discussion.

Finally, measuring the incidence of the platforms being used can be a tool for determining the changes that actors are making in the public policy space. In addition, by extrapolation solutions and positive communication channels for other spheres within the policy space can create solutions for others. For example, advances made in education can then be fed into governmental policy or health care policy and find success through an innovative lens.

## Empowerment Through Innovation: Think Tanks Communicating Better

The challenges of communicating complex ideas in the digital age are numerous and difficult to overcome. Creativity, personalization, and conveying information that “sticks” are common themes of how different organizations around the world have used interactive media to get their message across to a wide audience without sacrificing the effectiveness of the message. The first example was from an Australian railway, Metro Trans Melbourne. The organization created an animation to discourage “reckless behavior around trains” which included animated animals and other digital characteristics. A study showed that there was a 30 percent reduction of accidents following the publication of the animation.

Another example of the influence of digital media was an article on economic research on the housing bubble in Britain, originally

published in *The Economist* and then posted to the media site, BuzzFeed. The BuzzFeed post contained infographics, GIFs, and pictures. The BuzzFeed post ended with more visits than the original article published in *The Economist*. In a third example, the *New York Times* created an interactive online platform to deliver the results of the population census that personalized the information to the demographics of the reader. The tool was not about the census; it was about how the census related to the audience and this was why it was successful.

Think tanks should take creative risks to get their messages across, while retaining credibility and urgency. Presentation of data needs to be user friendly and personable, which might even be an opportunity for growth on the part of think tanks. If think tanks can make the message engaging and personal, readers who want to go deeper can then follow a link to the paper, for example. Successful initial



exposure is crucial to increasing readership.

There is still an opportunity to use traditional ways to communicate better in the digital age. The message needs to be communicated in the appropriate language(s), literally and figuratively. To reach minorities, the content needs to be translated literally. Translation must be done by a multilingual team into as many languages as possible to tackle this fundamental communication barrier. The appropriate language must also be conveyed in a figurative way conducive to specific audiences. An econometric study is not prone to give access to a wide variety of audiences, for example. The message needs to be digestible with a wider appeal.

Another way to utilize traditional ways of engaging audiences is inclusion. Think tanks should report available studies in the public media that often receive little coverage. This is so the message can be received by audiences that are still receiving news from audio/radio and newspaper formats. By informing citizens, think tanks can help magnify their voices. Generating trust among journalists is also important. Any think tank working on conveying their message on their own, misses opportunities for engagement and future partnerships. Think tanks should try to include more actors in this process. Think tanks need to think of these platforms as more than objects; they should strive to be part of the news. Citizens' expressions are often ignored, a challenge that think tanks can overcome by including stories that are not "mainstream" as well as have them engage in these more traditional sources.

To prevent the creation and dissemination of knowledge from getting lost in entertainment and spectacle, think tanks should reconsider their role; not only as providers of knowledge, but also of news. When think tanks merely create the

To prevent the creation and dissemination of knowledge from getting lost in entertainment and spectacle, think tanks should reconsider their role; not only as providers of knowledge, but also of news. When think tanks merely create the research study and publish it, the process often yields a dense and long product that may only be read by a small, select number of people. Think tanks should not be "done" after publishing research, but should take on the responsibility of effectively diffusing their research. The current linear process is not the best way to convey information. The 100-page white paper can be condensed into an article, a blog-post, a video, and a tweet. Think tanks should not only be experts in producing knowledge, but also in disseminating it.

Think tanks were not designed for the sole purpose of creating documents. The larger purpose needs to be held close in view. How to get our message across is as important as the message itself. However, think tanks need to beware of the line between creating theory and activism by increasing engagement without churning one-sided dialogues which might jeopardize credibility. There needs to be a clear impact without losing credibility and non-partisanship.



# Where Will the Next Generation of “Think Tankers” Come From? Diversity and Inclusion in Think Tanks

## Investing in the Future: Diversity and Inclusion in Think Tanks

In a time when globalization is perceived as a threat and the social fabric of the world has become more exclusive, diversity and inclusion are more important than ever. The predicament of our time is not solely financial; it is the threat to liberal democracy and the task of creating a civil society. Think tanks can be institutions that shape society and turn it into an inclusive, representative community. The benefits of diversity make sense and have been proven beneficial, and new initiatives foresee a brighter future for a civilized world.

The present, however, doesn't show a pleasant picture. For Latin America, violence against women in the region is still prevalent, the gender wage-gap has increased since 2008, and women are still underrepresented in the workplace—both in the diplomatic as well as the think tank sector. Rejection rates for women to work in think tanks is greater than that for men, which demonstrates that think tanks have yet to hold their promises of diverse staffs.

But it is not only about incorporating marginalized populations in think tanks—diversity—it's about ensuring that the environment where they work allows them to thrive—inclusion. Stereotypes and biases have created a social hierarchy, and human resources departments must be cognizant of the reasons that limit applicants from diverse backgrounds in gaining certain positions and that negatively affect an employee's work experience. Promoting inclusion is not only to solve a social issue, but also about optimizing outputs and become more efficient in creating research and content.

Creativity and innovation depend on marginal returns, and a diversified staff provides this added value.\* Diversity benefits research because it provides a plurality of ideas. It has been proven, for instance, that when women and other marginalized populations are included, results are optimized. This is somewhat due to the fact that a portion of the market for the information that think tanks produce—women, ethnic populations, LGBTQ communities, and others—consume information differently, and including their perspective in the creation of knowledge allows think tanks to have greater outreach and impact. Furthermore, inclusion can also happen in the topics of research that the think tanks pursue. The outputs that they deliver must be differentiated and appropriate to the demographics of the population. Think tanks can diversify their staffs, while maintaining or improving the quality of their research.



\*Think tanks must beware, however, in assuming minorities have an inherent preference to research the very issues that marginalize them.

When think tanks promote inclusion, they invest in the future. Affirmative action might cost time and resources, but it will pay off in the long-run. Think tanks must invest in researchers with graduate degrees, offer competitive wages, but moreover flexibility, time schedules, and high leadership positions so that the position is attractive to them. Think tanks can recruit from different places, work with non-traditional NGOs, look for different alternatives, and have different dialects on research to achieve diversity. Diverse staff should be part of projects, but also participate in the decision-making process. Initiative as “Women in Think Tank,” provide a platform where they are creating

a new culture of social and political sciences, empowering women, and demonstrating examples of women in leadership positions.

“When think tanks promote inclusion, they invest in the future”

Think tanks can ensure that no matter someone’s background—religion, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ableism, or rurality—they have all the opportunities to thrive and produce top-notch analysis in research.



# How to Effectively Disseminate Information in an Information Overloaded World?

Generally, the media is fulfilling its duty to the public by disseminating truthful, fact-checked information. However, this work has been shaken by the post-rationality phenomenon. Audiences go to distinct platforms for the information they want to hear, not to become informed. The world is living in bubbles of information, and audiences surround themselves with the news outlets and people who think alike. In this post-truth time, there's no need to hear opposing opinions. The drive to consume news is desire of reaffirmation of what they already believe in. The appeal for information is emotional, not rational.

In addition to the post-fact phenomenon, the role of journalism has changed. The media doesn't disseminate "breaking news" anymore. Social media is doing it for free, providing wider access, and reaching a broader audience. This instigates a question: what can journalism do when providing quality news is expensive, and competitors are doing it for free? In the current information overloaded world, media must work to condense the message and optimize time to attract more people. Shorter messages, like infographics and entertaining could be solutions, but as previously mentioned, there are pros and cons that need to be taken into consideration.

Another challenge that the media faces is deciding the hierarchy of the topics that should make the headlines. There has been criticism that the media spends most their time on spectacle news, instead of chronic and 'unexciting' problems like poverty, violence against women, climate change,

and the extermination of endangered species. The problem is that these topics are abstract and difficult to communicate, becoming too dense and unappealing. Instead, breaking new stories like terrorist attacks, especially when they happen in western countries retain the spotlight. The media can humanize the data and provide ways in which the audience can help. This provides an emotional connection. In this way, the media can spend time speaking about poverty and make the audience feel implicated and empowered to do something act.

“The media can humanize the data and provide ways in which the audience can help.”



The post-truth era, and the rise of populism, have shed light on the idea of non-partisan, equal-treatment for all parties involved in a news story. In principle, giving voice only to a certain perspective on an issue is insufficient, and more importantly, unfair. But what if the other side is telling lies; do you still give them equal participation? This happened in Colombia with the propaganda against the peace-treaty agreement supporting the defeat of the referendum, in Britain with Brexit, and in the U.S with the rise of Trump. The rise of populism and polarization in the world has forced the media to reflect on the core principles of journalism. This “voice-equity” paradox has instigated questions about opening the microphone to a criminal or a liar. Discussions surround the redefinition of equity and what rules should guide this principle.

There could be a changing role for the media from journalist to militant journalist. The answer for journalists has been to provide equity for both parts of an issue, and provide equilibrium in this paradox. The media should provide equal treatment, but reveal when information is false or inexact. This non-partisan stance might transform to not only giving news, but also interpreting them. The media can contextualize and explain why news matters. This might be perceived as a civic duty, a commitment to truth, in a time where facts don't matter. The media can be soldiers of the truth.

“The media should provide equal treatment, but reveal when information is false or inexact.”



# Creating New Ideas for the Future of Latin America: the Think Tank 5.0

## 4th Latin American Think Tank Summit

Mexico City, October 26-28, 2016

**Organizers: TTCSP, COMEXI, Ethos Public Policy Lab**



### **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26**

19:00 - 21:00 - Welcome Cocktail

Venue: Restaurante El Lago

James G. McGann, TTCSP, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Luis de la Calle, COMEXI, Mexico

José Luis Chicoma, Ethos Public Policy lab, Mexico

Shinichi Nakabayashi, Asian Development Bank Institute, Japan

Claudia Calvin, COMEXI, Mexico

### **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27**

Regional Policy Agenda

Venue: Marriott Reforma

8:30 - 9:00 - Registration of Participants

9:00 - 9:30 - Summit Opening

James G. McGann, TTCSP, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Moira Paz-Estenssoro, CAF, Mexico

Claudia Calvin, COMEXI, Mexico

José Luis Chicoma, Ethos Public Policy Lab, Mexico

09:30 - 10:30 - Panel 1: Keeping Governments Clean: Transparency and Anti-Corruption

Description: Corruption and lack of transparency in government is a persisting problem undermining development in Latin America. In Brazil, we currently find one of the most illustrative cases with the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff based on corruption charges, however, hers is not the only case, the resignation of former President Othon Perez in Guatemala following accusations of corruption, the initiation of investigations against former President Cristina Fernández in Argentina, the developing crisis in Venezuela and the Mexican case of the "White House" of President Enrique Peña Nieto. All of these highlight the systematic and political defects of our region in terms of transparency and anti-corruption. It is important to reflect on the role and capabilities of Think Tanks to promote instruments of transparency and anti-corruption, and how Think Tanks can become real agents of change.



Moderator: Julia Pomares, CIPPEC, Argentina  
Panelist: Enrique Cárdenas, CEEY, Mexico  
Panelist: Pablo Hurtado, ASIES, Guatemala  
Panelist: Celso Castro, FGV, Brazil  
Panelist: Alexandra Zapata, IMCO, Mexico

10:30 - 10:45 - Coffee Break

10:45 - 11:45 - Panel 2: Building Bridges: Think Tanks Working Together

Description: Think Tanks each have their own agendas and target audience but fostering national, transnational, or regional networks between think tanks can provide an opportunity not only for collaboration and sharing of knowledge and ideas, but also to increase the impact of a particular agenda or policy. Whether focused on a region, issues or interest group, what are the factors for a network to become successful, efficient and achieve greater results than individual organizations.

Moderator: James G. McGann, TTCSP, University of Pennsylvania, USA  
Panelist: Winfried Weck, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Germany  
Panelist: Guillermo González, Espacio Público, Chile  
Panelist: Edna Jaime, México Evalúa, Mexico  
Panelist: Kevin Casas, Inter-American Dialogue, USA

11:45 - 12:45 - Panel 3: New Economic Challenges, Innovation and SDGs

Description: In Latin America, the volume and complexity of economic and social challenges requires innovation and capacity building at different levels of government. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN establishes that it's crucial for all countries and all stakeholders to act in collaborative partnership to accomplish the balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. Across the region, this issue has been addressed in different ways and partnerships among different actors have been established to enhance innovation, institutional capacities, and develop instruments for effective policies and programs, in which Think Tanks play a crucial role as agents of knowledge.

Moderator: Marlos Lima, FVG, Brazil  
Panelist: Aaron Shull, CIGI, Canada  
Panelist: Jorge Vargas, PEN, Costa Rica  
Panelist: Leticia Jáuregui, CREA, Mexico  
Panelist: Diego Ortiz, Ethos, Mexico

13:00 - 14:30 - Lunch: Defining the Media Agenda in a Over-Informed World

Opening words: James G. McGann, TTCSP, UPenn, USA  
Opening words: Aaron Shull, CIGI, Canada  
Moderator: Claudia Calvin, COMEXI, Mexico  
Moderator: José Luis Chicoma, Ethos, Mexico  
Speaker: Gabriela Warkentin, W Radio, Mexico

15:00 - 16:00 - Panel 4: Best Practices Implemented by Regional Think Tanks on the Issues of Violence Prevention and Fighting Organized Crime

Description: Latin America is one of the most violent regions in the world. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that in 2012, at least 437,000 people globally were victims of homicides, of which 36% occurred in Latin America. At the same time, the SDGs emphasize the the need to prevent violence and crime. In this context, preventive

policies become more important, because they mitigate the much higher social and economic costs related to criminal activities. The participation of Think Tanks on this issue can improve the effectiveness of government policies, as well as push for innovative projects to reduce crime and violence and enhance security.

Moderator: Liliana Alvarado, Ethos Public Policy Lab, Mexico

Panelist: Mauricio R. Díaz, FOSDEH, Honduras

Panelist: Miguel Ángel Simán, FUSADES, El Salvador

Panelist: Ana María Sanjuán, CAF, Argentina

Panelist: Lainie Reisman, JPV, Mexico

16:00 - 16:15 - Coffee Break

16:15 - 17:15 - Panel 5: U.S. Elections, Brexit and Colombia: Democratic Processes Impacting the World

Description: In 2016 we are witnessing different events that are worth analyzing: the elections in the United States which are a few days away and the effect they will have on our policies; the Brexit and how it is significant for the region; and the shocking decision of Colombians who voted against a peace agreement between the government and the FARC after a 52-year war. Think tanks need to understand the challenges of the current international scene in order to shape and embrace their role in the policy making process in each of their countries.

Moderator: Claudia Calvin, COMEXI, Mexico

Panelist: José María Lladós, CARI, Argentina

Panelist: Carlos Carnero, Fundación Alternativas, Spain

Panelist: Adriana Mejía, ICP Hernán Echavarría, Colombia

Panelist: Carlos Heredia, Wilson Center, USA

## **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28**

Institutional Strengthening Agenda

Venue: Marriott Reforma

9:45 - 10:45 - Presentation: Stronger Think Tanks: Ensuring Quality, Independence and Integrity

Description: The Quality, Independence and Integrity (QII) project is a comparative study of the research related policies and procedure of three types of research institutions: universities, hospitals, and think tanks. The study highlights how practices and protocols vary widely across Think Tanks opening for criticism on the credibility of our research, independence and integrity. This presentation will focus on how robust and transparent research policies, procedures and practices can mitigate this criticism and create stronger and better think tanks in Latin America.

Presenter: James G. McGann, TTCSP, UPenn, USA

Comments: Antonio Villafranca, ISPI, Italy

Comments: Marco Herrera, FUNGLODE, Dominican Republic

Comments: Edna Camacho, ACA, Costa Rica

10:45 - 11:45 - Working Session I - Empowered by Innovation: Think tanks Communicating Better

Description: Think tanks all over the world are in a constant battle with fast information services for the attention of policy and decision makers. How can think tanks explore new

institutional strategies and structures, harness technology and (big) data, work with and cater to new audiences and partners to create innovative and engaging products, services, and events to communicate better while ensuring excellence, innovation, and impact.

Moderator: José Luis Chicoma, Ethos, Mexico  
Panelist: Sonia Jalfin, Sociopúblico, Argentina  
Panelist: Diego Macera, IPE, Peru  
Panelist: Adriana Lobo, WRI, Mexico  
Panelist: J. Tadeo Ramírez, Global Voices, Mexico

11:45 - 12:00 - Coffee Break

12:00 - 13:00 - Working Session II - Investing in the Future: Diversity, Inclusion and Gender in Think Tanks

Description: Diversity in Think Tanks is not only a human resource issues, it is crucial factor to be on the forefront of innovation - diversity spurs internal discussion, provides incentives for rigorous research, and draws attention to projects that address contentious issues. Diversity on paper is not enough, Think Tanks need to think critically about where new ideas come from and to be proactive in seeking out new voices reflecting the diversity of our society. During this workshop we will discuss challenges, examples and concrete plans for bringing more diversity to the Latin American think tank community.

Moderator: Jordi Bacaria, CIDOB, Spain  
Panelist: Claudia Calvin, COMEXI, Mexico  
Panelist: Patricia Zárate, IEP, Peru  
Panelist: Dorothee Schmid, IFRI, France  
Panelist: Claudia de Anda, Fundar, Mexico  
Panelist: Lina Barrantes, Fundación Arias, Costa Rica

13:00 - 14:00 - Working Session III - Faraway, So Close: Think Tanks Fighting Red Tape

Description: The relationship between Think Tank and government institutions in Latin America is a fine balance where both are trying to influence the other. Media restrictions, fiscal disincentives, policy challenges and other red tape strategies employed by governments can become a serious concern for Think Tanks. This working session will discuss the growing red tape and how it affects the overall strategic planning of Think Tanks in different countries around Latin America.

Moderator: Manuel J. Molano, IMCO, Mexico  
Panelist: Rafael Gutiérrez, CIDAC, Mexico  
Panelist: Rocío Guijarro, CEDICE, Venezuela  
Panelist: Miguel Jaramillo, GRADE, Peru  
Panelist: Juan S. Chamorro, FUNIDES, Nicaragua

14:00 - 14:30 - Closing: Conclusion and Recommendations

Closure: James G. McGann, TTCSP, UPenn, USA  
Conclusions: Adolfo Pérez Piera, CLAEH, Uruguay  
Conclusions: Adriana Mejía, ICP Hernán Echavarría, Colombia  
Closure: Jaime Zabludovsky, COMEXI, Mexico  
Closure: José Luis Chicoma, Ethos, Mexico

14:30 - 16:00 - Lunch  
Venue: Broka Bistrot

# Participant List

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# About TTCSP



## THINK TANKS AND CIVIL SOCIETIES PROGRAM

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations. Over the last 25 years, the TTCSP has developed and led a series of global initiatives that have helped bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environmental issues, information and society, poverty alleviation, and healthcare and global health.

These international collaborative efforts are designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that improve policy making while strengthening democratic institutions and civil societies around the world. The TTCSP works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs, and produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories.

This is achieved with the help of a panel of over 1,900 peer institutions and experts from the print and electronic media, academia, public and private donor institutions, and governments around the world. We have strong relationships with leading think tanks around the world, and our annual Think Tank Index is used by academics, journalists, donors and the public to locate and connect with the leading centers of public policy research around the world.

Our goal is to increase the profile and performance of think tanks and raise the public awareness of the important role think tanks play in governments and civil societies around the globe. Since its inception in 1989, the TTCSP has focused on collecting data and conducting research on think tank trends and the role think tanks play as civil society actors in the policymaking process. In 2007, the TTCSP developed and launched the global index of think tanks, which is designed to identify and recognize centers of excellence in all the major areas of public policy research and in every region of the world.

To date TTCSP has provided technical assistance and capacity building programs in 81 countries. We are now working to create regional and global networks of think tanks in an effort to facilitate collaboration and the production of a modest yet achievable set of global public goods. Our goal is to create lasting institutional and state-level partnerships by engaging and mobilizing think tanks that have demonstrated their ability to produce high quality policy research and shape popular and elite opinion and actions for public good.

## THE LAUDER INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies offers an MA in international studies, and conducts fundamental and policy-oriented research on current economic, political, and business issues. It organizes an annual conference that brings academics, practitioners and policy makers together to examine global challenges such as financial risks, sustainability, inequality, and the future of the state.

## UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school with highly selective admissions and a history of innovation in interdisciplinary education and scholarship. A world-class research institution, Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of a dynamic city. Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 and recognized as America's first university, Penn remains today a world-renowned center for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It serves as a model for research colleges and universities throughout the world.

# Latin America Team TTCSP

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### Project Lead

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# About Ethos



Ethos is a think tank that transforms research and experience into clear recommendations and concrete actions for public policies that address the most relevant issues and major challenges that face Mexico and Latin America.

Ethos is one of the main research centers in Mexico related to the subject of public expenditure since it has wide experience and recognition in the matter. It also stands out for analyzing and promoting the understanding, diffusion and implementation of various mechanisms that facilitate the collaboration between agents of the innovation system for the development of high impact projects.

It is integrated with a multidisciplinary and international team of economists, lawyers, political scientists, communicators and designers with varied experience in government, politics, academia and the social sector, motivated for integral and innovative research and proposals.

It also analyzes some elements regarding transparency, innovation, public spending, welfare and poverty in developed countries and in emerging economies, as well as it considers the best practices and guidelines promoted by the main specialized agencies (OECD, World Bank, etc.). For this reason, Ethos creates conclusions and recommendations around these issues, adhering them to the highest international standards.

# About COMEXI



The Mexican Council on Foreign Relations (COMEXI) is the first pluralistic and multidisciplinary forum advocated to analyze and debate Mexico's role in the international politics, as well as the influence of those events on the national scene. The Council is a civil and non-profit association independent from the government, and financed exclusively by membership fees and corporate support. Its primary goal is to build a framework where international issues can be discussed thoroughly, and that provides Mexican and foreigners with information to make strategic choices more accurately.

There are three special programs developed by the Council in order to adapt to each associate's needs: the Corporate Program, addressed to leading companies; the Institutional Program, which gathers Foreign Embassies in Mexico, international organizations with offices in our country, as well as, research and teaching centers; and the Term-Member Program, created to support future leaders.

COMEXI produces numerous research papers on important topics and co-authors outstanding materials such as "Mexico and the World 2006", elaborated in partnership with the Center for Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences (CIDE) and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Participation in conferences, studies and working groups abroad are among additional activities of the Council. It has formed alliances with key regional and international organisations in the United States, Latin America and Asia.

The high level of our debates, in a friendly and open framework, has made us an important forum for foreign personalities that visit our country, at the same time that it has allowed COMEXI to gain recognition as an opinion leader in foreign affair matters and global issues.



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