

# EDITORIAL

## ACCOUNTING FOR IMPACT IN COLOMBIA

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My journey to explore and discover the Colombian accounting academic environment and community started just about a year ago. I fully credit and thank Mary A. Vera-Colina, Associate Professor at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas and Director of the Grupo de Estudios Interdisciplinarios sobre Gestión y Contabilidad (INTERGES), who invited me to serve as the International Keynote Speaker at the *Sixth Global Conference on Accounting and Finance 2022*, which was held in Bogotá, Colombia, on October 26 & 27, 2022. In her invitation, she had stated that “*Traditional approaches and alternative trends in accounting, finance and management*” was the selected main topic for the discussions and that “considering your [my] leading role as researcher in accounting topics, we would be glad if you join us for this academic event.”

During the organizational and logistical meetings preceding the conference, we all converged and agreed that in addition to the workshop (on “*Eclectic Approaches in [Social and Environmental] Accounting Research*”) and the panel (on “*Research*

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on Sustainability, Accounting and Finance”), the optimal theme for my keynote speech should be: “*Accounting Research: Interdisciplinarity, Engagement and Impact.*”

This presentation aimed at discussing how accounting research conducted from a true interdisciplinary approach can benefit society to a greater extent. It was also going to highlight the importance of finding ways to engage with a broader set of non-academic stakeholders (such as practitioners, executives, media, regulators and/or policymakers) to make accounting research more impactful for broader society. Last but not least, it introduced a recent initiative to help create and strengthen bridges between academics and practitioners (and beyond) and provide some examples of engagement and impact work – which is Accounting for Impact, which I co-founded in 2021 with Erica Pimentel.

I recall the presentation to be engaging and lively (and live translated on YouTube!) and much positive feedback and thanks. This was rewarding and reassuring to know that Colombian academics are also quite concerned with the impact of research (or lack thereof); the wrong incentives and workload; and the lack of means and resources – although I had argued that it is up to us, academics, to run the extra mile as this is not only about ‘what counts’ but also to make a positive impact of society. I reminded the audience that most universities are public (I am aware that there are many private ones in Colombia) and we are accountable to our societal constituents by producing research that matters; research that is impactful!

During this visit, Associate Professor Mary A. Vera-Colina and I discussed the possibility to run a workshop or a panel on this topic at the upcoming *Critical Perspectives on Accounting Conference* (which took place in July 2023) since she was the lead organizer. After some e-mail exchanges, we agreed on a workshop in a parallel session, with the following description:

Accounting for Impact “fosters engagement and impact for accounting scholars” and aims to “inspire academics of all levels of experience and areas of expertise to reach outside the academic ivory tower to make a positive impact and for a better society” (<https://www.accountingforimpact.org/>). In this context, what does engagement and being engaged mean to you? What about impactful research and/or making (and having) an impact with your research? Who are our stakeholders when we conduct academic research? This highly interactive and experiential collaborative workshop will be organized to delve into these questions and discuss them collectively, so join us!

I consulted with my AFI team to explore avenues on how to run this workshop and received great ideas – but without having much idea about how many people would attend the workshop, it was difficult to predict the outcome. Regardless, I was confident that I could make this effective.

Around 15 people (from various countries) came to the session, and it was actually the perfect size. The workshop agenda went as follows:

1. Quick introduction (5 minutes)
2. Anonymous Post-It Notes (10 minutes)
3. Discussion in Small Groups (20 minutes)
4. Short view/perspective on research #impact from me (25 minutes)
5. Broader discussion and key take-aways (30 minutes)

I focus on the second and third points. The Anonymous Post-It Notes exercise asked one question (“*What does #impact mean to you?*”) and the Discussion in Small Groups asked two questions (“*What does it mean to be #engaged and to have an #impact in research?*” and “*How would you see different forms of engagement with research stakeholders across three levels? Inform; Consult; Empower*”)

Some responses were as follows:

What does #impact mean to you?

- “Something changes really”
- “Impact is something that can influence someone’s behaviour or thinking”
- “Our voice heard”
- “Challenge the status quo”
- “Saving a life”
- “Difficult to measure”
- “To change practice for the public good”
- “Making a positive practical difference to something”

What does it mean to be #engaged and to have an #impact in research?

- “Impact: derived from engagement to cause a change in actions and behaviours; change that accommodates other/competing views”
  - “Engaged: engagement with local research community and societal community; issues of conflict between being published and impacting society”
    - “Engagement: holding conversations with key stakeholders to understand societal problems and then co-identify the problems and concrete solutions”
      - “Your CV ≠ your life contribution”

How would you see different forms of engagement with research stakeholders across three levels? Inform; Consult; Empower

- “Classroom”
- “Co-creation”
- “Commitment/time”
- “Social issues”
- “Two-way long-term relationships”
- “Care about what I care”

It is important to note that these exercises and answers came before the “*Short view/perspective on research #impact from me*”, which was quite interesting and... reassuring. Finally, among the key take-aways were:

- “[Read] the Open Researcher literature”
- “Method/Moderation of session also good for lectures!”
- “Learn the language to communicate with practitioners early on while you are an engaging scholar”

Overall, I think this was an extremely productive and insightful session to foster engagement and impact for accounting scholars, as per AFI’s mission – it was especially relevant and heartwarming to hold this session in Latin America and I thank all the colleagues who allowed me to (hopefully) make an #impact!

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