How local ideas spread in English: a network analysis of think-tanks on Twitter

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Summary
This paper analyses the networks of relations between Think tanks in order to better understand their nature and the way they operate in a global reality. This exploratory research makes use of data collected on Twitter.

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- Introduction
- Structural analysis: the Think tanks on Twitter
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Introduction
What are known as research institutes or Think tanks carry out activities that are sometimes viewed with suspicion by public opinion. At other times, their activities are not fully understood by a part of civil society that fails to comprehend both their nature and the way they operate. This study attempts to shed some light on how Think tanks function worldwide, analysing the factors underlying their relations in a wide-ranging social network such as Twitter.

This paper analyses the networks connecting Think tanks in order to better understand their nature and the way they operate within a social reality. As an exploratory study, it makes use of data collected on Twitter in order to approach the larger phenomenon that is the subject of analysis. It focuses on studying the network of relations involved and on what they tell us about how Think tanks function. Nevertheless, it does not specifically deal with the influence that these institutions exert through Twitter.

Twitter creates networks of people and institutions through which information travels and ideas are easily spread, but the Think tanks’ relationship models in this network
diverge from the classic communications standard and modify it for their own ends. Counting how many twitter followers a Think tank has is an insufficient criterion to evaluate its influence since the latter must be assessed on the basis of other variables that relate to the quality of contacts rather than to their number.

For this reason, we are interested in knowing exactly what the relations between international Think tanks are and, above all, how they operate in relation to certain factors involved in the political decision-making process. Thus, a Think tank’s influence is drawn up as a map of relationships represented by graphs. These relationship maps do not focus on the worldwide renown of a particular institution but are based on the intensity of the relations between Think tanks in the network. Thus, if a Think tank wishes to influence decisions in a political process generated within a particular institutional framework it will be easier for it to exert its influence virally through networks that share common goals. This is the reason why a Think tank’s influence map will revolve around a political power hub and will be conditioned by it and by the political decisions taken there.

We define a Think tank as an institution devoted to the analysis of international networks and to researching public policies, whose main goal is to influence the various actors that operate in decision making processes. The term ‘influence’ is related to others used in the analysis of international relations such as ‘presence’ and ‘power’, but it differs from them in that it needs to create trends through the ideas or ideology.

Think tanks can be independent or be affiliated to an ideology, political party or power group identified as such, and often bridge the gap between different communities in the academic and political worlds. At the same time they serve the public interest by producing basic research and studies adapted to a form and language accessible to both public opinion and legislators. Furthermore, they shape opinion and provide advice on international issues and public policies. They do so by using different forms of languages and by having among their main goals influencing both policy makers and public opinion –providing that public opinion


3 T. Medvetz (2008), Think Tanks as an Emergent Field, Social Science Research Council, New York.

enjoys a share of power, as it is expected to in a state based on the rule of law and democratic values.\textsuperscript{5} This paper’s aim is neither to analyse the origin of the ideas generated within the framework of these institutions nor to scrutinise their financing or their circles of power and presence.

The kind of influence exerted by a Think tank is similar to that of the press; namely, it is regarded influence through mediation.\textsuperscript{6} Its power lies in the creation of conceptual frameworks that deal with a topic and in the selection of its content, both when it comes to choosing what topics are to be treated and to what extent they are important, as well as to deciding which data must be shown to be relevant and which are not—a process known as news-framing—.\textsuperscript{7}

Although Think tanks tend to get closer to the news-framing process in order to offset the analytic inadequacies of the non-specialised press,\textsuperscript{8} there are still differences between the two. The differences lie in the ‘expert’ status of researchers, as against journalistic independence, and in their aims, which focus to a lesser extent on the general public than the media, including specialised publications. Among the sources used to validate ideas, the media are at a stage prior to Think tanks, mainly because the latter’s targets are decision makers and they expect the press to act as a mediator between them and public opinion. Think tanks that deal with issues related to human rights and that focus on various aspects of human security at times of crisis and conflict are, generally, the exception to the rule. In fact, some believe they should be treated as something completely different.

**Structural analysis: Think tanks on Twitter**

Analysing the influence of Think tanks through their networks is an idea we have been considering for some time at the Elcano Royal Institute. Although the analyses carried out over the past 10 years within the framework of the gotothinktank.com programme at the University of Pennsylvania\textsuperscript{9} have been the only data gathered so far, the methodologies used in them have failed to meet our expectations in terms of influence. The data, which derive from surveys made with international experts,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{5} McGann & Johnson (2005), \textit{op. cit.}
  \item \textsuperscript{6} J.M. Noguera Vivo (2013), ‘How open are journalists on Twitter?: trends towards the end - user journalism’, \textit{Communication & Society = Comunicación y Sociedad}, vol. 26, nr 1, p. 93 - 114. In this regard, Professor Noguera’s research suggests that end-user journalism –focused on the user–, in which non-professionals are more involved and journalist have a greater capacity to select and make decisions, is increasingly prevalent on Twitter..
  \item \textsuperscript{7} M. McCombs & D. Shaw (1972), ‘The agenda-setting function of mass media’, \textit{Public Opinion Quarterly}, nr 36.
  \item \textsuperscript{9} ‘The global go-to think tank’, included in ‘The think tanks and civil societies program (TTCSP)’ of the International Relations Program at the University of Pennsylvania (http://gotothinktank.com/).
\end{itemize}
show gaps that we aim to fill while trying to provide a different point of view in analysing the sector.

As indicated by the University of Pennsylvania’s 2013 ranking,10 over the past five years the Brookings Institution has unquestionably positioned itself as one of the world’s leading Think tanks. However, it has less influence on the Spanish government or on the EU than other institutions such as the Elcano Royal Institute, in Madrid, or Bruegel, in Brussels. In these cases, influence is exerted in a geographical context rather than on a sectoral basis. Therefore, it is not that relevant that certain experts should identify Brookings as the best Think tank, but that the policy-makers involved in decision-making in the Council or in the European Commission, or even European public opinion itself, should take into consideration their relations with other players with a more direct influence.

The rankings consider each institution to be independent from those with which it competes. However, political influence is best exercised through a network, so we consider it more appropriate to map relations where ideas flow towards their target and position themselves via the network. The best-positioned Think tank networks will be determined on the basis of the ideas they try to convey, and regardless of the audience each has on Twitter. In addition, a good position within the network of those with influence will guarantee that the Think tank involved is well recognised by other relevant players, which is, after all, the result of re-evaluating the data used in other analyses through a different methodology.

Over the past few years, thanks to the development of the social web and of different techniques of political communication adapted to this new format, Think tanks have positioned themselves in the digital world, developing their own qualified networks of influence, particularly on Twitter. By means of these networks they can transmit their ideas in a swift and easy way. Contrary to the values still promoted in sectors such as marketing and communication, the influence of Think tanks is not directly proportional to their audience. What Think tanks should value the most is the quality of their networks, assessing the targets of their messages and the impact of the debates they create.

Twitter is a social network and also a communication tool whose networks among active users are often related to tastes or ideological motives rather than to geographical proximity.11 Contrary to other social networks like Facebook, where

10 James G. McGann (dir.) (2015), ‘2015 Global go-to think-tank: index report’, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=think_tanks. The Global Go To Think Tank project included in The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the International Relations Program at the University of Pennsylvania carries out annual surveys with specialists and experts on different topics related to the analysis of international relations. It has the aim of creating a ranking of the world’s best think-tanks, divided into several research categories by fields of research and geographic areas.

you interact with people you know personally, on Twitter you talk to people who share interests with you, whether you have met them in person or not. On the other hand, Twitter's horizontality means it has a low tolerance to marketing, while it is highly favourable to the transmission of ideas due to its easy-to-handle format and its high complexity when it comes to developing networks.

The first step in our work is focused on identifying a network of Think tanks on Twitter that can serve to describe the basic behaviour patterns of the relations between the main international Think tanks. We do so without assessing their work in their various fields of research, and limiting the sample in accordance to the methodology we employ, as we shall see. Twitter does not have the same presence in every country and the language variable is a complicated barrier as regards the transmission of ideas. In China there are channels of communication other than Twitter –Weibo– and in Russia –as in other countries across Europe, Asia and the Middle East– the use of writing systems that differ from the Latin alphabet is an obstacle to our research. Our sample is mainly limited to English-speaking networks and, to a lesser extent, Spanish, French and German-speaking ones.

We start from the study that has had the greatest impact in the sector in the last few years: [http://gotothinktank.com/](http://gotothinktank.com/). Although the data we analyse in this study provide us different variables –mainly geographical, but also on audiences and contents–, they do not contribute to the analysis of the relations between these institutions, which is a basic factor in any network. Thus, we do not consider it necessary to flood the sector with questionnaires –although they may be pertinent to their own studies– and nor do we believe that the data thus obtained are relevant to our analysis. We do not deem it necessary to ask those who are influenced in order to detect who they are influenced by. We do not believe that simplifying data gathering is methodologically correct, especially when measuring influence. Being known to everyone is not enough to be influential: one must also be a valid player actor in the context in which one wishes to exert influence.

Our research is based on the structural analysis of the relations between Think tanks that are influential on Twitter. Its starting point is the categorisation in the gotothinktank.com study, which divides Think tanks into major fields of research, of which we have adopted the following: international politics, development, international and local economy, energy, public policies and technology. We have also created a further geographical category, Europe, which does not distinguish between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe –a distinction inherited from the Cold War–.

By applying methodologies typical of the social sciences we have established some comparative processes between our own networks issued from infometric analysis.

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12 James G. McGann (Dir.) (2015), op. cit.
As pointed out earlier, we are aware that social networks on the Internet are difficult to manage and that they raise certain doubts within the social sciences. However, we consider that in this case they are an interesting source due to the follower/following relationship of the Think tank channels that are present on Twitter. The result of the comparison between methods will help to better define the relations between these institutions.

But for some exceptions, most of the Think tanks analysed have a network of Twitter followers which is greater than the network of people and institutions they follow. The reason for this is that although they cannot, as institutions, chose who may follow them, Think tanks can and do chose who they follow. In many of their Twitter profiles one can find the statement $RT \neq endorsement$, indicating that their retweeting of the message of another user should not be understood as an endorsement of their ideas. For the very same reason, Think tanks take the election of who they follow into careful consideration, being aware of the relevance they bestow, as institutions, by the act of validating another player as a source of information. Think tanks themselves, for political reasons, have to be careful regarding their own networks and must thoroughly assess who they should and should not relate to. Following someone implies opening a channel that generates proximity and openness, but which also forces one to manage a conversation.

Based on this, we have identified the following of the main Think tanks in order to create a network of institutions validated by all their components. As we shall see by means of several graphs, not all of these institutions are validated to the same degree, since a few centres are far more popular within the network than others.

In order to create this network our starting point was the connection between the Twitter accounts of the main Think tanks that comprise it by superimposing three procedures to locate related Twitter accounts:

1. The use of a search algorithm to find those with influence, developed by the Sentisis company from ‘seeds’ provided for this particular research. First, 100 mutually related institutions were identified by the algorithm. The selected centres were then regarded as baseline Think tanks both at global and regional levels according to The Global Go to Think Tank programme of the University of Pennsylvania. The seeds provided to start the algorithm were: *Brookings Institution*, *Carnegie Endowment*, *Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales (COMEXI)*, *Consejo Argentino de Relaciones Internacionales (CARI)*, *Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais (CEBRI)*, *Elcano Royal Institute*, *Bruegel*, *European Council on Foreign Relations, Chatham House, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP), Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), Lowy Institute for International Policy and South African Institute of International Affairs.*

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(2) The search for specific terms on Twitter (Think tanks, institution, research, international affairs), in which Think tank is a key term. The fact that the institution identified itself as a think tank in its digital channel of communication was regarded as a significant factor. Think tank is a very common term in the Anglo-Saxon world, but little used in French or Spanish channels. For this reason, the semantics of the search were extended (institución ‘institution’, consejo ‘council, board’, centro de investigación ‘research centre’) and all the results were manually filtered.

(3) Manually, by means of a snowball methodology. A network methodology known as snowball sampling14 was used by applying the same seeds described in step (1). The lists of institutions followed by each Think tank were then checked, including those institutions related to them. Finally, the process was repeated with the newly identified research centres.

Figure 1. Diagram of the snowball sampling methodology

By superimposing the three lists we obtained a sample of some 400 twitter accounts. After filtering the irrelevant ones, we ended up with the 276 Think tank accounts used in the present analysis. In order for the sample to be as reliable as possible we had to discard the accounts associated with publications and/or magazines, as well as those that were inactive or underdeveloped. We also had to take out of the network some Think tanks that belonged to overrepresented countries such as Spain due to the geographic location of our own account in the Twitter search results. The multiple accounts of institutions such as Brookings and Chatham House, which have a Twitter profile associated to each of their fields of study, also had to be ruled out. The Brookings case is particularly important since its foreign policy account is almost as big as its institutional one and has a much greater impact in Europe.

Once the institutions we were going to work with were identified as Think tanks, we created the network by measuring their relations. This was achieved by means of an algorithm that divides the network into modules or subnetworks based on the intensity of the bidirectional relations –incoming and outgoing– of each institution with the other centres on the network.

Figure 2. Natural network of relations between Think tanks

We created the natural network of relations appearing in Figure 2, in which each circle of the network represents each of the Think tanks under analysis. The size of the circles is proportional to the number of relations of the Think tank within our global network. The algorithm provides a different colour based on the different modules or subgroups it identifies, and on the affinity and relations between Think tanks, taking into consideration their relational proximity with other research centres.
In this way, five subgroups were identified in our global network. As we will eventually show, they correspond quite accurately to the regional subnetworks of Think tanks in the US, Europe, the UK and Latin America. A last group was made up by organisations devoted to research in topics regarding human and/or civil rights.

The algorithm successfully located the subnetworks with which we will work in this study: the Latin American Think tank community, which includes 89% of the research centres located in Latin America; the British network, which is 90% made up of Think tanks which are less influenced by Brussels, but including only half of the UK's Think tanks; the US network, with a 63% success rate; and the European one, with 61%. The latter two networks reach a lower degree of reliability because their big size causes them to lose some of their peripheral groups in favour of others.

Therefore, our Think tank network consists of 276 research centres with relations that take into consideration the directionality of the information flow between institutions on Twitter. They are either unidirectional or bidirectional relations, based on whether only one of the Think tanks follows the other on Twitter or whether they follow each other mutually. The size of the Think tanks corresponds to the weight of their input, ie, to the number of Think tanks that are following them on the social network.

**The global relations of Think tanks**

The colours in Figure 3 represent the variable defined as geographic scope, ie, ‘the geographic interests generated by the research of the Think tanks and the geographic location of their headquarters’. Although the majority of Think tanks tend to be global and their research often has transnational goals, they carry it out from local and regional perspectives and interests based on the funds used for the research.
Figure 3. Global network of Think tanks according to their geographic scope
The position of the nodes on the network in Figure 3 is also important. The nodes are ordered according to a force-directed algorithm\textsuperscript{15} which takes into consideration the links between institutions, getting them closer or separating them according to the intensity of their relations. This algorithm applies to every graph in our study.

Both Figure 2 and Figure 3 clearly show how that these institutions devoted to research and analysis relate to each other, mainly based on geography. Several of the Think tanks with a larger number of inputs occupy spots between the US and Europe because they are well-known by the others regardless of their geographical location: the Council on Foreign Relations, Brookings Institution, Chatham House and the Carnegie Endowment. We consider this group of Think tanks to be global in respect to its geographical scope. Although the relation between institutions of the same region may seem trivial, their behaviour differs from that of the customary Twitter user, whose network organisation is mainly based on its tastes and ideological stance, as already noted.

In order to define a global Think tank we have referred to both its geographic scope and the diversity of its fields of research. These are regarded as basic factors in order to be perceived by the rest of the world as a highly influential Think tank. Therefore, in order to categorise a Think tank as global regarding its geographic scope, its research must be global too, ie, it must have several multidisciplinary research programmes with interests in most fields concerning international relations, and it must also have a large number of network inputs with a significant influence on its audience.

As noted in the introduction, the institutions devoted to human and/or civil rights, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, differ essentially from the rest of Think tanks in the way they deal with their ability to influence since they are institutions that pursue a direct impact on public opinion. This is perhaps why some of them are among the most followed institutions. Moreover, since they have a high degree of centrality in Figure 3, even though they are very specific in regard to the topics of their analyses, we have labelled them as global Think tanks.

Some of the more peripheral Think tanks, such as the International Crisis Group and the SIPRI, have a weight and characteristics similar to those of the global Think tanks but their fields of study are more specific and less multidisciplinary. Thanks to their predominant relation with other well-defined subgroups within the network, we believe the influence of these major non-global Think tanks is very high with respect to the groups they relate with. As we will eventually show, some centres like the SIPRI are, despite their peripheral location, even able to articulate sub-networks.

\textsuperscript{15} Stephen G. Kobourov (2012), \textit{Spring Embedders and Force-Directed Graph Drawing Algorithms}. 
The Think tanks that are closest to each other in our graphic representation are those that are most closely connected. At the same time, those with the largest number of inputs have a higher centrality within the network. Because of this, institutions such as the CFR, Carnegie Endowment and Chatham House are the Think tanks that most contribute to the network and that most successfully articulate it. However, other research centres, such as the ECFR in Europe and the RAND Corporation in the US, are very good at articulating the geographic sub-networks that have a significant weight in those regions.

**Figure 4. Institutions with the largest number of network inputs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think tank</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Think tank</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council on Foreign Relations</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>European Council on Foreign Relations</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham House</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>Center for Strategic &amp; Security Studies</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Endowment</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>German Marshall Fund of US</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brookings Institution</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>Stockholm International Peace Research Institute</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Crisis Group</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>Atlantic Council</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>Rand Corporation</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Institute for Security Studies</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>Carnegie Europe</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In accordance with Figure 2, in Figure 5 we divide the subnetworks according to the geographic location of their headquarters and hence distinguish four major groups: continental Europe, the UK, the US and Latin America. We will go on to analyse each of the four subnetworks by isolating them from the global framework.
Europe’s bipolarity

Europe is represented in a dual way, with two power hubs located in London and Brussels. If we exclude most British Think tanks, whose interests are focused on the analysis of public policies with an international focus, the majority of European centres focus on issues that are relevant in Brussels: the EU and the topics that arise within it. It is, in any case, still a geographic network which gives rise to a subnetwork that uses four of the big European Think tanks as a bridge in their relations with the US and the rest of the world: Chatham House, SIPRI, International Crisis Group and the International Institute for Security Studies (IISS). Chatham House positions itself as the European Think tank with the largest number of relations with other groups of Think tanks, not only within the US group but also within the Asian and North African ones. This it achieves thanks to its links with the research centres located in the Commonwealth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>US Think tanks</th>
<th>British Think tanks</th>
<th>Other European Think tanks</th>
<th>Latin Americano Think tanks</th>
<th>Canadian Think tanks</th>
<th>Other Think tanks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The European network is more homogeneous than seems at first glance. No doubt, the topics that concern the EU represent a 75% of the network, which results in a clear division in relation to the bulk of the British network, more focused on developmental issues and public policies beyond the EU. The green subnetwork includes those centres devoted to developmental issues and, mainly, British institutions focused on topics related to the analysis of international relations and development.

The British Think tanks show the greatest amount of mutual influence and concentrate their relations with themselves. Although the bulk of the British network is in a more peripheral position than first expected, the most important of their Think tanks act as a bridge for the flow of ideas between Europe and the US: Chatham House, IDEAS, Legatum Institute and the Overseas Development Institute. A part of the British network is decidedly oriented towards Latin America due to its relations on developmental issues. The upper section of Figure 5 shows how the network of Think tanks related to security and defence is clearly influenced by British institutions: the RUSI and the International Institute for Security Studies (IISS). As for British centres, it is important to note the role that the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) plays in the European network, whose main axis is, interestingly, Brussels.
The SIPRI, a think tank focused on security and defence issues, generates a big network of relations within and outside Europe. This confers the institution with a significant centrality in the graph, while it maintains a slightly peripheral position due to the weight of its relations with other research centres that deal with defence and security.

Figure 7. Map of relations of the SIPRI

Figure 6 shows that, unlike the IISS and the RUSI, the SIPRI is positioned as a think tank with a very significant weight in the European network. The peripheral position of this Swedish centre has to do with its relations with security and defence networks, which also regard Brussels as their area of influence. Nevertheless, in SIPRI’s case its research focuses on issues that arise in connexion with NATO. The network based around security and defence issues is one of the few instances in which the field of research is more important than its geographical scope. In Europe’s case, this subnetwork also looks towards Washington, centred on the RUSI, IISS and the ISN in Zurich.

The case of the International Crisis Group is a special one because although it is located in Brussels its networks go beyond Europe and North America and even beyond the security and defence network, contrary to what its research focus could lead us to expect. The International Crisis Group can be included among the institutions devoted to civil rights which have a more direct mediation with the general public, although its size does not allow us to refer to it as a global think tank.
If we take a look at the same network organised by country, we can see that, aside from the British Think tanks, the European network is dominated by French and Belgian research centres, considering as Belgian all the institutions centred on the Council and the European Commission. In this European environment, the languages used for the transmission of ideas are English and French. While it does not achieve a significant status, German does have a highly central, although not much internationalised, position within the network. Interestingly, the German research centres that have the greatest weight in the European network and the highest number of international relations are Transparency International and the Atlantic Community, whose Twitter channels use English as their language of communication. The global diffusion of ideas in German should be, as of today, regarded by Berlin as an obstacle in comparison with the presence that Germany has on the European political scene.

Figure 8. Network of European Think tanks by country

Other, less important, centres that also position themselves in the network in relation to their field of research are the Center for Transatlantic Relations and the European Institute. The focus of both North American Think tanks is clearly oriented towards European and EU studies, for which reason they are more integrated in the European region than in their own geographical area.
The Think tanks of southern Europe are more connected to the network centred on Brussels than around London. The paradigm of the Spanish Think tank is the Elcano Royal Institute. If we analyse Elcano’s interests we can identify three different lines of research in its networks of influence: the EU, security and defence, and, to a lesser extent, Latin America. The centres that exert a peripheral influence must optimise their resources and concentrate their efforts on reaching their influence targets. In Elcano’s case, it is patently clear that its direct relation with the European network is centred on Brussels, but it also makes use of the security and defence network in order to have an impact not only in Brussels but in Washington as well.

It is surprising that Latin America should occupy a distant third position in Elcano’s interests and relations, but this may be related to the polarisation of the influence targets in the Latin American network, which prompts it to prefer to use intermediaries such as the Red Iberoamericana de Estudios Internacionales (RIBEI) in order to exert its influence.

The US and the world factory of ideas
The US Think tanks have a relationship map that is more endogamous than the European network since more than 70% of these research centres keep up fluent mutual relations. This is partly due to the convergence of interests as to their research topics. Furthermore, in the US case, one does not find any traits of the aforementioned European bipolarity because all political influence is concentrated in a single hub of power: Washington.
Around 65% of the institutions we have analysed apply multidisciplinary approaches regarding international relations. This contrasts with the European research centres, which tend to be more specialised. The US network –in blue– comprises research centres oriented towards the study of international relations and international security, with a far more multidisciplinary approach.

Drawing an imaginary line on the network map of US Think tanks, we can see that there is a greater variety of colours on the left of the graph. The dark crimson colour identifies the research centres that are more specialised in activism and in the safeguard of human and civil rights, which also have a profile devoted to the analysis of international armed conflict from the point of view of human safety. The institutions devoted to public policies and/or public opinion, environmental issues and development, among others, appear in green. Finally, there is a small group of fuchsia-coloured Think tanks that deal with topics which are more closely related to Europe and whose focus from Washington is mostly economic.

Figure 10. Network of US Think tanks
The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) is the Think tank that structures all these relations. Its centrality in the network makes it more influential than other important research centres such as the Rand Corporation, CSIS and the Brookings Institute. Its links with the centres of analysis of international relations are as intense as with the institutions devoted to the study of public policies and energy and environmental issues, probably because it is the most global Think tank and the one that carries out the most multidisciplinary research. In fact, it seems that the CFR is more closely connected to institutions devoted to the study of public opinion, such as the Pew Research Center, to the study of developmental issues, like the Center for Global Development, and to the analysis of environmental policies, like the World Resources Institute. The latter is, together with the Carnegie Endowment, primarily oriented towards the analysis of international politics.

The fact that the Carnegie Endowment has a high centrality within the network bestows it with a structural value, but it primarily focuses on its relations with institutions devoted to international politics and is not regarded by the rest as related to other fields of research.

Since approximately 65% of the US network focuses its analyses on international politics, the US Think tanks generate more transnational relations than the European or Latin American networks. As illustrated in Figure 2, the international approach of the research topics of the US network is the reason for the coexistence of Canadian, Mexican, Middle Eastern and Asia-Pacific Think tanks within its area of influence.

The US network is more closely related to the rest of the networks due to the interest the world has in relating to it. It is positioned close to groups dealing with security and defence, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Canada and the Middle East. The reason is that Washington is still the influence target of most of the world’s Think tanks. Although it was to be expected that the algorithm would identify this feature on the global network, it is surprising that the difference still remains once the relations with foreign Think tanks are removed. Thus, we can see two well-defined halves: the left half has close links with Latin American, environmental and development Think tanks, while the right half is related to Asian and African centres, who focus on Washington’s foreign policy and its implications with respect to international politics.

**Latin America**

The Latin American case is quite different from the rest of the network. Mexico has almost a third of the research centres we have analysed in this study. Its institutions relate mainly among themselves or with Chilean research centres, while the rest of the Think tanks are distributed across the whole network, Asuntos del Sur being the institution that structures this community of Latin American lobbies. The importance of the Mexican and Chilean Think tanks appears to be directly proportional to the
intensity of their relations with, first, the US network and, secondly, with the European one.

Figure 11. Network of Latin American Think tanks

Both if we analyse the Latin America case within a global context and if we ignore its external relations we can see a polarised network that is difficult to structure. This is due to the scant interest these institutions show towards the major research centres in which international decision makers operate. We have not yet analysed the role of these institutions within the context of local politics, but we believe that it must be one of their priorities.

What seems certain is that Latin America has too peripheral an influence within our network of relations. This is because the FLACSO network plays a weak role within the Latin American community, being limited to working with some regional networks with a scant global projection. This could be due to FLACSO’s lack of interest in international politics –its influence being focused on local networks instead– or to the fact that Twitter may not be one of its preferred channels when it comes to spreading its ideas abroad.

Although at an initial stage of this research we decided to stick to the networks of research centres categorised as Think tanks by the gotothinktank.com project, in fact the Latin American network causes a break in this model of relations which compels us to reflect on the very nature of these institutions, particularly the FLACSO network and the councils of study of international relations located in many of these countries (COMEXI, CARI, CURI and CEBRI, among others).
In order to do so, we believe it necessary to look further into the proper use of the term Think tank, since we question whether these centres match the concept of Think tank as used throughout this analysis. On the one hand, FLACSO is a university centre devoted to training graduates and to social science research and does not aim to influence any targets beyond the standard academic community. On the other hand, the councils of studies are highly academic and do not fit in with the models of political influence with which we have dealt in this study.

**Conclusions**

A Think tank is an institution devoted to research and analysis whose main goal is to influence those that make political decisions, this influence being an intrinsic element of the essence of the institution. A Think tank ceases to be a Think tank the moment it does not try to influence political decision-making, as is perhaps the case with some of the research centres in Latin America.

Political influence is relative and is exerted depending on the target upon which the Think tank wishes to act, so that its ideas and analyses are taken into consideration by politicians and legislators. This inertia in exerting influence is the driving force that mobilises and shapes the network of Think tanks’ relations worldwide.

In general, Think tanks tend to exert their political influence by creating qualitative networks that aim to reach their goals in the most profitable way possible. The network of Think tank relations we have analysed leads to the conclusion that the need to manage those relations is directly proportional to the number of common interests between institutions, which implies the existence of common political spaces and related fields of research.

Washington, first, and Brussels and London, afterwards, enjoy an outstanding position in that they are the targets of the entire network of influence in international politics and thus the hubs through which the whole Think tank network is structured.

Washington –and by extension, New York and the UN– is the global hub for international politics, which conditions all relations and exerts the political magnetism demanded by power lobbies. The US research centres diversify their relations either by field of research or by geostrategic interests and give rise to more fluid networks with research centres located in different geopolitical spaces such as the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region. Because of this, not only has the US become the world factory of ideas but its network of Think tanks has also become the model for every agent aiming to exert influence across the world.

The European Think tanks diversify their areas of influence to a greater extent around two political power hubs: Brussels, where the interests more closely linked to UE politics prevail and the issues focused on security and defence enjoy a more
peripheral status; and London, which has more global and cross-regional interests and which has more points of contact with Washington and other parts of the world.

But this dynamic is not followed by the Latin American Think tanks, which include a large number of institutions unconnected to these political centres and with interests that are more local and regional. On the other hand, there are a small number of Latin American Think tanks whose networks seek to exert a direct influence on public opinion by reporting injustice and engaging in activism.