

# GDI IMPULS

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**GDI** GÖTTLIEB DUTTWEILER  
INSTITUTE

# The Top 100 Global Thought- Leaders

Exklusive Studie  
Global-  
Thought-Leader  
Ranking 2013/14

The  
100 most  
influential thinkers  
An exclusive excerpt from  
"GDI Impuls" 4.2013  
[gdi-impuls.ch](http://gdi-impuls.ch)

Wer beeinflusst, wie wir leben,  
arbeiten und konsumieren

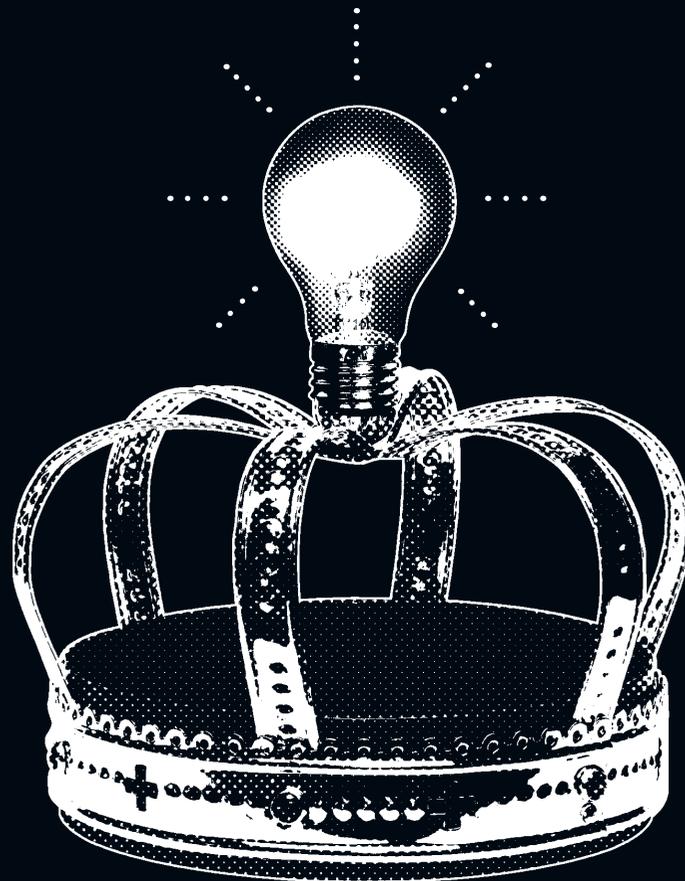
**Randall Collins**  
Die Netzwerke der Denker

**Jerry Michalski**  
Der Konsument als Bürger

**David Bosshart**  
Food at Work

Karin Frick . Peter Gloor . Detlef Gürtler

# Global- Thought-Leader 2013



Who are the thought leaders shaping today's discourse on the future of society and the economy? Whose ideas are defining and changing our lives? Where is the impetus for innovation and social change coming from? Working together with Peter Gloor, GDI now presents the second “Global Thought Leader Map”, and the resulting “influence rank”, which may prove to be an effective tool for measuring the influence of the world's most important thinkers.

**MORE IS BEING MEASURED THAN EVER BEFORE.** And faster. Rankings used to be simple – the most frequently played song, the best-selling book, the most cited expert. With the volume of information now available and the rise of new media and new communication technologies, the number of ways to measure the dissemination of information and the influence of an idea or a product or an actor or a thinker have also grown. Rankings and ratings can be created today in a split second, and everything from the most popular topics on Twitter or Wikipedia, Amazon's sales figures, the most streamed songs on Spotify, the most watched videos on YouTube or the most searched terms on Google can be tracked in real time – just like a stock ticker. The trend is moving from the hit of the year or week to the real-time, or instant, hit. One television appearance, one viral video, one outlandish tweet can be enough to make you talk of the town – or talk of the world – just not for very long. When you measure thought leaders on a minute-by-minute basis, everybody's chance of fifteen minutes (or seconds) of fame gets bigger. Andy Warhol would have loved us.

And fame is now not only more fleeting – the stages it plays out on are also getting smaller and smaller. Every website now offers its own ranking of the most frequently clicked, most liked, most shared, most commented posts. What matters now is no longer so much pervasiveness, popularity or sales as a whole – the essential thing is to be at the forefront of the specific target group or “filter bubble”. This has given rise

to countless new micro-hitlists and peer group rankings. You could almost feel sorry for the television producers thirty years from now whose job it is to make the equivalent of today's “80s shows” for the youth of that time – but then again, in thirty years' time there probably won't be anything resembling what we today call television.

**WE MEASURED MORE SLOWLY.** And more generally. In contrast to the micro-ratings, which survey the number of hits in ever finer niches – actually bunkers of a sort – the global thought leader ranking is our attempt to identify the thinkers and ideas that resonate with the global infosphere as a whole. The objective of this study, which was developed jointly by GDI Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute and Peter Gloor and his company Galaxyadvisors, is nothing less than to identify the world's most influential contemporary thinkers using software specifically designed to do so.

In our analysis, the importance and influence of a thinker and/or idea is measured not only by how well they come across in a particular segment or on a specific platform such as Twitter or YouTube, but also how heavily they are networked and linked. We measure “links and likes” (Norbert Bolz). Unlike other rankings, global thought leaders in this study are not simply reduced to a place number: the analysis also shows how the world's leading thinkers are networked, and which of them are relevant across countries and subject areas, which are being talked about, and which are triggering wider debate.

For the sociologist Randall Collins, one of the world's leading experts on the origin and development of ideas, the progress of thought and ideas originates in networks of intellectuals (see interview page 40). Traditional ranking and survey methods are not conducive to recognising such networks – Time magazine has after all never chosen a “Network of the Year” as opposed to a “Person of the Year”. The advantage of the method applied here is that both the individual and the network

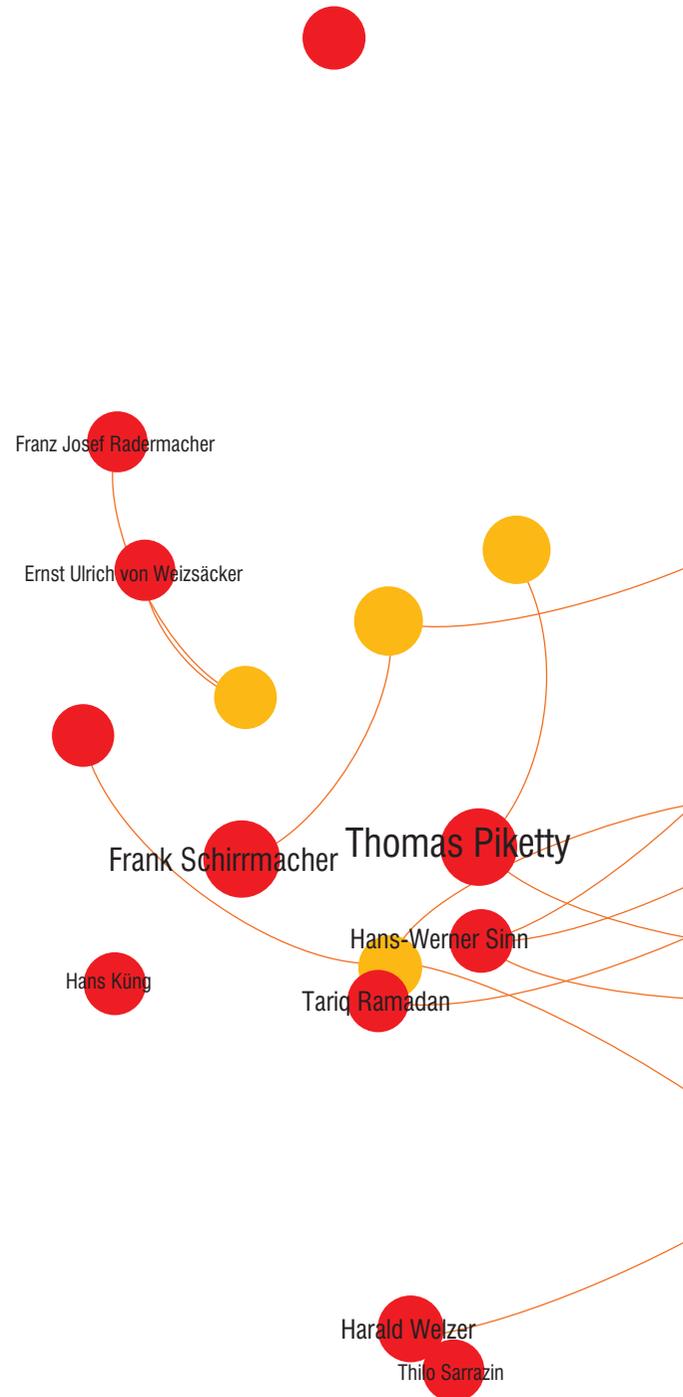
## The progress of thought and ideas originates in networks of intellectuals.

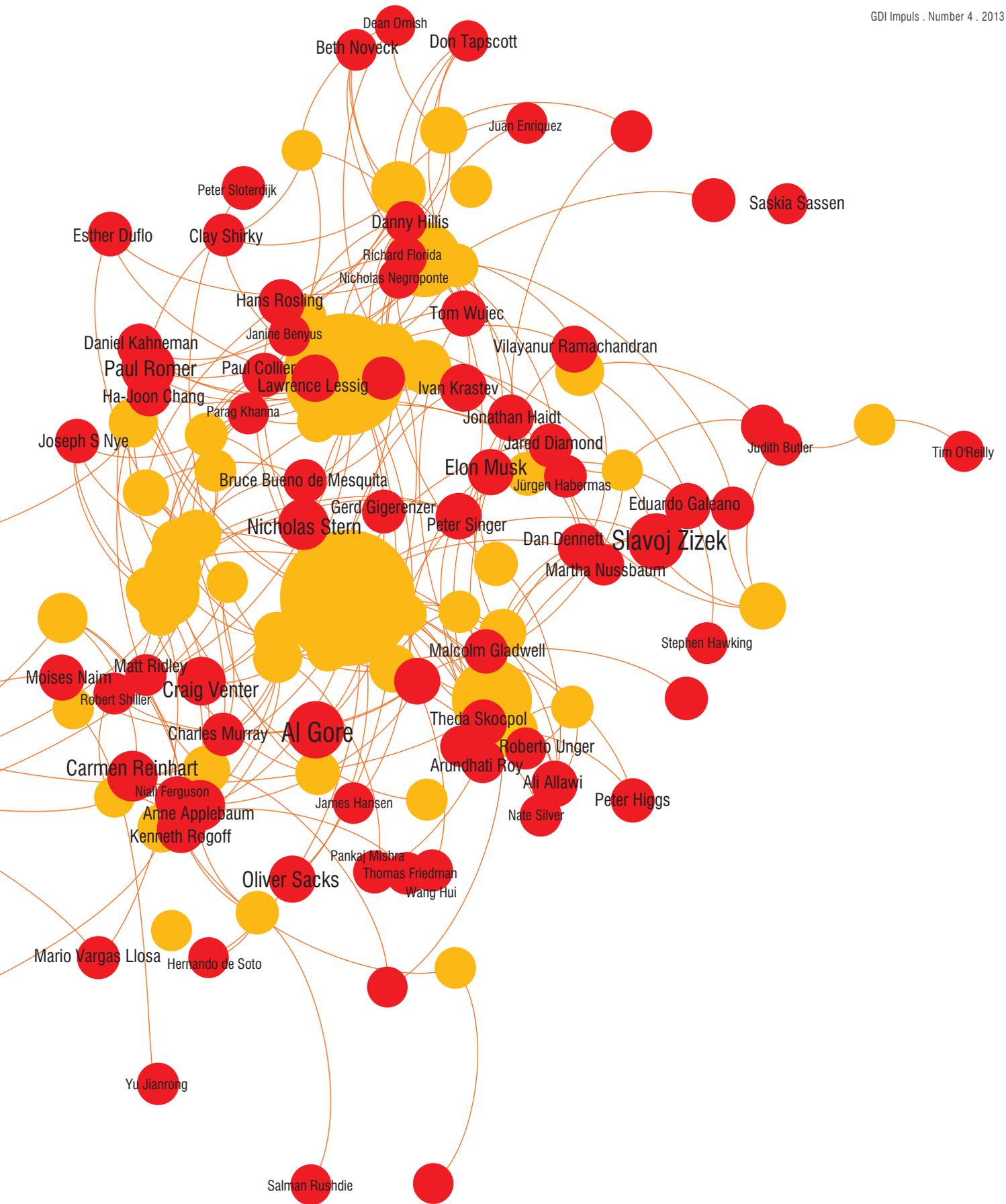
are taken into account. Using this method, an “influence rank” was determined for each thinker under consideration (a table of the top 100 can be found on page 17), and also the relative position of each thinker within the global, English-speaking infosphere.

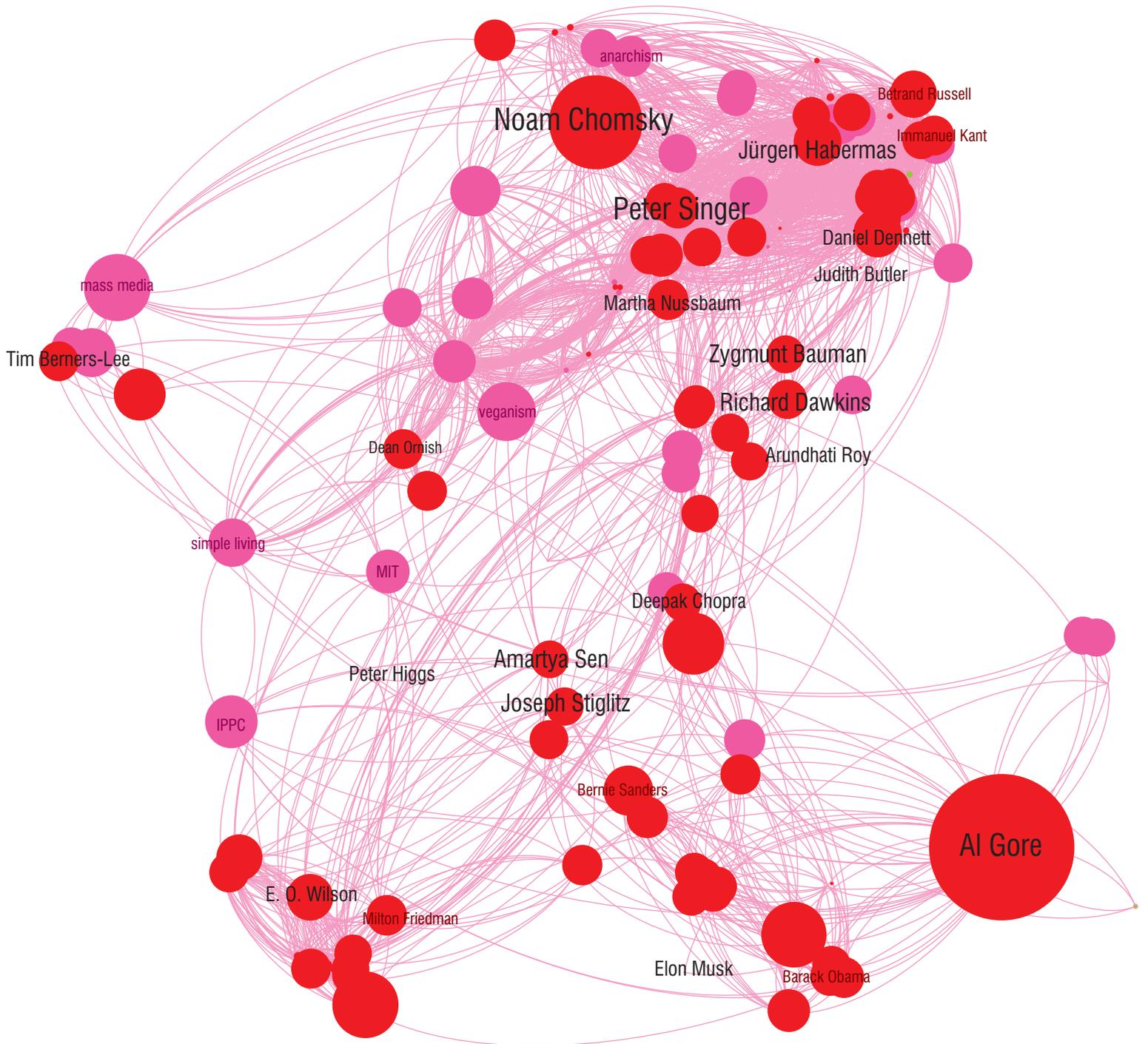
**BLOGOSPHERE NETWORKING** In accordance with the study design, an initial selection of over 200 thinkers from all disciplines and from throughout the world were measured in terms of their influence, centrality and networking in two different environments: the blogosphere and the Wikisphere.

The extent to which the leading thinkers in the blogosphere are networked is shown on the right. We see this primarily as a measure of influence that tends to be short-term. Each individual is measured here in terms of the intensity of debate surrounding them. The yellow dots represent the sources included in the study, while the red dots represent the individuals. Quite a number of people did not make it into the assessment because they did not meet the specified criteria: working predominantly as a thinker, known beyond the borders of their own discipline, and influential (see page 21 for more on the methodology of the study).

The position of a thinker or an idea can be influenced by current events that happen to focus particular attention on an individual during the period of the study. Last year for example, this can be assumed to be an important reason why the controversial German pundit Thilo Sarrazin landed second place in the global ranking – his book “Europe Doesn't Need the Euro” had just been published, triggering fierce debate not







only in Germany, but also in other European countries. A year later, with no new book and no new controversy to generate debate, Sarrazin came in at 70th in the blog ranking and 116th place in the overall result.

**WIKISPHERE NETWORKING** The extent of networking within the English-speaking Wikisphere, which was not included in the assessment for last year's ranking, is shown here on the left. Working on the assumption that Wikipedia citations and their wording provide a relatively neutral and objective view of the relevance and influence of each individual thinker, the

## Only thinkers, not doers, were included in the list of global thought leaders.

quantity and quality of relationships with people and concepts were measured. In the illustration, the pink dots represent individual concepts, terms or institutions, while the red dots represent people.

The larger number of unlabelled dots here compared to the presentation of the blogosphere on the previous page can be attributed mainly to the significantly higher number of deceased thinkers, such as Immanuel Kant or Milton Friedman, referenced as important influences in many entries. Some examples of these are labelled in the graphic in grey.

We see the position of these intellectuals within the Wikisphere as a more medium-term measure of influence. Whereas ardent and clamorous short-term debates are rarely reflected in a lasting manner in a thinker's Wikipedia entries, those who exercise an enduring influence on social debates with their books and articles are for the most part acknowledged accordingly by Wikipedia's authors.

**THINKERS AND DOERS** Probably the most important single factor in determining the outcome of the study was the determination of the people to be included in it. As with any analysis of networks, the work of the Coolhunting software used by Galaxyadvisors for this study is highly dependent on input – the nodes must first be established before the connections between them can be used to create a network. In our view, the demarcation of thinkers from doers is an important distinc-

tion and worthy of discussion. As thought leaders, we have defined those who exercise influence primarily through their words as opposed to their actions. With a small number of exceptions, active politicians and top managers for example were therefore generally not included.

In Europe and America, making this distinction generally poses few problems and proves difficult only at the boundary between the two, where, however, borderline cases are not necessarily the exception. In some cases, this resulted in individual decisions on inclusion among the thinkers that were contentious among our study team: we have for example included Al Gore among the thinkers, but not Bill Clinton or Jimmy Carter. The entrepreneurs Craig Venter and Elon Musk made it into the circle of thought leaders because they have changed the world with their own products – whereas for their colleague Bill Gates or Larry Ellison, we have considered the focus of the debate to be rather on their business activities in the strict sense, and therefore not included them in the assessment. The speculator George Soros is in, because he is also heavily involved in the social debate, while the speculator Warren Buffett is out, because he cares for little else except making money. For us, great journalists like Malcolm Gladwell or Frank Schirrmacher belong to the thinkers, whereas the investigative journalists Julian Assange or Glenn Greenwald do not.

**AESTHETIC KEY THINKERS** While in our culture the most influential thinkers tend to work in the humanities, and often in universities, we were forced to apply a different search mode throughout the Spanish-speaking world, where the role of the key social thinker is traditionally occupied by writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez or Mario Vargas Llosa. We have also included figures from the world of poetry and fiction among the candidates for thought leader in a number of other cases, including for example the Indian author Salman Rushdie.

In emerging and developing countries, we effectively abandoned the attempt to distinguish between thinkers and doers. One reason for this is that the concentration of intellectuals is so low that the best thinkers are often to be found in senior political roles, such as the Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who, after several years in the top management of the World Bank, is currently serving as Finance Minister in her home country.

Another is that the western model of the division of labour between thinkers and doers is a long way from being applied so stringently around the world: China, for example, can look back on a tradition of several thousand years in which the most desirable career goal for the best minds in the country was invariably to become a civil servant. Indeed, another factor here is that while our basic assumption – that the English language is the most conducive to thinking globally – appears to hold true throughout most of the world, that is clearly not the case in China. We were not able to measure the extent of networking between Chinese and other thinkers in either the blogosphere or Wikisphere: of the four Chinese people in the group of 216 thinkers examined, none made it into the top 100 list.

**PHILOSOPHERS IN THE VANGUARD** So what does our study of the thought leaders presented here tell us? It sees one discipline well in the lead, a discipline about which it is often claimed that it is subject to the competition of the attention economy: philosophy. The Australian Peter Singer, the Slovene Slavoj Žižek and the American Daniel Dennett (places 3 to 5) all work in this discipline, and with regard to the thinker with the second highest influence rank in this year's study, the German Jürgen Habermas, one could argue at length and in detail about whether he belongs in the camp of the sociologists or the philosophers. The alleged flattening of public debate is not discernible, at least from the results of this study.

Nor do the philosophers in the leaders' group owe their good position in the overall assessment so much to a top ranking in one of the two categories, but rather to solid positions in both. This makes them somewhat of an exception among the key thinkers examined – in many cases, the picture for the separate rankings within the blogosphere and Wikisphere are very different (the top 20 in each category can be found on page 38). For the blogosphere ranking, it must also be assumed that some people only made it so far up the list because they happened to publish a controversial book during the period of the study. This may again lead to some rather surprising placements in the world ranking in the coming years, as was the case with second place for Thilo Sarrazin in 2012 or fourth place for the German columnist Frank Schirrmacher (Ego) this year.

**THE FRONT RUNNER:** a thinker who used to be a doer In last year's study, we felt compelled to state that there were appar-

ently no outstanding thinkers at that time. That is not the case for this study: both in the blog and in the Wiki rankings, Al Gore is out front with a clear lead. However, with all due respect to the former US vice-president, Oscar winner and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, this is arguably due not so much to the originality of his thought, but instead to his ability to popularise ideas and build bridges between science, politics and society. In his 2006 film “An Inconvenient Truth”, he popularised the fight against climate change without having himself contributed any new insights to the discussion. The same may be said of the two terms coined by Gore two decades ago, and

## The world lacks personalities capable of building bridges between thinkers and doers.

with which he is associated to this day: “information super-highway” and “global Marshall Plan”. That he can still achieve such a singular result today suggests above all that the world lacks personalities capable of building such bridges between thinkers and doers.

Significantly larger in the thought leader ranking is the proportion of thinkers who build bridges between disciplines and can help other regions of the world join in the public discourse. Most of them are listed in the table as “Pundit” – personalities such as Frank Schirrmacher or Malcolm Gladwell (or even Al Gore) who are good at packing other thinkers' ideas into good stories and popularising them. That they are not simply copying existing ideas is evidenced by their outstanding ability to coin neologisms. Thomas Friedman's “flat world” or Malcolm Gladwell's “tipping point” have given new life to existing ideas by giving them new terms.

**A MORE VARIED MIXTURE** In last year's thought leader study, we saw a particularly high concentration of front runners from the United States, and of men and economists. We were uncertain as to whether and to what extent this result actually reflected their importance in the networks of thinkers, or whether it may perhaps have been due to our selection criteria. In compiling the 2012 list, we have therefore taken particular care to comply with minimum country, gender and discipline quotas.

# THE TOP 100

The world's most influential contemporary thinkers – and one of their most important and best-known ideas.

1	AL GORE, USA	2	JÜRGEN HABERMAS, D	3	PETER SINGER, AUS
					
Date of Birth	<b>31.03.1948</b>	Date of Birth	<b>18.06.1929</b>	Date of Birth	<b>06.07.1946</b>
Discipline	<b>Author</b>	Discipline	<b>Sociologist</b>	Discipline	<b>Philosopher</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Global Marshall Plan</b>	Most Notable Idea	<b>Structural transformation of the public sphere</b>	Most Notable Idea	<b>Preference utilitarianism</b>
Google Hit	<b>8 690 000</b>	Google Hit	<b>762 000</b>	Google Hit	<b>906 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>45 800</b>	Google Scholar	<b>83 100</b>	Google Scholar	<b>25 800</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>1</b>	Wikipedia Rank	<b>4</b>	Wikipedia Rank	<b>3</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>1</b>	Blogs Rank	<b>17</b>	Blogs Rank	<b>18</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>1</b>	Influence-Rank	<b>2</b>	Influence-Rank	<b>3</b>

Influence-Rank	Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas
1	Gore, Albert Arnold "Al"	USA	Author	Global Marshall Plan
2	Habermas, Jürgen	D	Sociologist	Structural transformation of the public sphere
3	Singer, Peter	AUS	Philosopher	Preference utilitarianism
4	Žižek, Slavoj	SI	Philosopher	Post-structuralism
5	Dennett, Daniel Clement	USA	Philosopher	Atheist naturalism
6	Musk, Elon	USA	Entrepreneur	Electromobility
7	Lessig, Lawrence	USA	Jurist	Creative commons
8	Diamond, Jared Mason	USA	Evolutionary Biologist	Evolution geography
9	Roy, Suzanna Arundhati	IND	Author	The God of Small Things
10	Stern, Nicholas Herbert	GB	Economist	Economics of climate change

Influence-Rank	Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas
11	Sacks, Oliver Wolf	GB/USA	Neurologist	Anecdotal medicine
12	Higgs, Peter Ware	GB	Physicist	Higgs boson
13	Nussbaum, Martha	USA	Philosopher	Capability approach
14	Kahneman, Daniel	IL/USA	Psychologist	Prospect theory
15	Vargas Llosa, Jorge Mario Pedro	PE/E	Author	Total novel
16	Hawking, Stephen William	UK	Physicist	Physics of black holes
17	Lovins, Amory Bloch	USA	Ecologist	Smart energy
18	Ramachandran, Vilayanur S.	IND	Psychologist	God module
19	Stiglitz, Joseph Eugene	USA	Economist	The Shadows of Globalization
20	Venter, John Craig	USA	Entrepreneur	Human Genome Project
21	Rushdie, Ahmed Salman	IND/GB	Author	The Satanic Verses
22	Gladwell, Malcolm T.	GB/CDN	Author	Tipping Point
23	Duflo, Esther Caroline	F	Economist	Economics of poverty
24	Hansen, James Edward	USA	Climate Scientist	Global warming
25	Ferguson, Niall Campbell Douglas	GB	Historian	Decline of western civilization
26	Okonjo-Iweala, Ngozi	NGR	Economist	Sustainable debt
27	Applebaum, Anne Elizabeth	USA	Author	Civil society in Eastern Europe
28	Nye, Joseph Samuel	USA	Political Scientist	Soft power
29	Romer, Paul Michael	USA	Economist	Endogenous growth theory
30	Butler, Judith	USA	Philosopher	Queer theory
31	Goodall, Dame Jane Morris	GB	Anthropologist	Study of chimpanzee behavior
32	Chomsky, Avram Noam	USA	Linguist	Universal grammar
33	Rogoff, Kenneth Saul	USA	Economist	History of the financial crisis
34	Pinker, Steven	CDN	Psychologist	Language instinct
35	Reinhart, Carmen M.	C/USA	Economist	This Time is Different
36	Berners-Lee, Timothy "Tim" John	UK	Information Scientist	World Wide Web
37	Enzensberger, Hans Magnus	D	Author	Europe, Europe
38	Skocpol, Theda	USA	Political Scientist	States and social revolutions
39	Murray, Charles	USA	Political Scientist	The Bell Curve
40	Yamanaka, Shinya	J	Medic	Pluripotent stem cells
41	Brand, Stewart	USA	Author	Eco-pragmatism
42	Piketty, Thomas	F	Economist	Economics of inequality
43	Gell-Mann, Murray	USA	Physicist	The quark model
44	Unger, Roberto Mangabeira	BR	Political Scientist	Empowered democracy
45	Friedman, Thomas L.	USA	Author	Flat world
46	Kurzweil, Raymond "Ray"	USA	Futurist	Singularity

This more varied mixture for the initial selection of the thought leader candidates is also reflected in the final outcome. While one might expect the rankings of candidates initially selected under a quota system to fall back in the competition itself, such an effect was almost nowhere to be observed in this study: the proportion of women among all candidates was 12.5 percent, and women accounted for 16 percent of the top 100 and 10 percent of the top 20. And although economists still represent the largest contingent among the thinkers, their share fell from about a third to 19.1 percent. Natural scientists, however, continue to be somewhat under-represented. Biology and physics each contribute four of the top 100 thinkers, representing the best of the natural scientists and taking sixth place among all disciplines.

With respect to national distribution, the continuing overwhelming importance of the United States remains unshaken. 43 of the 100 highest ranked candidates are US citizens, and when dual citizenship is taken into account, almost half of the most influential thinkers in the world come from the United States. The result is likely to be even more unambiguous if place of residence or work rather than citizenship is taken into account, which was not the case in this study. At four percent and fourth place in the national ranking, India is consid-

## **43 of the 100 highest ranked leading thinkers in the world are US citizens.**

erably better represented than in the past, unlike China, which does not appear in the top 100. To what extent the major non-western cultures will need to be given more prominence in future thought leader studies is discussed in a separate article on page 32.

**VIDEO AS AN AMPLIFIER** “Anyone wishing to change the world must, even today, still write a book.” That was one of the findings of our study last year. We're not so sure about it anymore. It is now clear that beyond books, there are other, increasingly important ways to make an idea known. Video talks, and especially TED talks, are particularly relevant in this respect: no less than 13 of the thought leaders in the top 20 have delivered a successful TED talk or YouTube video with over

500,000 views. Which makes it all the more surprising that leading thinkers make it into the top 20 without TED, YouTube or a major marketing machine behind them. Books by Al Gore and Hollywood films may be heavily marketed, but

## **13 of the top 20 thought leaders have uploaded a YouTube video with more than 500,000 views.**

we can be pretty sure that the marketing machine behind Jürgen Habermas is pretty modest. <

Influence-Rank	Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas
47	Murakami, Haruki	J	Author	Utopia of love
48	Ornish, Dean Michael	USA	Medic	Stress management
49	Haidt, Jonathan	USA	Psychologist	Happiness formula
50	Silver, Nathaniel Read "Nate"	USA	Statistician	Bayesian predictions
51	Ramadan, Tariq	CH	Theologian	Islamic ethics
52	Wilson, Edward O.	USA	Biologist	Sociobiology
53	Schirrmacher, Frank	D	Author	The Methuselah Plot
54	Chang, Ha-Joon	ROK	Economist	Heterodox development economics
55	Küng, Hans	CH	Theologian	Critics of Papal infallibility
56	Gigerenzer, Gerd	D	Psychologist	Gut feelings
57	Ridley, Matthew White "Matt"	UK	Zoologist	Rational optimist
58	Hillis, William Daniel "Danny"	USA	Inventor	Thinking machines
59	Sinn, Hans-Werner	D	Economist	Bazaar economy
60	Zimbardo, Philip George	USA	Psychologist	Stanford Prison Experiment
61	Rosling, Hans	S	Statistician	Trendalyzer
62	Sloterdijk, Peter	D	Philosopher	Critique of cynical reason
63	Krastev, Ivan	BG	Political Scientist	Democracy and Trust
64	García Márquez, Gabriel José de la Concordia	CO	Author	Magical realism
65	Dawkins, Clinton Richard	UK	Evolutionary Biologist	New atheism
66	Shirky, Clay	USA	Author	Crowdsourcing
67	Sterling, Michael Bruce	USA	Author	Cyberpunk
68	Sheldrake, Alfred Rupert	UK	Biologist	Morphic fields
69	Collier, Paul	GB	Economist	African economies
70	Negroponte, Nicholas	GR/USA	Informatiker Information Scientist	MIT Media Lab
71	Mishra, Pankaj	IND	Author	How to be modern in India...
72	Sen, Amartya Kumar	IND	Economist	Welfare economics
73	Bauman, Zygmunt	PL	Sociologist	Liquid modernity
74	Krugman, Paul Robin	USA	Economist	New economic geography
75	Pisani-Ferry, Jean	F	Economist	Europe's elusive growth
76	Galeano, Eduardo Hughes	RDU	Author	Open Veins of Latin America
77	Taleb, Nassim Nicholas	RL/USA	Statistician	Black Swan
78	Weinberg, Steven	USA	Physicist	Electroweak unification theory
79	Wujec, Tom	CDN	Innovator	Return of imagination
80	Noveck, Beth Simone	USA	Innovator	Open government
81	Allawi, Ali Abdul-Amir	IRQ	Politician	Crisis of Islamic civilization
82	Naim, Moisés	YV	Author	The end of power

Influence-Rank	Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas
83	Sassen, Saskia	NL/USA	Sociologist	Global city
84	Warren, Elizabeth Ann	USA	Politician	Consumer protection
85	von Weizsäcker, Ernst Ulrich	D	Ecologist	Factor 4
86	Florida, Richard	USA	Economic Geographer	Creative class
87	Chopra, Deepak	IND/USA	Medic	Quantum healing
88	Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce	USA	Political Scientist	The Predictioneer's Game
89	Soros, George	H/USA	Entrepreneur	Boom-and-bust cycle
90	O'Reilly, Tim	USA	Entrepreneur	Web 2.0
91	Welzer, Harald	D	Sociologist	Future Perfect
92	Sachs, Jeffrey David	USA	Economist	End of poverty
93	Goldacre, Ben Michael	GB	Medic	Bad science
94	Benyus, Janine M.	USA	Author	Biomimicry
95	Klein, Naomi	CDN	Author	No Logo
96	Shiller, Robert J.	USA	Economist	Irrational exuberance
97	Scott, James C.	USA	Anthropologist	The art of not being governed
98	Tuchman Mathews, Jessica	USA	Political Scientist	Power shift
99	de Soto Polar, Hernando	PE	Economist	Property rights and poverty
100	Romer, Christina D.	USA	Economist	New Keynesian economics

**METHOD** For the global thought leader ranking, we worked with the Coolhunting software supplied by the company Galaxyadvisors. This software ranks the relationships between the subjects studied in the English-speaking infosphere, and the frequency and relevance of citations. Two separate assessments of influence were undertaken, one for the blogosphere and one for Wikipedia entries.

**CANDIDATE SELECTION** The initial selection of candidates was made with reference to qualitative influence rankings (including for example Foreign Policy, Prospect magazine), thinkers included in last year's GDI thought leader rankings, or participants in high-profile events (for example speakers at TED events), provided they met the criteria for inclusion: working predominantly as a thinker, known beyond the borders of their own discipline, and influential. Additional candidates from previously under-represented disciplines, regions or languages were also included.

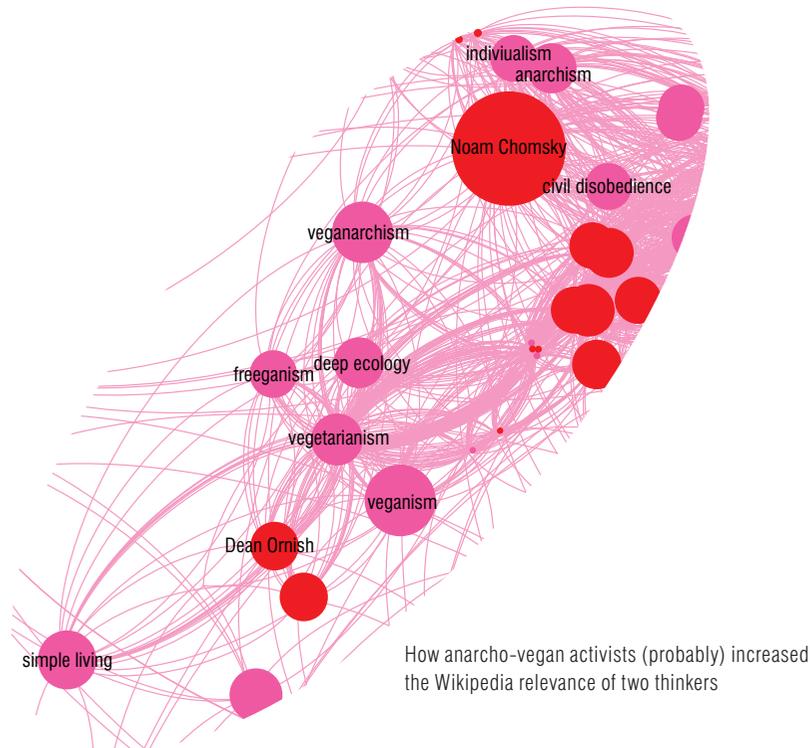
**INFLUENCE INDICATOR** In both categories, the Wikisphere and the blogosphere, an influence indicator was determined for each of the 216

candidates in the initial group. For the weighting of the blogosphere sources, the network analysis software calculates a topic-based relevance coefficient. The influence indicator is not an absolute value (such as Google's page rank for instance). Instead, it depends in each case on the composition of the statistical population: a change in the group or to the selection of the underlying sources would change the absolute value of the indicator.

**INFLUENCE RANK** In both categories, a place number for each candidate was derived from the influence indicators. These two numbers were then added together— the lower the sum, the better the overall ranking. Where the sums were equal, the rank was decided by the number of Google Scholar hits. The resulting placement is the influence rank.

# GAMING THE SYSTEM

Any attempt to measure quality is subject to risk – and the better the method, the bigger the risk.



“Whoever measures, measures muck”, is the rough translation of a saying common among German-speaking physicists. The moment you intervene in a physical process, you influence that process and therefore the result. This fundamental “measurement error” cannot be eliminated entirely: the best you can do in practice is to find a measurement method that leads to the smallest possible error. The social sciences are of course not concerned with elementary particles or laws of nature, but with people and their behaviour. But here too, measurement errors are inevitable in principle.

In this case however, the problem is not so much the particularly bad measuring methods – it's the particularly good ones. Because the better an indicator, statistic or ranking is at measuring a quality, the more likely it is that it will lead to

individuals and groups adapting their behaviour to the method. “All attempts to describe quality using quantitatively measurable metrics or indicators lead to perverse incentives”, stated the Swiss economist Mathias Binswanger.

This “principle of perverse incentives” stands out with particular clarity when we look at measurements of the research strength of scientists. The high level of weighting in favour of the number of papers published means, according to Binswanger, that “the question of what you can publish in which journal and with whom has become the *raison d'être* of the modern scientist”. Research results are divided up into a large number of individual findings and published separately to suggest more intensive research activity than is actually taking place, and well-known scientists with established reputa-

tions are included as “phantom authors” in order to increase the chance of publication in a reputable journal.

But if the focus is shifted from the simple number of publications to how often the work of a scientist is cited by others – actually a more plausible indicator of the relevance of a publication – what you get are citation cartels, some more pronounced, some less, of researchers citing each other frequently to suggest a relevance that they do not in fact have.

In theory, a possible solution to this dilemma is to dispense with measurements of relevance and quality entirely – in practice, however, this is impossible in today's world. There are too many processes and decisions that are designed to reward quality without being able to judge it in any detail, from the awarding of grants to the choice of university by undergraduates. And there are too many media that rely on stand-

## **Whoever measures, measures muck. But not measuring at all leads to someone else making (even worse) measurements.**

ards for quality in order to be able to present complex relationships to their audience and the public. If anything, dispensing with measurements and rankings is likely in practice to lead to someone else making (even worse) measurements, and these then becoming the standard.

**HARE AND HEDGEHOG METHODS** This is why “hare and hedgehog” methods have proved to be successful in many areas, as applied by Google, for example, in its search algorithms. The measurement bases used for “page rank”, the most important criterion used by the search engine in assessing the relevance of a website, are changed continuously to stay ahead of the tricks with which the search engine optimisers attempt to achieve particularly high values for their pages. Which in turn means that as soon as a change is made, the optimisers immediately start looking for ways to find out how relevance will be measured in the future – and how they can adapt their sites to take advantage of it. Some website operators are even said to have tried working with content that really is actually relevant, rather than just gaming the system.

For those playing it, this relevance game is about billions: the higher the page rank assigned by Google, the higher their placement in search results, and with it their chances of higher sales and profits. And looking at it the other way around, Google can very quickly lose the trust of its users, and its market value, if users consider its search results to be of poor quality.

**RANKING-COMPLIANT BEHAVIOUR** In terms of its practical implications, the influence rank calculated here by GDI and Galaxyadvisors is far removed from Google's page rank. It will not be used to decide who gets research funding or academic awards, it is not a priority list for the NSA, and if the day comes when the earth is threatened by meteorites or aliens, its front runners will not be the first people summoned to the White House by the US President for consultation. And there are no cool parties you need a high influence rank to get in to.

But if the influence rank is to be attributed significance in the real world, it is certainly to be expected that behaviours will be adapted to achieve a higher ranking. That books or controversial articles will happen to be published during the appraisal period to improve the blogosphere ranking, or that there will be more links than usual in Wikipedia entries designed to suggest a higher degree of networking than is actually the case.

In the current survey, for which nobody could prepare because the period and methodology were not published, the examples of Noam Chomsky and Dean Ornish illustrate what this might look like. In addition to being a world-famous linguist, Chomsky is also one of the most prominent left-wing

## **The most contested criterion of relevance today is probably Google's page rank.**

intellectuals of our time, and Ornish is a well-known physician who advocates, among other things, a strict vegetarian diet. In the Wikipedia category of the influence rank, both achieve extremely high values, with Chomsky in fact at second place worldwide. But with all due respect to his academic work and political commitment, this sets the mark a little too high.

In the detailed analysis of network relations (see chart on page 22), what is particularly striking is that both Chomsky

and Ornish are both associated with a variety of very similar-sounding concepts – from “veganism” to “vegetarianism” and “freeganism” to “veganarchism”. The obvious conclusion: that one or more well-organised groups with a vegan and/or anarchist background have disseminated their idols and their positions in the online encyclopaedia well beyond the relevance criteria usually associated with Wikipedia.

Influence groups trying to nuance Wikipedia entries in favour of their own standpoints are very common. For the most part, their efforts are quickly detected and removed by the Wikipedia community, particularly with regard to important issues surrounded by much controversial discussion. In niches on the margins of public perception, unconventional practices of many kinds can remain undetected for quite some time – as for example the “Bicholim conflict”, a fictitious war

## Away from public attention, you can even find invented wars at Wikipedia.

that ostensibly took place in 17th century India, which was available for five years on Wikipedia's German pages before the hoax was uncovered at the end of 2012. With a network analysis such as this one, it is possible at least to register exaggerations or distortions of this kind that make it from the recesses to the centre of attention – and as for housekeeping at the crowd-sourced knowledge base, well, that's up to the Wikipedia community.

**ATTENTION-BIAS** Arguably of more long-term consequence is the objection of the “attention bias” with which a ranking that measures the public perception of individuals and positions is necessarily connected. And that is exactly how the GDI and Galaxyadvisors thought leader ranking is designed: the more discussion or controversy there is surrounding an individual or issue, the higher the influence rank will be. Where the influence rank itself becomes an influential indicator, there is the risk of ranking complacent or beguiling figures highly, those whose qualities lie rather in the presentation of the thinker than in the originality of their thoughts.

This risk cannot be eliminated per se, first and foremost because there is no clear boundary between those who advo-

cate their own ideas and those who popularise the opinions of others: how many of his ideas did Al Gore, number one in this year's rankings, come up with himself? What is the extent of his contribution to the dissemination of ideas and concepts? The World Wide Web was created in 1990 by Tim Berners-Lee and spread around the world. But the term “information superhighway”, coined by Al Gore, has done much to contribute to the triumph of the Internet since the mid 1990s. With ideas and concepts, the decision as to which of them (or any other instigator) reaps the rewards of fame is after all not made by some wise committee or through a patent process, but by the public.

Second, attention bias cannot be eliminated anyway in the assessment of influence rank, if only because the concept of “influence” itself assumes that people presenting their opinions on issues actually do influence other people. People who can carry an audience, who inspire or provoke, create discussion about positions, and often also bring about a change in personal convictions and individual behaviour. These effects should be recognised and presented, which is why the method of measurement of public (and digitally processable) debate is selected.

**THE GLADWELL-CHABRIS CONTROVERSY** That the consistency and quality of thought sometimes suffers in the jockeying for attention is a criticism at least as old as the book market. This issue is currently the focus of the debate around one of the people with the highest influence rank: Malcolm Gladwell, number 23 in the current thought leader ranking. One example of this that may be cited is the critique by psychology professor Christopher Chabris of Gladwell's new book “David and Goliath”. Gladwell throws out exciting-sounding theses as “laws” or “rules” to the world, theses for which he can adduce

## Every measure of attention or influence risks ranking charlatans too highly.

at best very meagre and/or very controversial scientific evidence – but that have the advantage of being pretty much exactly what his audience in management circles and the media wants to hear. The impediment rule from “David and Goliath”

# THE YOUNGEST

The 10 most influential thinkers under 50.

**1** **ELON MUSK, USA**



Date of Birth	<b>28. 6. 1971</b>
Discipline	<b>Entrepreneur</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Electromobility</b>
Google Hit	<b>3 920 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>837</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>29</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>10</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>6</b>

**2** **ESTHER DUFLO, F**



Date of Birth	<b>25. 10. 1972</b>
Discipline	<b>Economist</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Economics of poverty</b>
Google Hit	<b>241 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>5330</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>69</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>23</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>23</b>

**3** **NIALL FERGUSON, GB**



Date of Birth	<b>18. 4. 1964</b>
Discipline	<b>Historian</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Decline of western civilization</b>
Google Hit	<b>1 020 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>8650</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>46</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>51</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>25</b>

Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas	Influence-Rank
Musk, Elon	USA	Entrepreneur	Electromobility	6
Duflo, Esther Caroline	F	Economist	Economics of poverty	23
Ferguson, Niall Campbell Douglas	GB	Historian	Decline of western civilization	25
Applebaum, Anne Elizabeth	USA	Author	Civil society in Eastern Europe	27
Piketty, Thomas	F	Economist	Economics of inequality	42
Silver, Nathaniel Read "Nate"	USA	Statistician	Bayesian predictions	50
Krastev, Ivan	BG	Political Scientist	Democracy and Trust	63
Shirky, Clay	USA	Author	Crowdsourcing	66
Mishra, Pankaj	IND	Author	How to be modern in India...	71
Noveck, Beth Simone	USA	Innovator	Open government	80

# THE WOMEN

The 10 most influential female thinkers.

**1 ARUNDHATI ROY, IND**



Date of Birth	<b>24. 11. 1961</b>
Discipline	<b>Author</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>The God of Small Things</b>
Google Hit	<b>939 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>7070</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>11</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>37</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>9</b>

**2 MARTHA NUSSBAUM, USA**



Date of Birth	<b>6. 5. 1947</b>
Discipline	<b>Philosopher</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Capability approach</b>
Google Hit	<b>547 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>24 700</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>15</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>44</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>13</b>

**3 ESTHER DUFLU, F**



Date of Birth	<b>25. 10. 1972</b>
Discipline	<b>Economist</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Economics of poverty</b>
Google Hit	<b>241 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>5330</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>69</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>23</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>23</b>

Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas	Influence-Rank
Roy, Suzanna Arundhati	IND	Author	The God of Small Things	9
Nussbaum, Martha	USA	Philosopher	Capability approach	13
Duflo, Esther Caroline	F	Economist	Economics of poverty	23
Okonjo-Iweala, Ngozi	NGR	Economist	Sustainable debt	26
Applebaum, Anne Elizabeth	USA	Author	Civil society in Eastern Europe	27
Butler, Judith	USA	Philosopher	Queer theory	30
Goodall, Dame Jane Morris	GB	Anthropologist	Study of chimpanzee behaviour	31
Reinhart, Carmen M.	C/USA	Economist	This Time is Different	35
Skocpol, Theda	USA	Political Scientist	States and social revolutions	38
Noveck, Beth Simone	USA	Innovator	Open government	80

for example, according to which obstacles are said to inspire us to perform better, is based on a single experiment with forty students – and this study is also the only one of a large number of similar studies to support this very counter-intuitive assertion.

Given his popularity and way with words, Gladwell succeeded in giving weight to one-sided and esoteric theories in the public debate. “Readers are not interested in consistency and coherence, that's something that only critics do”, as Chabris quotes Gladwell, before continuing: “When I think of a talented writer with a large audience that is not interested in such things, the result will be the dissemination of a whole lot of misconceptions among a large number of influential people.”

No doubt even the biggest Gladwell fans will not go so far as to deliberately place obstacles in their own or other people's way in an attempt to improve their performance. Nor does the best-selling author himself call for this. With his “theory of desirable difficulties”, he actually simply points out that difficulties – here, a barely legible task in a test – force people to pay more attention and can therefore lead to better performance. Those who manage to overcome difficulties grow as a

## **“Readers are not interested in consistency and coherence. That's something that only critics do.”**

result – if they succeed. When it comes down to it, an old insight. But as a “theory”, it is abundantly oversold, because depending on the person and situation, the exact opposite result is also possible: The pseudo-scientific packaging increases the credibility, and thus also the relevance, of what is otherwise a rather lukewarm thesis.

**THE FACT CHECK AS A WEAPON** Do popularisers and best-selling thinkers like Gladwell in fact sharpen the perception of their audience, and therefore of society as a whole, or are they sensationalists pointing us in the wrong direction? Chabris' critique actually provides the best answer: those who wish to claim relevance must also be able to withstand criticism. An attack along the lines of “but he isn't wearing anything at all!” in “The Emperor's New Clothes” is an important tool for debunking windbags – and the method of falsification can be

applied equally against both trendy philosophers and particle physicists.

“The fact check is the strongest weapon against populism”, said the German politician Heiner Geissler recently, defending the use of referendums against accusations that citizens lack knowledge and information. Something similar applies not only to the discourse about decisions, but also to the debate about ideas.

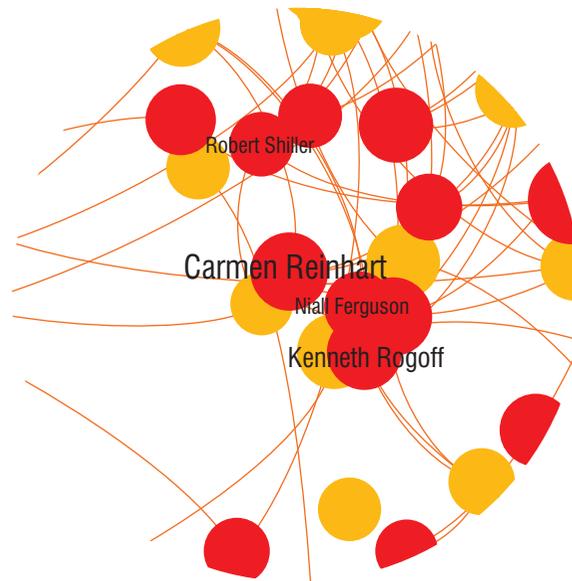
## **A proper fact check is the best way to counter overly complacent thinkers and ideas.**

The creation of an influence ranking can even be helpful here, in particular because it identifies the people or ideas on which the attention of the world (or a region or an industry) is focussed – and on whose intellectual output high standards should therefore be set.

Moreover, there appears to be no immediate risk that figures of little substance will rise to the upper echelons of the influence ranking. The top positions are held primarily by serious thinkers steeped in the flow of debate, with a quality of intellect better than any bestseller list. <

# ARGUING PROPERLY

Instead of conducting their battles on a level playing field, many big thinkers would unfortunately seem to prefer to be treated like gurus. Some suggestions for managing conflict properly.



Their own troops ready at hand, the enemy at a distance:  
a typical, if unfortunate, line-up of thought leaders

“History”, according to Karl Marx, “is the history of class struggles.” And the history of ideas, we might add, is the history of classic struggles. Because whenever a new idea seeks to break fresh ground, it is confronted with the resistance of the familiar. The Traditional, the Classical is called into question, and among the great minds of the time, the New encounters thinkers who are not accustomed to being contradicted. This is where it can sometimes get rough.

In fact, this is exactly the way it should be. Since Karl Popper, it has been a generally accepted belief that science makes progress through the falsification of theories – from Ptolemy through Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Einstein and Planck to Peter Higgs and his “God particle” today, and there is no reason to believe that this will simply stop. And Randall Collins has shown that the rivalry between schools of thought is one of the most important elements in the emergence of new thin-

king. Disputes among great minds excite the scientific community, stimulate the public – and carry humanity forwards.

**PROGRESS THROUGH EXTINCTION** Expressed by the third great researcher of scientific progress in the 20th century, the sociologist of science Thomas Kuhn, this all sounds much more sober, or perhaps more aptly, sobering. He states that when a “paradigm shift” – his central concept – takes place, there is often no dispute at all. According to this theory, the transition to a completely new way of thinking usually happens not because the adherents of the old school are won over, and also not because they are toppled from their posts, but mostly because of the fact that they simply die. The time for the institutional establishment of the new school is ripe only when the old generation demographically cedes the stage.

And what pattern of intellectual rivalry and scientific controversy do we see in the current thought leader maps? The animated exchange in the Popperian sense, Collinsian rebellion mode, or perhaps after all the tending of one's own paradigm garden à la Kuhn? To be honest, most likely the latter. We like to call it the “guru pattern”: most major thinkers evidently do not conduct much in the way of debate with others of an equal stature. Wherever thinkers are found close to each other in the presentation, they are people with very similar ideas.

The economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, for example, are closely associated with each other since the publication of their jointly authored book on the history of financial crises, “This Time Is Different”. Academic opponents such as bubble expert Robert Shiller or the Keynesian Paul Krugman are rendered by the thought leader software at distances from each other, sometimes far apart. If there really was passionate and intense controversy between one major thinker and another, the names and ideas would have to be much closer together.

**NEVER AD HOMINEM** How then does one conduct an argument properly? There are two basic rules. The first: argue with the person, but never get personal. And the second: admit to and deal with your own mistakes. In that order.

Even where the debate becomes bitter, where the existence of humanity is supposedly under threat (or at least the national budget), ad hominem arguments are not allowed. It

## **Even where the debate becomes bitter, ad hominem arguments are not allowed: the point is to stick to the argument.**

doesn't matter whether your adversary was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, or writes atrociously cheesy poetry, the point is to stick to the argument.

One positive example in this respect is clearly Jürgen Habermas. His name is immediately associated with a whole slew of political and academic controversies, two of the most notable no doubt being the Habermas-Luhmann debate in the field of sociology, and the Historikerstreit, the “historians' de-

bate” about the singularity of the Third Reich under the Nazis. With an extremely engaged but never abusive style of debate, Habermas never failed to show respect for the arguments of

## **Key thinkers in shitstorms must feel like they're surrounded by a pack of hunting dogs.**

his opponents Niklas Luhmann and Ernst Nolte – doubtless boosting his own reputation by doing so. It would presumably be a major contribution to the debate over the future constitution of Europe if Habermas could conduct the argument with an evenly matched protagonist.

**ECONOMISTS LASHING OUT** But the complete eschewal of personal attacks proves extremely difficult in an attention economy that by its nature rewards the most extreme failures with the widest attention. And quite a few of the current examples of how not to conduct an argument revolve around a man who is probably today's biggest media star among economists: Paul Krugman. The sharp-tongued Nobel Prize winner has not only a blog and a column in the New York Times, but also a very distinct opinion on how to go about dealing with the global economic crisis. And he lashes out fiercely against all who do not share it. And that's a lot of people.

Including for example Niall Ferguson. For the British historian, his opponent in the field of economic policy is “Krugtron the Invincible”. And Ferguson complains bitterly about the insults, personal attacks and “chronic lack of civility” he alleges Krugman to display. Now Krugman's polemic is indeed often hurtful, and rarely civil, but never (well, almost never) personally offensive. But then there are others who take care of that for him. His abrasive style, and no doubt also the substance of his opinions, have won Krugman a whole lot of fans in the fast moving scenes surrounding the economic debate – for Ferguson, the “claque” of Krugman “acolytes”. And when economic and financial journalists and shitstorm-meisters like Josh Barro or Joe Weisenthal go on the attack, it's hard for the victim not to feel like he's surrounded by a pack of hunting dogs. When he gets to read public invective along the lines of “Oh holy shit Niall Ferguson said something EVEN DUMBER THAN WHAT HE USUALLY SAYS” (Josh Barro).

Dealing with such shitstorms cannot be easy for an earnest academic. But Ferguson might have been expected to realise that the best strategy for dealing with it may not have been to label his adversary's hellhounds “boorish and unpaid one-trick ponies”.

**JUST NEVER ADMIT ANY MISTAKES** Dealing with their own mistakes is extremely difficult for stars, of whatever stripe, and for superstars and gurus, it's well-nigh impossible. To the end of his life, Christopher Columbus insisted that he had discovered a sea route to Asia, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe held chromatics to be his greatest and most lasting achievement, never accepting that the physics was wrong.

Among the key thinkers examined in this study, very many find it difficult to admit to and deal with their own mistakes, notwithstanding the fact that – to repeat once again – the falsification of theories is supposed to be a completely normal process for any scientist.

To illustrate this, we may again turn our attention to the economy. In the years before, during and after the big financial and economic crisis of 2008/09, every economist, expert and journalist – without exception – got it wrong, and got it wrong repeatedly, in terms of their analysis, forecasts or re-

## **Even if they are provoking you, you don't call your opponents “boorish one-trick ponies”, Mr Ferguson.**

commendations for action, and sometimes all three. Those who correctly predicted the crash of 2008, such as Roubini or Shiller, underestimated the resilience of the US dollar to the crisis, and those who predicted the grave consequences of the austerity policies in southern Europe, such as Krugman, underestimated the will of the countries affected to keep the euro as their currency, whatever the cost.

A common error analysis could restore the conditions for all camps to resume a proper academic discussion. But until the crisis comes to an end, as long as the battles for and against new debt and economic stimuli rage on, it is unlikely that any of the fighters will dare to emerge from their ideological trenches.

A work by Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff is once again symptomatic in this respect. In 2010, they published a study, covering pretty much every debt crisis of the past century, according to which it almost always ends badly for states if their debt increases to more than 90 percent of gross domestic product. The study was barely published before the economists in the opposing camp, the Keynesians, started grinding their teeth at their dislike of the findings. Because it was of course not simply a historical review, but a fairly direct warning to the governments of the industrialised countries to get their finances back in order as quickly as possible.

## **As personal brands, key thinkers could learn a lot about crisis management from branded companies.**

Three years later, a doctoral student by the name of Thomas Herndon proved to Reinhart and Rogoff that the shock figures in their study only came about because they had made a mistake in their central Excel spreadsheet. The ninety percent cliff was nowhere to be found in the corrected figures. But instead of openly participating in the overhaul of the study from the beginning, the star authors rowed laboriously and reluctantly back over several stages – thereby increasing the damage to their reputations even further.

**ANYTHING TO LEARN FROM BRANDED COMPANIES?** Perhaps it would be advisable for these key thinkers, all fairly valuable “personal brands” in themselves, to seek a little crisis management coaching from the big branded companies. A Nestlé, a Lufthansa, an IBM do after all have a wealth of experience in dealing with crises, and with their own and other people's mistakes. The intellectual giants could doubtless learn a thing or two from the sales giants.

But are they willing to do so? <

# THE LOCALS

The 10 most influential thinkers from German-speaking countries.

**1** JÜRGEN HABERMAS, D



Date of Birth	<b>18. 6. 1929</b>
Discipline	<b>Sociologist</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Structural transformation of the public sphere</b>
Google Hit	<b>762 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>83 100</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>4</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>17</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>2</b>

**2** HANS MAGNUS ENZENSBERGER, D



Date of Birth	<b>11. 11. 1929</b>
Discipline	<b>Author</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Europe, Europe</b>
Google Hit	<b>535 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>9760</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>48</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>68</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>37</b>

**3** TARIQ RAMADAN, CH

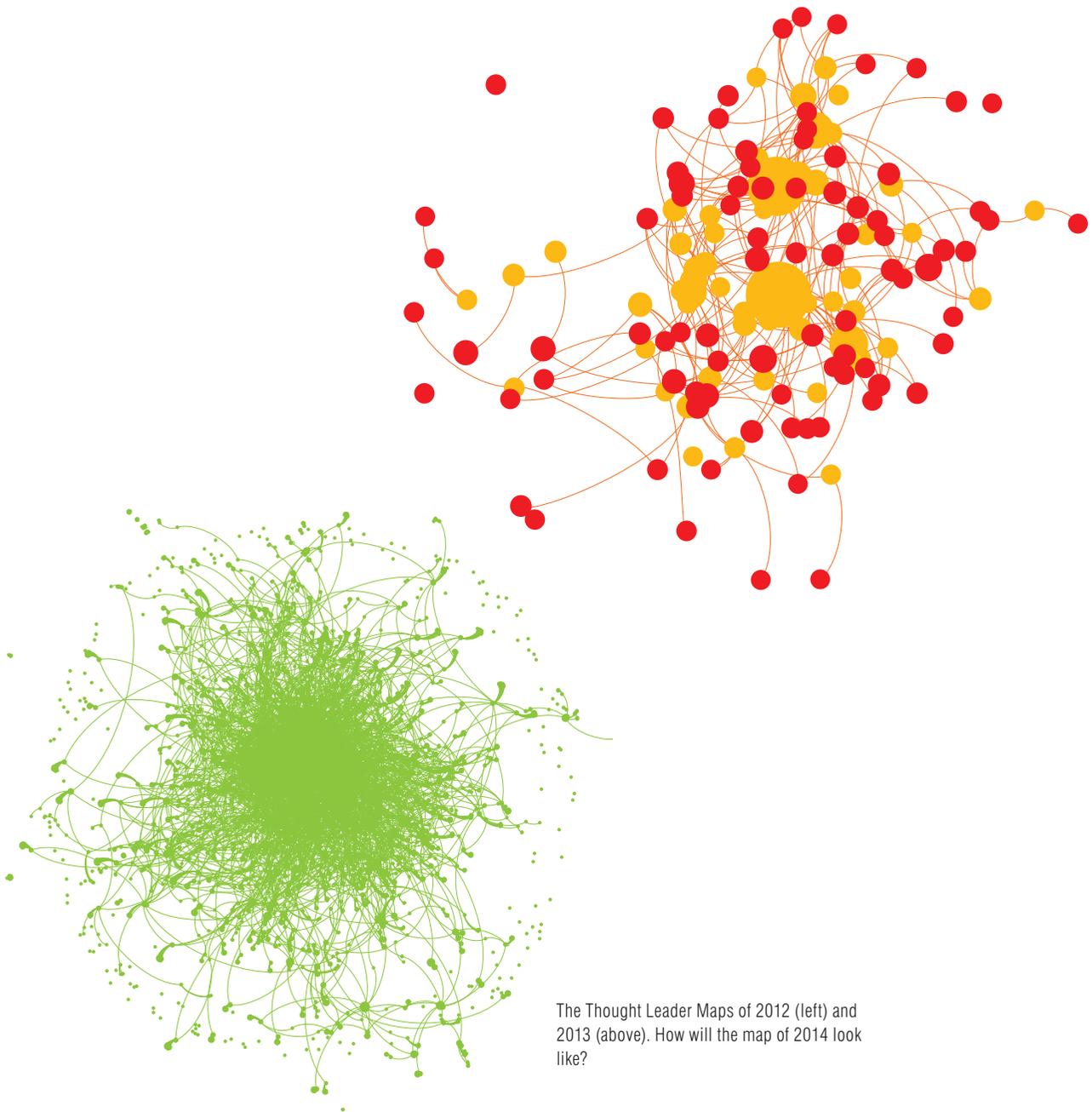


Date of Birth	<b>26. 8. 1962</b>
Discipline	<b>Theologian</b>
Most Notable Idea	<b>Islamic ethics</b>
Google Hit	<b>1 460 000</b>
Google Scholar	<b>3650</b>
Wikipedia Rank	<b>77</b>
Blogs Rank	<b>49</b>
Influence-Rank	<b>51</b>

Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas	Influence-Rank
Habermas, Jürgen	D	Sociologist	Structural transformation of the public sphere	2
Enzensberger, Hans Magnus	D	Author	Europe, Europe	37
Ramadan, Tariq	CH	Theologian	Islamic ethics	51
Schirrmacher, Frank	D	Author	The Methuselah Plot	53
Küng, Hans	CH	Theologian	Critics of Papal infallibility	55
Gigerenzer, Gerd	D	Psychologist	Gut feelings	56
Sinn, Hans-Werner	D	Economist	Bazaar economy	59
Sloterdijk, Peter	D	philosopher	Critique of cynical reason	62
von Weizsäcker, Ernst Ulrich	D	Ecologist	Factor 4	85
Welzer, Harald	D	Sociologist	Future Perfect	91

# TOWARDS THE 2014 THOUGHT LEADER MAP

The investigation of the influence of the world's most important intellectuals has only just begun. How it might continue in the coming year.



The Thought Leader Maps of 2012 (left) and 2013 (above). How will the map of 2014 look like?

In sports, champions are usually selected once a year. The Oscars and the Nobel Prizes are also awarded once a year, and most other prizes and rankings also hold to the annual rhythm. No sooner do the continuous flow of new insights, books and works of art see the light of day than they are selectively and regularly assessed by juries and other institu-

## **As so often the case in research work, every answer raises entirely new questions.**

tions. For the study of global thought leaders, undertaking the ranking on an annual basis would also seem appropriate, in order to facilitate an assessment of the development of the influence and relevance of individual thinkers and schools of thought over time.

After drawing up the first Global Thought Leader Map in 2012, we were faced with a series of questions that could only be answered by carrying out a new study of the same kind, and we also had a range of assumptions that could – or could not – be confirmed the next year. And the study now presented has indeed provided a series of answers – answers from which, as so often the case in research work, new questions arise for which answers may in turn be found next time round.

**CENTRALITY AND RELEVANCE** One of our most open and exciting questions concerned the time frame of the analysis. A survey of the blogosphere for a short sample period of one to two weeks might have more of the character of a snapshot of the surge of current debate, rather than a means of identifying the truly influential thinkers. This assumption was only partially confirmed: some of the thinkers rated very highly in 2012 do indeed land way down the rankings in 2013 (see table on page 39), but a great many of them achieved solid places at the front of the field in both studies.

Which raises the question of whether there is a pattern here that can be used to distinguish between one-off successes and thought-leaders who remain influential in the long term. One possible indicator for this distinction may be found in the centrality of a thinker: the closer an individual is to the centre of the thought leader map of the blogosphere, the more probable it may be that they appear among the front runners

in the coming year. Another possible indicator could be the number of connections with which a thinker is linked to other thinkers in the study. The more relations of this kind there are this year, the greater would be the probability of again achieving a high placement in the coming year.

Given that both assumptions are directly related to the presentation of the completed studies, a method for testing them suggests itself – by formulating a forecast based on the first two studies in advance of the next study, predicting which of the thought leaders in the first two years come out in front and which fall back into mediocrity.

**DOMINANCE OF THE WEST** The design of the analysis software used in the study specifies that the selection of the individuals to be tracked plays a decisive role. This input is one of the factors that to a large extent determine the relevance to the analysis of the many potential sources in the infosphere.

In the first study, the list of candidates was drawn up for the most part by the study team itself, taking account of many suggestions from thinkers with a working relationship with the GDI Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute. The natural assumption was that given the mindsets of those involved, certain groups of thinkers could be overrepresented – particularly economists and Western intellectuals.

The considerably broader selection process for this year's study allowed us to test this assumption, and confirmed quantitatively the prominent role of economists: they again represent by far the largest quota of all academic disciplines. In

## **The closer a thinker moves the centre of the thought leader map, the more stable his position is likely to be.**

today's climate, their field of expertise is evidently particularly heavily involved in building bridges between different disciplines. Economists also play a major role in shaping social discourse, concerned as they are with matters directly relevant to the way many people live their lives.

And as for the West: even with a broader selection of candidates, the West appears to set the agenda for the global discussion – at least to the extent that it is played out in English. However, one issue in need of explanation is that, again, there

is not a single Chinese thinker in this year's list of the one hundred most influential intellectuals. We would like to find an explanation for this in the coming years – preferably in the form of a “China Thought Leader Map”.

**THE OPEN LANGUAGE QUESTION** This takes us to the first of the completely new and open questions facing us after this second study, questions that can only be answered in the course of future studies. It is the question of language – and with it indeed the question of the inclusion of other cultures. To date, we have concentrated largely on the study of English sources: anyone looking to be included among the global thought

## **One issue in need of explanation, however, is that there is not a single Chinese thinker in the top 100.**

leaders, we reasoned, must also contribute their ideas to the debates taking place in the global language, which happens after all to be English. Studies of the thought leaders in the cultures of the other major languages of the West – French, Spanish and German in particular – can doubtless paint an interesting picture of the most influential thinkers and debates in the countries in which those languages are spoken, but they are nevertheless in the second league.

The picture is somewhat different for the major languages of the non-Western world – namely Chinese and Arabic, and to a lesser extent also Russian and Turkish. Because the thinkers in these language regions are pretty much absent from the English-speaking sources. Here, there is apparently no automatic mechanism by means of which the ideas of the most influential minds find their way into the English-language infosphere.

The reasons for this can be assumed to be diverse, and also specific to each case. In Turkey and the Arab-speaking world, religious reasons no doubt play their role in the relative isolation of new thinking in those regions, while in Russia, the traditional antagonism to the United States, stemming from the Cold War period, may also be hindering intellectual expansion into the English language. In China, this is also compounded by a systemic problem: the “great firewall” that separates the Chinese Internet from the rest of the world is also

almost impossible for the Galaxyadvisors software to penetrate – and where it succeeds, it must be expected that the search results are distorted. What does get through is either written by Chinese exiles or manipulated by censors. But regardless of the various reasons that keep these countries or languages on the sidelines of the global flow of ideas, there remains every good reason to create separate thought leader maps for them, or at least for China and the Arab world.

**A HUNDRED MILLION ZHANGS** Technically, this is certainly feasible. The effort involved for each language, however, is considerable: The publications and discussion forums in which the debate among intellectuals is held within each society must be identified, there must be a high-quality initial selection of candidates, which requires a good knowledge of the culture in each case, and the thinkers themselves must also be correctly identified and the relationships between them registered and assessed. The latter in itself can present a tricky technical problem – in China for example, there are no less than one hundred million people with the surname Zhang. Whether studies in other language areas will be possible in the coming year therefore remains to be seen.

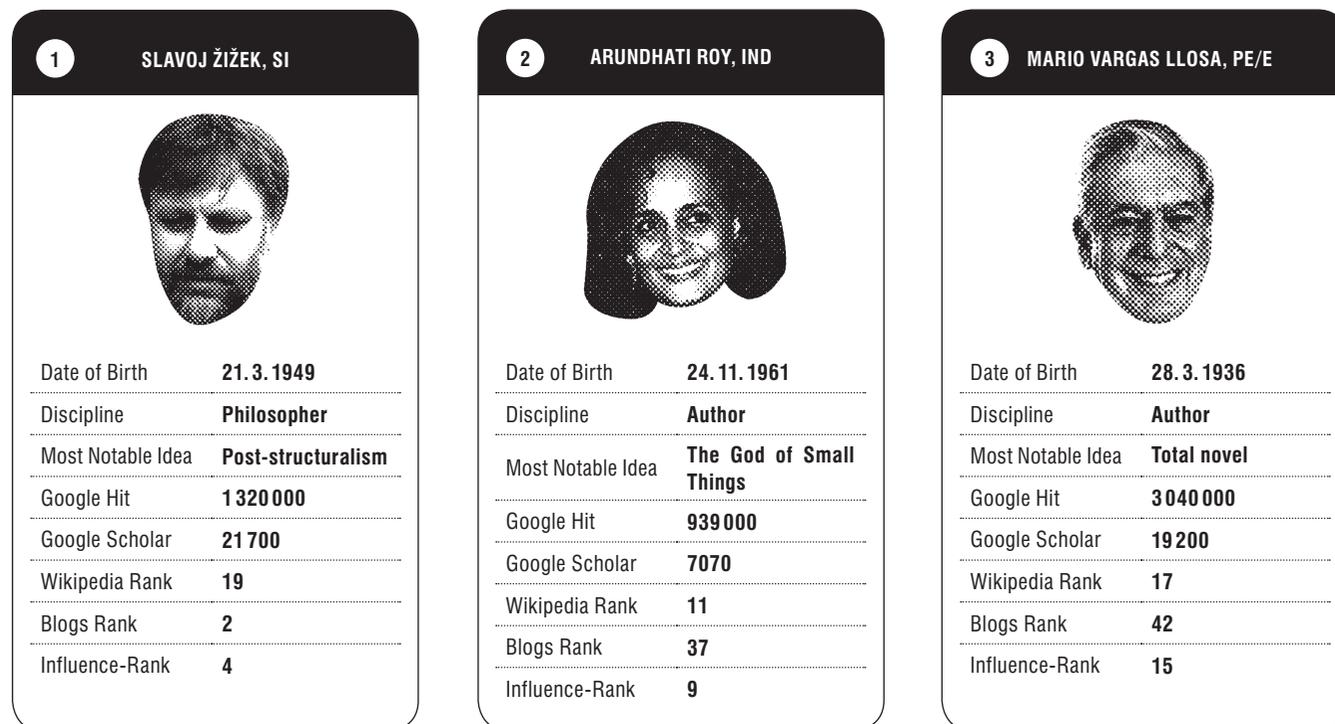
**ADDITIONAL RANKINGS** Another method of broadening the study would no doubt be easier in technical terms, but would definitely also be controversial in terms of methodology: the addition of new criteria. One attractive option, for example, would be to measure the influence of individual thinkers in social networks. Not so much in terms of their own commitment: after all, few major thinkers use social media intensive-

## **The “great firewall” around the Chinese Internet is virtually impossible for the search software to crack.**

ly, and quantitative indicators such as the number of followers on Twitter or fans on Facebook are therefore hardly relevant. For this reason, we feel compelled to reject a proposal by the British historian Niall Ferguson, number 25 in the global thought leader ranking: On Twitter, according to Ferguson, the quotient between the number of followers and the number of tweets provides useful information on the relevance of

# THE NON-WESTERNERS

The 10 most influential thinkers of the non-western world.



Name	Nationality	Discipline	Most Notable Ideas	Influence-Rank
Žižek, Slavoj	SLO	Philosopher	Post-structuralism	4
Roy, Suzanna Arundhati	IND	Author	The God of Small Things	9
Vargas Llosa, Jorge Mario Pedro	PE/E	Author	Total novel	15
Ramachandran, Vilayanur S.	IND	Psychologist	God module	18
Rushdie, Ahmed Salman	IND/GB	Author	The Satanic Verses	21
Okonjo-Iweala, Ngozi	NGR	Economist	Sustainable debt	26
Unger, Roberto Mangabeira	BR	Political Scientist	Empowered democracy	44
Chang, Ha-Joon	ROK	Economist	Heterodox development economics	54
Krastev, Ivan	BG	Political Scientist	Democracy and Trust	63
García Márquez, Gabriel José de la Concordia	CO	Author	Magical realism	64

the Twitter user. This calculation does indeed give him a significantly higher value than his nemesis, Paul Krugman, number 74, but nothing remotely as good as the results achieved by stars such as Beyoncé or Miley Cyrus. If it actually measures anything at all, the Ferguson quotient is clearly a measure of the popularity of a person rather than the quality of their commentary.

There are also methodological challenges with respect to another possible extension of the study: the inclusion of videos. The increasing importance of lectures and videos in the intellectual sphere comes at the cost of a decrease in the importance of books and written commentary. The absolute number of views of the most popular video lectures by a thinker on YouTube can provide an indication of the audiovisual influence of that individual in the first approximation. The extent to which these or other parameters will be included in next year's influence rank remains undecided.

**HIGHER FREQUENCY** Another possibility worth considering would be to broaden the study by shortening the interval between two analyses. While a slower rate of change could be expected in the assessment of influence in the Wikisphere, the rate for topics and people in the blogosphere – in the public debate – would obviously be much faster. More frequent

## The number of YouTube views of lectures is an indicator of the influence of a thinker.

measurements of influence and networks would presumably detect the patterns in the noise of the debate more clearly.

Theoretically, there is no lower limit for the frequency of a thought leader analysis of the infosphere: twelve, six, three, two months, any interval could be presented, and the quality and information value of the ranking of thinkers increases with each study. Even continuous monitoring of the public debate is conceivable, in the same way that Google continuously monitors the entire network in order to calculate page ranks. As with Google however, this approach would require an adjustment of the criteria for the influence rank from time to time, as well as an update of the people to be included.

**MORE PEOPLE** The study method chosen here is not quite so flexible when it comes to a quantitative expansion of the number of people included. From 2012 to 2013, the number of thinkers assessed was roughly tripled. Further growth measures of this magnitude would quickly push the software and the presentation to the limits of growth: a network presentation of the relationship of the total world population, or even only of all Facebook users, would be of little information value and highly complex.

Without having to determine whether 500 or 1000 thinkers could be studied and their relationships presented in this way, we were able to establish that the method selected here for identifying an influence rank cannot be applied for the general public. However, should the influence rank prove to be a popular measure of intellectual influence, we will probably have to expect a certain amount of demand for the democratisation of the approach behind this thought leader study.

**NETWORK SEARCH** If we assume, following Randall Collins, that ideas do not arise in isolated individual minds, but are instead found, developed and contested in networks of thinkers, it might prove useful to identify these networks and to determine their influence. While the presentations of networks in the thought leader maps to date do show the relative proximity or distance of individuals in relation to each other or to specific concepts and ideas, they give no direct information about the extent to which these are in fact real, existing networks.

This is also not easy to identify. We are after all dealing here not only with institutions that explicitly regard themselves as networks of thinkers, such as the Club of Rome: there are also individual institutions which effectively function as such, including for example various centres at MIT or Harvard, or what used to be Xerox Parc. There are (rarely) great thinkers who join forces, and (very often) great thinkers who gather many followers around them. There are issues around which networks spin, and there are networks that organise themselves along the lines of conflict.

Even the best software can be expected to be overwhelmed by such a variety of network concepts in the first round. Initially, it would probably require intensive human input, as was the case with the first edition of the thought leader study.

But let's not let that stand in the way. <

# NAMES AND NUMBERS

Two Global Thought Leader Maps were created for this year's assessment. Here are the rankings for them, and a few more tables for good measure.

## BLOGOSPHERE

The top 20 in the ranking for the blogosphere

Name	Blogosphere-Rank	Influence-Rank
Gore, Albert Arnold «Al»	1	1
Žižek, Slavoj	2	4
Piketty, Thomas	3	42
Schirrmacher, Frank	4	53
Venter, John Craig	5	20
Stern, Nicholas Herbert	6	10
Reinhart, Carmen M.	7	35
Sacks, Oliver Wolf	8	11
Romer, Paul Michael	9	29
Musk, Elon	10	6
Krastev, Ivan	11	63
Skocpol, Theda	12	38
Rogoff, Kenneth Saul	13	33
Applebaum, Anne Elizabeth	14	27
Lessig, Lawrence	15	7
Rosling, Hans	16	61
Habermas, Jürgen	17	2
Singer, Peter	18	3
Ramachandran, Vilayanur S.	19	18
Gigerenzer, Gerd	20	56

## WIKISPHERE

The top 20 in the ranking for the Wikisphere

Name	Wikisphere-Rank	Influence-Rank
Gore, Albert Arnold «Al»	1	1
Chomsky, Avram Noam	2	32
Singer, Peter	3	3
Habermas, Jürgen	4	2
Stiglitz, Joseph Eugene	5	19
Dawkins, Clinton Richard	6	65
Sen, Amartya Kumar	7	72
Hawking, Stephen William	8	16
Rushdie, Ahmed Salman	9	21
Bauman, Zygmunt	10	73
Roy, Suzanna Arundhati	11	9
Wilson, Edward O.	12	52
Berners-Lee, Timothy «Tim» John	13	36
Dennett, Daniel Clement	14	5
Nussbaum, Martha	15	13
Krugman, Paul Robin	16	74
Vargas Llosa, Jorge Mario Pedro	17	15
Okonjo-Iweala, Ngozi	18	26
Žižek, Slavoj	19	4
Murakami, Haruki	20	47

**NATIONALITY**

Share in percent

Nationality	In Top 100	In Selection
USA	43	41,9
Great Britain	11	9,1
Germany	8	7,5
India	4	5,0
France	3	7,1
Canada	3	2,5
Japan	2	0,8
Switzerland	2	1,7
Dual nationality	11	5,8
Rest of the world	13	18,6

**DISCIPLINE**

Share in percent

Discipline	In Top 100	In Selection
Pundit/Author	19	16,7
Economist	18	19,1
Political Scientist	7	7,1
Philosopher	6	10,8
Psychologist	6	4,1
Biologist	4	5,0
Physicist	4	5,8
Sociologist	3	5,0
Other	33	26,4

**GENDER**

Share in percent

Gender	In Selection	In Top 100	In Top 20
Male	87,5	84	90
Female	12,5	16	10

**CONTINENT**

Share in percent

Continent	In Top 100	In Selection
North America	47	45,6
Europe	28	29,8
Asia	8	10,0
South America	5	4,1
Africa	1	1,2
Australia	1	0,8
Other	10	8,5

**AND WHERE DID 2012'S THOUGHT LEADERS COME IN?**

2013 influence rank for the top 20 in 2012

Name	2012	2013
Florida, Richard	1	86
Sarrazin, Thilo	2	116
Kahneman, Daniel	3	14
Graeber, David	4	152
Pinker, Steven	5	34
Rushkoff, Douglas	6	125
Ferguson, Niall	7	25
Gelernter, David	8	174
Schirmmacher, Frank	9	53
Radermacher, Franz Josef	10	134
Kurzweil, Ray	11	45
Sterling, Bruce	12	67
Ridley, Matt	13	57
Gigerenzer, Gerd	14	56
Sandel, Michael	15	123
Diamandis, Peter	16	129
Wilson, Edward	17	52
Slaughter, Anne Marie	18	113
Sheldrake, Rupert	19	68
Castells, Manuel	20	117

An interview with Randall Collins

# In Rebellion Mode



How do new ideas come into the world, and how do they become accepted? In the same way today as 2,500 years ago. This is the thesis advocated by US sociologist Randall Collins, who sees functioning networks and productive argument with elders and competitors as the key prerequisite for intellectual progress.

**Mr Collins, you have studied the development of thoughts and thinkers throughout the history of the world. What is the big difference between our era of the globalised knowledge society and previous eras?**

There is none.

**None?**

Oh, there are plenty of differences, of course, and I'm sure we'll get into them shortly. But the big difference, no. Even if our era considers itself something very special (like almost every other era before us), the most important pattern for the emergence of new thinking has remained the same down the centuries and millennia.

**And that is?**

The network. The progress of thought, knowledge and ability in well-connected, related groups of intellectuals. The first well-documented networks of thinkers appear as early as 500 years before Christ. Ancient Greece is certainly best known to us, but at roughly the same time, the Indian philosophy blossoms and Confucianism emerges in China. Since that time, the pattern of network of thinkers has remained prevalent throughout the world. And I see nothing so far to suggest that the forms of intellectual innovation or the dynamics of the networks might change in the current information age.

**What are the typical features of networks of thinkers?**

First and foremost, their intergenerational character: The most important people in each new generation build relationships with the leading minds of the previous generation to learn from each other and to argue with each other. Which is why the first thing you should do, while you are still young and still want to change the world, is find out where the previous generation has distinguished itself most – and then go there.

**But to do that, I should at least have some idea of which field I want to make my mark in.**

Yes and no. Yes in relation to the field in which the previous generation worked, and no in relation to the field in which you might work. Because if we are talking about really new thinking, it is equally possible that you might create the field yourself. Because, second typical model: the innovators form a kind of circle at an early age – I call this the “young Turks” – and go into rebellion mode ...

**... Against everything old?**

No, not against everything – but there are one or more aspects that they want to change fundamentally.

**Just as there has always been moaning about the youth of today, has it also always introduced the new to the world?**

Not everyone, always just a few in each new generation. One of the decisive factors here is to find the right teacher while young – and a few like-minded people from the same generation with whom they can then form their network.

### **One network? Or more?**

One to begin with – the stuff with the rivalry comes later. The young Turks act together at the beginning, and then differentiate themselves apart. Accordingly, in eras that are productive in terms of the history of ideas, there is always more than one school of thought, almost always between two and six, competing with each other. This rivalry, this competition on an equal footing with those who hold different opinions, seems to be an important factor in actually making the advance to new intellectual horizons.

**Why not more than six opponents? If you gather even ten economists in a room, they're bound to come up with at least seventeen different positions.**

I call this the law of small numbers. There are of course a huge number of people at any time who would like to become famous with their thoughts – but it seems to be impossible for more than six at a time to achieve it. Our attention span appears to be unable to cope with more. Three rival schools of thought or thinkers, that is probably the ideal number.

**And what about the others? Those who would like to be at the top with their own school of thought, but don't make it?**

These people – I call them secondary intellectuals – start asking themselves, usually around their middle years: is my position strong enough to stand in the centre myself? Or would it be more advisable to connect myself to one of the other centres?

**“Rivalry is an important factor in advancing to new intellectual horizons.”**

Or should I withdraw completely from the intellectual rivalry? My favourite example of this type of development is Schopenhauer: in his early period, he fought vehemently against the dominance of his arch-rival Hegel, his lectures in Berlin were always scheduled for exactly the same time as Hegels' ...

**... except that Hegel always filled his lecture hall, whereas Schopenhauer had his to himself.**

And then at some point he gave up. Still, at least he had the good fortune to live long enough to see his work recognised.

**How important is it to be a star among thinkers in one's own lifetime? After all, unrecognised geniuses were and are always available in droves.**

It is not very important to have been important in your own lifetime. The only important thing is to be heard. To stay in the game. Confucius, for example, spent his entire life trying

**“Those who keep their thoughts to themselves, without friends, without exchanging views, have no chance of posthumous fame.”**

to change China's social system – and when he died, he felt he had achieved virtually nothing. But he had passed the baton to the next generation and became, soon after his death, as immortal as it is possible for an intellectual to be. By contrast, those who keep their thoughts to themselves, isolated, without friends, without exchanging views, have pretty much no chance of posthumous fame.

**Pretty much no chance suggests that there are also examples that prove the opposite...**

Yes, there are. The first that comes to mind is Giambattista Vico, a philosopher who taught in Naples in the early 18th century and who was only rediscovered about 150 years later. But he had already published a number of books during his lifetime. The completely unknown thinker, whose work appears out of nowhere after decades or centuries, is a myth.

**Another myth was put about by Plato in his day: the myth of the philosopher king. The brightest minds at any given time should also govern the state, Plato postulated. But it has been taken up only rarely – and even then generally without success. Are thinkers really unable to rule?**

Yes, mostly. By and large, leading thinkers are not good politicians – and politicians rarely shine as intellectuals. Of course, there are exceptions: Julius Caesar, for example, combined

both skills, as did Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Maynard Keynes was highly influential both academically and politically. I might also mention Sayyid Qutb, a leading Muslim philosopher of the 20th century, whose views helped shape the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, Al Qaeda and others.

**And Winston Churchill? He was not only a successful British Prime Minister, after all, he also won the Nobel Prize for literature.**

But of far greater importance as a politician than as a thinker. The volatility of the political life, the constant ups and downs, the back and forth and the strategy and tactics, all of this could have been made for him – and it is unbearable for most intellectuals. Whether we look at Max Weber or Machiavelli or Karl Marx or, as mentioned above, Confucius, their political achievements were at best mediocre and often quite catastrophic. There are countless examples of the opposite case: For those who dominate the crooked corridors of power, it is more difficult to think clearly.

**Has the number of schools of thought that people can handle really not been changed by technological transformation? Five centuries ago, for example – by the invention of the printing press and the explosion of knowledge that followed it?**

No, not really. The pattern that emerged in an era when the tradition was predominantly oral is the same model found in the era of prevailing literacy. The number of intellectuals has

of course dramatically increased since the invention of the printing press. But among the circle of innovators, people still know each other personally. Just as it was 2500 years ago.

**But it feels completely different. We do after all live in an era of aircraft and the Internet, we can after all communicate with anyone in the world in seconds?**

As far as I can tell so far, the model remains constant even with media communications. Take the now ubiquitous mobile phone. Most calls made by mobile phone users are with people they also know personally – as a new means of communi-

**“By and large, leading thinkers are not good politicians – and vice versa.”**

cation, the mobile phone therefore reinforces the cohesion of people who are also in direct physical contact.

**The communications revolution, the knowledge society, globalisation – all of these things have passed by without leaving their mark on the educational models of great thoughts and great thinkers?**

No, it is not as though they haven't left their mark. When I say that the pattern remains constant, that doesn't mean that processes and outcomes do not change. In terms of the emer-

## Plato's philosopher kings

Thinkers take over! This may have occurred occasionally and temporarily in world history – most recently doubtless Vaclav Havel during the Czech “Velvet Revolution”, but never as consistently as Plato called for in his “Politeia”. The salvation of mankind was not possible, as he put it, “until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophise,

that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide”.

Even in ancient times, there was massive criticism of the model of the philosopher's rule: Aristotle said that it was sufficient for rulers to appoint the wise as counsellors. But probably the most vehement attack against Plato came from Karl Popper in 1945 in “The Open Society and its Enemies”, which asserts that it is not so much a question of installing a sovereignty of the best. Those who start as wise rulers can also end as brutal dictators. The more important thing is therefore to establish institutions

with which one can get rid of bad rulers as quickly as possible.



gence of elites of thinkers, the knowledge society broadens the pinnacle – and globalisation reduces diversity.

### **Less diversity?**

It may sound somewhat paradoxical – but in fact it is obvious. If our attention span is limited to a maximum of six schools of thought at any given time, but the range of our world is very limited, many more schools of thought can emerge simultaneously: lets say six in China, six in India, six in Arabia, six in Europe, six in North America, six in South America, six in Africa – that would already be 42 in the world as a whole. But if all of these regions of the planet are connected to each

**“For those who dominate the crooked corridors of power, it is more difficult to think clearly.”**

other in a globalisation process, the total number of schools is reduced to six worldwide. Calculated schematically, that would amount to nothing less than a dramatic intellectual impoverishment!

### **And how does the pinnacle become broader at the same time?**

Through specialisation. We currently have a very strong and productive infrastructure for manufacturing intellectuals. The decisive impulse for this came a good 200 years ago with the opening of the University of Berlin as a research university in the wake of Humboldt's reforms – a breakthrough innovation that has since been taken up throughout the world. As a result, we now tend to have a surplus of intellectuals: There are too many thinkers competing with each other. The system's response to this is diversification: We divide a discipline into a whole slew of different specialist fields – what was formerly simply economics develops into political and business economics, agricultural, development and behavioural economics, and so on, and in each of these fields, the various schools of thought can then attempt to distinguish themselves.

### **Generally speaking, how would you characterise the currently prevailing schools of thought?**

Since 1975, one in particular has emerged, centred around the concept of postmodernism. It is somewhat ironic that the

postmodernists of all people, who are after all so sceptical of traditional philosophy, have become so successful in this field. However, I do have the impression that the productivity of this school is slowly being exhausted.

### **And what can we expect next? Maybe even something from China?**

Not be ruled out. A team of researchers from Denmark looking into the development of Chinese thinking with regard to foreign policy has reported that of the three to four directions to be found there, one is making the case for a specifically Chinese approach. This could be the start of a new Chinese school.

### **But one that only makes itself felt beyond a small circle of adherents in the next generation.**

How much time a development of this kind requires is a difficult question to answer. In this case, I would assume that something new can be established within a generation – and that then, after the new school becomes apparent, it will take another ten to fifteen years before it really gets going. <

Interview: Detlef Gürtler

Translation: Cerebro AG