

## How Does a Think Tank Make It into the Top 10 Globally Ranked Environmental Think Tanks?

### News

#### Insights from Ecologic Institute, Berlin

In the University of Pennsylvania's 2010 global ranking of policy institutions or "think tanks", Ecologic Institute ranked 6th in the category "environment". This is a huge success for the institute, which has enjoyed less notoriety when compared with other German institutes such as the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (ranked 5th) for instance.

The yearly ranking system was developed by Prof. James McGann of the University of Pennsylvania and released for the fourth time in 2010. The top rankings were awarded to American Think Tanks: the [World Resources Institute](#) (WRI) ranked first among environmental think tanks, and the [Brookings Institution](#) was named the most important think tank across all categories. In the previous three years, [Ecologic Institute](#) did not appear in the rankings at all and, this year was placed at spot 6. R. Andreas Kraemer, director of Ecologic Institute explained in an interview what made this success possible and where Ecologic Institute is headed now.

#### What is a think tank exactly, and to what extent does Ecologic Institute fit this description?

[R. Andreas Kraemer](#): The term "think tank" actually comes from the military sphere, originally used to refer to a closed space in which strategic options were discussed. Since then, the term has come to refer to independent research and consultancy institutions. These think tanks take part in the "market of ideas" in an open, democratic society, perform independent research and develop ideas and concepts for the future. In contrast to private lobbyists, think tanks work in the interest of the public. In addition, they should be extremely innovative, creative and forward-thinking. Ecologic Institute belongs to this group of institutions that create and develop ideas. We strive to make our work as transparent as possible and are therefore more aptly compared to, say, an aquarium than a soundproof room. Ecologic Institute is predominately active in the field of environment and addresses the whole range of eco-political issues but has also made a name for itself beyond environmental politics in European, foreign and development policy.

**About 100 employees work at Ecologic Institute, spread over offices in Berlin, Brussels and Washington, DC. However, it might come as a surprise that the institute was ranked higher than several much larger institutes. Ecologic Institute also wasn't even listed in 2009. Can you tell us how you achieved such a good position in 2010?**

[R. Andreas Kraemer](#): There are a several reasons for this, some of which have to do with the ranking system itself and some that have to do with us. On the one hand, the ranking system was refined in the past year by James McGann: the nomination process was opened up so that anyone could send in

recommendations. This is how Ecologic Institute became eligible for the ranking for the first time. On the other hand, the ranking reflects the opinions of those interviewed by James McGann. Those who vote on the ranking are predominately either from the United States or Canada, which leads to a bias in the results. For this reason, most of the other think tanks in the top 10 are American. Ecologic Institute certainly benefitted from its international orientation and its [office in Washington, DC](#), both of which put the institute in the eye line of the voters. Despite this, I do want to emphasise that we absolutely deserved a spot at least in the top 25 and are of course very pleased that we made it to the top 10.

**So the ranking is based on the opinions of the interviewees. But isn't there a risk that the voters will come to some agreement among themselves and only vote for their own institutions? Is the opinion of third parties an appropriate basis for measuring the influence of think tanks at all?**

[R. Andreas Kraemer](#): First of all, no one is allowed to vote for his or her own institution. Who votes for whom is not made public. Therefore, I don't think the voting process is transparent enough to make such "agreements" possible. Biases do occur, however, through the selection of the voters, which have led, on the one hand, to the favoring of North American institutions and, on the other hand, to an emphasis on institutes from the fields of peace and security. James McGann has declared it a goal to correct these biases. In the future, it is going to be important for us to maintain our position among the best. It is extremely important for Ecologic Institute to appear in such a ranking. The many messages of congratulations that the institute has received are proof that the ranking has been noticed and that it can stimulate donations and support for Ecologic Institute.

**With what other parameters does Ecologic Institute measure its influence? What do the higher-ranked institutes do better than you?**

[R. Andreas Kraemer](#): Ecologic Institute has no all-purpose system to measure its influence. An evaluation generally only takes place within a given project. Our influence on policy decisions also isn't easy to define due to the many factors that play into it. But, over its sixteen-year history, Ecologic Institute has left its mark on the landscape of environmental policy in the European Union and especially in Germany and has become an important partner in environmental policy dialogues. In the field of development policy, the institute is still given too little attention, despite our strong competence in this field. Compared to many US think tanks, we have very few means at our disposal to make our work known, e.g. media channels. We also don't receive any institutional support, unlike the [Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research](#) (PIK), for instance. Financially we support ourselves exclusively by project-related means, with the result that publicising our work is only possible on a reduced scale. Nevertheless, we should let this ranking motivate us to reflect on our work over the past years and evaluate our successes.

**What are Ecologic Institute's goals for the coming year?**

[R. Andreas Kraemer](#): Our goal is to once again be among the top 25 in the category "environment" next year. Naturally, we would be very pleased to make it into the top 10 again, but with such an opinion-based ranking, one cannot rely on this. We will continue on with the high quality work that we do, but we should also strive to speak about it more. Independent of our own prominence as a think tank, it is above all important for us to increase the public awareness of the significance of environmental issues. And much has changed in this area in the past few years. On the other hand, there isn't a single environmental think tank in the list of the overall top 25 think tanks in Western Europe. That has to change!

## Further Links

- [Ecologic Institute](#), Berlin, Germany
- [Ecologic Institute](#), Washington DC
- [Ranking report](#)
- [University of Pennsylvania Press statement](#)

- [Ecologic Institute among Top 10 Environmental Think Tanks in 2010 Global Ranking](#)

## Keywords

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