

Abstract of the Doctoral Research Project

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Think tanks and academic entrepreneurs in the production of knowledge

Importance of the topic

In the conditions of globalisation and the knowledge-based economy, governments face a general challenge of introducing specialist knowledge into the decision-making process. Until recently the university has been considered the main centre for knowledge production. But an increasing number of autonomous public policy research institutions identified as “think tanks” also fill lacunas in the current system of knowledge (Finnegan R., 2005; Hart P. 2006; McGann J. G., 2002). And while universities have often been represented as being occupied with the unselfish aspiration to knowledge, think tanks are a type of research institution explicitly striving for policy influence (Stone D., 2001). Moreover, a fundamental role of think tanks is seen in building a “bridge” between academic thought and practical application, between the academic universe and the sphere of government (Haass R. N. 2002; McGann J., 2011; Traub-Merz R., 2011).

However, European think tanks have only recently begun to captivate more comprehensive attention of scholars. Taking into account the growing complexity of the EU policy-making process due to the enlargement of its policy environment in geographic scale and in range of activities, decision-makers increasingly require timely expert knowledge and policy solutions. The question is whether this potential has been utilised by think tanks and in what form (Sherrington, 2000; Ulrich, 2004).

The aim of the project

As an analytical framework this project builds on the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu and its recent developments by Thomas Medvetz (2010, 2012) conceptualising American think tanks, as applied to their European counterparts. Based on empirical data on think tanks and university-based research institutes from Brussels, as well as the United Kingdom, France and Slovenia, this project aims to show the complex and multi-scalar processes of think tank operation in Europe and to provide insight to the strategies of knowledge production and dissemination which European think tanks employ to influence the policy-making process on the European level relying on the different resources they have at their disposal, as well as taking into account opportunities and limitations related to the political context.