

Quantitative differences in think tank dissemination activities in Germany, Denmark and the UK

Kelstrup, Jesper Dahl

Published in:
Policy Sciences

DOI:
[10.1007/s11077-016-9254-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-016-9254-0)

Publication date:
2017

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (APA):
Kelstrup, J. D. (2017). Quantitative differences in think tank dissemination activities in Germany, Denmark and the UK. *Policy Sciences*, 50(1), 125-137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-016-9254-0>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact rucforsk@kb.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Important note from the Publisher: This version of the article has been accepted for publication, after peer review and is subject to Springer Nature's [AM terms of use](#), but is not the Version of Record and does not reflect post-acceptance improvements, or any corrections. The Version of Record is available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11077-016-9254-0>

Quantitative differences in think tank dissemination activities in Germany, Denmark and the UK

Kelstrup, Jesper Dahl

Published in:

Policy Sciences

DOI:

10.1007/s11077-016-9254-0

Publication date:

2017

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (APA):

Kelstrup, J. D. (2017). Quantitative differences in think tank dissemination activities in Germany, Denmark and the UK. *Policy Sciences*, 50(1), 125-137. DOI: 10.1007/s11077-016-9254-0

Introduction

This contribution is interested in understanding comparative variation in the dissemination activities of think tanks in policy advisory systems and thus adds to recent research on think tanks (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014; Nachiappan, 2013). The article also adds to the study of policy advice by arguing for a focus on the dissemination of policy advice as a supplement to the location or the content of policy ideas provided by think tanks (Craft and Howlett, 2012). The article asks how the dissemination activities of think tanks vary across different policy advisory systems and what this implies for the study of policy advice.

A policy advisory system has been understood as ‘an interlocking set of actors, with a unique configuration in each sector and jurisdiction, who provided information, knowledge and recommendations for action to policy-makers’ (Halligan, 1995). Contributions to the literature now acknowledge that multiple actors share expertise between them and that externalisation and politicisation are important developments in policy advisory systems (Craft, 2015; Howlett and Migone, 2013). Nevertheless scholars of policy advisory systems continue to understand think tanks as organisations which supply evidence-based content to the policy-making process (Craft and Howlett, 2012: 91). While this view reflects think tank’s dependence on scholarly credibility, it does not fully capture that think tanks may also direct their expertise to target audiences beyond the policy process including the media and stakeholders. This is an omission because think tanks can be associated with a broad, long-term and indirect policy influence rather than direct influence on policy-making (Leeson et al., 2012). The article argues that focusing on the dissemination activities of think tanks can help capture how think tanks supply ideas to multiple audiences and thus broaden the focus of their activities beyond a focus on evidence-based policy advice (Craft and Howlett, 2013). Three dissemination activities including issuing publications, hosting events and generating media mentionings are combined with indicators of think tank staff in the study.

Comparative institutional differences are explored because they may be expected to matter for how think tanks carry out their dissemination activities in different policy advisory systems. Germany is included in the study because it is generally recognised as a case of a coordinated market economy with a tradition for compromise-oriented policy-making and an emphasis on public funding for think tanks (Braml, 2006; Thunert, 2006). The UK, on the other hand, has a liberal market economy with a more adversarial political tradition and more privately funded think tanks (Denham and Garnett, 2006; Stone et al., 1998). Finally, Denmark constitutes a mixed model with some coordination in policy-making (Campbell et al., 2006) and an emerging think tank environment. Samples of think

tanks from each of the three policy advisory systems are selected on the basis of existing indexes and think tanks are included in the samples on the basis of a minimum level of activity. A quantitative research design is used to compare the three dissemination activities in the year 2012. The quantitative comparison indicates that there is variation in the dissemination activities of think tanks in the three policy advisory systems. Think tanks in the UK sample are generally smaller and have a higher level of activity on all indicators per number of staff compared to think tanks in the other cases. Think tanks in Germany generally focus on publications and events. Think tanks in Denmark focus on generating media attention. The study implies that factors beyond the policy process such as developments of funding and media environments in different advisory systems should be analysed further as they are likely to be important in shaping how think tank act in different policy advisory systems.

Think tank expertise and policy advice

The literature about think tanks has emerged out of the context of the United States. Early contributions reflected a belief in the problem-solving capacity of these organisations which were reminiscent of Harold Lasswell's belief in the application of the intellectual skills of the policy scientist for democracy (Lasswell, 1971: 27ff). In his renowned book 'Speaking Truth to Power' Aaron Wildavsky used independent think tanks as the spearhead in his criticism of public policy in Western Europe by arguing that:

'It is exactly the intolerance for independent advice that has inhibited schools of public policy from starting in Europe. If you have hierarchical societies, if you have legitimated the idea of a bureaucracy having a monopoly over expertise in policy areas, you will not look too favourably on the idea of think tanks' (Wildavsky, 1979: xxvii).

Others went even further in suggesting that think tank are: '... enclaves of excellence in which groups of multidisciplinary scholars and professionals work full-time on main policy problems' (Dror, 1984: 199). The idea of the independent think tank continued to influence US understandings throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Smith, 1991; Weiss, 1991) as reflected in the seminal definition used by James McGann and Kent Weaver which understood think tanks as: 'Non-governmental, not-for-profit research organisations with substantial organisational autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties' (McGann and Weaver, 2000: 4). American understandings of think tanks have spread to the global domain (McGann and Sabatini, 2011; Stone, 2013). The Think Tanks and Civil Society Program at the University of Pennsylvania

(TTCSP) have issued a ‘Global Go-To Think Tanks Index’ annually since 2006. In the 2011 report the mutually reinforcing, virtuous circle between civil societies and think tanks was clearly expressed in the assumption that: ‘The strength of think tanks promotes the strength of civil society, just as the strength of civil society promotes the strength of think tanks’ (McGann, 2012: 14). The idea that think tanks contribute towards democratic development is also represented in a publication from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that defines think tanks as: ‘Organizations engaged on a regular basis in research and advocacy on any matter related to public policy. They are the bridge between knowledge and power in modern democracies’ (2003: 6). The literature on policy advisory systems used a broad view of think tanks as actors which can operate outside as well as inside government (Halligan, 1995). Nevertheless, John Halligan identified think tanks as ‘the most identifiable trend’ in relation to the development of competing policy competence in policy advisory systems which reflected an emphasis on the outside roles of these organisations (Halligan, 1995: 153). Recent contributions to the literature on policy advisory systems have taken two important steps in analysing think tanks that reflect a tension in the understanding of these organisations. On the one hand it has been recognised that a multiplicity of partisan and non-partisan actors influence policy-making and that think tanks have found their place alongside ‘...lobbyists, but also ... partisan political advisors, scientific, technical and legal experts, and many others both inside and outside of government’ (Craft and Howlett, 2013: 187). On the other hand think tanks are understood to supply advice which falls under the heading ‘evidence-based policy-making’ (Craft and Howlett, 2012: 91). The focus on evidence-based advice effectively makes the point that think tanks are dependent on analytical credibility in order to be influential. It does not capture, however, that think tanks simultaneously need to attract funding, a task that is likely to influence their strategies and direct them at multiple audiences.

Think tanks and multiple audiences in policy advisory systems

As think tanks became a political factor outside the United States, as they had in the UK at least from the 1970s, the literature encountered a ‘travelling problem’ to paraphrase Giovanni Sartori (Sartori, 1970: 1033f). The concepts, definitions and typologies that had already been defined in the United States, including the understanding of think tanks as non-government organisations, did not resonate with the European context where many public policy research organisations were either controlled by or had limited independence from government. As think tanks developed European scholars were concerned that what constituted a think tank was highly ‘reflective of the socio-political context in

which think-tanks were first constituted' (Stone, 2007: 260). European criticisms of the US-centric definitions of think tanks overlapped with more fundamental criticisms which were developing inside the US. From the mid-1990s the literature on interest groups in the US began to devote attention and chapters to think tanks based on the understanding that many of these organisations were concerned with political advocacy and could be understood as sub-species of interest groups (Berry, 1997; Cigler and Loomis, 1998; Rich, 2004: 10). More widespread discussions and concerns with the advocacy roles which some think tanks were playing were addressed in the literature. In an important contribution Andrew Rich criticised the tendency in political science to assume that a firewall separates expertise and politics and called for increased studies of the advocacy practices of think tanks (Rich, 2004:209). James McGann, a proponent of the positive roles that think tanks could play in democracies, expressed concern that healthy think tank competition was turning into an 'uncivil war of ideas' as a result of polarised political contestation over power (McGann, 2005). The increased attention to the advocacy roles of think tanks has had different implications. Some studies have taken an analytical approach to think tanks as suppliers of policy relevant information to politically divided legislatures such as the US Congress (Bertelli and Wenger, 2009). Others have adopted more critical stances in arguing that think tanks in some instances merely symbolise: '... intellectual authority that can be used to support entrenched policy prejudices and political causes' (Stone, 2004: 14) or in presenting examples of the role of think tanks in supporting prevailing ideas such as those suggested by neo-conservatives during the presidency of Georg W. Bush (Parmar, 2013). The most comprehensive critique of think tanks has arguably been presented by Thomas Medvetz who has argued that: '... the "power" of think tanks is the greatest precisely when such organizations have no independent policy influence whatsoever – which is to say, when they are most deeply involved in the business of endorsing policy prescriptions determined strictly by political and economic interests' (2012: 179).

By regarding think tanks as members of policy advisory system, rather than independent organisations, the prevalent understanding of think tanks emphasises the relationship between think tanks and the policy process. While it is justifiable that think tanks are likely to want to influence policy-making, an exclusive focus on policy advice and the policy process conceals that the expertise which think tanks produce is useful for multiple audiences and that the supply of expertise can be political in the sense that it may be used to support and challenge different policy ideas. This point is important to stress because it suggests that the demand for policy expertise is not the prerogative of inside-agents in policy-making and that dominant policy paradigms are not hegemonic (Campbell

and Pedersen, 2014: 10). In addition, policy expertise might be presented indirectly by think tanks by getting coverage in mass or new media. While creating public attention via mass media and maintaining it over time is demanding because of the large availability of information, it is also important for the purpose of attracting attention. As Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye foresaw in 1998:

‘A plenitude of information leads to a poverty of attention. Attention becomes a scarce resource, and those who can distinguish valuable signals from white noise gain power ... Brand names and the ability to bestow an international seal of approval will become more important’ (Keohane and Nye, 1998: 89 quoted in Wells 2011).

The increased amount of information which is transnationally available has important implications for think tanks. While these organisations compete over substance in the policy process, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye suggest that think tanks also have to get to grips with a policy environment in which their expertise risks becoming interpreted as ‘white noise’ rather than ‘valuable signals’. Think tanks, many of which are outside agents in policy-making, find themselves in positions in which there is a risk that sound policy analysis does not reach the ears of decision-makers. The dissemination activities of think tanks are related to the circumstances under which decision-makers, stakeholders and other agents are likely to pay attention to them (Brooks et al., 2013). In particular, competition from other organisations is likely to put pressure on think tanks to create and maintain a public appearance in mass media which provides exposure to potential donors as well as policy-makers. Because many think tanks compete for funding they have incentives to convey their analyses to several, larger audiences because this increases the likelihood that knowledge of their brand name trickles down to more potential stakeholders. Sources of long-term public funding are limited both by budget constraints and austerity measures which many European welfare states pursue (Blyth, 2013; Pierson, 1994) as well as by the more modest availability of long-term private funding in Europe compared to the United States (Boucher et al., 2004). Short-term or conditional funding from both private and public sources is more readily available in Europe because of the need for policy advice on specific issues. Likewise, existing research indicates that private donors are more inclined to sponsor short-term projects than long-term ones (Kelstrup, 2014: 114). Nevertheless it has not been determined whether institutional variation leads to different quantitative levels of core think tank activity.

To summarise think tanks have been understood as organisations which supply policy advice which falls on the broad notion ‘evidence-based policy-making’ (Craft and Howlett, 2012: 91). While this understanding captures that think tanks are dependent on scholarly credibility, it does not fully capture that think tanks may contribute advice to multiple audiences including policy-makers, the media and stakeholders, and that these target audiences may interpret policy advice according to their different interests in policy-making. A comparative analysis of core think tank activities is an initial step in understanding the extent to which institutional difference in policy advisory systems, such as traditions for more private or public funding, shape the dissemination activities of think tanks. The following section develops an analytical framework for studying how dissemination activities of think tanks vary across different policy advisory systems,

Methods

In this section three different cases of policy advisory systems are selected on the basis of institutional variation in their policy advisory systems and think tank environments. A sample of think tanks is then selected in each of the three cases based on indexes and a minimum level of activity. Finally three quantitative indicators are used to operationalise the dissemination activities of the think tanks in the study.

Cases of policy advisory systems and think tank sampling

Institutional reasoning is not new to the study of policy advisory systems, but developing institutional arguments further can help distinguish more clearly between different policy advisory systems. Existing research on policy advisory systems has tended to focus on Anglo-American cases, in particular the ‘Westminster’ systems cases of the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Craft, 2015; Halligan, 1995; Howlett and Migone, 2013). Recently more studies have begun to address other cases of policy advisory systems (Hustedt, 2013; Metz, 2013; Nachiappan, 2013). This article follows this expansion. The selection of cases seeks to compare developments of countries which represent different institutional traditions and draws on the literature on knowledge regimes and varieties of capitalism which have studied institutional variation through a focus on corporations and the interplay between institutions, markets and policy ideas in different countries (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Katzenstein, 1985). The selection of three cases ensures institutional variation in studying the dissemination activities of think tanks. This is in line with earlier research which has emphasised the institutional variation between think tanks operating in different knowledge regimes (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014). On the one hand Germany has a coordinated public policy

tradition and represents a case of a coordinated market economy, which is characterised by public sources of funding and a culture of science (Braml, 2006; Thunert, 2006). On the other hand the UK has a pluralist public policy tradition and a liberal market economy (Hall and Soskice, 2001) in which think tanks rely on private sources and tend to be more advocatory (Denham and Garnett, 2006; Stone et al., 1998). The case of Denmark represents a smaller system with an intermediate model (Campbell et al., 2006) which has been characterised as ‘privileged pluralism’ (Binderkrantz et al., 2014).

In terms of selecting the individual organisations to include in the study, conventions from statistical sampling theory would recommend determining the size of the total population of think tanks and using a sampling frame to select a random sample of think tanks from this population (Bryman, 2004: Chapter 4). This statistical approach to sampling, however, is not easily applied to think tanks, as neither the total population nor a mechanism for selecting think tanks randomly is available. In addition self-classifying as a ‘think tank’ comes with a variable bias, in that some practitioners are cautious of the term and prefer terms such as ‘research organisation’ whereas others embraced it more eagerly. On this basis think tanks constitute something similar to a ‘hidden population’ where neither practitioners nor researchers know the exact extent of the total population and where there is a bias involved in characterising oneself as a member of the population (Heckathorn, 1997: 174). The process of selecting the think tanks to be included in the analysis is based on a broad understanding of think tanks as organisations which claim autonomy and attempts to influence public policy through dissemination activities and existing databases or directories of think tanks including the Global Go-To Think Tank Index (McGann, 2012), a web-based project on think tanks called ‘Think Tank Initiative’ (Think Tank Network Research, 2013), a private German think tank directory (Florian, 2013) and the EU’s transparency register (EU Transparency Register, 2013). Together these directories included several hundred think tanks in 2012 based in Germany, Denmark or in the United Kingdom. The directories, however, were in some instances not up to date and the selection criteria for the think tanks listed in them vary or are not specified. Therefore many entries are invalid, either because think tanks no longer exist or because those listed produce no, or very limited, outputs. An open, ‘maximalist’ approach to think tank sampling has the advantage that it allows creating indexes of think tanks that can be used as an encyclopaedia containing qualitative information about a large number of think tanks. For analytical purposes, however, this approach has some shortcomings. As the criteria for inclusion are not specified the directories include think tanks with very limited activities in terms of public events and publications. From a functional point of view this is problematic as including inactive think tanks in samples questions representativeness and

runs the risk of over-representing the number of think tanks and consequently under-estimating their average level of activity. In simple terms, the average think tank appears less active and important for policy-making if inactive think tanks are included in the sample. As a consequence of the problems associated with including inactive think tanks, a minimum criterion of 15 publications, 15 public events or 100 media citations has been used as the minimum level of activity allowed for think tanks to be included in the study. Although this criterion rules out think tanks with a low level of output it is deemed necessary for ensuring that only active think tanks are represented in the sample, something that most other indexes do not ensure. As an effect of the activity criterion many of the hundreds of organisations in each of the cases of political systems under investigation are not included in the study either because of their limited resources or because they have been characterised as research institutes. The *Parteinaher Stiftungen* (Political Party Foundations) in Germany are large organisations and important to the German think tank landscape. As these organisations have a global presence, only part of their activity can be attributed to Germany. Four of these organisations have been included in the German sample with a weight of 15 per cent of their full-time staff, publications and events, and 50 per cent of their media impact attributed to Germany. In total the data collection strategy results in samples of think tanks including 15 organisations from Germany, 10 from Denmark and 21 from the UK.

Three dissemination activities

In an ideal world think tank activities in policy advisory systems would be studied through indicators such as the income generated by think tanks, scholarly proficiency from PhDs in staff and associated/guest university staff and their access to political decision-makers. There are, however, multiple problems in getting and collecting data amongst other things because most think tanks do not make their budgets and sources of income public. The analysis below is quantitative and relies on the number of full-time staff, as reported on homepages of the think tanks in the study in the year 2012. Using in-house staff as an indicator of think tank resources is a crude indicator which does not capture that some think tanks rely partly on affiliated staff to produce and disseminate their work.

As indicators of activity, drawing on the methodology of the Global Go-to Think Tank Report (McGann, 2014: 14) the analysis below is based on three indicators including the publications that think tanks issue, the public events that they host and the newspaper mentionings that they generate according to websites and newspaper search engines (cf. appendix for an elaboration of the search process underlying the analysis of newspaper mentionings). The three indicators have been measured

in the year 2012 and are elaborated below.

First, a publication is the main format in which think tanks can analyse and diagnose public policy problems and present solutions. As publications are documents they provide a way of fixating policy recommendations and thus serve an instrumental use in informing agents in the policy process. In addition the internet provides an infrastructure for think tanks to make their publications available to larger audiences. Think tank publications cover a wide variety of types including books, reports, analysis, journal articles and policy briefs. One way of increasing attention is to change the format of publications so as to produce more, shorter publications rather than longer reports. This practice is epitomised in the policy brief which is a widely used means of conveying analytical points in a manner which is easy for policy-makers to digest quickly. The length of think tank publications varies considerably from books and 100-page reports, to two-page policy briefs. The publications in the analysis have been quantified and simplified: A research report of 80 pages and a policy brief of 5 pages are given the equal weight. As a result the data says nothing about the resources that have been put into publications or the quality of their content. Rather it is assumed that there is not a proportional relationship between the length of a publication and the amount of attention and readership which it attracts.

Second, hosting events on a regular basis allows think tanks (and their stakeholders) to interact with decision-makers. Public events can supplement publications by allowing participants to explore policy advice orally and interactively. Many think tanks aim at making their public events meeting places for decision-makers and politicians who can interact in a lively way, expand their networks and develop common concepts. Taking on a 'salon function' (Köllner, 2011: 5) creates the impression that 'things are happening' at a think tank and that going to events is an opportunity to gain information about a given policy area. Events are also used by think tanks to launch and communicate their publications and to get some press coverage on them. Interestingly, hosting events introduces a new element to the discussion of the importance of location in policy advisory systems (Craft and Howlett, 2012) because they temporarily locate multiple agents in policy advisory systems in the same place.

Finally, mass media have been a key component of politics for almost a century and have now become led to mediated democracies (Hjarvad, 2013; Lance Bennett and Entman, 2001). In contrast to the other indicators newspaper mentionings is an impact measure and not an activity per se. Nevertheless generating attention in mass media serves a symbolic function because a think tank is more likely to be perceived as influential if it features frequently in newspapers and other mass media.

Regrettably, many studies carried out on think tanks have focused on defining and contextualising think tanks and tend to neglect analysis of think tank media impact (Boucher et al., 2004; Sherrington, 2000; Ullrich, 2004). The number of times think tanks are mentioned in newspapers is used to supplement the other indicators with a measure of think tank impact in the wider public sphere. Collecting reliable data regarding media impact in different countries requires consideration both in terms of newspaper sources and think tank searches. The use of the media search engines used is elaborated in the appendix to the article. Given the bias towards UK newspapers in the LexisNexis search engine, the results of the newspaper mentions should be treated with particular caution.

A quantitative comparison of dissemination activities

The analytical framework developed in the above allows this section to study quantitative differences in the dissemination activities of the selected think tanks. In table 1 below the three cases represent a coordinated (Germany), mixed (Denmark) and liberal (UK) system. The mean and median size as measured by the number of full-time staff and the mean and median levels of activity on the three indicators are compared below.

Table 1: Average numbers of full-time staff, publications issued, public events hosted and newspaper mentionings for think tanks in three policy advisory systems in 2012 (N=46).

| | Coordinated system Germany (N=15) | Mixed system Denmark (N=10) | Liberal system UK (N=21) |
|----------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| | Means (standard deviation), medians | | |
| Size (number of full-time staff) | 80,23 (79,13), 60 | 39,3 (60,53), 13,50 | 23,48 (22,99), 15 |
| Number of publications issued | 191,67 (227,77), 127 | 75,00 (88,87), 39 | 75,95 (118,20), 26 |
| Number of public events hosted | 81,45 (75,85), 86 | 15,4 (28,79), 3 | 60,81 (87,25), 36 |
| Number of newspaper mentionings | 325,67 (363,39), 188 | 465,4 (374,65), 282 | 377,62 (336,00), 253 |

Table 1 indicates interesting differences between the cases. The average size of think tanks is substantially smaller in the UK and in Denmark than in Germany. This is in line with previous research on think tanks in the UK and Germany which, as mentioned, found an emphasis on public funding in Germany (Braml, 2006; Thunert, 2006) and on private funding and pronounced competition between think tanks in the UK (Denham and Garnett, 2006; Stone et al., 1998). Table 1 also reveals that in the majority of instances the standard deviation from the mean is larger than the mean in each of the cases. The differences between the means and medians reported also indicate that the means are affected by outliers in the samples of think tanks. These observations underline the methodological challenges in generating representative think tank samples discussed in the above. Within each of the three cases there is substantial variation in terms of the size and the dissemination activities of the think tanks. Besides challenges in sampling, the large standard variations in the number of publications issued might also reflect that different types of think tanks weigh the importance of their dissemination activities differently within each case.

By controlling for the different sizes of think tanks it is possible to compare the mean number of dissemination activities of the think tanks per staff as shown in table 2 below. This illustrates how many resources as measured by staff think tanks in each case put on the three dissemination activities on average.

Table 2: Mean outputs and newspaper impacts per full-time staff for think tanks in three policy advisory systems in 2012 (N=46).

| | Coordinated system Germany (N=15) | Mixed system Denmark (N=10) | Liberal system UK (N=21) |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Publications per number of staff | 2,39 | 1,92 | 3,24 |
| Public events per number of staff | 1,02 | 0,39 | 2,59 |
| Newspaper impact per number of staff | 4,06 | 11,90 | 16,09 |

Table 2 indicates that there are comparative differences in the average number of dissemination activities per staff for each sample of think tanks. Think tanks in the liberal system, the UK, are the most active in quantitative terms when the size of think tanks is controlled for. Per number of staff

think tanks in the UK issue more publications, host more events and feature more often in newspapers than do think tanks in the Germany and Denmark. The UK system appears conducive to comparatively high levels of think tank output on all three indicators. Compared to Germany, there are a higher number of think tanks in the UK with a lower average size. The higher number of think tanks and the activity of think tanks in the UK might be a result of the comparatively early development of think tanks in the UK compared to the European Continent which has produced more openness towards these organisations. Competition between think tanks might also explain the higher average output of think tanks in the UK, which compete for short-term private funding (Denham and Garnett, 2004; Stone, 2004).

Although the German think tanks in the study are less active per staff compared to their counterparts in the UK, they have a higher level of publications and on hosting events than think tank in Denmark. Although some German think tanks, such as those who seek accreditation from the Leibniz Association, have incentives to target the media in order to attract funding, others, such as the Political Party Foundations can rely on long-term public funding. This might help explain that think tanks in Germany cannot match the number of newspaper mentionings per staff of UK and Danish think tanks. It should be noted, however, that the measurement of newspaper mentionings may underrepresent German newspapers (cf. appendix). A possible explanation of the comparatively low activity of German think tanks compared to those in the UK is the scientific tradition related to the relatively strong role of documents in policy advice in Germany. The *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, that can roughly be translated to ‘a culture of science’ which has been used to characterize German policy-making might also help explain the focus on issuing publications rather than targeting the media among German think tanks as well as the comparatively low level of activity in this case (Braml, 2006: 246; Thunert, 2006: 208).

The think tank sample in Denmark is the least active in terms of publishing and hosting events but think tanks are relatively active in newspapers. In relation to the understanding of Denmark as a mixed-model (Campbell et al., 2006) it is surprising that average number of publications and events per staff is lower in Denmark than in Germany. Existing research has emphasised the strong neo-corporate tradition in Denmark and the involvement of interest groups in policy-making (Christiansen and Nørgaard, 2003). This tradition might help explain the reliance on informal coordination rather than on issuing publications and hosting public events among think tanks in Denmark. In terms of newspaper mentionings, however, Danish think tanks are more active than German think tanks

perhaps as an indication of increased competition for public attention and increased mediatisation in Denmark (Hjarvad, 2013).

The quantitative comparison indicates that the dissemination activities of think tanks do vary across different policy advisory systems. This finding not only supports the institutional variation of previous comparative studies of think tanks (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014; Stone and Denham, 2004). For the study of policy advice, this study is important because it shows that the role of think tanks in policy advisory systems go beyond supplying evidence-based policy advice (Craft and Howlett, 2012). While think tanks do continue to rely on the credibility of their scholarly expertise, think tanks balance between investing their resources in analytical activities and on disseminating their advice through dissemination activities in order to reach multiple audiences. The study suggests that think tanks handle this balance differently in the UK, Germany and Denmark.

Conclusions

This study has addressed a gap in the study of policy advisory systems by investigating how core think tank activities varies across different policy advisory systems and what this implies for the study of policy advice. Two contributions are worth emphasising. First, the conceptualisation of think tanks in policy advisory systems has been focused on their supply of evidence-based advice to the policy-making process (Craft and Howlett, 2012: 91). The broader notion of dissemination activities has paved the way for studying quantitative differences in the extent to which think tanks issue publications, host events and impact newspapers. Second, the comparison of think tanks in a coordinated (Germany), mixed (Denmark) and liberal (UK) system has indicated that there are comparative differences in the size of think tanks and in their dissemination activities. This analytical finding conforms to the understanding of the UK as a system with competition and contestation between think tanks (Denham and Garnett, 1998; Denham and Garnett, 2004). It also reflects existing understanding of the more recent and less competitive role of think tanks in supplying policy advice in Germany (Thunert, 2004) and Denmark (Kelstrup, 2014). Future studies should compare a larger number of cases in order to further explore how think tanks disseminate their analysis in more cases of policy advisory systems. The differences between the three cases investigated here should be followed up by more comparative analysis. The comparative differences in average size and dissemination activities of think tanks suggest that the dependence on private funding in liberal systems lead to more competition and active strategies for think tanks. But does more competition lead to better policy-making as Wildavsky suggested in his criticism of the lack of think tanks in Europe in 1979? Or do the larger think tanks in coordinated systems have better preconditions for

producing evidence-based advice which is useful in policy-making? As a first step in addressing these questions this article has indicated that think tanks in the liberal case of the UK appear to target multiple audiences more actively than the think tanks in the other cases where public funding is more prevalent. This suggests that competition between high numbers of smaller think tanks makes them more likely to focus on disseminating their policy advice to multiple audiences. Future studies should explore how institutional differences and competitive dynamics affect the dissemination of policy advice and the relationship between think tanks, policy-makers, stakeholders and the media in different policy advisory systems.

References

- Berry, J. M., 1997, *The Interest Group Society*: New York, Longman.
- Bertelli, A. M., and J. B. Wenger, 2009, Demanding Information: Think Tanks and the US Congress: *British Journal of Political Science*, v. 39, p. 225-242.
- Binderkrantz, A. S., P. M. Christiansen, and H. H. Pedersen, 2014, *Organisationer i politik. Danske interesseorganisationer i forvaltning, Folketing og medier*, Hans Reitzels Forlag, 246 p.
- Blyth, M., 2013, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*: New York, Oxford University Press.
- Boucher et al., S., 2004, *Europe and its think tanks: a promise to be fulfilled. An analysis of think tanks specialised in European policy issues in the enlarged European Union*, Studies and Research, Paris, Notre Europe.
- Braml, J., 2006, U.S. and German Think Tanks in Comparative Perspective: *German Policy Studies*, v. 3, p. 222-267.
- Brooks, S., D. Stasiak, and Z. Tomasz, eds., 2013, *Policy Expertise in Contemporary Democracies*, Ashgate.
- Bryman, A., 2004, *Social Research Methods*: New York, United States, Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, Hall, and Pedersen, 2006, *National identity and the varieties of capitalism*: Copenhagen, DJØF Publishing, xiv, 525 s. p.
- Campbell, J. L., and O. K. Pedersen, 2014, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark*: Princeton, United States, Princeton University Press.
- Christiansen, P. M., and A. S. Nørgaard, 2003, *Faste Forhold - Flygtige Forbindelser. Stat og interesseorganisationer i Danmark i det 20. århundrede: Magtudredningen*: Gylling, Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Cigler, A. J., and B. A. Loomis, eds., 1998, *Interest Group Politics*: Washington D.C., CQ Press, 422 p.
- Craft, J., 2015, *Conceptualizing the policy work of partisan advisers*: Policy Sciences.

Craft, J., and M. Howlett, 2012, Policy formulation, governance shifts and policy influence: location and content in policy advisory systems: *Journal of Public Policy*, v. 32, p. 79-98.

Craft, J., and M. Howlett, 2013, The dual dynamics of policy advisory systems: The impact of externalization and politicization on policy advice: *Policy and Society*, v. 32, p. 187–197.

Denham, A., and M. Garnett, 1998, *British Think-tanks and the Climate of Opinion.*: London, UCL Press.

Denham, A., and M. Garnett, 2004, A 'hollowed-out' tradition? British think tanks in the twenty-first century, *in* D. Stone, and A. Denham, eds., *Think tank traditions. Policy research and the politics of ideas*: Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press.

Denham, A., and M. Garnett, 2006, 'What Works'? British Think Tanks and the 'End of Ideology': *The Political Quarterly*, v. 77.

Dror, Y., 1984, Required breakthroughs in Think Tanks: *Policy Sciences*, v. 16, p. 199-225.

EU Transparency Register, 2013, Statistics for register - Transparency Register.

Florian, D., 2013, *Think Tank Directory Deutschland*.

Hall, P. A., and D. Soskice, eds., 2001, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*: Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Halligan, J., 1995, Policy Advice and the Public Sector, *in* G. B. Peters, and S. T. Savoie, eds., *Governance in a Changing Environment*: Montreal, Canada, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 138–172.

Heckathorn, D. D., 1997, Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations: *Social Problems*, v. 44, p. 174-199.

Hjarvad, S., 2013, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*: Abingdon, UK, Routledge.

Howlett, M., and A. Migone, 2013, Searching for Substance: Externalization, Politicization and the Work of Canadian Policy Consultants 2006-2013: *Central European Journal of Public Policy*, v. 7.

Hustedt, T., 2013, Analyzing Policy Advice: The Case of Climate Policy in Germany: *Central European Journal of Public Policy*, v. 7, p. 88-111.

- Katzenstein, 1985, *Small states in world markets: Cornell studies in political economy*: Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 268 s. p.
- Kelstrup, J. D., 2014, *Think Tanks in Europe: Explaining their Development and Variation in Germany, the United Kingdom, Denmark and at the EU-level.*, Roskilde University, Roskilde, 225 p.
- Keohane, R. O., and J. S. Nye, 1998, *Power and Interdependence in the Information Age: Foreign Affairs*, v. 77, p. 81-94.
- Köllner, P., 2011, *Think tanks: Their Development, Global Diversity and Roles in International Affairs*, GIGA Focus, Hamburg, GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies - Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien.
- Lance Bennett, W., and R. M. Entman, 2001, *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Lasswell, H. D., 1971, *A Pre-view of Policy Sciences*: New York, United States, American Elsevier Publishing.
- Leeson, P. T., M. E. Ryan, and C. R. Williamson, 2012, *Think tanks: Journal of Comparative Economics*, v. 40, p. 62–77.
- McGann, J., 2005, *US think-tanks: casualties in the war of ideas*, Open Democracy.
- McGann, J. G., 2012, *Global Go-To Think Tank Index Report 2011*, University of Pennsylvania, United States, University of Pennsylvania.
- McGann, J. G., 2014, *Global Go-To Think Tank Index Report 2013*, Pennsylvania, United States, University of Pennsylvania.
- McGann, J. G., and R. Sabatini, 2011, *Global think tanks: policy networks and governance*: New York, Routledge.
- McGann, J. G., and R. K. Weaver, eds., 2000, *Think tanks and civil societies: catalysts for ideas and action*: New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 617 s. p.
- Medvetz, T., 2012, *Think Tanks in America*, University of Chicago Press.

- Metz, J., 2013, Expert groups in the European Union: A sui generis phenomenon?: Policy and Society, v. 32, p. 267–278.
- Nachiappan, K., 2013, Think tanks and the knowledge–policy nexus in China: Policy and Society, v. 32, p. 255–265.
- Parmar, I., 2013, The knowledge politics of democratic peace theory: International Politics, v. 50, p. 231-256.
- Pierson, P., 1994, Dismantling the welfare state? Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Retrenchment.: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rich, A., 2004, Think tanks, public policy, and the politics of expertise: Cambridge, UK New York, Cambridge University Press, xii, 258 s. p.
- Sartori, G., 1970, Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics: The American Political Science Review, v. 64, p. 1033-1053.
- Sherrington, P., 2000, Shaping the Policy Agenda: Think Tank Activity in the European Union: Global Society, v. 14, p. 173-189.
- Smith, J. A., 1991, The idea brokers: Think tanks and the rise of the new policy elite.: New York, The Free Press.
- Stone, D., 2004, Introduction: think tanks, policy advise and governance., in D. Stone, and A. Denham, eds., Think tank traditions - policy research and the politics of ideas: Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Stone, D., 2007, Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think Tanks? Three Myths Regarding Policy Analysis Institutes: Public Administration, v. 85, p. 259-278.
- Stone, D., 2013, Knowledge Actors and Transnational Governance. The Private-Public Policy Nexus in the Global Agora: New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stone, D., Denham, and Garnet, eds., 1998, Think Tanks Across Nations: A Comparative Approach.: Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press.

Stone, D., and A. Denham, eds., 2004, *Think Tank Traditions - Policy research and the politics of ideas*: Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Think Tank Network Research, 2013, *Think tank network initiative*, watch.

Thunert, M. W., 2004, *Think tanks in Germany*: *Society Abroad*, v. 41, p. 66-69.

Thunert, M. W., 2006, *The Development and Significance of Think Tanks in Germany*: *German Policy Studies*, v. 3, p. 185-221.

Ullrich, H., 2004, *European Union think tanks: generating ideas, analysis and debate*, *in* D. Stone, and A. Denham, eds., *Think tank traditions. Policy research and the politics of ideas.*: Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press.

UNDP, 2003, *Thinking the Unthinkable: From Thought to Policy. The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping Government Strategy: Experiences from Central and Eastern Europe*, Bratislava, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Weiss, C. H., ed., 1991, *Organizations for Policy Analysis: Helping Government Think*: Newbury Park, SAGE Publications, Inc, 312 p.

Wildavsky, A. B., 1979, *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis*: Boston, Little-Brown.

Appendix

Measuring newspaper impact: Search engines and representativity

Think tank media impact was searched in the media database LexisNexis which has 2169 newspaper sources available in 'Nexis' as of August 2013. Citations were searched in all languages. Unfortunately Nexis has an Anglophone bias in its sources. The database thus includes 648 newspapers in the United Kingdom, 71 in the Benelux countries, 69 in Germany, 40 in France and only 1 in Denmark. Furthermore not all important newspapers are included. While it was impossible to eliminate the bias in newspaper sources, the very weak representation of Danish newspaper sources was corrected by using the Danish search engine Informedia to access the newspaper impact of Danish think tanks in the following 9 daily Danish Newspapers: Berlingske, BT, Børsen, Ekstra Bladet, Information, Jyllands-Posten, Kristeligt Dagblad, Politiken, Weekendavisen. All searches of media impact were performed from January 1st to December 31st in the year 2012. Think tanks were searched by keywords were searched in the whole text. Citations were filtered for close similarity with other sources to avoid duplications. Magazines, journals, newswires, press releases, newsletters-blogs and web-based publications were discarded as sources because they challenge the temporal comparison of impact by over-representing the development in citations. Despite the increased importance and think tank focus on new and web-based media these sources were considered too unreliable to be used for any temporal assessment of media impact.