
U.S. and German Think Tanks in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

Independent non-profit policy research institutes, commonly known as think tanks, are almost exclusively privately funded and are very visible in the U.S. public. By contrast, their German peers enjoy mainly public government funding, but are far less noticeable in the process of public policy making. This and further puzzling observations pose two practically as well as academically relevant research questions: What causes think tanks' different organizational and strategic patterns and how does it influence their behavior? Two main hypotheses are tested to answer the questions: Firstly, despite a clear trend of internationalization, think tanks remain nested in their institutional, legal, funding, labor, media, intellectual, and increasingly competitive think tank environment(s) and employ different and changing strategies to cope with and impact their changing marketplace(s) of ideas and resources. Moreover, and secondly, not only from a cross-national comparative perspective, but also within a given national environment, (different types of) think tanks are settled in their distinct niches in the marketplace(s) of ideas and resources. It is necessary to comparatively analyze a wide range of different think tanks in the U.S. and Germany to operationalize these hypotheses. In order to collect the quantitative and qualitative data to support the theses, several methods needed to be applied: participant observation, a comprehensive survey among 428 think tanks, and in-depth interviews with the heads of the top 41 organizations in both countries. Combining a quantitative focus and in-depth perspectives from people in charge of determining the strategic orientation of think tanks in both countries, this study seeks to foster a practical and academically relevant understanding of think tanks' different ways and means of coping with and impacting their marketplaces of funding and (public) policy ideas.

Part 1: Theoretical and Practical Focus

“Will Germany’s market-place of ideas ever resemble America’s?” pointedly asked the Economist (2004, p. 29), highlighting Germany’s pressing structural problems: “When a nation has produced Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel, it seems safe to say that thinking deeply is among its strengths. But when it comes to reflections of a more practical nature, the German way of generating new ideas fails to reach the desired level of output.” The Economist’s observation was right on the mark, and it put the finger into Germany’s open wound: Already from the hands-on perspective of then Federal President Roman Herzog, Germany’s challenge is not so much to identify and understand its problems (“Erkenntnisproblem”) but to translate this knowledge into practical action (“Umsetzungsproblem”), as the Bundespräsident gave as a reason for Germany’s “reform block or stalemate” (“Reformstau”) in his speech at the opening of the Hotel Adlon on April 26, 1997 (Herzog, 1997, p. 87).

1.1 Think Tanks’ Relevance

The subject of think tanks and their appropriate role(s) has gained increased attention in the Federal Republic of Germany; especially since reunification, political practitioners as well as academics have identified think tanks as a priority on their public and research agendas. Research institutes in the German Democratic Republic have been examined by the Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat), and suggestions have been made of how to apply their academic contributions to the political system of unified Germany.

Moreover, the standards applied when reorienting and redefining the mission of those formerly ideologically

tainted institutes in the New Länder to be compatible with the changing cultural, institutional, and legal environment of unified Germany have also become a point of reference and orientation for those organizations that were already operating within the framework of the Old Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany. Two long established and mainly government funded institutes, the Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWA Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung) and the ifo Institute in Munich, were especially concerned with these evaluations of the Science Council, because it recommended that they be cut off from the public funding scheme. This fate could only be averted by the massive intervention of the respective state governments of Hamburg and Bavaria. While these institutes did not vanish under this challenge, they had to readjust or reinvent their basic mission. Furthermore, as it became clear in many interviews for this study with other think tank managers, the example of the HWWA and the ifo Institute have obviously sent, if not shock waves, then at least some clear signals throughout the German think tank landscape and triggered debate about the appropriate roles of think tanks and the evaluation thereof by the Science Council.

The political issue of think tanks gained some additional importance because the overall evaluation of the scientific landscape in Germany coincided with the government's reduced budget flexibility resulting both from a global economic recession that had hit the whole European continent and the specific German challenge of reunification. In this context, the question of the most effective and efficient use of limited governmental resources has become acute. Not surprisingly, from a popular perspective, think tanks have become an easily identifiable target: While their access to public funding is well known, well publicized and often criticized by the media, many German think tanks' output and contributions

are less noticeable in the public arena. In light of shrinking government funds, and the limited potential for government funding, the *raison d'être* of think tanks has come under scrutiny, and think tanks increasingly see themselves in a situation where they have to (re)define and articulate their roles if they are to survive.

In a speech at the SWP, then President Roman Herzog rhetorically asked, “why is it that in the U.S. think tanks’ roles are regarded as a commonplace, while in Germany they are still considered to be a luxury?” (Herzog, 1996, p. 25; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, p. 4). This and related statements in later speeches by the German Federal President on behalf of think tanks have resonated especially well with those who view the American way of doing (think tank) business as a role model.

1.2 Comparing U.S. and German Think Tanks

In his final chapter—with the indicative title “(K)ein Vergleich” (Compared/Beyond Comparison)—Winand Gellner (1995a) states that German think tanks do not compare very well with their U.S. counterparts. However, his main argument suggests that think tanks play equivalent and comparable functions in these two culturally and institutionally distinct settings, allowing for a cross-cultural analysis of think tanks. Comparing U.S. and German think tanks from an institutional macro perspective, Gellner has empirically laid the groundwork by describing the different cultural and institutional factors in the U.S. and Germany that account for national differences in think tanks’ organizational patterns and strategies. Empirical results of work by Diane Stone (1996), Stone et al. (Stone, Denham, & Garnett 1998), R. Kent Weaver and James McGann (2000a) based on the analysis of a variety of distinct settings, organizational patterns and strategies,

suggest similar conclusions and provide a solid institutional basis for this analysis.¹

Building on the evidence from these broader assessments from the institutional macro-level of think tanks' entrenchment within their respective environments, it seems promising to look at think tanks' world from their organizational micro perspective and to discern how their organizational behavior represents an attempt to cope with and impact on their environment. Looking at the institutional, legal, funding, labor, technological/media, intellectual, and increasingly competitive think tank environments from different think tanks' organizational inside-perspectives, one can gain valuable insights into the organizational sociology of think tanks. Adding those micro

¹ Different points of view either allow—or have prevented—us from seeing variable images or concepts of think tanks. Ideological blinders detracted from a serious discussion of think tanks by demonizing their role. In this light, elite theorists (Eakins, 1972; Dye, 1978, 1987; Silk & Silk, 1980) described think tanks as a controlling agent of the “Washington establishment,” comprised of government, business and academia. Ruling class perspectives (Domhoff, 1978, 1983; Useem, 1984; Alpert & Markusen, 1980) attempted to “prove” the influence of think tanks by empirical “power structure research” of interlocking directorates. It was argued that overlapping board memberships demonstrate the presence of a “power elite.” Furthermore, ethnocentric boundaries required that think tanks be regarded as a largely American phenomenon. The depiction of the U.S. system, on the one hand, as open, permeable, and competitive, and of parliamentary systems, on the other, as closed and bureaucratized, has led to a perception that think tanks' role is necessarily very limited within a parliamentary structure (Kay, 1989; Oliver, 1993). More recent comparative perspectives (Gellner, 1995a; Stone, 1996; Stone, Denham, & Garnett 1998; McGann & Weaver 2000; Thunert, forthcoming) however, have demonstrated that think tanks can and in fact do play important roles in a variety of different societies. For a more comprehensive discussion of the different theoretical approaches, see Stone 1996, pp. 26-37; and Gellner, 1995a, pp. 37-45.

aspects inside—and from the inside—of different think tanks to the institutional and cultural macro analyses, one can hope to add some additional perceptions and aspects to the existing body of think tank literature.

1.3 Research Questions

What causes think tanks' different organizational and strategic patterns and *how* does it influence their behavior? These questions guide the research design. Even though “there is no such thing as a logical method of having new ideas” (Popper, 1968, p. 32) and posing new questions, there are at least two criteria, beyond individual preferences, of determining the likely value of a research project: It should both pose a question that is important in the “real world” and should make a specific contribution to identifiable scholarly literature (Shively, 1990; King, Keohane & Verba, 1994, p. 15). While there is enough evidence of practitioners' concern about specific shortcomings within German political culture, it also can be argued that the academic discussion, empirical analysis and evaluation of think tanks' role and contributions have—with a few exceptions (Gellner, 1995a; Thunert 1997)—been so far neglected in the German academic literature. To be sure, there exists an extensive body of related work within the Anglo-Saxon research community. However, the pluralistic view, that there is intense competition among think tanks for “dollars, scholars and influence,” is mainly focused on the U.S. experience (McGann, 1995; Rich, 1999, 2004). While think tanks' resources have been deemed important in order to explain the dynamics of the U.S. marketplace of ideas (Rich & Weaver, 1998), a systematic approach to study these issues from a comparative cross-national perspective has not yet been undertaken.

A seemingly promising approach is the

conceptualization of a model that analyzes the differences in think tanks' environments, and more specifically, the impact of these distinct environmental forces on think tanks' competitiveness and potential influence on the process of public policy making in the two different countries. Thus, a systematic comparative analysis promises to better explain the "politicization of expertise in American politics" (Rich & Weaver, 1998), because a comparative perspective provides a good point of reference from which to (a) better discern distinct factors that are accountable for this development, and (b) from which to identify some alternative ways and means in order to cope with this trend. Likewise for the German context, this comparative analysis may provide a frame of reference from which to see the distinct framework conditions of German think tanks and better understand both the restrictions and opportunities provided by think tanks' distinct environments. A systematic analysis of think tank behavior based on case studies is possible and forms the cornerstone of this study. Two major hypotheses serve as the main foundation upon which the model and conception of this research are based.

1.4 Testing Two Main Hypotheses

1. Despite a clear trend of internationalization, think tanks remain nested in their institutional, legal, funding, labor, media, intellectual, and increasingly competitive think tank environment(s) and employ different and changing strategies to cope with and impact their changing marketplace(s) of ideas and resources.
2. Moreover, not only from a cross-national comparative perspective, but also within a given national environment, (different types of) think

tanks are settled in their distinct niches in the marketplace(s) of ideas and resources.

In order to test the validity of the first argument, it is necessary to falsify the null hypothesis that think tanks in the two different countries have the same perceptions and views regarding their environment and accordingly employ the same strategies to cope with and impact this environment. Or in statistical terms, it will be necessary to falsify the null hypothesis that the environment of think tanks and their perceptions and strategies are not statistically significant independent variables.

To test the second main assumption, it will be necessary to falsify the null hypothesis that there are no discernibly distinct types of think tanks. In statistical terms, it is necessary to falsify the null hypotheses that (1) there is no discernible clustering of patterns of think tank behavior across behavioral variables (e.g. in terms of image, staffing, funding, research, marketing, etc.) and (2) that there are not any discriminating variables that would explain these differences in think tanks' organizational patterns and behavior.

However, if these two main hypotheses cannot be falsified, they have implications for the choices a think tank can make. While think tanks constantly change to cope with, and have an impact on their environment, at the same time there are limits to the type and direction of change a particular (type of) think tank can undergo because of its entrenchment within its distinct environment. To be sure, (different types of) think tanks may successfully adopt certain aspects of other think tanks' management and operating styles; however, actors are embedded in a complex environment, which places considerable constraints on their room to manoeuvre. McGann and Weaver (2000b, pp. 13-21) analytically distinguished seven environmental factors influencing the "opportunity structures" of think tanks both at the domestic and the

regional/global levels—which are assumed to be the independent explanatory variables of this study: (1) political/institutional environment, (2) legal environment, (3) funding environment, (4) labor supply and demand environment, (5) technological/ media environment, (6) the intellectual/ideological and cultural environment, and (7) the increasingly competitive think tank environment.

These specific environmental influences translate into three more or less directly observable and measurable interdependent intermediary variables, which in their specific combination have a distinct impact on think tanks' growth, organizational and strategic behavior, and thus, the role(s) they can play. These intermediary explanatory variables are (1) financial resources, (2) personnel resources/human capital, and (3) mission/ brand identity.

Funding, especially the kind of funding, is an important point of strategic orientation for a think tank's operations. While financial resources are an important factor for explaining think tanks' different strategies, they are not the only kind of resource a think tank can draw upon. Besides funding, think tanks have to go on the job market and draw upon human resources, and have to steadily cultivate their individual brand identities. To be sure, there are probably as many brand identities as there are think tanks. Yet it is possible to identify certain characteristic features that allow for their categorization.

McGann and Weaver (2000b, p. 7) argue “that most think tanks can be understood as variations on one or more of four basic ideal types, [of which] the first two types, academic and contract research think tanks, have strong similarities,” as it is the case with advocacy and party think tanks that “also have a family resemblance to one another”. In addition to McGann and Weaver's concepts of families

and types,² one can also identify think tanks' individual brand identities.

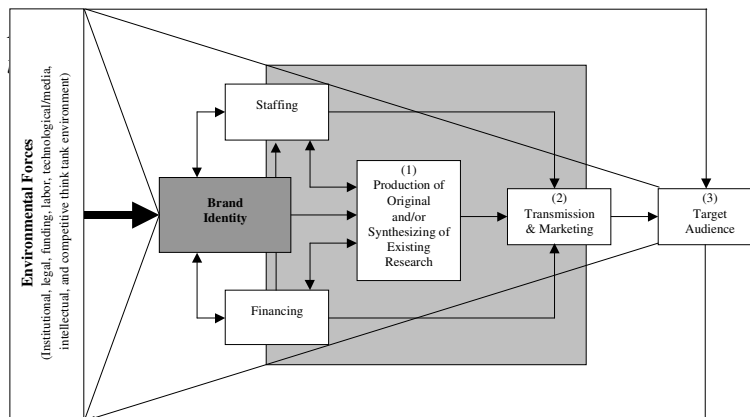
² A four-tier typology will be used in this study: (1) "academic/university without students," (2) "contract researchers," (3) "advocacy tanks," and (4) "party think tanks" (McGann & Weaver 2000, pp. 6-12; Weaver, 1989, pp. 563-569). See also Gellner (1995a, pp. 32-37; 1995b, pp. 497-510) and Rich (Rich & Weaver, 1998, pp. 235-254) who use similar typologies.

Figure 1: Brand Identities, Types, and Families of Think Tanks

Families	Politically/Ideologically identifiable (id)										Politically/Ideologically non-identifiable (non-id)														
Types	Advocacy					Party					Academic					Contract									
Brand identities (of individual think tanks)																									

The brand identity of a think tank is not really measurable in monetary or quantitative terms. It does, however, constitute an identifiable and important, if not the most important strategic (here probably in the truest sense of the word “long-term”) resource a think tank can rely upon when competing with other think tanks both on the financial marketplace of resources and the political marketplace of ideas. The brand identity of a think tank is the institution’s most strategic and sensitive resource, as it also guarantees or helps to draw upon specific types of personnel and financial resources. These resources combined have an impact on a think tank’s organizational patterns and operations. Figure 2 illustrates these three (interdependent) intermediary factors for explaining a think tank’s organizational and strategic behavior, which at the same time, are dependent upon the environmental forces—the original starting point of explanation (the independent variables).

Figure 2: Analytical Look Inside & From the Inside of a Think Tank



1.5 Methodology and Definitions: The Communicative Role Concept

It is necessary to analyze a wide range of different think tanks in the U.S. and Germany to operationalize these hypotheses. By comparing think tanks cross-nationally, one can analyze some factors that account for both national and cross-national differences and obtain insights into their typical differences in organizational and strategic patterns, and the distinct roles they can play within a given society. In order to collect the quantitative and qualitative data to support the theses, several methods need to be applied: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and sample surveys.³ Yet, before embarking on this endeavor, some definitional ground and working concepts need to be laid out.

The notion of “I know a think tank when I see one” is not necessarily helpful when comparing think tanks cross-nationally, as there are different perceptual blinders in different cultures. The ways of looking at a think tank not only differ from one to another national context; the term think tank has also had different connotations within a given country over time.⁴ And even at a given moment in time, in a given country, different people view think tanks differently.

For the purpose of this comparative study, think tanks can be defined and seen from a more abstract level as civil societal organizations⁵ that mediate between the

³ For more information about the applied methodology, see Braml, 2004, pp. 37-42.

⁴ For an account of the etymology of the term think tank, see Gellner, 1995a, pp. 15-19; Smith, 1991, pp. xiii-xiv; and Dickson, 1971, pp. 21-34.

⁵ According to McGann and Weaver (2000, pp. 2-6), think tanks are “third sector”/“civil societal” organizations, which are not-for-profit in their legal statute, relatively independent/autonomous from the government/state, and dedicated to impacting public policy making, effectively so by playing a number of critical roles.

private and the governmental spheres of a society by performing distinct and distinctive communicative roles. By trying to communicate most effectively, a think tank contributes to increasing the communication, the exchange of ideas and information crucial to a pluralistic and democratic society—a democratic order in which consensus on the policy alternatives and outcomes is not a priory set and engraved in stone, but in which consensus is reached through an open and ongoing communicative process of democratic negotiation and bargaining.

This abstract definition can be put in more concrete terms and variables in order to better view and analyze think tanks as they operate in their specific environments, since a think tank, if it were to communicate in its most

By performing these roles, as McGann and Weaver contend, “think tanks are an integral part of the civil society and serve as an important catalyst for ideas and action in emerging and advanced democracies around the world.” Hence, by assuming these roles, they also become “political actors.” It is important to note, however, that the extent to which they are either more rooted in the private sector or rather nested in the realm of government varies across countries and within a given institutional, legal and cultural context. Surely the underlying definition excludes both organizations that are either identical with or not (perceived as sufficiently) independent from government on the one hand, and organizations that do not enjoy a tax-exempt status because they mainly operate in the private sphere on a for-profit basis on the other. However, one can conceive of a broad continuum that ranges between these two definitional poles. See also Andrew Rich (1999, pp. 5-6) who identified think tanks as “a little studied political actor,” whose experts also “affect the short term, immediate positions and actions of policy makers”. Rich’s assessment qualifies John Kingdon’s view, according to which experts are principally affecting a “general climate of ideas which, in turn, affects policy makers’ thinking in the long run” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 59).

effective way, must play three major roles:⁶

- (1) *Research role*: It seeks to have a distinct (type of) message that is intended (and perceived as) to “make a difference,” and especially to make a think tank’s voice distinct from other organizations’ and think tanks’ contributions to the public debate, which may be based on its own “independent” original, or synthesized research and expertise.
- (2) *Transmission and interpretation role*: It seeks to get this “message” out and across and acted upon by transmitting and interpreting its research and advice through different channels of communication.
- (3) *Convocation, networking, elite transfer and recruiting role*: Given the specific gatekeeping mechanisms associated with each of the channels of communication they are dependent upon—makes it more often than not necessary for think tanks to make a convocational effort of assembling people, providing them with a forum for exchange and networking, or identifying, recruiting, hosting and sending messengers to convey their ideas and expertise into the public debate.

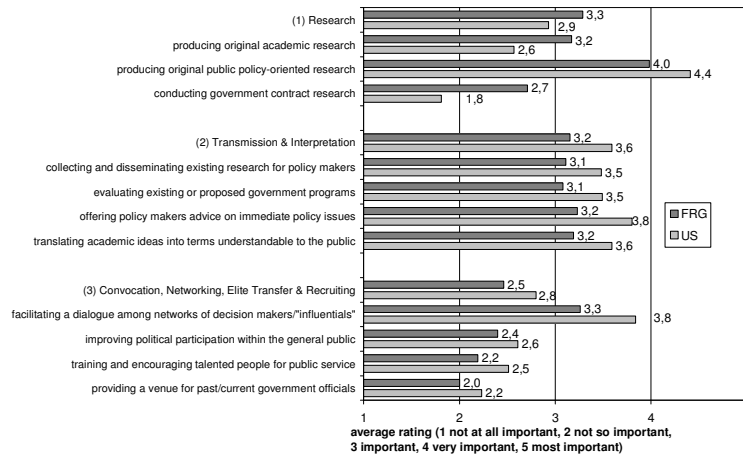
With these communicative roles, it is possible both to distinguish “think tanks” from other organizational entities and players⁷ and to discern comparative differences. In fact, comparing U.S. and German think tank managers’ views on

⁶ It is important to note that think tanks may perform all these roles; not all think tanks, however, perform these roles to the same extent—which will be helpful to distinguish (different types of) think tanks in different countries.

⁷ Such as interest groups, grassroots advocacy organizations, universities, elite networks, non-operating foundations, PR-firms, political consultants, governmental units like the Congressional Research Service or the Scientific Service of the German Bundestag (Wissenschaftliche Dienst). For a more encompassing application of the Communicative Role Concept to distinguish “think tanks” from the aforementioned organizational entities and players, see Braml, 2004: pp. 56-61.

their distinct roles they expect to play, distinct patterns suggest that U.S. and German think tanks are embedded in two distinct environments:

Figure 3: U.S. and German Think Tanks' Perception of Their Roles
(n = 115, 63 US, 52 FRG)



Convocation, networking, elite transfer and recruiting (role 3), as well as the transmission and interpretation of research (role 2) are generally deemed more important in the U.S. than in the German context. By contrast, in Germany the research role (1) is more important. It is noteworthy, however, that even in this communicative role, U.S. think tanks place a greater emphasis on the production of original public *policy*-oriented research than their German counterparts do. The significant differences in U.S. and German think tanks' perceptions of their roles are due to the distinct environments U.S. and German think tanks are embedded in. The external forces and their impact on U.S. and German think tanks behavior will be explained in more detail in the following part.

Part 2: Environmental Forces

Forces of the (1) institutional, (2) legal, (3) funding, (4) labor, (5) technological/media, (6) intellectual, and (7) increasingly crowded and competitive think tank environment(s) influence U.S. and German think tanks' strategic and organizational behavior. Different external stimuli translate into the distinct perceptions of U.S. and German think tank managers and play out in terms of think tanks' distinct overall organizational behavior, strategies, and the different roles they may assume in their respective countries.⁸

2.1 Institutional Environment

There is no doubt that think tanks are able to find more openings in the U.S. than in the German institutional setting. In the German parliamentary system, a relatively narrow channel into the executive branch constitutes the most promising avenue for more immediate and effective input on policy making. It is in the cabinet where decision making takes place; the German parliament, by contrast, can be regarded as a "rubber stamp" for executive actions. Not surprisingly, the federal/national executive figures most prominently on German think tanks' radar screen. However, the Bundestag is also the place where the government communicates and legitimates its decisions and legislation to the broader public. Moreover, for its role of checking the government and presenting an alternative to the existing government, the opposition uses public debate within and sometimes outside of parliament, and is, given

⁸ The following is a summary of the quantitative and qualitative data presented in Braml, 2004: pp. 71-288.

the more limited internal resources, more inclined to accept external expertise.

The federal structure provides the opposition (parties) with another, in many instances more effective, tool of participation in the legislative process: Due to the enormous veto powers of the Bundsrat, the representatives of the state governments are called to co-govern. While party discipline in the Bundestag is very strong and an important requirement to sustain the national government, there are many instances where the national government is at odds with the state governments, even when controlled by the same parties or coalitions. Hence, the German type of co-operative federalism, which has been called the embodiment of the “grand coalition state” (Schmidt, M., 1996), provides some opportunities for think tanks to have their input on—and via—state levels, all the more so because many German think tanks have a regional identity as they obtain their mandate and funding from their state governments.

In the U.S. context, there is more evidence than one would have expected for think tanks’ interest in the sub-federal level. The strategic orientation of U.S. think tanks towards the state levels may reveal an underlying shift of powers from the federal to the state level. Notwithstanding these devolutionary tendencies, the U.S. Congress is both the most important institution where decisions are shaped and the central place for public debate of the U.S. marketplace of ideas. Unlike the more homogeneous, closed, and party controlled German parliament, Congress is a very fractious and transparent place that offers many more openings for outside influences. Therefore, it is not surprising that the U.S. legislature is the most popular target for U.S. think tanks.

Another distinctive feature of the U.S. system is its permeable nature that allows personnel to easily move and switch between different positions and careers. Think tanks

have become an important mechanism for allocating well-educated and trained personnel resources for public service. By contrast, the recruitment and transfer of personnel for the German political system is monopolized by political parties. The German Bundestag is almost exclusively made up of career politicians. The political socialization in one of the parties, that leaves little room for alternative experiences, has been an important prerequisite for many successful political careers in Germany. Moreover, some form of affiliation or affinity with one of the political parties does not seem to hurt the advancement of a career in public service, para-public institutions, the media, and academia. More generally, institutional incentives, legal barriers, and cultural customs discourage people in the German system to change their jobs or careers.

In summary, most experts would agree that no political system other than the U.S. offers such an open and dispersed policy debate within which think tanks can operate and define their various roles. Nonetheless, the institutional environment in Germany, and the emerging governance structure on the European level also provide an increasing number of think tanks with room to manoeuvre.

2.2 Legal Environment

The legal framework in the U.S. has had an important impact on the opportunity structure of the different players in the political process. In the U.S., freedom of speech implies that “money talks”—and the political arena has become increasingly noisy in this sense, if the data on campaign contributions is any indication. The voice of political parties has become weaker in this growing concert of PACs, corporations, business, and individual donors voicing their interests directly in the process of political debate and bargaining. While the

limited role of political parties in the U.S. system of checks and balances generally allows for a larger playing field of U.S. think tanks, the increasing input of corporate and private money into the political process has particularly encouraged policy entrepreneurs and advocacy think tanks to jump on the bandwagon. The “permanent campaign” in the U.S. context provides an immense opportunity structure for a myriad of actors—and also for advocacy oriented types of think tanks which leave no doubt where they come out on an “issue.”

In Germany, legal mandates have provided for a predominant governmental funding for both the parties and their political foundations/ political party think tanks. There are now two types of potent and omnipresent organizations that may assume policy formulation, recruiting, elite transformation, and public education roles, as both political parties and their foundations have an explicit and well-funded legal mandate to do so. Compared with the political party foundations, many German think tanks have a competitive disadvantage, not only in terms of political access, but also in terms of political foundations’ privileged position to provide employment or sources of extra income for many experts, and to facilitate the recruitment of personnel for public service and offer political education to many individuals, especially those who are promising to hold a (future) position as a “multiplier” in the media, educational system, unions, or other political associations. In the German “party state” (von Beyme, 1993), political parties and their political foundations have created well functioning networks that influence many aspects of public life.

Given the increasingly tight government budget situation, however, political party foundations may as well have to face some financial challenges in the future. (Beise, 1998, p. 222). However, changes in the legal framework, especially, the inheritance tax regulations and the law on

private foundations (Stiftungsgesetz) could also provide for some alternative resources for the political party think tanks.

Private foundations can provide an additional civil societal structure. The Bertelsmann Foundation is an illustrative example for this. There have been many political efforts to establish a philanthropic culture in Germany. One effort, the Green Party's bill, became law (Federal Law Gazette, 2000, pp. 1034ff) after it had been joined by the other political parties, both on the federal and state levels.⁹ While the new legislation offers significantly improved tax incentives for setting up or donating to private foundations, it remains to be seen whether this new funding potential will also materialize for policy oriented German think tanks. So far, as the following empirical evidence will show, private funding is rather the exception from the government funding rule.

2.3 Funding Environment

The distinct intellectual soil of both countries provides U.S. and German think tanks with different types of alimentation: From a cross-national comparative perspective, the term "independence" has different connotations. German think tanks, with the exception of advocacy tanks and some other private funded think tanks, tend to see themselves and want to be seen as independent from

⁹ Interestingly, since 1998, two think tanks, the Maecenata Institute and the Bertelsmann Foundation have joined forces to advocate a reform of the private foundation law. The Maecenata Institute has commissioned an external study (Kalupner, 2000) to analyze the impact of this effort—the "Maecenata Institute/ Bertelsmann Foundation Expertenkommission zur Reform des Stiftungs- und Gemeinnützigkeitsrechts" (Commission for the Reform of the Private Foundation and Non-profit Laws).

corporate interests; government funding is widely regarded as their way of achieving this end. Independence in the U.S. context is often perceived to invest greater meaning in autonomy from the government, which can be guaranteed by maximizing competition in the private financial marketplace of resources. U.S. think tanks tend to respond to these dominant conceptions and beliefs in the most extreme case by avoiding any form of government money, or by just simply diversifying their funding sources or establishing endowments.

Hence, German think tanks predominantly obtain their funding from the federal and state governments, and mainly so in the form of appropriations. By contrast, U.S. think tanks mainly raise private funding from foundations, and increasingly from corporations and individuals. The relatively few governmental resources in the U.S. come with more strings attached, when compared with the relatively easier, albeit recently somewhat volatile government money in the German context.

Many government funded German think tanks are a little anxious about their future funding from the government. In Germany, and even more so in the U.S., the prospects for raising future (private) funding seem dimmer for politically/ideologically non-identifiable think tanks—when compared with their more advocacy oriented competitors. Nine out of ten respondents in the U.S. indicated in the survey that it is easier to attract the attention of potential donors, if an organization's political point of view is clearly identifiable and persistent.

More generally, it became also evident that the two distinct funding regimes correspond with U.S. and German think tanks' distinct focus on their institutional environments. Mainly government funded German think tanks have a more narrow focus on the government elite—the source of their funding. U.S. think tanks' broader institutional focus—including both the governance

structure and the private sector—can be explained by their funding predominantly from the private sector. With the typical private funding of U.S. think tanks in mind, their significantly stronger institutional orientation towards the business world and the media, makes even more sense: In order to raise visibility and future funding, a good relationship with the media seems to be particularly important in the U.S. context.

Moreover, the distinct patterns of think tanks' geographic distribution in the two countries give an additional indication of U.S. and German think tanks' different financial and institutional embeddedness. U.S. think tanks' obvious closeness to the media and the centers of power in the nation's capital Washington, DC contrasts with the institutionally more opportune and financially more favorable spread of German think tanks all over the Federal Republic.

Finally, while the more stable governmental funding patterns in Germany have tended to develop bigger organizations, the more competitive U.S. marketplace of funding and ideas has offered many more opportunities for all kinds of organizations, big and small, to define their niche.

2.4 Labor Supply and Demand Environment

Financial resources matter for personnel resources. The average German think tank can draw upon more financial and thus personnel resources than its U.S. equivalent. There are smaller organizations in the U.S. that organizationally respond by outsourcing strategies to cope both with their more constraint financial environment and their more competitive labor market situation. Equally important as the amount of funding is the type of funding: Predominantly privately funded U.S. think tanks have to

reinvest a great deal of their personnel and financial resources to secure their future funding, whereas their German counterparts, which tend to enjoy more secure funding from the government, are able to devote more resources—through relatively more permanent employment forms—to their research functions.

The influence of the distinct institutional and legal environments in the two countries becomes apparent when looking at the mobility patterns of research staff. The more permeable set of political institutions in the U.S. allows generally for a greater staff movement, and especially between think tanks and the government; only the staff exchange with other think tanks is slightly more frequent. By contrast, the movement between German think tanks and the government is—if at all—a one way street, since there are no institutional mechanisms or incentives to encourage government officials to change their quite privileged public status and location.

The organizational setting in the German university system requires particularly young academics aspiring to their habilitation to be very mobile. Yet, even this mobility is confined to the academic sector. Thus, the custom of the habilitation at German universities provides German think tanks—especially those with a strong academic reputation—with a huge supply of staff with Ph.D. degrees. German think tanks' close financial and staff ties with universities become very apparent in their mobility patterns. Not surprisingly, the only door that really revolves in Germany is between think tanks and universities.

These distinct mobility patterns are also reflected in the typical qualifications/skills that are deemed important for research staff. In the U.S., government experience, political orientation, media skills, and specific issue experience are significantly more important than in Germany, where academic credentials enjoy a significantly higher standing. These qualifications and skills also match

with the dominant self-perceptions in both countries: Whereas the *raison d'être* of U.S. think tanks is more empirical and pragmatic, German think tanks mainly see themselves as disinterested theoretical experts, which however isn't less "pragmatic," if one considers the specific funding mechanisms in Germany. In order to maintain their vital base of government funding, it is crucial for German experts to keep up their academic standards and reputation.

2.5 Technological and Media Environment

Some new and promising avenues of communication in the Internet world notwithstanding, think tanks still communicate their message mainly through the traditional media. To the extent that think tanks are dependent on the media as an intermediary institution for their operations, they have to deal with political/ideological, situational/contextual, and structural biases.

It became evident that think tanks with a clear ideological/political image inclined to anticipate the structural needs of the media business have a considerably greater opportunity to attract the attention of the media. While these potential gatekeeping mechanisms figured to be even stronger in the German context, they have further reaching implications in the U.S. context. In fact, both in terms of having a (perceived) impact on policy makers and especially for the purpose of funding, U.S. think tanks see themselves more exposed and vulnerable to any kind of media bias than their German counterparts. As a consequence, U.S. think tanks are more sensitive and attentive towards their visibility in the media; they tend to put more personnel and financial resources into media related activities, and their more professional management

of their media relations not surprisingly results in a more spectacular output.

All this can be considered as evidence of the “impact of the perceived impact.” More important than the actual impact U.S. think tanks may have, is their perceived impact, which has de facto a general impact on their behavior to cope with their environment, and more specifically, an impact on how the distinct types of think tanks are able to capitalize on the opportunities provided by their marketplaces of ideas and funding.

2.6 Intellectual Environment

The consensus orientation of post-war-Germany, which The Economist identified as “dull pragmatism,” (1991 Dec., pp. 49-53; 1991 May, pp. 23-26) can be explained with “Germany’s broken history” (Wallace, 1994, p. 152). Particularly, the label “ideological” has become somewhat tainted with the traumatic historical experiences in the German context. Moreover, the low currency of “ideology” in Germany seems to correlate with the worship of “Wissenschaftlichkeit.” Most German think tanks do not feel very comfortable with the label “advocacy tank” (Thunert, 1997). This is not to say that there are no politically/ideologically identifiable think tanks in Germany. However, unlike many advocacy organizations in the U.S. context which actively market their political/ideological leanings in the marketplace of ideas, German organizations that are special interest driven or have a clear political agenda are less inclined to portray their *raison d’être*.

Moreover, and more basically, while great philosophical questions do not seem much en vogue these days in the German context, in today’s U.S. marketplace of ideas, think tanks that have a longer tradition of

dispassionate empirical research are increasingly challenged by advocacy think tanks, which are less concerned with the finding of facts, and are more attuned into promoting their values. (Smith, 1989, p. 193).

Equally important as the understanding of ideas, however, is the organization of ideas. For U.S. historian James Allen Smith (1991, p. 10.), “one of the obvious characteristics of modern intellectual life is that it is highly organized.” Accordingly, argues Smith, “the story of the policy elite is as much the story of these institutions and their growth as it is of individuals.” Hence, the next aspect is devoted to the growth and development of think tanks—an important manifestation of these intellectual institutions that are able to shape our very ideas.

2.7 Competitive Think Tank Environment

Looking at the history of German think tanks, one can outline a few interesting patterns. The initial phase of growth was strongly inhibited by the two wars and the Nazi regime. Only after the Second World War was there a significant growth pattern in Germany. Most frequently in form of contract research but also through (political party) foundations, the government became the dominant force for the evolution of German think tanks. The species of think tanks that were established during this period manifest the government’s manifold efforts to re-establish its domestic infrastructure and international standing. There were also a few special interest-based initiatives. Yet in quantitative terms, these efforts were relatively small compared with the overall involvement of the government.

This situation changed markedly in the subsequent period, however, when the creation of all kinds of advocacy think tanks indicated a changing pattern in German think tank history. Since the end of the 1960s and early 1970s,

the growth rate of private sector based and oriented advocacy think tanks became even stronger than the increase of organizations that were established by the government.

German reunification marked another point of inflexion, where the growth pattern of politically/ideologically identifiable advocacy think tanks became again significantly stronger. Unlike the previous period, however, the immense challenge of reunification also reactivated a strong—and compared with private institutions' stronger—involvement of the government. At the same time, e.g. shortly thereafter, the German government shouldering these huge reunification efforts, appears to have sensed the limits of its financial strength. Looking at the data since the mid-1990s, it is not unlikely that its exhausted budget does not allow the German government to keep up with the likely sustained involvement of all kinds of groups in the private sector. And this pattern may reinforce advocacy.

Table1: Evolution of Politically/Ideologically Identifiable and Non-identifiable

Think Tanks in Germany (N = 123, 49 id, 74 non-id)

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>1900–1932 (Pre-WWI/ WWI and Aftermath)</i>	<i>1933– 1945 (WW II^a)</i>	<i>1946–1967 (Post-WW II)</i>	<i>1968– 1989 (Post- '68)</i>	<i>1990– 2000 (Post- Cold War)</i>	<i>Total (in 1998)</i>
Non- id	5	0	27	19	23	74
Id	3	0	12	22	12	49
Total	8	0	39	41	35	123

a This era designation refers to the Nazi Dictatorship/WWII in Germany and the New Deal policy/ World War II in the U.S.

More recent trends of advocacy and the potential for the further growth of this type of think tanks in the future notwithstanding, it is important to bring in perspective that a “qualified majority” of more than 60 percent¹⁰ of the German think tank population is not politically/ideologically identifiable, as most of which also adhere to academic standards and methodological principles rather than political values or special interests. This does not seem to be a mere coincidence. As of today, nearly one out of five think tanks in Germany are organized under the funding scheme of the “Blue List”/Leibniz Association (WGL).¹¹ If one were to add other institutes that are geographically and in terms of staffing close with universities, that is “at the university of”-institutes (An-Institute),¹² there is a third of the whole think tank population which has a close organizational relationship and a steady intellectual exchange with universities. And this does not preclude other organizations that also cultivate strategic relationships with academia and heavily draw upon government funding—which has more often than not been dependent on the academic standing of an institute.

Moreover, within a generally academic landscape, German advocacy think tanks’ ideas are different from their peers’ in the U.S.: They are more consensus-oriented, which also accounts for the fact that German think tanks are mainly government funded. Overall, this suggests the labelling of the German think tank landscape with the term

¹⁰ 60.2% (74 out of 123 organizations).

¹¹ 18.7% (23 out of 123 organizations); the Scientific Association of “Blue List” Institutes was established in 1995. Responding to bylaws that are based in the German constitution, these institutes are jointly funded by the federal and the respective state governments. In 1997, the annual membership meeting in Cologne decided to rename the Scientific Association of “Blue List” Institutes as Leibniz Association (WGL).

¹² 14.6% (18 out of 123 organizations).

“academic,” whereas observers of the think tank evolution in the U.S. context have identified a shift in pattern from “academics to ideologues” (McGann, 1992).

For James Allen Smith (1991), the history of U.S. think tanks starts at the turn of the century, with the establishment of the social sciences and the beginning of the progressive movement. Several institutes, like the Russell Sage Foundation (1907), the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910), and the Institute for Government Research (1916), the forerunner of the Brookings Institution, were created in the wake of the progressive movement. Brookings can be considered to be the role model of this time period, since it was “the first organization dedicated exclusively to conducting public policy research” (McGann, 1992, p. 733). Other organizations that emerged during this time and thereafter would share with Brookings the premise that scientific methods and rigor were the most effective means to enhance the efficiency of government and solve social problems.

World War I and the emergence of the U.S. as a global power, the economic crisis in 1929, the subsequent depression and Roosevelt’s New Deal, as well as World War II created further domestic and foreign policy rationales for the creation of new think tanks. By the 1960s, the U.S. government had become fully involved in administering social welfare programs. The increasing number of experts paralleled the growing size of the government. Particularly the federal involvement in the “War on Poverty” created an opportunity for domestic, social policy oriented think tanks.

Over time, however, the increasingly powerful flow of this intellectual and political mainstream began to erode its underlying basin. The unanimous faith in government and science started to fade away. (Rich, 1999, p. 99). The Hudson Institute (1961), and the Institute for Policy Studies (1963) began to articulate more straightforwardly their

conservative and liberal agendas, respectively. Hudson and IPS can be considered as the prototypes of a new type of advocacy tanks as they broke the mould of academic neutrality and objectivity that had thus far shaped the output of the research industry.

While the emergence of these two organizations already manifested the intellectual tensions between the different paradigms, the foundation of Heritage in 1973 can in historical hindsight be considered as the pursuit of the politics of ideas with different means. Declaring the “war of ideas,” Heritage shook the traditional world order of think tanks. The Heritage Foundation became a role model for a rapidly growing species of politically/ ideologically identifiable advocacy think tanks, which also forced the traditional types to rethink their strategies. As table 2 illustrates, both the overall number of think tanks and particularly the number of politically/ideologically identifiable advocacy think tanks have proliferated in the U.S. context.

Table 2: Evolution of Politically/Ideologically Identifiable and Non-identifiable

Think Tanks in the U.S. (N = 305, 165 id, 140 non-id)

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>1900–1932 (Pre-WWI/ WWI and Aftermath)</i>	<i>1933–1945 (WW II^a)</i>	<i>1946–1967 (Post-WW II)</i>	<i>1968–1989 (Post-‘68)</i>	<i>1990–2000 (Post-Cold War)</i>	<i>Total (in 1996)</i>
Non-id	17	6	15	75	27	140
Id	2	3	4	111	45	165
Total	19	9	19	186	72	305

a This era designation refers to the Nazi Dictatorship/WWII in Germany and the New Deal policy/ World War II in the U.S.

Data source: Rich & Weaver, 1998.¹³

As is the case with other historical “events,” there are usually several underlying currents that culminate in a certain event.¹⁴ More specifically, changes in the institutional, legal, funding, technological/media, intellectual, and increasingly crowded and competitive think tank environments have contributed to the trend of specialization, fragmentation, and politicization in the increasingly competitive U.S. think tank industry.¹⁵

¹³ The population of 305 think tanks in the U.S. were identified and defined by Rich & Weaver, 1998. I owe many thanks to R. Kent Weaver and Andrew Rich for sharing their thoughts, accounts and data with me which helped me to better understand the U.S. think tank scene and provided me with an operational definition and the most up to date and complete list of relevant U.S. think tanks to base my comparative work on.

¹⁴ James McGann explains the “rise of the specialty tank” with six interrelated trends influencing the “development of subgroups within this universe of institutions.” See McGann, 1992, pp. 736ff.

¹⁵ For more information, see Braml, 2004; pp. 282-284.

Part 3: Characteristic Behavioral Responses to the Environmental Forces

Think tanks cultivate different images in order to remain competitive in terms of fundraising, maintaining the respect of policymakers, and retaining a staff whose standards and views need to be compatible with the organizational brand identity. While there are probably as many different brand identities as there are think tanks, it is nonetheless possible to categorize different families and types that correspond with Weaver's four basic ideal types, of which the first two types, academic and contract research think tanks, have strong similarities, as it is the case with advocacy and party think tanks. (McGann & Weaver, 2000b, p. 7). While academic and contract types of think tanks¹⁶ try to portray a middle-of-the-road, centrist image, maintaining a balance in a political sense and presenting a broad middle ground of policy, advocacy and party think tanks¹⁷ champion certain ideas and want to be known for a

¹⁶ In general, the organizational self-descriptions of both the academic prototypes—the Brookings Institution and the Social Science Research Center (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, WZB)—and the organizational mission of the RAND Corporation and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP)—as the prototypes of contract research—reveal a common feature: sound research based on high academic standards. (Note: The label “contract research” does not mean that research is necessarily based on contracts.)

¹⁷ Driven by their “mission” (Heritage Foundation), “underlying conviction” (Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft, IW), or “interests” (Economic Policy Institute, EPI), the type of advocacy think tanks seeks to “roll back the liberal welfare state” (Heritage Foundation), or to acts as an “advocate for entrepreneurial freedom and a favorable investment climate” (IW), or wants to “include the interests of low- and middle-income workers” (EPI). Political party think tanks are a somewhat unique organizational

set of political values they stand for. They nurture a more specific, easily identifiable, coherent and persistent political image. In order to operationalize the concept of brand identities and types, the results illustrating the self-identification of U.S. think tank managers in the survey¹⁸ are going to be compared with Andrew Rich and R. Kent Weaver's distinction of politically/ideologically identifiable versus not identifiable think tanks, which they based on their observations and readings of U.S. think tanks' mission statements. For the German context, the author's prior coding of German think tanks will also be compared with German think tank manager's self-identification in the survey.

Indeed, the data and the statistical evidence¹⁹ suggests that (1) the way think tanks view themselves corresponds with the way they are externally (re)viewed and (de)coded, which simply means (2) that they belong to different families, which (3) can be distinguished and characterized by a variable discriminating between politically/ideologically identifiable and non-identifiable families

entity confined to the German context. "Party-near" think tanks in Germany—as this terminology indicates—may not be directly associated with their parties; however, their specific names, mission statements and governmental funding mechanisms, leave no doubt about their closeness with the ideas and political principles of their parties.

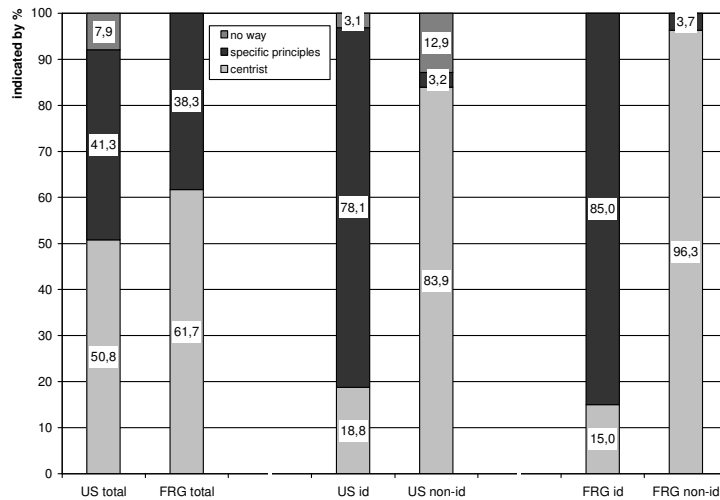
¹⁸ "In pursuing the institution's goals, do you either steer a middle-of-the-road/centrist course, in a political sense or represent specific (e.g. conservative, libertarian, liberal, social, etc.) principles? (please choose one option)."

¹⁹ The statistical measures for both countries indicate—the observed significance level (Asymp. Sig. 2-sided) is .000 both for the U.S. and the Germany—that there is strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis that think tanks' self-perceptions as expressed in the survey and accounts of how they are externally viewed, registered, and coded are unrelated.

of think tanks. This statistical evidence can be illustrated more graphically and specified with data:

Of those think tanks that were coded as members of the politically/ ideologically identifiable family, 78.1% in the U.S. and 85.0% in Germany avowedly represent specific principles (e.g. conservative, libertarian, liberal, social, etc.), while 83.9% U.S. and 96.3% German think tanks in the politically/ideologically non-identifiable family indicated that they steer on a middle of the road/centrist course in a political sense when fulfilling their mission.

Figure 4: U.S. and German Think Tanks' Political Course
(n = 110, 63 US [32 id, 31 non-id], 47 FRG [20 id, 27 non-id])



About half of the think tanks in the U.S. (50.8%) and approximately six out of ten German think tanks (61.7%) try to portray a middle-of-the road image maintaining a balance in a political sense presenting a broad middle ground of policy. This compares with over 41.3% of U.S. think tanks and 38.4% German think tanks

that avowedly champion certain ideas and want to be known for a set of political values they stand for. They nurture a more specific, easily identifiable, coherent and persistent political orientation. While the discrete variable of politically/ideologically identifiable versus non-identifiable think tanks enables some explanation of think tanks' behavior patterns, a more refined analytical framework demonstrates how think tanks' strategic behavior on a set of observable variables—funding, staffing, research organization, and service/product marketing—is congruous with their distinct types.²⁰

²⁰ This evidence is presented in quantitative and qualitative detail in Braml, 2004: pp. 289-475.

Part 4: The Impact of the Fittest on Policy Making

Judging from both Germans' views and the impressions evoked by eminent voices in the U.S., the institutional grass and its organizational flora and fauna, including the species of think tanks, appears to be greener on the American continent. For U.S. political scientist Nelson Polsby (1983, p. 59) "it is no wonder that thoughtful inhabitants of other democratic systems, whose elite political cultures provide far less diversity of this sort, wish they could transplant some seeds from at least a few of these remarkable institutions to foreign soil."

Nelson Polsby at the beginning of the 1980s painted—probably in retrospective—an idyllic picture of think tanks in the U.S. Today, in a time of fierce "Competition for Dollars, Scholars and Influence in the Public Policy Research Industry" (McGann 1995), the perceptions of think tanks are quite ambiguous: Whereas in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century "think tanks were widely perceived as objective and highly credible producers of policy expertise for policy makers", at the beginning of the twenty-first century, "they are increasingly perceived, and may have in fact become, contentious advocates in balkanized debates over the direction of public policy" (Rich & Weaver, 1998, p. 250).

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²¹ The data of Rich and Weaver (1998, pp. 243-245) suggest that "the number of independent public policy-oriented think tanks more than doubled between 1970 and 1985, ... [which] has continued to grow in recent years, with the number of ideologically motivated organizations increasing at the quickest pace ... [showing a] pattern of conservative dominance over liberal think tanks ... [, even] when the relative size of think tanks is taken into account."

The proliferation of think tanks in the U.S. may cause an erosion of the institutional soil and the drying out of think tanks' grounds and resources, that is, the respect of policy makers and funders. Carlyn Bowman's lament (as quoted in: Rich & Weaver, 1998, p. 250) may be emblematic for the current trend of the U.S. think tank industry: "I wonder what is happening sometimes to the think tank currency, whether its becoming a little bit like paper money in Weimar [Germany]—currency without a lot of value because of the proliferation and because of the open advocacy of some of the think tanks."

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the socio-political system that followed in the tradition of (and sought to correct the mistakes of) Weimar, the situation is different. The academic currency still enjoys a value similarly strong to the DM, the German national currency before the Euro was adopted in January, 2002. It will be interesting to see whether the reduction of government funding in Germany leads to a new growth pattern of think tanks outside the governmental greenhouse. For this, the important question may reside whether the German civil-societal environment can provide for enough private, non-government resources to allow for the continued growth or even spur new growth in the German think tank landscape. In fact, legislative efforts have been made to stimulate philanthropic activities of the private sector. Changes of the legal environment are expected to provide also think tanks with increased funding opportunities in the private sector. And this potential is enormous: "For the first time in this century, private wealth was neither destroyed by war nor by inflation but can be passed on in full measure to the next generation," highlighted the Bertelsmann Stiftung (1998, pp. 3-4).

In this changed environment, German think tanks would have to redefine their ways and means of cultivating resources. German think tanks may then have to engage—

as well as their U.S. counterparts already do—more in symbioses with the media in order to improve their visibility and thus, prospects for private funding.

Yet given the highly politicized private funding and media environment—as generally seen by German think tank managers in the survey—, advocacy think tanks would also in the German context find a more opportune habitat. At the same time, the traditional species of mainly government funded think tanks continues to be faced with a weaning problem. It is likely that particularly bigger organizational plants that have over a long time become accustomed to the governmental alimentary channel will find it more difficult to adapt to new environmental conditions outside the greenhouse, facing a more immediate exposure to the political wind and weather.

In addition, the ongoing political integration in Europe is likely to change the conditions for policy research. The permanent negotiations within dispersed political institutions, has led political observers to discern a pattern already so familiar in the U.S.—with policy research contracted out, advocacy, lobbies and political consultancies. In this increasingly “dynamic confusion of powers” (Schmidt, V., 1997) at the European level, think tanks are able to find many access points, more so, because the EU is not structured according to the principles of a parliamentary setting, and political parties do not play a dominant gatekeeping role. Responding to the changes of the institutional environment, and the “quest for legitimization through performance” (Mayntz, 1999, pp. 108-109) that is to offset the “deficit in democratic legitimization” (Scharpf, 1998, p. 164.), there is in fact a strong development of think tanks that are oriented to the European Union’s policy agenda in Brussels (Wallace, 1998, p. 228).

With the increasing European integration, the environment of German think tanks has been changing. Not

only have Germans had to cope with trading their DM for a common European currency. In this changing context, the think tank currency may also assume a different denomination. So far, in the German national context, the fiat fiduciary money to safeguard a think tank's (perception of its) independence has been provided by the government. In the predominantly government funded German context, government funding has been commonly viewed as the means to ensure a think tanks' independence—from private sources. Yet in a changing geopolitical environment, alleged national interests may be considered as a so-called public good and may therefore not be subject to the same suspicious attitudes as special interests and their money in the national context.

Moreover, with shifting geopolitical paradigms, new issue and policy areas are emerging that continue to challenge the existing national "iron triangles." Interest groups, and other organizational actors are less constrained by a potential gatekeeping power of political parties on the supranational level, and have easier immediate access to a growing number of relevant players. Furthermore, instead of merely relying on established direct and private channels with "their" governments, a broader variety of actors may also attempt to indirectly influence a growing number of decision makers on different levels of governance via public opinion. In this increasingly convoluted European context, the perceived impact is likely to be more important than the actual impact think tanks may have. And this impact of the perceived impact will become visible in new organizational patterns. In this changing institutional environment, a symbiosis of think tanks and the media may be very likely to become an increasingly popular organizational option for German think tanks to define their communicative niche in the European bazaar of funding and public policy ideas.

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