



Ecologic Institute

Berlin
Brussels
Vienna
Washington DC



The role of think tanks in environmental politics

- German and EU perspectives

Christiane Gerstetter

Ecologic Institute



Table of content

- ▶ Environmental think tanks at the EU level and their impact on EU policy making
- ▶ Quality control in thinks tanks at the EU level
- ▶ Impacts of think tanks on the research agenda (EU & Germany)
- ▶ Improving the perception of the public image of environmental think tanks – is it necessary?



Environmental think tanks in the EU

- ▶ Estimates that there are 250 environmental think tanks in the EU (James McGann)
- ▶ Most important ones according to University of Pennsylvania Go To Think Tank Ranking (2013): Chatham House (with environment-related programme, UK), Centre for European Policy Studies (some energy/climate-related work, Brussels), Stockholm Environment Institute (Sweden), Ecologic Institute, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK, Germany), Center for Environmental Research (Germany), E3G Third Generation Environmentalism (UK)
- ▶ No overarching network/organization of environmental think tanks, but strong informal networks (encouraged partially by the EU)
- ▶ Some strongly dependent on public funds



Impact of (environmental) think tanks on EU policy-making

- ▶ Difficult to assess methodologically, no systematic study
- ▶ But: very regular involvement of think tanks in studies commissioned by EU through competitive tender procedure, notably impact assessment, framework contracts with the European Parliament to provide scientific expertise, evaluation etc.
- ▶ Access to/part of policy processes at the EU, continuing demand for input into EU policy process
- ▶ Very likely there is some (indirect) impact



Impact of (environmental) think tanks on EU policy-making

- ▶ Probably: range from input of think tanks taken as justification for what policy makers had in mind anyway to genuinely (moderately) influencing course of affairs, e.g. through new ideas
- ▶ EU has commitment to „smart regulation“, i.e. evidence-based policy making, evaluation of policies > role for think tanks
- ▶ EU think tanks do not necessarily want to have visible influence
- ▶ Functions of think tanks at EU level: forum for debates, developing ideas (also long-term vision)



Quality control of think tanks at EU level

- ▶ No overarching system
- ▶ Quality control when performing service contracts for EU institutions directly by institutions (partially already in tender procedures), Commission's impact assessment board for impact assessments
- ▶ Selection of contractors/grant recipients through competitive process
- ▶ Mechanisms for ensuring good scientific practice (e.g. peer reviews)
- ▶ Internal mechanisms at the institutes that may vary
- ▶ Some codes of conduct at national level for policy consulting, none at EU level



Impact of (environmental) think tanks on research agenda

▶ **Germany:**

Umweltforschungsplan (UFO-Plan) of Ministry for Environment and federal environmental agencies: no formal channels for impact, but informal channels exist; UFO Plan seen sometimes as best-practice for contract-based research

German Federal Ministry of Education and Research: conferences on research programmes, some major organisation represented on committees deciding on funding priorities and details of funding, in addition informal channels

▶ **EU level**

Service contracts: follow political agendas, hardly any influence

Research Framework Programme/Horizon 2020: official consultations, informal channels and also some degree of „lobbying“



Public image of think tanks – improve it

- ▶ Generally: ongoing debate about role of think tanks in policy-making, related to larger debate on involvement of scientific experts in policy-making
- ▶ Mostly: scientific advice seen as positive and necessary in complex world, but sometimes negative image of think tanks as „lobbyists“ unduly interfering with democratic policy-making; maybe lack of knowledge on what a think tank is
- ▶ What think tanks can do (and Ecologic does): be transparent about what you do (including sources of income), do not put yourself in conflicts of interest situations, emphasize freedom of research (e.g. Ecologic has NO institutional opinion, similar to academic institutions)
- ▶ Think tanks mostly better at explaining their findings to larger audience than academic institutions



Ecologic Institute

Berlin
Brussels
Vienna
Washington DC



Thank you for listening.

Christiane Gerstetter

Ecologic Institute, Pfalzburger Str. 43-44, D-10717 Berlin
Tel. +49 (30) 86880-0, Fax +49 (30) 86880-100

christiane.gerstetter@ecologic.eu

www.ecologic.eu