

# **Think-Tanks in Scotland**

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## Abstract

This paper will look at the major think-tanks operating in Scotland and will describe their activities, functions and structural and personal relationship to the political, academic and economic spheres. In order to distinguish think-tanks from consultancies or government agencies, they are theoretically defined as institutions providing public policy research/analysis with relative legal, financial and scholarly independence. A four-fold typology which divides think-tanks into 'universities without students', 'contract research organisations', 'advocacy institutes' and 'vanity think tanks' facilitates an understanding of their organisational forms.

A brief overview of the Scottish think-tank landscape is followed by a more in-depth description and analysis of the *David Hume Institute*, the *Scottish Council Foundation* and the *Policy Institute* based on primary material analysis and interviews. The paper concludes that most of Scotland's think-tanks can be classified as advocacy institutes. Only with devolution, which created a situation of uncertainty and change stimulating a growth in the advice industry, Scotland became of locus for this type of think-tank. Initially, Scottish think-tanks were able to benefit from widespread disappointment with devolution and with the traditional intellectual driving forces of policy change; i.e. political parties, trade unions and the bureaucracy. However, today the mostly very small think-tanks struggle for scarce research funds. Government is a rare research partner for think-tanks. Their medium to long-term research with visionary, yet vague policy proposals does not seem to appeal to decision-makers. Lastly, Scotland's think-tank landscape reveals an incoherent political picture, as e.g. the nationalist movement never engaged in any think-tank activity in spite of the credibility that research institutes offer for policies.

Devolved government in Scotland has had many consequences for its political landscape. It has fostered Scottish national consciousness by confirming its distinct history and future within the framework of a United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> and at the same time re-enforced the unity of the UK<sup>2</sup>. Then, devolution has re-cast institutional structures of decision-making and executive power according to the principle of subsidiarity<sup>3</sup>. Scotland has become a *locus* of actual policy-making; it is no longer a 'stateless nation'<sup>4</sup>. Devolution, following Foucault's concept of governmentality<sup>5</sup>, can be interpreted as representing an attempt to 'actively constitute and construct new subjectivities to facilitate effective forms of governance'<sup>6</sup>. Thus, we can find a political environment encompassing political parties, lobby and interest groups and, of significance for this study, a number of a certain breed of policy research institutes, broadly called "think-tanks".

This article will explore the neglected landscape of think-tanks in Scotland. The World Directory of Think-Tanks does not list a single Scottish-based think-tank in their review of trends in Western European think-tanks<sup>7</sup>. Where a Scottish-based think-tank, the David Hume Institute, is mentioned alongside a vanguard-Thatcherite think-tank such as the Adam Smith Institute, it is ignored in the eventual study<sup>8</sup>. This certainly has to do with the relatively recent proliferation of think-tanks in Scotland. Moreover, with the 'fourth wave of *transnational* think-tanks'<sup>9</sup> evolving, these latecomers may have slipped out of focus despite Scotland's new political scenery and the European trend towards regionalism apparent in it.

This study briefly discusses the functions and the various types of think-tanks, maps out the major think-tanks operating in Scotland and will then analyse three think-tanks – the Scottish Council Foundation, the David Hume Institute and the Policy Institute – in more depth. Do think-tanks matter in a devolved Scotland? How do they exert influence? What interests, perhaps in the form of political parties, business corporations or individuals, stand behind them? This paper is based on interviews with key figures of several Scottish think-tanks and on analysis of primary material. The three cases are selected by convenience sampling, as the main source of data are interviews with senior think-tank figures on whose cooperation the study rests<sup>10</sup>.

## DEFINING THINK-TANKS

Establishing clear boundaries between research institutes, lobby groups and think-tanks is necessary to understand the think-tanks analysed below. Diverse organisations are labelled think-tanks and the term has been over-inclusively applied to almost any research institute, invoking images of scientific detachment and objectivity. Weaver<sup>11</sup> defines think-tanks – in a US context – as relatively large, 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'. Autonomy is a relative term. It does not mean total detachment from policy-makers, as think-tanks must have some 'kind of engagement with government if they are to succeed in influencing policy'<sup>12</sup>. Three dimensions of independence – legal, financial and scholarly – are identifiable. Think-tanks tend to be charitable non-profit organisations

without formal/legal links to political parties, governmental bodies or companies. Their funding is non-project related and usually is not dependent on only one benefactor. Scholarly independence is constituted by certain 'practices within the institute: for example institutionalised peer-reviewing mechanisms and open inquiry rather than directed research'<sup>13</sup>. Institutions which fulfil these criteria fall into several ideal types. The first type, "universities without students", is characterized by 'heavy reliance on academics as researchers, by funding primarily from the private sector' and by long-term book-length studies as the primary research output<sup>14</sup>. Think-tanks of this category stress their objectivity and non-partisanship. Secondly, there is the 'contract research organisation', which is mostly commissioned by government departments. It hardly executes its 'own' research and its results take the form of shorter reports<sup>15</sup>. "Advocacy think-tanks" combine a strong policy, partisan or ideological bent with 'aggressive salesmanship and effort to influence current policy debates'<sup>16</sup>. Their output is less 'academic', but they have very good access to policy-makers, as their explicit aim is to change policies and to shift public opinion. Often they simply re-package and synthesise existing material and adapt it to – in this case – a Scottish policy context. Though this last think-tank type resembles interest groups – in that they share e.g. similar techniques for disseminating their research results and explicitly seek to acquire high-profile researchers for their activity – advocacy think-tanks tend to appeal 'to as large a segment of the electorate as possible, they do not, like interest groups, speak on behalf of a particular constituency'<sup>17</sup>. A fourth, more recent, type is the vanity think-tank, which exists mainly for the 'self-aggrandizement of its members or for the promotion of a political career'<sup>18</sup>.

When it comes to the function of think-tanks, some research asserts that they 'support and encourage policy pluralism, broad participation and involvement of policy actors: citizen empowerment'<sup>19</sup>. Denham and Garnett are more cautious and stress that the proliferation of think-tanks itself does not necessarily mean a step towards a more pluralistic society, as 'opinions which threaten vested interests will never get attention'<sup>20</sup>. For elite theoreticians, think-tanks serve the long-term interests of economic and political leaders. They highlight the interlocking of directorates of the corporate, military and administrative policy communities. Think-tanks serve as means to reach consensus between elites and help to overcome political tensions and differences. Equally, particularly advocacy think-tanks are criticised because they act as mouthpieces of lobby groups attempting to get their message across to decision-makers<sup>21</sup>. Lastly, a neo-Marxian analysis of the role of think-tanks emphasises their ability to bring problems of the political economy to elite attention and to develop long-range plans, which convert these problems into manageable objects of public policy. Thereby they support the hegemony of the ideology of advanced capitalism<sup>22</sup>.

One of the most important functions of think-tanks is policy diffusion. Stone has identified different variations: transfer, convergence and lesson drawing/learning<sup>23</sup>. Policy diffusion can be facilitated by policy networks, through which participants can build alliances, share discourses and construct consensual knowledge. The networks relevant for the analysis of think-tanks are epistemic communities: 'communities of shared knowledge'

without vested interests<sup>24</sup>; advocacy coalitions: based on the belief system rather than knowledge itself; and policy entrepreneurial groups: ‘advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea’, not seldom for personal aggrandizement<sup>25</sup> and political ambition.

For Stone, think-tanks are mainly occupied with lesson-drawing, i.e. the understanding of

‘the conditions under which policies or practices operate in exporter jurisdictions and whether and how the conditions which might make them work in a similar way can be created in importer jurisdictions’

and with lesson-learning, which can be defined as ‘cognition and the re-definition of interests on the basis of new knowledge which affects the fundamental beliefs and ideas behind policy approaches’<sup>26</sup>.

Think-tanks are ambiguous constructs; they hover between the margins of state and market. Sometimes, they are formally included in policy processes when responding to government consultations. More often they informally influence policy processes by targeting an interested audience within a relevant policy community. In an ‘unknown society’<sup>27</sup>, where ‘a plenitude of information leads to a poverty of attention [and] attention becomes a scarce resource [.]’, those who can distinguish valuable signals from white noise gain power<sup>28</sup>. Think-tanks build bridges between members of a policy community, who are ‘major political and administrative actors – sometimes in conflict, often in agreement, but always in touch and operating within a shared framework’<sup>29</sup>. With their aura of scientific credibility they can strengthen and legitimise political ideas. Think-tanks facilitate institutionalised contacts between the scientific elite of think-tanks, a wider epistemic community and the traditional political and economic elite and contribute to the formation of political ‘discourse coalitions’<sup>30</sup>. Within these coalitions, the traditional elites remain the dominant partners, as think-tanks rely on the financial support of foundations and corporations<sup>31</sup> - wherefore it may be seen as exaggerated to talk of think-tanks as a new technocratic decision-making elite. Think-tanks want to make things happen unlike “disinterested” academic research institutions; they want to affect an audience as large as possible while maintaining close links to elites. They seek influence through allegedly evidence-based rational argument, which re-formulates political aims into technically defined administrative means, rather than through lobbying. However, think-tanks are far from being non-ideological. Also, Fischer argues that policy analysis ‘has in significant measure evolved as a strategy for a ‘technocratic form’ of governance [.] reflecting a subtle antipathy towards democratic processes’<sup>32</sup>.

## THINK-TANKS IN SCOTLAND

Using this framework what follows is an analysis of the influence of think-tanks on Scotland’s emergent, post-devolution policy-making community. A brief description of some of the most important Scottish think-tanks will be followed by an in-depth analysis of the David Hume Institute (DHI), The

Scottish Council Foundation (SCF), and the Policy Institute (PI), considering their involvement in elite structures and discourse coalitions.

One of the few self-styled think-tanks which had existed in Scotland prior to devolution is the Centre for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP). Based at Glasgow's Strathclyde University and founded in 1976, it is a hybrid between a consultancy, a university research institute and a contract research think-tank. It is mainly concerned with barometer surveys on democratic attitudes and behaviours in post-communist countries<sup>33</sup>. Labelling itself a 'specialist independent research unit of the university'<sup>34</sup>, it has consulted the World Bank, OECD and UN agencies on 'problems of post-Communist countries'<sup>35</sup>. The CSPP has received funding from the European Union, UNESCO, the World Bank and the Austrian National Bank<sup>36</sup>.

The John Wheatley Centre has recently become the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CenSPP). In summer 2004, Ross Martin, a former Labour Councillor and failed Labour-candidate for a seat in the Scottish Parliament in 1999 ('a recovering politician'<sup>37</sup>), was appointed Executive Director. He followed Gerry Hassan, who afore was Head of Communications at the Scottish Council for Development and Industry lobby group (SCDI), and who is now working with think-tank Demos on the 'scenario-building' project Scotland 2020<sup>38</sup>. Prior to his new position at the CenSPP, Martin was head of the Scottish Forum for Modern Government at Aberdeen's Robert Gordon University. This institute, set up in November 1999, has effectively ceased to exist. Martin wants the CenSPP 'to act as a bridge-head between the government and the people they seek to govern by providing opportunities for engagement, by challenging vested interests'<sup>39</sup>. He wants the institute to be seen as 'centre-left'<sup>40</sup>, although not aligned to a political party. The CenSPP's aim is the 'promotion of an imaginative public policy debate' by 'organising opportunities for politicians, policy thinkers and practitioners to meet and to learn from each other'<sup>41</sup>. In cooperation with the SCF, the CenSPP is pursuing research into 'public sector reform in Scotland'<sup>42</sup>. It has received sponsorship among others by BAA Scotland, the European Parliament and the German Social Democratic Party's Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation. Though Martin emphasised the significance of the new institute for citizen empowerment by acting as a mouthpiece for them<sup>43</sup>, it remains to be seen how it will seek to represent "the public interest".

The Edinburgh office of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is another exception in Scotland's think-tank landscape. Founded in the USA in 1971 as the International Institute for Environmental Affairs, its main office today is in London. The IIED is a non-profit organization promoting sustainable world development. It describes itself as a globally operating agency contributing to 'environmental policy and action'. The Scottish IIED office concentrates on promoting sustainable development for Africa's drylands belt south of the Sahara. It is a 'specialist think-tank'<sup>44</sup>, as it focuses on environmental issues and does not pursue an 'all-round'-agenda like many other think-tanks. In 2000/01 the IIED received about £6 million from aid and development ministries, intergovernmental agencies, foundations, and corporate and individual donors from across Europe and North America<sup>45</sup>. The IIED discloses all its sources of funding and lists its sponsors and partners on its website.

The David Hume Institute (DHI) was founded in 1985 by Alan Peacock, the once Professor of Economics at York University and Vice Chancellor of the independent University of Buckingham<sup>46</sup>, and the industrialist Gerald Elliot, then Chairman of Christian Control Salvesen, an international logistics business. Peacock was Chairman of the Home Office Committee on Financing the BBC 1985-1986, where he proposed making subscription to the BBC voluntary and to bring more market pressure to bear on it. The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), where Peacock is a Fellow, gave an address on the same topic in 2004, boasting that these ideas are now being 'discussed by several commentators, including experts from the BBC and Ofcom'<sup>47</sup>. Peacock was member of various other UK Government and international Commissions and served as Chief Economic Adviser in the UK Department of Trade and Industry (1973-76). According to Peacock, his motivation to set up the DHI was to establish an institute independent of government funding in order to avoid constraints on research and publication and to counter the 'metropolitan perspective of economic events' coming from the overwhelming number of research institutes based in London<sup>48</sup>. Obviously, Peacock's desire to influence policy making had not been quenched by his work within governmental agencies; perhaps he felt that the IEA's influence on the Thatcher governments was more impressive than the power of governmental commissions. In 1995 Professor Brian Main, who in 2002 was official advisor of the Scottish Parliament Justice Committees One and Two, joined the institute and has been its director since 1999. In June 2005 he will be replaced by Jeremy Peat, former Group Chief Economist at the Royal Bank of Scotland and former economist at the HM Treasury and the Scottish Office. He is also on the Board of Governors of the BBC for Scotland<sup>49</sup>. It is an interesting move to fill the position formerly held by an academic with a professional economist who has 'extensive connections with business and areas of government in Scotland and further afield' – Peat's appointment probably will push the DHI into a more business-oriented direction and will certainly open new sources of sponsorship. The DHI employs one full-time secretary and one part-time fundraiser and uses offices rented from the University of Edinburgh. Its board of trustees unites the who's who of the Scottish policy community: senior journalists, members of the Scottish Parliament's Corporate Body Audit and Advisory Board, the CEO of TSB Scotland and a high official of the Rowntree Foundation<sup>50</sup>.

Another key think-tank is The Scottish Council Foundation (SCF). It differs from the DHI in a number of ways, especially in terms of its connection to business and lobby groups. The SCF does not have a university background but was established by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) in 1999. This lobby group is made up of some of the largest corporations in Scotland. There is also 'a smattering of trade unions' on the SCDI's executive board<sup>51</sup>. It seeks to 'strengthen Scotland's economic competitiveness and sustainable prosperity by influencing Government policy at all levels'<sup>52</sup>. Three of the SCF's five trustees<sup>53</sup> are high-ranking members of the SCDI executive and its board<sup>54</sup> and all of them are important members of Scotland's business community<sup>55</sup>. The SCF employs seven full-time and one part-time staff; of whom five are involved in research and securing research income. The present director, James

McCormick, was appointed in 2002. Previously he worked for the Institute for Public Policy Research's (IPPR) Social Justice Commission Report, published in 1994.

A third think-tank in this study is the Policy Institute (PI). Its foundation coincided with the first election to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. It is, like all think-tanks in this sample, institutionally independent from any political party. Bill Jamieson, senior journalist at the right-leaning *The Scotsman* broadsheet, is the Director of the PI, which has no office, 'only a desk at the *Scotsman*'. Tom Miers, the only salaried member of the PI, has been employed as Executive Director in May 2003 'to run the institute on a more full-time basis'. He formerly worked for the IEA in an administrative role and does not rule out going into politics one day. He described *The Scotsman* as very generous in allocating logistic resources to the PI and allowing a senior member of its staff to re-dedicate some of his time to the institute<sup>56</sup>. Jamieson has been a frequent guest at the IEA<sup>57</sup> and at the Bruges Group – a Thatcherite 'independent all-party think tank' committed to a fight against deeper UK integration into the EU<sup>58</sup>. The PI's board of trustees is less impressive than that of the more established DHI and SCF and is composed of another *Scotsman* pundit (Katie Grant), a top manager of Scottish Friendly Assurance (Colin McLean), and Allan Massie, a journalist-turned-writer.

## RESEARCH AIMS AND PARADIGMS

The DHI and the PI share the same research paradigm, but differ markedly in their research areas and in their style. The DHI neither pursues the outspoken pro-market philosophy nor the rather polemic style of the PI, which has in the past likened the NHS to Soviet-style bureaucracy<sup>59</sup> and generally demands that the forces of the free market are let loose on the public sector<sup>60</sup>. This goal is fuelled by the PI's 'mission and [its] purpose, which is broadly to research how the classical liberal ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment [...] can be applied to modern Scotland'<sup>61</sup>. The PI is a multidisciplinary think-tank concentrating, just like the DHI, exclusively on Scotland's economy, public services, environmental and agricultural policies, and issues of governance. The DHI describes its mission in more modest fashion; as 'primarily focused on areas linking economics and law, with a particular interest in the interaction between institutional or legal frameworks and market forces'<sup>62</sup>. It may be noteworthy, that the interplay of law and economics has been a central element of neoliberal discourse, as law defines humans as free subjects and guarantees private property of the means of production and thus is the basis of concrete power and dominance. Both institutes can be categorised as belonging to the neoliberal privatisation epistemic community<sup>63</sup>, though the DHI's director emphasises that they consider themselves only 'slightly to the right'<sup>64</sup>.

In contrast, the SCF operates in a different rhetoric universe. Officially non-aligned to any political party, the SCF's language resembles (New) Labour-speech: the institute's core aims are 'tackle[ing] inequalities in the marketplace', in public health and in the distribution of wealth<sup>65</sup>. It demands action led by the Scottish Executive to 'promote cost-cutting partnerships between local shops and major retailers, and offer incentives for new businesses to set up in low-income neighbourhoods' in order to allow



poor households to get more value for their money. In order to 'enjoy the benefits of competition' more commitment from government and a clearer challenge to private service providers is demanded<sup>66</sup>. Equality is not an aim in itself; at best marked disparities are seen as economically undesirable for all members of society – 'a pronounced set of inequalities is bad for everyone, for the economy, for the people in the middle, for the people at the bottom'<sup>67</sup>.

Although they differ in their ideological agenda, all three think-tanks address a similar audience and have similar generic aims. Broadening decision-makers' and a general public's view on public policy issues is what the interviewees described as their mission. They want to 'bridge the gap' between academic research and the policy-making community's need for information, 'therefore our target audience is never academia, [...] the people we want to see, [...] are the politicians and the civil servants'<sup>68</sup>. Alternatively, rather than primarily addressing politicians, the main target audience of e.g. the PI is constituted by 'current and future opinion formers'<sup>69</sup>, such as journalists, businessmen, civil servants, academics and students, who will change Scotland's 'climate of opinion'. Whereas the DHI classically focuses on politicians and civil servants and the PI concentrates on a broader Scottish elite, the SCF explicitly steers away from a narrow definition of decision-makers as senior politicians and businessmen and tries to shift attention, at least partly, to other groups: 'if you are a medical consultant or a head teacher [...], you have to make a decision often without enough evidence, you have to do it now, and you're not waiting around for government'<sup>70</sup>. Thus, governments are by no means the only recipients of the advice industry, although they remain the principal target. One concerted attempt of the SCF to influence the Scottish government shows this. Shortly before the elections to the Scottish Parliament in 2003, the SCF's director and others published an article in the pro-devolution<sup>71</sup> Sunday Herald. Entitled 'Dream Team', the authors named a number of persons they wanted to see in charge of governmental responsibilities. They claimed that the 'pool of MSP talent leaves a lot to be desired' and demanded training and more experienced support for senior politicians<sup>72</sup>. It is here where the SCF wants to help 'adding to the system some more support to develop the individual [...], that's our ability: to say to the government: "here are our results", [...] I just think we could do with a bit more expertise in the subjects than we have'<sup>73</sup>.

Informing the long-term agenda of policy change is at the centre of think-tank activity, and short-term electoral politics are seldom dealt with: 'we're not interested in lobbying politicians or worry about what is achievable by politicians; our ideas [...] could be almost inconceivable in the current political climate', said Tom Miers<sup>74</sup>. Keen on influencing broader long-term discourses unlike lobby groups, think-tanks also differ from university research institutes in that they take an "interested" view on their research fields – their explicit mission is to 'make things happen' over longer periods of time<sup>75</sup>. It is difficult to balance the drive to influence policy change with the interest in providing more than just ammunition for short-sighted election campaigns, as, in the eyes of the interviewees, parliamentary democracy does not favour long-term thinking<sup>76</sup>. If this is so, think-tanks struggle to become the intellectual driving force within this system,

although McCormick dismisses political parties as having forfeited this function, 'intellectually, they don't have the new ideas for policy ten years from now'<sup>77</sup>.

## SPONSORING AND FINANCES

Financial independence has been identified as a significant feature of a think-tank. All three institutes are registered as independent charitable educational organisations without political alignment, granting them tax exempt status. They have recognised the necessity of autonomy from a single sponsor and of their scholarly independence when it comes to the selection of research projects: 'we're trying to keep the majority of donations general because it avoids us having to worry whether we're fulfilling a contract to somebody who's our paymaster instead of being an entirely independent institute', said Main from the DHI<sup>78</sup>. The private sector is the most important source of revenue for the DHI and the PI, whereas the SCF has a more balanced mixture of public and private funding.

The SCF has received support by ongoing project-unrelated donations from companies such as Boots, BP (which warmly praises the SCF on its webpage as a provider of 'new thinking'<sup>79</sup>), British Telecom and Pfizer. Governmental bodies such as the Scottish Executive, charities and voluntary organisations (Charities Board Glasgow, Council for Voluntary Services) have commissioned and 'partnered' SCF projects<sup>80</sup>. The PI has had about 30 different sponsors over the last two years, of which about half were trusts, such as the Tay Charitable Trust and the Binks Trust. Companies, e.g. Scottish Equitable, Holyrood Holdings (Barclay Bros holding company for Telegraph Media Group, The Scotsman, the Spectator Magazine, Scotland on Sunday and the Edinburgh Evening News), and Stagecoach, the trade association Federation of Small Business and individuals make up the other half. Between 2000 and 2004, the DHI received financial sponsorship from blue chip corporations including the Royal Bank of Scotland, the Bank of Scotland, Lloyds TSB Scotland and Standard Life. The academic background of the DHI is reflected in the sponsorship by the ESRC and Edinburgh University's Europa Institute. Some individuals, including a member of the board of the SCDI and a Scotsman journalist, were also among the financial contributors<sup>81</sup>. Public institutions only play a minor role in the financing of the think-tanks under scrutiny. The SCF only rarely responds to consultations from the Scottish Executive, because it 'proved to be frustrating not to receive feedback on reports or to see any difference one's ideas are making'. The few SCF projects for the Executive were small-scale undertakings: 'we would facilitate some discussions groups, some seminars, we would write up the findings in the form of reports; we're talking probably of six days work'<sup>82</sup>.

## EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES

Network theories describe think-tanks as part of epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions or policy communities. Also, they engage in lesson learning and lesson drawing. Where do these three think-tanks fit in here? To foreclose some results, all think-tanks seem to be fairly reclusive when it comes to their cooperative research efforts – although there are many

personal links in the shape of guest lectures or holdings of chairs which do not translate into any further research collaboration.

The DHI hardly pursues any local, national or international cooperation with other think-tanks or research institutions. The only ongoing cooperation is to be found with the Europa Institute of the University of Edinburgh. Though Stone describes the DHI as an advocacy institute which is part of a wider epistemic community of privatisation and as the ASI's Scottish counterpart<sup>83</sup>, today it has neither the interest nor the ability in a wider cooperation with other like-minded institutions. Neither is the PI part of a larger network of think-tanks of a similar ideological background. The PI's Executive Director even regards networking as detrimental to the philosophical profile of his think-tank: 'if you collaborate with too many people you risk [...] diluting your position'. The personal linkage to the IEA in the form of the PI's current Executive Director and his aspirations to mould the PI on the IEA's model, do not translate into formal links with the London institute; 'there is no need for it, [...] Scotland operates [...] very separate from the UK'<sup>84</sup>. Research trajectories depend on the organisational structure of the institution. Shell organisations such as the PI and the DHI without in-house research staff depend on contract-researchers who mainly draw from their existing work. Therefore the DHI's and the PI's output is typical for advocacy institutes: synthesised and repackaged existing research. Membership in a larger research community such as an epistemic community is not a necessity if research is 'outsourced' in the first place. However, this means that research is hardly ever original. The SCF, which employs an in-house research team, carries out more original research and only occasionally draws from external expertise in the form of cooperation between the SCF and an individual researcher on an original project. Unlike the DHI and PI, the SCF has cooperated on research with various groups, including the Washington D.C Centre for Excellence in Government, the IPPR, the Public Health Institute of Scotland and the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health<sup>85</sup>. The SCF emphasises the international and national relevance of its projects and therefore the 'exportability' of its products. The in-house research competence allows it considerably more freedom to do research. Also, in 2001 the SCF established The International Futures Forum (IFF)<sup>86</sup> 'to bring international thinking to bear on our work'<sup>87</sup>, i.e. to promote policy ideas derived from policy transfer. Today, the IFF is independent of the SCF and it seems as if it has not proven particularly valuable to the SCF's rather pragmatic approach to public policy. The IFF, which tries to bring together so-called "deep thinkers" in order to 'examine[s] deep structures in the modern global system in its search for a second enlightenment'<sup>88</sup>, has rather obscure aims and purposes. With support from BP it 'explore[s] new ways of operating effectively and responsibly in a world of boundless complexity, a world we no longer fully understand and cannot control'<sup>89</sup>. This world is seen as a challenge for business, government and society and confronts them with the task of 'restor[ing] the capacity to act effectively and responsibly and thereby revive and foster a culture of human aspiration'. Based on this view of today's world, the IFF seeks to create a new 'paradigm' by renouncing 'traditional' ways of making sense of the world. How does the IFF view its role in the spread of the Second Enlightenment? A diagram in

one its first reports shows a “dialogue” between a variety of actors<sup>90</sup>. ‘Core dialogue thinkers’ disseminate knowledge, specialist information and support to a ‘tier of converters’, who ‘convert the insights from the dialogue into practical form and who disseminate it to a wider audience’. This group is composed of a broad variety of organisations and actors, such as the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), business corporations, artists and writers, the BBC, unspecified ‘social entrepreneurs’, policy makers, the OECD and also BP. Finally, a further group of agents, who will ‘make things happen on the ground’, should use the information provided through the dialogue. In spite of the emphasis on ‘dialogue’, the IFF appears to see its role almost in a Hayekian tradition of ‘original thinkers’ who inform policy entrepreneurs or ‘second hand dealers in ideas’<sup>91</sup> with their theoretical and rather abstract knowledge so that they can utilise it to influence the wider society, including policy-makers. And, in fact, the IFF makes ‘no apology for taking seriously Margaret Mead’s conviction that a small group of individuals can change the world’<sup>92</sup>. This small group convening for the IFF’s first meeting in April 2001 included among others former Director of the OECD International Futures Programme and ‘futurist’ Wolfgang Michalski; Kees van der Heijden (director of the scenario and strategy consultancy Global Business Network, Emeritus Professor of General and Strategic Management at Strathclyde University, former head of the Business Environment Division in Group Planning at Royal Dutch/Shell, London), Arun Mairo from Boston Consulting Group India, Biologist Brian Goodwin, Pat Kane from the Sunday Herald, and Mark Woodhouse, a philosopher interested in ‘scientific, spiritual, and healing communities’<sup>93</sup>. Rather than being a permanent think-tank, the IFF is an attempt to facilitate an international network of thinkers, businesspeople and policy makers. During a case study trip to BP’s Grangemouth refinery – the IFF group also conducted case studies on the ‘learning society in Dundee’<sup>94</sup> and on health provision for ‘deprived individuals and communities in Fife’<sup>95</sup> – the IFF came up with a “vision” for the future of BP and Falkirk/Grangemouth. When BP asked the IFF how it could combine the challenge of adjusting the plant to global competition bearing on mind the responsibility of BP to all local stakeholders<sup>96</sup>, (page 2) the IFF responded by proposing to understand the downsizing of the plant, which culminated in the lay off of about 1000 employees, as a creative act. As BP is a ‘different kind of energy company, radiating energy of all kinds – intellectual, physical, creative – into the community’, the sacking of workers equals ‘releasing high quality resources into the community’<sup>97</sup>. This rather interesting take on unemployment and economical restructuring is part of the IFF’s attempt to create new management and organisational approaches. It wants to act as a kind of “spiritual management consultancy” – although behind the airy language of challenges and creativity we find statements with stark consequences if put into practice: for example, the IFF’s stance on the NHS-generated ‘entitlement culture’ which should be transformed into a more creative ‘gift culture’, would lead to significant changes in the allocation of resources, as gift cultures rely on their reciprocity rather than on solidarity and social contracts<sup>98</sup>.

Though there is not much to talk about research cooperation, all institutes make considerable efforts in disseminating their research results to a

wider public and to decision-makers. The most popular method of reaching the latter are seminars and lectures, which are the loci of networking. They often lead to 'an unusual combination of people who really know the area' with members of other communities whom they otherwise never meet – these events are 'pretty elite, that's where we bring together senior civil servants, politicians, business people, the media'<sup>99</sup>. Politicians are the most difficult decision-makers to attract to these seminars. The SCF 'targets the MSPs who are the most talented' and most committed. Ministers, influential party spokespersons and young promising MSPs are among this hand-selected crowd of about 30 MSPs in the SCF's dissemination network<sup>100</sup>. The PI's approach to addressing 'future opinion formers' appears rather unsystematic and diffuse. They send out a two-page research summary to approximately 1000 recipients, including all MSPs. For its Executive Director, MSPs are not the most important other opinion formers on the networking-priority list. Uniquely among the think-tanks under scrutiny, the PI also sends its summaries to Scottish schools teaching economics. It lacks, however, resources to seek feedback.

To influence the climate of opinion, good press relations are very important. Different assessments of the difficulties of access became obvious during the research. The DHI claims it is struggling to get press attention, because of the media's commercial structure: the 'press generally want you to say something quite sensational, political, and we [...] are generally not talking in those terms'. Such media relations are left to institutes which 'are more politically oriented. [...] to be pejorative, some of them are for people who actually want to be MPs or politicians'<sup>101</sup>.

The PI, to the contrary, has more advanced press contacts, due to the fact that one of its founders is a senior journalist for one of Scotland's conservative broadsheets: The 'Scotsman is anyway quite keen on exploring classical liberal ideas [...], the editor of the Scotsman is quite happy for either me or our authors to have a column'<sup>102</sup>. Considering that the PI was founded by a senior Scotsman journalist with logistical and financial support by the newspaper and that it is the PI's main dissemination outlet it seems that the PI is a creation by The Scotsman.

The publishing efforts of all think-tanks rely heavily on the internet, as it is the most inexpensive medium and the one that is believed to allow the broadest dissemination as all reports are easily accessible. The reports published by these think-tanks typically do not exceed 40 pages and some of them are closer to pamphlets: 'we know quite a lot about our audience, and they [...] rarely read a lengthy report, so we're trying to get 20 minutes of their attention'. The major advantage of short publications for a non-academic audience is that the small time gap between research and publication does not 'frustrate people who live in different time-scales [than academics], particularly in business and government'<sup>103</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The article asked questions both about the application of organisational ideal types and theoretical concepts to Scotland's think-tank landscape. An adumbrated description of micro-level elite structures and "revolving

doors” amended the macro-level approach of epistemic communities and hegemonic structures.

The four-fold typology, mostly derived from a US point of view, needs adaptation to a Scottish context. Scotland’s think-tanks with a regional focus are a belated part of the third wave of think-tank organisational development from the late 1970s ‘which brought diversification, specialisation, more apparent normative agendas and stronger advocacy of policy analysis’, along with smaller sizes of institutes<sup>104</sup>. Not surprisingly, there are no universities without students as they are a US-American phenomenon. Furthermore, there are no true contract research organisations dealing exclusively with governmental partners. By and large, government is a rare partner for the three research institutes under scrutiny – each interviewee emphasised that this is a deliberate abstinence. Reasons for this are the small size and a degree of inflexibility that does not allow for quick responses. Small shell organisations such as the PI and the DHI share the disadvantage of not having ‘reports on the shelves’<sup>105</sup>, with which they could quickly respond to consultations from the Executive. Though a general aim, thinking ahead in the sense of having all sorts of public policy recommendations “abrufbereit” in order to influence the Executive’s decision, is difficult for the PI and the DHI. Therefore, they have to try to set the political agenda rather than to react to an Executive-set one.

Into what categories do the think-tanks under scrutiny fall? The PI features some characteristics of a vanity think-tank, seemingly being the brainchild and hobbyhorse of a conservative journalist at odds with devolution and the perceived leftist Scottish consensus. It also shares characteristics with the CenSPP in that they are basically run by only two persons, who either have or had ambitions for a political career or, respectively, run the think-tank like a hobby. Comparisons to Ian Duncan Smith’s attempt to set up ‘his’ think-tank, the Centre for Social Justice in London, could lead to the conclusion that some of the small think-tanks are refuges for failed politicians. However, it is difficult to assess the PI as it has only been working on a regular and consistent basis since the designation of a permanent executive director in May 2003 and is therefore the youngest think-tank in Scotland. It remains to be seen whether it will produce reports of a quality with which it can establish itself in the evolving Scottish think-tank landscape or whether it will basically serve the Scotsman as a reliable source for neo-liberal leaders and opinion pieces. The DHI has similarities with the CSPP, being an institution independent of the university, yet run by an academic and very rarely carrying out consultancy work, as was the case with the cost-benefit analysis of a Central Scotland Airport<sup>106</sup> as part of a Government White Paper, which ‘totally killed the idea’<sup>107</sup>. The SCF finally is closest to the ideal type of the US-style advocacy institute in all but size. It has the closest links to a variety of interest groups, notably the Scottish industrial and commercial sector. Its size, structure and activities also resemble London based think-tanks, whereas the shell-structure of DHI and PI is more typical for a relatively small and still evolving polity such as Scotland.

The three cases only partly support the theories of policy networks. Scottish think-tanks lead a rather isolated existence. Only the SCF makes noteworthy efforts to establish transnational or UK-wide cooperation with

other like-minded institutes and can be described as a member of an advocacy coalition. A thorough analysis of the impact of these institutes could reveal whether their deliberate abstinence from networking within epistemic communities has any effect on their success. Certainly, the smaller the think-tanks are and the more they merely act as a platform for contract-researchers, the less they are able to cope with the implications of a wider cooperation. It is certainly not a coincidence that the SCF, the only institution with in-house researchers, maintains a number of international contacts.

Scottish devolution confronted a newly evolved community of regional politicians with a complex new polity. Also, the business community had to learn how to deal with the Scottish Executive and to direct its attention from London to Edinburgh, facing new challenges but also new 'opportunities [...] to influence agendas and pursue alternatives'<sup>108</sup>. Last but not least, the civil service is still trying to accommodate itself with the shift from Westminster to Holyrood. This situation of uncertainty and change stimulated the growth of a Scottish advice industry. However, the market for independent research institutes created by devolution is limited and e.g. the DHI is quite open about the fact that it is struggling for scarce research funds. It can still afford to turn down projects, in spite of "commercial pressures [...] I think this year we're running a deficit, [but] that couldn't go on forever"<sup>109</sup>. The widespread disillusionment with devolution and the UK's political system and political class in general<sup>110</sup> has led to a disappointment with political parties, trade unions and the bureaucracy, i.e. the traditional intellectual driving forces of policy change. It is not clear whether think-tanks are beneficiaries of these failing systems, but it appears as if Scotland's think-tanks so far have been unable to establish themselves as an alternative source of research analysis.

Scotland's politics are often said to be shaped by a 'leftist consensus'<sup>111</sup>, 'egalitarian tendencies'<sup>112</sup> and more 'socially oriented'<sup>113</sup> attitudes; this consensus is not synonymous with the New Labour project. This perception is reflected in the political orientation of the think-tanks in this sample. Though all think-tanks distinguish themselves from university research by 'saying what they stand for' and by the desire to 'make things happen'<sup>114</sup>, they refrain from any close party alignment. Certainly, they do not deny their ideological background – neoliberal in the case of the PI and the DHI, social-democratic or Third Way in the case of the SCF and the CenSPP – but they all seek to 'challenge[ing] the consensus', in Scotland

'to say that you're a left think-tank would not really say anything, it would say you're part of the consensus, because Scotland is so heavily centre-left, and you want to challenge the consensus [...] so we're not really interested in being aligned in a partisan sense'<sup>115</sup>.

Think-tanks are very cautious about their public image and their identification with political ideologies. It seems as if the leftist consensus impedes a closer party affiliation and at the same time provokes a counter reaction to this consensus, as think-tanks want to be associated with new ideas. It appears as if for Scotland's think-tanks independence from political parties

are more important than it is for many London-based institutes. Whereas the IPPR suns itself in Tony Blair's appreciation of its work<sup>116</sup> and the ASI quotes Milton Friedman praising Thatcherite policies<sup>117</sup>, all three leading members of the think-tanks in the sample emphasised their non-partisanship. The SCF merely admitted belonging to a broad "European social democratic community"<sup>118</sup>, while the PI considers itself as fighting a lonesome struggle to popularise 'classical liberal ideas', which at the moment can be found in no political party<sup>119</sup>. Certainly, the DHI sees its 'right-wing' image as detrimental to its activities, as its audience mostly made up of the local professional community of businessmen and politicians is very careful not to be seen to be 'on the right'<sup>120</sup>.

An interesting characteristic of the Scottish think-tank landscape is that the proportional-representative electoral system favours non-aligned think-tanks, as opposed to Westminster's first-pass-the-post system. In the former, consensus among parties and decision-makers plays a far greater role for the success in the policy process and so do policies which can reach a consensus. Explicitly aligned think-tanks tend to contribute to polarising debates which is not helpful in coalition governments and does not increase think-tank utility.

Scotland's think-tank landscape is strikingly unbalanced when one looks at the ideological orientation of existing think-tanks. There are centre-left think-tanks and free-market think-tanks, but nothing promotes a nationalist agenda. It is surprising that the Scottish National Party (SNP) has not sponsored any activity that might inform its policies and bolster them with the credibility that think-tanks are able to offer.

Whether any of the three think-tanks has yet had any real influence upon policy-makers is hard to say. It is possible that their preference for grand, yet vague, long-term research projects which, written in a deliberately provocative style, does not appeal to decision-makers. None of the institutes has any mechanisms in place to receive and measure feedback. The DHI is probably the only institute in the sample that lends itself to an assessment, as it has been active for a much longer time-span than the SCF or the PI.

Throughout this text I have tried to show the links between institutions, business and government – be it on the personal level of "human capital" or a structural one relating to finances, dependencies and origins. The think-tank community appears to be a tightly knit one, leading members seems to move rather effortlessly between business community and think-tank community, though the revolving doors to the decision-making community seem to be more sluggish than they are in Westminster, where Geoff Mulgan, founder of Demos, then director of the Government's Strategy Unit and head of policy in the Prime Minister's office, is now director of the Institute for Community Studies. These exchanges are vital to the success of a think-tank and it remains to be seen whether Scottish think-tanks can establish themselves within the revolving door mechanism at full.



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