

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THINK TANKS IN THE EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

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Abstract:

The complex nature of the European Union has mainly been theorized through the governance process. In a global perspective, the concept of governance refers to an interdependence between state and non-state actors.³ The aim of this article is to investigate theoretical perspectives about actions of think tanks in a governance process. It shall be focused on think tanks, analyzed as knowledge organizations. Therefore this article shall investigate the strategies developed by think tanks in order to create a power dependency in the European governance.

Keywords: Think tanks, European governance, policy networks, power dependence, knowledge

Introduction

Far from being “catch-all” concept, *governance* refers to a mode of decision-making process, partly including non-state actors. In the first instance, researches on governance focus mainly on the “new” place and

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³ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, *Understanding governance. Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, Buckingham Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1997.

role of the state in the decision-making process.⁴ Rhodes⁵ underlines the change in the traditional meaning of government, referring to a new “government process”, condition of ordered rules, or new methods by which society is governed.

In the same perspective, Rhodes specifies that the concept of governance refers mainly to the interdependence between all ((non-)state) actors involved in the governance process. Nowadays a large range of non-state actors is indeed active in governance, or new decision-making process. The state is involved in an unequal system of governance wherein state should face various private actors within the process.

In this perspective, the European Union constitutes one of the biggest application of governance. Considered as a unique governance mix⁶, the European Union involves various non-state actors, such as think tanks (considered in the present article as a type of knowledge organizations⁷). According to the transparency register of the European Commission and European Parliament⁸, 413 think tanks are present in the European Union (EU). This represents 5.1% of all groups represented in the EU. Despite their low number, various scholars^{9,10} have recognized their active role within the European decision-making process. Think tanks acting at the European level are indeed active in various policy areas subject to EU competences.

⁴ David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁵ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, *Understanding governance. Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, Buckingham Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1997.

⁶ Tanja A. Börzel, “The European Union – A Unique Governance Mix”, in David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 613-627.

⁷ Diane Stone, “Agents of knowledge”, in David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 339-352.

⁸ In the interest of transparency of the European decision-making process, the European Commission created (in 2008) a register which takes a census of all “groups and organizations with which they [European Commission and European Parliament] interact”.

⁹ Philippa Sherrington, “Shaping the policy agenda: think tank activity in the European Union”, in *Global Society* no 14-2, 2000, pp. 173-189.

¹⁰ Heidi Ullrich, “European Union think tanks: generating ideas, analysis and debate”, in Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds.), *Think tank traditions. Policy research and the politics of ideas*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 51-70.

Therefore this paper addresses think tanks as knowledge organizations on European governance from a theoretical perspective. As knowledge organizations, think tanks seek to establish a power dependence. This establishment of such phenomenon is possible in a governance framework, which include various non-state actors such as think tanks.

Therefore this paper will first refers to the concept of governance, by underlying the involvement of non-state actors in decision-making structures, and the resource-dependence developed by those actors. Then the focus will be stressed on the European governance, defined by Börzel as a unique governance mix and underlying the network aspect of this European governance. The last part of the present paper will go further on think tanks – as knowledge organizations –, and on their strategies to create or maintain resources dependency.

I. Governance

Since the beginning of the European integration process, the project that has been set in place has ceaselessly raised the question of the relationship between the member-States and its institutions. Such a project has always been based on a major political principle which has never been fundamentally questioned, the principle according to which the European integration cannot be realized or progress without the impulsion of the member-States. All along its history, the European integration has witnessed various debates such as the powers of its institutions, the decision making process (more specifically the decisions to be taken with a majority or with the unanimity of the member-States) or, more generally, the governance of the European Union. However, if evolutions have been noticed in the missions as well as in the running of the European institutions, the State was most often seen, though from a superficial perspective, as an intangible and stable unit on which is based the European construction. Nevertheless, State actor shall also be subject to evolutions.

Essentially after the second world war, the evolution of the State under the influence of various factors gradually lead to the increase of its burden and the sclerosis of its bureaucracy. Such phenomenon happened while new issues occurred on domestic as well as on the international scene (such as globalization). These issues induce the State to be overwhelmed by

challenges that are beyond its capacity to control or to intervene alone in its three functions of social cohesion, macroeconomic balances and security.¹¹ The State then gradually faces a phase of transformation crisis. Some are referring to it in terms of “end of the State, of “erosion of the State”, of “obsolete State” ...¹²¹³

Since the beginning of the 90's, in particular because of the phenomenon of multiple globalization, we are witnessing a shift from the concept of “government” toward “governance”.¹⁴ The World Bank, the international organization which revived this concept fallen into obsolescence since the 18th century, provides the following definition: “a way in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development” (World Bank, 1992, 1). Governance is then presented as likely to provide solutions to legitimacy and efficiency problems faced by democracies in this context of transformation crisis of the State. As early as the end of the 80's, governance was seen as a possible answer to what was defined by Renate Mayntz as a “crisis of governmentality”.¹⁵

As specified by the World Bank, the conception of governance is not without implication as it carries a number of principles which confers to it a strong prescriptive value: transparency, accountability, struggle against corruption¹⁶, respect of the rule of law and of human rights, decentralization and balanced budget thanks to the reduction of public spending...¹⁷ Furthermore, since the early 90's, two ideas were spread on a global scale by two political initiatives: the “Washington Consensus” on the one hand, and the “Washington Security Agenda” on the other hand.

¹¹ Thomas Fleiner-Gerster, *Théorie générale de l'Etat*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.

¹² Susan Strange Susan: *The retreat of the State: the Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

¹³ Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: the Rise of Regional Economies*, London: Harper Collins, 1996.

¹⁴ Pierre Vercauteren, “Globalisations, Etat et Gouvernance”, in *Studia Diplomatica* no 57-1, 2004, pp. 55-82.

¹⁵ Renate Mayntz, “Governing Failures and the Problem of Governability: Some Comments on a Theoretical Paradigm”, in Jan Kooiman (ed.), *Modern Governance: New Government-Society Interactions*, London, Sage, 1993, pp. 9-20.

¹⁶ Joan Corkery (ed.), *Gouvernance: concepts et applications*, Institut International des Sciences Administratives, 1999, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ Ali Kazancigil, “La gouvernance: itinéraires d'un concept” in Javier Santiso, *A la recherche de la démocratie: mélanges offerts à Guy Hermet*, Paris: Karthala, 2002, pp. 121-131.

“Together, they promulgate the view that a positive role for government is to be fundamentally distrusted in core areas of socioeconomic life – from market regulation to disaster planning – and that the sustained application of inter-nationally adjudicated policy and regulation threatens freedom, limits growth, impedes development and restrains the good”¹⁸. More specifically, the Washington Consensus was aiming at enhancing economic liberalization and to adapt the public domain – local, national and global – to market-leading institutions and processes. In this perspective, the main principles of governance have been formulated by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in ten points¹⁹ :

- 1) The government should steer rather than get involved in rowing;
- 2) The government should empower communities to serve themselves rather than itself get involved in community service activities (e.g. in health and welfare related services);
- 3) The government should set out to create competition in public service delivery so that customers get the best value for money;
- 4) The government should be transformed from being rules-driven to being mission-driven;
- 5) The government should be result-oriented, and fund outcomes rather than inputs (even if it means liberalizing the budgeting rules and regulations);
- 6) The government should be customer-driven, meeting the needs of the citizen-customer rather than mainly the needs and requirement of the bureaucracy;
- 7) The government should become business-like, and try and earn what it spends on its various activities;
- 8) The government should concentrate on prevention rather than cure, and learn to anticipate problems;
- 9) The government should decentralize its operations and learn to get its work done through participative management and team work rather than hierarchically through the orders of the bosses;

¹⁸ Held David, “Reframing global governance: Apocalypse soon or reform”, in *New Political Economy* no 11-2, 2006, p. 161.

¹⁹ David Osborne & Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector from Schoolhouse to State House, City House Hall to Pentagon*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992.

- 10) The government should harness incentives and markets rather than controls and regulations to bring about desired changes.

In such a context, the state will find itself somehow formatted under the constraint of the markers laid down by international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, which will embody this approach to governance on the global level. In other terms, the principal bodies of world governance have constituted the main vectors of external pressures on the state in favour of the withdrawal of this latter and consequently the arrival of the phenomenon of the shift of "government" towards "governance". Such an approach will be recommended not only in the developing countries but also in the Northern hemisphere, the countries of this latter having been encouraged in this direction not only by international bodies but also by leaders of the main industrialized countries benefiting from a preponderance in the formal bodies of global governance.

In this regard, Ali Kazancigil observes that : *"Governance (for the countries of the North) seemed to be able to give satisfying results in situations where the hierarchical dimension is weak and the heterarchical dimension strong with multiple partners with different statuses : public and private, or belonging to different jurisdictions and countries"*.²⁰ By its logic, governance has therefore been the bearer and has stimulated a movement of deregulation and even regulation. The formal processes have thus suffered a movement of withdrawal in favour of informal arrangements. It is this that Yannis Papadopoulos notes when he underlines: *"Governance often brings a de-formalisation of decision-making structures..."*.²¹

It should be noted that such an approach to governance which was dominant during the 90's was faced with criticism (Held, 2006, Ikenberry 2010) due not only to its limits but also because of the inadequacies of the results achieved in its implementation. However, despite these objections, a few of its principles are still leaving their mark on the European governance, particularly in relation to the role of the State, the way public actor is to act and the involvement of non-State actors. In this perspective, the 2008 European "White Paper on Governance", defines five principles combined to form the basis of what the EU thinks of good governance:

²⁰ Ali Kazancigil, *op cit.*, 2002, p. 8.

²¹ Yannis Papadopoulos, "Démocratie, gouvernance et "management de l'interdépendance": des rapports complexes", in Javier Santiso (ed.), *A la recherche de la démocratie. Mélanges offerts à Guy Hermet*, Paris: Karthala, 2002, p. 135.

- *openness*: the European institutions should attach more importance to transparency and communication in their decision-making;
- *participation*: citizens must be more systematically involved in the drafting and implementation of policies;
- *accountability*: the role of each party in the decision-making process needs to be clarified. Each actor involved should then assume responsibility for the role given to them;
- *effectiveness*: decisions need to be taken at the appropriate level and time, and deliver what is needed;
- *coherence*: the EU conducts extremely diverse policies which need to be pursued coherently.

II. European governance

In the context previously presented, it is worth notice that the study of the European Union has been mainly dominated by international relations approaches. Until 1960s, various scholars²²²³ mobilized the neofunctionalist approach in order to explain the European integration.

By initiating the European integration process, states are “losing control in an increasing complex web of interdependence, a web that involved supranational, subnational, and non-state actors”²⁴. However, from mid-1960s, realist approaches took precedence. Intergovernmentalist scholars²⁵ underlined a slowdown of the European integration by strengthening the national authority on European issues. From mid-1960s to mid-1980s, arguments developed by intergovernmentalist scholars have prevailed.

Then first theorizations of the European Union as political system appeared in 1986 with a renewed European integration: the Single European Act. “This initiative led to an expansion in EU competences and revised decision-making procedures, most notably to eliminate the national veto in

²² Ernest Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950-57*, London: Library of World Affairs, 1958.

²³ Leon Lindberg, *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963.

²⁴ Ian Bache, “Multi-level governance in the European Union”, in David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 628-641.

²⁵ Stanley Hoffman, “The European process at Atlantic cross-purpose”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies* no 3, 1964, pp. 85-101.

a number of areas to facilitate faster integration”²⁶. The Single European Act allows the emergence of a new wave of theory which counterview the intergovernmentalist / neofunctionalist approaches: the governance.

From 1990s on, scholars began the study and analysis of the nature of the European Union through governance process which seemed to best capture the nature of this latter. Through the governance, the European Union is described as “a unique set of multi-level, non-hierarchical and regulatory institutions, and a hybrid mix of state and non-state actors”²⁷ or network governance.²⁸

In order to define the specific architecture of the European Union, Börzel²⁹ underlines that is “a unique supranational organization that could not be compared to any other form of political order we are familiar with at the national or international level”. Therefore she specifies that the European governance is mainly characterized by a “unique governance mix”, including three modes of governance (hierarchical, market and network).

According to Börzel³⁰, network governance is a negotiation system wherein public and private actors are involved. Börzel³¹ mobilizes the concept of “network governance” to refer to a public-private co-regulation. That is the reason why we aim to understand the nature of the European Union through policy networks. The literature on *policy network analysis* reveals three main trends: network as description, theory or prescription.

Given that our purpose – in this paper – is the understanding of the European Union, we will considered the network as a description (i.e. the understanding of the decision-making process).

The interest in the analysis of *policy networks* is essentially due to the development of major analytical concepts in the study of public policies. In a general understanding of *policy networks*, Muller and Surel³² suggested an interpretation scheme, characterized as the “interpretation of state/society

²⁶ Ian Bache, *op cit.*, 2012, p. 628.

²⁷ Simon Hix, “The study of the European Union II: The “new governance” agenda and its revival”, in *Journal of European Public Policy* no 5, 1998, p. 39.

²⁸ Beate Kohler-Koch, “Catching up with change: The transformation of governance in the European Union”, in *Journal of European Public Policy* no 3, 1996, pp. 359-380.

²⁹ Tanja A. Börzel, *op cit.*, 2012, p. 613.

³⁰ Tanja A. Börzel, *op cit.*, 2012.

³¹ Tanja A. Börzel, *op cit.*, 2012, p. 616.

³² Pierre Muller and Yves Surel, *Analyse des politiques publiques*, Paris Montchrestien, 1998, p. 91.

relations that emphasizes the horizontal and non-hierarchical nature of these relations, the relative informality of exchanges between the actors of the network, the lack of closure that allowed the proliferation of devices and the combination of technical resources (related to the expertise of actors) and political resources (related to the position of the actors in the political system)".

Within the scientific literature, various definitions are developed and proposed. From those different definitions, there is a general agreement on the idea according to which there is an interdependence between actors present in the construction of the public action. The *policy network* is thus in strong contradiction with the monolithic vision of the central state.

Then as previously specified, Rhodes³³ underlines three different ways to understand *policy networks*, networks as description, theory or prescription. While the last two are dedicated to the study of the network behavior or the reform of the public management, the study of networks as a description underlines three types of networks: as interest intermediation, as interorganizational analysis and as a specific form of governance. According to the first school of thought (networks as interest intermediation), *policy networks* are mobilized as a generic concept which allows the analysis of each relationships between public/private actors. The second school mainly underlines the relationships between political institutions, rather than the relationships between actors within those institutions. Finally, the governance (third) school mobilizes the *policy networks* as specific form of interaction between public and private actors. This interaction form – characterized by a non-hierarchical coordination – opposes the two other mode of governance, the hierarchical and market governance.

New system of governance

The first references of *policy network* as a theoretical approach could be found "in the literature on the EU as an emerging political system"³⁴.

³³ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, "Policy Network Analysis", in Michael Moran, Martin Rein and Robert E. Goodin, *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

³⁴ Tanja A. Börzel, "What's so special about Policy networks? An Exploration of the Concept and Its Usefulness in Studying European Governance", in *European Integration online papers* no 1-16, 1997, p. 12.

Some scholars³⁵³⁶³⁷³⁸ question the dichotomous conceptualization of the European system of governance (international organization vs. supranational state). They reject these categories because of the state centric perspective. The permanent focus on the principle of territorial State sovereignty does not allow grasping the essence of the unique characteristic of the European Union as a new and unique emerging political system, summed up as “governance without government”³⁹. So the European governance could not be summarized in a hierarchical coordination by a supranational actor (such as the European Commission) or by all the national government of the Member States (through the Council of Ministers). Rather, negotiations are central in the manner in which the European governance proceeds. Public and private actors – from different levels and dimensions of government – are linked in policy networks.

Many scholars agree on the idea according to which the new system of governance is founded on a non-hierarchical coordination in policy networks between all its “participants” (from various level of government and spheres of the society). However some scholars (such as Kohler-Kohl⁴⁰) considers this new system of governance as a transformation of the State.

They affirm that a new form of the State is emerging. Other scholars – such as Christiansen & Jørgensen⁴¹ – call completely into question the whole conception of the State. Christiansen and Jørgensen⁴² state that governance could no longer be exclusively linked to the State if a governance through

³⁵ John G. Ruggie, “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations”, in *International Organisation* no 47-1, 1993, pp. 139-174.

³⁶ Thomas Christiansen, “European Integration between Political Science and International Relations Theory: The End of Sovereignty”, in *EUI Working Paper RSC* no 94-4, Florence: European University Institute, 1994, pp. 1-16.

³⁷ Beate Kohler-Koch, “Interactive Governance: Regions in the Network of European Politics”, paper presented at the *ECISA Conference*, 1997.

³⁸ Gerry Stoker, “Governance as theory: five propositions”, in *ISSJ* no 155, 1998.

³⁹ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, “The European Union, Cohesion Policy and Sub-National Authorities in the United Kingdom”, paper prepared for the *Robert Schuman Centre*, Florence: European University Institute, 1995.

⁴⁰ Beate Kohler-Koch, *op cit.*, 1997.

⁴¹ Thomas Christiansen and Knud E. Jørgensen, “Towards the ‘Third Category’ of Space: Conceptualizing the Changing Nature of Borders in Western Europe”, paper presented at the *second Pan-European Conference on International Relations*, Paris, 1995.

⁴² Thomas Christiansen and Knud E. Jørgensen, *op cit.*, 1995.

negotiation is foreseeable. So “this opens up for a polycentric system of non-territorial based governance”⁴³.

In both cases, policy network (as a theoretical tool) claims to provide some causal explanation of the processes of transformation, drawing from the *game theory*⁴⁴ or *resource dependency theory*⁴⁵.

So, Börzel⁴⁶ argued that the European decision-making process takes place in a complex, diversified and dynamic environment. This European environment includes numerous national and European public actors who are increasingly dependent on the resources of private (from all territorial levels) and subnational actors.

Börzel⁴⁷ proceeds to assert that “policy networks provide a most efficient form of governance at the European as well as the national level”. She justified her assumption by claiming (1) the inefficiency of the hierarchical coordination, either through the European Commission or the set of national governments; and (2) the limited possibilities of privatization due to the problem of market failure.

Policy Network – power dependence

As previously specified, governance involved numerous non-state actors who have limited resources. Network governance is indeed made of ((non-)state)) actors with limited resources. Therefore no actors may have the leadership – in terms of resources.

In order to understand this resources dependence between actors involved in the governance process, the focus will be laid on the power dependence approach.

Following this conceptual approach, *policy networks* are defined as “sets of resources-dependent organizations”⁴⁸. The main feature of those relationships (between organizations) is power dependence. Rhodes⁴⁹ underlines

⁴³ Tanja A. Börzel, *op cit.*, 1997, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Fritz W. Scharpf, *Games Real Actors Play: Actor-centered Institutionalism in Policy Research*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

⁴⁵ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, *op cit.*, 1997.

⁴⁶ Tanja A. Börzel, *op cit.*, 1997.

⁴⁷ Tanja A. Börzel, *op cit.*, 1997, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, *op cit.*, 2006, p. 431.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

the inextricable relationship between organizations which is mainly due to the need of (additional) resources of organizations in order to reach their goal(s). There is a need – for each organization – to exchange their resources. From that moment on, each organization considers each relationship as a ‘game’ – with its own rules. Each organization (=player) deploy its own resources (of whatever type: legal, financial, informational...) in order to maximize its influence on outcomes whilst avoiding being dependent on others players. So according to Rhodes⁵⁰, the *policy network* is like a game which is regulated by rules. Each rules have been negotiated and agreed by all players. Therefore there are various variations or differences between networks due to the specific distribution of resources in each network. Finally, Rhodes also specifies that “networks have a significant degree of autonomy from government”⁵¹.

Power dependence – knowledge as resource

As we explain below, this paper is focused on think tanks considered as knowledge producer. Therefore in this case, power dependence is based on knowledge as resource.

Knowledge, as such, does not exist. As precised by Callon and Latour⁵², scientific facts result from construction: “nature is not speaking on his behalf”. Those two sociologists underlined that science “could not be reduced to a mere record of results provided by experiments”. However even if knowledge constitutes a resource-dependence, this paper shall not get into a precise definition of what knowledge is, but what it is referring.

According to Diane Stone⁵³, knowledge refers to “first, research and evaluation studies and other in-house expert products originating from within official or public domain; second, scholarly and scientific knowledge that is used, abused, or adapted for governance activities and deliberations; third, independent policy analysis and advice commissioned or given on the basis of recognized expertise of individuals or organizations”.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² Michel Callon and Bruno Latour (eds), *La science telle qu'elle se fait. Anthologie de la sociologie des sciences de langue anglaise*, Paris : La Découverte, 1991, p. 8.

⁵³ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2012, p. 339.

Following Diane Stone⁵⁴, knowledge has long had a particular “task”: inform and/or legitimize public policies. However, nowadays, knowledge agents are involved in a devolution of governance. Diane Stone⁵⁵ underlines that “knowledge agents have intrinsic governance capacities in their power to define problems, shape the climate of debate, or engage in standard-setting, rule-making, or other regulatory activity”.

Knowledge organizations

Considered in the third Diane Stone’s⁵⁶ perspective, knowledge organization are non-public organizations which are undertaking policy researches. Weidenbaum⁵⁷ specifies that think tanks represent a form of knowledge organization which seek to influence (in)directly policy. Think tank often claims the “independence” of their researches and findings

With regards to think tanks, Stone⁵⁸ underlined that they often highlight and claim the “independence” of their findings; considered as more credible than government researches. Think tank claim indeed their freedom “to think the unthinkable and question policy orthodoxy”⁵⁹.

III. Think tanks, agents of knowledge

In the framework of this paper, the focus is stressed on think tanks, as specific knowledge organizations present in the European Union. As mentioned in the introduction, this paper addresses think tanks in the European governance. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to discuss the nature of a specific type of non-state actors generally involved in the governance process.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ Murray Weidenbaum, *The Competition of Ideas: The World of Washington Think Tanks*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009.

⁵⁸ Diane Stone, “Garbage cans, recycling bins or think tanks? Three myths about policy institutes”, in *Public Administration* no 85, 2007, pp. 259-278.

⁵⁹ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2007, p. 344.

Definition of think tank

Before going further on *knowledge networks*, it is relevant to define what a *think tank* is. There are almost as many definitions as researchers writing on think tanks. Generally speaking, think tanks “vary considerably in size, structure, policy ambit and significance”⁶⁰. Those various differences between definitions reflect the various cultural comprehension and analysis of these organizations.

Considering that the first definitions of think tanks were expressed in the Anglo-American literature, a first development of those definitions will be provided before the development of a European definition.

In a general and global comprehension, James Mc Gaan⁶¹ (University of Pennsylvania, US) defines think tanks as “organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues in an effort to enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues”.

Donald Abelson⁶² (Western University, Canada) remains more cautious about a complete and precise definition. However, Abelson and Carberry⁶³ give a first definition of a think tank that “may consist of a handful of people involved actively in studying a particular policy area who seek to inform and educate policy makers and the public through a variety of channels”.

Following Abelson and Carberry⁶⁴, this definition may fit for the biggest majority of think tanks in Canada and the United States. Given the diversity of think tanks, those scholars do not provide any global definition; they underline some common features of think tanks. In general, think tanks are “nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations engaged in the study of public policy”.

⁶⁰ Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds.), *Think tank traditions. Policy research and the politics of ideas*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 2.

⁶¹ James Mc Gaan, *Think tanks and policy advice in the United States. Academics, advisors and advocates*, Oxon: Routledge, 2007, p. 11.

⁶² Donald Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter?*, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009 (2nd edition).

⁶³ Donald Abelson and Christine M. Carberry, “Following Suit or Falling behind? A Comparative Analysis of Think Tanks in Canada and the United States”, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science* no 31-3, 1998, p. 529.

⁶⁴ Donald Abelson and Christine M. Carberry, *op cit.*, 1998, pp. 525-555.

A British perspective is provided by Diane Stone (University of Warwick, UK) and Andrew Denham (University of Nottingham, UK)⁶⁵ who put the “North-American” definitions into perspective. They stressed that “adopting an Anglo-American definition of ‘think tank’ is problematic”; especially regarding the ‘free-thinking’ notion – supported by the North-American authors – which does not travel into other cultures (as in Europe).

Generally speaking, Stone⁶⁶ considers that the term of think tank is used to mean “independent [...] policy research institutes containing people involved in studying a particular policy area or a broad range of policy issues, actively seeking to educate or advice policy-makers and the public through a number of channels”. According to Stone⁶⁷, think tank should not be classified as a (sub-)category of non-governmental organization (NGO). Even if we can consider think tank as a non-state actor; it is not a question – once again – of NGO. In some cases, think tanks are closely linked to government or universities, which creates dependence and connections, which is denied by NGOs.

On the basis of the various scientific perspectives, we can deduce some characteristics of “European think tanks”, i.e. think tanks active in the European arena. The first two features are common with north-American think tanks, there is a difference on the third feature.

Firstly, think tanks are “permanent organizations”, which differentiate them from social movements. Most think tanks are nowadays established as (international) association without lucrative purpose or non-governmental organizations. Hence, they take place outside the public sector. Therefore this allows them a significant autonomy from any corporate and any other interest.

Secondly, as non-state actor, think tanks have no formal decision-making power. They are organizations producing policy-oriented researches and/or analyses, with their own research team. As shown later, these analyses can take several different forms, according to the “type” or “category” of

⁶⁵ Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds.), *op cit.*, 2004, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Diane Stone, “Think tank transnationalisation and non-profit analysis, advice and advocacy”, in *Global society* no 14-2, 2000, p. 154.

⁶⁷ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2000, p. 154.

think tanks. According to Denham and Garnett⁶⁸, the primary objective of a think tank is the communication of their results to policy-makers (to inform public policy decisions), and public opinion in order to influence public opinion.

Finally, if we wish to define think tanks from a European perspective, think tanks are non-profit organizations, financed through public and/or private funds⁶⁹, which represents a major difference compared to north-American think tanks. However a precise definition shall not be further developed in this section. Because, as William Wallace⁷⁰ stresses, “it therefore makes little sense to define a “think tank” too precisely. The functions which think tanks fulfil – research relevant to public policy, promotion of public debate, the questioning of the conventional wisdom, the formulation and dissemination of alternative concepts and policy agendas – can be fulfilled in many ways, under different constraints”.

Furthermore, as stated above, Stone, Denham and Garnett⁷¹ take some distance from the notion of independence developed by Mc Gaan⁷².

In one of his studies, this latter makes a clear distinction between independent and affiliated think tanks. However Stone, Denham and Garnett⁷³ consider that “the notion according to which a *think tank* requires independence or autonomy vis-à-vis the State in order to enjoy a perfect 'freedom of thought' is a peculiarly Anglo-American notion that does not export well in other cultures”. This ‘free-thinking’ linked to think tanks is an Anglo-American norm which could not be translated into other different

⁶⁸ Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *British Think Tanks and the Climate of Opinion*, London: UCL Press, 1998, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁹ Based on the report from the *Bureau of European Policy Advisers* (2012), we can argue that the big majority of “European” think tanks are funded by the European Union and various stakeholders.

⁷⁰ William Wallace, “Ideas and influence”, in Diane Stone, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *Think tanks across nations. A comparative approach*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 226.

⁷¹ Diane Stone, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *Think tanks across nations. A comparative approach*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

⁷² James Mc Gaan, *Think tanks and policy advice in the United States. Academics, advisors and advocates*, Oxon: Routledge, 2007.

⁷³ Diane Stone, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *Think tanks across nations. A comparative approach*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 3.

political cultures. Furthermore Stone⁷⁴ points out that this distinction – between independent and affiliated think tank – is not clear.

Prior to a better understanding of think tanks through their institutional development, it is necessary to analyze the notion of dependence to which think tanks are associated. Think tanks have indeed specific engagement or relationship with “government” in order to succeed in influencing policy. However, according to Stone and Ullrich⁷⁵, “their desire to preserve intellectual autonomy means that most institutes try to strike a delicate balance between dependence on government and total isolation from it”. That is the reason why the notion of “(in)dependence” should be taken with care.

According to Stone and Ullrich⁷⁶, “the degree of independence of these organizations varies across at least three dimensions”: a legal, financial and/or scholarly independence. Firstly, the *legal independence* means that we face a private organization located outside the formal / public apparatus. Considering that, various “types” of status can be observed, these organizations can be established as a commercial entity or as a non-profit organization. However even if some organizations are – by their status – considered as private organization, they are directly linked to government, political parties or corporation. Secondly, the *financial independence* “could be constructed as developing an endowment or having numerous sponsors and a diverse funding base”⁷⁷. According to Stone⁷⁸, the increase in the number of stakeholders and financial sources allows think tanks to tend to an intellectual integrity. Thirdly, the *scholarly independence* is analyzed through the research practices within an organization, such as the freedom of the research agenda definition, the peer review of the research, the critical analysis,...Overall, “cultural understandings of independence, the degree of research autonomy and the extent of interest in policy and political issues, varies [...] from one institute to another”⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2000.

⁷⁵ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, “Policy Research Institutes and Think Tanks in Western: Development Trends and Perspectives”, in *Discussion Paper No. 24. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative*, Open Society Institute, Budapest: Hungary, 2003, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.*, 2003, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.*, 2003, p. 7.

⁷⁸ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2000.

⁷⁹ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.*, 2003, p. 7.

IV. Think tanks, actors included in network governance

As specified in a lot of analysis, numerous scholars⁸⁰⁸¹ have highlighted the blurring of borders between state and non-state actors; through the various relationships between states actors and think tanks.

Along the same lines, Marie-Laure Djelic and Krestin Sahlin⁸² consider think tanks as “soft actors” which are “institutionally embedded”. By contracting out researches and consultations to public actors, think tanks are allowing the emergence of a co-constitutive governance.

If we have a look at the strategies developed by think tanks, we can highlight that the set of actions put in place lead to the emergence of networks, considered by Stone⁸³, as “a mode of governance whereby the resources of public and private actors are mobilized toward common policy objectives in domains outside the hierarchical control of government”.

From their part, Stone and Ullrich⁸⁴ have developed “methods that [...] may lead think tank research to have increased policy relevance”. They have developed those ten methods on basis of think tanks in EU member states.

1. *Quality*: Stone and Ullrich⁸⁵ recommend think tanks not to favor the promotion of ideas at the expense of the quality of research. An inadequate, wrong, or botched research will have negative impact on the think tank’s reputation.
2. *Dissemination*: “one supply problem is the inadequate dissemination of research result”⁸⁶. Researches and findings should be disseminated by other means ways than the academic way (which represents a small readership). The dissemination is an important method also underlined by Abelson⁸⁷ who seeks to measure a part of the think tank’s impact on public opinion in accordance with the number finding’s publications in media.

⁸⁰ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2012, pp. 339-352.

⁸¹ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, *op cit.*, 1997.

⁸² Marie-Laure Djelic and Kerstin Sahlin, “Reordering the World: Transnational Regulatory Governance and its challenge”, in David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 745-758.

⁸³ Diane Stone, *op cit.*, 2012, p. 346.

⁸⁴ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.*, 2003, p. 23.

⁸⁵ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.*, 2003.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ Donald Abelson, *op cit.*, 2009.

3. *The 'Brief Case Test'*: this third method is based on the strategy used by the president of the Heritage Foundation (American think tank). He always required his staff to write 'policy brief' that he could cart in a brief-case to Capitol Hill. Those "policy brief" should not exceed ten pages, and should summarize the policy issue and lay out explicit recommendation in order to resolve the "problem". "Research is re-packaged to meet the specific needs of policy makers: executive summaries; simple and non-technical language; short and accessible for busy politicians or staffers to read in 15 minutes"⁸⁸.
4. *Creative Communication*: generally speaking, researchers are poor communicator and have difficulties to "sell" their findings. Therefore think tanks hire 'policy entrepreneurs' who can simplify – through story lines – complicated research findings. "Usually an entrepreneur is an individual, but sometimes an organization such as a think tank or research network plays a similar role in marketing knowledge or synthesizing and popularizing research"⁸⁹.
5. *Public Debate*: "research for policy is also research for the recipients of that policy"⁹⁰. Popular support is an item that should be taken into consideration. A "good" policy could fail if it does not have the support of the public opinion. Therefore the presentation of research findings to a large audience allows the protection of the research integrity. Researcher are considered by public opinion as objective actors who can present findings without any distortion.
6. *Serving Policy Maker Demands*: policymakers are looking for policy researches. However they are in a 'pressure cooker' environment. So policy researches should be relevant, and above all action oriented. Policy makers demands may refer to two different purpose. Some decision-makers are asking for research findings in order to put into question a political status quo. Others are looking for a scientific credibility in order to legitimate their actions, decisions and policy orientations. The most important – for a think tank – is to know the decision-making process and the deadline or forced by decision-makers.

⁸⁸ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.* 2003, p. 23.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

7. *Policy process awareness*: Stone and Ullrich⁹¹ underlines that “one of the supply of research is flawed is due to the poor policy understanding of researchers about both the policy process and how research might be relevant to this process”. Researchers should have a good knowledge of the different stages of the policy process, and being aware of windows of opportunity within this policy process. Generally speaking, think tanks are more active at the ‘agenda setting’ and ‘policy evaluation’ stages. Furthermore, Stone and Ullrich⁹² specifies that decision-makers are in an environment which exerts pressure in all directions. Therefore policy analyses and alternatives are increasingly needed by public actors.
8. *Target research to key audiences*: the principal challenge of think tanks is to determine who are the key actors within a policy community (both inside and outside the government) at each stage of the decision-making process.
9. *Networks*: “research results are given force and amplified by the collegial recognition of peers and the weight of scholarly opinion. Knowledge networking activities [...] help build a scientific consensus that decision-makers can only ignore at their own risk”⁹³.
10. *Cooptation and cooperation*: think tanks should create a bridge between their research topics and “policy actors projects”. According Stone and Ullrich⁹⁴, “researchers in close contact with policy makers develop a better understanding of their needs and the political constraints they face”. This cooperation with policy-makers could be done through the appointment to official committees. In this way, think tanks may provide updated feedbacks and recommendations on a specific policy.

Conclusion

The theoretical perspectives on think tanks in the European Union provides opportunities and need for further empirical research. Indeed such a research remains an under investigated field in the study of the EU governance. This research is not, however without challenge.

⁹¹ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.* 2003, p. 24.

⁹² *Ibidem.*

⁹³ Diane Stone and Heidi Ullrich, *op cit.* 2003, p. 25.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

Indeed, the scanning of theories about and around governance reveals its complexity as analytic tool. Commonly understood as buzzword, framing device or umbrella concept, *governance* constitutes itself, as David Levi-Faur⁹⁵ underlines, “an interdisciplinary research agenda on order and disorder, efficiency and legitimacy all in the context of the hybridization of modes of control that allow the production of fragmented and multidimensional order *within* the state, *by* the state, *without* the state, and *beyond* the state”. Governance refers – since the beginning of the 1990s - to all the changes related to the exercise of power within the State system.

This polysemous concept should not be reduced to a grid of analysis of the various changes affecting the State; its complex developments must also be taken into consideration.⁹⁶

In an ideological dimension, governance can be viewed as “a process of coordination of public and private actors, social groups, institutions designed to achieve goals collectively discussed and defined in fragmented and uncertain environments”⁹⁷. This definition of governance follows a logical horizontal relationship – rather than a vertical relationship between policy makers and civil society. This definition postulates that the various political bodies do not longer hold a monopoly on political decision-making.

One of the most notorious application of the concept of governance is the European Union. Scholars⁹⁸⁹⁹ have indeed seek to understand and analyse the European integration with international relations approaches.

However, the years 1990s are synonymous of the emergence of the governance process in order to best capture the specific architecture of the European Union, considered by Börzel¹⁰⁰ as a unique governance-mix. In

⁹⁵ David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Jacques Chevallier, “La gouvernance, un nouveau paradigme étatique?”, in *Revue française d'administration publique* no 105-106-1, 2003, pp. 203-217.

⁹⁷ Guy Hermet, Ali Kazancigil, Jean-François Prud'homme, *La gouvernance. Un concept et ses applications*, Paris: Karthala, 2005, p. 138.

⁹⁸ Ernest Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950-57*, London: Library of World Affairs, 1958.

⁹⁹ Leon Lindberg, *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963.

¹⁰⁰ Tanja A. Börzel, “The European Union – A Unique Governance Mix”, in David Levi-Faur, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 613-627.

this perspective, the paper focused on the network governance which is founded on a non-hierarchical coordination between all ((non-)state) actors.

Each of these actors involved in the governance process are bounded by a resource-dependency. Rhodes¹⁰¹ has indeed demonstrated the closed relationship – between actors – due to their need of some specific resources to achieve their goal.

Therefore this paper on think tanks reveals that those actors can be analysed as knowledge organizations or soft actors. Think tanks have for long been recognized as having an active role within the decision-making process. Even if think tanks in the EU have some specificities, their main resource (knowledge) is central in the governance process. Through their researches and strategies to promote themselves, they are establishing a resource- dependence to other (non-) state actors.

This paper also opened conceptual perspectives. Firstly, the concept of *knowledge* has been briefly developed because it is mobilized by think tanks in their power interdependency with public actors. Knowledge is indeed often mobilized by decision-makers in order to legitimize their policies. However as social construct, it is interesting to investigate the condition of production of this “knowledge” which is – at the end – one of the component of the justification of policy choices. Secondly, the paper also discuss the European governance. In the light of the crisis the European Union is facing (e.g. banking and financial crisis, migration crisis), it seems that the set of instruments of the European governance are not mobilized in order to solve those crises. Therefore we could argue about whether we are facing nowadays a crisis of the European governance or a potential evolution of this latter. Thirdly we could also discuss the power dependence based on knowledge as resource.

Finally, even if the influence of think tanks in the European governance is difficult to measure, further researches are needed to complete the theoretical approach with empirical outputs. Those further studies could underline the specific actions put in place by think tanks in a unique European governance.

¹⁰¹ Roderick A. W. Rhodes, *op cit.*, 1997.

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