

# THINK TANKS AND GLOBAL POLITICS

Key Spaces in the Structure of Power

Edited by  
Alejandra Salas-Porras and Georgina Murray



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Editors

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## PREFACE

We are very excited to be able to bring you our controversial book about think tanks and their machinations. We have worked from a broad definitional base of what a think tank is, which includes those organizations that specialize in researching and disseminating public policy ideas. But our lens focuses on the world of politics through the eye of power: who has it, who uses it, and who controls it. This takes our definition of think tanks further than the standard meaning to elaborate on the role they play in constructing, reproducing, and (in a few cases) challenging prevailing relations of authority and influence. So we add to our queries a question about their roles in key organizational networks that enable them to produce and disseminate policy ideas to assist elites in the construction and exercise of, as well as challenges to, power—particularly through knowledge production, concentration, and mobilization. They are, we suggest, the permanent [but covert] persuaders.

We move from the existing “liminal” position occupied by think tanks in the literature, which makes them look neutral, objective, and independent, distanced from particular interests, to a new perspective that focuses on their relationships with structures of power (at the global, regional, and national levels). Traditional analytical distancing from sites of power may have enhanced the think tanks’ ability to persuade, as it allows them to disguise, or at least make less obvious, their connections and commitments to power, power elites, and particular interests in general. We have taken it upon ourselves to look forensically at these covert

institutions and their relations with power, to assist with the academic process of examining their accountability.

We do not suggest that all think tanks take the same paths or have the same objectives or interests. They do not. They follow different paths, and this is where the expertise of our international authors from Mexico, Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United Kingdom are able to provide us with unique insights into how think tanks operate in different locations. They give us a drone-like comparative look across their different locations, functions, and order—thus one group of think tanks specializes in neoliberal persuasion on policy makers in executive or legislative branches, while a second group targets the way public opinion is targeted to produce a groundswell impact that ultimately makes their bargaining position more effective. A third group—more internally oriented—aims to persuade members and participants of a particular idea or policy approach, to develop forms of cohesion and solidarity among elites, reconciling divisions, mobilizing members, and projecting a unified vision to increase their leverage *vis-à-vis* policy makers, labor and government officials. Some think tanks combine to different degrees these and other mechanisms to convince or put pressure on policy makers. Opposing the right are the alternative policy groups and left-wing think tanks that devise similar strategies to gain credibility, but are focused instead on rolling back the neoliberal agenda; they operate from opposing activist communities.

In short, this book focuses in all those organizations that create ideas to influence policy and activist communities, particularly think tanks and employer (business) associations.

We would like to thank all the authors (and their partners) who gave us their valuable time and expertise to complete this book. We would also like to thank Prof. Heidi Gottfried, president of the ISA Economic Sociology branch that financed the workshop for the authors in this book to meet in Vienna in 2016. This workshop was the basis on which this work was produced and we are grateful for her support.

Finally, we want to dedicate this book to working people everywhere when they are subject to unfair duping by these factories of persuasion that make the fight for equity just so much more difficult but that much more necessary.

Mexico City, Mexico  
Nathan, Australia,  
October 2016

Alejandra Salas-Porras  
Georgina Murray

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC)
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AHIP	America's Health Insurance Plan
AIG	Australian Industries Group
AIIA	Australian Institute of International Affairs
ALP	Australian Labor Party
APG	Alternative Policy Group
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista
ASI	Adam Smith Institute
ASM	Arbeitsgemeinschaft für eine Soziale Marktwirtschaft
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAS	Complex Associative System
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CDESL	Centro de Estudios Sobre la Libertad
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CED	Committee for Economic Development
CEEY	Centro de Estudios Espinoza Yglesias
CEO	Chief Executive officer
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations

CIEN	Center of National Economic Studies
CIS	Centre for Independent Studies
CIWG	Consumer Issues Working Group
CNE	Centre for a New Europe
CPA	Consumer Protection Agency
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
CUAIR	Construction Users Anti-Inflation Round Table
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
EC	European Commission
EIN	European Ideas Network
EJOLT	Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade
EO	Erhvervenes Oplysningsråd
EPAC	Economic Planning Advisory Council
ESEADE	Graduate School of Economics and Business Administration (Buenos Aires)
ESRA	Economic and Social Research Aotearoa
EU	European Union
FAES	Foundation for Social Studies and Analysis
FEE	Foundation for Economic Education
FIEL	Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericanas
FIL	Fundación Internacional para la Libertad
G20	Group of 20
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GEA-ISA	Grupo de Economistas Asociados
GEEJ	Gender, Economic and Ecological Justice
HACER	Hispanic American Center for Economic Research
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs (UK and Australia)
IEA	International Energy Agency
IESM	Instituto de la Economía Social de Mercado
IfG	Institute for Critical Social Analysis
IFG	International Forum on Globalization
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Institute of Public Affairs
IPEA	Instituto de Pensamiento Estratégico Ágora
IPN	International Policy Network
LI	Liberal International
MPS	Mont Pèlerin Society
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAG	North American Group (of the TC)
NAM	National Association of Manufacturers
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDF	New Direction Foundation
NFIB	National Federation of Independent Businesses
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NILS	National Institute of Labour Studies (Flinders University)
NZBRT	New Zealand Business Round Table
PC	Productivity Commission
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
PRO	Propuesta Republicana
RELIAL	Red Liberal de América Latina
RosaLux	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
SN	Stockholm Network
TAPG	Transnational Alternative Policy Group
TC	Trilateral Commission
TIGN	Transnational Informal Governance Network
TNI	Transnational Institute
UAP	United Australia Party
UN	United Nations
UPLA	Unión de Partidos Latinoamericanos
WTO	World Trade Organization

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# Think Tanks and Global Politics: Key Spaces in the Structure of Power

*Alejandra Salas-Porras and Georgina Murray*

Think tanks—broadly defined as organizations that specialize in researching and disseminating public policy ideas—have become increasingly important in integrating and rearticulating private, state, media and academic elite interests to advance their public policies and preferences. This type of organization first emerged at a national level (Blach-Ørsten and Kristensen 2016; Lingard 2016; Stone 1996), but spread as cloned versions (Beder 2001; Pusey 1991) from the core to operate transnationally (Carroll 2010; McGann 2016); and they are now influencing global populations (Drezner 2015).

The term itself was not widely used until the 1970s, when this type of organization expanded enormously in the United States to cover different areas of policy research (Medvetz 2012; Plehwe 2015). Until then, most of these organizations were viewed as centres or institutes that carried out research and provided advice from several ideological perspectives, depending on the country or region in which they were located. In England, for example, both the Fabian Society (founded in 1884)

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and the Policy Planning Institute (founded in 1931 as the Political and Economic Planning Institute) contributed to the construction of the welfare state. Apart from the Institute of Economic Affairs (that is, London based started in 1955), right-wing think tanks did not appear until the 1970s (Denham and Garnett 2004). In Germany, party-affiliated centres like the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (created in 1925) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (created in 1964) were among the earliest organizations to carry out policy research (Thunert 2004). In the United States, conservative right-wing tanks like the Heritage Foundation, CATO and Manhattan Institute for Policy Research did not appear until the 1970s. Before that time, research centres were committed to scholarly research and improving the process of policy-making (Abelson 2004).

From the 1970s onwards, the presence of neoliberal conservative think tanks expanded rapidly throughout the Global North and increasingly appeared in the Global South, as can be seen from James McGann's (2014) lists. These think tanks advocated free trade, low taxation, tightened labour market discipline and privatization, as well as low levels of state intervention—particularly in relation to government spending on welfare and the regulation of market interests. These originally few and sparse think tank institutions are now numerous—over 6500 according to McGann (2014)—and globally hegemonic in their highly successful marketing of neoliberal ideas. Neoliberal is defined here as a commitment to the market to maintain social and economic society through a small state with privatized welfare and state assets. This thinking applied from their think tank beginnings in the pre-Keynesian period (e.g. Institute of Political Affairs 1924) to their initial blossoming at the beginning of the Keynesian period (e.g. Mont Pèlerin Society 1945) and then their popularization after the 1970s, when their thinking was activated by wealthy individuals like Antony Fisher, who set up the Institute of Economic Affairs on the advice of Friedrich von Hayek (see Cockett 1995).

It was not until the 1990s that any real counter-hegemonic think tanks were established to resist and counteract the neoliberal global advance (e.g. Compass in 2003; New Matilda in 2010; Terra Nova in 2003). According to Carroll and Coburn (see Chap. 8 of this book), the projects behind these organizations usually have a regional stretch that challenges 'the common sense of neoliberal forms of capitalism and

sometimes the capitalist system as a whole, for its politico-economic inequalities and ecological irrationality’.

However, in the United States several progressive, left-wing think tanks were created before the 1990s; among the most important were the Institute for Policy Studies, founded in 1963, the members of which were actively involved in popular movements such as the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s, the women’s and environmental movements of the 1970s, and the peace and anti-intervention movements of the 1980s. In 1986, economists Jeff Faux, Robert Reich, Ray Marshall, Barry Bluestone, Robert Kutter and Lester Thurow, among others, founded the Economic Policy Institute as a labour-affiliated think tank with the aim of improving the living conditions of working families (Trumka 2016).

The expansion of neoliberal think tanks was an accelerated trend for several reasons, but two in particular. On the one hand, as the economy and public administration become more complex, highly educated and thirsty for more sophisticated scientific information, bureaucracies looked to think tanks to provide it. And on the other hand, the smaller state meant public sector institutions became relatively underfunded and in some cases this meant that the state was forced to out source policy research activities to private, autonomous or semi-public institutions. The state was being rolled back to the minimum and Think Tanks walked gladly into the gap.

Small government as part of the neoliberal mantra played an important ideological role in persuading previously Keynesian states of the rightness of this ‘new’ right-wing politics, spreading ideas of welfare dependency and personal or individual responsibility, together with other philosophies that tended to undercut the social principles underlying the welfare state. Think tank publications and lobbying was charged with the neoliberal necessity to find new efficiencies and enable the market greater freedom in its practices, along with the means and ability to turn their thinking into common sense or taken-for-granted thought.

As this book shows, such popularizing roles for neoliberal think tanks and their networks become dominant especially when alternative policy initiatives challenge the status quo or where critical situations and/or political constraints (e.g. violence and security problems) demand new policy ideas and knowledge. This ideological role has become particularly powerful, and at times belligerent—for example, in Latin America as think tanks try to transform the pink tide nations (*la marea rosa*) and

*delegitimize left-wing politics that have grown increasingly influential in this region since the beginning of the twenty-first century.*

Think tanks are thus often used to create and articulate new policy ideas (or repackage old ones), frame and push forward policy agendas and engage in public policy debates following rather diverse strategies. They often concentrate enormous expertise, channel funds into their organizational resources, and function as nurseries for technocrats and public officials. In order to embark on these activities, they have to interact in different ways with state agencies, particularly in the executive and legislative apparatus. But, once created, they weave networks at the national, regional and global levels, within which public and private interests are redefined and discussions are organized to reach ideological consensus, and tight teams of technocrats are brought together with public officials to push their agendas forward. However, they are far from homogeneous as they espouse different ideologies—even within the broad neoliberal/conservative nexus, with different social purposes, issues and contradictions, and divisions within their networks. They are also very differentially funded, but generally not forthcoming about who does fund them and in whose interests they are consequently aligned.

This aspect is one that makes this book particularly interesting. Capital is not homogenous, so why should we view think tanks that largely represent the interests of different fractions of capital as homogeneous? They are not. Competition and conflict within and between think tank networks exist as they confront alternative ideas, defend and further their different policy projects, order their preferences and shape their compromises. Think tanks can contribute decisively to the polarization of inequalities associated with the neoliberal reforms and policies they recommend and defend, or they can come from the opposite direction to recommend alternative strategies to benefit the environment and to help humanitarian struggles. Although there are fewer of the latter type of think tanks, they have been more or less successful in constructing alternative strategies to the most acute problems facing society, including the distribution of social, economic and security rights.

Our perspectives on think tanks look at them across the political spectrum; our writing (like the think tanks themselves) focuses on those dominated by the market-led agenda, rather than those that resist market forces—although this smaller number of alternative think tanks area is explored in Chaps. 8 and 9. Our aim is to go beyond the largely descriptive accounts of think tanks that at present dominate the current think

tank literature. We look analytically from a radical, socialist or Marxist perspective at the place in society occupied by think tanks; their control of global resources, both in economic and political policy fields; and their inroads into structures of power. We do so by addressing the following questions. How have think tanks reached these positions of power? Has the Northern core produced neoliberal clones that have colonized the globe? Who funds and controls these think tanks and for what purpose? How is policy-making knowledge created? How are new policy ideas propagated and validated? How do think tanks become dominant sources of knowledge in public spheres, including the media?

To answer these questions, we will explore the dynamics of think tank networks in specific regions and countries, the coalitions they generate to advance the social purpose they implicitly or explicitly endorse and, in particular, the spaces they occupy in the structures and fields of power at the national, regional and global levels. We will argue (albeit in different ways) (1) that think tanks are controlled by networks of public and private interests; (2) that in the centre of each network is a very reduced group of experts, policy ‘wonks’, political intermediaries and members of corporate elite that can be identified; (3) that think tanks influence public policies in several ways, including the concentration of knowledge, information and other resources, executive and legislative lobbying and a strong presence in the media to define agendas, construct and disseminate an ideological or political discourse and validate knowledge; (4) that their need for funding can create a symbiotic relationship between funding and the research produced (see Mulgan 2006); and (5) that, in order to integrate new ideas and knowledge with policy-making, think tanks mix in different ways and degrees in their research, analysis, advising, lobbying, persuasion, deliberation and advocacy, although there may be a more or less acute tendency to specialize in one or more of these tasks, depending on the particular think tank, country or region.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature on think tanks (e.g. Kandiah and Seldon 2013; Medvetz 2012; Shaw et al. 2014; Stone and Denham 2004) has struggled to reach a broadly accepted definition of the concept due to the hybrid and ambivalent character of these organizations, which adopt very diverse forms, roles and characteristics. The differences in the definition of think tanks refer to the level of autonomy of these organizations, not only

from the financial and organizational groups they may be affiliated with (e.g. NGOs, Business Lobby Groups or Labour Associations) but also from the ideological viewpoint: how overt are the think tank's affinities and commitments within the economic and political interests and doctrines, and to what degree do these doctrines lead to activism, the construction and definition of agendas, and the shaping of public opinion? Yet all think tanks combine in different ways to do varying degrees of research activities, advocacy and activism, and they all compete to voice their ideas to a community of public officials, legislators and political elites. On the one hand, this combination entails an intermediate role in the structure of power, where several fields interlink and overlap, making their situation elusive and murky. On the other, the multiple roles played by these organizations (research, advocacy, dissemination and defence of policy ideas, production and legitimation of knowledge) make a clear-cut definition more difficult (Plehwe 2015).

The line that divides think tanks focusing on scientific and academic research from those that emphasize dissemination of ideas or political activism becomes increasingly faint, although in one way or another they all try to connect knowledge with public policy, and their experts with politicians. The knowledge they produce has varying ideological content, depending on the social agenda pursued by each think tank. In other words, knowledge is produced in organizations with strong academic objectives, approaching policy problems from diverse theoretical perspectives but with a keen eye on their ability to impact on the process of policy-making.

Think tanks constitute spaces where public policies are designed, discussed, planned and evaluated. But the knowledge produced by think tanks is influenced closely by their special links to business, labour or other interest groups, putting forward and defending policies in their favour and building consensus around such policies. Therefore, these spaces cannot be understood as isolated from particular interests and preferences, exhibiting a neutral commitment to scientific knowledge as might be the case with scientific research centres—although even those are often linked to public policy networks, either at the level of individual researchers or the institutions themselves.

The dominant narrative, very much influenced by Weberian and liberal theoretical approaches, contends that think tanks respond to changes in the economic model, which in turn generate changes in public administration and the bureaucratic and legislative apparatus. As rationalization

permeates broader and broader spheres of society, the narrative goes, society requires an increasingly specialized knowledge and set of technocratic capabilities. The (small) state can no longer perform all the specialized services it requires in house, so these must be outsourced to think tanks or other private or semi-private research centres. This trend intensifies as the state retreats from the public sector economy. Once they are created, think tanks try to shape public policies, engaging in the most important public policy debates, following rather diverse strategies and interacting in different ways with state agencies.

However, as several reviews (e.g. Medvetz 2012; Tevelow 2005) reveal, there are additional tensions in the literature. On the one hand there are those scholars who argue from Marxist or elite theory perspectives that think tanks are instruments of domination and control (see Domhoff 1980, 2014; Mills 2000); and on the other, those coming from a pluralistic perspective, who contend that think tanks represent only one type of pressure group among many (Dahl 1989). Think Tanks are therefore just another competing voice in a democracy.

Both elite theory and Marxist perspectives stress the role of think tanks in the political debates and typify them according to their ideological and political affiliations, the origin of their funding and the role they assume (persuasion, advocacy, dissemination), as well as the interests they represent and defend. Burris (2008), for instance, examines the networks articulated by the boards of twelve of the most important policy planning organizations in the United States.<sup>1</sup> He distinguishes between those with liberal, moderate and conservative orientations, and examines changes undergone between 1973 and 2000 in the position each of them held in the network. While liberals occupied a central position in the 1960s, in the 1980s conservative organizations moved to the centre of the network, coinciding with changes in the policies promoted by the right-wing political movement.

From a pluralist perspective, James McGann (1995) and David Newsom (1996) argue that think tanks compete with labour, business, non-government organizations (NGOs) and other associations to get attention and influence policy-making. However, as Donald E. Abelson (2002) contends, this approach does not identify the characteristics of think tanks, much less their connections to public officials and legislators, or the degree to which such connections increase their chances of being heard.



Over the past two decades, institutionalism (e.g. Powell and DiMaggio 2012) has become increasingly important in the study of think tanks, raising additional tensions between those who try to find the connections of ideas to institutions and those who link knowledge, power and institutions. From this perspective, Abelson (2002) asks about the relevance of think tanks and how they become involved in the definition of public policies. He assesses their influence on their ability to help define public policies by weighing their presence in the media (citations) and hearings before Congress, concluding that their influence varies notably throughout the process: from the definition of the agenda, the formulation of particular policies and the formation of a favourable public opinion. This institutionalist approach also focuses on the history of each think tank and the changes think tanks undergo over time. Their narratives tend to be descriptive, except when they explicitly try to account for the emergence of these organizations in different countries or regions.

Another analytical line of the institutionalist approach focuses on the involvement of think tanks in policy communities, and in particular how they produce knowledge and the mechanisms whereby they shape knowledge–power relations. This line of research draws on the concept of epistemic communities introduced by Haas (1992), which can help us understand how think tanks build knowledge communities in areas of public interest, as well as the ways in which such communities are produced and reproduced in the multiple venues, meeting and discussions of an increasingly intricate network. This network greatly facilitates the circulation of elites. As they design and evaluate public policies, they generate inter-subjective processes, breeding consensus. The ideas and visions of public policy are elaborated and re-elaborated in the interactions that integrate national, regional and international actors. Within the context of these networks, think tanks create spaces of discussion and reflection where epistemic communities emerge—that is, communities of experts, policy wonks, technocrats, academic, intellectual and business elites, concentrating on the knowledge and information relevant to the most important issues of public interest. This is how a common vision of the different policy problems happens, but more importantly, patterns of reasoning and mutual understandings among elites become increasingly homogeneous and naturalized (Salas-Porras 2012).

In a similar constructivist vein of institutionalism, Rich (2011, 2004) and Campbell and Pedersen (2011) argue that think tanks not only produce ideas but also reflect and elaborate on this dominant thinking.

Specific ideas on public policies (education, health, energy and finance, among others) stem from the dominant vision permeating expert preferences—for example, those aligned with free market, anti-state ideologies, versus those more aligned with equality and justice. However, to influence public preferences, expert believers are not sufficient. An organizational and intellectual infrastructure is required, one with the capacity to finance projects, publish research results and promote discussions in the media and other forums (Mulgan 2006). Without such infrastructure, think tanks would not be able to propagate and legitimize the ideas that they consider to be best state and social practices. In his analysis, Rich (2011) writes that liberal and conservative ideas have a differentiated effect on the orientation of think tanks: conservative think tanks privilege ideas whereas liberal<sup>2</sup> or, in Australian parlance, left think tanks prefer academic knowledge. The former think tanks are predominantly ideological; the latter are divided among those dedicated to academic research and only marginally to the dissemination of the ideas they produce, and progressive think tanks who tend to be activists clearly committed to the interests they represent and defend (Rich 2011).

Recently, some scholars have become more interested in the ways think tanks interact with and transform the knowledge regime. Campbell and Pederson (2011), in particular, claim that the level of independence and autonomy of think tanks depends on the knowledge regimes to which they belong. These two scholars define such regimes as the set of institutions and organizations (mainly think tanks) that are dedicated to generating the knowledge needed for designing, defining and evaluating public policies. They contend that the characteristics of think tanks, and of the links they form with the state, depend on the political economy of each country—that is, on the way the relationships between economics and politics are structured. Of the four types of regimes that these authors identify, two correspond to states with a predominantly decentralized political structure, more open to civil society—such as the United States and Germany—while the other two regimes correspond to states with centralized political structures more closed to civil society—for example, the United Kingdom and France. Thus we have several typical cases. The first is a market-oriented regime that prevails in the United States, in which private interests fund think tanks where they may pursue different objectives—either academic or a promotion of interests that representing diverse ideological preferences. The process of knowledge production associated with this type of political economy is usually highly

confrontational, partisan and competitive. The second type of regime characteristic of decentralized and open states (such as Germany and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands) will essentially aim to generate social consensus around public policy; this may involve the need to generate more willingness to negotiate. Even if they are financed by the state this type of regime think tanks produce non-partisan knowledge. The third kind of knowledge regime characteristic of the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent Australia, is also related to liberal market economies operating from a centralized and closed state with greater autonomy from pressure groups. In this type of regime, funding may come from either the public or private sector, and a better balance is achieved between the interests of parties, businesses and labour associations, resulting in a less intense confrontational scenario. The final type is the statist technocratic knowledge regime, which prevails in France; it is common in coordinated market economies and is characterized by large think tanks that are financed mostly by the state. The knowledge generated in these think tanks tends to be technocratic and non-partisan—meaning that the think tanks deliberately try to separate economics from politics (Campbell and Pedersen 2011, p. 186).

As political economies undergo changes that put more emphasis on the market and large corporations,<sup>3</sup> with much narrower states, the landscapes of think tanks often undergo important changes too. As a consequence, independently financed think tanks acquire greater significance in the knowledge regime, without totally abandoning the paths followed previously. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Campbell and Pederson (2011) avoid using the concept of think tanks; in their view, the term was coined to suit the pattern followed by these organizations in the United States, which does not correspond to the experience of knowledge-producing organizations in other countries.

Along the same lines, Medvetz (2012) argues that, despite many efforts, the definition of think tanks remains vague, largely due to their ambivalent position. In trying to discover the essence of think tanks, he focuses on the space they occupy in the US structure of power. In his view, such space—which, following Bourdieu (2005), he regards as a field of power<sup>4</sup>—has become a boundary space, ‘a hybrid subspace of knowledge production’ where experts affiliated with think tanks, who have more or less academic, political, corporate, media and scientific backgrounds, meet, interact and struggle for different purposes. Two roles of think tanks, in particular, are crucial to the dynamics of this field

of power: first, redefining the institutional rules that certify and legitimize the knowledge they produce and disseminate; and second, constructing dominant policy discourses on the basis of this knowledge. According to Medvetz (2012), the dynamics of the field of think tanks revolves around the tension between, on the one hand, a universalist claim to reason and intellectual proficiency and, on the other, the pursuit of worldly power. He highlights that the inherent difficulties in accurately defining think tanks stem from the intermediary position they hold, the various roles they simultaneously play and the murky characteristics of the space they control. They achieve a stronger position in the field of power when they accumulate the right combination of different kinds of capital: academic prestige and credentials, argumentative proficiency, fundraising ability, quasi-entrepreneurial styles, presence and access to the media.<sup>5</sup>

Despite some differences between Campbell and Pedersen (2011) and Medvetz (2012), they agree on the key role played by think tanks in the production and reproduction of knowledge. But whereas Campbell and Pederson use a comparative approach to understand the role of think tanks in the context of different knowledge regimes, Medvetz concentrates on the US experience, and how think tanks change as they compete to control the norms required to produce and legitimize public policy knowledge. Although they agree on some of the most important characteristics of American think tanks, Campbell and Pederson highlight their tendency to compete for funds and demonstrate the superiority of the ideas and policy proposals they put forward, as well as to gain credibility and legitimacy from public officials, legislators and the public opinion in general, whereas Medvetz argues that coordination between American think tanks only occurs as they struggle to define the rules needed to produce, disseminate and legitimize public policy knowledge, in the process changing their affiliations and level of autonomy or heteronomy (i.e. dependence on certain interests). In addition, according to Medvetz, think tanks and experts invent new ideas and articulate policy discourses. In this way, they cut across the arbitrary division between practical and scientific knowledge. As a result, think tanks construct the norms and conventions that connect intellectual and political practices, besides regulating the circulation of knowledge, delimiting the ideas valid for public policies, and encouraging their experts to cross the frontiers between different social spheres (political, economic and media). To participate in public debates, it is necessary to follow the rules