

T08P05 / Corporations and Think Tanks: Knowledge Utilization Beyond Political Technocracy

Topic : T08 / Policy Discourse and Critical Policy Research

Chair : Dieter Plehwe (Berlin Social Science Research Center (WZB))

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The critical examination of political dimensions of expert knowledge has been an important pillar of the argumentative turn literature. The founding volume contained a chapter by Fischer (1993), which explained the relevance of think tanks for the succession of and competition between political technocracies in the United States. Less attention has been paid to the socio-economic background and the social co-production of think tank based expertise (but compare Medvetz 2010 on early think tanks, Jane Meyer's 2016 "Dark Money" on recent influence). The literature on think tanks in any case can be strengthened if we explore the relationship between corporations and think tanks systematically including the place of commercial think tanks and non-commercial efforts of such think tanks that overlap with consulting business, the roles of think tanks in corporate lobby efforts at different levels (company, groups of businesses, industries etc.). More insights need to be gained with regard to the various ways in which corporations influence think tanks (funding, project finance, board membership, revolving door practices, networks etc.)

Fischer, Frank, 1993, Policy Discourse and the Politics of Washington Think Tanks. In: Fischer, Frank, Forrester, John, eds., The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning. Duke University Press

Medvetz, Tom, 2012, Think Tanks in America. University of Chicago Press

Jane Mayer, 2016, Dark Money. The hidden history of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right. Doubleday

CALL FOR PAPERS

Surprisingly, the role of corporations has not been sufficiently focused on in critical think tank studies so far in particular outside the United States. In light of recent reports on the role of even highly respected think tanks like Brookings for corporate lobby efforts (NYT 7.8.2016), the well-known strategies of oil companies like Exxon to use free market think tanks to nourish climate change skepticism, or the ways in which soft drink giants employ think tanks in their effort to prevent public health measures we can speak of a growing need to more closely study the links between political and corporate technocracy. The panel invites scholars to submit papers that explore the broad range and complexity of the corporate think tank nexus at the level of individual corporations, groups of companies or industries, nationally and internationally. Apart from the role of think tanks as corporate lobby tools papers will be considered inter alia that address the role of think tanks for broader firm strategies (e.g. the pro-bono research consulting firms or the future studies of re-insurance companies), or broader corporate strategies (e.g. free market campaigns, austerity perspectives), the variety of think tank efforts financed (and directed to greater or lesser extent) by corporations, the diverse links between corporations and think tanks (like board membership, revolving doors etc.), or the relations between corporations and different types of think tanks (like academic, partisan, commercial, political party, advocacy etc.).

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Session 1 Corporations and Think Tanks

Friday, June 30th 13:45 to 15:45 (Manasseh Meyer MM 2 - 1)

Corporations and think tanks in Germany

Dieter Plehwe (Berlin Social Science Research Center (WZB))

Studying Think Tank Integration: Examples From Canada

Julien Landry (University of Alberta)

Corporate Masters of Climate Denial: The invisible hand of the fossil fuel industry in orchestrating the anti-science agenda, practices and strategies of think tanks – an Australian case study

Elaine McKewon (University of Technology Sydney)

Think Tanks and Management Consultants: An Emergent Nexus?

Matthias Kipping (Schulich School of Business, York University)