

# Typology of think tanks:

## A comparative study in Finland and Scotland

Markus Mykkänen, PhD  
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Neil Freshwater, PhD candidate  
Queen Margaret University, Scotland

### Abstract

This paper provides a comparative analysis of current Finnish and Scottish think tanks and reviews how think tanks in these countries have evolved, how think tanks seek to influence decision making and engage with their stakeholders. To address the ways of influence this paper looks how Finnish and Scottish think tanks describe themselves and how they use publications in their advocacy. Conducted content analysis indicates that usually registered association based Finnish think tanks are generally more research-focused organisations, who overall deploy more research publications for advocacy than the company based Scottish think tanks. Findings also reveal that the number of think tanks in both countries has greatly increased in the last two decades due to the political challenges with European Union and national politics. The paper provides a new approach to study think tanks in national contexts.

**Keywords:** think tanks; decision making; advocacy; policy making; Finland; Scotland.

### Introduction

In recent decades, the number of think tanks has increased and their impact on governmental decision making has grown. Think tanks have many varied roles in societies and their work has distinct impact in decision making. The term “think tank”, describes a wider system of social relations and organisations that pursue to produce real-time, value-free information and commentaries for public debate and policy making (Shaw *et al.*, 2015). Think tanks have a history, agenda and they do take a position (Shaw *et al.*, 2015). This paper provides a comparative analysis of Finnish and Scottish think tanks and reviews how think tanks in these countries have evolved and how think tanks seek to influence decision making and engage with their stakeholders by using various publications. Most research related to think tanks has traditionally relied on definitions and typologies devised in the 1980s and 1990s (Pautz, 2011). The need for timely and concise information and analysis has risen, nature of decision making has become more complex, and the monopoly of governments’ information has ended (McGann, 2018). In Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East diversity among think tanks has increased and more independent, political party affiliated, and business sector think tanks are being created (McGann, 2018). In Europe and North America, where

most of the World's think tanks are, the number of think tanks is slightly decreasing (McGann, 2017). Comparative studies have focused mainly using United States as a point of reference while in Europe the studies have focused more on national context (e.g. Thunert, 2006; Pautz, 2013; Jezierska, 2018). But still, the academic discussion related either to Finnish or Scottish think tanks has been scarce. This study aims to look at national context in both countries and makes a comparison of the special features and various differences between the think tanks in these countries. We concentrate on how Finnish and Scottish think tanks describe themselves and how they use publications in their advocacy.

### Definition of think tanks

Defining what a think tank has been challenging for researchers as the term holds several meanings that describe a huge amount of different organisations (McGann, 2016). Also the think tanks' range of objectives, attitudes towards practices, and standards of scientific research hampers to find a clear definition (Ruser, 2018). The term think tank originated during the Second World War to describe an environment in which military personnel could meet to discuss strategies (Abelson, 2014). Contemporary definitions have been manifold (see e.g. Abelson, 2002; Ruser, 2018; McGann, 2016; Almiron, 2017) and at times contested (McLevey, 2014; Stone, 2007). The definitions have either been very broad and vague, or narrow and categorised. For instance, in broader scale McGann (2016: 5) defines think tanks as "public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice" which "policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues". Stone considers think tanks as research communication bridges between social sciences and policy (Stone, 2007). Abb (2015) sees think tanks generally as "public policy research organisations". Abelson (2002) argues that think tanks differ from other organisations involved in policy making by their emphasis on research and analysis. But still, as Pautz (2011) argues, not every institution that offers policy advice should be considered as a think tank. He adds that the criterion for think tank being non-governmental is generally accepted in the scientific literature (Pautz, 2011). Some definitions put emphasis on the autonomy and independence of the organisations (Pautz, 2013; Jezierska, 2018; Rich 2005) while others leave it more open (Abelson, 2002; Abb, 2015). More narrow and categorised definitions attempt to classify think tanks as universities without students, contract researchers, advocacy think tanks (Weaver, 1989) or vanity think tanks, based on famous persons, by McGann, Pautz and Abelson (via McGann, 2016). Think tanks are considered autonomous or affiliated with a political party, a university, or a government (McGann, 2016). They are considered a highly heterogeneous group including "universities, research centres, media and consultancies, semi-informal networks, NGOs and both internal and external policy research centres" (Singh *et al*, 2014: 292). Medvetz (2012) divides the clients of think tanks to three distinctive groups: political, economic and media organisations.

Political clients consist of policy makers, parties and activists networks. The economic clients (e.g. corporations and foundations) provide financial support, and the media (media organisations and journalists) provide access to public visibility.

### **Think tanks, strategic communication and the media**

Media often presents think tanks as “scientific establishments, composed of experts and scholars engaged in the task of thinking, writing and publishing” (Stone, 2007: 261). Think tanks have a reliance on resources from relevant academic, corporate, media and political fields, and think tanks can have multiple identities with their audiences (Medvetz, 2012). As think tanks have developed, they have developed more tailored features for audiences, have become more market oriented and closer tied to corporations and other constituencies (Asher and Guilhot, 2010). Think tanks, as Coman (2019) finds, have started to strengthen their strategic role via research, which has increased think tanks credibility, reputation, and intellectual productivity. Due their multidirectional transfer capacity think tanks are able to transform research knowledge for media and policy documents (Plehwe, 2014). For journalists and media, think tanks are considered to be sources of expertise (Pautz, 2013). He finds that think tanks are used in media because they themselves claim to influence the thinking of decision-makers, and their ideas form the basis of new policies. Earlier Hames and Feasey (1994) argue that media believes think tanks to be important because think tanks themselves claim to be important. By using media think tanks promote their publications more aggressively than any university would (McGann, 2018). For instance, think tanks have increased their public visibility in Chinese media, where they have become as a “key supplier of expert analysis in the media, reaching a broader audience and perhaps paving the way for policy advocacy” (Abb, 2015: 532).

### **Think tanks in Finland**

The Global Go To Think Tank Index considers Finland to have 18 to 29 think tanks (McGann, 2018). Finnish think tanks are considered mainly to provide public information, consultancy for private sector and publishing economic forecasts (Boucher *et al.*, 2005). They argue that earlier in Northern Europe the institutional think tanks dominated the independent research. In the 1990’s the scarce number of think tanks concentrated on closely European policy issues and especially Russia was a major area for research (Boucher *et al.*, 2005). Nowadays by their own definitions, most of the Finnish think tanks strive to participate in Finland’s decision making by producing new ideas, original research reports, advocating for certain ideas, and challenging current practices. Their orientation towards research varies a lot. For instance, all of the party-based think tanks claim to produce publicly available research reports and accounts. Generally, the Finnish think tanks can be grouped into 1) think tanks and 2) organisations resembling think tanks. Boucher *et al.* (2005) find that proportional representation in Finnish political power help think tanks to be objective and more independent.

The first Finnish think tanks were established after World War II through national legislation and were mainly funded by the state (Boucher *et al.*, 2005). The oldest Finnish think tanks are considered to be the Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (ETLA), Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA and The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra. They were established to promote economic growth and cooperation. Besides ETLA, EVA and Sitra, most of the think tanks have been established during the last 20 years. In the 1990's only nine think tanks existed (McGann and Weaver, 2000) while nowadays the number has risen to near thirty. In February 2003, the government led by Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen started a policy program for civic engagement (2003-2007), which resulted in a think tank project coordinated by the Ministry of Justice (Niemelä and Wakeham, 2007). This project offered funding for five educational organisations close to political parties, which started their own think tank processes (Kervinen, 2006). All of these five projects continued their think tank activities. Since then, as Kervinen (2006) finds, the main challenges of Finnish think tanks have are the collecting a sufficient amount of broad-based funding, and the maintenance of the independence of research activities, and the strategic and professional communication to decision makers and a broad public.

Many of the Finnish think tanks are highly dependent on state-based financing (Raivio *et al.*, 2018). In 2018 eight of the think tanks were supported by political parties and received financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Raivio *et al.* 2018). In 2018 the party-based think tanks were awarded about 600 000 euros from The Ministry of Education and Culture. The Finnish Institute for International Affairs gets its funding from the Finnish Parliament. The peace and conflict research institute TAPRI, Pan-European institute PEI and Northern Dimension Institute NDI are universities based. Sitra is a public organisation funded by taxes. The rest of the think tanks are funded by a varying degree by individual donors, foundations, companies, projects, and assignments.

### **Think tanks in Scotland**

Think tanks in Scotland should be seen in the context of Scottish devolution. In 1999, the Scottish Parliament was opened, and responsibility for policy relating to areas including health, housing, criminal justice, rural affairs and the environment were devolved from the United Kingdom (UK) parliament and administration, to the Scottish Parliament and its executive branch, the then called Scottish Executive. In 2016, further limited powers were devolved to Scotland around some tax and social welfare matters. Notably however powers for topics such as defence, foreign affairs, constitutional matters and most taxation and welfare issues, remains UK-wide. Although extensive, the number of powers for which Scotland has sole responsibility are limited, and as such the number of think tanks operating in Scotland is smaller than in Finland. This study focuses on think tanks which operated

UK-wide, but have a distinct Scottish presence or activity. In total 17 think tanks have been identified in Scotland. A further two were identified but not included in this study as they were assumed defunct due to lack of evidence of current activity.

Scotland-based think tanks have seen the greatest increase in number since the devolution of powers to Scotland and the formation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Prior to then, only two or three Scottish think tanks existed (Pautz, 2005). In the last two decades, further sixteen organisations have come into existence, most recently as 2019, and includes one dedicated to the funding of think tank research. Due to this relative infancy, literature on think-tanks in the Scottish context is limited. There has also been the closure or merger or closure of a number of think tanks over that period. Depending on the definition used, the oldest think tank in Scotland is the Fraser of Allander Institute (1975) which is a university-based institute, describing itself as “a leading independent economic research institute focused on the Scottish economy”. The first example of non-university think tank was the David Hume Institute (1985) which describes itself as “an independent, non-partisan, evidence-based policy institute that has been operating at the heart of Scottish policy debate for over 30 years”. It was not until the time of Scottish Devolution in 1999 that there began to exist considerably more think tanks in Scotland, particularly those with a political leaning; Policy Institute (1999) (Conservative/free market) (now part of Reform Scotland), Democratic Left Scotland (1998) (far-left), Centre for Scottish Public Policy (1999) (centre-left); Progress Scotland (2019) (Scottish independence). The small number of think tanks in Scotland has been acknowledged by the formation of the Scottish Policy Foundation in 2017, which is a charity set up to promote and fund think tanks and policy research. In its paper *Good Government: A Case for Funding Think Tanks*, the foundation states that with “any government there should be a broad infrastructure of independent policy generation; that this infrastructure in Scotland lags the growth in the scope and scale of the Scottish Government” (2019: 1).

Whereas the pre-Devolution Scottish think tanks adopted no particular political ideology or party association, post-devolution half of those today could be considered as having such a stance. A limited number of Scottish think tanks focus on a particular topic, and even these are quite broad e.g. the case for Scottish independence, market liberalism and Scotland-EU relations. Scottish think tanks might be considered in the main, generalist, opting to focus on topics on an ad hoc basis, albeit aligned to their particular ideology. Most think tanks in Scotland receive money from external donations, either through individual membership subscriptions or through corporate sponsorship. Those with Registered Charity status benefit from tax breaks afforded to charities in the UK, but will have stricter rules on how their money is obtained and spent, with restrictions on party-political activity. The three think tanks which are university institutes are funded through the higher education funding streams in

Scotland (i.e. tuition fees, research grants, donations, legacy). Scotland's Future Forum has the unique position of being wholly owned by the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body, which is also its sole funder. Only one of the think tanks have the status of a shareholding private company, the common structure of a 'for-profit' private business, which is Progress Scotland.

## Methods

Ruser (2018) finds that in order to understand better the behaviour of think tanks, it would be necessary to analyse the techniques of think tanks approaching their stakeholders. Comparative studies could increase the knowledge how think tanks operate in different national contexts. This comparative study aims to clarify how Finnish and Scottish think tanks try to influence policy making and public opinion. In order to formulate a typology of Finnish and Scottish think tanks it is needed to investigate e.g. different patterns of output and publications of think tanks. The research was guided by the definition of McGann (2016: 5) who defines think tanks as "public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice". Social media channels (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) were excluded from this analysis. The research questions of this study are:

- How Finnish and Scottish think tanks describe themselves?
- What kind of publications think tanks use to advocate decision making and approach their stakeholders?

The information on Finnish think tanks was collected by assembling a list of think tanks from documents and newspaper articles (e.g. Huhtala *et al.*, 2016; McGann, 2018; Kervinen, 2006; Kuikka 2018; Raivio *et al.*, 2018). After this a search engine searches with the keywords 'ajatuspaja' and 'ajatushautomo' was conducted. Basic information on the organisations - including year of establishment, basis of funding, ideology, type of organisation, publications, self-descriptions - were collected in a spreadsheet. All of these were found from the organisations' websites.

In Scotland, think tanks were gathered by reading the limited literature on Scottish think tanks (e.g. Pautz, 2005) and by searching the term "think tank Scotland" into Google and undertaking internet research to identify think tanks' websites. Where appropriate, the online (UK) Companies House register was used to identify the current entity status of a think tank. The identified organisations were sorted into independent think tanks and political think tanks based on their own descriptions. From both countries only the currently active think tanks were selected to final sample. Overall 26 Finnish and 17 Scottish think tanks were selected for further analysis. Based on their initial descriptions think tanks were divided into two categories: independent (non-political) and political. After this, a thorough content analysis to organisations' websites and collected information was executed.

## Findings

### *Finland*

According to definitions 20 think tanks defined themselves as independent and non-related to political parties. 6 think tanks described to be either supporting certain political party or supporting certain political world view. The independent think tanks (table 1) on their Finnish websites used words “independent”, “sovereign”, “non-partisan”, “unbiased” and “uncommitted” to describe their role as a think tank. These think tanks are later called either independent or non-political. Think tanks related to political parties are called political.

The independent think tanks (table 1) in Finland are registered associations (12), part of other organisations (5), public organisations (2) or foundation (1). The independent Finnish think tanks described several topics that they are covering. In general, many think tanks described several topics that they are supporting or promoting, for instance individual freedom, the success and welfare of Finnish society, free markets and society, peace efforts and security, welfare, etc. The older think tanks (Eva, Sitra, Etna, Labour Institute for Economic Research) claimed to concentrate especially on supporting decision making around Finnish economy. Few think tanks (e.g. SaferGlobe, UNU-Wider, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs) described to concentrate on producing studies and information related on international affairs and peace efforts. Some of the newer think tanks, which are established during the last 15 years (e.g. Libera, Demos Helsinki, Magma, Tänk), heavily drive to promote societal changes based on their ideology. Few think tanks had a unique topic that they are promoting for, e.g. feminism and women’s expertise (Hattu), sustainability (Tankki) and Swedish language (Agenda).

<b>Name of the Think tank</b>	<b>Ideology and organisation</b>	<b>Shortened self-description of purpose and activities</b>
Libera (2011)	independent, foundation	Supports and promotes individual freedom, free enterprise, free market and free society. The work consists of researching, publishing, and organising events.
Ajatuspaja e2 (2006)	independent, registered association	A research community that produces research that meets scientific criteria for organisations, companies, media, administration and politics
Demos Helsinki (2005)	independent, registered association	The purpose of our work is to create a persistent societal change, towards which we work with many changemakers and partners. They vary from ministries and cities, researchers and universities, corporations, associations and foundations, to popular movements and activists.
Elisabeth Rehn - Bank of Ideas (2015)	independent, registered association	A think tank promoting security policies.

Name of the Think tank	Ideology and organisation	Shortened self-description of purpose and activities
SaferGlobe (2010)	independent, registered association	An independent peace and security think tank, studying and developing tools for the promotion of lasting peace and security. Understanding peace and security requires cooperation between different academic disciplines as well as practice and theory.
Täнк (2011)	independent, registered association	Täнк is an independent, non-partisan Finnish think tank. We work to support and improve the success and welfare of the Finnish society at large. Täнк takes a pragmatic, fact-based approach to solving societal challenges.
Hattu (2015)	independent, registered association	Pursue to address the invisibility of women's expertise in the fields of science, media, politics, culture and leadership.
Finnish Business and Policy Forum Eva (1974)	independent, registered association	EVA is a business and policy think tank aiming to promote the long-term success of the Finnish society. EVA produces knowledge and views for current public debate and proposes reforms to political decision-makers.
Magma (2008)	independent, registered association	Supports liberal values and is independent of party politics. Since the beginning Magma has focused on issues such as integration, minorities, media, and the consequences of structural and economic change.
ETLA (Research Institute of the Finnish Economy) (1946)	independent, registered association	The goal of the Research Institute of the Finnish Economy is to provide useful information to support decision-making on important issues concerning the Finnish economy by applying economic methodology.
Sitra (1967)	independent, public organisation	As an agile, experienced, future-oriented organisation, we have a wide variety of tools at our disposal to identify the need for change and to make it happen. Our role as a future-oriented fund involves creating preconditions for reform, spurring everyone towards making a change and providing opportunities for co-operation. Sitra investigates, explores and develops operating models in close co-operation with other responsible operators to support public administration.
Agenda (2016)	independent, registered association	Agenda is a think-tank that produces high-quality factual background briefings to public debates. Brings together the Swedish-speaking and bilingual population in Finland, promotes lively educational activities and constructive societal discussions.
Tankki (2017)	independent, part of the Finnish Association of Nature Conservation	Tankki is a think tank for 18-25 year olds who want to take a stand on the current consumer culture and find more sustainable solutions for everyday life.

Name of the Think tank	Ideology and organisation	Shortened self-description of purpose and activities
UNU-Wider (1984)	independent, part of United Nations	Serves as a global platform to facilitate joint research and information exchange. Serving as a forum for open dialogue, the Institute brings researchers together with national decision makers and their international partners to discuss key research and policy insights.
Labour Institute for Economic Research (1971)	independent, registered association	The Institute carries out economic research, monitors economic development and publishes macroeconomic forecasts. The aim is to contribute to the economic debate and to provide information for economic policy decision making in Finland.
The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (1961)	independent, public organisation	The purpose of the research carried out by the Institute is to produce focused information of a high standard for use by the academic community and decision-makers, and in public debate. The Institute maintains active international contacts in its activities and its researchers participate in public debate by writing articles for newspapers, periodicals and specialist journals.
Pan-European Institute (PEI) (1988)	independent, part of a university	PEI conducts research funded by international institutions, Finnish governmental organisations, and the Academy of Finland, as well as large corporations. Furthermore, PEI publishes the Baltic Rim Economies (BRE) review for experts to write about current themes and events in the Baltic Sea region.
Pellervo Economic Research (PTT) (1979)	independent, registered association	An independent applied economics research institute and a registered non-profit organisation. Our research is policy-oriented and focuses on five key themes: Globalization and regional development, Food, Forestry, Housing, and Welfare. A notable characteristic of PTT is its ability to investigate these issues from the perspective of regional economy. Our mission is to advance public discussion and to assist both public and private decision-making.
Northern Dimension Institute (NDI) (1999/2006)	independent, part of a university	The ND policy aims at supporting stability, well-being and sustainable development in the region by means of practical cooperation. The Northern Dimension covers a wide range of sectors, such as the environment, nuclear safety, health, energy, transport, logistics, promotion of trade and investment, research, education and culture.
The peace and conflict research institute TAPRI (1969/1994)	independent, part of a university	TAPRI's core tasks consist of publishing, advising and consulting and international cooperation in the fields of peace, conflict and security. TAPRI and its researchers also bring their contribution to debates in the Finnish society. This societal service function includes information in the media, civil society organisations, and educational institutions.

*Table 1. Non-political (independent) Finnish think tanks and their self-descriptions*

The political think tanks (table 2) mostly in Finland are either foundations (3) or registered associations (3). They described themselves to support certain political values or stated contributing discussions based on certain political point of view. Overall, the political think tanks listed to contributing the political conversation and debate, highlighting new opinions, initiating new political openings, participating in

social discussions and providing new perspectives and solutions. In more detail, they described also to promote their party related programs and values. Only exceptions are the think tanks related right-wing parties, Suomen Perusta and Ajatuspaja Toivo. These think tanks mainly focused on to describe their operative focus. In addition, the other think tanks described their operative focus in more detail.

<b>Name of the Think tank</b>	<b>Ideology and organisation</b>	<b>Shortened self-description of purpose and activities</b>
Kalevi Sorsa Foundation (2005)	political, a social democratic think tank, foundation	The foundation describes and contributes to the conversation on what kind of social democratic policies combine freedom and justice with equality, also in the long term. Our work is in the realm that overlaps research, policy formulation and political decision-making. The foundations build bridges between the academic community, media, civil society organisations and political actors.
Suomen Perusta (2012)	political, True Finns party, foundation	Our main focus areas are immigration/multiculturalism, European integration and economics. Promotes social research, debate and decision-making in Finnish democratic society. Carries out research and publishing activities, organises discussion sessions and seminars, and participates in social discussion by highlighting new opinions, perspectives and solutions.
Ajatuspaja Toivo (2010)	political, National Coalition party, foundation	Works at the crossroads of research, political activity and public debate. We find new insights, produce interesting openings, and encourage thinking about social issues. The work consists of commentary of current topics, analysis, pamphlets and wider research projects.
Vasemmistofoorumi (The left Forum) (2006)	political, Left Alliance, registered association	The Left Forum is building a collaborative network sharing a leftist set of values and extending from political parties to universities, research institutions and expert organisations. Produces proposals, initiatives and openings on political and economic issues for the use of Left Alliance. Participates in party programming and in the development of party program.
Visio (Educational Centre Visio) (2005)	political, Green Alliance, registered association	Educational Centre Visio offers training and educational services for civil society organisations and volunteers, members of the Green Party, immigrant associations and individuals interested in environmental issues. Visio aims to improve and realize sustainable development, green values and democracy through adult education and cultural projects.
Ajatushautomo Kompassi (2016)	political, Christian Democrats, registered association	The aim is to promote social research, debate and decision-making in Finnish society based on a Christian democratic value. In its activities, the association strives to promote human dignity and overall human well-being.

*Table 2. Political Finnish think tanks and their self-descriptions*

Overall six of the twenty-six think tanks described that they intend to promote societal change, development or success. Think tanks also claimed to promote public

discussion and debate by offering new openings and insights. For instance, Demos Helsinki describes their work towards “persistent societal change” by participating in public discussion and bringing together people and organisations. Overall, eight think tanks described that they want to raise more societal discussion. Five out of six think tanks that are related or support political parties or worldview, described that they are directly producing information and openings for the parties.

### *Publication types of Finnish think tanks*

The publications of Finnish think tanks were collected by noting and listing every publication type the think tank has listed on their website. Overall 98 publication types were listed for non-political think tanks (N=20) and 32 for political think tanks (N=6). Based on the publication types, the identified publications were categorised to bigger, distinguished categories as presented in Figure 1.

Publications of non-political and political think tanks in Finland

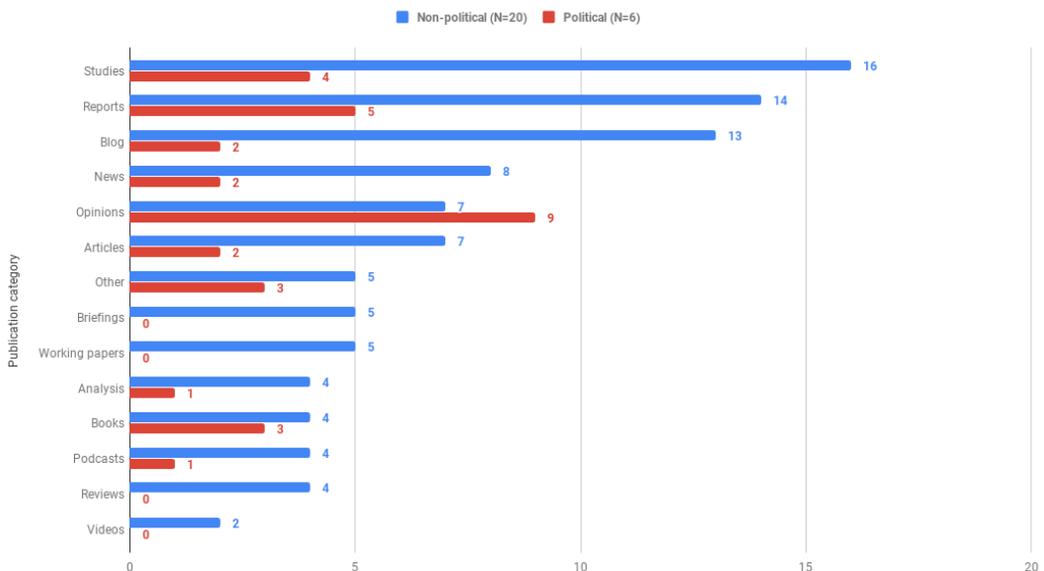


Figure 1. The type of publications of Finnish think tanks.

Based on the listed publication types the Finnish non-political think tanks can be seen as heavily research based organisations. Overall the variety of publication types is smaller in political think tanks (10 different publication types) than the political think tanks (14 different publication types). Findings show that the non-political think tanks concentrate on mainly to publish studies and reports. 16 studies related publication types and 14 reports related publications were identified. They are also very active bloggers as overall 13 think tanks out of 20 had active blogs. Non political think tanks concentrate also to publish current news (8 related publications), sharing opinions (7

and articles (7). Some of the non-political think tanks also rely on publishing analysis, working papers, reviews and books based on their own research projects. The other category contains various publications, for instance information packages, comics and a web magazine. Few think tanks also had podcasts (4) and videos (2) on their websites.

The Finnish political think tanks on the other hand execute their role very much as organisations supporting political opinions of the parties they are related. They publish much less studies (4) or reports (5) than non political think tanks. The political think tanks rely more on sharing their views and opinions (overall 9 related publications) via multiple channels (e.g. opinions, pamphlets, statements, columns), which all can be categorised as published opinions. Some political think tanks are active to publish books (3) and write blog posts (2). The other category of political think tanks contains book reviews, a web magazine and publications of masters thesis.

### *Scotland*

Nine of the 17 think tanks identified in Scotland are private companies, 'limited by guarantee'. This entity is commonly used in the UK by not-for-profit organisations, such as charities, and includes the David Hume Institute, Centre for Scottish Public Policy, Bright Blue, IPPR Scotland, Reform Scotland, Common Weal, International Futures Forum, Scottish Centre for European Relations and Scotland's Future Forum. Three of these have the additional status as a Registered Charity, while an additional two, the Scottish Constitutional Commission and Scottish Policy Foundation are unincorporated associations, but have Registered Charity status. Two think tanks, Democratic Left Scotland and Jimmy Reid Foundation are neither companies nor Registered Charities, although the latter is closely linked with an established publication, Scottish Left Review, itself a company. The Scottish Policy Foundation does not undertake its own research, but rather provides funding to third parties for undertaking research.

Scottish think tanks seek to contribute to the public policy debate to, as they see it, benefit society in some way. This includes to, "campaign for social and economic equality" (Common Weal), "inform debate" (Scottish Centre for European Relations) or "foster co-operation between academics, practitioners and policy makers" (Policy Scotland). Most think tanks are structured as not-for-profit limited companies (a common model common for NGOs in the UK) with some also being registered charities. Three of the think tanks are research institutes are based at universities; Policy Scotland based at Glasgow University, the Centre for the Study of Public Policy at Strathclyde University, and the Fraser of Allander Institute, also at Strathclyde. One organisation, the Scottish Policy Foundation, has the unique position in that it "funds policy research by think tanks, charities and other organisations". Although it does behave wholly like a think tank, given its remit to promote and fund independent think tanks (Scottish Policy Foundation, 2017), it was deemed appropriate to include.

Name of the Think tank	Ideology & organisation	Short description of purpose and activities
David Hume Institute (1985)	Limited Company, Registered Charity	The David Hume Institute is an independent, non-partisan, evidence-based policy institute that has been operating at the heart of Scottish policy debate for over 30 years.
Scotland's Future Forum (2005)	Limited Company, Run by Scottish Parliament	The Scottish Parliament's futures think-tank. It works on a non-party basis to promote research and to stimulate debate on the long-term challenges and opportunities that Scotland faces.
Scottish Policy Foundation (2017)	Registered Charity	Independent, apolitical grant-making charitable foundation working to promote honest, insightful and objective policy research to the people of Scotland in order to inform public debate.
International Futures Forum (2007)	Limited company	IFF is developing a body of ideas and philosophy about how to make sense of today's complex world. We share that thinking widely as a contribution to the global intellectual commons.
Scottish Centre for European Relations (2018?)	Limited company	Independent and unaligned EU think tank, based in Edinburgh, that will inform, debate and provide up-to-the-minute, high-quality research and analysis of European Union developments and challenges, with a particular focus on Scotland's EU interests and policies
Centre for Study of Public Policy (1976)	University department	The CSPP applies ideas from the social sciences to major problems of government by combining quantitative, qualitative and institutional methods drawn from political science, sociology, economics and related disciplines.
Policy Scotland (2017)	University department	To generate and provide a space for local, national and international public policy debates. We foster co-operation between academics, practitioners and policy makers, and pool this collective expertise in order to flesh out new initiatives, test the effectiveness of interventions, generate better evidence and engage a wide variety of audiences.
Centre for Scottish Public Policy (1990)	Limited company	A leading, independent, membership based, cross-party & non-party think tank.
Fraser of Allander Institute (1975)	University Department	In the 40 years since, it has become established as a leading independent economic research institute focused on the Scottish economy.
Scottish Constitutional Commission (2005)	Registered Charity, Scottish Confederalist	The work of the Constitutional Commission starts from three axioms. Firstly, that legitimate sovereignty in Scotland resides in the "whole community of the realm", and not in the Queen-in-Parliament at Westminster.

*Table 3. Non-political (independent) Scottish think tanks and their self-descriptions*

### *Political think tanks and their descriptions*

No think tank in Scotland is formally connected to a political party. That is, they are a separate legal entity, they are not, in the main, funded by political parties, and

they self-identify as being independent. However, some do *identify* with a particular political position (Table 4). Their public activity of engaging with politicians, and their self-descriptions allows us to therefore identify them as “political”. Although not detailed in this paper, it would be possible to link each think tank in this category to a particular Scottish political party or parties.

Name of the Think tank	Ideology & organisation	Short description of purpose and activities
Reform Scotland (2008)	Limited company, Registered charity, Centre-right	Is a public policy institute which works to promote increased economic prosperity and more effective public services based on the principles of limited government, diversity and personal responsibility. Independent of political parties and any other organisations.
Common Weal (2014)	Limited company, Pro-Scottish independence, Left-wing	A people-powered think and do tank in Scotland. We develop policy on and campaign for social and economic equality, for wellbeing and the environment, for quality of life, for peace and justice.
Democratic Left Scotland (1998)	Unincorporated Association, Left-wing	We want to see a society which meets the basic needs of all, and enables them to develop their talents and abilities to the full, enriching society and themselves. Is free from oppression and exploitation. A world where children are nurtured, nourished and respected, and which values and cares for its older citizens. Is pluralist, valuing people from different backgrounds and cultures, celebrating their rich diversity. Ensures that its development is ecologically sustainable and takes responsibility for bequeathing a healthier environment to future generations. Contributes to the creation of a new global community of co-operation and interdependence which leaves behind poverty, famine, debt, militarism and war.
Jimmy Reid Foundation (2011)	Unincorporated association, Left-wing	An independent ‘think tank’ and advocacy group focused on practical, policy proposals for transforming Scotland which are based on analysis and investigation of the current Scottish and global political, cultural and social situation.
Progress Scotland (2019)	Limited company, Scottish Independence	Progress Scotland commissions public opinion polling, focus groups and other research to better understand how people’s views are changing in Scotland.
Bright Blue Scotland (2019 Scotland, 2014 UK)	Limited company, centre-right	Independent think tank and pressure group for liberal conservatism. We defend and champion liberal, open, democratic and meritocratic values, institutions and policies.
Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland (1988 in UK) (2014 in Scotland)	Limited company, Registered Charity, centre-left	Scottish branch of UK IPPR. We are cross-party, progressive, and neutral on the question of Scotland’s independence. IPPR Scotland is dedicated to supporting and improving public policy in Scotland, working tirelessly to achieve a progressive Scotland.

Table 4. Political Scottish think tanks and their self-descriptions

### Publication types of Scottish think tanks

The publications of Scottish think tanks were collected same manner as Finnish think tanks (Figure 2). Overall 28 publication types were listed for non-political think tanks (N=10) and 29 for political think tanks (N=7). The distinguished categories are presented in Figure 2. Overall the findings show that the non-political think tanks have more publication types than the political think tanks. Generally the both type Scottish think tanks intend to reach their stakeholders with reports, publishing news and blog posts. Nearly all non-political think tanks publish reports (8) based on studies. They also publish lots of news (6), blog posts (4), some publish articles (2), briefings (2), working papers (2) and analysis (2). Overall the variety of publication types is smaller in non-political think tanks (8 different publication types) than the political think tanks (12 different publication types). Both the non-political and political think tanks rely on very much written publications even they don't publish studies. Only one non-political think tank publishes studies. The political think tanks also rely less on articles (1) and briefings (2), but they use podcasts (2) and videos (1) to reach their publics. Scottish political think tanks also publish policy documents (2), various magazines (4) and consultation responses (1), what the non-political think tanks don't do. The other (2) category for non-political think tanks contains presentation materials and surveys, and for political think tanks (3) media summaries, fact sheets and political policy trackers.

Publications of non-political and political think tanks in Scotland

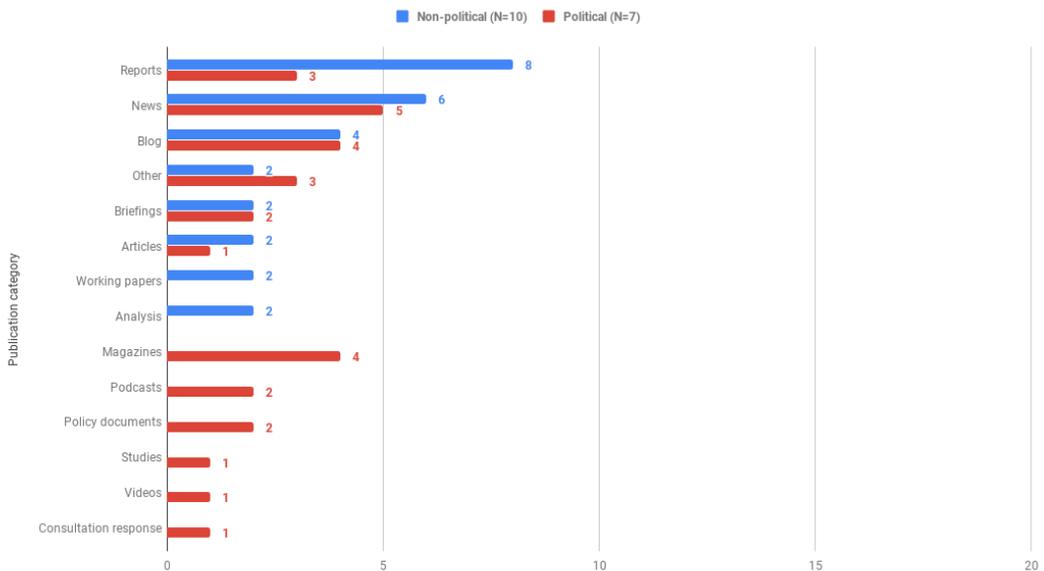


Figure 2. The type of publications of Scottish think tanks.

The comparison of publication types in two countries indicates that the Finnish think tanks are overall more research based organisations than their counterparts in Scotland. The Finnish think tanks are active in their communication and deploy overall more publication types for advocacy than the Scottish think tanks. In Scotland the political think tanks are more active in their publications than the non-political think tanks, while in Finland the non-political think tanks are clearly more active in their publications than the political think tanks.

## **Conclusions and discussion**

This study has contributed to the literature on think tanks and their influence on policy making and public discussion in Finland and Scotland. By comparing Finland with Scotland, we have added new empirical insights about advocacy methods in both countries. This descriptive study has also increased understanding of the roles of think tanks and their development in both societies, and explored new possibilities to study the influence of think tanks.

The findings show that the Finnish think tanks embrace various ideological orientations. The development of political and economic changes in Finland has increased the diversity and number of think tanks. Among the Finnish independent think tanks, few well-established and bigger think tanks exist. In Finland, think tanks are making a clear distinction in their political linkage. While the majority of the Finnish think tanks present themselves as independent and non-related to political parties, they also point out that they want to engage with the political processes and undertake activities to influence policies. The findings indicate that the think tanks in Finland are mostly research based organisations, and their main operative focus is to make studies or reports and make them available for stakeholders, decision makers and media. The number of political think tanks in Finland is small, but their ties to their parties and political values are strong. To make their research and information available for public and media, Finnish think tanks use various communication channels and types of publications. Think tanks in Finland are not targeting certain stakeholders with their information, but merely concentrate on how to make the information publicly available. The think tanks related to political parties concentrate more on bringing their opinions to public discussion and in this manner support the ideology of their mother parties. Their communicative efforts rely more on traditional and written communication channels, and they have not developed as many means of communication as non-political think tanks. Many think tanks describe that professional communication to the public, decision makers and the media plays a very important role. Still, the overall findings suggest that the role of strategic communication is considered only through publishing research-based information to stakeholders.

All the Scottish think tanks included are independent organisations in that they have no formal ties with political parties. E.g. they are not legally part of them or do not receive funding from them. However, it was possible to categorise these think tanks as those which have a political stance and are closely associated to a political party or stance, and those which are not. For example, Common Weal is closely associated with Scottish independence and the Scottish National Party, Bright Blue (at a UK level) has 184 parliamentary supporters who are Conservative politicians or peers), and The Reid Foundation has associations with left-wing politicians and the Scottish Left Review magazine.

There are limitations to this study, especially in considering the transferability of our findings and conclusions to other settings. This descriptive study has looked into descriptions and type publications of think tanks. Defining accurately what think tanks in Finland and Scotland are is challenged by various things. National context, the development of political systems, the organisational diversity and think tanks' attitudes towards research and dissemination of information varies very much. Categorising the publications is challenged by the language, as for instance in Finland the think tanks have different ways to produce research to different publications. Still, this study shows that think tanks have become more influential political communication actors. They want to influence political decision making via various communication channels and publication types. In the future, it would be beneficial to study how the knowledge in think tanks is created, and how this knowledge and the voice of think tanks is presented in media. The content of their communication and the difference of various publications should be studied more closely. More analysis on the content of publications and information would update the picture on how think tanks use strategic communication to influence political decision making and public opinion. In addition, the significance of social media channels should be studied closely. Alongside the rich research tradition of quantitative data of think tanks growth, more focus on their actions and efforts on policy making should be studied. This study presents a view of the role and development of think tanks more closely in various national contexts. The methodology of this study can be used more to research the influence of think tanks to decision making more closely.

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