Dangling in a Vacuum:
A Presentation of Polish Think Tanks in Political Life

Katarzyna Jezierska
Division of Law, Politics and Economics, University West, Sweden

This article explores the image and reputation of think tanks in their reciprocal relationship with their environment. The aim is to unravel the logic of think tanks’ institutional identity formation in the largely understudied context of Poland. How do Polish think tanks present themselves and how are they (re)presented by others? To answer these questions, the Goffmanian microsociological framework and positioning theory are adjusted to a study of institutions. The analysis of original interview and media data reveals that Polish think tanks project an image of and are perceived by the media as being weak. I argue that this image and reputation of weakness should primarily be explained by think tanks’ and the media’s perceptions of the political field, which confine the possible identity and positioning of think tanks.

Keywords: think tanks; policy advice; institutional identity; Poland; Goffman

Introduction

Think tanks, that is, policy research institutes, are obscure creatures for three distinct reasons. These institutions are largely absent from major political science and sociology handbooks, making them invisible to students of these subjects; the scholarship focusing specifically on think tanks almost exclusively studies these institutions in the Anglophone world, obscuring our knowledge of think tanks in other parts of the globe; and lastly, the everyday operations of think tanks are often conducted behind the scenes, concealing them from the public eye. At the same time, think tanks exist in almost every country in the world, exercising influence on politics through policy advice and shaping public opinion. The organizational form of think tanks is also somewhat unclear, which might be the epistemological explanation for their obscurity. Think tanks resemble many other institutions and perform functions typical of such varied actors as the media, universities and civil society organizations. Taken together, these features make think tanks especially interesting and challenging to study.

This article explores the image and reputation of think tanks in their reciprocal relation with their environment. The aim is to unravel the logic of think tanks’ institutional identity formation in the largely understudied context of Poland. How do Polish think tanks present themselves, and how are they (re)presented by others? To
capture the latter part of the question, I study media representations, as the media is arguably most influential in making (in)visible and shaping the reputation of other societal actors. Hence, the more concrete research questions are as follows: How do Polish think tanks perceive their own role and identity, how do they assess the position of think tanks in Poland? How often and how are think tanks reported about in the Polish media? How is the role and position of think tanks in the sociopolitical landscape (re)presented?

The article is structured in the following way. First, two strands of literature to which this article contributes are introduced: research on institutional identity and newer developments in think tank scholarship. Next, there is a section discussing the more concrete analytical tools that are helpful in the study of think tanks’ institutional identity formation, that is, Erving Goffman’s theory of the presentation of self complemented by positioning theory. An examination of the contextual specificities of the chosen empirical setting of Central Europe and Poland is followed by the presentation of data and methods used in this article. The subsequent analysis reveals that Polish think tanks project an image and are perceived by the media as being weak. I argue that this image and reputation of weakness should primarily be explained by think tanks’ and the media’s perception of the political field, which defines the possible identity and positioning of think tanks.

Approaching Think Tanks’ Identity Formation

Two streams in the literature are especially important for this article: the broader literature on organizational identity formation and the more specific scholarly work on think tanks as boundary organizations. While a discussion of the vast scholarship on organizational identity, developed in the field of marketing and organization studies, is beyond the scope of this article, let me point out some of the recurring themes in this literature that will be helpful for my purposes in this article. One basic insight is that institutions can be treated as social actors or “artificial persons,” which means that, after some modifications, concepts and theories about individual identity apply. A simple definition of organizational identity points to that which is most central, enduring, and distinctive about an organization: a social actor’s self-definition in relation to others. Importantly, this self-definition should be treated “as embedded and categorical claims making,” suggesting that the process of identity formation is social, that is, always in relation to the surroundings, and discursive, that is, located in practices of claims making. “Thus, the self—individual and organizational—is produced, reproduced and maintained in discourses, past and present.” Sorting out the interlinked notions of identity, image, and reputation, we learn that image can be treated as the message sent out to external stakeholders about what is most central, enduring, and distinctive about the organization, while organizational reputation is the feedback received by an organization from its stakeholders, concerning the credibility
of the organization’s identity claims. Thus, image is the projection of identity, including claims regarding alterity (how the organization differs from other organizations), and reputation is the perception of such projection, that is, the standing of an organization in the eyes of beholders and a subjective estimate of its credibility or worth. The analysis in this article is structured accordingly, focusing on projected image and perceived reputation. The theory section further elaborates on how these notions are combined with the Goffmanian dramaturgical metaphor guiding this investigation. While the literature about organizational identity is very useful, what this article focuses on is not the identity of individual think tanks but the collective organizational identity of Polish think tanks as a specific organizational form. To make this distinction clear, I use the term institutional identity.

This article also draws inspiration from and contributes to the newest development in think tank scholarship—the perspective of think tanks as boundary organizations. While previous studies indicate there is heterogeneity among think tanks across countries and within the same country, with individual organizations differing in size, budget, scope, and type of activity preferred, the boundary organization perspective allows me to highlight the shared characteristics that group these organizations into one sociological category. The distinctive traits of think tanks are drawn from their interstitial position between other fields, which leads to combining a variety of qualifications, functions, and professional models. Operating on the verge of other societal fields, think tanks perform boundary work; they are described as relying on resources from the academic, market, civil society, media, and political fields, constructing a unique entity. The claims of think tanks to expertise and influence are based on an affinity to these fields, while their claims to autonomy make distancing themselves from these same fields necessary. By rendering think tanks visible as a specific organizational type, the boundary approach also highlights the importance of idiosyncratic features created by any given sociopolitical context. The special local characteristics of the more established fields necessarily define the character of local think tank landscapes. The current article contributes to this newest development in the research on think tanks by turning attention to the consequences of these relational traits for think tanks’ identity. Both the relative “maturity” of the more established fields and the perception of think tanks by other actors shape the possibilities and limitations of think tanks’ ability to successfully project a distinct identity and perform their functions.

To develop concrete analytical tools to approach the dynamic of institutional identity formation that coordinate well with the chosen perspective on think tanks as boundary organizations, I turn to Erving Goffman and positioning theory.

**Scaling Up and Expanding Goffman**

I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the
impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.  

More than sixty years ago, Goffman published his monumental book about how individuals engage in image creation, staging their identity in meetings with an interactive audience. While Goffman developed an influential framework for the microsociological understanding of human interaction, this article applies his framework to the mezzo level of institutional interactions. Goffman’s scholarship has inspired a wide range of studies developing his framing theory for the purposes of different levels of analysis and different academic fields. Scaling up the dramaturgical framework, however, is a far less common exercise. For example, Meyer and colleagues discuss world society and the global spread of the nation-state blueprint. Twenty years later, Sallaz states that “we should be ambitious about using Goffman to generate and develop theories about other levels of social reality.”

As this article seeks to highlight the logic of think tanks’ identity formation, Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor of social interaction seems to be a particularly good fit. This metaphor inspires an exploration of the enactment of institutional scripts by think tanks, capturing the dynamics of image creation and reputation. Image creation does not here imply a purely rationalistic, strategic action; instead, following the dramaturgical metaphor, it also includes an enactment of scripts, suggesting that adaptation is part of creation. Moreover, taking seriously Goffman’s admonition to view reality as a relational construct and to examine the meanings that emerge and circulate through these relations, I analyze what think tanks’ self-sense is, how they present and perceive themselves (image), and how they are (re)presented and perceived by the media (reputation). Following Goffman, the focus is not on truthfulness (what think tanks truly are; how influential they truly are; what truly is most central, enduring, and distinctive about them) but on performance – how they present themselves, how they stage their influence, and how that presentation and perception of influence is received and further represented by the media. In this sense, the article focuses on discursive creations of institutional identity.

The usual critique of Goffman’s theory of self is that his focus on roles results in a rather static framework of analysis, which can be contrasted with the more dynamic approach of positioning theory. The latter “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of ‘role’ serves to highlight static, formal and ritualistic aspects.” Positioning theory underlines the studied actors’ specific location with respect to others with the help of language. Most generally, positioning theory focuses on “how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others.” Although positioning theory also originates from the field of social psychology and person-to-person encounters, the theory has been scaled up and used to analyze the identities of such entities as states. For the purposes of the current article, this theory is not treated as an alternative to the Goffmanian framework but as complementary, helping to further highlight the
elements of interactive meaning creation that are already present in Goffman. Positioning theory has the merit of stressing the dynamic process of identity creation, where positioning is an interpretation of a social role in interactions with others. The Goffmanian focus on the dramaturgy of identity through image creation and the enactment of scripts is expanded by positioning theory’s more careful attention to the constellation of other actors and their interpretation of the staged image (reputation). Taken together, these theories provide promising tools for an analysis of the think tank (re)presentation and an assessment of the perceived location of the studied actors in the Polish sociopolitical context.

**Think Tanks in Transition**

This study is empirically situated in Central Europe and more specifically Poland during the transition to capitalism and liberal democracy, that is, from 1989 to 2015. There are several interrelated reasons for why this context is especially interesting for a study of think tanks. First, when looked at from the perspective of think tanks, the period of transition from state-socialism to capitalism and liberal democracy was a time of great opportunity. The extreme societal politicization, when the old socio-politicoeconomic system was being replaced, offered plenty of room and much need for innovative ideas and solutions. The transition period was a time when “the frame of the society was debated,” and think tanks were eager to leave an imprint. Second, when practically all societal fields were unsettled, think tanks, serving as negotiators and translators between other fields, had the chance to contribute to shaping the new social landscape by helping define the boundaries of surrounding fields, such as politics, the market, media, academia, and civil society. Third, as a relatively new institution in Central Europe, without wide recognition in the surrounding society, think tanks had to actively engage in different strategies to justify their raison d’être. Hence, one could expect that the performance of the institutional identity of think tanks in Central Europe would have taken a more explicit form, as the insecurity of both the fields and the borders between them necessitated more identity work. The above conditions are to various degrees shared by all Central European countries. Among them, Poland is a typical case regarding the transition trajectory, with round-table agreements followed by democratic as well as economic liberalization and accession to the EU. What distinguishes Poland is the comparative vibrancy of its civil society, which includes think tanks. Compared to Hungary or the Czech Republic, Poland cherishes a significantly larger and more active third sector in addition to informal activism. Poland also hosts a larger number of think tanks. The transition period, especially the late 1980s and early 1990s, was undeniably a time of blossoming of think tanks in Poland. The think tank community grew from only a handful of organizations in 1990 to approximately forty-two in 2015. The year 2015 and the coming to power of the radical right-wing party Law and Justice
(Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) marks another milestone and a second acceleration in the numerical development of Polish think tanks. The more recent, 2017 edition of the same directory lists sixty think tanks for Poland, an increase of eighteen organizations compared to the preceding year. The period after 2015 is sometimes labeled the second transition, this time from liberal to illiberal democracy, and it deserves a separate investigation. The current article focuses on think tanks in Poland between 1989 and 2015.

It should be mentioned that some scholars trace the origins of think tanks in Poland even further back in time. Stasiak gives an account of Polish think tanks pretransition, going as far back as the interwar period. Sus provides an overview of a specific type of think tanks, foreign policy institutes, before 1989. Among these organizations, The Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych [PISM]), originally created in 1947, is commonly referred to as the first modern Polish think tank. Obviously, such a long historical perspective requires a broad definition of think tanks to accommodate the conditions of policy advice during state-socialism, with the heavily state-controlled policy agenda annuling any claims to autonomy.

In regard to the ideological representation of Polish think tanks, aligning with the zeitgeist and foreign donors’ preferences, think tanks founded in Poland in the early 1990s were predominantly liberal. According to some, it was partly due to the active engagement of think tanks that the public discourse and orientation of the reforms was settled in the neoliberal direction. Since then, the ideological landscape of Polish think tanks has gradually pluralized. Until 2015, some variation in ideological orientation could be observed. Although liberal think tanks still clearly dominated the scene, both leftist and conservative policy institutes were in place. An initial review suggests a significant increase in the number of conservative organizations after 2015.

During the studied period between 1989 and 2015, the revolving-door metaphor suggesting a seamless transition between the government and nongovernment sectors with think tankers moving in and out of formal politics was not a very suitable description of the Polish context. Even though the financial resources of Polish think tanks were unevenly distributed, all organizations were rather small or moderate in size, both with regard to budget and staff. Given that think tanks as new organizations in Poland were relatively unknown to decision makers, these aspects significantly diminished the incentives of Polish policy makers to rely on these institutions for expertise. Think tanks were often ignored in the making of both internal and external politics. On the other hand, given the reality of the transition and the absence of in-house expertise within the administration, we could expect that think tanks, as external advisers on policy issues, would fill this gap. This type of need is certainly an important enabling condition for think tanks to thrive, but as Abelson argues, the opportunity structures of local regimes are not the whole explanation; other factors also play a role in either boosting or hampering the role of think tanks.
“Their ability or inability to market their ideas effectively may have as much to do with how these institutions define their missions, the directors who lead them and the resources and strategies they employ to achieve their stated goals, as with the political environment they inhabit.” I would rather argue that the sociopoliticoeconomic environment to a large extent frames the available possibilities for defining a mission and choosing strategies. Therefore, the current article includes the contextual Central European conditions in its analysis of think tanks’ presentation of self while acknowledging that both opportunity structures and the agency of think tank leaders play a crucial role in the positioning of think tanks in the sociopolitical landscape.

The Empirical Material

To qualify as an object of study in this article, organizations had to exhibit some think tank characteristics constituting a working definition of a think tank, that is, claiming autonomy, conducting social research and attempting to (directly or indirectly) influence policy making, regardless of whether they defined themselves as think tanks. In this sense, institutions were identified through their functions rather than formal labels.

The data used in the analysis of think tanks’ self-presentation consist of 16 qualitative interviews with Polish think tankers who worked at nine different think tanks at the time the interviews were conducted (2013). Selected interviewees were either directors of think tanks or leaders of research programs and were informed that the study focused on the institutional, not personal, level. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. All the interviews were conducted by the author and were structured, with the help of an interview guide, around the themes of opportunity structures for Polish civil society and think tanks’ role in Poland. Additionally, the self-presentation of think tanks is also drawn from an analysis of the “About Us” sections on the respective think tanks’ websites, as it is there that they present themselves in the way they want to be viewed by the broader public. The 2013 versions of the websites were accessed with the help of the Internet Archive for the sake of data consistency.

The reception of their presentation and how think tanks are further represented in the media is studied through a selected corpus of texts from two main Polish broadsheets, Gazeta Wyborcza and Rzeczpospolita. Articles included in the corpus were identified by archive searches for the word “think tank” (in the Polish language, the English word is used). The time interval chosen for the media study is 1989 until the end of October 2015, starting with the shift to liberal democracy and ending just before the shift to illiberal democracy, which was initiated by the coming to power of the right-wing, nationalist Law and Justice party in November 2015. All types of articles, including opinion pieces and letters from readers, and all sections of newspapers, including regional, culture, business, and sports
sections, were incorporated because media is considered an actor that creates the reputation of think tanks. Hence, even letters from readers selected for publication by a newspaper are treated as the “media’s” voice. For Rzeczpospolita, the total hits for the studied period were 912, excluding some random articles not related to the topic of policy analysis.40 The search in Gazeta Wyborcza’s archives led to 743 hits.41 All these articles were used for the descriptive, quantitative part of the study to map the occurrence of the phenomenon of think tanks in the Polish press over time and to distinguish the character in which think tanks appear in the media. From this corpus, 26 texts from Gazeta Wyborcza and 40 texts from Rzeczpospolita were selected for qualitative analysis because these contain more substantial material about the phenomenon of think tanks, thus allowing for an in-depth investigation of how think tanks are represented by the media.

Presentation of Self: The Image Creation of Polish Think Tanks

One could expect that think tankers will exaggerate their own prominence.42 According to the theory of reputation management, the goal is to appear successful and thus to achieve a good reputation.43 However, this approach is not confirmed by my material. An analysis of think tanks’ websites reveals the rather modest image of Polish think tanks. A commonly stated goal is to improve the quality of public debate (Civic Institute, Batory Foundation, Institute of Public Affairs), to ground politicized issues in expert knowledge (Shipyard), and to introduce new issues or ideological profiles to the public debate (Civic Institute, Institute of Public Affairs, Ferdinand Lassalle Centre for Social Thought, Sobieski Institute). These aspirations showcase the ambition to be an active agent in policy making and the public sphere. The position that think tanks aspire to is also revealed through the scope of their declared aims, which range from national (“the aim of critical and reliable description of challenges of social life in Poland and searching and promoting effective, innovative methods of reacting to them”44) to international (“improving the quality of Polish democracy, . . . strengthening the role of civic institutions in public life, . . . developing international cooperation and solidarity”45). In contrast to these ambitious goals, direct boasting about the achievements of think tanks is very rare in the studied About Us sections. The Civil Development Forum is an exception; this think tank presents claims such as “We are effective, well known, credible and increasingly transparent”46; the heading of its website states “We Successfully Promote Freedom.”47 This think tank also lists newspaper quotes from influential public figures praising its activities. Such explicit self-presentation as successful and credible is atypical, but more modest statements about competence and achievements can be found in the About Us sections of The Institute of Public Affairs and Sobieski Institute,48 which claim to have both broad expertise and good connections with politicians and civil servants. Keeping in mind the fact that websites function as
promotional material through which think tanks attract potential contractors, it is surprising how relatively humble they are in projecting their image.

During the interviews, the respondents were asked to describe the position of think tanks in Poland. There seems to be agreement among the interviewed organizations that Polish think tanks are rather weak and do not have much influence. This overall perception of weakness is probably one of the reasons behind the fact that many of the interviewees did not self-identify as think tankers. This lack of self-identification is visible in the quotes below in which the interviewees often reflect about think tanks as an external object (“they are,” etc.). I will look into the arguments behind this denial in a separate section, but first, I will analyze the different explanations given for the self-perceived weakness of Polish think tanks. Apart from such internal factors as the lack of sufficiently qualified staffers, resulting in weak outputs, the main sources of weakness identified were the economic and political environments of Polish think tanks. Financial weakness and income instability over time, as well as a lack of alternative funding sources, such as philanthropy, were mentioned.

Here, [in Poland] it’s a kind of limbo because EU funding can’t be applied for, and philanthropy is either weak or oriented in other directions. *(Batory Foundation)*

Tracing the development of Polish think tanks, it becomes apparent that, after foreign democracy assistance and EU funding receded in the mid-2000s due to Western donors’ assessment of Poland as a consolidated democracy, think tanks like other NGOs in Poland faced new challenges. Nevertheless, think tanks exhibited economic perseverance, and to secure their survival, many resorted to diversified forms of action, engaging in new tasks and alliances, which strengthened their hybridity. The most common response to economic constraints was the adoption of what the interviewees label “impure” forms—operating on a project basis and taking on tasks far from their mission, which sometimes even put their claims to autonomy at risk.

They [think tanks] have spread themselves too thinly, like “we can do anything depending on where the money is—give us the money and we’ll do it.” So, the most important dimension is lost, being an independently thinking center. *(National Federation of Polish NGOs)*

Financial problems, however, are superseded by the unfavorable political environment. One recurring theme is the generally unwelcoming attitude and lack of understanding among politicians.

There is no such culture on the decision-making side. There are various definitions of think tanks, but for me, a think tank is an organization that aims at influencing the shape of public policy. In order to do that, the other side has to be willing to listen. And
this other side is hopeless. There are obviously some niches where you can try to sell your ideas, but it’s not systemic. (Batory Foundation)

The interviewee reflects upon the inherently relational character of think tanks. Think tanks need a counterpart; their reports need to end up on somebody’s desk in order for them to matter. Therefore, the quality of the political field necessarily defines the quality of the think tank space. “The status [of think tanks] is very weak because the hypothetical main target is rather meagerly interested. I’m speaking of political parties” (Ferdinand Lassalle Centre for Social Thought). Polish politics is repeatedly portrayed as immature, with no programmatic reflection or understanding of the need for expertise.

It’s also an example of how politics is conducted in Poland. You work on something, think tanks keep working, but politics is still conducted by daily throwing chalk at each other. Because one gets off on the wrong foot, and another one does not, suddenly, all the priorities are changing, coalitions shift and so on. (Green Institute)

This lack of predictability and clear contours in the political field result in think tanks “having the quality of dangling in the vacuum [zawieszonych w próżni]” (Green Institute). With such unstable and unreflective partners on the political side, it is hard to even establish a relationship.

The “gaping hole [dziura]” (Institute of Public Affairs), “vacuum [próżnia]” (Green Institute), “limbo” (Batory Foundation) or “undefined field [nienazwane pole]” (Shipyard) notions used to describe the position of think tanks resulting from the undefined character of Polish politics and political debate are predominantly seen as a problem. Almost none of the interviewees reflected on the fact that such a situation could give think tanks traction by clarifying the need to fill this abyss and allowing them to define the boundaries of the think tank space. However, as discussed in the analysis of their websites, the image projected to the broader public to some extent meets this expectation, showcasing contributions to a more expert-based and high-quality public debate as their main stated ambitions and desired image.

Overall, the picture emerging from the website analysis is more self-confident than the almost self-abasing image coming through in the interviews. In the former, it seems that think tanks find their rationale for being in the very weakness of the political field they point out in the interviews. The discrepancy between the self-presentations in interviews and on the websites could probably be attributed to the expert interview dynamic. Interviewed think tankers clearly related to me as a coexpert, promptly exhibiting a self-critical position. Interviews also made it easier to slip into talking about other institutions as weak, smearing their reputation, while the websites focus on only creating their own organization’s image.

In 2013, some interviewees expressed the sense of improving the recognizability of think tanks.
And generally, [how would you assess] the position of think tanks in Poland?

I think it’s growing. . . . At least the understanding among those we have the most immediate contact with, that is, journalists, politicians, civil servants—the understanding of what a think tanks is, today, is incomparably bigger than ten years ago, not to mention 15 years ago. . . . Today, if someone asks me, and I say I work in a think tank, I don’t have to explain too long what that is. Back then, when I started working here, I had problems with that. (Institute of Public Affairs)

One think tanker ascribes this shift to the parallel process of change in the understanding of politics as something that is “not only done in the parliament.”

My impression is, at least based on my conversations with politicians, that they start to understand that politics is also conducted in the discursive sphere, which is created by various actors. (Ferdinand Lassalle Centre for Social Thought)

Underlying in this quote is the notion that discursive shifts are crucial components of policy making, and think tanks both recognize and experience that they are becoming acknowledged by external actors as being especially skillful in this task. The carefully hopeful tones about their own position coming through in the quotes above are ascribed to how politicians, civil servants, journalists, and the broader public perceive think tanks. This perception, yet again, points to the limits of image creation set by reputation.

Think Tanks in Denial: Alterity before Identity

By analyzing in greater depth the arguments for why many of the interviewed institutions deny a think tank identity, we can discern their ideas about what a think tank is and what it should be, that is, the image of the institutional type of think tank. First, the interviewees seem to cherish an idea of a pure form of think tank, which, according to them, few Polish institutions achieve. Interestingly, and as discussed above, this very quality of organizational and functional impurity is what, according to the scholarly debate, defines a think tank. Hence, hybridity, which the interviewees list as a flaw, is exactly what distinguishes think tanks from other institutions.

Here, [in Poland] it’s very difficult to keep the [think tank] structure, and most of these organizations simply vegetate, taking on whatever they want or, rather, whatever they can. The Institute [of Public Affairs] also ended up there—“we do some training and some grant-giving because there was money for organizations dealing with legal help.” The institutions become hybrids, not like in the West. (Batory Foundation)
Impurity is partly blamed on financial instability. Without a solid income, the organizations turn to various activities that are not always in line with their think tank identity.

As a pure think tank, it [the Institute of Public Affairs] would never survive, it wouldn’t have enough financial means for the activities, so unfortunately, we need to reach out for different projects. We are careful to always have a research component, but it’s often simply concrete engagement [konkretne działania]. (Institute of Public Affairs)

Even an orientation toward applied research is mentioned as conflicting with a think tank identity. Another factor, seemingly disqualifying their organizations as a think tank, is a lack of human resources for systematic research matching the quality of university research and insufficient academic credentials: “In fact, we couldn’t compete with formal think tanks because we don’t have this whole establishment with all the degrees” (Shipyard). “Pure,” “formal,” “serious,” and “like in the West” is what Polish think tanks are not, which contrasts with the reputation they hold of real think tanks. What comes forth is the view of Polish organizations as insufficiently focused on research to qualify as think tanks, while we know from empirical findings from other contexts that, even though conducting policy research is a necessary component of think tanks, it is present to a varying degree. To capture this variance in think tanks’ dedication to research, only some organizations that have predominantly academically accredited staffers and primarily produce academic-like book-length publications are dubbed “universities without students.”

A contrasting perspective stressing alterity with the aim of achieving a positive distinction raises the independence and ambition of the interviewed organizations to initiate new debates as elements that seemingly distance them from a think tank identity. Again, these qualities are usually listed as core characteristics (or aspirations) of a think tank but were seen by these interviewees as something distinguishing their organization from an imaginary and, in this account, negatively viewed “real think tank.”

That is, we for sure cherish more agency [podmiotowość] and feel more sovereign because think tanks are often linked to someone else, usually someone stands behind them. We have nobody behind us, and we’re not anybody’s instrument; this is how I’d put it. This is one thing, and another is the level of operating. Think tanks are more at the instrumental level, not truly creating completely new ideas but rather ascribing a certain ideology to given interests. (Political Critique)

The allusion to the classic understanding of think tanks as elite organizations that translate interests into expertise is clear. This interviewee reverses the perspective, discussed above, in which a lack of identification with think tanks envisions Polish institutions as insufficient in terms of their purity of focus. What we see here, in contrast, is a pejorative view of think tanks, while the interviewed organization
conveys a more ambitious and independent image of themselves, looking down on think tanks and distancing itself from these institutions.

And I think it [what we do] is more “meta” than what think tanks do. They rather think about or have a segment . . . are first of all specialized. They do something concrete and are knowledgeable. These are experts who specialize in something concrete, e.g., international politics, the economy, new ideas. This [what we do] is rather an attempt at connecting very different spheres and disparate disciplines. . . . In the sense that we are very multifunctional, and I guess that makes us different. (Political Critique)

What scholars define as the differentia specifica of think tanks—hybridity and the mediating function between different fields—is here listed as a quality excluding the given organization from the think tank identity. Taken together with the previous critique of think tanks’ weak position in the sociopolitical landscape and the perceived unfavorable political and economic opportunity structures, we can conclude that these utterances reflect the interviewees’ critical assessment of the current condition of think tanks in Poland. This perspective is a deliberate stance—an unwillingness to be conflated with what they define as flawed institutions. One interviewee puts it quite explicitly: “This is why we don’t fully identify and don’t want to be included in this world [of think tanks] because it doesn’t function the way we wish it would” (Political Critique).

An interesting trope that is clearly visible in the material discussed above is the dissonance between the institution of a think tank as the interviewees imagine it and the implementation of this institutional ideal in the organization for which they work. This decoupling, as we could call it, highlights the impossibility of a copy–paste implementation of an institutional form in a context that differs from the default American version. What is problematic in the case of Polish think tanks is that the pure think tank to which local institutions compare themselves represents an impossible ideal. There is plenty of evidence from scholarship, even in the United States, that think tanks are always already hybrids.

(Re)presentations in the Media: The Reputation of Polish Think Tanks

In any case, in so far as the others act as if the individual had conveyed a particular impression, we may take a functional or pragmatic view and say that the individual has “effectively” projected a given definition of the situation and “effectively” fostered the understanding that a given state of affairs obtains.

In this part of the article, I investigate whether think tanks have managed to convey their image to the media. How are think tanks presented in the mainstream printed media? How congruent is this picture with the one given directly by think tanks? A
previous preliminary study finds that think tanks are not given a prominent position in the Polish media, which is also the case in the Czech Republic as Markéta Klásková and Ondřej Císař demonstrate in their contribution to this Special Section. Based on material from 2011, covering a selection of outlets from television and printed media, Hess concludes that think tanks were mentioned in only 2 percent of the analyzed printed media and in 4 percent of the analyzed television material. Keeping this in mind, the task of this section is not to discuss how influential think tanks are but to bring about a better understanding of their reputation and positioning.

Media is surely one of the targets for think tank activities through which they aim to indirectly influence public opinion and, in the long run—policy making. Think tankers perform free services for journalists, providing facts, figures, and sound bites. At the same time, the media is obviously not only a pure receiver and transmitter of think tank presentations. Sometimes newspapers directly offer their medium to think tankers, publishing articles written by them without any comments; at other times, they refer to think tank reports, publish interviews, or give accounts of think tank conduct and misconduct. Overall, the media is an actor and has its own stake in presenting other actors in a certain way.

As mentioned above, the analysis in this section is based on a corpus of texts selected from two main Polish dailies, Gazeta Wyborcza and Rzeczpospolita. The time interval is 1989 to the end of October 2015. For Rzeczpospolita, the period was slightly shortened, starting in the beginning of 1993, when archive searches were made available; however, the first hits in the Rzeczpospolita archive come only in 1995. In Gazeta Wyborcza, the first article mentioning think tanks was published in 1993. As Figure 1 shows, it is only in the second half of the first decade of the 2000s that the term “think tank” appears more frequently. Since then, the appearance has
grown exponentially. Occasional drops in the diagram (for Gazeta Wyborcza in 2009 and 2012) do not disrupt the overall trend of gradual growth in think tanks’ appearances in the media. Note that 2015 was searched only until the end of October 2015, which explains the lower score for Rzeczpospolita, though there were still more hits in Gazeta Wyborcza than in any previous year. This corroborates the interviewed think tankers’ sense of increasing recognition in the last decade.

In the early years, until the mid-1990s, the articles referring to think tanks mostly introduced the phenomenon. Even those published until the mid-2000s explained the term (in Polish, the English term is used), sometimes providing innovative translations. From then on, think tanks are mentioned to varying degrees and in different capacities. Figure 2 presents a juxtaposition of the appearance of think tanks divided into three categories:62 articles written by think tankers (Polish and foreign), articles
in which think tanks are only mentioned (Polish and foreign), and articles in which think tankers or think tank reports are used as a source of expert knowledge (Polish and foreign). While this study focuses on Polish think tanks’ image and reputation, appearances of foreign think tanks in the studied media outlets were also included. This was done to provide some comparative assessment of Polish think tanks’ reputation and enable a conversation with previous scholarship in which such distinction was introduced. The few existing studies provide a contradictory picture, either arguing that Polish media tend to refer to Polish think tanks more than to foreign think tanks, or the exact opposite.

It is clear that almost half (49 percent) of all the articles in the corpus refer to think tanks as experts. Interestingly, foreign think tanks appear seven times more often in this capacity than Polish think tanks, and they are consulted on a variety of topics, including economics, the political situation in a given country, and international politics. Polish think tanks appear as experts to a strikingly lesser degree. When Polish think tanks do appear as experts, it is almost exclusively to comment on economic or EU matters.

The second category in size, accounting for 41 percent of the articles, is brief mention of think tanks without consulting them as experts. Here, Polish think tanks appear almost twice as often as foreign think tanks. At times, these are articles dedicated specifically to a think tank, for example, reporting about the activities organized by it or informing about a new think tank being founded. This category also includes articles mentioning that think tanks in general are needed in Poland or mentioning that they are weak or misbehave in some way. More often, think tanks are mentioned only in passing, for example, as a venue visited by a Polish politician or as an affiliation of a person featured in the article.

Within the last and least prominent (10 percent) category of articles, those produced by think tankers, again Polish think tanks have twice as large a share as foreign think tanks. These articles are often opinion pieces, not always clearly connected to the main activity of the think tank. Nevertheless, these articles make think tanks visible by providing information about the author’s affiliation, indicating that think tanks are important participants in public debates. It is interesting that some Polish think tanks are much more noticeably present in this category, for example, the Civic Institute, which accounts for 50 percent of Rzeczpospolita’s hits in this category (45 out of 91), while the European Council on Foreign Relations Warsaw Office and Civic Institute together account for half of the hits in this category in Gazeta Wyborcza.

What we can conclude from the figure above is that, in general, that is, disregarding the distinction between Polish and foreign organizations, think tanks and think tankers more often than not (59 percent of the time) are presented either as active or activated. These entities are given direct voice for the length of the whole article, or their comments and reports are directly or indirectly quoted. In this sense, these entities get to convey their preferred image. In the following, I will provide greater detail
about these presentations as well as those in which think tanks are given a more passive role—being objects of description by the media. Interestingly, for Polish think tanks, the picture is quite different. First, it is rather striking that two Polish dailies write more about foreign (60 percent) than Polish think tanks. This finding contradicts one of the previous studies,67 which is probably due to different methodological approaches (this article analyzes printed media over a long time period; the other analyzes different types of media in a much shorter time period). Moreover, it is possibly a failure of Polish think tanks that they appear three times more often as objects of description than as active agents in the analyzed material. Instead of presenting their ideas and policy recommendations through citations of their work and their representatives, Polish think tanks are much more often mentioned only in passing. Therefore, the reputation that emerges is that the voice of Polish organizations is weaker than those of foreign think tanks. It could be argued that Polish think tanks, being relatively unknown to the reader, required more introduction, which might explain their frequent appearance as objects of description.

**Worlds Apart?**

The qualitative analysis of the selected media material provides three distinct themes. The first theme presents think tanks as auxiliary and often single-task advisory bodies for politicians’ gain. The second theme presents think tanks as providers of serious policy advice that are either absent or not utilized by Polish politicians. The last theme presents think tanks as institutions suspiciously close to politics. In all the categories, the relational position with respect to the political field is highlighted.

In the early articles in particular, the term “think tank” is used to describe advisory bodies for local and regional politicians, often with a single, delimited task. It is not unusual that these bodies are composed of politicians and businessmen alone, without the presence of academics. At times, the groups of advisers, dubbed “think tanks,” have a single objective of making sure the ruling city mayor gets reelected or that the opposition candidate gains office. The goals of think tanks could also include providing ideas for regional development or something specific, such as providing a local opinion on fracking.68 In these representations, think tanks are understood as service units for politicians, which are established for a clear task without any distinct organizational form or autonomy. This representation is clearly at odds with how think tanks present themselves.

The second type of representation stresses the need for think tanks, which are here linked to the idea of serious policy advice. The contrast between the short-term character of party politics and the more long-term and strategic production of think tanks is repeatedly underlined to show the relevance and potential of think tanks. A typical representation states that “think tanks, preparing expert reports detached from the bustle [bieżącza] are indispensable for political parties.”69 Think tanks are portrayed
as potential sites for this type of strategic thinking: “Poland needs a clear reinforce-
ment of the expert supply base . . . ; we need a serious national debate about the
strategic future of Poland.”70 Recalling the ambition Poland has in the international
arena, the country’s difficult geopolitical position, and the various challenges it
faces, several articles call for reliable sources of expertise. With very few exceptions
mentioning positive outputs of think tanks, there seems to be a common understand-
ing that the existing community of Polish think tanks does not live up to these ambi-
tious tasks. This perspective mirrors the “weak think tanks” image communicated by
think tankers in the interviews. Often, these laments about the nonsatisfactory state
of affairs is complemented by a contrasting representation of Western think tanks,
especially American and German, which are portrayed as competent and influential.
As in the interviews, part of the explanation behind the weak status of think tanks in
Poland is sought in the weakness of the political field and the unresponsive attitude
of politicians. Two cases described in the articles are quite telling in this regard.

Case 1: In 2010, the governmental think tank The Polish Institute of International
Affairs (PISM) published a report about the unfair share of Polish representatives in
the diplomatic structures of the EU. In Brussels, the report was interpreted as a
sophisticated move just when the High Representative of the Union for Foreign
Affairs was about to make a decision about appointing new officials. In Warsaw,
however, the think tank was reprimanded and banned from publicly commenting on
the report. The think tank also had to publish an explanatory note next to the report
declaring that it was not meant as a critique of the government. “The director [of
PISM] had worked abroad for the last dozen of years, employed by serious think
tanks and conducting research. He thought it would work the same way here: his
institute prepares a report, the ministry uses it in negotiations, and he gets recogni-
tion. He didn’t understand what Polish hell is.”71

In the face of an immature political class that worries more about losing face in front
of their constituency than any potential gains in international negotiations, the think
tank report was seen as a threat. The message conveyed by the media, echoing the
laments of think tankers, is that the potential of this rather smart move was lost
because of the lack of understanding on the political side. No dialogue can be estab-
lished and think tanks cannot do what they do best because there is no partner. A
recurring theme is the complaint about the lost potential, that is, the expertise pro-
duced by think tankers being wasted or not utilized by politicians.

Case 2: In 2009, three renowned Polish scholars decided to run for office in the
European Parliament. “Kolarska-Bobińska, Kik and Migalski have rather disparate
political convictions, but they agree on one thing—their choice to enter politics can be
seen as an expression of powerlessness. They argue that, in our country, expert knowl-
dge of politics is not utilized. And a political scientist whose advice is not listened to
is like a doctor who’s banned from practice. Neither the government nor political par-
ties have an expert base—says Kolarska-Bobińska. I’ve been collaborating with
German think tanks for many years. These are grand institutions with public funding. In Poland, we are still far behind. Perhaps, if such institutes existed here, we would have found an outlet for our ambitions, Migalski adds, and gives the example of the US, where scientists are incorporated in the intellectual network of main political parties having a huge amount of influence on their politics. There is no shortage of experts in Poland. But, the unprofessional politicians don’t want to utilize that knowledge. These two worlds are separate, stresses Kik.72

What both of these cases illustrate is the frustration coming from the realization that expertise is needed in politics, and Polish experts have an ambition to provide it, which clashes with the perceived lack of professionalism and unresponsiveness on the political side. Again, the image of Polish think tanks dangling in the vacuum emerges. Not only are the worlds of politicians and policy experts separate, even Western and Polish think tanks are repeatedly represented as worlds apart, with Polish think tanks “lagging behind” the powerful, grand institutions in the West.

The third theme represented in the media material deals with debunking various kinds of links between think tanks and politics. While the media represents the intersection between politics and think tanks as a focal front-line defining think tanks, a suspicious view of these relations also emerges. At times, there are articles discrediting think tanks as falsely apolitical, attempting to mask their ideological or clearly political, “servile” intentions73 “under the veil of expertise.”74 Sometimes, new think tank initiatives are debunked as private enterprises of politicians and simple PR tricks to gain a more “meritocratic image”75 before returning to politics, “a perfect springboard back to active politics.”76 These media representations allude to an imagined ideal of an apolitical think tank, which the reported institutions fail to comply with. While the recognition of the murky boundaries of think tanks is important for understanding these institutions, such a negative portrayal of the links with politics makes this type of identity very difficult to navigate and creates distrust of think tanks among readers.

All three of the distinguished themes in the media representations touch on the relations between think tanks and the political field and create a bad reputation for Polish think tanks, either as servile to politicians, as unsuccessful, or sometimes even as bogus institutions. The negative representations are further strengthened by the fact that the media rarely reports on the successes of Polish think tanks. The need for think tank expertise is recognized, but the current shape of it is deemed insufficient. Just as in the interviews, the political class is partly blamed due to its lack of understanding of think tanks as a useful resource. Additionally, mirroring the self-presentation of think tanks, comparisons with Western think tanks cast an unfavorable light on Polish institutions. Given the research design applied in the article, it is impossible to conclude whether think tanks’ identity as weak has been successfully conveyed to the media or whether the representation of these institutions in the media has instilled such a self-identity. What can be concluded with
certainty is that there is congruence between the image and reputation of Polish think tanks as weak institutions.

**Conclusions**

The primary focus of this article is on how think tanks present themselves and how they are represented by others to unravel the logic of their institutional identity formation. I have analyzed interviews with Polish think tank leaders and the websites of think tanks to capture the image they wanted to convey about themselves, as well as a corpus of newspaper articles from two major Polish dailies to identify the reputation of think tanks formed by other actors during the period 1989–2015. In contrast to what we might expect, the studied think tanks did not put much effort into shaping an appearance of being successful; even their own websites were not particularly boastful. The general picture from the analyzed material is of think tanks as weak, readily pointing out their insufficiencies and misconduct. This image could possibly be interpreted as a drawback of Goffman’s framework for the analysis of institutional identities. While creating a positive image and achieving a good reputation was certainly important for the studied organizations and was partly visible on their websites, their distinctively relational character set limits for these processes. The perceived quality of the political field confined the position that think tanks could occupy and the identity that they could create. In particular, the media narrative put think tanks in a difficult position: at times critiquing them for being too closely linked to politics and at times blaming them for lacking impact. One prominent explanation for this perceived weakness is the immature state of the Polish political field, which, during the studied period, left think tanks in a weird position of nonreference. Unable to find a partner on the political side, think tank activities lost their purpose. Think tank positioning was thus defined by the unresponsiveness and unwillingness of politicians, leaving Polish think tanks dangling in the vacuum. Think tanks’ relational character, their function of converting different types of capital and translating the logics between different fields, was compromised when the political field, their main point of reference, was seen as a nonspace, a void. Such problems are probably not unique to the Polish context but are certainly related to the relatively recent experience of transition. While the unsettled atmosphere during the transition period indeed created possibilities for policy advice and expertise, it was also problematic in terms of lacking stable counterparts with respect to whom positioning could take place.

In the interviews, think tankers openly listed their own shortcomings, admittedly more often addressing the critique toward other organizations or the population of think tanks as a whole, without counting themselves in as part of that cohort. Some organizations even rejected self-identification as a think tank. Those “think tanks in denial” were eager to point out how their own organizations were different from the
imagined pure think tank supposedly existing in the West. The hybridity of Polish think tanks, their resorting to a variety of tasks to secure income, and their broad and diverse focus was emphasized as distinguishing them from the imagined “real” think tanks. The think tank script is clearly dictated by the American think tank model, and what we see in the studied context of Poland is a realization on the part of think tanks that a pure enactment of this script in the local context is not possible. Goffman’s notion of decoupling is helpful, stressing the detachment between the idealized model and the local application of the institutional form of think tank in Poland. Think tanks’ positioning and identity are developed in alterity to this distinct and unreachable model. Two problems emerge here. First, the very idea of a pure think tank can easily be questioned, even in the Anglo-Saxon context, and second, we need to remember that any enactment necessarily requires interpretation, that is, iterations to the original. Apparently, Polish think tanks seem to judge their local performance as being too far from the script. The perceived unfavorable political and economic conditions made it very difficult to creatively rework the think tank institutional blueprint and develop a positive think tank identity.

ORCID iD
Katarzyna Jezierska  [ID]  https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1413-0300

Notes
1. J. G. McGann, “The Global Go to Think Tank Index Report 2019,” TTCSP Global Go to Think Tank Index Reports, https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=think_tanks (accessed 26 February 2020).
2. For a good overview, see M. G. Pratt, M. Schultz, B. E. Ashforth, and D. Ravasi, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
3. S. Albert and D. A. Whetten, “Organizational Identity,” in Research in Organizational Behavior, vol. 7, ed. L. L. Cummings and B. M. Staw (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1985).
4. D. A. Whetten and A. Mackey, “A Social Actor Conception of Organizational Identity and Its Implications for the Study of Organizational Reputation,” Business & Society 41, no. 4 (2002): 398.
5. B. Czarniawska, “Alterity/Identity Interplay in Image Construction,” in The SAGE Handbook of New Approaches in Management and Organization, ed. D. Barry and H. Hansen (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 51.
6. Whetten and Mackey, “A Social Actor,” 400–1.
7. E. Lindquist, Behind the Myth of Think Tanks: The Organization and Relevance of Canadian Think Tanks (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 1989).
8. T. Medvetz, “Murky Power: ‘Think Tanks’ as Boundary Organizations,” in Rethinking Forms of Power in Organizations, Institutions, and Markets, ed. D. Courpasson, D. Golsorkhi, and J. J. Sallaz (Bradford, UK: Emerald, 2012), 113–34; T. Medvetz, Think Tanks in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
9. K. Jezierska, “Performing Independence. The Apolitical Image of Polish Think Tanks,” Europe-Asia Studies 70, no. 3 (2018): 345–64. Regarding how these two desirables, that is, independence and
influence, are practically balanced and how they conceptually constitute a paradox for think tanks, see K. Jeziwerska and A. Sörbom, “Proximity and Distance: Think Tanks Handling the Independence Paradox,” Governance (2020).

10. E. Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1956), xi.

11. J. W. Meyer, J. Boli, G. M. Thomas, and F. O. Ramirez, “World Society and the Nation-State,” American Journal of Sociology 103, no. 1 (1997): 144–81.

12. J. J. Sallaz, “Can We Scale Up Goffman? From Vegas to the World Stage,” UNLV Gaming Research & Review Journal 20, no. 1 (2016): 79 (emphasis in the original).

13. B. Davies and R. Harré, “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves,” Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour 20, no. 1 (1990): 43.

14. F. Moghaddam and R. Harré, “Words, Conflicts and Political Processes,” in Words of Conflict, Words of War: How the Language We Use in Political Processes Sparks Fighting, ed. F. Moghaddam and R. Harré (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 2.

15. R. Harré, F. Moghaddam, T. Pilkerton Cairnie, D. Rothbart, and S. Sabat, “Recent Advances in Positioning Theory,” Theory and Psychology 19, no. 1 (2009): 5–31.

16. J. Schneider, “Think-Tanks in Visegrad Countries. From Policy Research to Advocacy,” Final Research Paper (Budapest: Center for Policy Studies, 2002).

17. Cf. J. Kuchareczyk and M. Mineva, “Think Tanks in Poland. Country Report for the ‘Think Tanks at a Cross-Road: Shifting Paradigms and Policy Dilemmas in Southern and Eastern Europe,’” (Open Society Foundations, n.d.), 8.

18. See other contributions to this Special Section: K. Jeziwerska and S. Giusti, “Introduction: Travelling from West to East. Think Tank Model Adaptation to Central and Eastern Europe,” East European Politics and Societies (2020); M. Bigday, “Genesis of a Social Space: Think Tanks in Belarus 1992-1995,” East European Politics and Societies (2020); Klásková and Csád “Agents of Europeanization” and O. Keudel and O. Carbou, “Think Tanks in a Limited Access Order: The Case of Ukraine,” East European Politics and Societies (2020), in this Special Section.

19. K. Jacobsson and E. Koroleczuk, eds., Civil Society Revisited: Lessons from Poland (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

20. P. Zbieranek, Polski model organizacji typu think tank (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2011); W. Ziętara, Think tanks na przykładzie USA i Polski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2010); T. Bąkowski and J. H. Szlachetko, eds., Zagadnienie think tanków w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo UG, 2012).

21. J. G. McGann, “The Global Go to Think Tank Index Report 2016,” TTCSP Global Go to Think Tank Index Reports (2017), https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=think_tanks (accessed 20 August 2017).

22. Ibid.

23. A different Polish source claims there is evidence of more than ninety Polish think tanks by 2011. See D. Stasiak, “Think Tanks in Poland: Policy Experts at the Crossroads,” Polish Journal of Political Science Working Papers 2, no. 1 (2014): 95–140. Such divergencies should be attributed to methodological differences. The directory compiled by McGann is constructed based on peer-reviewed data, with think tankers and experts in the field noting organizations known to them. What is important here is the rapid increase with the same methodology employed in directories composed by McGann for 2016 and 2017.

24. A follow-up study focuses on the period after the illiberal turn in Poland to capture potential changes in the positioning of think tanks with the transformed political and discursive opportunity structures.

25. Stasiak, “Think Tanks.”

26. M. Sus, “Still Lagging Behind? Foreign Policy Think Tanks in Poland—The Origins and Contemporary Challenges,” in Think Tanks, Foreign Policy and Geo-politics. Pathways to Influence, ed. D. E. Abelson, X. Hua, and S. Brooks (New York: Routledge, 2017).
27. Zbieranek, Polski model.
28. I. Krastev, “The Liberal Estate,” in Think Tanks and Civil Society: Catalysts for Ideas and Action, ed. J. McGann and R. K. Weaver (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher, 2000); A. Stenning, A. Smith, A. Rochovska, and D. Świątek, Domesticating Neoliberalism: Spaces of Economic Practice and Social Reproduction in Post-socialist Cities (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010); K. Jezierska, “Moral Blueprint or Neoliberal Gobbledygook? Civil Society Frames among Polish Think Tanks,” East European Politics and Societies 29, no. 4 (2015): 831–49.
29. Cf. Jezierska, “Performing Independence.”
30. Zbieranek, Polski model. Regarding the revolving door phenomenon as a distinctive feature of American think tanks, see D. Abelson, “From Generation to Generation: Reflections on the Evolution of Think Tanks,” International Review of Public Policy 1, no. 2 (2019): 238–49.
31. B. Biskup and K. Schöll-Mazurek, “Instytucjonalne podstawy doradztwa politycznego oraz lobbyingu w polsko-niemieckim porównaniu,” in Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w parlamentarnym procesie decyzyjnym. Polska i Niemcy w perspektywie porównawczej, ed. A. Kopka, D. Piontek, and M. Minkenberg (Kraków, Nowy Targ: Wydawnictwo ToC, 2018); D. Cadier and M. Sus, “Think Tank Involvement in Foreign Policymaking in the Czech Republic and Poland,” The International Spectator 52, no. 1 (2017): 116–31.
32. J. L. Campbell and O. K. Pedersen, The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
33. D. Abelson, Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009). This explains why some forms of influencing and ties to policy makers are not adopted outside of the United States, for example, various forms of private influence, such as fundraising events.
34. D. Abelson, “Do Think Tanks Matter? Opportunities, Constraints and Incentives for Think Tanks in Canada and the United States,” Global Society 14, no. 2 (2000): 215.
35. To an untuned eye, think tanks might be confused with lobby organizations or interest groups. This distinction is carefully elaborated in Kopka, Piontek, and Minkenberg, Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying.
36. In 2013, the total population of Polish think tanks was estimated at forty. The interviewed organizations were Batory Foundation (Fundacja Batorego), Civic Institute (Institut Obywatelski), Civil Development Forum (Forum Obywatelskiego Rozwoju), Ferdinand Lassalle Centre for Social Thought (Ośrodek Myśli Społecznej im. F. Lassalle’a), Green Institute (Zielony Instytut), Political Critique (Krytyka Polityczna), Sobieski Institute (Instytut Sobieskiego), The Institute of Public Affairs (Instytut Spraw Publicznych), The Unit for Social Innovation and Research – Shipyard (Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych “Stocznia”). Additionally, I have also interviewed a representative from the National Federation of Polish NGOs (Ogólnopolska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych), serving as an umbrella organization for a variety of NGOs in Poland, including think tanks.
37. Both Polish and English versions of “About Us” pages were consulted, as in a few cases the English versions were abbreviated or nonexistent.
38. The nonprofit organization The Internet Archive provides a free-access digital library of internet sites in digital form. See https://archive.org/about/ (accessed 3 July 2018). One of the websites, the Green Institute’s, was not available in the 2013 version, and a later iteration of the website was used. This fact, however, should not be a problem because, except for one organization, the Civil Development Forum, which, in 2013, did not have an English version of its website and also significantly reworked the About Us section in Polish, for all the other organizations, these sections remained basically unaltered until 2018.
39. According to Polskie Badania Czytelnictwa, http://www.millwardbrown.com/subsites/poland/services/syndicated/readership-survey (accessed 27 November 2018), these two dailies continuously top the ranking of most read quality press in Poland, with Gazeta Wyborcza having approximately four times more readers than Rzeczpospolita.
40. The total number of hits for the period of 1 January 1993 to 31 October 2015 were 927, but for a variety of reasons, 15 articles were excluded from the analyzed corpus. For example, within this interval,
four articles mentioned Blur’s album “Think tank,” two more referred to a PR magazine with the same title, five randomly included the term without any connection to policy analysis, and four articles were doubles, which erratically appeared twice in the database.

41. Again, this excludes 42 articles, which, for different reasons, contaminated the data. For instance, 13 articles randomly included the word “think” in an English lessons cycle, 13 more mentioned Blur’s album, a few were doubles, and a few mentioned some other companies named “think tank” (a PR firm, a coworking hub, a food journal), none of which had anything to do with policy analysis.

42. Compare Abelson, “From Generation to Generation.”
43. Goffman, The Presentation.
44. https://web.archive.org/web/20130906002312/http://stocznia.org.pl:80/www/about-us (accessed 4 July 2018).
45. https://web.archive.org/web/20130413132050/http://www.batory.org.pl/en/about_the_foundation/mission_statement (accessed 4 July 2018).
46. https://web.archive.org/web/20130520011938/http://www.for.org.pl/upload/en-presentation/FOR_Presentation_10_07_2012.pdf (accessed 4 July 2018).
47. For the English version of the website, the heading was made more modest, stating that “We Promote Freedom,” https://for.org.pl/en (accessed 4 July 2018).
48. https://web.archive.org/web/20130509010818/http://www.isp.org.pl/site.php?id=22&lang=2 (accessed 10 September 2018); https://web.archive.org/web/20130728150717/http://www.sobieski.org.pl/en/ (accessed 10 September 2018).
49. Klon/Jawor, Raport. Kondycja organizacji pozarządowych (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor, 2019). See also Klásková and Císař “Agents of Europeanization” in this Special Section.

50. On the varieties of positioning and emotional work in expert interviewing, see J. Kleres, “Emotional Expertise: Emotions and the Expert Interview,” in Methods of Exploring Emotions, ed. H. Flam and J. Kleres (London: Routledge, 2015).

51. K. R. Weaver, “The Changing World of Think Tanks,” Political Science and Politics 2, no. 3 (1989): 563–78.
52. Difficulties with the English translations of the Polish term “podmiotowość” have been discussed in E. Matynia, Performative Democracy (Boulder: Paradigm, 2009), 57. She suggests that agency better reflects what is sometimes translated as subjectivity or self-determination.
53. E.g. J. G. Peschek, Policy-Planning Organizations: Elite Agendas and America’s Rightward Turn (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987). See also Jezierska and Giusti, “Introduction: Travelling from West to East”.
54. E.g., D. Stone, “Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think Tanks? Three Myths Regarding Policy Analysis Institutes,” Public Administration 85 (2007): 259–78; Medvetz, Think Tanks.
55. E. Goffman, Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience (London: Harper & Row, 1974).
56. Goffman, The Presentation, 3.
57. A. Hess, “Polskie think tanki jako społeczni uczestnicy dyskursu politycznego,” Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne 37 (2013): 37–56.
58. M. Klásková and O. Císař, “Agents of Europeanization: Think Tanks Discussing the Refugee Crisis in the Czech Republic,” East European Politics and Societies (2020).
59. Ibid.
60. While media was selected to capture the reputation of think tanks in this study, because media is arguably most influential in making (in)visible and shaping the reputation of other societal actors, including policymakers, it would also be interesting to contrast the image of think tanks with the reputation they hold among policy makers.
61. Unfortunately, the data are fully reliable only from July 1994. Until then, not all editions of the daily are available in the archives, with some months completely missing, and others giving access to all editions.
62. In coding the data, the units of observation were individual articles, and each article was ascribed to only one, most fitting category.
63. This category includes articles, which only mention the think tank phenomenon or a specific think tank in passing, but also information pieces about the creation of or activity undertaken by specific think tanks, as well as those mentioning a think tank in short bios under the article informing about the affiliation of the person introduced in the article.
64. Including interviews with think tankers in the capacity of experts on a given issue or shorter informational notes accompanying an article in which a think tanker’s comment is published.
65. Hess, “Polskie think tanki.” As mentioned above, this study has a much narrower sample.
66. In his book, Zbieranek (2011) has analyzed think tanks in the Polish media during 2005–2009. He found that foreign think tanks were more frequently reported about than Polish think tanks.
67. Hess, “Polskie think tanki.” As mentioned above, this study has a much narrower sample.
68. E.g., Gazeta Wyborcza, April 14, 2012, “Marszalek powołał radę na gaz” (accessed 15 August 2017).
69. K. Borowska, “Niepartyjny think tank PiS,” Rzeczpospolita, 22 December 2009 (accessed 20 August 2017).
70. K. Katka, “Think tank im. Lecha Kaczyńskiego,” Gazeta Wyborcza, 9 March 2011 (accessed 15 August 2017).
71. D. Rosiak, “Dyplomacja przy okazji,” Gazeta Wyborcza, 18 September 2010 (accessed 15 August 2017).
72. J. Stróżyk, “Polityka uwiodła ekspertów,” Rzeczpospolita, 11 April 2009 (accessed 20 August 2017).
73. S. Żerko, “Polityczny teatr zamiast dyplomacji,” Rzeczpospolita, 30 September 2011 (accessed 20 August 2017).
74. A. Niewińska and M. Młocka, “Ideologiczny kombajn,” Rzeczpospolita, 20 October 2012 (accessed 20 August 2017).
75. B. Piłat, “Mam opinię człowieka niekonwencjonalnego,” Gazeta Wyborcza, 26 April 2013 (accessed 15 August 2017).
76. J. Olechowski and A. Gardynik, “Marcinkiewicz bez polityki żyć nie może,” Rzeczpospolita, 12 April 2007 (accessed 20 August 2017).

Katarzyna Jezierska is an Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer at the International Programme in Politics and Economics, University West, Sweden. She is also a researcher in the Gender and Diplomacy Program (GenDip) at the University of Gothenburg. Her major research interests focus on democratic theory, civil society, and political sociology.