

Think Tanks in Central and Eastern Europe
and the Need to Improve the Quality of Their Policy Research

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Abstract

The think tanks of Central and Eastern Europe have been often praised for their ability to influence governmental policies and less so to analyze various policy alternatives. The literature to date has looked in the impact of these organizations assuming that it is backed by a quality of research. This paper will show that the appreciation of quality standards for policy research and ability to communicate policy recommendations largely depends on the frameworks in which think tanks operate. Analyzing the work of six think tanks in four countries through the lenses of pluralist democracy, elite theory and knowledge regimes, this paper identifies the need for individual think tanks or their networks to develop a set of quality standards for the policy research and the dissemination of their research results and recommendations.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“For a long time, old guard American think tanks were defined as universities without students; at present, Central and East European think tanks might be described as public policy research institutes without research. This cannot go on for much longer”

(Krastev 2000: 290)

Writing in 2000, Ivan Krastev – one of the most prominent think tankers and policy analysts in the region¹, identified the need for the influential think tanks of the time to “return to social science proper” (2000:290). He identified, in other words, the risks think tanks were subjecting their nascent credibility to by failing to raise the standards of their policy research, and by continuing to prioritize values over hard data in their analyses. In a similar vein, Ionita (2003) laments the little attention think tanks give to the communicating of their results to the outside world. According to him, this negligence is due to the fact that many think tankers are academic researchers who perceive the value of ideas as self-evident and assume that they are worth listening to by default. Avramov (2007) bemoans the tendency of the economic think tanks in the region to shy away from economic theory. His comparative study reveals that these organizations are rarely, if at all, inventors or promoters of new theories and paradigms². While he identifies the lack of “critical mass” and “intellectual weight” behind think tanks as the central reason for such trends, his study does not scrutinize the type and quality of policy research undertaken by the think tanks. By

¹ This thesis addresses the issues in the following three sub-regions: east new member states of the European Union (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria), Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and selected countries of the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). Given the different political and societal circumstances for operation of think tanks, the Russian Federation, Belarus and central Asian republics are not encompassed with the analysis in this paper.

² Avramov, here most follows the logic of McGann’s definition of role of think tanks “... to link the two roles, that of policy maker and academic (2005:12)”. By emphasizing the second dimension, Avramov has an explicit expectation of economic think tanks to engage in economic theory. While this is certainly not a Western standard where academic centers dominate the field of economic theory, this reasoning could be explained by the lack of good research in the academic circles in CEE. It should be noted that the sample of Avramov included several centers linked to Universities. I could also speculate that Avramov’s expectation think tanks to fill in the gap is based on the assumption that they are better equipped researchers given their direct exposure to and involvement with their western peers (see discussion on lack of competition for policy research in Krastev 2003).

contrast, this is the problem that this paper focuses upon – the often poor quality and standards of think tanks in the CEE region.

Raymond Stryuk is probably the only author who has explicitly dedicated some attention to the quality of policy research carried out by the CEE think tanks. For example, he dedicated an entire chapter to the quality control of policy studies in his – by regional standards --seminal book (Stryuk 2006: 49-62). However, most of the advice in this textbook is normative in nature, emphasizing the importance of quality control and describing the practical process of undertaking such efforts within a think tank. Similarly, his other article on Bosnian think tanks (Stryuk and Miller 2004), and the report of the state of Azerbaijani think tanks (Stryuk and Stobetskaya 2006), while identifying many weakness in the quality of research, do not offer the kind of qualitative, systematic overview that would help reveal national or even regional trends.

Were the prospects really so grim, or did the above authors have too high expectations for the quality of policy research carried out by the region's think tanks? This dissertation aims to shed more light on this aspect by providing an overview of the quality of policy research carried out by six selected think tanks (case studies). Furthermore, it will contextualize the quality of the work performed by think tanks within three broader theoretical frameworks -- pluralism, elite theory and knowledge regimes – and explore how quality plays out in each of those settings³. This paper will argue that while some think tanks in the region have improved their research/methodological and communication standards somewhat, the majority still cannot match the more rigorous standards of their Western peers. In other words, to paraphrase the opening quote: Public policy institutes in CEE are still to achieve quality research.

³ It should be noted here that the original purpose of these theories in the context of think tanks has been to explain their impact. The main concern of this dissertation is quality and standards of think tanks that often could be linked to influence. While the two issues are connected, for heuristic and analytical reasons, I will separate them in order to come up with a different slant on considering the relevance and effectiveness of these organizations. As some of the evidence will later show, under some circumstances, quality and standards not always to be prerequisites for influence.

1.1 Think Tanks in Central and Eastern Europe

Before defining the specific problem and stating the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to present the definition of a think tank, applicable to this region, and a brief overview of the existing literature of scholarly and practitioner analysis pertaining to this region. Defining a think tank has never been an easy task. The global scholarly community has suggested various concepts with no agreed upon definition (Stone 2004; Abelson 2002; McGann 2000). Given that the idea and practice of policy research evolved out of the Anglo-Saxon political tradition and took root in central Europe only in the 1990s, defining an independent think tank is even more challenging⁴. In this thesis, I adapt Stone's definition (2000a: 3) and define think tanks as,

“independent (and usually private) policy research institutes containing people involved in studying a particular policy area or a broad range of policy issues, actively seeking to educate or advise policy makers and the public through a number of channels.”

With the above definition in mind⁵, the forthcoming analysis pertains only to those organizations that are registered as NGOs or private, not-for-profit institutions⁶. The paper's scope does not extend to university-based policy centers, state-controlled research institutes, political party think tanks or for-profit consulting agencies. According to the latest estimates⁷, there are approximately 200 independent policy centers that operate like NGOs across the region at the moment.

⁴ For example, Krastev (2003: 77) rejects some of the Western definitions and typology of think tanks as inappropriate for this region.

⁵ Unlike Stone who 'avoids identifying think tanks as a sub-category of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)', this dissertation particularly studies the think tanks that act as part of the civil society sector and are independent from the state and interest groups.

⁶ In only a few countries in regions such as Azerbaijan and Ukraine, it is easier for these organizations to register as private institutes or companies, but those still operate as an NGO. .

⁷ Comparing the think tanks listed in the Freedom House Directory (2006) and the documentation of the OSI's Think Tank Fund.

In the last ten years, the continued proliferation of think tanks has generated interest among academics and practitioners who are defining and analyzing this emerging “proto-field”⁸. Donor support, the main engine behind the emergence of think tanks in the 1990s, has not abated. As the complexity of reforms grew in the 2000s, many governments and public administrations were weak and unable to competently analyze the myriad issues they were rapidly responding to. While the rest of civil society was focused on service provision and capacity building, and deemed inept to address the challenges of complex EU and NATO accession processes, think tanks and advocacy organizations ascended to prominence.⁹ As such, research about them also grew.

The discussion of think tanks in Central and eastern Europe has followed world trends by either focusing on the way they are organized (Weaver 1989; McGann and Weaver 2000) or viewing “think tanks as a vehicle for broader questions about the policy process and the role of ideas and expertise in decision making” (Stone 2004:2). Authors have addressed the genesis of think tanks and their roles in different countries (Kimball 2000; UNDP 2003); identified their place within the broader political system and civil society (Sandle 2004); tried to assess the impact of think tanks on the reform processes (Meseznikov 2007), and raised awareness about the risks to their sustainability (Boucher and Ebélé, 2003; Buldioski 2009).

UNDP sponsored a comprehensive volume that addressed different aspects of work by and with think tanks in the region (2003). Within this volume, the only specialized collection of essays on this subject in the region, Andjelkovic (2004) looked at the position of think tanks in Serbian society, openly questioning their place within the NGO sector. Following the concept of think tanks “as vehicles for broader ideas”, Pippidi (2003) described the current policy practices in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), identified the position and potential roles of elites, and demonstrated the

⁸ The term ‘proto-field’ is taken from Medzihorský (2007).

⁹ It is important to note that think tanks did not become ubiquitous phenomena in all countries of the region. For example, a few think tanks were created in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Croatia, all of which had limited effect on particular policy areas.

weaknesses of think tanks in the region. Additionally, Krastev (2003) compared the think tanks to other providers of policy-relevant research such as government-supported institutes, university-based research centers, political parties, consulting agencies and business lobbyists. In the absence of a better source for policy research, and provided that think tanks would address some internal weaknesses, Krastev saw an unprecedented opportunity for think tanks to create a market of ideas and to flourish within.

More individual case studies surfaced. Following the functionalist tradition Schneider (2002) examined think tanks in the Visegrad countries and Stryuk (forthcoming) mapped think tanks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two studies used various political concepts to contextualize think tanks in Hungary (Reich, 2009) and Slovakia (Medzihorský, 2007)¹⁰. The region's think tanks were featured prominently in two edited volumes analyzing the global proliferation of think tanks (Stone and Denham, 2004; McGann and Johnson, 2005). Freedom House produced the third edition of its Think Tank Directory (2006). In sum, a considerable effort has been put into mapping out think tanks; there has been some qualitative analysis of their functions, and a few authors have tried to gauge their impact on policy processes.

1.2 The research question and thesis

The existing literature notwithstanding, issues such as the quality of research carried out by think tanks, have been somewhat ignored. While this issue has been implicitly mentioned in many of the above-mentioned studies, it has never been systematically addressed. From one country to another, or across various policy areas, it is hard to pinpoint what constitutes a quality¹¹ think tank in this region. It is also difficult to identify the quality of said think tank analysis, as well as how

¹⁰ The last two are unpublished theses of former students at the Central European University.

¹¹ Quality is an elusive term subject to different interpretations. While the debate of defining quality is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to highlight that in this paper, quality is result of an objective evaluation. For example, the evaluation reports and the review of 36 papers provide generic assessment that reflects the styles and forms of the analyzed papers/studies and for some of those the contents of the papers. Additional discussion on the choice for quality standards is provided in Chapter 3 in explaining the rational behind the choice of RAND (2010) standards and RAPID model (Court and Young, 2006).

effectively their ideas are communicated and how they subsequently impact the policy-making process.

- Has there been no effort made to determine a set of quality standards for policy research and the dissemination of research results by think tanks individually or across the region?
- Have donors, local and international supporters of think tanks erroneously assumed that think tanks would automatically enhance ‘evidence-based policymaking’ and thus contribute to democratic development and economic reforms?
- Have the region’s think tanks built a better façade in the emulating of their western peers, while failing to develop solid analytical policy capacity within their ranks?
- Has the quality of their research and the successful communication of policy ideas contributed to the impact they have had within a political context, or have other factors been more important?

This paper argues that while think tanks developed basic in-house capacity for policy research, they have largely failed to undertake appropriate measures to improve the quality of their own policy research and the manners how they communicate it. By analyzing the practice of six think tanks in four countries, this paper will detect some trends, then discuss about future challenges ahead of think tanks and thus identify potential topics for future in-depth research on the subject.¹²

The Research methodology¹³ of this paper relies primarily on a qualitative analysis based on primary and secondary data. The secondary data consists of relevant literature from books, academic journals and other publications, such as texts from practitioners’ journals and materials published by regional think tanks. In addition, information will be culled from special evaluation and consultancy reports on think tanks¹⁴ from the Open Society Institute’s collection. These reports examine the work of the six chosen think tanks (case studies).

¹² In doing so, the paper focuses only the supply side of policy research (carried out by think tanks) and not the demand side. While equally important, the demand, the political will and competences of policymakers to understand expert/policy advice is a subject for another study and falls outside the scope of this one.

¹³ Appendix 1 contains detailed description of the Research methodology.

¹⁴ All these reports share same guiding principles that are explained in Appendix 1 to this paper.

Primary data will consist of internal documents and research papers produced by the region's think tanks with an emphasis on the six examined case studies. It will also include proceedings of the expert debate on think tanks in central and Eastern Europe held in Budapest on May 10, 2010 and findings from four additional semi-structured interviews with representatives of donor organizations. Finally, I have utilized the 'participant observation' method in meetings, events and activities within the region's think tanks. This was facilitated through my capacity as program director of the Open Society Institute's Think Tank Fund.

This paper consists of this introduction and four different chapters¹⁵. Chapter Two contextualizes the forthcoming analysis within three different approaches to decision-making: (interest group) pluralism, elitism and knowledge regimes. Building on these theoretical frameworks and further employing the standards of the RAND Corporation (2010) for policy studies and papers; and Overseas Development Institute on the process of policy analysis (Court and Young 2006), a practical tool will be developed to better scrutinize the six case studies. The tool will then be used to test theoretical frameworks against variables that indicate the quality of the policy research and its communication. Quality¹⁶ of policy research will be measured by analyzing the ability to identify relevant policy problems, quality of research design and overall quality of sampled policy studies. Communication will be measured by checking the existence of a communication strategy, the clear identification of target audience and an indication of interest about the think tank's work (in academia and among policy makers).

The third chapter presents the empirical evidence gathered through the case studies and tests it against the normative framework. In parallel, the findings from the case studies are compared and

¹⁵ Appendix 1 contains a comprehensive overview of the methodology employed; Appendix 2 includes details about the studies, think tanks, participants at the panel, and interviewed donors.

¹⁶ As indicated on page 14, for the purpose of this paper the quality of policy research will be defined through the standards suggested by RAND. This however does not preclude other authors to engage with the same subject using other definitions or perceptions about what constitutes quality of research and communication.

complemented with some general observations from literature and additional empirical evidence drawn together from a debate among practitioners and four interviews with as many representatives of donor organizations. In the last chapter, this paper examines the initial thesis, lists several challenges think tanks face when attempting to improve its quality and standards and links them with ideas for further systemic analysis of this very important question.

CHAPTER 2: Three theoretical underpinnings

The influence¹⁷ on policies and policy debates has been a paramount issue in the debate around think tanks. While not central to this paper, it is important to consider this issue when placing the quality of policy research in the wider political and policy environments in which think tanks operate. Stone provides an excellent overview of “different approaches to the role of think tanks in policy making” (2004:10-15). Her analysis canvases a wide array of theoretical lenses such as elite theory, pluralism, Neo-Marxist interpretations, discourse construction, and touches upon the neo-Gramscian framework, listing various network theories (knowledge networks, epistemic communities, advocacy coalition frameworks and policy entrepreneurship). Each theoretical framework makes certain assumptions about the role of ideas. Given that policy research is key step in analyzing, presenting and advocating for those ideas, the same assumption extends to the role of (quality) policy research. Therefore, this chapter briefly lists all considered theoretical frameworks and then discusses in depth the three most appropriate theories for the purposes of this paper.¹⁸

Some approaches, although useful in many other contexts, seem to have limited use in explaining the situation in the region. For example, the local political and business elites have never explicitly employed think tanks in their pursuit to maintain hegemonic control over society, as the Neo-Marxist frameworks would suggest. Likewise, a few of the network theories, such as the advocacy coalition approach, are simply too complex (with their emphasis on values and beliefs), to properly depict the current system of policy making in Central and Eastern Europe¹⁹. Next, proponents of epistemic communities who emphasized the role of experts in the policy-making process had their

¹⁷ Stone (2004:10) provides concise discussion on methodological problems in determining influence of think tanks.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the third theory comes from a contemporary and emerging analysis not covered by Stone in 2004.

¹⁹ For example, Ionita (2003) claims that the political systems in the Balkans (analysis that could extend to post-Soviet areas) are pre-modern, lacking in the sophistication that more advanced democracies possess.

fine hour in the EU accession process²⁰. When it comes to knowledge of the region's political system, the more pressing debate is to identify the centers of knowledge and determine if and how knowledge influences policy before employing a theoretical framework that defined by narrow clustering of knowledge/expertise²¹. While the presented approaches are not a good fit for the purposes of this article, they single out three key features: interest groups, the role of knowledge, and the nature of the policy process. These three key features (knowledge replaced with the more narrow evidence-based analysis), will be of key importance when selecting the appropriate theoretical foundation. For each theory, in addition to listing its general definitions and features, it will be important to determine how it treats and/or perceives the quality of analytical products and their communication. Finally, the importance of evidence-based policy research for the successful promotion of ideas and a think tank's subsequent influence on policies operating within these theoretical frameworks will be reviewed.

Building on the analysis in the previous section, it appears that the theories of (interest group) pluralism, elitism and the new notion of knowledge regimes would be the more suitable frameworks under which to analyze think tanks and to test the quality of their policy research and communication. The (interest group) pluralism theory would do a good job of describing those contexts where democracy has taken a deep root and some if not all policy stakeholders have access to the process. On the other hand, elitism would be a suitable framework in areas where think tanks have been a part of the emerging liberal-minded elite. The concept of a knowledge regime²² as defined by Campbell and Pedersen (Forthcoming:4) seems to provide a good foundation for the

²⁰ While the EU accession made strides in improving the policy process within the new EU member countries (Grabbe 2006), the rest of the region, even some of the new EU member states, have reversed some of the positive developments (Rupnik 2010; Pippidi 2010).

²¹ Most of the countries in CEE are small and simply do not have neither the human capital nor market for highly specialized expertise (as it would be the case of the epistemic communities)

²² Although related, the knowledge regime is much broader concept than those of epistemic communities. The latter resides on narrow technical or single policy issues communities, phenomenon that exist but is not wide-spread in the (relatively) small countries across the region.

analysis of think tanks that create evidence-based research in these countries²³. While in a handful of CEE countries²⁴ each theory could be used as a different lens in parallel to each other, it makes sense to use one or maximum two theories to interpret the collected evidence in most of the cases.²⁵ The following section briefly reviews the three models and outlines specific aspects important to the continued analysis of policy research quality.

2.1 Pluralism (interest groups)

Originally developed to describe democracy in the United States (Dahl 1961), pluralism refers to a system based on multiple centers of power. As such, the system includes checks and balances between various interest groups, branches of government and legislative bodies, which result in an open process of policy formulation and policy-making. In the U.S., the pluralist democracy theory put the groups and associations representing citizen's interests on the map and acknowledged their role in policy-making (Ainsworth 2002). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many politicians and donor agencies from the West promoted pluralism in the post-communist societies as part of the democratization and development of a market economy in Central and Eastern Europe. Although, there are various takes on the success of exporting this model (Shopflin 2001), today several countries boast of vibrant civil society sectors and interest groups. In the absence of strong labor unions and domestic business associations that would dominate the social dialogue such as it is in the corporatist societies of Central Europe and Scandinavia, the following definition concisely describes the type of pluralism that operates in parts of CEE.

²³ I am aware that originally this concept is applied to developed political economies. However, the aspect of creating knowledge and the power that comes with it is very important in developing countries too, and this concept captures some of the important nuances pertinent to the work of a think tank.

²⁴ The work of think tanks in Slovakia, a consolidated democracy, could be analyzed through the lenses of all three theories.

²⁵ For example, it makes little sense to use pluralist theory for analyzing the work of think tanks in a consolidated autocratic regime such as Azerbaijan.

“Interest group pluralism can be recognized by the [following] characteristics: a multiplicity of small interest groups, the absence or weakness of peak organizations, little or no tripartite consultation, and the absence of tripartite pacts.” (Lijphart 1999:172)

In the last 20 years, citizens have been encouraged to participate, and special support has been provided to develop the nascent civil society. Guidelines and later criteria for participatory policy-making were devised to foster the development of a pluralist society in Central and Eastern Europe. The Manual published by OECD (2001) that became a blueprint for many national initiatives, is a case in point. Therefore pluralism is a convenient tool for analyzing the work of think tanks.

Within pluralist theory, think tanks operate as one of many voices among non-governmental organizations and interest groups. They would aim to produce relevant analyses and make their voice heard in a democratic (open) process of policy deliberation; they would produce recommendations for various policies. This puts a particular pressure on the quality of their policy research and the way they communicate to policymakers. Operating in a competitive market for ideas, think tanks have to ensure that their analysis stands out and is noticed by policy-makers. Ideally, knowledge and evidence-based analysis is respected and accepted by various policy makers. In the pluralist frame, quality is argued to arise via the competition of ideas and advocacy/communication which supposedly ‘weeds out’ bad ideas. While think tanks are essential for the functioning of the democratic process, are they also relevant and recognizable among the many actors who compete for clout as relevant stakeholders in the policy process? Is quality of their work instrumental in this process?

2.2 Elite theory (interest groups)

The elite theory was developed as an antidote to the pluralist democratic theory. Instead of sharing power among many small interest groups, the elite theorists, such as C. Wright Mills, claim that

power is unequally distributed in all societies. The power is vested in those who control the largest organizations and institutions.

“The national elite is composed of those individuals who formulate, manage and direct the policies and activities of governments, corporations, banks, insurance and investment companies, mass media corporations, prestigious law firms, major foundations and universities, and influential civil and cultural organizations.” (Rye 2001:3).

Only those who have access to resources such as money, prestigious educations, and status can be part of the elite and thus participate in the policy-making process. While this type of decision-making is not necessarily undemocratic, sometimes elites can act to advance narrow, self-serving goals rather than following the interests of the masses. In Central and Eastern Europe, the democratization period was characterized by diffused elites: from transformed communists to dissidents to liberals to elites – the winners of privatization. Literature suggests great circulation and power games among these elites played out through the 1990s (Higley and Pakulski 2000). Looking at elites that were crucial to the transition process,, Ionita highlighted the development of “linkage-elites” in finance ministries and national banks – “who speak the conceptual language of their Western colleagues” (2003:152). Similar analogy could be made for many experts within the think tanks that become the key ‘translators’ of the reforms inspired by the Washington Consensus to the local elites. All these examples support the case for employing the elite theory for the analysis of some, if not all, think tanks in the region.

When applied to think tanks, the elite theory suggests that those that strive to exert influence over the policy-making process must either belong to an elite class or have immediate access to it. Pertaining to policy processes that rely on technical knowledge, Putnam argues that, “the development of technical and exclusive knowledge among administrators and other specialist groups is a mechanism by which power is stripped from the democratic process and slipped sideways to the advisors and specialists influencing the decision-making process,” (1977: 385).

With the dearth of technically competent people, (especially in social and political fields), across the region, some think tanks could occupy a privileged place in the policy-making process. In a different vein more specifically related to think tanks, Stone dispels the myth that they represent the interest of the general public (Stone 2007). Applied to this region, Krastev and Pippidi (UNDP 2003) singled out the role of liberal elites in the formation and maintenance of its think tanks. When they possess technical expertise, and/or belong to particular elite and do not represent the general public interests, think tanks can be easily analyzed against the normative basis of the elite theory.

The spectrum of questions that are raised when quality policy research and its dissemination are analyzed through the lens of the elite theory is somewhat different from those asked under pluralism. The successful communication of policy results and products morphs into the ability of think tanks to access and maintain a reputation within the elite class. For example, a think tank's legitimacy no longer depends on civil society, as it was the case within the pluralism framework. Once access is secured, it becomes questionable if the access is used for the presentation of quality policy analysis.

If we follow Putnam and Rye's propositions, expertise and a prestigious education are part of the "entrance criteria" for accessing elites in western democracies. Applied to think tanks, it means that they maintain their reputation as long as their analysis is sound and accepted and used by elite policy-makers. This presupposes that elite determine the criteria of quality (via adoption of certain academic practices or bench marks). However, this should not necessarily be true for all the elite think tanks in the CEE region simply because not all elites appreciate or understand an expert advice. Under those circumstances, often donor agencies or elites contracted by the donors are those who evaluate and validate the quality. In the latter case, it sometimes happens that think tanks simply recycle existing knowledge and produce opinions instead of doing evidence-based analysis and still are well-funded. Finally, Abelson raises the fear that "think tanks often serve as

instruments of the ruling elite” (2002:50). In some cases²⁶ elites have created think tanks to serve only that function.

In other words, to what extent in this framework are matters of quality/standards assumed? That is, if a think tank belongs to an exclusive ‘club’ by virtue of local elites, donor funds, or research collaboration with western think tank or academy, are questions of quality by-passed or overlooked? Unlike the pluralist frame where bad ideas and poor analyses is ‘eliminated’ in the competition of ideas, in each of the two scenarios outlined in the previous paragraph, is quality one of the reasons for being in the elite club or are there more important factors? These are important concern that should be examined against the nature of the policy products and especially their communication of research.

2.3 Knowledge Regime

This theory, unlike elitism and pluralism, is not based on the power of interest groups. The knowledge regime, a relatively new concept, instead looks at the institutions and organizations that create and advance relevant policy research.

“A knowledge regime is a set of policy research organizations, such as private think tanks and government research units, engaged in policy research. It consists of three dimensions: a structure that is, a set of relationships among the organizations involved; a set of processes by which these organizations compete, cooperate and coordinate their activities or not; and a set of institutions (e.g., formal and informal rules, norms and understandings) that governs these interactions.” (Campbell and Pedersen forthcoming: 4)

The key functions of knowledge regimes are the production of data and research, the suggestion of new theories, policy recommendations and the floating of ideas to influence the policy-making and

²⁶ Foundation of Effective Governance a policy think tank financed by Ukraine’s richest man, Rinat Akhmetov is a prime example for this practice.

production systems²⁷. According to its proponents, knowledge regimes are an important source of social innovation and change. For example, some authors highlight their crucial role “in developing and disseminating neoliberal ideas -- the notion that reducing taxes, regulation, and government spending is the cure for what ails national economies” (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Badd as cited in Cambell and Pedersenn: forthcoming).

The very definition of knowledge regimes hints at how quality is interpreted and understood. That is, that quality is not about objective or ideal standards but emerges contextually from relationships, informal rules and social understandings of the organizations and actors involved. Building on this premise, the quality of think tanks in CEE could be tested at least against two settings: national and international knowledge regimes. The national knowledge community in each of the region’s countries is small; it would be important to identify to what extent the think tanks’ policy products have differed from academic research and what has been their role in influencing their respective policy-making regimes. Moreover, if think tanks were part of the knowledge regime, the scholarly community in the country would accept the products produced by the think tanks. Using the example of Bulgaria and the countries of the Western Balkans, Krastev (2003) and Buldioski (2009) demonstrated that think tanks have a competitive advantage when compared to other producers of policy-relevant knowledge in realm of social sciences (universities, governmental research units, political party think tanks and consulting firms). In societies with few outlets capable of producing evidence-based research, Ionita (2003) and Buldioski (2007) have noted that one of the key roles for think tanks is to act as a depository of knowledge (waiting for an open window to change the policy in question)²⁸. In conclusion, under national knowledge regimes, this paper will analyze the quality of the research produced by the think tanks, namely whether completed studies have benefited from

²⁷ “Policymaking regime includes the state, political parties and other political actors and their surrounding political institutions. ...Production regimes, in turn, are comprised of firms, employer associations, trade unions, other economic actors and the institutions that govern them” (Campbell and Pedersen forthcoming: 4)

²⁸ This role of think tanks at global level is explained in Stone (2000:54)

the above competitive advantage, and whether think tanks have become key players within the emerging new knowledge regimes.

International knowledge regimes pertaining to the processes of democratization and economic development have influenced the region since the early 1990s. For example, from early on think tanks have been credited as one of the loudest voices promoting neo-liberal market reforms (Johnson 1995). Lately, they have been identified for their potential to shape EU policies (Demes 2009). The specific point of interest in this regard will be to examine whether local think tanks have become part of the (international) knowledge regimes that have promoted specific knowledge and policy ideas (such as neo-liberal market reform and EU accession, among others). In this respect, the subsequent analysis will determine if the quality of the analytical products of local think tanks has been comparable with those of their western peers and thus becoming part of the international 'knowledge regime'. Next, in addition to producing relevant evidence-based research, the paper will scrutinize the evidence if they managed to successfully communicate their ideas. In sum, it will be useful to apply the knowledge regime theory to think tanks from this perspective because it will explain whether their policy analysis has contributed to the production of new evidence/analysis/knowledge and influenced policy processes within their societies and beyond.

This chapter introduced several theoretical frameworks that describe the policy-making processes and political environments in which think tanks operate. Within the pluralist perspective, quality emerges through the competition of ideas among think tanks. From the elite viewpoint, quality arises from the club-like character that develops as a result of the high academic achievement of think tankers and/or their political connections, and/or their ability to speak the same technocratic language as foreign donors. Within the knowledge regime approach, standards of quality are developed through relationships, informal rules, and the social awareness of the actors involved in these processes. These three theories would further help to not only contextualize the work of the

previously analyzed think tanks, but also to analyze the quality of their production, keeping in mind the specific role that think tanks play within each of these specific frameworks.

CHAPTER 3: Specific Analytical Tools

The democratic pluralism, elite, and knowledge regime theories provide enough solid theoretical background to partly suggest some general benchmarks against which to check the policy products of the six think tanks analyzed in this paper. While these frameworks provide an explanation for the work of think tanks on a macro-socio-political level, a more nuanced and detailed tool is required to scrutinize their distinct features, qualitative aspects, and patterns of communication at the micro-organizational level. A myriad of challenges make the selection of such a tool difficult. These include: finding competent think tanks and individual researchers to design and carry out a good research design; ensuring competent and convincing writing skills that will appeal to different audiences; and an ability to successfully convey policy recommendations to the public and share ideas within networks. Consequently, There are many approaches to defining a tool that assesses quality in this context.

One potential approach is to check the quality of writing for scholarly articles (Sigismund 1999), given that think tankers are expected to exercise the same rigor as academics in their research. Others suggest more prescriptive guidance in form of manuals (Smith 2000). The latter approach has been taken by Quinn and Young (2002), who developed a manual tailored to the needs of Eastern and Central Europe. In turn, Stryuk (2005) emphasizes the importance of quality control built within think tanks. None of these approaches is sufficiently comprehensive to encompass the challenges listed above. Moreover, as mentioned before, one of the perennial challenges for regional think tanks is to reach the quality level of their Western peers. Therefore, the tool used in this paper will aim to resemble a list of flexible criteria rather than a set of specific prescriptive measures limited to the region or academia only.

The tool used in this paper's analysis will rely on two models: the RAND Standards of High

Quality Research (2009)²⁹ and the RAPID³⁰ Outcome Mapping Approach (Court and Young 2006), developed by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The RAND standards will be instrumental in checking the quality of the analyzed think tanks' published materials. The ODI set of standards relate to the process of identifying problems, conducting research, communicating the results and influencing policy makers. A list of RAND Standards is presented in Table 1, while RAPID's key features are listed in Table 2. Both RAND and RAPID are normative models that set guidelines for what researchers/think tanks need to do or aspire to do. The RAND criteria draw from a generic list whose elements can be found within most standards for academic research. There are some embedded assumptions within the model itself, such as the fact that the client/donor will be able to clearly identify the purpose of the study, that the data is available and credible, and that the study will be understood by relevant stakeholders (their competence is assumed). While some of these assumptions do not pertain to all policymaking contexts in the region, the RAND open-ended model is useful for mapping the boundaries of quality designed and written studies³¹. The RAPID ROMA model offers a more static approach by clustering all the aspects of a policy research under four key characteristics: policy context, evidence, links and external influence.

Table 1: RAND's Standards for High-Quality Research and Analysis

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The problem should be well formulated, and the purpose of the study should be clear. • The study approach should be well designed and executed. • The study should demonstrate understanding of related studies. • The data and information should be the best available. • Assumptions should be explicit and justified. • The findings should advance knowledge and bear on important policy issues. • The implications and recommendations should be logical, warranted by the findings, and explained thoroughly, with appropriate caveats. • The documentation should be accurate, understandable, clearly structured, and temperate in tone. • The study should be compelling, useful, and relevant to stakeholders and decision makers. • The study should be objective, independent, and balanced. <p>Hallmarks of Outstanding Research and Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study is comprehensive and integrative. • The study is innovative. • The study is enduring. |
|--|

Source: RAND 2010.

²⁹ There are many different standards available. The name and reputation of RAND stands as a universal etalon in quality of policy. Hence, my choice

³⁰ RAPID stands for Research and Policy Development Program. This framework has been originally developed to support the research in development. Give that the countries in CEE are in transition period and have been through many similar developing processes, the rationale behind the framework is suitable for the purpose of this paper.

³¹ I will analyze this issue in more details while presenting the empirical evidence in chapter 4.

Each of the two tools could be juxtaposed with some of the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2. For example, RAND criteria can be considered ‘pluralist’ in its approach and the breadth it tries to cover, elite – given that it comes out of one of America’s oldest and respected think tanks; and, in part, because RAND is a self-appointed arbiter of what constitutes ‘high quality research and analysis’ – sees itself as a place of convergence for aspiring think tanks to copy³². The RAPID approach is more modest in breadth by only allowing a combination with either the pluralist or elite theory.

Table 2: How to influence policy and practice

What researchers need to know	What researchers need to do	How to do it
Political Context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are the policymakers? Is there policymaker demand for new ideas? What are the sources / strengths of resistance? What is the policymaking process? What are the opportunities and timing for input into formal processes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get to know the policymakers, their agendas and their constraints. Identify potential supporters and opponents. Keep an eye on the horizon and prepare for opportunities in regular policy processes. Look out for – and react to – unexpected policy windows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the policymakers. Seek commissions. Line up research programmes with high-profile policy events. Reserve resources to be able to move quickly to respond to policy windows. Allow sufficient time and resources.
Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the current theory? What are the prevailing narratives? How divergent is the new evidence? What sort of evidence will convince policymakers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish credibility over the long term. Provide practical solutions to problems. Establish legitimacy. Build a convincing case and present clear policy options. Package new ideas in familiar theory or narratives. Communicate effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build up programmes of high-quality work. Action-research and Pilot projects to demonstrate benefits of new approaches. Use participatory approaches to help with legitimacy and implementation. Clear strategy for communication from the start. Face-to-face communication.
Links: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are the key stakeholders? What links and networks exist between them? Who are the intermediaries, and do they have influence? Whose side are they on? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get to know the other stakeholders. Establish a presence in existing networks. Build coalitions with like-minded stakeholders. Build new policy networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships between researchers, policymakers and policy end-users. Identify key networkers and salesmen. Use informal contacts.
External Influences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are main international actors in the policy process? What influence do they have? What are their aid priorities? What are their research priorities and mechanisms? What are the policies of the donors funding the research? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get to know the donors, their priorities and constraints. Identify potential supporters, key individuals and networks. Establish credibility. Keep an eye on donor policy and look out for policy windows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop extensive background on donor policies. Orient communications to suit donor priorities and language. Cooperate with donors and seek commissions. Contact (regularly) key individuals.

Source: ODI (2004:4)

³² Knowledge regime is a novel theory and RAND standards have not been drawn with knowledge about it. The link and interpretation are completely mine.

These are complex and detailed tools. The same can be said for the “relationship between research, policy and practice: complex, multi-factorial, non-linear and highly-context specific -- what works in one context might not work in another,” (ODI 2009:2)³³. While this paper will not draw on all the facets and richness of the suggested models, these models will serve as “framing tools” to concretely look at the way the analyzed think tanks identify, plan, conduct and communicate their research.³⁴ The following elements drawn from the two models will form the backbone of the forthcoming analysis:

- Identification of needs, the mapping of problems and the quality of research design
- Quality of published material: policy studies, papers and briefs
 - o *Use of data*
 - o Clarity of writing, selection of language and specific target audiences
 - o Systems of quality control
 - o *Policy recommendations*
- Quality of networking
- Quality of communication and advocacy
 - o existence of communication strategy
 - o clear identification of a target audience, and
 - o an indication of interest (by academia and policy makers) in the think tank’s work.

The second half of this paper will scrutinize selected research products against this tool and the findings will be checked against the broader theoretical frameworks. Each of the findings will then be analyzed within one or more of the suggested theoretical frameworks to test the suggested hypothesis about the role and status of quality policy research.

³³ It should be noted that the link that I establish between the theoretical frameworks (pluralism, elite theory and knowledge regimes) and the tools is entirely mine. The RAND and ODI standards are used as complementary tools for analysis and will be contextualized within the larger theoretical framework wherever appropriate.

³⁴ For example, I will not use the entire stage on establishing monitoring and learning networks in the ODI model. Likewise, ODI model blends advocacy as integral part of every research efforts. Examples in CEE show that some think tanks purposely avoid advocacy of any kind. Therefore I will treat this feature separately.

CHAPTER 4: Quality of Policy Research and its Communication – What Does Evidence Suggest?

This chapter presents the collected evidence from the case studies and information from other relevant literature. The evidence is clustered under the bullet point list derived from the standards stipulated by the RAND and RAPID tools. The evidence is then tested against stated theoretical hypotheses about the role and importance of quality policy research conducted by think tanks.

*Selection of the think tanks – case studies*³⁵: The six selected case study think tanks draw upon the diversity of the region and include: the Economic Research Center (ERC) – Azerbaijan; Analytica – Macedonia; The Institute for Public Policy (IPP) – Romania; The Romanian Academic Society (SAR); The Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) – Slovakia; and the Slovak Institute for Economic and Social Reform (INEKO). The selected think tanks operate in four countries with differing political systems – from a consolidated authoritarian regime (Azerbaijan) to a consolidated democracy (Slovakia), as measured by the scale of Freedom House³⁶. The six think tanks are also at different developmental stages, from the inexperienced (Macedonia) to the reputable (Slovakia)³⁷. The extensive documentation in this chapter is extracted from the Open Society Institute’s Think Tank Fund. The key sources are several independent evaluation reports that assess the work of all six think tanks (Blagescu 2006; Nelson 2008, Stryuk 2009; Hozic 2010). Various reports and samples of policy products from each think tank³⁸ are used to complement the evidence from the evaluation reports.

³⁵ Appendix 1 contains detailed description on the rational behind the choice of these diverse case studies. More information on the selected think tanks is provided in Appendix 2.

³⁶ Regime type as defined in the Nations in Transit 2010, Freedom House accessible at http://www.freedomhouse.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=321:nations-in-transit-2010&catid=46:nations-in-transit&Itemid=121.

³⁷ Appendix 1 contains detailed selection criteria)

³⁸ Six samples of published reports/briefs and studies are chosen per think tank.

Issues at stake: The studied think tanks are engaged in highly complex, political, economic and social problems that impact their own countries or the region as a whole. Analyzing quality across such a wide range of analytical products and events requires the definition of certain aspects of the work done by think tanks that can be universally assessed. Drawing from the RAPID model, this section will first look at how organizations identify their policy needs, map problems and design their research. The quality of the published material will then be tested against the RAND standards. Finally, the section will analyze how a think tank's findings and recommendations are communicated to policymakers and shared with other stakeholders.

4.1 Identification of needs, mapping problems and quality of research design

Every think tank, from its onset, must be able to identify societal problems, be motivated to address these issues, and possess robust theoretical and practical knowledge about the subject matter or the policy processes (Panel Discussion 2010). The evaluation reports tell us that the case study think tanks identified the problems in their societies with relative ease. It has been much harder, however, for all of them to transform the issues they consider important into policy agendas. Policy agendas are overwhelmed by multiple strategies set by governments and various international organizations assisting these governments.³⁹ This leaves very little space for think tanks to introduce new ideas in a systematic manner.

Second, the market for funding is dictated by donors that usually set their own thematic foci upfront⁴⁰. Moreover, donor communities rarely interact with researchers who are in the process of deciding their priorities (CRPM 2008). Although think tanks are not the principle agenda setters anywhere in the world, in developed countries governments engage with different stakeholders when defining national strategies. In CEE, predictably, the selection of research topics is extremely

³⁹ For example, the Macedonian government reports that it is currently implementing more than 50 different national strategies [Information taken from the official web-site of Macedonia government: www.vlada.mk accessed on June 20, 2010]. Almost as a rule, none of these strategies are properly budgeted.

⁴⁰ Not surprisingly the European Commission, national governments and private or public international donors/organizations have imposed severe limitations on the thematic priorities for their funding.

limited. This situation seriously impedes a think tank's ability to work on issues that may not be recognized by the mainstream agenda setters, but that are equally important. Another negative aspect is that think tanks carry out research based on the assumptions of other actors -- not always a scientifically precise undertaking.⁴¹

Individual studies do not come up against the same barriers. On the contrary, once a topic is defined with or without interference of the donor or the governmental body, the think tanks enjoy relative freedom to use the methods of their preferred choice. While almost all think tanks, (with the exception of Analytica), approach research in sophisticated ways, their theoretical framing of the issue is often unclear. In his evaluation of Romanian think tanks, Nelson (2008) notes: "One difficulty that recurs across these organizations is a failure to adhere to strict standards of social science inference." For example, SAR's challenge has been to avoid a political agenda imposing itself on the analysis (Nelson 2008:23). IVO's research designs are built according to models common for political or social sciences; however in some of the analyzed studies the evaluator points to the continued repetition of the same combination of methods (mainly qualitative methods and surveys). Analytica usually correctly identifies the problems, but fails to provide a suitable analytical framework or theory to check their findings against. It is their lack of field research and their focus on elites in the capital that severely limit their research designs. While this tendency is not present in the other five think tanks, it is unknown to what extent similar think tanks across the region resort to such ill-conceived and limited practices (Hozic 2010:4).

The policy studies of ERC and INEKO, the economic think tanks in this sample, offer the clearest framework that conforms to the tenets of economic theory. Their studies often attempt to explore

⁴¹ For example, Igor Bandovic (2010) from the European Fund for the Balkans and Scott Abrams (2010) from the Open Society Institute acknowledge that donor organizations cannot have expertise on all of the research projects they underwrite. Instead, they count on the reputation of the prospective grantees and some feedback from the policymakers to ascertain the value of the supported projects. While evaluations are regularly carried out, they cover only a small number of projects representative of the grant-portfolios. The OSI's Local Governance Initiative has a network of external experts that provides peer reviews of technically challenging themes.

and prove causal relationships. Yet, despite ascertaining inference in their studies based on usually known economic models, the economic think tanks reveal a different weakness. While able to devise unique analytical tools for their research, none of these organizations has engaged in theoretical innovation. The leaders of both organizations point to the absence of a competitive scientific environment and the absence of an impartial, home-country, peer review system as the main reasons for the lack of innovation. These statements relate to the theoretical frames at the macro-level: the lack of competition, for instance, clearly suggests limits to the pluralistic model. Peer review is a tool associated with the elites. Combined, they create the social norms and practices of a knowledge regime. The evidence from these economic think tanks suggests that there is a limit to competition and thus to pluralism in the countries where peer review is seldom practiced and where the domestic knowledge regimes are in infancy.

Additionally, the literature identifies a genuine lack of incentives to stimulate such work in Central and Eastern Europe. The two economic think tanks in this sample confirm Avramov's thesis of 'theoretical parochialism' applied to the CEE economic think tanks according to what "Western economists are the source of theory and methodology (a fiercely competitive area with no chance for outsiders), while Easterners are confined to applied economics (a more friendly and universal sphere)" (2007:13). In sum, these examples do not question the ability of think tanks to properly identify the needs for policy research, but rather identify their limitations when selecting and addressing their initial research topics. Notwithstanding their compliance to the basic standards in identifying research topics, think tanks in general shy away from theoretical innovation, and repetitively resort to established models for policy research. In some cases, as noted about SAR, there was also the fear that political (and ideological) bias would affect the quality of the research design and shift the analysis toward a pre-determined solution.

4.2 Quality of published material: policy studies, papers and briefs

Once the research is carried out and the evidence collected, the demanding task of writing begins. Writing good policy papers is more of an art than a science. The shorter the format, the greater the challenge is to balance a mix of evidence, spot-on analysis and sound recommendations. Even the most complex policy solutions have to be explained in comprehensive language. Today, think tanks and individual researchers alike may successfully carry out a research project only to then damage its impact with technical and tedious language. By comparing the findings of four evaluation reports that examined 36 sampled policy studies, papers and briefs, this section provides a summary of the observed trends⁴². It then mirrors the quality standards employed by the examined think tanks against the RAND list of quality standards⁴³.

4.2.1 Use of data

Of the six think tanks, IPP and INEKO excel in their use of data. IPP Romania certainly leads in the region in forcing its government to release data that it attempted to keep from the public. To do this, IPP uses the Freedom of Information Act, a tool that few think tanks in the region use. To date, they have requested substantial data official institutions, and have legally challenged the withholding of such data in more than 100 instances. By using the court system, IPP has generated momentum for this method of accessing public information (Nelson 2008:14). But this momentum would not exist if it weren't for IPP's capacity to analyze and use the statistical data. IPP has gradually "become a 'data collector' and 'data translator' on matters of public policy -- a role otherwise filled inadequately in Romania" (Nelson 2008: 15).

INEKO has taken a different path but achieved similar success. Faced with a snowball of unrealistic populist policies promoted by the government, the institute has used data to expose the unfulfilled

⁴² The publications greatly vary in terms of their purpose and quality across the six think tanks. SAR – Romania is the only think tank in this sample of organizations that publishes a peer reviewed Journal. The quality of the Journal articles has not been part of the forthcoming analysis.

⁴³ This section purposefully avoids entering into the detailed discussion of each think tank and specificity of its policy product. Some of the evaluation reports provided a detailed analysis of the think tank's written products.

promises and discredit statements by politicians that were not backed by evidence. To ensure the credibility of the effort, they have gathered a large network of economic analysts – from the state, and for-profit and not-for-profit sectors to analyze available statistical data. Other centers have turned out to be more cooperative with the government. For example, IVO has created a database of information about Roma communities in Slovakia, which served as a source of information for state institutions, donors and organizations involved in carrying out or supporting projects in Roma communities (Blagescu 2006). Both IVO in Slovakia and IPP in Romania have developed an in-house capacity to undertake public opinion surveys.

Despite these successful examples, the use of data and its interpretation is fraught with challenges. For example SAR “does not necessarily aim to replicate the academic rigor expected in most Western journals or faculties. Still, the center makes a conscious effort to produce statistically-relevant studies and establish a factually-based foundation for the analysis of trends and predictions.” (Nelson 2008:9). ERC quantitative analysis, while accepted by Azerbaijani stakeholders, fails to reach the universally accepted standards of economic research (2010 Panel discussion). Analytica, on the other hand, is the only think tank in this sample that exclusively bases its research on secondary data. Some of their fellows “were reluctant to venture into the real world, whether to conduct non-elite interviews, conduct original survey research, or visit localities beyond the capital” (Hozic 2010:14). Both practices would not meet the RAND standards. These sample organizations reflect think tanks across the region: there are a few who have excelled in the collection and processing of data sets, however a lot of new and upcoming organizations are still struggling to meet professional standards.

4.2.2 Clarity of writing, selection of language and targeting specific audiences

While the collection of data and the ability to interpret it can occasionally meet the RAND standards, the quality of writing is beset by more serious problems. The think tanks in the region

publish a lot of their analytical papers in their national language and in English⁴⁴. Producing in English serves three purposes: it communicates directly with donors/sponsors⁴⁵; acts as a source of legitimization among international and sometimes domestic audiences; and addresses international policymakers. The evidence gathered from the six sample think tanks and the available evaluation reports unequivocally express criticism. Among the comments are statements such as: “Several papers are ‘marches through data’” or “the paper is descriptive ... conclusions are either weak or missing” (Stryuk 2009: 23), and “...there are very few literature citations” (Stryuk 2009 and Hozic 2010).

Froitzheim notes the style of several researchers: “overall, their arguments are understandable, but often their desire to sound fluent and clever frustrates their ability to be clear, precise and persuasive.” (2010:5). Even more experienced analysts such as IVO researchers are prone to write long, cumbersome papers -- interesting only to experts (Blagescu 2006). INEKO, whose materials in the Slovak language are praised by the local public, fails to have the same effect in their English materials. SAR has a superior English production compared to other think tanks in the sample. Yet it has a predicament with the identity of its production in English. Namely, SAR leaders regularly publish their analysis as individual peer-reviewed articles in Western journals (e.g. Journal of Democracy) rather under their organizational brand.

The cited examples underscore three types of challenges think tanks face when publishing their research in English: First, there is a lack of rigorous scientific education and training⁴⁶; Second, there are academic researchers who do not have the skills to translate their findings and recommendations into language understandable to those outside of expert circles. The last challenge involves the introduction of systematic quality control. Regrettably, despite reviewing some solid policy studies, only a few of the case studies meet the rigorous RAND standards. Therefore this last

⁴⁴ Note: This paper analyzes only those studies, papers and briefs published in English.

⁴⁵ These by default are not direct users of the policy advice.

⁴⁶ This also reflects the scarcity of young talent to be recruited by these organizations

challenge merits further attention⁴⁷.

4.2.3 Systems of quality control

According to a recent study, the absence of quality control does not seem to jeopardize the perception of quality by stakeholders in local markets (CRPM 2008). One possibility for such a response is that in the absence of better analysis providers, the work of think tanks is welcomed and taken at a face value (Krastev 2003). However, the situation changes when the same reports are presented at the international level and subjected to greater scrutiny. Out of the six examined think tanks, only SAR has a basic system for quality control⁴⁸ of their published materials. ERC has formally employed an internal quality control manager, but he does not vet the papers of senior researchers which basically leaves half of the production unchecked. IPP does not have a standard protocol for the systematic reviewing of policy papers and methodologies. The other think tanks, if they have any control, employ an ad hoc system based on collegiality rather than on a set of professional standards.

At the regional level, PASOS⁴⁹, the biggest network of think tanks in CEE, has identified the poor quality of its members' work as one of the reasons for their failure to inform European policy makers. The network recently launched a series of internal debates that should lead to the introduction of a "Seal of Excellence for Policy Centers." This quality control stamp was the most debated element in standards debates (Panel Discussion 2010). This leads us to an interesting conclusion: At the national level, it seems that the absence, or presence of, systems of quality control have little impact on politicians and policy makers (who may not be competent enough to

⁴⁷ The first two are part of the context and too big to be analyzed in this short paper. They deserve a separate study.

⁴⁸ All SAR publications are vetted by two leaders with the occasional involvement of a board member as a peer reviewer.

⁴⁹ PASOS stands for Policy Association for Open Society.

recognize quality)⁵⁰. At the European level, however, access is more difficult, and quality assurance enables think tanks to access top civil servants and politicians.

4.2.4 Policy recommendations

Policy recommendations are considered to be the “holy grail” of policy papers. The think tanks in the sample are praised for making concrete recommendations when compared to the rest of civil society (e.g. Hozic 2010). However, once evaluators probed deeper to isolate instances when the concrete recommendations by think tanks translated into policy measures or laws, the picture blurred. For example, “IVO’s purpose within Slovak society is to promote ideas and induce ‘deep thinking’ on certain issues,” (Blagescu 2007). Sometimes this is literally illustrated by the absence of recommendations in some of their reports. The organization sees itself more as a provider of knowledge and analysis, influencing the policy processes indirectly, rather than providing direct advice. In Azerbaijan, recommendations are built directly upon the evidence developed by the analysis of only a couple of reports. Most reports, however, “state recommendations in a highly compressed fashion leaving it up to the policymaker to convert them to specific actions,” (Stryuk and Stobetskaya 2006). In Macedonia, where there is heavy political pressure on think tanks, the evaluation report finds instances of self-censorship: “It becomes quite obvious that the quest for ‘political neutrality’ may have taken Analytica to the extreme of avoiding politics at any cost (2010:6).”

From the macro-perspective of the three theoretical lenses, pluralism explains the actions of IPP. This think tank enhances its analytical savvy by using democratic tools (the Freedom of Information Act) to tease out additional data from state bodies. IVO, on the other hand strives to become an independent hub/depository of information and knowledge – a pole in the Slovak knowledge regime. The elite theory could be a good lens through which to understand the controversial

⁵⁰ This could be comfortably stated for all countries outside the European Union. In the European Union, the quality of policymaking process has increased along with the competence of the policymakers (e.g. Estonia is an excellent example of a healthy political and policy process where the civil servants and the politicians are very competent.)

insertion of quality control. At national level, the quality of policy studies is not a key factor for the impact the think tank makes on elites. However, at European level, this becomes a key criterion for entry. Due to their unique blend of academic and policy research, SAR is the best example a think tank's successful entry into the regional and EU policy spheres.

4.3 Quality of networking

This section will explore the quality and nature of links that think tanks have forged with the rest of civil society, policymakers and other policy stakeholders at national level. At the international level, the subsequent analysis is limited to membership in associations and networks of like-minded organizations and access to international policymakers.

The think tanks in this sample provide several examples of cooperation with civil society organizations. IVO is credited for their unique contribution “to the development of a vibrant and engaging civil society and to public debate and public awareness around issues such as elections, minority rights program, and in foreign policy reform in preparation for the country's accession to the EU,” (Blagescu 2007). During the first years of its existence, the institute has been hailed as one of the key galvanizing forces of civil society against the authoritarian regime of Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar. Consequently, members of civil society, Slovak and international experts, journalists, and few state officials attended IVO's events. Although an active participant, IVO never actively corralled civil society. Likewise, their policy analysis never followed a research agenda that would be either defined by or coordinated with other civil society players.

Unlike IVO, which has been a galvanizing force but never a leader, SAR is credited for playing a leadership role in several issue coalitions. The “Coalition for Clean Parliament,” SAR's most prominent undertaking to date, saw itself teaming up with several national NGOs, local NGOs, a trade union, and investigative journalists. Within this group, SAR has been the most critical voice,

and the main organizer and coordinator. SAR used the network as one of the main advocacy tools to increase the legitimacy of their efforts. ERC has taken a similar role within the “Publish What You Pay and Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative” – Azerbaijan networks. Though both examples showcase think tanks as leaders of issue coalitions, these two cases are more the exception than the rule. It is also worth observing that the research methodologies used within these coalitions might not pass the rigor tests used by classical research studies (Nelson 2008).

INEKO has turned more towards professional economists than to NGOs. Through one of their projects, it created a platform⁵¹ where independent economists, economic analysts, journalists, academics, people from the business community, representatives of trade unions and NGOs competent in economic matters share their views on quality and importance of different economic and social measures. What at the beginning seemed to be a nascent epistemic community, later evolved into in a powerful and respected platform for monitoring socio-economic reforms in Slovakia that the government could not afford to neglect. IPP – Romania can be singled out for their successful collaboration with for-profit companies such as Gallup, also unusual for think tanks in the region. They are also among the few think tanks that successfully provided consulting services to local authorities, and thus created a web of clients at local level. Although building a network of clients is desirable for the sustainability of an organization (Stryuk 2006), such efforts raised questions about IPP’s not-for-profit identity.

Networking at the national level notwithstanding, links with the international community have been important from the onset of these centers. ERC, IPP and IVO are members of the Policy Association for Open Society (PASOS), the biggest network of independent policy centers in Europe. ERC is also a member of the Stockholm Network of market-oriented think tanks in Europe. Analytica is a member of an ad hoc network of Western Balkans think tanks supported by the

⁵¹ The name of the project and later the platform is called HESO.

European Fund for the Balkans (Bandovic 2010). INEKO has resolved to focus on the national level and never aspired to connect with other think tanks outside of Slovakia. Only few organizations have forged deep ties beyond formal membership within networks. IVO and SAR are among the few who have joined global scientific networks and have been invited to contribute in respected international journals. This type of networking has sometimes been more important than formal alliances since it allowed for access to the best academics and policy makers in the field, as well as a more direct transfer of know-how from and to other countries.

The different types of networks listed above illustrate the relevance of the three theoretical frameworks and single out the quality elements within each of those. IVO's linkages could be tested against the normative frame of knowledge regime. IVO's aim has always been to further knowledge and to develop conceptual solutions within its networks. As much as this has been their strength, IVO has failed to reach the public at large, and to develop a more participatory approach. SAR, while clearly linked to liberal elites, has forged a broader coalition with stakeholders falling within the tenets of liberal-pluralist frame.. Teamed up with various stakeholders, SAR has added legitimacy and representativeness. The INEKO network grew into a knowledge regime that challenged the existing policymaking regime. Finally, at the international level, SAR and IVO leaders have become members of exclusive, informal elite networks (scientific and policy). At times, this has allowed them to enjoy club-like privileges, for example, regular contributions by their leaders to peer reviewed journals⁵². PASOS, as mentioned in the previous section, has initiated a standard-setting process. However, the network has yet to facilitate mentoring opportunities for weaker institutions and to create a forum for the improvement of standards (Panel discussion 2010).

4.4 Quality of communication and advocacy

Independent think tanks have tended to perceive communications as an optional, marginal activity.

⁵² The best illustration is that the leaders of these organizations have been regular contributors to the Journal of Democracy, whenever it has covered CEE.

However, the creation of a comprehensive annual communications strategy is becoming integral to the activity of any think tank. Every organization requires a communications strategy to maximize its work's impact, but technological advancement and the perception that there is abundant information and analyses at policy makers' disposal⁵³ complicate the task of choosing appropriate channels of communication.

The think tanks examined here have lagged in accepting this reality and failing to develop comprehensive communication strategies for their ideas and advocacy. With the exception of ERC, all other think tanks in this sample do not have an overall organizational communication strategy; instead they focus simply on communicating their projects' results. This is not to say that they aren't aware of such strategies, but most of their efforts look scattered and exclusive of larger plans. None of the think tanks except INEKO have successfully used new media and technology to establish innovative channels of communication with stakeholders and new constituencies.

Within this sample INEKO and SAR make the most elaborate efforts to communicate and advocate their recommendations related to specific research projects. For example, INEKO used its access to the business elite to deliver 20 presentations about pension reform benefits to Slovakia's largest companies (Blagescu 2006). INEKO also enticed Slovakian economic affairs journalists to the Slovak Press Watch— a blog designed to influence journalists' practices by improving their understanding of economic affairs. These two examples show INEKO's strength: approaching specific stakeholders and exerting influence via direct communication. Simultaneously, they also reveal the weaknesses of INEKO in areas where they cannot establish direct communication channels. For example, with EU policymakers in Brussels they have had little leverage and are unknown to European policy makers who could otherwise benefit from INEKO analyses.

⁵³ Even though this statement is correct for Western European democracies, even in a region such as the CEE where research and analysis is not so common, the number of providers and would-be providers of policy analysis is increasing.

SAR has taken a different approach. While advising the Romanian liberal political elite and becoming regular commentators to national and local media, they have nurtured a community of stakeholders in Brussels and other European capitals. SAR has achieved this position by associating its brand with the reputations of Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Sorin Ionita as prominent researchers and public figures. SAR has also built its profile via conscious product diversification including op-ed, newspaper, and peer-reviewed journal articles. While praised by many, this approach has also been criticized by those who believe that SAR strayed from the role of activist think tank to that of partisan advocate in the early 2000s (Nelson 2008).

IVO is regarded as an “intellectual den” (Blagescu 2006:8). In part this reputation has led them to become what Stone (2000:53) defines as an information and expertise clearinghouse. As such, they have assumed the passive role of analysts and observers regularly contacted by journalists for expert opinion, but rarely taking their own initiative. IVO has also remained faithful to traditional media and standard publishing formats, mainly books and lengthy reports, contributing to a shrinking audience. For example, over the past 13 years IVO has produced their annual flagship publication “The Global Report on Slovakia,” but has failed to modernize their approach. With over 700 pages, this publication is an extremely valuable resource in keeping abreast with Slovakia’s political and economic developments. Yet the report’s sheer size, its lack of shorter policy backgrounders, and the lack of author interviews made available as podcasts on IVO’s web site⁵⁴, make the publication unappealing to a majority of the policy-relevant audience.

The think tanks examined here reflect the trends and challenges of the wider think tanks population. A recent PASOS survey showed that only one in seven think tanks surveyed has a full-time communications professional; while only one in three think tanks attracts international media

⁵⁴ Several Western think tanks have developed excellent communication channels by using new formats. For example: the European Council on Foreign Relations records short interviews with the authors of its policy briefs; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace posts the speeches from their conferences as podcasts to be downloaded individually or integrally; DEMOS–UK broadcasted their flagship lectures online thus increasing their audience tenfold. However none of these practices have made headway in Central and Eastern Europe.

attention more than once or twice a year. That communication skills need to be built across the sector is made clear by the fact that only one in three think tank directors have received communications training.⁵⁵

Compared to the detailed planning described in the RAPID model, it becomes apparent that in terms of communication work, think tanks in this region are often doing too little too late. With two exceptions, the examined think tanks do very little planning at the outset of their research projects. Aside from not developing concrete communication tools and making critical choices in their approaches, think tanks often embark on new policy research projects without having a clear methodology for achieving their desired change. Sometimes this undermines their credibility more than the quality of their analyses, since it makes the impression that they have not considered structural obstacles and concrete strategies toward gaining key stakeholder support while achieving policy change.

The quality of communication matters differently under each of the theoretical frames discussed in chapter three. If think tanks would like to outclass the competition in pluralist societies, their analyses should be presented in the manner most appealing to their target audiences. As INEKO demonstrates, an organization can present excellent products domestically and still remain unnoticed in the more competitive international market. Analytica reveals even more weakness due to improper analyses of different audiences. Some of their products simply never reach the intended audience because Analytica has not utilized effective channels of communication and has been crowded out by competitors.

Entrance to informal corridors and direct access to policymakers has been the key ‘communication tool’ in influencing national elites. Products exuding intellectual prowess and technical ability have

⁵⁵ The study was carried out in 2010 and encompassed 33 think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe (not limited to PASOS members).

been the main magnets for the international donors and policymakers. Combined with media savvy, IVO, INEKO and SAR built a reputation of ‘linkage elites’⁵⁶. While successful with donors, this image had negative consequences on the public opinion about these organizations. Regardless how cooperative they were with other NGOs, their communication channels and styles led to general public perceiving them as elite think tanks. Finally, communication is harder to track under the knowledge regime since the quality of communication depends on the contextually from relationships, informal rules and social understandings of the organizations and actors involved in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. INEKO’s platform for monitoring of socio-economic reforms has managed to ‘translate’ some of the messages developed within their knowledge regime and successfully communicate them to the general public. This practice is however an exception to the rule of ‘unsuccessful transition of ideas’ between knowledge regimes and policymaking and production regimes.

⁵⁶ As defined by Ionita (2003) and discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

5.1 The role quality of think tanks within different contexts and need for improvement

The previous chapter provided an overview of the evidence pertaining to the quality standards on research design, identification of problems, published materials, networking and communication and advocacy strategy. In each of these aspects, evidence was tested either against the RAND standards or RAPID models and then compared to the expectations set by each of the theoretical frames. This chapter will canvass the broad findings about the state of quality standards under each of the theoretical frames based on the collected evidence. Then, the chapter examines the questions posed at the beginning of this paper and concludes with a list of challenges that think tanks in CEE need to address in order to improve quality of their work.

5.1.1 Pluralism

IPP and SAR Romania, by nurturing specific niches⁵⁷, make a good use of the pluralist features of Romanian democratic system. While most of their analysis in the Romanian policymaking environment is appreciated and respected, the main distinguishing characteristics that lead to their popular success are outside the research domain – they are rather actions against the government. Both SAR and IPP have made strides to back up their dissent on some governmental policies with good policy products. The quality factor that seems missing in both organizations is a developed communication strategy targeted to particular constituencies.

On the contrary to the Romanian think tanks, Analytica's aspiration to become a policy voice from minority perspective has completely faded. As expected in the pluralist framework, their weak analysis and inappropriate messaging has been 'weeded out' by other more competitive think tanks and NGOs in the advocacy stakes. With the advance of new technology, social media and various

⁵⁷ IPP – strategic litigation and FoI Law to get data and prominence; SAR – Coalition of various stakeholders

possibilities for interaction on the internet, the pluralist field for policy advice is become leveled. Think tanks in this sample are lagging behind these developments. Their new communication strategies have to take into consideration these modern channels; otherwise these institutes would risk losing out to a more visible competition. The evidence confirms that quality of the policy products and their communication, as suggested in chapter 3, are decisive factors for the success of think tanks that operate in pluralist policymaking environment.

5.1.2. Elite theory

The presented evidence and case studies point out an interesting duality about the role of quality when a think tank operates within the elites. At national level⁵⁸, once a think tank is accepted by the elites, it seems that the quality of its work will not stand a big scrutiny until their reputation remains intact. ERC in Azerbaijan vis-à-vis the donor community and IVO in Slovakia in front of intellectual liberal-minded elite are good examples⁵⁹. This is not to claim that the quality of their products is low, but rather to ascertain that it is not the key criterion for being able to inform the particular elites. At the level of EU policymaking (EU integration, European Neighborhood Policy and other policies relevant for the work of the regional think tanks), the access could be achieved in various ways, but is maintained only by producing high quality relevant analysis.

SAR is probably the best example among the examined think tanks for pursuing successful strategy towards European policymakers. Unfortunately, this is a rare successful story among the think tanks in the region. As the PASOS network shows, access to European policy makers has always been considered important, but most of its member-organizations failed in gaining access to consistently provide policy advice to Brussels-based policymakers. While sufficient to entice national policy makers, the quality of presented analysis has been deemed insufficient to make an impression at the

⁵⁸ I have to acknowledge that this conclusion is more relevant in Macedonia and Azerbaijan than in Slovakia and Romania, where the national elites have become increasingly competent and able to is more relevant

⁵⁹ INEKO in Slovakia for example provides an example of other type: a high quality product and access to the elites. The necessity for professional respect is due to the economic professions. However, this observation cannot be extended to other think tanks in the region.

European market of ideas. To remedy this deficiency, this network of 40 member-organizations has started to develop ‘a seal of excellence for think tank quality’ aiming at improving the quality standards of its members. In conclusion, reputation still trumps quality of analysis as a key criterion for access to national elites; however at the level of European policy-making, the quality of CEE think tanks has to be leveled with those of their Western peers so that the newcomers from the East would stand a chance of access and success.

5.1.3 Knowledge regime

The presented evidence shows that the Slovak and Romanian think tanks have become part of nascent national knowledge regimes. INEKO has created a specific knowledge regime related to economic knowledge and policy in Slovakia that has successfully counteracted the policymaking regime and made tangible influence on various economic policies. IVO has become a depository of knowledge, scholarly articles, books and expert literature and thus complemented, if not replaced, universities in Slovakia. IPP has become a reference point for collection and interpretation of data, a clearly acknowledge position within the scholarly and policymaking circles in Romania.

All these examples show think tanks as part or hubs of knowledge regimes that have produced new data or innovatively interpreted old data, have recommended policy and floated ideas that have affected the policymaking regime – exactly in line with expectations knowledge regime aspires to fulfill. However, it should be noted that while some policy change has been made, think tanks and the knowledge regimes they have contributed to are yet to become an important source of social innovation. Finally, it is important to mention that this theoretical lens has its own limits and not all think tanks could be explained through it. In countries such as Azerbaijan and Macedonia, even if they had tried, think tanks would have probably failed to create anything similar to knowledge regimes. The intellectual and analytical scene alongside the state of policymaking and production regimes is too underdeveloped for accommodating such a development.

5.2 The quest for improved think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe: challenges ahead

Ten years have passed since Krastev quipped “Central and East European think tanks might be described as public policy research institutes without research” (2000:290). This paper has shown that the appreciation of quality standards of research and ability to communicate these results largely depends on the frameworks in which think tanks operate. The quality of written production and the ability to stand out among the competition have been paramount for those think tanks that operate in pluralist environments. For think tanks operating within the national elites, it became apparent that once the access is secured, the quality of analysis could be mediocre as long as the organizational or personal reputation remains intact. Under knowledge regimes, the quality standards became a crucial tenet in the construction of the system: think tanks are expected to first design and develop and then aspire to achieve high quality of research for the pursuit of knowledge and policy impact alike. The analysis in this paper shows that some think tanks have advanced their research and cannot be accused today for the same ills as they were rightfully so by Krastev (2000) a decade ago. In the meantime think tanks have made contributions to reform processes and have yielded ‘a good return’ for the modest investments of their international (and rarely) local supporters and donors. Several of the think tanks analyzed in detail in this paper have become hubs for data analysis and evidence-based recommendations in their respective countries.

These positive developments however have not been systematic in all aspects of the think tank work and across the field of the 200-odd different think tanks in the region. Neither individual think tanks nor networks such as PASOS have determined a set of quality standards for the policy research and the dissemination of research results and recommendations. Some think tanks, as explained through the elite theory, have managed to enter the ‘corridors of power’ and as part of the elites provide advice to policymakers, but regrettably without backing it by compelling evidence. Their nice

façade has been stripped down when think tanks endeavored to influence the EU policymaking using the same analysis and approach. Other think tanks have become contained by their achievements locally and have not put any effort into producing the same quality papers in English and thus failed to extend the influence of their research across borders. The list of weaknesses is probably topped by an immediate need for addressing the way how most think tanks communicate their results.

These drawbacks are repairable. “Think tanks are perpetually squeezed between the Scylla of quasi-democratic governments and the Charybdis of overbearing donors.” (Hozic 2010:18). One of the challenges they need to address in their work is identify the problems and needs beyond the limits posed by governments and donors. In a region as politicized as Central and Eastern Europe, politically and policy relevant research means rich ethnography, focus on localities or sectors which are indicative of broader trends in politics or political economy; there are plenty of opportunities and swathes of under-researched subjects. The region, after all, knows very little about itself. In order to do so, think tanks need to go beyond their usual practices and look for new methods of data collection and ways how to interpret it; search for new theories of change and have to be daring in suggesting models for social innovation and change. Setting standard of quality in their work is one step in the right direction. While far from being comprehensive models, RAND standards and RAPID model could be a first stop in the quest of PASOS for ‘a seal of excellence for think tanks’. The practice of policymaking advances in parallel with the ability of researchers to influence it. The think tanks inevitably will have to secure high quality of their research and successful communication of their policy ideas to stand a chance of impact within all three political contexts analyzed in this paper.

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¹ All reports were prepared by independent consultants who followed the Terms of Reference set forth by the Think tank fund. Each consultant reviewed minimum 5 reports/briefs per evaluated think tanks and met with the leadership of the evaluated think tank, its senior and junior staff, board members as well as policy makers, politicians, donor organizations, NGOs and other think tanks, journalists and other relevant stakeholders in each respective country. All reports are part of OSI Think Tank Fund Archive and available on demand.

APPENDIX 1: Research Methodology – additional information

1.1 Selection of case studies

In this research, I employ a diverse- case method (according to typology provided in Gerring 2008) aiming to represent a full range of values based on multiple variables. The base-variable is the political system (and consequently the state of policy processes) in the country where the think tank operates. Using the Freedom House's Nation in Transit Report 2010 and its rankings, I choose four different countries that represent the range of political systems across the region (see table 3)⁶⁰.

Table 3. Nations in Transit 2010 Democracy score and rating in the selected countries.

Country	Electoral Process (EP)	Civil Society (CS)	Independent Media (IM)	Democratic Governance (NGOV)	Local Democratic Governance (LGOV)	Judicial Framework and Independence (JFI)	Corruption (CO)	Democracy Score	Regime Type
Azerbaijan	6.75	5.75	6.75	6.50	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.39	Consolidated authoritarian regime
Macedonia	3.25	3.25	4.25	4.00	3.75	4.00	4.00	3.79	Semi-consolidated democracy
Romania	2.75	2.50	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.46	Semi-consolidated democracy (EU member)
Slovakia	1.75	1.75	3.00	3.00	2.50	3.00	3.75	2.68	Consolidated democracy (EU member)

Source: Nations in Transit 2010 Report

NOTES: The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The 2010 ratings reflect the period January 1 through December 31, 2009.

Then, within these countries I choose think tanks along three additional variables (criteria for selection): 1) state of the national think tank scene (*underdeveloped* - very small number of organizations, *in development* – period of expansion and gaining in prominence, *developed* – two sub-types: under 10 and over 10 organizations); 2) size of the organization (small, medium or big), and 3) reputation in their own country (low, medium, high). I paid particular attention not to include extreme case in the sample (such as very underdeveloped - one-person think tanks on one side of the spectrum or very developed centers employing 20-40 people on the other side. These are anyway very few and apart throughout the region). It is important to note that not all combinations of the three variables pertaining to the think tanks exist in the field and therefore the sample does not include them. For example, there is no big think tank in a consolidated authoritarian regime in the region. Table 4 provides an overview of the characterization for each of the examined think tanks.

⁶⁰ From the NIT scale, the transitional governments or hybrid regimes is the only type that is not represented here. There are existing think tanks in the countries that could serve for this purpose: Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia. However, there are no available documentation and evaluation reports for any of these think tanks. Moreover, from experience (participant observation) I know that the think tanks in these countries are very complicated cases and none of them could represent the wider population. Another limit is the size of this paper. Expanding the sample would not allow for a concise analysis.

Table 4: Selected think tanks – case studies

Think Tank	Country	Think tank scene	Size of the think tank	Reputation in the country	Well known for	Appropriate framework to analyze
Economic Research Center (ERC)	Azerbaijan	Underdeveloped (3-4 organizations constitute the field)	Medium 7 employee 5 regular collaborators	Medium/High	Alternative economic analysis to gov't policies Non-elite TT but with some access to elites	Knowledge regime Elitism
Analytica	Macedonia	In development (5 to 10)	Small 4 employees 3 interns	Low	Regular newsletter Non-elite TT	Pluralism
Romanian Academic Society (SAR)	Romania	Developed (small size, 5 to 10)	Medium 11 employees 10 regular collaborators	High	Political analysis (Sometimes accused for supporting liberal elites and political parties. Access to liberal elite/ also some cooperation with NGOs	Knowledge regime Pluralism Elitism
Institute for Public Policy (IPP)	Romania	Developed (small size, 5 to 10)	Small 5 employees 10 regular collaborators	Medium/High	Technical analysis / use of freedom of information law Non-elite TT but with access to elites.	Knowledge regime Pluralism
Institute for Public Affairs (IVO)	Slovakia	Developed (big size, more than 10)	Big 12-20 employees 20 regular collaborators	Medium/High	Political commentaries. Big books. Belongs to liberal elite. Elite TT.	Knowledge regime Elitism
Institute for Economic and Social Reform (INEKO)	Slovakia	Developed (big size, more than 10)	Small 5 employees 30 regular collaborators	High	Macroeconomic Analysis Access to liberal elites. Still not perceived as elite TT.	Knowledge regime Elitism

The work of each of these think tanks was evaluated by external consultants following the same guidelines, i.e. the assessment should include three critical aspects of 'think tank' work – policy analysis and research, communication and advocacy, and institutional management – in order to evaluate whether organization remains strategic and relevant in the very challenging policy making environment of 'respective country'.

Each of the consultants produced a report per organization (Blagescu 2007; Nelson 2008, Stryuk 2009; Hozic 2010). While the reports varied in style and focus, they have all covered the items listed above, provided evidence about the work of the assessed organizations and required evaluation. The evidence presented in this paper largely draws from these separate evaluation reports.

1.2 Panel discussion on think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe

Panel discussion held on May 10 in Budapest

Aim:

To openly discuss the state of policy processes in CEE, the role of independent policy research and specifically think tanks therein.

Participants:

Members of the Think Tank Fund Sub-Board, four guest speakers and employee of OSI

APPENDIX 2: Short description of the think tanks – case studies

Azerbaijan

Economic Research Centre (ERC) is a policy research nonprofit think tank that has a mission to facilitate sustainable economic development and good governance in Azerbaijan. The Center's major research dimensions cover the issues on popularization of economic and business knowledge in the society, macroeconomic policies, enhancing government's transparency and accountability, fostering public participation in decentralized governance issues.

Macedonia

Analytica was established in 2005 by a group of young Turkish-Macedonian intellectuals, who have all studied and received their undergraduate and graduate degrees in Turkey. Analytica is a non-profit independent policy research center created in parallel with several other think tanks in Macedonia with a mission to channel minority support in the achievement of the strategic goals of the country. The Center is active on public administration reforms, foreign and security policy, Macedonia's EU accession, energy and education policies.

Romania

The Institute for Public Policy (IPP) assists the development of Romania's democratic process through extensive primary research, fostering open discussions and unbiased public policy analysis. Main programmatic areas are a) promoting transparency and accountability through monitoring of parliamentary activity, b) administrative transparency and rule of law, c) reform of the local public administration, d) electoral systems and processes and d) European values and foreign affairs.

Romanian Academic Society (SAR) aims to further the ideas of freedom, democracy and good governance in Eastern Europe. Starting with Romania, SAR seeks to raise the public awareness level of policy issues, contribute through research and advocacy to inform policy formulation and assist administrative reform through performance assessment. SAR aims to contribute to good governance and development through policy research, contribute to the European integration of Romania, Western Balkans countries and Moldova.

Slovakia

Established in 1997, **The Institute for Public Affairs (IVO)** for long has been regarded as one of the leading professional think tanks working on policy issues in Central Europe. IVO helped to shape public policies during Slovakia's transitional period, its EU accession and membership. Its programmatic activities are organized in two clusters: democratic institutions and processes; and social problems and public policy.

The Slovak Institute for Economic and Social Reform (INEKO) combines applied economic research and consultation with governmental authorities, international partners and Slovak experts in order to promote long-term economic growth based on the democratic development of the Slovak society. Its portfolio includes pension system analysis, health care, public finance reform, education reform, administrative and fiscal decentralization.