

Intellectuals, Think Tanks, and Politics in CEE

First draft abstract of the paper to be presented on the Annual Doctoral Conference 2008

The paper outlines the theoretical and methodological grounds of the research project on the CEE think tanks as a prominent and specific form of intellectuals' presence in politics. The international proliferation of think tanks took place jointly with the democratizations of post-communist countries. Originally a US phenomenon, think tanks spread to sharply differing regions. The interaction of Western models with local conditions unsurprisingly resulted in differences between the Western and post-communist think tank spheres, as well as within the latter. The literature identifies a set of core differences of post-communist think tank spheres from the Western ones and explains them with the different political, legal, and economic conditions and the characteristics of the groups from which think tankers recruit in post-communist countries. (see e.g. Schneider 2003, Stone & Garnett 1998, Struyk 1999)

This project aspires to re-conceptualize these existing explanations into a coherent theoretical framework inspired by Medvetz's (2007) Bourdieuan theory of US think tanks. Think tank spheres are conceptualized as relatively autonomous proto-fields located at the intersections of their 'paternal fields' to which they have vital material and symbolic ties. Together with proto-fields' internal characteristics (differentiation, number, organizational forms, and orientations of their think tanks) these ties constitute the crucial dimensions on which think tank spheres will be compared in order to define the central differences between Western and post-communist countries as well as within the latter. Taking a think tank, embedded in its national context, as the primary unit of analysis I outline a nested research design that combines a medium-N QCA-based comparative and small-N in-depth analysis and the rules for the sequential case-selection.

Developing Krastev's (2000) explanation of liberal-oriented advocacy think tanks as typical post-communist form emerging out of liberal intelligentsia's attempts to safeguard and institutionalize liberal agendas after the post-transitory ascent of populist politics, I elaborate an explanation that focuses on the more distal factors behind this proximate factor. I hypothesize that several central specificities of CEE think tank spheres are caused by different types of relations between intellectuals and the nomenklatura in communist regimes, whose effects are shaped by the opportunity structures. I build on a body of research on CEE intellectuals, grounding the research into the debates on the role of the intellectuals in the post-communist societies and in the transformations of democratizing countries.

Reference list:

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