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Book Part — Manuscript Version (Preprint)

Think tanks and the politics of climate change

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Suggested Citation: Plehwe, Dieter (2021) : Think tanks and the politics of climate change, In: Abelson, Donald E. Rastrick, Christopher J. (Ed.): Handbook on Think Tanks in Public Policy, ISBN 978-1-78990-184-9, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, pp. 150-165, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789901849.00022>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/240934>

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Think Tanks and the politics of Climate Change

Dieter Plehwe¹

Abstract

In pluralist accounts, in deliberation minded and civil society-oriented scholarship think tanks are considered relevant because of their constructive role in policy related knowledge generation. They are held to establish and enable expertise from diverse stakeholders and multiple angles, and to successfully feed the policy process by way of addressing the media and particular audiences. The environmental policy field in general and climate change mitigation in particular allows observing a less benign and wider range of roles and functions of think tanks in multiple conflict constellations. In light of militant policy battles think tanks amass relevance with regard to a more fundamental transformation of policy fields and political institutions. Conflict theoretical and power sensitive approaches also suggest an increasing need to relate the work and role of think tanks and expert knowledge in general in quite agnostic ways to political struggles of competing discourse coalitions that frequently rely not only on innovative and problem-solving research, but also on destructive strategies of “knowledge shaping” and “strategic ignorance” (Bonds 2011, McGeoy 2018). To illustrate both the participatory-democratic and post-democratic-technocratic potential of policy think tanks this chapter will go back to the post-WW II origins of academic and partisan think tanks in the emerging field of environmental studies. The advancing field of climate science in conjunction with the growing concern over ecological degradation eventually led to the co-constitution of both radical ecology and aggressive corporate and neoliberal defenders of fossil industries and life style. The development of the climate change mitigation struggle needs to recognize movement-counter-movement dynamics that play out heavily in the field of policy related expertise and the academic sphere. It turns out that current vitriol in climate change mitigation debates cannot simply be attributed to the abuse of science and fake news. Evidence instead points to the far-ranging transformation of the “global knowledge power structure” (Susan Strange 1988) in past decades, and of a range of national and international governance structures, in which the rising number of policy-think-tanks have come to play an ever more important role.

Think Tanks, Networks, Climate Change, Governance, Conflict, Neoliberalism, Discourse Coalition

Introduction

The European Institute for Climate and Energy (EIKE) located in Jena, Thüringen, is Germany’s and possibly Europe’s leading climate change denial think tank at least in terms of numbers of publications. According to a team of researchers, EIKE counts for almost three quarters of 1700 papers published by European denial think tanks in recent years (Almiron et al 2019). In May 2020, EIKE published part III of Ferruccio Ferroni’s attack on the UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for example, according to which solar activity is the determining influence on climate change, not anthropogenic causes. While this denial standard has been refuted many times – and no serious climatologist has ever denied solar influence among other, for the present warming decisive factors –

¹ Special thanks to Moritz Neujeffski and Lilian Mauthofer for help with the graphs and research assistance

Ferroni's blogpost comes along with a lot of data and looks quite scientific. His academic credentials at the same time are more than dubious. One successful academic journal publication by Ferroni and Richard Hopkirk on questions of energy return of solar energy has been subject to a devastating attack on the scientific peer review system in place of the journal "Energy Policy", in which the piece had been printed.²

Regardless of the state of the art of climate science, the anthropogenic climate change denial voices, the latest instance in a history of well organized "merchants of doubt" (Oreskes and Conway 2010), have yet to leave the public sphere. Much like the near exclusive think tank landscape of denial paper production in the United States (Dunlap and Jaques 2013), the European discourse of climate change (policy) skepticism and denial has been sustained by think tanks like EIKE in Germany, the Global Warming Policy Foundation and the Institute of Economic Affairs in the UK or the Instituto Juan de Mariana in Spain. Together with the Berlin based neoliberal Institut für Unternehmerische Freiheit (IUF), Germany's EIKE has organized a yearly international climate conference in Munich, Germany, and both institutes are strongly involved in other European denial conferences and think tank networks. Participants include the who is who of U.S., European and Australian climate denial voices many of which are based in think tanks like the Heartland Institute in the United States or the Australian Institute of Public Affairs (IPA). The IPA's Environment Foundation is directed by Peter Ridd, the Australian physicist who claims the Great Barrier Reef is the "least endangered of any ecosystem to future climate change" and that "the case for alarm regarding climate change is grossly overstated".³ Ridd was the key note speaker at an October 2019 conference of climate change sceptics organized by three Scandinavian think tanks in Oslo, Norway (<https://ecr.network/agenda/>), in which EIKE pundits also took part.

Conjointly, a wide range of such think tank professionals in different countries around the globe have been busily influencing public opinion, political debate, economic discourse and even academic discussions on climate change mitigation. While academic influence of denial pundits in the climate sciences is near nil, the denial think tanks are packed with neoliberal pro market economists who are part of the mainstream of the economics profession. When it comes to policy conclusions and policy instrument discussions like the cost-benefit analysis of mitigation measures, market minded economists frequently reinforce climate change policy skepticism uttered from various political and economic interest groups. Focusing on the natural climate science debate only is missing the climate change related economic policy debate in which neoliberal think tanks like Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute in the United States, Stiftung Marktwirtschaft or the Centrum für Europäische Politik (CEP) in Germany, the Adam Smith Institute in the UK and many others play a key role (see Plehwe 2020 on the asymmetrical climate science-economics coalitions). Climate change (policy) denial is very much like a chameleon as a result of the odd combination of central and marginal actors, takes different shapes at different times and adapts to local circumstances. Common to all the more and less respectable varieties of the climate change denial and policy opposition, however, is a desire to do little rather than more at lower rather than higher cost later rather than earlier to deal with global warming and to unilaterally focus on adaptation measures rather than investing in precaution. As such, the various strategies attempt to delay and to water down climate change policies, which may in fact turn them ineffectual (see Lamb et al. 2020 on the variety of delay

² <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-11-08/another-failure-of-scientific-peer-review-a-completely-wrong-paper-on-the-energy-return-of-photovoltaic-energy-1/>

³ <https://www.desmogblog.com/peter-ridd>

discourses, for example). Grosso modo, the strategies must be considered *destructive* rather than constructive with regard to the policy goal of climate change mitigation.

Contrary to intuition, the “right wing climate-denial machine” (Riley Dunlap) has been developed after the scientific debate had been settled on the anthropogenic cause of contemporary warming. Until the most important political landmark decisions in the global effort to break the warming momentum – the Rio conference of 1992 and the Kyoto protocol of 1997-- the climate change policy opposition composed of fossil interest groups and neoliberal “free market” pundits emphasized scientific uncertainty in their efforts to defend energy policy status quo (Oreskes and Conway 2010). Scientific certainty about human causes of contemporary warming was good news, of course, because in turn this means warming can be influenced by human action and the situation would be hopeless if the causes are natural. But since the warming is man-made and can be limited, all kinds of fossil energy related interest groups increasingly felt the need to act to prevent policy choices considered harmful. The prospect of increasing state interventionism at the same time alarmed neoliberals concerned with free market economics. Once it was no longer possible to exploit academic uncertainty, a diverse climate change policy opposition stepped up efforts to meet overwhelming scientific evidence in the climate sciences with “evidence” generated by dedicated think tank research. Unlike academic research standards, dedication in think tank research in this case has been to the partisan cause for which the particular think tanks have been created or for which their services have been acquired. Since climate change politics increasingly has become a subject of scientific expertise, fossil fuel and a certain wing of neoliberal anti-regulation and anti-planning interests have merged to undertake enormous efforts in politicizing climate science for lobby purposes, namely to “institutionalize delays” (Brulle 2014).

The involvement of quite many think tanks, consultancies, PR-firms and other members of denial-think tank networks in North America and Europe (Jaques, Dunlap, Freeman 2008, various contribution in Almiron and Xifra 2020) calls into question widely shared understandings of think tank landscapes and activities. In spite of the recognition of “grey zones” in which think tanks operate because of the relevance of interest groups and corporations or public sector relationships, McGann and Weaver (2000) enthusiastically claimed think tanks to be part of civil society, a space of neither state nor market. Both think tanks and NGOs are held to be important “catalysts for ideas and actions” (McGann and Weaver 2000, 3). A decade later, McGann’s Global Go To Think Tank Index and Ranking Reports – the latest for 2019 data published in 2020 – distinguish between independent, government affiliated, political party affiliated and for profit think tanks, for example. But there is no discussion of problems related to the different types of think tanks and the character (and quality of) expertise they produce (compare Abelson, this volume). While there can be no doubt that the creation and operation of think tanks are and should be protected by fundamental human and democratic rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom to form coalitions and freedom of opinion, their work at the same time needs to be subject to critical analysis and public scrutiny since they attempt to exercise knowledge authority. Think tanks that claim to operate in the field of science in particular should be subject to reliable academic standards and quality control, but this has not been often the case in many policy fields and discourses crisscrossing the public sphere. As such, think

tanks also operate in a grey zone of *knowledge authority* part of which is subject to serious regimes of quality control and part of which is not.

Academic merit or not, think tanks are increasingly relevant to lively debates around issues of democracy, pluralism, deliberation and governance. But this is not due to a confirmed record of research quality produced by think tanks in many cases. Quite to the contrary. A lack of transparency and a lack of institutionalized efforts of quality control is characteristic to the think tank sector unlike the academic work in most countries. But relevant knowledge does not only come from recognized academic experts of course, and academic hierarchies produce their own myopias and idiosyncrasies (Fischer and Forester 1993).

Both pluralism and governance theories as well as critical policy studies stipulate the positive role of participation of a wider range of policy actors in policy debates, therefore. According to neo-pluralist scholarship, policy making will be able to thrive on the basis of the competition for input from diverse sectors and their ability to have their concerns considered within the domain of representative democracy regardless of significant asymmetries of power and influence (Mai 2013, van Schendelen 2010). Participatory governance even goes further by way of deliberately including a wide range of civil society actors without much concern for democratic representation in order to remedy some of the deficits of the representative system. The European Commission has been observed to compensate for her lack of legitimacy in terms of representative government by way of increasing civil society access, for example (Kohler-Koch 2010). Not least because of the advance of governance and deliberation theory, think tank and other input into policy debates has been welcome as a sign of inclusion and openness regardless quality concerns, suggesting improvements of constructive policy debates in old and new arenas. Yet such benign theories of the widening of public and private policy networks and the policy process at large have also been subject to strong criticism. For some scholars, participatory governance cannot be considered a compensation for the declining relevance of representative organizations (like political parties and trade unions) and institutions (like parliaments). Post-Democracy theories have pointed to the hollowing out of democracy because of increasing lobby influence and shifts toward technocratic decision making (Crouch 2004, Mair 2013). Jonathan Davies (2011) attacked the positive attributes of networks, reflexivity and communication that deflect attention away from the social production of hegemony, from the maintenance of hierarchy and from the patterns of domination under the guise of “governance”.

Only such a critical governance perspective yields an analytical lens to advance in think tank studies, open to conflict theoretical understanding of discourse coalitions in which think tanks come to play important roles in support of both political movements and political technocracy (Fischer 1993). Think tanks can be part of political innovation processes, but they can just as likely be part of organized and strategic efforts to exploit governance structures and opportunities to systematically distort public debate, to undermine policy efforts and to shape policy instruments and objectives in line with particular interest groups and ideological commitments that have been overlooked, denied or belittled in many a public policy debate. Inter alia the case of climate change policy making requires a much less benign perception of contemporary landscapes of deliberation and lobbying in the field of climate change policy making (Bonds 2011, McGeoy 2018). How can it be possible that relevant circuits of knowledge and expertise continue to influence public spheres and decision making related to climate change even if they are nowhere situated in recognized and respected institutions of the climate sciences? What accounts for the weight of *unscientific* think tank expertise

and for the relevance of think tank “experts” without recognized expertise? And why does mainstream academic economics seem to outweigh mainstream climate science? In order to tackle these questions and to come to terms with denial think tanks in climate change mitigation we need theoretical frameworks that recognize the relevance of political economy for the analysis of capitalist democracy, the relevance of asymmetry and diverse sources of political power and an agnostic view of expertise and policy conflict in which destructive strategies matter as much or more, occasionally, than constructive policy making and compromise.⁴

In order to situate the rise of the climate change counter movement organizations and discourse coalitions including many think tanks we need to first go back in time to reflect on the post-WW II development of economy and ecology. Both the cold war and the impact of industrial mass production around the globe led to the changing policy climate of the 1970s. In 1972, the UN Stockholm conference brought into existence the new environmental policy field (Dodds and Strauss 2012). Growing environmental concerns and crisis had contributed to the recognition of the need to deal more pro-actively and consistently with a wide range of pollution and degradation problems. Like the counter-movement against ecological concerns the beginning and the evolution of environmental policy making culminating in the institutionalization of environmental policy making can be pinpointed by way of looking at the history of environmental think tanks, which have been overlooked in many a history of the policy field in spite of their central role in the origin and evolution of the field (e.g. Böcher and Töller 2011, Meyer 2011)

1950s – 1980s: from the resource conversation to the birth of ecology and back

The history of environmental policy started outside the academic sphere and is hard to imagine without a clear picture of a number of ambitious think tanks in various countries. Due to space constraints, only a few of the particularly important policy think tanks will be recalled here to provide missing background of the contemporary environmental and climate policy constellation and confrontation with fossil energy groups and neoliberal networks.

A good example of the productive implications of “unintended consequences” discussed by Albert O. Hirschman (2001) is provided by the history of the think tank “Resources for the Future” (RFF). Asked by U.S. president Truman to look into natural resource limitations in the cold war context of the early 1950s, the head of the Materials Policy Commission, William Paley of CBS, recommended setting up a think tank. RFF was established in 1952 with funding from the Ford Foundation. Subsequently RFF was not only at the center of the new research field of environmental and natural resource studies. The think tank also provided the ambit for the new approaches to *environmental* economics in general and ecological perspectives in economics in particular. Researchers attempted not only to quantify negative environmental impact (externalities) and to establish economically efficient ways to reduce such costs, but also helped to reconsider the value of conservation and restoration with John Krutilla’s (1967) paper on the economic value of pristine nature. In addition to the supplement of economic instruments like taxation to the roaster of regulatory and technical approaches, the new think tank provided space for a challenge to the traditional consumption and growth paradigm. By

⁴ Will Davies reminded his audience of Thorstein Veblen (1919) in his lecture on the moral economy of sabotage at the Berlin Social Science Center, February 8, 2018.

1979, the Association of Environmental and Resource Economics counted 800 members in 30 countries (<https://www.rff.org/about/legacy/>).

Because of growing environmental concerns, a number of new environmental think tanks were founded around the time of the UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (1972). Barbara Ward's International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was arguably the most important. The British economist Ward and the American biologist René Jules Dubos had been asked by Maurice Strong, the Canadian oil industrialist and organizer of the Stockholm conference, to supply the report "Only one Earth" for the international founding moment of the environmental policy field (Strong 2001). Every state had to establish a federal government institution dedicated to environmental policy in order to participate. Ward and Dubos established the influential metaphor spaceship earth. IIED's mission was to "build a fairer, more sustainable world, using evidence, action and influence in partnership with others". It focused on five areas: natural resources; climate change; human settlements; sustainable markets; and governance. Funding was provided by aid agencies, contract research, foundations and corporations. The think tank was run out of offices in London, Edinburgh, Dakar (Senegal), Buenos Aires (Argentina), and Washington DC. Dakar and Buenos Aires eventually became independent, and the Washington DC office merged with World Resource Institute in 1988.

In Europe in the meantime the *Institute for European Environmental Policy* was set up in 1974 by Konrad von Moltke, son of Helmuth James Graf von Moltke who was executed by the Nazis in 1945 as part of the Kreisauer Kreis opposition to the Nazis. After Stockholm, Konrad von Moltke perceived of a need to push for European environmental policy for both ecological and economic reasons. A devoted supporter of transatlanticism, he feared a nationalistic backlash due to environmental problems. Offices were established across Europe with a headquarter in Bonn, Germany. IEEP was funded by the Dutch Lottery Fund and the European Cultural Foundation. It ended in 1985, succeeded by the two German environmental policy think tanks Wuppertal Institute and Ecologic. The latter is a new international think tank with offices in Vienna, Brussels, London, and Washington DC. The drive to push European environmental policy has been surprisingly successful. Much to the dislike of many industries within Europe and abroad (e.g. U.S. agricultural interests that rely on genetically engineered crops), the EU has set comparatively high regulatory standards that impose considerable cost on private industries and public institutions required to enforce the rules (Vogel 2012).

But the policy field was not only created and populated by intellectuals, academics and funders close to established political forces and institutions. What became one of the arguably most influential environmental think tanks in Germany was founded as a result of militant anti-nuclear energy protests in Freiburg, the Öko-Institut. Born in social struggles against the plans for a nuclear power plant in Wyl at the French-German border, the think tank was needed to supply expertise for the court room. It provided a home for scientists who could not publish their nuclear power critical work. But the link to militant street protests notwithstanding, even the Öko-Institut was backed by value conservative Social Democrats and the environmental speakers of the Christian churches (Roose 2002).

At the same time another conflict background provided the reason for the founding of the neoliberal Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) and the Foundation for Research on Economics and Environment (FREE) by John Baden, a self-proclaimed spokesman for *new resource economics*

and *free market environmentalism* in Bozeman, Montana. PERC was founded in 1978 after Baden's efforts to establish "free market environmentalism" at the University of Montana, the Center for Political Economy and Natural Resources, ran into trouble. Oil industry related foundation funding from Liberty Fund and the Scaife Foundation and the emphasis on cutting economic waste by way of promoting entrepreneurship and market solutions only to address environmental problems were meeting strong criticism at the University, which Baden and his supporters blamed on recipients of state subsidies and university co-conspirators

(<http://thisisbozeman.com/component/authorlist/author/1:johnb>). Baden served two terms on National Petroleum Council, the key lobby organization of the oil industry and funding of his organizations comes from major corporations. As part of the conservative legal movement (Teles 2010), PERC and its staff are particularly keen to influence the judiciary on issues of environmental damage litigation.

While the Öko-Institut is similar to Greenpeace in terms of militancy and activism and came to play an important role as a driver of the green party turned ecological movement, Baden's efforts are similar to the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT) and other business lobbies that became increasingly worried about the new environmental campaigning and regulation. The policy climate of the 1970s was co-constituting new environmental policy think tanks and approaches both on the left and on the right. Baden is keen to distance his "new resource economics" approach from the original resource economics of the RFF because he insists on a pure and simple property rights approach to the living environment. Organizations like PERC and FREE (the latter founded in 1985) were central elements of the neoliberal counter-movement, which confronted ecological interventionism. Together with the neo-Malthusian author of the 'tragedy of the commons', Garret Hardin, Baden edited a volume titled *Managing the Commons* in 1977. While the book included authors respected for their work on environmental problems like the Ostroms, Virginia school members like Gordon Tullock's contribution was on the cost of regulation. Public choice "state failure theory" in the field of environmental politics of course paved the way for so-called 'free market environmentalism' (Eckersley 1993; Beder 2001). While few environmental policy experts think highly of this branch of environmental economics, think-tanks promoting this counter-movement against environmental and regulatory activism are numerous and carry influence in highly publicized debates around climate change, for example. Baden is listed at the Heartland institute, the major think tank dedicated to the promotion of climate change denial, for example. While the original resource economics helped clearing the ground for ecological reasoning, new resource economics wants to remove the growing environmental policy obstacles to corporate investment and deal making. While the Öko-Institut in the meantime has become a part of the respectable environmental policy field in Germany and Europe, benefiting from the research contracts offered by various ministries and even corporate actors, the neoliberal counter-movement think tanks in support of "free market environmentalism" aim at delaying and undermining meaningful environmental regulation in general, and climate change mitigation in particular. Strength of this rising opposition to green politics in the United States accounts for the role reversal between Europe and the U.S. in environmental policy making. Whereas the U.S. was an early champion of precaution, environmental policy standards have been relaxed way before President Trump entered office. In Europe in the meantime the opposite movement led to a much greater regulation of risk (Vogel 2012). Nowhere is this role reversal clearer at evidence than in the climate policy field. And no other type of organizations had a greater role in developing climate change policy opposition in the United States, Europe, and Australia among other regions than think tanks.

The 1980s to the present

In 1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been set up by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environmental Program. The purpose of the IPCC has since been the evaluation of the state of climate science. In spite of the lack of academic opposition to the scientific consensus on the anthropogenic causes of contemporary global warming in the reports of the IPCC, as late as 2004 Naomi Oreskes referred to U.S. government officials who suggested there continued to be uncertainty in the academic field (Oreskes 2004). By 2007, IPCC's fourth Assessment report told readers the science was "unequivocal". But more than half of U.S. citizens were found to believe the science was not settled in 2009, and the disbelief in global warming was growing (Oreskes and Conway 2011, 169).

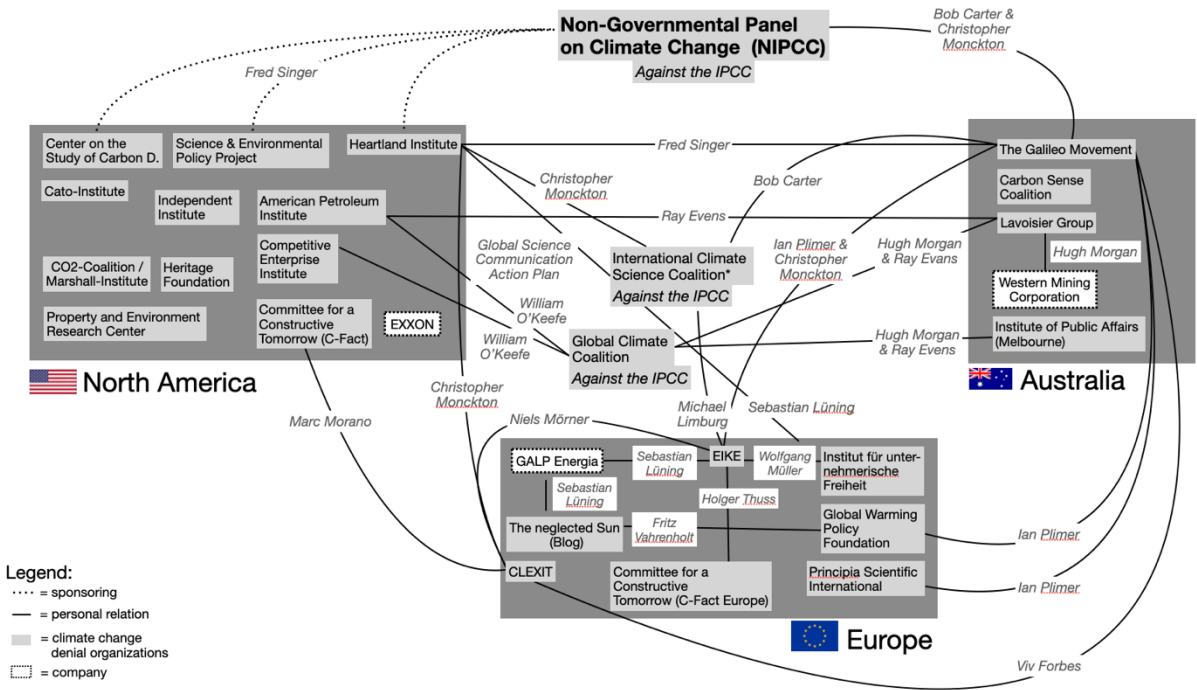
Oreskes and Conway trace the activities of three individuals dedicated to the manufacturing of doubt about climate change in great detail up to the U.S. senate decision defeating the Kyoto protocol: Bill Nierenberg, Fred Seitz and Fred Singer. Because of the work of these cold war warriors and experienced authors in previous denial efforts (tobacco, ozone layer etc.), and the interest groups backing them, climate change mitigation was blocked at the federal level in one of the most important countries in spite of solid scientific evidence. Oreskes and Conway also address the central role of a number of think tanks like the Marshall Institute, the Heartland Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute or the Independent Institute in the various strategies pursued to undermine climate change mitigation policies (Oreskes and Conway 2011, 247f.). Historians of science, the authors note the painstaking efforts made by denial pundits to look like the scientific effort of the established climate scientists and institutions. Unlike the scientists of the field, denial authors combined their phony studies with petitions designed to maximize public media influence. While there was no controversy within the scientific field, the media picked up contrarian perspectives in support of "balanced reporting" not realizing the ways in which journalists were instrumentalized by professional media strategies. It took a while for investigative work to uncover the fossil industry funding of denial and policy opposition forces. Greenpeace eventually published a study of denial think tank funding from the oil corporation Exxon between 1998 and 2014, totaling more than 30 million USD (exxonsecrets.org). This study was complementing a study of the Union of Concerned Scientists (2007). While we know a lot now about the coordinated climate change policy opposition campaigns of "free market" think tank networks in the United States (Dunlap and Jacques 2013), dedicated efforts to develop global think tank network structures matching the global climate change related policy institutions still deserve closer scrutiny.

In 2003, Fred Singer used his Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP) to organize a meeting in Milano, Italy to evaluate the fourth IPCC report. In 2008, Singer's think tank joined forces with the Heartland Institute and the Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide to counter the reports of the IPCC on a regular basis. SEPP, Heartland and the Center founded the Nongovernmental Panel on Climate Change to rapidly respond to IPCC reports in a mode and style mimicking the high level academic exercise. The opposition team launched a website in 2010 (www.nipccreport.org) to document and widely dispense the publication activities of the NIPCC. "Because it is not a government agency, and because its members **are not predisposed to believe climate change is caused by human**

greenhouse gas emissions, NIPCC is able to offer an independent “second opinion” of the evidence reviewed – or not reviewed – by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the issue of global warming.” (<http://climatechangereconsidered.org/about-the-nipcc/>, emphasis added).

It is crucial to note that the opposition to global climate change mitigation stepped up the anthropogenic global warming denial efforts *after* the scientific consensus did not leave any room to maneuver in the scientific-technocratic field of policy making. Instead, the opposition forces needed to go public and did so by way of building up contender matching infrastructures and new repertoires of publications and activities designed to feed public (media) discourses and behind the scenes political networks. If the climate change mitigation foe is organized at the global level (in the shape of the IPCC), the contender forces understood that they need to build a panel at the same level that attempts to look like the scientific body of the original: International roster of individuals that claim to be experts in the field, reports that resemble the IPCC reports and refute the core content of the IPCC reports assembled by the global community of climate scientists. If the strategic effort of fossil industry groups and free market advocates to oppose regulatory politics and state intervention in environmental politics in general and in energy markets in particular cannot succeed by way of relying on academic infrastructures, a competing infrastructure of think tanks can be developed and will do the job for a public to be confused. Drawing on our research database of global denial think tanks and staff we can show the intricate relationships between the denial forces in and between the different global regions focusing on the United States, Australia, and Europe.

Graph 1: Global Climate Change Denial and Mitigation Opposition Machinery, Selection: North America, Australia, Europe



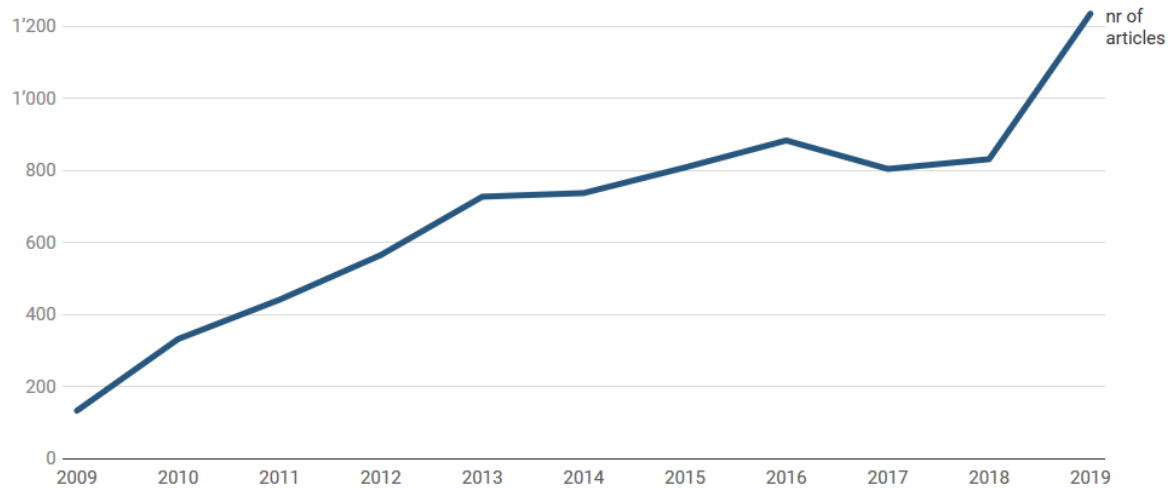
Sources: Own Compilation, www.thinktanknetworkresearch.net, McKewon 2019, Götze and Joeres 2020

The graph describes the transnational linkages between the United States, Australia and Europe. Joint projects include the International Climate Science Coalition and the Nongovernmental

International Panel on Climate Change. Much like the corporate lobby organization Global Climate Coalition, which had been formed to lobby against the results of the IPCC when the global climate change mitigation policy started in earnest, the NIPCC and the International Climate Science Coalition were founded to fight the IPCC after the demise of the Global Climate Coalition in 2002. The activities have nevertheless been prepared by the corporate lobby organization, which drafted the Global Climate Science Communication Action Plan in 1998 (McKewon 2020). From the sequence of events, the folding of the Global Climate Coalition and the formation of the NIPCC and the International Climate Science Coalition, we might induce the perceived need of the remaining corporate lobbies against the IPCC to change course. Not direct corporate lobbying, but indirect action via think tanks and campaign organizations that claim to work in the field of science and evidence based policy making rather than in the realm of interest groups. The graph shows a few central actors who link the various think tanks and efforts between the continents. Some of the individuals in the graph, e.g. Fred Singer in the earlier period and Lord Monckton later, can be considered key brokers of the global denial machinery. The information provided in this graph is but a tip of the iceberg representation of the wide and deep networks that have been created to undermine global climate change mitigation politics by way of launching central attacks on the IPCC. More successful in the United States and in Australia, the European effort is nevertheless not to be underestimated as it has provided legitimacy for the Anglo-American networks and because the greater consensus on climate change mitigation in Europe has also been quite fragile with countries like Poland eager to defend the continuous reliance on coal and many others also committed to prolong the reliance on fossil fuels rather than speeding up the conversion to renewables. A number of right-wing populist parties like AFD in Germany have also come out in support of climate change denial, breaking up the mainstream consensus between all political parties and collecting voters among those in the population in Europe who consider themselves undecided with regard to the science or in opposition to climate change politics. European denial think tanks in Europe and the EIKE institute in Germany in particular here come to play an important role apart from tying into the global elite networks and behind the scenes wheeling and dealing.

While denial and other climate change policy opposition strategies are more prominent in the United States and Australia than in Europe, opposition forces have been busy building up considerable capacities in the European Union as well. Heartland related institutes in Germany such as EIKE and the Institut für unternehmerische Freiheit have organized conferences in Germany and other European countries and Clexit has been founded as a group to suggest exit strategies in the carbon field can be successful following the example of the British exit from the EU. The following graph shows the growth of activity of the most prolific denial think tank in Europe, Germany's "European Institute of Climate and Energy" (EIKE).

Number of at EIKE Blog-articles per year



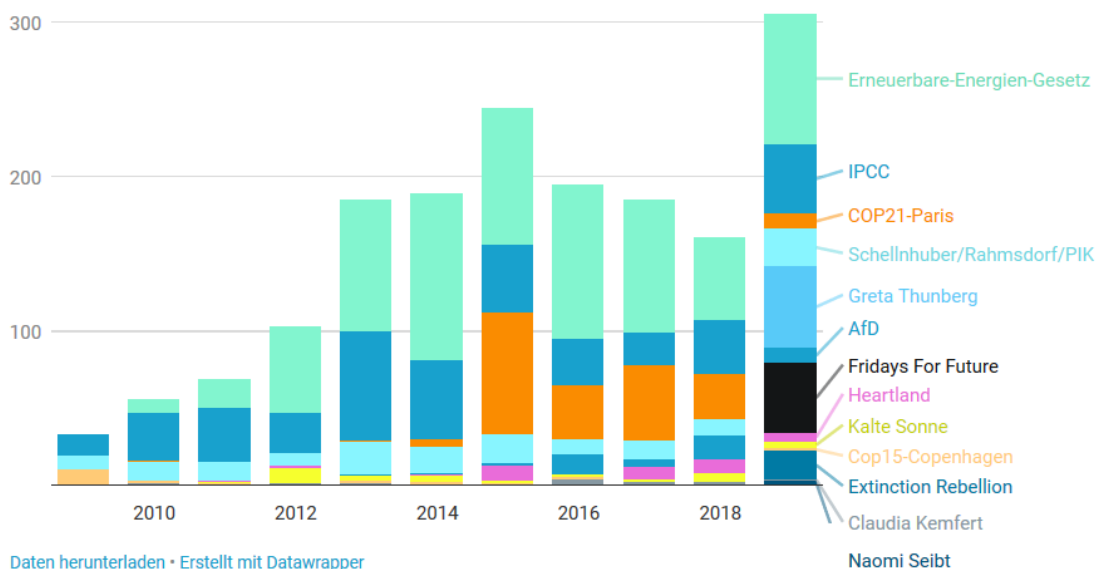
Daten herunterladen · Erstellt mit Datawrapper

Data: blog posts available on the EIKE website between 2009 and 2019.

Chart: Own compilation

While EIKE has been active since about the time of the global financial crisis, the think tank grew in importance when Germany's right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) entered the German (state and federal) and European parliaments in the second half of the 2010s. Eike is closely related to AFD, which is the only German political party in opposition to global and European climate change mitigation. AFD in turn secured the invitation of EIKE experts in hearings in the Bundestag, for example. The following table shows the major subject areas on which EIKE blogposts devote space.

Recurring topics in EIKE Blogposts

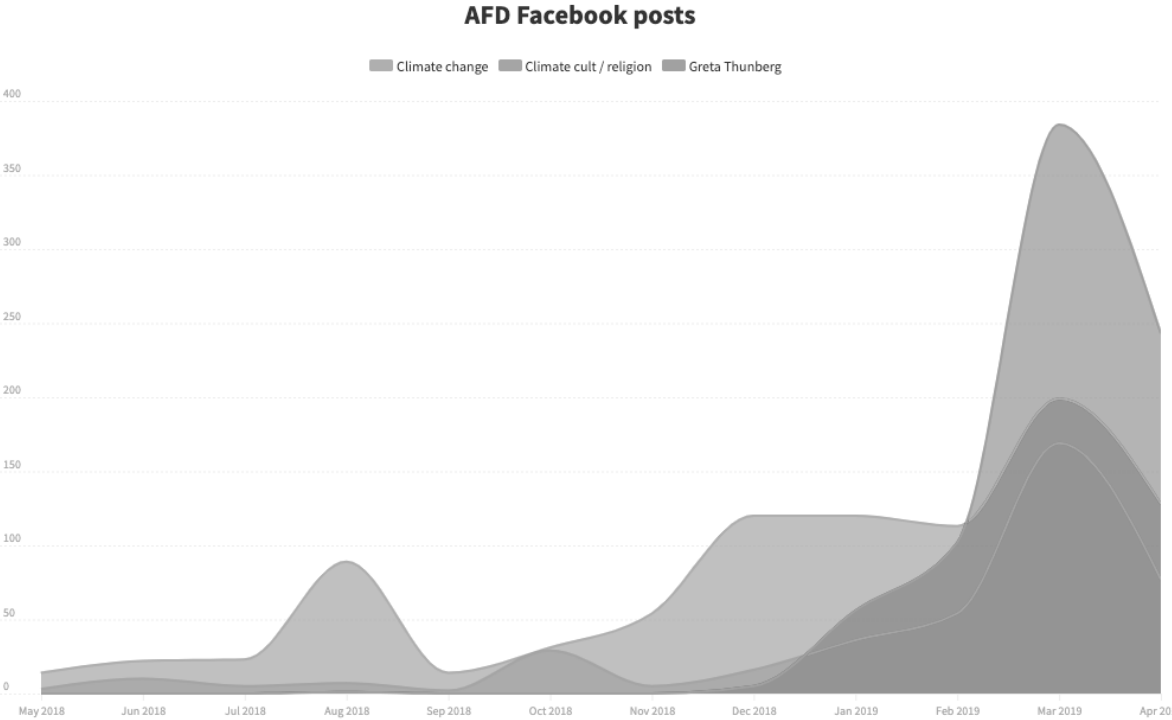


Daten herunterladen · Erstellt mit Datawrapper

Data: blog posts available on the EIKE website between 2009 and 2019.

Chart: Own compilation

A lot of writing is in opposition to Germany’s renewable energy legislation (Erneuerbare Energien Gesetz), the IPCC and some of the leading German climate scientists like Schellnhuber and Rahmsdorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Science. But EIKE is also feeding opposition to the leaders and activists of the new environmental movements like Greta Thunberg of Fridays for Future or extinction rebellion. If we look at the social media feed of AFD in turn, we can see how input from organizations like EIKE reappear in the social media and political field, translated into major campaigns against climate change, alleged climate cult, and the leader of the opponent, Greta Thunberg.



Source: <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2019/05/14/germany-climate-denial-populist-eike-afd/>

Conclusions

Contrary to the widespread belief in the benevolent contribution of experts and expertise from think tanks in policy making this chapter has drawn on the policy field of climate change mitigation to point to the wider range of roles and functions of think tanks in multiple conflict constellations. Think tanks were leading and paving the way to the new environmental policy field born in 1972 at the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Both mainstream and radical think tanks were set up to meet the growing need for ecological expertise and movements like the anti-nuclear energy movement. On the other side of the political spectrum the new policy field and regulatory activism contributed to growing concerns of fossil energy related interest groups and free market minded neoliberal economists. Driven by different concerns a new conservative alliance took shape in opposition to perceived green activism and radicalism. A wide range of strategies of the new right have since been employed in the strategic development of think tank capacities to undermine constructive climate change related policy making. Think Tanks fighting climate change mitigation inter alia emphasize technological alternatives, market-based instruments, adaptation rather than precaution and the limits of climate sciences in general and data modelling in particular. With regard to think tanks

and the constructive use of expertise it has to be emphasized that the rise of climate change denial has been orchestrated after the scientific community had arrived at the scientific consensus about anthropogenic causes of contemporary global warming. Think tanks were not employed to engage in constructive dialogue. To the contrary. Think tanks were created or employed to create a new competition for expertise from the outside of the academic sphere in order to mislead the media and to confuse the public. A conflict theoretical understanding of knowledge and expertise and an agnostic approach to the politics of science and expertise is required to appreciate the wider range of political strategies in which think tanks have come to play critical roles. The development of contender matching capacities at the global level by fossil interest groups and certain “free market” networks of neoliberals needs to be appreciated in terms of political efficacy because it has been highly successful in institutionalizing delays and in diffusing a wide range of messages of doubt in climate change policy making.

In this article we had no space to cover the whole range of think tanks involved in opposition to climate change mitigation, which also includes the efforts to replacement policy focus by policy instrument discussions (e.g. the alleged superiority of market based solutions) and the dismissal of precaution and mitigation by way of bringing in cornucopian arguments of technical solutions that allegedly do not require any change in the mode of energy production and consumption (compare Oreskes and Conway 2011, 247f.). But the development of global capacities to undermine climate change mitigation efforts under the auspices of the United Nations and the buildup of denial think tank capacities in close relation with new populist right wing parties in Germany shows the extent to which climate change politics has become a battlefield that resembles war making and sabotage rather than constructive policy making: in war and in love all the strategies are allowed the saying goes. Add climate change politics and you are close to the jobs think tanks are set up and paid for to do in opposition to climate change mitigation: develop a policy opposition strategy regardless of any scientific evidence base, and develop by yourself the data you need for the task.

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