



**EUROPEAN THINK TANK CONFERENCE 2022**  
**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2022, 2:00 PM – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2022, 6:00 PM**  
**DGAP, RAUCHSTRASSE 17, 10787 BERLIN**

The [Open Think Tank Directory](#) counts 684 think tanks in Europe. While think tanks are well-networked when it comes to their specific topical interests, there are few opportunities to exchange about think tanking as a profession and a practice, common challenges, and industry trends. Think tanks' legal structures, topical interests, and modes of operation vary. But what all of us have in common is an interest in shaping policy and public debate with evidence-based analysis, growing our international networks – and getting better at what we do.

On October 19-20, 2022, the Think Tank Lab brought together think tankers and think tank partners from all over Europe for the European Think Tank Conference 2022. At the two-day conference in Berlin, we discussed trends, shared good practices, and heard about inspiring new approaches in five key areas:

- Think tank management and funding;
- Trends in policy analysis;
- Political communication and advocacy;
- Networks and cooperation;
- Policy impact and evaluation.

The program offered workshops, exhibitions, and discussions as well as many networking opportunities.

For any questions, please contact the Think Tank Lab team ([thinktanklab@dgap.org](mailto:thinktanklab@dgap.org)).

2:00 PM

WELCOME

Dr. Guntram Wolff, *Director and CEO*, German Council on Foreign Relations  
 Dr. Mikko Huotari, *Executive Director*, Mercator Institute for China Studies  
 Claire Luzia Leifert, *Head, Think Tank Lab*, German Council on Foreign Relations  
 Barabra Pongratz, *MERICS Project Lead, Think Tank Lab*, Mercator Institute for China Studies  
 Enrique Mendizabal, *Director*, On Think Tanks

2:30 PM

PARALLEL SESSIONS 1

AI, THE METAVERSE, BLOCKCHAIN,  
AND THE FUTURE OF POLICY  
COMMUNICATIONS

*#Communications & Advocacy*

Chair: John Schwartz, *CEO*, Soapbox  
 Sonia Jalfin, *Director*, Sociopublico  
 Katharina Nachbar, *Head of Communications*,  
 Global Public Policy Institute  
 Jonathan Tanner, *Founder*, Rootcause

Over the last few years, we have been thinking a lot about the future of policy communications. As digital technologies continue to evolve, we want to take a closer look at the intersection between AI, the Metaverse, blockchain, and other emerging trends. All of these are interconnected, and all relate to how we, as humans, interact with technology and with each other in digital spaces. Looking at these trends, what are the opportunities and threats for policy communications? What products will respond to these trends and still meet the objectives of think tank communications? The session included short presentations, a brain-writing exercise with the participants and time for Q&A.

REFRAINING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF  
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)  
IN THE THINK TANK INDUSTRY

*#Management & Funding*

Chair: Sarah Jones, *Senior Officer for Diversity Equity and Inclusion*, German Marshall Fund  
 Julia Kramer, *Manager for Institutional Development*, German Institute for Global and Area Studies  
 Barbara Pongratz, *MERICS Project Lead, Think Tank Lab*  
 Claudia Wessling, *Director Communications and Publications*, Mercator Institute for China Studies

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has been around for decades but has recently become a hot topic of conversation for many Think Tank leaders and funders. However, the subject of DEI is often discussed in the abstract without clear actionable steps or in the sole context of hiring for diversity without consideration of developing and retaining historically marginalized groups. In this session, participants were introduced to a new framework that suggests we shouldn't first seek out diversity, but instead focus on equitable structures and inclusive practices that will result in diversity of the workplace. Participants engaged in exercises and reflections that allow them to think about how reframing our current discussion on DEI can help foster a more inclusive environment, not only for historically marginalized groups, but for all employees at various levels in the Think Tank industry.

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS IN POLICY  
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

*#Trends in Policy Analysis*

Co-Chairs:  
 Sanjan Sabherwal, *Head of Policy Innovation*,  
 Policy Lab  
 Neha Sharma, *Policy Designer*, Policy Lab

Think tanks are important convenors of policy debates and advisors to policy-makers but few are aware of the variety of modern methodologies at their disposal to think out of the box and engage the wisdom of diverse stakeholders when coming up with policy recommendations. Policy Lab recently launched a set of 12 experimental method cards introducing public sector innovators to new concepts and initiating the sharing of new knowledge across practitioners, nationally and internationally.

In this session, Policy Lab introduced a range of concepts from Moral Imaginings to Engaging through the Metaverse - exploring why these methods could be relevant in the policy making of today and tomorrow. The presentation was followed by a facilitated discussion with participants exploring how these methods could be integrated into the policy research, development and advocacy work carried out by think tanks.

3:30 PM	COFFEE BREAK		
4:00 PM	PARALLEL SESSIONS 2		
	<p><b>EUROPEAN THINK TANKS: TIME FOR TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION</b></p> <p><i>#Networks &amp; Collaboration</i></p> <p>Chair: <b>Fabian Zuleeg</b>, <i>Chief Executive</i>, European Policy Centre  <b>Sophie Pornschlegel</b>, <i>Senior Policy Analyst</i>, European Policy Centre  <b>Lisa Marie Rumpf</b>, Board member and treasurer, Polis180  <b>Funda Tekin</b>, <i>Director</i>, Institut für Europäische Politik &amp; <i>Board Member</i>, Trans European Policy Studies Association</p> <p>European think tanks face growing challenges: crisis-driven politics, growing distrust from citizens, and a fragile economic situation, to name only a few. The rise of authoritarianism in Europe also means the civic spaces in which think tanks operate in are shrinking. These developments lead to a fragmentation of the European think tank ecosystem. However, think tanks in Europe do not yet tap into the potential for collective action. In this session, we would like to explore how think tanks can better work together at European level and which steps would be necessary to ensure a sustainable and inclusive format of cooperation. We welcomed 20-25 participants to this interactive brainstorming and exchange session.</p>	<p><b>FUNDERS' PERSPECTIVES: THE CHANGING FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR THINK TANKS</b></p> <p><i>#Management &amp; Funding</i></p> <p>Chair: <b>Jan Weidenfeld</b>, <i>Director Policy &amp; Advisory</i>, Mercator Institute for China Studies  <b>Henry Alt-Haaker</b>, <i>Senior Vice President</i>, Robert Bosch Stiftung  <b>Dr. Lars Grotewold</b>, <i>Director Climate Action &amp; Director (interim) Europe</i>, Stiftung Mercator  <b>Angela Liberatore</b>, <i>Head of the Scientific Department</i>, European Research Council</p> <p>This panel discussed trends in think tank funding, how funding organizations are adjusting their funding strategies given current global crises, and what funders are looking for in the think tanks they fund – now and in the near future.</p>	<p><b>OUT OF THE BOX: WHAT CAN THINK TANKS LEARN FROM THE ARTS?</b></p> <p><i>#Trends in Policy Analysis</i>  <i>#Communications &amp; Advocacy</i></p> <p>Chair: <b>Claire Luzia Leifert</b>, <i>Head, Think Tank Lab</i>, German Council on Foreign Relations  <b>Claudia Roth</b>, <i>Deputy Spokesperson</i>, WZB Berlin Social Science Center  <b>Berthold Schneider</b>, <i>Artistic Director</i>, Wuppertal Opera</p> <p>In this session, we explored what think tanks can learn from the arts. In a moderated conversation, we learned from Berthold Schneider, artistic director of the Wuppertal Opera, what it meant to switch roles with a think tank director for three weeks and from Claudia Roth, deputy spokesperson at the WZB Social Science Research Centre Berlin, why and how one of the premier social science research institutes in Germany has fostered cooperation between social scientists and visual designers. Which ideas, projects and products can emerge from such cooperations? What were the biggest challenges and take aways? And how has the cooperation changed the way they go about their work today?</p>
5:15 PM	REVIEW & CLOSING OF DAY 1		
5:30 PM	SNACKS & DRINKS		
7:30 PM	AFTER CONFERENCE GET-TOGETHER		

9:30 AM

**OPENING DAY 2 – WELCOME & NETWORKING**

Claire Luzia Leifert, *Head, Think Tank Lab, German Council on Foreign Relations*  
Barabra Pongratz, *MERICs Project Lead, Think Tank Lab, Mercator Institute for China Studies*

10:00 AM

**PARALLEL SESSIONS 3**

**HELLO FROM THE OTHER SIDE:  
CRAFTING INTERGENERATIONAL  
SOLUTIONS TO KEY CULTURAL AND  
MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES**

*#Management & Funding*

Co-chairs:  
**Anne Flotho-Liersch**, *Board Member, Polis180*  
**Philipp Rotmann**, *Director, Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI)*

Over the last few years, we have been thinking Think tanks across a wide range of business models have long experienced a tension between “substantive” work and internal management. In recent years, expectations as to the needs for professional management or even basic cultural requirements for maintaining a healthy collaborative environment increasingly diverged along generational lines. Massive differences in power and influence over shaping those internal environments make it challenging to have open, honest, and constructive conversations about these issues.

Facilitated by an intergenerational facilitation team, Anne (board member of grassroots thinktank Polis180) and Philipp (director at the Global Public Policy Institute in Berlin) seek to provide a level playing field for think tank directors & senior managers as well as junior and mid-level think tankers to start a conversation across organizational boundaries. We worked in small groups with inputs collected from all Think Tank Conference participants via survey.

**OPEN SPACE – KILL POWERPOINT  
FOREVER & LAYERED PUBLICATIONS**

*#Communication & Advocacy*

Co-Chairs:  
**Sonia Jalfin**, *Director, Sociopublico*  
**Joscha Wirtz**, *Scientific Consultant, Wuppertal Institut gGmbH*

In this session we gave participants the chance to discuss a topic they would like to discuss with fellow European think-tankers that wasn't on the conference agenda. During the opening of Day 2, we collected topics that are of interest for participants. All participants were invited to propose topics and chair a spontaneous session during the Open Space.

In this open space Sonia Jalfin und Joscha Wirtz discussed why we should use less Power Point presentations and what suitable alternatives, like layered publications, are out there for Think Tankers.

**THINK TANK STATE OF THE SECTOR:  
EUROPEAN THINK TANKS 2020-2021**

*#Networks & Collaboration*

Chair: **Andrea Baertl**, *Research and Learning Director, On Think Tanks*

The Think Tank State of the Sector is an annual report that offers the evidence-informed policy community a deeper understanding and analysis of the think tank sector. In this session, On Think Tanks presented the results from the 2022 report focusing on Europe, how they compare to the rest of the world, and what differences can be found between regions. We presented data to answer questions like: Which topics do European think tanks focus on? Who founds them? How many European think tanks are led by women? How do they view their political and funding context? And what are their key challenges? The objective is to facilitate a discussion with participants to make sense of the findings, explain trends and regional differences, as well as further lines of inquiry. The results of the session will inform a series of articles (with participants as co-authors).

11:00 AM	COFFEE BREAK		
11:30 AM	PARELLEL SESSIONS 4		
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS OF THINK TANKS – AND HOW THINK TANKS CAN SUCCEED IN THE NEW INFORMATION ENVIROMENT</b></p> <p><i>#Communication &amp; Advocacy</i></p> <p>Co-chairs:  <b>Tom Hashemi</b>, <i>Managing Partner</i>, Cast from Clay  <b>Katy Murray</b>, <i>Insights and Relationships Lead</i>, Cast From Clay</p> <p>Think tanks aim to provide expert insight into the topics that shape our societies. But over a decade of huge changes in technology and communications means the information environment that spawned think tanks is no more. How can we accept and work with this new reality to build quality debate? Participants heard about Cast From Clay's new research on citizens' perceptions of experts, democracy and the information environment, then they confronted some of the knotty questions facing think tanks in our new information age in a discussion about implications for policy research and communications.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DATA SCIENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING: PRACTICAL USE-CASES FOR THINK TANKS</b></p> <p><i>#Trends in Policy Analysis</i></p> <p>Co-chairs:  <b>Moritz Laurer</b>, <i>Researcher</i>, Centre for European Policy Studies  <b>Pegah Maham</b>, <i>Lead Data Scientist</i>, Stiftung Neue Verantwortung</p> <p>More and more think tanks are looking into new data science tools and how they can be used in their everyday work. This session tackled this topic by providing concrete examples of applications of data science in the work of think tanks. We explained, for example, how CEPS supported the European Commission in understanding written citizen feedback to several legal proposals using unsupervised machine learning. We hope that our examples are helping other researchers implement their own data science projects successfully. Using our concrete examples, we answered and discussed more general questions such as: Where does data science actually add value and where are other methods more adequate? What are preconditions for a successful data science project?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPEN SPACE – POLICY IMPACT</b></p> <p><i>#Impact &amp; Evaluation</i></p> <p>Chair: <b>Fabian Zuleeg</b>, <i>Chief Executive</i>, European Policy Centre</p> <p>In this session we gave participants the chance to discuss a topic they would like to discuss with fellow European think-tankers that wasn't on the conference agenda. During the opening of Day 2, we collected topics that are of interest for participants. All participants were invited to propose topics and chair a spontaneous session during the Open Space.</p> <p>Fabian Zuleeg, Chief Executive of the European Policy Centre in Brussels, discussed with other participants how to maximize policy impact and how to measure that impact in general.</p>
12:30 PM	LUNCH BREAK		

**"WELCOME TO URLAND!" A SIMULATION GAME: WHEN AND HOW TO ENGAGE WITH POLICYMAKERS**

**#Communication & Advocacy**

Chair: **Chloe Hill**, *Workshop leader, Freelance*  
**Cornelius Adebahr**, *Associate Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations*  
**Erika von Schneidemesser**, *Research Group Leader, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies*

Welcome to Urland, a beautiful country that has recently discovered a large shale gas deposit that could be used to diversify and secure its energy supplies while also providing much needed employment to the local people! A recent application made by Drilling & Co to exploit this resource looks like a promising opportunity and they have already made a risk assessment. But is this enough evidence to base a decision on? That's up to you to decide! This simulation game allowed us to explore policymaking concepts, while putting ourselves in the shoes of various stakeholders on the science-policy interface and practicing science-advisory skills. During the simulation, participants were given a character to play who had specific aims and motivations that are either driven from their own person values or their professional position. This was followed by a reflection on real-life policymaking and how the session's key take home message can be applied when dealing with science advisory processes in participants' own work.

**FOUNDING A THINK TANK: WHO, HOW, WHAT AND WHEN?**

**#Management & Funding**

Chair: **Andrea Baertl**, *Research and Learning Director, On Think Tanks*  
**Dr. Olumide Abimbola**, *Executive Director, Africa Policy Research Institute*  
**Simonida Kacarska**, *Director, European Policy Institute*

Policy entrepreneurs aiming to establish a think tank find themselves needing to think, and plan for, a lot of details which go beyond the impact they want to make and the focus of their research. And finding answers to these questions end up occupying more time than the research itself: Where do I start? What business model should the organization have? How do I fundraise? How do I budget operating costs? How much weight should I give to research, communications and management, respectively? Who can support us? The prospect can be daunting as establishing a new think tank is hard work. But policy entrepreneurs do not need to do this alone.

In this workshop we worked with think tanks founders and experts who shared their experience and expertise in an interactive workshop.

Andrea Baertl (On Think Tanks) presented the "Build a Think Tank" guide for policy entrepreneurs which collects useful advice, guiding questions and experiences from think tankers across the world. Simonida Kacarska, director and co-founder of the European Policy Institute in Skopje and Dr. Olumide Abimbola, founder and executive director of APRI in Berlin, shared their first-hand experience of founding a think tank.

**THINK TANK SCHOOL 2022: PROJECTS PRESENTATIONS & CLOSING CEREMONY**

**#Think Tank Lab Special**

Chair: **Weronika Perlinski**, *Project Officer, Think Tank Lab, German Council on Foreign Relations*  
**Christian Mölling**, *Research Director, German Council on Foreign Relations*  
**Claudia Wessling**, *Director Communications and Publications, Mercator Institute for China Studies*

In this Think Tank Lab Special, participants had the opportunity to join us for the Think Tank School 2022 Closing Event.

The Think Tank School is a unique training program that empowers early-career think tankers to further develop their skills for effective think tank work and expand their network in the German and international policy community. It is based on a competency framework that is specifically developed to reflect the variety of roles required of think tankers today.

This year's six-month curriculum covered topics such as policy analysis, policy advice, communication and advocacy, project management, and fundraising. Throughout the School, the fellows applied their newly acquired skills and tools to policy problems from their fields of expertise and explored novel ways to tackle them.

The result are fifteen policy projects addressing issues such as detecting and combating disinformation, France's role in EU-Africa relations, the use of AI systems for public services, the potential of a feminist climate foreign policy and many more.

An overview of our fellows and their policy projects can be found [here](#).

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4:15 PM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CLOSING REMARKS &amp; FAREWELL – THE ROLE OF THINK TANKS IN TIMES OF MULTIPLE CRISES</b> Christiane Hoffmann, <i>First Deputy Spokesperson</i>, Federal Government &amp; Deputy Head, Press and Information Office Dr. Guntram Wolff, <i>Director and CEO</i>, German Council on Foreign Relations Sarah John, <i>Program Coordinator</i>, Global Solutions Initiative Claire Luzia Leifert, <i>Head Think Tank Lab</i>, German Council on Foreign Relations Enrique Mendizabal, <i>Director</i>, On Think Tanks</p> <p>We closed the European Think Tank Conference with some key take aways from contributors and participants and closing remarks from Christiane Hoffmann.</p>
5:00 PM	<b>END OF CONFERENCE</b>

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The Think Tank Lab is a joint initiative of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS). It is kindly supported by the Stiftung Mercator and the Robert Bosch Stiftung.