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EU Think Tank Fora as Transaction Cost Reducers: A Study of Informal Interest Intermediation in the EU

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Abstract

By examining the organisational structure of EU think tank fora (seminars, workshops and conferences), this article proposes that fora can play the role of transaction cost reducers in EU policymaking. I argue that certain aspects of EU policymaking, including i) controlled processes of consultation, ii) diminishing costs of management, and iii) the risk of state capture, incentivise EU institutions to outsource part of the consultation activity to policy actors that can help EU institutions fulfil their informational and legitimacy needs. I argue that think tanks are able to play this role because they i) reduce information asymmetries by connecting a wide variety of policy actors and ii) act as intermediaries that mitigate opportunistic behaviour. The empirical assessment reveals that the dimensions characterising transactions are present in EU think tank fora. It shows that policy actors that do not usually participate in formal consultation processes frequently attend fora where they meet representatives of EU institutions, particularly Parliament and Commission representatives.

Keywords

European Union; Think tanks; Interest intermediation; Transaction costs

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By examining the organisational structure of EU think tank fora, this article proposes that fora can play the role of transaction cost reducers in EU policymaking. Think tank fora (seminars, workshops and conferences) are usually described in the literature as one of the strategies think tanks use to pursue public influence (Abelson 2006: p. 148). By creating fora, think tanks are able to gather a wide variety of policy actors, from policymakers to corporate representatives to academics, in order to discuss topics of particular relevance. The benefits for think tanks are multiple (Abelson 2013, 2006). They gain visibility in different policy circles, they enhance their reputation by showing themselves able to assemble key policy figures, they identify new ideas, subjects and perspectives, and they disseminate the information their experts produce relating to the mission of their organisation. Additionally, through demonstrating successful fora creation, think tanks can attract new members and sponsors. Research indicates that think tank fora are the result of think tanks' considerable capacity to network and constitute one form of knowledge brokerage in policymaking processes (Stone 1996: p. 126). The question is, however: what is the function of think tank fora in the policymaking process?

According to Stone, fora

> serve an intangible purpose of promoting interaction among people from diverse backgrounds who would not ordinarily meet but who have common interests. Importantly, think tanks provide a neutral territory where people feel more comfortable and have an opportunity to mingle. Academics can meet practitioners, business people can discuss regulatory policy with bureaucrats, and activists can confront politicians (1996: p. 126).

In this regard, Ullrich indicates that EU think tanks[1] serve as 'catalysts' and 'a forum' for the discussion of policy issues for different policy actors (2004: p. 67). Ullrich argues that think tank fora constitute a type of impact in EU policymaking, although she does not explain how. This lack of clarity regarding the function think tank fora have in the policy process calls for an analysis of the

institutional effects of think tank fora on the organisation of EU politics. For this reason, this article contributes to the literature by introducing a new perspective for assessing fora, i.e. examining fora as transaction cost reducers for the exchange of information.

Policy actors face difficulties and costs in collecting and processing relevant information;[2] in consequence, they use information intermediaries (Ward, House and Hamer 2009; Lomas 2007; Womack 2002). Information intermediaries develop functions such as i) knowledge management, ii) linkage and exchange of information, and iii) capacity development (Ward, House and Hamer 2009). These are functions that will be costly for policy actors to develop independently (in addition to their main objectives) in order to exchange information. By contrast, for think tanks the creation of fora is an activity facilitated by their network capacity and their ability to develop a common language accessible to all policy actors.

Consequently, I hypothesise that when think tank fora yield economies for policy actors regarding the exchange of information, then fora become transaction cost reducers in the EU polity. I argue that certain aspects of EU policymaking, including i) controlled processes of consultation, ii) diminishing costs of management, and iii) the risk of state capture, incentivise EU institutions to outsource part of the consultation activity to policy actors able to help EU institutions fulfil their informational and legitimacy needs. Think tanks can play this role because they i) reduce information asymmetries by connecting a wide variety of policy actors, and ii) act as intermediaries that mitigate opportunistic behaviour.

To examine this proposition, the structural conditions of EU think tank fora are assessed in order to understand how they matter in EU policymaking. There are two reasons to focus on the EU. In the first place, research has found that EU think tanks mainly concentrate on customised knowledge management and fora creation for target publics to appeal to partners, members and sponsors (Perez 2013). Thus, it is necessary to consider the utility of fora for policy actors and EU policymaking. In the second place, research concerned with the institutionalisation of informal practices as a strategy to reduce transaction costs in EU policymaking has focused on the main EU institutions – the Commission, Council and Parliament (Reh et al. 2011; Farrell and Héritier 2003) – and the intergovernmental conferences (Stacey and Rittberger 2003), but, as the scope of think tank fora suggests, it is also necessary to consider the institutionalisation of practices beyond the EU's institutional setting and among non-state actors.

The second section first looks at the logic behind transaction costs and shows why transaction costs in EU consultation processes are high for EU institutions and policy actors. It explains how, by using a controlled system of consultation that tends to give insider status to certain policy actors, EU institutions work to a bounded rationality that affects not only policy outcomes but also the legitimacy of the EU's policies vis-à-vis its citizens. Second, it explains the dimensions used to examine how regular organisation of fora in settings that foster trust and gather different types of policy actors reduce transaction costs in EU policymaking. The third section describes the sample and data sources. The empirical assessment of the first-hand data in the fourth section reveals that seminars are the most prominent type of fora and that the EU-national divide and academic and business sectors together dominate think tank fora. It shows that representatives of the Parliament and, especially, the Commission are the most prominent EU representatives in EU think tank fora. The last section discusses the implications of the results with regard to EU policymaking and EU think tanks' role as transaction cost reducers.

TRANSACTION COSTS IN EU POLICYMAKING AND THE FUNCTION OF THINK TANK FORA

In politics, transaction costs are incurred when policy problems demand complex solutions, and governance structures emerge in order to reduce those costs and formulate effective policy solutions (North 1990; Coase 1960). The purpose of such structures is to economise on bounded rationality[3] and mitigate uncertainty (North 1990; Williamson 1979). To economise on bounded rationality means to reduce the information asymmetries between the parties involved, and to mitigate uncertainty means to reduce the possibility that the parties would take advantage of the situation or act opportunistically.

In the EU, policy solutions frequently bear high transaction costs due, among other factors, to the large number of policy actors with different interests. This increases both the number of elements the parties need to consider in order to design a policy and the barriers to accessing processes of consultation for policymaking. Therefore, the degree of bounded rationality under which parties operate increases. Moreover, the indirect institutional system of representation increases obstacles to participation and negatively affects the legitimacy of policies.

For reasons of efficiency, EU institutions have developed controlled processes of consultation. For instance, the Commission, the main institution in which interest intermediation activity takes place given its duty regarding policy initiation in the EU, has developed a system of consultation to control access and avoid overload. This usually comprises the organisation of comprehensive consultation activities and the creation of expert committees for specific advice (Broscheid and Coen 2007). As a result, the Commission tends to favour policy actors configured as umbrella organisations (Hix and Høyland 2011) with a broad geographical representation (Greenwood and Halpin 2007: p. 198). Focusing on umbrella organisations, the Commission avoids the cost of transacting with numerous policy actors with individual or small representation (Greenwood and Halpin 2007). In the Parliament, the system for consultation is also controlled and experts are consulted at hearings and workshops organised by the committees. Moreover, to participate in these consultations, the Commission and Parliament invite (on a voluntary basis) policy actors to register on the Transparency Register. Nevertheless, some studies indicate that registration results in de facto accreditation (Greenwood and Halpin 2007).

But efficiency comes at a cost. By using a controlled system of consultation that tends to give insider status to certain policy actors, EU institutions are exposed to 'capture of the state'[4] (Olson 1971). Policy actors with insider status might be tempted to filter information so their insider position is guaranteed (Hix and Høyland 2011: p. 173). This situation affects not only the degree of bounded rationality under which EU institutions operate but also the legitimacy of the EU's policies vis-à-vis its citizens.

However, the development of a consultation system in which all parties affected participate would impose enormous costs on EU institutions and would require them to expand their administrative capacity considerably. Therefore, just as firms outsource activities they cannot carry out efficiently in-house due to 'diminishing returns to management' (Coase 1937: p. 395),[5] EU institutions need to outsource part of the consultation activity to policy actors able to gather a significant number of policy actors and function as intermediaries.

Additionally, by participating in think tank fora, EU institutions can demonstrate their intention to seek out alternative spaces in which to exchange information and mitigate the risk of state capture. Moreover, EU institutions can show their engagement with the principles of transparency and participation associated with the adopted approach to governance. In particular, the Commission, given its duty to inform the citizens about EU policies (Christiansen 2006), is likely to be interested in think tank fora as a mechanism for dissemination.

But how do think tanks reduce transaction costs? In order to examine this it is necessary to consider three main dimensions characterising transactions: a) recurrence of transactions, b) 'durable transaction-specific investments', and c) uncertainty mitigation (Williamson 1979: p. 239). Regarding the first dimension, notwithstanding the difficulty in assessing the difference between recurrent and occasional transactions, EU think tank fora are certainly numerous – 389 fora in 2011, i.e. seven a week. This frequency indicates that there is a constant interest amongst policy actors and policymakers to participate in think-tank fora.

Secondly, think tanks make transaction-specific investments not only because they frequently organise fora, but also because they hire experts with the capacity to develop both the specific knowledge of the issues discussed in fora and the language that brings together policy actors and policymakers. Expert staff members constitute the knowledge capital of think tanks; they act as mediators of policy actors' interests and reduce information asymmetries between them. At the same time, policy actors make transaction-specific investments by not only devoting time and human capital to think tank fora but also contributing to think tank funding to different degrees. For instance, with the intention of increasing participation and legitimacy, the EU has launched a number of programmes that support the activities of a wide range of policy actors, think tanks among them.

Thirdly, uncertainty implies that in order for think tank fora to constitute useful structures for the reduction of transaction costs, they should attenuate the opportunistic behaviour of policy actors and policymakers. This is a notion that frequently floats round think tank scholarship. Accordingly, Ullrich describes think tank fora as spaces that 'allow for the sharing of ideas, broadening of perspectives and exchange of information' (2004: p. 67), while Stone states: 'Importantly, think tanks provide a neutral territory where people feel more comfortable and have an opportunity to mingle' (1996: p. 126), and Boucher (2004: p. 30) and Pautz (2007: p. 64) use a metaphor similar to Stone's. Moreover, the potential for think tank fora to economise on bounded rationality is supported by research showing how think tanks perform as information intermediaries (Abelson 2013, 2006; Stone 2010; Pautz 2007; Ladi 2005; Lucarelli and Radaelli 2004). In fact, the argument that the attenuation of opportunistic behaviour is a key aspect that structures of transactions in the political field deal with has been elaborated by Hindmoor (1998). Based on the principle that embeddedness is a key factor in politics,[6] Hindmoor (1998) contends that what makes networks one of the structures through which transaction costs can be dealt with is their ability to foster trust (an uncertainty reducer). A significant part of think tanks' work is networking, either through engaging with networks or because they are set up as networks (Stone 2000). For instance, among the EU think tanks examined here (see Table 1), the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) was a member of two networks (the European Credit Research Network and the European Capital Markets Institute), and the European Ideas Network (EIN), the European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN) and the Trans European Studies Association (TEPSA) are think tank networks. Accordingly, it is assumed that think tanks, as networkers, have the ability to foster trust and, thus, attenuate the tendency of parties to behave opportunistically. In the case of fora particularly, opportunistic behaviour is mitigated because policy actors and policymakers give think tanks the power to mediate in the discussions. Think tanks are incentivised to be fair mediators in fora because the parties involved constitute important sources of information and funding for think tanks and because the reputation of think tanks is at stake.

But why would policy actors turn to think tank fora? EU processes of consultation either impose significant barriers to exclude certain policy actors or, for policy actors with access, require constant investment. In fact, policy actors' access to consultation processes depends on their interests and their capacity to invest in the accumulation and analysis of the technical information that policymakers need (Broscheid and Coen 2007). As a result, policy actors are incentivised to seek alternative spaces for the exchange of information. In fact, Chalmers has found that the process

policy actors follow for developing useful information in order to participate in policymaking has two dimensions, and one of them includes actions 'to anticipate and prepare to meet informational needs of EU decision makers' (2011: p. 472). For these actions, Chalmers found that successful policy actors tend to prioritise informal information sources such as 'word of mouth and face-to-face meetings' and 'contacts and networking' (2011: p. 480), as well as EU sources, over formal sources such as newspapers and newsletters. The think tank fora are one of the places where such sources can be found. As Stone has already pointed out, fora are crucial for building the personal and institutional relations that ultimately lead to policy communities and networks (Stone 2000). As a result, policy actors that seek to diversify their strategies to influence policymaking or that do not fulfil the 'umbrella' or 'broad geographical representation' criteria sought by EU institutions would be incentivised to participate in think tank fora in order to meet other policy actors, express their perspectives and receive timely policy analyses and key information.

These are the circumstances under which EU think tank fora reduce transaction costs. Nevertheless, there are empirical questions that need to be addressed in order to understand the extent to which EU think tank fora reduce transaction costs. Which kind of think tank fora is most prominent? What kinds of transaction-specific investments are involved? What kind of policy actor attends think tank fora? What are the main EU institutions attending think tank fora? To answer these questions, the structural conditions of EU think tank fora are examined in light of the three dimensions outlined above.

The examination evaluates a) the type and frequency of think tank fora in order to assess the *recurrence of transactions*, b) EU think tank expert staff and funding received from policy actors in order to assess whether *transaction-specific investments* are incurred, and c) the types and number of policy actors and their return to fora frequency in order to assess *uncertainty mitigation*.

Assessment of the type and frequency of think tank fora will help elucidate the kind of intermediary role think tanks play and the degree of *reciprocity,* i.e. the opportunities the parties involved have to express their ideas and recognise each others' views. The fora organised by think tanks range from speeches and lectures to seminars, workshops and conferences. Speeches and lectures are brief meetings in which usually one speaker presents a perspective; they seldom provide time for questions or discussion. Given that the think tanks' intention is to deliver inclusive fora and stimulate thinking, seminars, workshops and conferences are considered the fora where reciprocity can be better achieved. At all these different types of fora there are usually discussants from the think tanks who are experts and who present synopses and the unconvincing or inconclusive aspects of the speeches in order to introduce the discussion. Whereas in seminars the audience is expected to participate in the discussion, in workshops and conferences the discussion generally develops principally among the panellists. As a result, it is expected that think tanks organise seminars with a higher frequency than workshops and conferences due to the significant resources and expert input that workshops and conferences require. Finally, the type of fora has a direct effect on uncertainty mitigation because the more reciprocity is emphasised the lower the chance that one or just a few actors takes or take advantage of the exchange of information.

For the second dimension, the assessment of expert staff is used as an indicator of think tanks' investments in the knowledge capital required for reducing the information asymmetries between policy actors. It is expected that the more think tanks invest in expert staff – when conditions of reciprocity and representation are present – the more popular the fora will be. Similarly, the assessment of funding received by EU think tanks from policy actors and EU institutions is used as an indicator of the participants' interest in think tank activities.

Finally, the number and characteristics of the participants are used as an indicator of the degree of representation in fora, i.e. the variety of actors expressing their views in fora. Accordingly, in order to evaluate the degree and type of representation it is necessary to find out what kind of policy

actors and policymakers participate in think tank fora, and to this end an assessment of the policy actors and policymakers attending as panellists is presented. It is expected that representatives of EU institutions, particularly the Commission, and policy actors not organised as 'umbrellas' and without 'broad geographical representation' will participate in think tank fora. Although it is expected that some institutions and policy actors attend think tank fora with some frequency, it is not expected that the frequency is very high. A high frequency of attendance of the same actors would suggest a high risk for collusion.[7] A high degree of collusion will reduce think tanks' opportunities to reduce transaction costs effectively.

EU THINK TANKS, FORA, DATA AND METHODS

In Brussels, different types of think tanks coexist. They include approximately ten international, global and pan-European think tanks, a dozen branches of national think tanks, a handful of Belgian think tanks, one EU institute (the European Union Institute for Security Studies), one autonomous EU agency of the Commission (the Bureau of European Policy Advisers) and 22 EU think tanks, all of which share a transnational EU origin, an interest in EU subjects and the intention of contributing to EU policymaking. This article examines 18 of the 22 EU think tanks (see Table 1). Four think tanks (EPIN, CES (Centre for European Studies), GRIP (Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité) and PLS (Pour la Solidarité)) have been excluded because they do not provide comprehensive information on their fora.

Table 1: EU think tanks

1. Bruegel
2. Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)
3. European Corporate Governance Institute (ECGI)
4. European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE)
5. European Institute for Asia Studies (EIAS)
6. European Ideas Network (EIN)
7. European Liberal Forum (ELF)
8. European Policy Centre (EPC)
9. Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)
10. Friends of Europe (FOE)
11. International Security Information Service (ISIS)
12. The Madariaga College of Europe Foundation (MCEF)
13. Institut Européen de la Recherche sur la Coopération Mediterranéenne et Euro-Arabe (MEDEA)
14. Migration Policy Group (MPG)
15. Observatoire Social Européen (OSE)
16. Security and Defence Agenda (SDA)
17. The Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA)
18. The Lisbon Council for Economic Competitiveness (TLCEC)

Excluded from the analysis:

19. Centre for European Studies (CES)
20. EPIN
21. Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la sécurité (GRIP)
22. Pour la Solidarité (PLS)

Regarding their role as intermediaries, the mission statements of these EU think tanks state their concern with informing EU policy and contributing to public-opinion formation: they are 'dedicated to promoting original thinking on the role of the European Union' The Madariaga College of Europe Foundation (MCEF) (2012a) and 'provid[ing] information to policymakers in European and other institutions' (EIAS, 2012). They emphasise their interest in creating inclusive fora for policy actors concerned with the EU polity by declaring their intention, as described by the Security and Defence Agenda (SDA) (2012), to 'bring […] together experts and policymakers from the EU institutions, NATO, national governments, industry, the media, think tanks, academia and NGOs'. Also visible in their objectives is their intention to stimulate innovative thinking in the area of policy solutions: while CEPS describes itself as 'a leading forum for debate', Friends of Europe (FoE) refers to the 'confrontation of ideas' and MCEF states its purpose as encouraging 'creative debate'.

The data used to examine the think tank fora come from original research conducted between April and May 2012. Because think tanks use their websites as a key tool to explain their objectives and structure and help disseminate their work, the websites of the EU think tanks were the main data source. Activity reports and statutes published by the think tanks provided additional material. From the websites and activity reports it was possible to collect summaries, podcasts and materials presented in fora. The data collected cover 389 fora that took place during 2011 and include the 1,592 policy actors who performed as panellists. The think tanks studied tend to give different names to their fora: for example, MCEF uses the title 'Citizen's Controversy' for some of its seminars, while FoE uses 'Policy Summit' for some of its conferences. However, they generally follow the overall style of the forum types described above and were catalogued accordingly.

The categorisation of the panellists followed an inductive approach. In the first place, it was considered necessary to determine the participatory significance of the three main EU institutions; however, an initial examination of the data showed the European External Action Service (EEAS) to be much more evident in this respect than other EU agencies. For the remaining policy actors, it was considered necessary to look at how panellists represented different sectors of society and, accordingly, six different types of panellist were identified – international organisations, state representatives, NGOs, foundations and associations, academic and policy research organisations, corporations and the media. These categories were subdivided in order to assess the relevance of: i) transnational and national levels, i.e. international NGOs (INGOs) as opposed to national NGOs, and ii) different academic and research styles, i.e. academics as opposed to international and national research institutions.

The statistical analysis consisted of estimating the frequencies and assessing the proportions of the data collected.

THE STRUCTURE OF EU THINK TANK FORA

Recurrence of Transactions

As Table 2 shows, seminars, workshops and conferences are more numerous than lectures and speeches. Seminars are considerably dominant, constituting three-fifths of the total, and conferences are the least frequent – 13 per cent of total fora. It was expected that seminars would be the most common type of forum for two main reasons: i) seminars are more relaxed than conferences and less technical than workshops, and ii) seminars require fewer resources. Nevertheless, workshops are more common than seminars in two cases, International Security Information Service (ISIS) and FoE. ISIS is a think tank that focuses on technical work and actors associated with EU-NATO security policy,[8] which makes workshops the more appropriate kind of forum for the exchange of information. Another exception is The Lisbon Council for Economic

Competitiveness (TLCEC), which mostly organises lectures and keynote speeches. With keynote speeches by highly prominent figures such as José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Harry van Dorenmalen, chair of IBM Europe, TLCEC is in a position to improve its visibility in the EU environment. These differences indicate that the choice of forum type is likely to depend on the subject under discussion and the objectives of the think tank.

Table 2: Frequency of fora organised and average number of panellists by type of forum

	Think tank	Seminars	Workshops	Conferences	Other
1	Bruegel	40	8	2	1
2	CEPS	40	31	7	0
3	ECGI	0	0	1	1
4	ECIPE	11	1	4	0
5	EIAS	33	0	3	0
6	EIN	9	0	0	0
7	ELF	1	1	0	0
8	EPC	34	22	7	1
9	FEPS	2	3	2	0
10	FOE	2	14	9	1
11	ISIS	3	4	0	0
12	MCEF	23	2	3	0
13	MEDEA	6	1	2	0
14	MPG	1	0	3	0
15	OSE	7	1	2	0
16	SDA	8	2	4	3
17	TEPSA	1	3	3	0
18	TLCEC	0	5	0	11
Total		***221***	***98***	***52***	***18***
Average number of panellists		***3***	***4***	***7***	***1***

Transaction-Specific Investments

Although it is difficult to find comprehensive data to guide definite conclusions, the data collected on think tank's expert staff and policy actors and the EU funding of EU think tanks suggest that transaction-specific investments exist and are recurrent.

Browsing on the websites of think tanks it is possible to collect some information about their staff and identify the number of expert staff members of the institutions that contribute to EU think tank output. Expert staff members include senior, associate and assistant researchers or policy analysts. Table 3 shows that, excluding the two think tanks with the largest number of in-house experts, CEPS and European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE), most EU think tanks rely on an average of six expert staff members. It is difficult to assess the significance of this data; however, EU think tanks count on much the same number of experts as their counterparts in Canada, the UK and the USA (Abelson 2002; Stone 1996). Consequently, since EU think tanks seem to rely on a staff size comparable to that of other established, successful think tanks, it is reasonable to assume they incur similar transaction-specific investments.

Table 3: Staff hired by EU think tanks in 2011

Think tank	Staff	Expert staff	Network contributing to output
Bruegel	20	7	
CEPS	76	58	
ECGI			170 Research members
ECIPE	25	20	39 member institutions
EIAS	23	14	
ELF	4		
EPC	20	12	33 member institutes and associate members
FEPS	9	4	
FOE	21	6	
ISIS	5		
MEDEA	7	4	
MPG	13	8	
OSE	8	5	
SDA	12	6	
TEPSA	5	2	
TLCEC	8	5	

Regarding the transaction-specific investments of policy actors and EU institutions, the data collected on EU think tank budgets (Table 4) indicate that these organisations receive funding from various sources, some of which also participate in think tank fora and are frequently think tank members. As reflected in Table 4, EU think tanks rely on EU institutional funding to different degrees. With the exception of Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and European Liberal Forum (ELF) (highly dependent on EU funding) and TEPSA (highly dependent on both EU Commission and Parliament funding) most think tanks rely on a mix of funding: from EU institutions and from members of a corporate, academic or national character. For instance, Bruegel's revenue from membership constituted more than three-quarters of its total revenue in 2011 (Bruegel 2012). Bruegel's membership includes 18 corporate members (for example, Microsoft and Novartis), 19 state agencies from European member countries and six institutional members such as the European Investment Bank and Banque de France. According to its activity report (2012), CEPS has 112 institutional members, including the Mission of Malaysia to the EU and the European Climate Foundation, and 131 corporate members such as Hyundai and Nestlé. These memberships constituted 26 per cent of CEPS's 2012 budget (CEPS 2012). This mix of funding is not surprising. EU think tanks tend to seek to diversify their funding sources (Perez 2013).

Another source of EU funding is Action 2 (Active civil society in Europe) of the Europe for Citizens Programme. EU think tanks have received funding from this action since its launch in 2007. The Europe for Citizens Programme is the result of the Commission's reconsideration of EU governance (EC 2001) following debate on the democratic deficit of the EU. The description of the programme states that think tanks 'have a specific role to play in providing ideas and reflections on European issues, on active European citizenship or on European values and in feeding the debate at European level' (EC 2012). Although the capacity of think tanks to connect with citizens is disputable (Stone 2004, 1996), especially among EU think tanks (Perez 2013), the terms in which they are included in the EU's programmes to enhance participation and dissemination of EU policies indicates they are recognised as information intermediaries. An examination of the grants received by EU think tanks, taken from their applications to the Europe for Citizens Programme, shown in Table 5, suggests that at least five of the EU think tanks have recurrently received EU funding. Nonetheless, these grants do not seem to have a key impact on the other dimensions of EU fora studied here.

Table 4: EU think tanks' 2011 budget description

Think tank	Total budget (EUR)	Description of budget
Bruegel	3,948,289	7% subscriptions, 15% Framework programmes, Commission, Parliament, IMF, EIB, etc. (Bruegel 2012: 17)
CEPS	9,200,000	37% Commission, 4% Parliament, 26% membership fees, 15% private organisations, 3.5% from foundations, 3.5% organisation of events (CEPS 2012)
ELF	1,019,198	82% Parliament, 2% membership fees, 14% extraordinary contributions and participation fees (ELF 2012: 6)
FEPS	3,262,358	85% Parliament, 15% contribution from members (FEPS 2012: 42)
ISIS		'ISIS Europe receives funding from foundations, trusts, official institutions and national governments. Current funders include the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation, the Network for Social Change and project funding from the European Commission' (ISIS 2012)
MCEF		25% College of Europe, 27% Mott Foundation, 19% Foundation for Effective Governance, 10% Chinese Mission to the EU, 17% Other, 2% Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (MCEF 2012b: 3)
MEDEA		'With the support of Ville de Bruxelles, Fondation Charles Leopold Mayer, Rauyaume de Belgique, Anna Lindh Foundation' (MEDEA 2012)
MPG		MPG receives support from a variety of organisations and sponsors: private foundations such as the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Open Society Foundation; European institutions like the European Commission (Directorate General for Home Affairs, Directorate General for Justice, Directorate General for Education and Culture); inter-governmental agencies such as the Council of Europe, the International Organisation for Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe' (MPG 2012)
TEPSA		59%Commission Projects and grants, 25% Parliament, 8% Partners (TEPSA 2012: 20)
TLCEC	801,296	68% donations, 31% grants. 'The Lisbon Council is sustained by a diversified funding base with three pillars: an operating grant from the European Commission, research grants won in competitive tenders, and donations from corporations and foundations.' (TLCEC 2012: 6)

Table 5: Multiannual grants to think tanks from the Europe for Citizens Programme (Action 2 – Active civil society in Europe) 2008–2013

	CEPS	EPC	FOE	TEPSA	TLCEC
2008	120,000	150,000	174,800	110,000	150,000
2009	126,000	144,966	186,165	110,000	150,000
2010	139,634	146,400	191,635	110,000	200,000
2011	138,925	150,000	201,217	110,000	200,000
2012	145,871	139,830	211,278	110,000	200,000
2013	152,817	137,120	221,338	121,000	200,000
Total	***823,248***	***868,317***	***1,186,434***	***671,000***	***1,100,000***
Average	***137,208***	***144,719***	***197,739***	***111,833***	***183,333***

Uncertainty Mitigation

Overall, the results show that the EU-national divide dominates think tank fora but that these two perspectives are somehow counterweighted by the academic and business perspectives. Table 6 shows that four types of panellist, academic, state representative, corporate and EU representative, together constitute almost three-quarters of the panellists. As was expected, the participation of EU representatives is considerable; they make up more than a quarter of the total and most of them come from the Parliament and the Commission, with representatives from the latter constituting almost half the total number of EU representatives attending fora.

Regarding the panellist types with limited representation, as seen in Table 6, it is worth noting that the great majority of INGOs, foundations and associations are constituted as umbrella organisations. Some examples are the European Network of Migrant Women, the European Public Affairs Consultancies' Association (EPACA), the European Organisation of Military Associations (EUROMIL), and the European Climate Foundation. Also, regarding the international policy research institutes, it is worth noting that the majority are EU think tanks, which reflects the existence of some cooperation between think tanks. The salience of some policy problems is also reflected in the type of speakers. Data collection revealed the number of fora dedicated to discussions of the financial situation. Accordingly, national banks constitute the great majority of panellists in the category 'other'.

Table 6 also shows that a similar variety of policy actors participate in all types of forum. EU institutions are equally present in all types of forum, the institutions most frequently represented being the Commission in first place and the Parliament in second place. State representatives follow a similar pattern, with 15 per cent average attendance at all types of fora. This suggests that both EU institutions and state representatives consider all types of forum beneficial. Taking into account the reasons given above for why EU institutions turn to fora, these results suggest that through participation in conferences EU institutions fulfil their need to disseminate and make their work more visible, while through participation in workshops and seminars EU institutions fulfil their need to acquire technical knowledge and discuss EU politics in detail while identifying new stakeholders. Further, it was observed during data collection that state representatives had the role of explaining national positions vis-à-vis EU policies and/or discussing the effects of EU policymaking at national level. Accordingly, for state representatives EU think tank fora may be a useful tool for the dissemination of information as well as a means of finding out information regarding future policy changes by EU institutions.

Academics and corporate representatives follow different patterns of participation in the different fora. Academics are numerous in seminars and workshops, 19 and 21 per cent respectively, but their participation in conferences drops to 13 per cent. By contrast, the corporate sector's representation is highest in conferences, 16 per cent, but considerably drops in seminars, 9 per cent. The reasons for these differences may have to do with the objectives different types of forum help corporate representatives and academics to achieve. On the one hand, workshops help corporate representatives discuss the specific technical aspects they are concerned with, while conferences allow them to gain visibility and engage with new networks. On the other hand, seminars and workshops allow academics to dwell on details of their work and instruct audiences in the way they are used to, while conferences are more suitable for short presentations of results.

Table 6 shows that state representatives make up one of the most prominent panellist categories, constituting 15 per cent of the total. A closer look at the composition of these representatives (see Figure 1) reveals that half of them come from EU countries. An examination of EU panellists showed that representatives participating in think tank fora came from only 19 countries and representatives from three countries, Belgium, France and Poland, constituted 49 per cent of the representatives. In addition, representatives from Germany, the Netherlands and the UK accounted for 27.7 per cent of

the total, which means that just six countries constituted 76 per cent of the state representatives. Aspects such as resources, proximity, language, network engagement and subjects discussed in fora are factors that may impede state representatives from the less represented countries from being invited to or participating in think tank fora. Nevertheless, it was observed that a significant number of state representatives came from their national representations in Brussels; therefore, aspects such as network engagement and policy network style may be relevant.

Table 6: Percentage of panellists by given fora

	Seminars	*Workshops*	*Conferences*	*Total*
Commission	12.8	12.0	13.0	12.6
Parliament	9.0	7.0	5.6	7.2
Council	0.1	0	1.4	0.5
EEAS	3.3	2.5	3.2	3.0
Other	3.7	2.8	4.0	3.6
International Organisations	5.2	7.0	4.8	6.0
State/Local	16.9	13.2	16.0	15.4
Transnational/International Associations, Foundations NGOs	5.3	7.8	6.4	6.0
National Associations, Foundations NGOs	3.9	3.2	4.8	4.0
Academic	19.1	21.0	13.5	18.0
International Policy Research Institutes	2.2	2.6	1.0	2.0
National Policy Research Institutes	5.0	5.3	7.8	6.0
Corporations	9.2	12.0	16.0	12.0
Media	2.2	1.3	1.6	2.0
Other	1.9	1.8	0.6	1.3
Total	***99.8***	***99.5***	***99.7***	***99.6***

The European interest in developing links with Asia is also reflected in the data (see Figure 1) and a number of fora exploring this relationship were observed during the data collection. The presence of representatives from China and Japan, 44 per cent, is the most obvious in this regard. Transatlantic relationships are also present in fora. The great majority of American state representatives come from the USA (rather than South America); the same was observed of academics affiliated to American universities.

Figure 1: Percentage of state representatives by given region

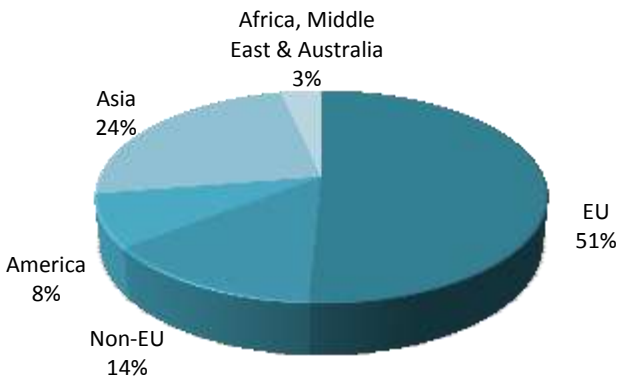
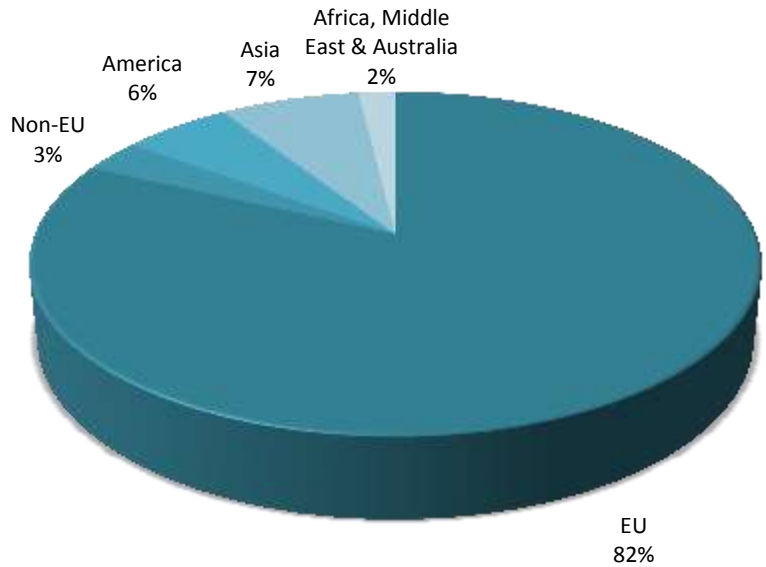


Table 6 shows that, after EU representatives, academics were the panellists most represented in think tank fora in 2011. This significant participation may be the result of the collaborative model of research production promoted in the EU (Defazio, Lockett and Wright 2008). This model encourages academics to conduct joint research with different types of organisations (including think tanks) and interact with practitioners in order to make their research relevant to society. By showing commitment to these principles, academics are able to secure funding.

A closer look at the data (see Figure 2) revealed that the great majority of academics come from EU countries. It was found that academics come from 15 EU countries, with academics from Belgium and the UK constituting half of the total. Meanwhile academics from France, Germany and the Netherlands constitute 30 per cent, with just one fifth coming from the remaining ten countries. As with state representatives, the factors that may impede academics from the less represented countries from being invited to or participating in think tank fora are resources, proximity, language, network engagement and the kind of subjects discussed.

A closer look at the university affiliation of the academics coming from Belgium and the UK revealed that Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL), Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) have particular representation among Belgian universities. Four fifths of the Belgian academics are affiliated to KUL, ULB and UCL, with the remaining fifth affiliated to the eight other Belgian universities and colleges participating in think tank fora. Of the 23 British universities participating in think tank fora, the London School of Economics (LSE) has the greatest representation, with a quarter of the academics affiliated to this institution. The proximity and size of the main Belgian universities represented and the limited resources that think tanks have for inviting academics from abroad may be reasons why the representation of academics is concentrated in a few universities.

Figure 2: Percentage of academics by given region



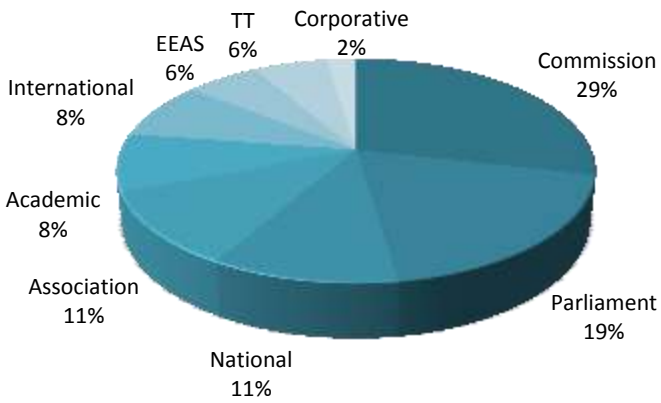
An examination of the frequency with which panellists attended more than one fora run by the same think tank revealed that the risk of collusion is low. As Table 7 shows, 75 panellists attended more than one fora run by the same think tank (4.71 per cent of the total number of panellists attending all fora). The think tanks with the largest number of panellists returning are European Institute for Asia Studies (EIAS), European Policy Centre (EPC), CEPS and FOE, with close to one-third of the panellists attending more than one fora. However, the returning panellists constitute a marginal share of the total number of panellists attending think tank fora, as Table 7 shows.

Table 7: Number of panellists attending more than one fora run by the same think tank, by think tank

Think tank	Number of panellists	Share of total number of panelists (%)
Bruegel	8	5.03
CEPS	10	3.20
FEPS	3	10.00
FOE	13	4.43
ECIPE	2	5.26
EIAS	18	13.04
EPC	11	5.44
MCEF	4	3.33
MPG	2	6.45
SDA	4	3.12
Total	***75***	***4.71***

Moreover, examination of the frequency with which panellists attended more than one fora run by different think tanks confirms that the risk of collusion is low. The results are slightly higher than they are for panellists attending more than one fora run by the same think tank. Only 0.56 per cent more panellists attended more than one fora run by different think tanks (see Figure 3). This assessment confirmed the regular attendance of Commission and Parliament representatives. Twenty-one representatives from 14 different directorates-general of the Commission attended fora run by different think tanks. In addition, President Barroso attended two events organised by TLCEC and FOE, and Vice-Presidents Almunia and Šefčovič attended fora run by Bruegel, EPC, CEPS and FOE.

Figure 3: Frequency of attendance at more than one fora run by different think tanks, percentage by type of panellist



CONCLUSIONS

The results of the data analysis seem to indicate that descriptions of think tank fora as 'neutral territory where people feel more comfortable and have an opportunity to mingle' (Stone 1996: p. 126) make sense. The results show that the dimensions characterising transactions as seen in the literature (Macher and Richman 2008; Williamson 1979) are present in EU think tank fora. In particular, it is seen that EU think tank fora facilitate EU institutions meeting with policy actors that are not organised as 'umbrellas' and lack 'broad geographical representation'. Nevertheless, limitations to this role are also evident.

As Abelson (2006: p. 148) describes, running fora is one of the strategies think tanks use in seeking to enhance their reputation and identify new ideas. Academics help think tanks achieve these objectives. Think tanks emphasise their academic orientation to different degrees (Stone 2007) but they are still generally seen as bridges between academics and politicians seeking to make academic knowledge 'policy-relevant' (Stone 2000: p. 154). Thus, the significant presence of academics at fora may be the result of EU think tanks' intention to keep fulfilling this role. At the same time it must be considered that, in the EU, there is interdependence between think tanks and academics. The significant participation of academic panellists in think tank fora may be the result of the collaborative model of research production promoted in the EU (Defazio, Lockett and Wright 2008). Both academics and think tanks are part of the European Research Area, which encourages joint research, and they both benefit from Framework Programme funding. Consequently, further examination of the relationship between academics and think tanks within the frame of the European Research Area will elucidate the character of their relationship and clarify the prominence of academics in EU think tank fora.

The relationship think tanks have with academics is in contrast to that with NGOs, foundations and associations. As Stone describes, given think tanks' concern for their reputation, independence and high analytical standards, it is difficult for them to develop 'long-term relationships with organisations that are deemed to be of lower social status, groups that are perceived to be radical or disrupt their demands, or bodies that are in competition with think tanks for media, political and foundation attention', while at the same time, civil society organisations may consider their role affected when they engage with organisations that are seen as elitist (Stone 2000: p. 169). The scant presence of these organisations in think tank fora may be the result of this situation, reinforced by the fact that interaction between the EU and European NGOs generally takes place through specific platforms (Kutay 2012).

In addition, aspects such as the resources, proximity, language, network engagement and policymaking style of national representatives and academics need to be further studied. In particular, given that the majority of national representatives come from their national representations in Brussels, there needs to be a special focus on network engagement and policymaking style.

Finally, the considerable presence of businesses is unsurprising. Although businesses invest in lobbying, by participating in think tanks they can gain credibility and respectability (Abelson 2013: p. 21). Moreover, at the transnational level, information about policymaking is less ubiquitous than at national and local levels, so policy actors and businesses tend to use information intermediaries such as think tanks as vehicles to enable themselves to be informed and participate in policymaking (Stone 2004). At the same time, businesses are an important source of funding for think tanks, including EU think tanks, which offer businesses privileged access to activities and outputs in return for membership dues. Think tanks depend on membership for various reasons: i) resources; ii) identification of interested audiences; iii) and 'quality control' to establish/maintain the reputation of the think tank (Stone 2000: p. 164).

This preliminary study needs to be complemented by comparative analyses of think tanks' performance in different EU policy areas. Broscheid and Coen found that lobby activity is different in regulatory and distributive policy areas, the first scenario generating more activity among EU institutions, sometimes leading to lobbying overload, while the second is 'highly intergovernmental and encourage[s] multi-level venue shopping' (2007: p. 361). In both scenarios think tank fora would have a role to play as transaction cost reducers, either as outsourced consultation (Coase 1937) in case of lobbying overload or simply as a basis for information economies (Williamson 1979: p. 241)[9] for policy actors in a venue-shopping scenario.

Overall, this article contributes to the literature on transaction costs by providing an illustration of how some aspects of EU policymaking can be outsourced to non-state policy actors, such as think tanks, playing an intermediary role. By explaining what the role of fora in EU policymaking is it is possible to understand how, despite being a small community with a limited focus on research and advisory work (McGann 2010; Boucher 2004), EU think tanks have a useful role to play in policymaking. The article is also a contribution to think tank scholarship seeking to explain how the intermediary role of think tanks may be of particular relevance at the transnational level, where public opinion formation is dispersed and participation in policymaking is resource-intensive (Stone 2008: p. 32).

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[1] i.e. think tanks located in Brussels that are concerned with EU politics.
[2] As Coase argued, most transactions yield a cost because in order to carry them out it is necessary to invest resources 'to discover who it is that one wishes to deal with, to inform people that one wishes to deal and on what terms, to conduct negotiations leading up to a bargain, to draw up the contract, to undertake the inspection needed to make sure that the terms of the contract are being observed, and so on'. (1960: p. 15)
[3] Bounded rationality maintains that rational behaviour is limited by accessibility, cognition and time (see Simon 1957).
[4] State capture occurs when a small number of policy actors influence policymaking and monopolise policy outcomes. State capture can sometimes lead to corruption.
[5] Following the economic law of diminishing returns, diminishing returns to EU management refers to when the expansion of the consultation system beyond a threshold incrementally decreases the efficiency of the consultation system by increasing costs and the time frame for consultation.
[6] The idea that relationships are determined not only by economic factors but also by political and social contexts.
[7] Collusion takes place when a limited number of actors reach agreement outside the formal structure (see Laffont and Martimort 1997; Clarke 1983)
[8] ISIS (2012) summarises its aims in the following terms: 'ISIS Europe facilitates parliamentary and inter-institutional dialogue with all stakeholders and provides policy input to strengthen common approaches to conflict prevention, crisis management, peace building, arms control and disarmament'.
[9] Think tanks, as a result of their networking capacity and ability to develop a common language accessible to different audiences, yield information economies to policy actors seeking to access and better understand EU politics.

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