

# SCOTTISH THINK-TANKS AND POLICY NETWORKS

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## INTRODUCTION

Devolved government has had many consequences for Scotland's political landscape. It has fostered Scottish national consciousness by confirming its distinct history and future within the framework of a United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> (UK) and at the same time re-enforced the unity of the UK<sup>2</sup>. It has re-cast institutional structures of decision-making and executive power according to the subsidiarity principle<sup>3</sup>. Scotland has become a locus of actual policy-making; it is no longer a 'stateless nation'<sup>4</sup>. Thus, we can find a political environment encompassing political parties, single-issue interest groups and a

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Bridget and Katarina Thomson (eds.). **Scotland and Wales: Nations Again?** Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999. Curtice, John; McCrone, David; Park, Alison and Lindsay Paterson. **New Scotland, New Society? Are Social and Political Ties Fragmenting?** Edinburgh: Polygon, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Nairn, Tom. **After Britain – New Labour and the Return of Scotland.** Granta Press: London 2000

<sup>3</sup> Raco, Mike. Governmentality, Subject Building and the Discourses and Practices of Devolution in the UK. **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, col 28, 2003, pp. 77-95.

<sup>4</sup> McCrone, D. **Understanding Scotland - The Sociology of a Stateless Nation.** Routledge: London, 1998

number of a certain breed of policy research institutes, broadly called ‘think-tanks’, of which the majority came into existence with devolution. This article explores the neglected landscape of think-tanks in Scotland. The World Directory of Think-Tanks does not list a single Scotland-based think-tank in their review of trends in Western European think-tanks<sup>5</sup>. Where a Scotland-based think-tank, the David Hume Institute, is mentioned alongside a vanguard-Thatcherite think-tank such as the Adam Smith Institute, it is largely ignored in the eventual study<sup>6</sup>. This certainly has to do with the relatively recent proliferation of think-tanks in the young Scottish polity. Moreover, with the ‘fourth wave of transnational think-tanks’<sup>7</sup> evolving, these latecomers may have slipped out of focus despite Scotland’s new political scenery and the European trend towards regionalism apparent in it.

This article describes and analyses this unexplored Scottish think-tank landscape within a framework of three dimensions – organisation and resources; goals and ideology and integration into the policy community. A meso-level policy network approach will be chosen to study three cases. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the potential role of think-tanks in the armoury of neoliberalism. The article addresses these questions through interviews with three senior think-tank members and through the analysis of primary documents<sup>8</sup>.

## **WHAT ARE THINK-TANKS?**

Diverse organisations are labelled think-tanks and the term has been over-inclusively applied to almost any organisation which in some form or the other

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<sup>5</sup> Kenkuyu, Sogo. *The World Directory of Think-tanks 2002*. 4th edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Stone, Diane. ‘Think-tanks and the Privatisation Band-Wagon’ in: Lovenduski, J. and Stanyer, J. (eds) *Contemporary Political Studies Belfast : Political Studies Association*, Vol. 1335, 1995, pp. 332-44.

<sup>7</sup> Stone, Diane and Ullrich, Heike. *Policy Research Institutes and Think-tanks in Western Europe : Developments, Trends and Perspectives*. 2003, Budapest : **Open Society Institute**, p. VII, *my emphasis*

<sup>8</sup> *Interviews, lasting between 60 minutes and 120 minutes, with Brian Main (DHI), Jim McCormick (SCF) and Tom Miers (PI) in June, July and August 2004. I would like to express my gratitude to the interviewees for allowing me to interview them, record the conversations and to quote them.*

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

aims at informing and influencing decision makers or the general public through research and its dissemination. The term invokes images of scientific detachment and objectivity, so that it has become attractive for organisations such as lobby groups and pressure groups to use it, while it is de-valued for other organisations. Adding to the definitional confusion is the acknowledgement that organisational structures, financing and last but not least the position of think-tanks in relation to government, (corporate) sponsoring institutions and the market for policy advice necessarily vary in different cultural contexts.

There are, unsurprisingly, various approaches towards the description and analysis of think-tanks. There are those scholars who focus on the institutional form and who are interested in explaining why and how think-tanks have emerged and why some are more influential than others. They employ Weberian ideal types. Then there are different approaches to the role of think-tanks: pluralist, elite theory and neo-Marxian analyses offer different and conflicting perspectives. A third approach understands think-tanks as vehicles of policy processes and focuses on the role of ideas and expertise in decision making by using policy network theories.

To begin with a generic attempt to define a think-tank, one might state that they are non-governmental not-for-profit research organisations with substantial organisational ‘autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties’<sup>9</sup> with an interest in the policy-applicability of their activity. Autonomy is the central criterion that may be used to shed light on the blurry boundaries between think-tanks, lobby groups, single-issue pressure groups and university institutes. Autonomy though is relative; it does not imply total detachment from policy-makers, as think-tanks must have some ‘kind of engagement with government if they are to succeed in influencing policy’<sup>10</sup>. There are three dimensions of independence – legal, financial and scholarly. Legally speaking, think-tanks tend to be charitable non-profit organisations without formal or legal links to political parties, governmental bodies or companies. Their funding is non-project related and

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<sup>9</sup> Weaver, Kent R. ‘The Changing World of Think-tanks’. *PS: Political Science and Politics*. Vol. 22/3, 1989, pp. 563-578; Weaver, Kent R. and McGann, James G. (eds) *Think-tanks & Civil Societies. Catalysts for Ideas and Action*. New Jersey : Transaction Publishers 2000, p. 4

<sup>10</sup> Stone & Ullrich 2003, p. 5, *op.cit.*

## *Scottish Affairs*

usually is not dependent on only one benefactor. Scholarly independence is constituted by certain 'practices within the institute: for example institutionalised peer-reviewing mechanisms and open inquiry rather than directed research'<sup>11</sup>. Institutions which fulfil these criteria fall into several ideal types. The first type, 'universities without students', is characterized by 'heavy reliance on academics as researchers, by funding primarily from the private sector' and by long-term book-length studies as the primary research output<sup>12</sup>. Think-tanks of this category stress their objectivity and non-partisanship. They form part of the first wave of organisational development of think-tanks mostly between 1890 and 1930<sup>13</sup>.

Secondly, there is the 'contract research organisation', which is mostly commissioned by government departments. It hardly executes its 'own' research and its results take the form of shorter reports<sup>14</sup>. The period between 1945 and the late 1970s was a period of 'massive growth of policy research and analysis capacity both inside and outside government, spurred by government funding. Institutes tended to be technocratic in style and non-partisan'<sup>15</sup>.

'Advocacy think-tanks' combine a strong policy, partisan or ideological bent with 'aggressive salesmanship and effort to influence current policy debates'<sup>16</sup>. Their output is less academic, but they have very good access to policy-makers, as their explicit aim is to change policies and to shift public opinion. Often they simply repackage and synthesise existing material and adapt it to a particular policy context. This think-tank type bears the most obvious resemblance to interest groups, but advocacy think-tanks tend to appeal 'to as large a segment of the electorate as possible, they do not, like interest groups, speak on behalf of a particular constituency'<sup>17</sup>. These advocacy institutes saw their heyday in

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Weaver, Kent R. 1989, p. 566, *op.cit.*; Abelson, Donald E. **Do Think-tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes**. Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002, p. 19

<sup>13</sup> Weaver, Kent R. 1989, 564 *op.cit*

<sup>14</sup> Weaver, Kent R. 1989, p. 564, *op.cit*

<sup>15</sup> Stone, Diane and Heike Ullrich 2003, 11, *op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Weaver, Kent R. 1989, p. 567, *op.cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Abelson, Donald E. 2002, p.11, *op. cit.*

the 1970s and are widely attributed with ‘thinking the unthinkable’<sup>18</sup> for the neo-liberal project. A fourth, more recent type is the vanity think-tank, which exists mainly for the ‘self-aggrandizement of its members or for the promotion of a political career’<sup>19</sup>. Parallel to these developments, the past 20 years witnessed the genesis of transnational think-tanks – with which we cannot deal here. This typology gives an indication of the functions think-tanks fulfil. To clarify this further, pluralist, elitist and neo-Marxist analysis can be applied.

Pluralist researchers assert that think-tanks are able to ‘support and encourage policy pluralism, broad participation and involvement of policy actors, citizen empowerment’<sup>20</sup>. Pluralist analyses of think-tanks emphasise the free and diverse character of democratic societies, where think-tanks compete with their policy proposals in the marketplace of ideas. An idea ‘wins’ because it is superior to another. Denham and Garnett, more cautiously, say that think-tanks have a yet to be realised potential to ‘enlighten the public o. key policy issues’<sup>21</sup>, but emphasise that the proliferation of think-tanks itself does not mean a step towards a more pluralistic society, as ‘opinions which threaten vested interests will never get attention’<sup>22</sup>. Pluralists hardly ever address power asymmetries which hamper the competition for the popularisation of ideas. There is no simple correlation between the flourishing of think-tanks and the spread of democracy in industrially advanced democratic polities. For elite theoreticians think-tanks serve the long-term interests of the economic and political elites – thus policy becomes the result of elite values and preferences implemented by decision-makers<sup>23</sup>. They highlight the interlocking of directorates of the corporate, military and administrative hierarchies<sup>24</sup>. Elite theories state that through the agenda-setting power of think-tanks decision-

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<sup>18</sup> Cockett, Richard. *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution, 1931-1983*. Harper Collins : London 1994

<sup>19</sup> Abelson, Donald E. 2002, p. 35, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Madoka, Nakamura. Introduction. In: Kenkuyu, Sogo. *The World Directory of think-tanks 2002*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002, p. xi.

<sup>21</sup> Denham, Andrew and Mark Garnett. *Influence Without Responsibility? Think-tanks in Britain*. *Parliamentary Affairs*, January 1999, 52/1, pp. 46-57, p.56

<sup>22</sup> Denham, Andrew and Garnett, Mark. *British Think-tanks and the Climate of Opinion*. UCL Press : London 1998, p. 197ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30; Stone, Diane, 1996, p.29, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p 29; Stone, Diane, 1996, p.30, *op. cit.*

makers simply execute what they are told. This approach assumes that elite consensus and cohesiveness are translated into strategies of control through think-tanks. Think-tanks, however, are relatively diverse and do not always sympathise with elite preferences of a particular administration or social group. Elite theory applied in this context also risks drifting off into the spheres of conspiracy theories, which see an ‘invisible government’<sup>25</sup> at work. Neo-Marxian analysis of the role of think-tanks sees them as organisations propagating the ideological hegemony – i.e. ‘when the political leadership of a group or a nation is exercised with minimal dispute and resistance’<sup>26</sup> of capitalism. As Murray and Pacheco argue, think-tanks fulfil a role in the survival of advanced capital which rests on its ability to ‘capture the imagination’<sup>27</sup> and legitimise itself in the cultural sphere<sup>28</sup>. The neo-Marxist instrumentalist approach, which looks at how class and corporate interests influence outputs into policy formation, tends to portray political institutions as a passive tool of a mobilised capitalist class active in promoting ideological hegemony and thereby ignores the considerable extent of autonomy; but it offers the most compelling framework for analysis of the three.

To overcome these problems, Rhodes’ concept of policy networks may enable us to develop a critical understanding of think-tank activity within a larger framework of their politico-economic environment. Rhodes understands policy networks as a ‘meso-level concept which provides a link between the micro-level of analysis, dealing with the role of interests and government in particular policy decisions, and the macro-level of analysis, which focuses on broader questions about the distribution of power within modern society’<sup>29</sup>. Rhodes defines a policy network as a cluster or complex of organisations connected to

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<sup>25</sup> Smoot, D. *The Invisible Government*. The Americanist Library : Belmont MA, Western Island 1962

<sup>26</sup> Gamble, Andrew. (1989) *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcher*. Macmillan : London 1989, p. 1

<sup>27</sup> Stone, Diane 1996, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Murray, Georgina and Douglas Pacheco: *Think-tanks in the 1990s*. Online available from [www.anu.edu.au/polsic/marx/interventions/thinktanks.htm](http://www.anu.edu.au/polsic/marx/interventions/thinktanks.htm). Based on an article ‘The Economic Liberal Ideas Industry: Australian Pro-Market Think-tanks in the 1990s.’ *Journal of Social Issues*. May 2000

<sup>29</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W. Foreword. Cricket, Walter JM, Erick Hans Klijn and Joop F. M. Koppenjan (eds.). *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector*. Sage : London 1997a, p. 29

one another by resource dependencies along a continuum from tightly integrated policy communities to loosely integrated issue networks<sup>30</sup>. Network analysis stresses continuity in the relations between interest groups and government department. Policy networks influence policy outcomes and reflect the relative status or power of the particular interest in a broad policy area. Through networks, participants can build alliances, share discourses and construct consensual knowledge. Networks can undermine ‘political responsibility by shutting out the public’ preventing the emergence of challenges to the dominant order respectively by perpetuating existing paradigms<sup>31</sup>. Policy networks consist of epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, policy communities, and policy entrepreneurs. These groups vary in their degree of proximity of the relationship of their members<sup>32</sup>. Epistemic communities are networks of experts from different backgrounds sharing one world view and the desire to turn this into policy or regime change; they are ‘communities of shared knowledge’<sup>33</sup>. They develop ‘consensual knowledge about the functioning of state and society which is shared by specialists but also endorsed as valid by decision-making elites’<sup>34</sup>. Advocacy coalitions are distinguished from epistemic communities by their ‘emphasis on the belief system rather than knowledge in itself’<sup>35</sup>. Thus, they are more overtly political and more likely to pursue an ideological agenda of certain morals and values. A policy community includes a wide range of policy actors – politicians, civil servants as well as researchers from one policy field in and of government<sup>36</sup>. These actors within policy communities ‘interact strategically, while engaging in exchanges involving the sharing of information, expertise and political

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<sup>30</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W *Understanding Governance : policy networks, governance, reflexivity, and accountability*. Open University Press : Buckingham 1997b, p. 38

<sup>31</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W and David. *New Directions in the Study of Policy Networks*. *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 21 1992, pp. 181-205, p. 200.

<sup>32</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W. 1997b, 43, *op.cit*.

<sup>33</sup> Haas, Peter. *Do Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control*. *International Organisations*. Vol. 43/3 1989, pp. 377-403, p. 377

<sup>34</sup> Stone, Diane 2000, p. 7, *op.cit*.

<sup>35</sup> Stone, Diane and Ullrich, Heike 2003, p. 39, *op.cit*.

<sup>36</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W. 1997b, *op.cit*, p. 38

## *Scottish Affairs*

support'<sup>37</sup>. They can consist of interest group activists, government officials, ministers or consultants<sup>38</sup>. Last but not least, policy entrepreneurs are 'advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea', not seldom for personal aggrandizement<sup>39</sup>. Policy entrepreneurs are those with easiest access to policy elites and they may have political ambitions. Whereas the epistemic community is most concerned with knowledge transfusion, the other policy networks emphasise 'policy formation and implementation more as the outcome of power struggles over resources among groups'<sup>40</sup>.

In policy networks think-tanks function as physical locations 'exchanging resources (money, authority, information, expertise) in order to achieve their objectives, to maximize their influence over outcomes, and to avoid becoming dependent on other players in the game'<sup>41</sup>. Think-tanks act as transfer agents providing intellectual legitimation for certain policies and diffusing ideas<sup>42</sup>; with their Institutional ties they promote coherence and solidarity and bolster the consensus<sup>43</sup>. The practical need for think-tanks, according to Stone, arises out of the increasing reliance of governments and international organisations on private organisations to help diffuse lessons, build consensus and entrench ideas<sup>44</sup>. This is the case because decision-makers face time constraints and a lack of resources to 'accumulate sufficient evidence to make valid comparisons for lesson-drawing' and suffer from an under-supply of information for in-house lesson-learning. Uncertainty especially in long-term policy areas makes decision-makers look for advice, as poor comprehension leads to instable

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<sup>37</sup> Coleman, William D. and Anthony Perl. *Internationalised Policy Environment and Policy Networks Analysis*. *Political Studies*, Vol. XLVII/ 4 1999, pp. 691-709, p. 696.

<sup>38</sup> Stone, Diane 1996, p. 91, *op.cit.*

<sup>39</sup> Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*: Harper Collins College Publishers : New York 1995, p. 122.

<sup>40</sup> Stone, Diane 1996, p. 76. *op.cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W 1997b, p.xii, *op.cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Stone, Diane 1995, p. 332, *op.cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Stone, Diane 1996, p. 88, *op.cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Stone, Diane. *Learning Lessons, Transferring Policy and Exporting Ideas*. Paper for International Workshop: **Diffusion of Environmental Policy Innovations**, Freie Universitaet Berlin, 8-9<sup>th</sup> December 2000. Available from <http://www.fu-berlin.de/ffu/akumwelt/download/stone.pdf>. [accessed 15th July 2004] p. 13

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

policy regimes<sup>45</sup>. The emergence of complex societies is a crucial factor for the existence of think-tanks and their undulated growth. In an 'unknown society'<sup>46</sup> or risk society<sup>47</sup> where 'a plenitude of information leads to a poverty of attention [and] attention becomes a scarce resource ..., those who can distinguish valuable signals from white noise gain power'<sup>48</sup>. The policy network concept highlights the significance of knowledge and how it penetrates bureaucracies and influences decision-makers and clarifies the significance of interaction between various actors. Think-tanks thus can be understood as filtering information and thus creating hegemonic discourses by giving selective accounts of reality and proposals for how to effect change.

This theoretical background will now be applied to facilitate an understanding of Scotland's think-tanks. The David Hume Institute, The Scottish Council Foundation, and the Policy Institute were chosen from the small population of five Scotland-based and Scotland-focused think-tanks. The Centre for Scottish Public Policy is not included in the study as it was being reconfigured at the time this study was carried out.

## **ORGANISATION AND RESOURCES**

The David Hume Institute was founded in 1985 by Alan Peacock, the once Professor of Economics at York University and Vice Chancellor of the independent University of Buckingham<sup>49</sup>, and the industrialist Gerald Elliot, then Chairman of Christian Control Salvesen, an international logistics business. Between 1985-1986 Peacock was Chairman of the Home Office Committee on Financing the BBC. Peacock was a member of various other UK Government and international Commissions and served as Chief Economic Adviser in the UK Department of Trade and Industry (1973-76). According to Peacock, his motivation in setting up the David Hume Institute was to establish

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<sup>45</sup> Stone, Diane 1996, p. 88, *op.cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Gunsteren, H. van. **Culturen von Besturen**. Boom : Amsterdam 1994

<sup>47</sup> Beck, Ulrich: **World Risk Society**. Polity Press : Cambridge 1999

<sup>48</sup> Keohane, Robert O. and Nye, Joseph S. *Power and Interdependence in the Information Age*. **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 77/5 1998, p.89

<sup>49</sup> Online available from

<http://www.buckingham.ac.uk/international/aboutdept/hongrads/peacock.html>. [Accessed 3 February]

## *Scottish Affairs*

an institute independent of government funding in order to avoid constraints on research and publication and to counter the ‘metropolitan perspective of economic events’ coming from the overwhelming number of research institutes based in London<sup>50</sup>. In 1995 Professor Brian Main (who in 2002 was an official advisor to the Scottish Parliament) joined the institute and was its director from 1999 to 2005. In June 2005 he was replaced by Jeremy Peat, former Group Chief Economist at the Royal Bank of Scotland and former economist at the HM Treasury and the Scottish Office. He is also on the Board of Governors of the BBC<sup>51</sup> and has ‘extensive connections with business and areas of government in Scotland and further afield’<sup>52</sup>, as the David Hume Institute introduces him. Peat’s appointment could make the David Hume Institute less academic in appearance and output and could open new sources of funding. The David Hume Institute’s board of trustees unites important members of the Scottish policy community: e.g. senior journalists, members of the Scottish Parliament’s Corporate Body Audit and Advisory Board, the chief executive of TSB Scotland and a high official of the Rowntree Foundation<sup>53</sup>. The David

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<sup>50</sup> Peacock, Alan. in: Kuenssberg, Nick and Lomas, Gillian. ***The David Hume Institute. The First Decade***. Norwich : Page Bros Ltd., 1995

<sup>51</sup> *DHI 1. Press Release for Appointment*. Online available from <http://www.davidhumeinstitute.com/DHI%20Website/Press/Spring%202005/Director%20press%20release.pdf>. [Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2005]

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Among them are: Robert Bertram, currently a member of the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body’s Audit and Advisory Board* (online available from [http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/our\\_peop/members/all\\_members/biogs/robertbertram.htm](http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/our_peop/members/all_members/biogs/robertbertram.htm). [Accessed 17 November 2004]. Andrew Ferguson worked briefly for the Conservative Party research unit before joining *The Economist* and the *Sunday Times*. Now he works at the *Scotsman* newspaper as Editor-in-Chief (Online available from <http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk/scotgaz/people/famousfirst673.html>. [Accessed 17 November 2004]. Isabelle Low, formerly a Scottish Executive civil servant, is now Deputy Chair of the Accounts Commission for Scotland (Online available from <http://www.asainternational.co.uk/fdoty/judge.asp>). [Accessed 17 November 2004]. Susan Rice, chief executive of Lloyds TSB Scotland plc, was a member of HM Treasury’s Policy Action Team on access to financial services. She is also a member of the Foresight Sub-Committee on Retail Finance, on the board of Scottish Business in the Community, and a member of the Scottish Advisory Task Force on the New Deal (Online available from [http://www.sra.ed.ac.uk/htc/susan\\_rice.htm](http://www.sra.ed.ac.uk/htc/susan_rice.htm). [Accessed 17 November 2004]. Professor Duncan MacLennan worked for the Rowntree Foundation

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

Hume Institute commissions external researchers as it does not employ full time research staff.

A second key think-tank is The Scottish Council Foundation. The Foundation was established by the Scottish Council Development and Industry in 1999, which is a lobby group of some of the largest corporations in Scotland with 'a smattering of trade unions' on its executive board<sup>54</sup>. It seeks to 'strengthen Scotland's economic competitiveness and sustainable prosperity by influencing Government policy at all levels'<sup>55</sup>. Three of the Scottish Council Foundation's five trustees<sup>56</sup> are high-ranking members of the Scottish Council executive and its board<sup>57</sup>. The Scottish Council Foundation employs five full-time research staff. Its director, James McCormick, previously worked for the Institute for Public Policy Research's 1994 Social Justice Commission Report, which was important for the Labour Party's Third Way concepts of the 'activating state'<sup>58</sup>.

The third think-tank in this study is the Policy Institute. Its foundation coincided with the first election to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Bill Jamieson, senior journalist at **The Scotsman**, is the Director of the Policy

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*and has provided advice to the World Bank, the European Commission and the European Parliament (online available from <http://www.scot-homes.gov.uk/annualreport98/members/dmaclennan.html>. [Accessed 17 November 2004].*

<sup>54</sup> David Miller, William Dinan, Philip Schlesinger: *The Herald Glasgow: Why Lobbyists Need to be Scrutinised* August 22, 2001

<sup>55</sup> SCDI 1. Online available from <http://www.scdi.org.uk/page.php?id=1104>. [Accessed 24 November 2004]

<sup>56</sup> SCF 1. Online available from <http://www.scottishcouncilfoundation.org/about.php>. [Accessed 1 June 2004]

<sup>57</sup> SCDI 2. Online available from <http://www.scottishcouncilfoundation.org/about.php>. [Accessed 14 November 2004]. The SCF's Trustees are: Shonaig MacPherson, Chairperson, Donald Dowds, Crawford Gillies, Mike Hambly, Alan Wilson

<sup>58</sup> Commission for Social Justice. *Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal*. Institute for Public Policy Research : London 1994. See e.g. Lister, Ruth. *The Rio via the Third Way: New Labour's 'welfare' reform agenda*. **Renewal. A Journal of Labour Politics**, Vol. 8/4 Autumn 2000. [available from <http://www.renewal.org.uk/issues/2000/autumn/feature1.htm>. [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2005]; The Hillcole Group (eds). *Rethinking Education and Democracy. A Socialist Alternative for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Tufnell Press : London 1997. Available from <http://www.tpress.free-online.co.uk/rethink.pdf>. [accessed 17 of November 2005]

## *Scottish Affairs*

Institute, which uses premises at that newspaper. Tom Miers, the only salaried member of the Policy Institute, was employed as Executive Director in May 2003 'to run the institute on a more full-time basis' and formerly worked for the Institute of Economic Affairs in an administrative role. He lauds **The Scotsman** for its generosity in allocating logistic resources to the Policy Institute and allowing a senior member of its staff to re-dedicate some of his time to the institute<sup>59</sup>. Jamieson has been a frequent guest at the IEA<sup>60</sup> and at the Bruges Group – a Thatcherite think-tank committed to a fight against deeper UK integration into the EU<sup>61</sup>. The Policy Institute's board of trustees is composed of further journalists from **The Scotsman**, a top manager of Scottish Friendly Assurance and an Edinburgh university professor<sup>62</sup>.

The International Futures Forum, an interesting off-spring from the Scottish Council Foundation, will be discussed later.

After having highlighted some of the personal and institutional linkages of the think-tanks to a variety of actors in a wider policy community, in the following a glance will be cast at their funding. Earlier, financial independence was identified as a significant feature of a think-tank. All three institutes are registered as independent charitable educational organisations without political alignment and are granted tax exempt status. All have multiple sources of funding, as autonomy from just one sponsor is recognised as a prerequisite for credibility: 'we're trying to keep the majority of donations general because it avoids us having to worry whether we're fulfilling a contract to somebody who's our paymaster instead of being an entirely independent institute'<sup>63</sup>. The private sector is the most important source of revenue for the David Hume Institute and the Policy Institute, whereas the Scottish Council Foundation has also a small number of public funders – however, it 'proved to be frustrating not to receive feedback [from the Scottish Executive] on reports or to see any

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<sup>59</sup> *Miers, Tom. (2004) My interview on July 23 2004 in Edinburgh*

<sup>60</sup> *Online available from <http://www.iea.org.uk/record.jsp?type=release&ID=13>. [Accessed on 3 February 2005]*

<sup>61</sup> *Online available from <http://www.brugesgroup.com/mediacentre/speeches.live?article=198>. [Accessed 3 February 2005]*

<sup>62</sup> *The Policy Institute. About. Online Available from <http://www.policyinstitute.info/About.php>. [Accessed 22 March 2006]*

<sup>63</sup> *Main, Brian 2004, interview.*

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

difference one's ideas are making'. The Scottish Council Foundation has received support by ongoing project-unrelated donations from companies such as Boots, BP – which praises the Scottish Council Foundation on its webpage as a provider of 'new thinking'<sup>64</sup> – British Telecom and Pfizer. Governmental bodies such as the Scottish Executive, charities and voluntary organisations have commissioned and 'partnered' Scottish Council Foundation projects<sup>65</sup>. The Policy Institute has had about 30 different sponsors over the last two years, of which about half were trusts. Companies, e.g. Holyrood Holdings (Barclay Bros holding company for Telegraph Media Group, **The Scotsman**, the **Spectator** magazine, **Scotland on Sunday** and the **Edinburgh Evening News**), and Stagecoach, the trade association Federation of Small Business and individuals make up the other half. Between 2000 and 2004, the David Hume Institute received financial sponsorship from blue chip corporations including the Royal Bank of Scotland, Lloyds TSB Scotland and Standard Life. The academic background of the David Hume Institute is reflected in the sponsorship by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Edinburgh University's Europa Institute. Some individuals, including a member of the board of the Scottish Council Development and Industry and a **Scotsman** journalist, were also among the financial contributors<sup>66</sup>.

We now turn to the normative standpoint of these think-tanks.

## **GOALS, IDEOLOGIES AND POLICY NETWORKS**

The David Hume Institute and the Policy Institute advocate the free market economy and the 'lean state'. Their style differs significantly. In the case of the David Hume Institute it is more academic than the Policy Institute's sometimes polemical tone, which for example has likened the NHS to Soviet-style

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<sup>64</sup> **BP Challenges**. *Making plans to meet new challenges to maintain Scotland's growth and prosperity*. Online Available from <http://www.bp.com/genericarticle.do?categoryId=2010597&contentId=2015433>. [Accessed 13 February 2005]

<sup>65</sup> **SCF 4**. Online available from <http://www.scottishcouncilfoundation.org/comm.php>. [Accessed 1 June 2004]

<sup>66</sup> **DHI 3**. Online available from <http://www.davidhumeinstitute.com/DHI%20Website/Sponsors/List%20of%20Sponsors.htm>. [Accessed 20 January 2005]

## Scottish Affairs

bureaucracy<sup>67</sup>. Both institutes are multi-issue think-tanks concentrating exclusively on Scotland's economy, public services, environmental and agricultural policies, and modernisation of governance. Both institutes can be categorised as belonging to the neo-liberal privatisation advocacy community<sup>68</sup>. Diane Stone remarks that the David Hume Institute was established as the Adam Smith Institute's Scottish partner<sup>69</sup>. The Policy Institute features some characteristics of a vanity think-tank, being the brainchild and hobbyhorse of a conservative journalist at odds with devolution and the perceived leftist Scottish consensus. It serves **The Scotsman** as a reliable source for neo-liberal leaders and opinion pieces and as a further outlet of the newspaper's views. Whereas the Policy Institute pursues 'classic liberalism'<sup>70</sup>, the David Hume Institute is aware that a hard-line right wing image is 'detrimental to our activities, as our audience is mostly made up of the local professional community of businessmen and politicians [and so the Institute] is very careful not to be seen to be on the right'<sup>71</sup>. This has to do with the perception of Scotland's politics shaped by a 'leftist consensus'<sup>72</sup>, 'egalitarian tendencies'<sup>73</sup> and more 'socially oriented'<sup>74</sup> attitudes compared to the rest of the UK. The Scottish Council Foundation's director considers his institute as part of a broad 'European social democratic community'<sup>75</sup>. However, quite similarly, it wants to confront the alleged 'Scottish consensus'

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<sup>67</sup> PI 1. Online available from <http://www.policyinstitute.info/AllPDFs/MiersMarch04.pdf>. [Accessed 30 July 2004]

<sup>68</sup> Stone 1996, p.22, *op.cit.*; 2003, p. 335, *op.cit.*

<sup>69</sup> Stone, Diane. *Think-tanks and the Privatisation Band-Wagon in: Lovenduski, J. and Stanyer, J. (eds). Contemporary Political Studies Belfast : Political Studies Association, Vol. 1, 1995, p 22; Stone, Diane 2003 op.cit., p. 335*

<sup>70</sup> Miers, Tom 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>71</sup> Main, Brian 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>72</sup> Paterson, L. *Scottish Home Rule: Radical Break or Pragmatic adjustment? In Elcock H. and Keating M. (eds.) Remaking the Union – Devolution and British Politics in the 1990s, Frank Cass Press : London, pp. 86-102, 1998*

<sup>73</sup> McCrane, *op.cit.* p. 21

<sup>74</sup> Nairn, Tom *op.cit.*

<sup>75</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

to say that you're a left think-tank would not really say anything, it would say you're part of the consensus, because Scotland is so heavily centre-left, and you want to challenge the consensus ... so we're not really interested in being aligned in a partisan sense<sup>76</sup>.

Challenging the consensus can only mean popularising pro-market concepts in the public opinion and among decision-makers. In fact, the Foundation embraces the notion that markets and competition are the driving force for holistic societal improvements and that the government's role is to implement the right framework for free markets<sup>77</sup>. The Foundation wants an inclusive society, taking the view that 'a pronounced set of inequalities is bad for everyone, for the economy, for the people in the middle, for the people at the bottom'<sup>78</sup>, as McCormick said.

All three think-tanks address a similar audience and have similar generic aims. They want to broaden decision-makers' and the general public's view on public policy issue and want to "bridge the gap" between academic research and the policy-making community's need for information: 'therefore our target audience is never academia, ... the people we want to see ... are the politicians and the civil servants'<sup>79</sup> or 'current and future opinion formers'<sup>80</sup>, such as journalists, businessmen, civil servants, academics and students. The Scottish Council Foundation explicitly widens the definition of decision-makers and includes senior politicians and businessmen as well as other groups: 'if you are a medical consultant or a head teacher ..., you have to make a decision often without enough evidence, you have to do it now, and you're not waiting around for government'<sup>81</sup>. Thus, governments are by no means the only recipients of the advice industry, although they remain the principal target – yet they are a rare partner. One concerted attempt of the Scottish Council Foundation to influence the Scottish Executive shows this. Shortly before the elections to the Scottish Parliament in 2003, the Scottish Council Foundation's director

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<sup>76</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> SCF 3. Online Press Release 20 February 2004. Online available from <http://www.scottishcouncilfoundation.org/news2.php#inscf>. [Accessed 1 June 2004]

<sup>78</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Main, Brian 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Miers, Tom 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>81</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

published an article in the **Sunday Herald**. Entitled 'Dream Team', the author named a number of persons he wanted to see in charge of governmental responsibilities. McCormick claimed that the 'pool of MSP talent leaves a lot to be desired' and demanded training and more experienced support for senior politicians<sup>82</sup>. It is here where the Scottish Council Foundation wants to help 'adding to the system some more support to develop the individual ..., that's our ability: to say to the government: "here are our results", ... I just think we could do with a bit more expertise in the subjects than we have'<sup>83</sup>. Also political parties were in need of advice, as parliamentary democracy did not favour long-term thinking and political parties 'intellectually don't have the new ideas for policy ten years from now'<sup>84</sup>; think-tanks should take up where party democracy has failed.

Informing the long-term agenda of policy change is at the centre of think-tank activity, and the interviewees stated that short-term electoral politics are seldom dealt with: 'we're not interested in lobbying politicians or worry about what is achievable by politicians; our ideas ... could be almost inconceivable in the current political climate', said Tom Miers<sup>85</sup>. Unlike lobby groups, think-tanks are keen to influence long-term discourses. Think-tanks are also different from university research institutes as they take an 'interested' view on their research fields – their explicit mission is to 'make things happen' over longer periods of time<sup>86</sup>. All three think-tanks are members of a pro-market advocacy community, rely mainly on corporate funding and do not have much cooperation with governmental agencies.

## **THINK-TANKS AND THE POLICY COMMUNITY**

The David Hume Institute does not pursue much continuous national or international research cooperation as such – as a shell organisation this is both difficult and unnecessary – but depends on recruiting individual researchers mostly from the UK to deliver policy papers. The only ongoing institutionalised cooperation is to be found with the Europa Institute of the

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<sup>82</sup> McCormick, J. *Dream Team*, *Sunday Herald*. (27 April 2003).

<sup>83</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>84</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Miers, Tom 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>86</sup> SCF 1, *op.cit.*

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

University of Edinburgh. Although the Policy Institute's Executive Director stated that 'if you collaborate with too many people you risk ... diluting your position', the personal linkage to the Institute for Economic Affairs and his aspirations to mould the Institute on the IEA's model have in the past led to cooperation in the sense of giving talks and publishing papers in cooperation. The Scottish Council Foundation carries out more original research and only occasionally draws from external expertise. It has cooperated on research with various groups, including the Washington D.C Centre for Excellence in Government, the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Public Health Institute of Scotland and the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health<sup>87</sup>. In 2001, the Foundation undertook an interesting move by founding the International Futures Forum. Its purpose was 'to bring international thinking to bear on our work'<sup>88</sup>, i.e. to promote policy ideas derived from policy transfer, with a 'generous grant' from BP<sup>89</sup>. Today, the Forum is independent and tries to bring together 'deep thinkers' in order to 'examine deep structures in the modern global system in its search for a second enlightenment'<sup>90</sup>. It 'explore[s] new ways of operating effectively and responsibly in a world of boundless complexity, a world we no longer fully understand and cannot control'<sup>91</sup>. Based on this view of today's world, the Forum seeks to create a new 'paradigm' by renouncing 'traditional' ways of making sense of the world. How does the Forum view its role in the spread of what it calls the 'Second Enlightenment'? A diagram in one its first reports shows the Forum in a 'dialogue' between a variety of actors<sup>92</sup>. It wants to provide the 'core dialogue thinkers', who disseminate knowledge, specialist information and support to a "tier of converters". These 'convert the insights from the dialogue into practical form and ... disseminate it to a wider audience'. This group is composed of a broad

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<sup>87</sup> SCF 4, *op.cit.*

<sup>88</sup> SCF 1, *op.cit.*

<sup>89</sup> IFF 1. *Partners*. Online available from <http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/partners.php>. [Accessed on 17 of November 2005]

<sup>90</sup> SCF 1, *op.cit.*

<sup>91</sup> IFF 2. Online available from <http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/index.php>. [Accessed 17 February 2005]

<sup>92</sup> IFF 3. *Project Prospectus*. December 2000. Online available from [http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/IFF1\\_prospectus.pdf](http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/IFF1_prospectus.pdf). [Accessed 17 February 2005]

## *Scottish Affairs*

variety of organisations and actors, such as the Department for Trade and Industry, business corporations, artists and writers, the BBC, unspecified ‘social entrepreneurs’, policy makers, the OECD and also BP. Finally, a further group of agents, who will ‘make things happen on the ground’, should use the information provided through the dialogue. The Forum sees its role in a Hayekian tradition of ‘original thinkers’ who inform policy entrepreneurs or ‘second hand dealers in ideas’<sup>93</sup> – i.e. think-tanks<sup>94</sup> – with their theoretical and rather abstract knowledge so that they can utilise it to influence the wider society and policy-makers. The Forum makes ‘no apology for taking seriously Margaret Mead’s conviction that a small group of individuals can change the world’<sup>95</sup>. Rather than being a permanent think-tank, the Forum is an attempt to facilitate an international network of thinkers, businesspeople and policy-makers. Its reports are written in an airy, pseudo-postmodernist language and seem to argue from a highly ‘individualistic’ experience rather than with empirical research. One example: during a case study trip to BP’s Grangemouth refinery – the Forum group also conducted case studies on the ‘learning society in Dundee’<sup>96</sup> – the Forum came up with a ‘vision’ for the future of BP and Grangemouth. When BP asked the Forum how it could combine the challenge of adjusting the plant to global competition bearing in mind the responsibility of BP to all local stakeholders<sup>97</sup>, the Forum proposed to understand the downsizing of the plant, which culminated in the lay-off of about 1000 employees in 2001, as a creative act. Since BP was a ‘different kind of energy company, radiating energy of all kinds – intellectual, physical, creative – into the community’, the sacking of workers equals ‘releasing high quality resources into the community’<sup>98</sup>. This rather interesting take on unemployment and economic restructuring is part of the Forum’s attempt to act

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<sup>93</sup> Hayek, Friedrich A.; **Feulner, Edwin J. and John Blundell. *The Intellectuals and Socialism*. London : Institute of Economic Affairs, 1998**

<sup>94</sup> Desai 1994, *op.cit.*

<sup>95</sup> IFF 3. p. 5, *op.cit.*

<sup>96</sup> IFF 4. *Learning in Dundee. A Second Enlightenment View. Online available from [http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/case\\_encounter\\_dundee.pdf](http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/case_encounter_dundee.pdf). [Accessed 4 March 2005]*

<sup>97</sup> IFF 6. *Health in Fife. Online available from [http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/case\\_encounter\\_falkirk.pdf](http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/case_encounter_falkirk.pdf). [Accessed 4 March 2005]*

<sup>98</sup> *ibid* p.18

### *Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

as a spiritual management consultancy. Another example is the Forum's proposal on health provision for 'deprived individuals and communities in Fife'<sup>99</sup>. It suggests that the NHS-generated 'entitlement culture' should be transformed into a 'gift culture'<sup>100</sup>, which effectively means that only 'the deserving' receive health care.

All think-tanks make considerable efforts to disseminate their research results to a wider public and to decision-makers. The most popular method of reaching the latter are seminars and lectures, which are the loci of networking. They often lead to 'an unusual combination of people who really know the area' with members of other communities whom they otherwise never meet – these events are 'pretty elite, that's where we bring together senior civil servants, politicians, business people, the media'<sup>101</sup>. Politicians are the most difficult decision-makers to attract to these seminars. Uniquely among the think-tanks under scrutiny, the Policy Institute sends its summaries to Scottish schools teaching economics.

To influence the climate of opinion, good press relations are very important. Different assessments of the difficulties of access became obvious during the research. The director of the David Hume Institute finds it difficult to receive media attention with academic output: the 'press generally want you to say something quite sensational, political, and we ... are generally not talking in those terms'<sup>102</sup>. The Policy Institute, to the contrary, has more advanced press contacts, because of the fact that one of its founders is a senior journalist for one of Scotland's conservative broadsheets: '**The Scotsman** is anyway quite keen on exploring classical liberal ideas ..., the editor of **The Scotsman** is quite happy for either me or our authors to have a column'<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> IFF 5. *Entreprise in Falkirk*. Online available from [http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/case\\_encounter\\_fife.pdf](http://www.internationalfuturesforum.co.uk/reports/case_encounter_fife.pdf). [Accessed 4 March 2005]

<sup>100</sup> IFF 6. p. 19, *op.cit.*

<sup>101</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>102</sup> Main, Brian 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>103</sup> Miers, Tom 2004, *op.cit.*

## CONCLUSION

The cases analysed show that Scotland's landscape consists of advocacy think-tanks which promote notions of markets, competition and privatisation. This is hardly surprising as think-tank development in Scotland only started with the third wave of organisational development 'which brought diversification, specialisation, more apparent normative agendas and stronger advocacy of policy analysis', along with smaller sizes of institutes<sup>104</sup>. There are no large-scale universities without students or contract research organisations dealing exclusively with governmental partners. By and large, the Scottish Executive is a rare partner for the three research institutes under scrutiny. Small shell organisations such as the Policy Institute and the David Hume Institute do not have 'reports on the shelves'<sup>105</sup>, with which they could quickly respond to consultations from the Executive. This makes agenda-setting a priority for Scottish think-tanks, rather than supplying decision-makers with policy-proposals. Scottish think-tanks mostly rely on corporate funding and often have the same donors. The newly devolved Scotland not only confronted a community of regional politicians and civil servants with a complex new polity. Also the corporate sector had to learn to direct some of its attention from Westminster to Holyrood. It discovered the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament as recipients of their attempts to make their long-term interests audible to decision makers<sup>106</sup>. As Neil Mitchell<sup>107</sup> argues, corporate power rests not only on the pro-business attitude of the political elite, and on the media, but also on the 'political activities of business including its sponsorships of party conferences, donations to parties, lobbying, PR, the creation and use of front groups, seemingly independent institutes and apparently enlightened business networks'. Think-tanks in Scotland run the risk of becoming a weapon in the armoury of corporate interest and their political orientation does not present us a picture of plurality.

This article did not measure whether the think-tanks under scrutiny were of any significance in any given policy process; however, it is the case that 'the

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<sup>104</sup> Stone & Ullrich 2003, p. VII, *op.cit.*

<sup>105</sup> McCormick, James 2004, *op.cit.*

<sup>106</sup> Eadie, Helen. *Discovering What's Going On. Scottish Left Review*, September/October 2003. p. 8-9

<sup>107</sup> Mitchell, Neil J. *The conspicuous corporation : business, public policy, and representative democracy*. University of Michigan Press : Ann Arbor, 1997

*Scottish Think-Tanks and Policy Networks*

creation of policy networks narrows the range of ideas likely to receive a hearing as it establishes authoritative voices and modes of discourse<sup>108</sup>, Scottish decision-makers can only expect a very limited range of choices from its think-tank landscape.

*May 2006*

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<sup>108</sup> Weir, Margaret. *Ideas and the Politics of Bounded Innovation*. Steinmo, Sven, Thelen, Kathleen, and Frank Longstreth (1992) (eds). ***Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis***. University Press : Cambridge 189-216, p. 210