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Working Papers Series

# The cultural logics in the field of scientific policy advice in France. Analyzing the justifications in the organizational identity of think tanks

Thomas Laux

Décembre 2018

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## Abstract

The number of think tanks in environmental and energy policies has rapidly grown since the 1990s in France. The study analyzes the ways think tanks legitimate themselves and how they qualify their expertise in order to explore the field of scientific policy advice in environmental and energy policies. Based on the analysis of 59 mission statements, the study shows that six of Boltanski and Thévenot's orders of worth are used to gain legitimacy and to characterize the expertise of the think tanks. The inspired and the ecological order of worth take up the greatest share in the mission statements.

## Keywords

Think Tanks, scientific policy advice, justification, environmental policy

Les logiques culturelles dans le champs du conseil scientifique aux politiques publiques en France. Analyse des justifications d'identité organisationnelle des think tanks

## Résumé

Les Think Tanks sur les politiques environnementales et l'énergie se sont multipliés rapidement en France depuis les années 1990. Cette étude analyse les modes de légitimation des think tanks et la manière dont ils nomment leur expertise afin d'envisager le champ du conseil scientifiques aux politiques publiques de l'environnement et de l'énergie. Basée sur l'analyse de l'énoncé de missions de 59 Think tanks, l'étude montre que six des cités (issues de la théorie de la grandeur de Boltanski et Thévenot) sont utilisées pour légitimer et caractériser l'expertise des Think tanks. La cité inspirée et la cité écologique sont les plus partagées dans les déclarations de missions.

## Mots-clefs

Think tanks, consultation scientifique, justification, politique de l'environnement

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## Introduction

Think tanks have gained increasing attention from different fields of sociological research over the last 25 years. From the perspective of the sociology of science, the rise of think tanks is a consequence of a new "mode of knowledge production" (Gibbons et al. 1994, 1; Nowotny et al. 2003, 187). The evolution of the Mode 2 goes along with the coexistence of different types of knowledge production and leads to an increasing importance of think tanks as actors within science and other social spheres (Gibbons et al. 1994, 1; Nowotny et al. 2003, 179).

From the perspective of political sociology, think tanks are interesting phenomena because of their role as advisers in politics and their assumed impact on political decision-making. On the one hand, think tanks are associated with lobbying activities and are thus suspected to use scientific methods and research primarily to pursue their own interests (Weaver 1989, 567)<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, think tanks provide scientifically sound expertise for decision-makers facing unclear risks or new complexities.

The expertise provided by think tanks encompasses both scientific knowledge and its interpretation with regard to the client's demands and to the political context in which

the decision-making takes place (Collins and Evans 2017, 15; Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20-21). As "mediators of knowledge", think tanks produce scientifically based expertise for politics as well as for citizens (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20; Weingart 2006a, 40-41). Nowadays, think tanks constitute a field of scientific policy advice, which grew and established itself further in many countries (Desmoulins 2000; Huyghe 2013; McGann and Weaver 2000; Weingart 2006b, 77). The rise of think tanks as well as the evolution of fields of scientific policy advice correspond with the diagnosed development towards knowledge societies (Lane 1966, 658; Nowotny et al. 2002, 15; Stehr 1994, 10f). The relevance of scientific policy advice is especially high in environmental and energy policies, which are characterized by risks, complexities and uncertainties (Beck 2003, 276; Giddens 1996, 41; Stehr 1994, VIII).

France is an interesting case for the very reason that it does not have a strong think tank tradition (France 2015, 7; Montbrial and Gomart 2014, 65; Murswieck 2006, 598). It is only since the 1990s that more think tanks have emerged while, simultaneously, the demand for scientific policy advice has increased (Murswieck 2006, 590, 595). Despite their greater presence in the last two decades, think tanks are still struggling to find their place in the French political system (Boucher and Royo 2009, 119). Nowadays the field of scientific policy advice in France consists of diverse organizations that provide expertise, such as government-funded, commercial or non-profit oriented organizations (Desmoulins 2000, 141, 154; Huyghe 2013, 72; Montbrial and Gomart 2014, 62; Murswieck 2006, 596). These organizations compete with each other and seek legitimacy. Their need for legitimacy is rooted in at least three grounds: (1) Think tanks provide expertise as their product and, as outlined above, this expertise consists of several, non-standardized elements (scientific knowledge, political knowledge, mediation skills, etc.) (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 16, 20-21; Weingart 2006a, 40-41). Due to the relational character and fuzziness of expertise, think tanks need to refer to disposable and established principles in order to accentuate

1. Oreskes and Conway (2010) show how think tanks in the USA have manipulated the public and political debates to influence political decisions.

their competencies as well as to position themselves in the field of scientific policy advice and towards the clients (Diaz-Bone 2013, 47; Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 16; Pfadenhauer 2006, 569; 2010, 106). (2) There is a lot of skepticism with regard to the influence of think tanks and experts on political decision-making, because it may violate the democratic principles of equality and transparency (Brown et al. 2006, 51-54; Jasanoff 1990, VII). (3) Due to their lacking tradition in France, think tanks do not have a clear and established identity and thus seek to gain recognition (Boucher and Royo 2009, 119; Desmoulins 2009, 16).

The study aims at analyzing the ways think tanks legitimate themselves, their work and how they qualify their expertise in order to explore the field of scientific policy advice. The analysis focusses on the organizational identity of think tanks as a crucial aspect that comprises the organization's core qualities and reflects what the environment expects from the organization (Gioia et al. 2013, 125-126). In this context, the study refers to insights from field analysis (Fligstein and McAdam 2011). A field constitutes an autonomous sphere in which actors interact according to shared purposes and certain rules (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 3). Besides the shared purpose and rules, the field's members refer to disposable cultural logics. The analysis of their organizational identities is a way to capture these cultural logics (Weber 2005, 228). They represent a „tool kit“ (Swidler 1986) for the field's members that they use “to solve different kinds of problems”, such as the task to obtain legitimacy or to state the qualities of their expertise (Swidler 1986, 273; cf. Beckert 2010, 610; Fligstein 1996, 660; Weber 2005, 228).

To capture the different cultural logics in the field of scientific policy advice, the study draws upon the modes of justification developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (1999, 2006). The ways think tanks legitimate themselves, their work and how they qualify their expertise are assigned to different modes of justification for exploring the field of scientific policy advice. By referring to prevailing cultural logics in society, the think tanks

signal specific qualities of their expertise to their potential clients (Beckert 2011, 106; Diaz-Bone 2015, 181).

The explorative study analyzes the mission statements of 59 think tanks in France that work at least partly in environmental and energy policies (see appendix 1)<sup>2</sup>. The following section briefly discusses different understandings of think tanks, introduces the definition used in this study and outlines the relevance of think tanks in France as well as their potential role in environmental and energy policies. Afterwards, section 3 introduces the theoretical concepts used that form the basis of the empirical analysis. Finally, section 4 presents the methodological approach and the empirical results that illustrate the relevant cultural logics in the field of scientific policy advice in environmental and energy policies in France.

## Think tanks as actors in scientific policy advice in France

### Think tanks in France

Expertise and scientific knowledge have always played an important role in French politics. The history of the think tank “France Stratégie” underlines the government's efforts to create an organization providing expertise for scientific policy advice within the state administration. It also exemplifies some of the changes within the field of scientific policy advice in France (Braun 1997, 108; Montbrial and Gomart 2014, 65): Founded as the “Commissariat général du Plan” in 1946 by the French government, its main goals were to plan economic recovery after World War II and to govern industrial politics. In 2006, the Commissariat was re-established as the “Centre d'analyse stratégique” and as a “think tank de l'Etat” (Moreau 2012, 66). It was part of the Premier Ministre's administration and combined different scientific disciplines (France Stratégie 2017). Another reform in 2013 led to the creation of France Stratégie whose mission is to conduct interdisciplinary research on strategic and future developments that are

2. This means that the chosen think tanks also work in other policy areas, such as European politics or economic policy.

relevant for public policy in general (Moreau 2012, 25). Although France Stratégie is government-funded, it is for widely free to choose its research topics (Moreau 2012, 28, 35)<sup>3</sup>.

The history of France Stratégie also illustrates the growing independence of scientific policy advice in France, even when it is government-funded. This development corresponds with the changing relationship between politics and scientific policy advice, that traditionally was characterized as “static” (Campbell and Pedersen 2015, 689) or “technocratic” (Münch 2000, 325) in France. Due to the emergence of new think tanks, more competition among the producers of expertise emerged which involves „value dilemmas and competing orders of worth” (Zanten 2013, 79) that the consumers of scientific policy advice then have to deal with. Today scientific policy advice is mostly interdisciplinary and deals with diverse topics that are relevant for public policy (Braun 1997, 108; Montbrial and Gomart 2014, 65). For 2015, the study identified 59 think tanks working in environmental and energy policies, but not exclusively. Since 1997, the number of think tanks in this field has doubled (see appendix 1) and they gain more and more attention from academia (Boucher and Royo 2009, 97-141; Desmoulins 2000; Huyghe 2013; Montbrial and Gomart 2014; Murswieck 2006, 590, 595).

The French field of scientific policy advice comprises diverse organizations in terms of their organizational features (size, age or financial sources) as well as the topics they are working on. Numerous think tanks have been and still are working in international relations, e.g. the Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), the Centre de recherches internationales (CERI) or the Institut des relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS) (Desmoulins 2000, 161ff; Montbrial and Gomart 2014, 66; Saint-Geours 2016). The growing demand for scientific policy advice in environmental and energy policies caused the increased activity of think tanks in these areas. Furthermore,

new actors entered the scene (such as civil society organizations, parties, companies, industry federations) and started to support the founding of think tanks (Boucher and Royo 2009, 104; Huyghe 2013, 13, 72-75).

This diversity of think tanks demands a suitable definition to analyze the field of scientific policy advice. Think tanks as empirical phenomena and political actors emerged first in the USA (Huyghe 2013, 47-70; Medvetz 2012b, 47-83). Consequently, the definitions in use are mainly based upon the characteristics of think tanks in the USA (Medvetz 2012b, 32; Stone 2013, 63). The following definition by Rich (2004, 11) is just one example: Think tanks are defined “as independent, non-interest-based, non-profit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain, support and influence the policymaking process” (Rich 2004, 11). Especially the criteria of think tanks as ‘independent’ organizations seems problematic, as Medvetz (2012b, 31) or Stone (2013, 65-66) point out, because independence can be captured in different dimensions: as financial, scientific, legal and political independence (Stone 2013, 65-66). In empirical terms, these four dimensions of independence may contradict each other, for example if a government-funded research institute that acts like a think tank enjoys full scientific and political independence. Such an ambiguous case produces difficulties for most existing definitions of think tanks (Medvetz 2012b, 36; Stone 2013, 64). Nonetheless, the definition reflects the “organizational form” (Hsu and Hannan 2005, 477) that is (supposedly) characteristic for think tanks<sup>4</sup>.

This cultural bias in the definition of a think tank is noteworthy because of two reasons: First, the organizational form both describes the typical features of think tanks and determines their characteristics. This is because organizations refer to an organizational form to gain legitimation (Hsu and Hannan 2005, 477). Second, the diversity of think tanks as empirical phenomena is often only poorly captured when the definition is applied to

3. The tasks of France Stratégie include answering questions and inquiries from the government. In these cases, they are not free to choose their research topics.

4. An organizational form “involves an abstraction from the uniqueness of individual organizations and a typification of commonality” (Hsu and Hannan 2005, 477).



countries other than the USA (Stone 2013, 63). A different approach to analyzing think tanks should both capture the “French exception with respect to think tanks” (Desmoulin 2000, 141)<sup>5</sup> and enable comparisons of France with other countries. One possibility to avoid the cultural bias in defining think tanks is to use a basic or “operational” (Medvetz 2012b, 15) definition that allows for identifying think tanks in different institutional settings and that captures their empirical diversity (Medvetz 2012b, 36f).

For the purpose of this study, think tanks are defined by what they do, the production of scientifically based expertise for advice in public policy questions (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20-21; Weingart 2006a, 40-41). Think tanks as organizations are characterized by two aspects that appear contradictory at first sight: Firstly, they are “internally divided by [...] opposing logics” (Medvetz 2012b, 23), because they participate in different spheres, such as politics, science, economics and civil society. The participation in different spheres influences their organizational structure, their strategy and their available resources (Medvetz 2012b, 24; 2012a, 122). As a result, think tanks are situated in-between different spheres and have to mediate between them, e.g. between science and politics (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20; Medvetz 2012b, 14; 2012a, 122-124). This makes them “hybrid organizations” (Jasanoff 1990, 229; Mair et al. 2015; Medvetz 2012b, 135)<sup>6</sup>. Secondly, think tanks constitute themselves the new and growing field of scientific policy advice in which they compete with other think tanks for resources and prestige (Medvetz 2012a, 124-126). Due to the fuzziness of expertise and its relational character, the skepticism towards the

influence of think tanks on political decision-making and their more recent existence in France, think tanks are in need of legitimation and a distinct identity (Medvetz 2012a, 121; Rich 2004, 12; Stone 2013, 74).

### Think tanks as actors in environmental and energy policies

In France 33.8 % of the population are “very much” or “extremely worried” about the climate change (European Social Survey Round 8 Data 2016, Variable D24)<sup>7</sup>. The perceived environmental problems and the climate change challenge not only politics and the economy, but also modern societies as a whole by questioning their way of living, consuming and producing (Méda 2017, 30). There is also growing skepticism about new technological innovations being able to remedy the negative consequences and problems in the ecosystem. This aspect marks a fundamental break with the technological optimism that has characterized the thinking about modern societies for decades (Beck 2003).

In France, there is no consensus about how to deal with environmental problems: On the one hand, radical social and economic changes are proposed, because only a post-growth society is able to deal with environmental problems (Larrère 2018, 123; Méda 2012, 6). On the other hand, more moderate propositions favor a gradual adjustment of the economy and our lifestyles to environmental challenges, e.g. by supporting sustainable development initiatives or the green economy (Larrère 2018, 123-124; Schmid 2018, 40). Because of this, the proposed political actions on environmental issues are inconsistent or even contradicting and thus not so influential (Larrère 2018, 126; Schmid 2018, 41).

The French government does not follow a clear strategy in environmental policy. It founded the ministry of the environment as early as in 1971, but environmental policy has not been always attributed high priority when it comes to political decision-making (Larrère 2018, 126). This is due to the fact that the

5. In comparison to most European countries, the USA seems to be an exception.

6. The definition of think tanks as hybrid organizations comprises of two aspects: Firstly, “hybrid organizations (1) involve a variety of stakeholders, (2) pursue multiple and often conflicting goals and (3) engage in divergent or inconsistent activities” (Mair et al. 2015, 714). Secondly, think tanks’ tasks include “gathering, balancing, and assembling various institutionalized resources” (Medvetz 2012b, 140) to provide scientifically based expertise for advice in public policy questions (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20-21; Weingart 2006a, 40-41).

7. 47.6 % of the interviewees state that they are “somewhat worried” (European Social Survey Round 8 Data 2016, Variable D24).

environmental movement was not as powerful in France as in other countries and did not trigger an overall cultural change in French society (Charbonnier 2018, 140; Larrère 2018, 125; Schmid 2018, 40-41). Furthermore, les Verts did not establish themselves in the party landscape. Only in 1997, when they entered French government, did they succeed in promoting environmental policy for a short period (Schmitt 2005, 335). Consequently, existing progress in environmental policy can be (at least partly) ascribed to European and global regulations (Charbonnier 2018, 141; Schmid 2018, 39). For example, INERIS and ADEME, two government-funded think tanks, were founded in the aftermath of the United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992) (see appendix 1) (Schmitt 2005, 336).

Facing climate change and environmental problems, the question arises as to the possibility of the "ecological integration" (Schimank 2016) of modern societies as functionally differentiated societies<sup>8</sup>. Functional differentiation means that particular macrosociological spheres gain "relative freedom from the overall society and therefore the chance to develop unique institutionalized value orientations" (Lepsius 2017, 71). Ecological integration as a task arose from the perception that the survival of modern societies fundamentally depends on a functioning ecosystem, which, for example, restricts the use of natural resources and the pollution of nature (Schimank 2005, 260). Ecological integration means that ecological principles, such as nature conservation or sustainability, are integrated into each value sphere and partly guide their actions (Schimank 2016, 63). For example, economy's "pursuit of profits as the guiding value of economic activities" (Schimank 2015, 418) must also take ecological aspects into account. In this understanding ecological integration undermines (to a certain degree) the autonomy of

the value spheres and is thus a contentious process (Lepsius 2017, 71; Schimank 2016, 62).

Ecological integration as an empirical phenomenon is not wishful thinking. Ecological principles and aspects gained more and more attention in politics, law, economy, science, art and education. A striking example is the institutionalization of the Charte de l'environnement in the preamble of the French constitution in 2005, which established environmental protection as a guiding principle for politics and law. Such empirical evidence leads to the question about the potential driving forces and the relevant actors for ecological integration.

Especially social movements, political parties and the media are crucial for putting environmental problems onto the public agenda and appeal to politics and law to solve these problems (Mormont and Dasnoy 1995, 49; Schimank 2016, 64-65). By doing so, environmental problems become social problems (Beck 2003, 108). Science's (possible) role in the process of ecological integration deserves a closer examination: Firstly, scientific research drew and still draws attention towards environmental problems and climate change (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 119). Scientists are crucial actors when it comes to pointing out the necessities and possibilities for a closer ecological integration of modern societies (Collins and Evans 2017, 4; Méda 2012, 10; Mormont and Dasnoy 1995, 59). But in France, scientific research on climate change and environmental issues has gained little attention for quite a long time, which lead to a low visibility of their results and to only few appearances of environmental scientists in the media (Mormont and Dasnoy 1995, 54). Recently, science's role has changed. Scientific experts on climate change seem now to be more influential and receive more attention from the public and politics, although environmental thinking in France does not share a common vision (Schmid 2018, 43). Secondly, science's role for political decision-making is not easy to define: scientific results are often contested, even among scientists, and science cannot and should not make decisions instead of political or legal institutions (Beck 2003, 276;

8. Following Max Weber (1988, 536-573), modern societies consist of different but equally ranked "value spheres" that fulfill different functions for society (Schimank 2015, 415-416). Each value sphere is a "sub-universe of meaning constituted by the reign of a particular guiding value – such as truth in science or justice in the law – which serves as a self-referential evaluative orientation of action" (Schimank 2015, 415).

Collins and Evans 2017, 145; Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 185)<sup>9</sup>. hirdly, science and politics follow different guiding values (truth vs. the “production of collectively binding decisions” (Schimank 2015, 421)), which draws the attention to the intersection of these spheres.

The intersection in-between these spheres is precisely the place where think tanks as hybrid organizations operate (Stehr 2003, 212). Because of their participation in different spheres, think tanks are potentially sensitive to different guiding values, search for possible compromises and mediate between the spheres. Consequently, their expertise is a product of several competencies: scientific knowledge, knowledge about the political possibilities and restrictions, their client’s demands and mediation skills (Collins and Evans 2017, 15; Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20-21; Weingart 2006a, 40-41).

This does not mean that think tanks always and automatically succeed in providing their expertise to their clients and the public. Advising is a contingent process that depends on numerous aspects, which need to be analyzed very closely (Pielke 2007). Due to their position and their organization, think tanks are an interesting object of research for investigating the process of ecological integration. They may bridge the gaps between the value spheres and may undermine their autonomy, or they may use their expertise to discredit scientific findings on climate change (Oreskes and Conway 2010). Strategies to discredit scientific expertise on environmental issues by counter-expertise can also be observed in France (Schmid 2018, 43). To allow for a deeper understanding of the role of think tanks in the process of ecological integration, this study offers insights into the principles guiding their expertise in environmental and energy policies.

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9. This is why Collins and Evans (2017, 17-18) propose to distinguish between a “technical phase” in which experts provide expertise on political questions and a “political phase” in which the persons and institutions in charge make their decision on the basis of the expertise and considering also other aspects.

## Theoretical concepts

### Analyzing organizational identities

Organizations follow goals or commit themselves to certain values “to cultivate an identity of its own” (Kühl 2016, 14). These goals are part of their identity, they derive from society and refer to prevalent value orientations, e.g. that a research institute’s goal is to discover scientific findings and truth (Schimank 2015, 415). The external influences on an organization’s goals and purposes result from both regulations and laws as well as “meaning systems” that guide their actions (Scott 1995, 57-59). Whereas regulations and laws define the permissible actions of organizations directly, the meaning systems form the identity of organizations and thus have an indirect effect (Scott 1995, 61). Besides, organizations pick up and incorporate certain aspects from a meaning system to gain legitimation (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 340).

Despite all external influences, a focal characteristic of organizations is their ability to decide autonomously about their goals, their hierarchy and their members. Organizations need autonomy to meet their purposes and to improve their results, e.g. recruiting competent staff with regard to their specific requirements or creating innovative organizational structures (Kühl 2016, 10-15). Consequently, the task for organizations is to find a balance between external demands and pressures and their “decision-making autonomy” (Kühl 2016, 14). This task gets even more complicated for hybrid organizations, such as think tanks, because different value orientations clash within such organizations and compromises have to be found in order to meet the organization’s purpose (Lepsius 2017, 38-39; Mair et al. 2015, 714).

Identity is a central part of each organization because it represents its goals and purposes and guides the actions of its members. It also reflects the environment’s demands and expectations to the organizations, e.g. from competitors, clients or a supervising authority (Gioia et al. 2013, 125-126; Hsu and Hannan 2005, 476). More concretely, organizational identity comprises the qualities and characteristics of the organization and their

products that are “core, enduring, and distinctive” (Albert and Whetten 1985, 292; cf. Gioia et al. 2013, 125). The identity stabilizes the organization and positions the organization as an actor within a field (Gioia et al. 2013, 132).

Scrutinizing organizational identities makes it possible to capture the entirety of organizations and to draw conclusions about the field’s structures within which the organizations operate and which are relevant for them (Fligstein 1996, 657; Hoffman 2001, 136). The analysis of mission statements is a common way of capturing organizational identities, because they contain the goals and purposes of the organization as well as the distinctive features of their products (cf. Kosmützky and Krücken 2015, 139-140; Philipps 2013). Furthermore, by analyzing the identity of hybrid organizations, we can see how the think tanks refer to the different claims coming from different spheres in which they participate and are thus important for gaining or maintaining legitimacy (cf. Mair et al. 2015).

### Field analysis

To describe the context in which organizations act and which affects their identity, this study uses field analysis. Fields are „a meso-level social order where actors (who can be individual or collective) interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field’s rules“ (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 3). The focus of this study is on the field of scientific policy advice in environmental and energy policies, which evolved in France over the past decades (Desmoulins 2000; Huyghe 2013).

Generally, field analysis allows for exploring the interplay between networks, institutions and cultural logics in which actors are embedded as well as the relations between the organizational features of the field’s members, their resources and their position within the field (Beckert 2010, 605; Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 3). Particularly, this study aims at exploring the different cultural logics within the field used by its members to legitimate themselves.

Field analysis was chosen here because fields are no closed entities and the approach offers the opportunity to focus on the intersection between different spheres where think tanks as hybrid organizations are situated (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 3). Furthermore, an analysis of the field of scientific policy advice offers a relational perspective on think tanks as producers of expertise, which corresponds with their intermediary position between the political decision-makers and the citizens (as laymen) (Pfadenhauer 2010, 105).

### Sociology of Justification

Action as well as a field’s order or the way of coordinating in an organization rest upon conventions that legitimate and guide it (Blok 2013, 495; Thévenot 2001, 405). With this principle in mind, Boltanski and Thévenot identify eight sets of conventions which are each “built around an order of worth” (Blok 2013, 495; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 74; Diaz-Bone 2015, 152-153), e.g. the “civic world” constitutes an order of worth according to which the “collective interest” is the highest “common good” and “particular interests” are insignificant (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 371)<sup>10</sup>. The different orders of worth become apparent in “critical moments“, when “something does not work” or the legitimation of an order is questioned due to a competing order (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 359-360). In that case, the orders of worth serve as an analytical tool for capturing the different articulated claims for legitimation. To evaluate the worth of a matter or a being as well as to find an agreement in such situations, a “principle of equivalence” is necessary as a framework to compare the claims based on different orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 361-363). One way to end such critical moments is to find a compromise that encompasses different “modes of evaluation”. Such compromises are also potential starting points for a new order of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 283).

10. Apart from “the civic world”, this approach identifies “the world of inspiration”, “the domestic world“, “the world of renown”, “the market world”, “the industrial world”, “the connexionist world” and “the green world” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Diaz-Bone 2015, 152-153; Thévenot et al. 2011).

The orders of worth also serve as a “typology of cultural logics” for analyzing the coordination in fields and in organizations (Diaz-Bone 2013, 49; 2015, 181; Thévenot 2001). Applied to fields and organizations, the logics represent “legitimate principles” for evaluating the field’s structure and its members (Diaz-Bone 2013, 49; Thévenot 2001, 409). Both organizations and fields encompass different logics and the organizations have “to cope with critical tensions between different orders of worth” (Thévenot 2001, 410). Consequently, organizations position themselves by referring to established logics and in relation to the other field members (Diaz-Bone 2013, 49; Thévenot 2001, 418).

The empirical analysis applies the orders of worth as an analytical framework that captures the different logics and claims from the different spheres in which the think tanks participate (see chapter 4). This approach allows us to analyze systematically the field of scientific policy advice in France as a first step to arriving at a cross-country comparative perspective.

## Analysis

### Methodological approach and empirical implementation

The aim of the analysis is to identify the cultural logics think tanks use to legitimate themselves and to characterize their expertise. Inquiring the mission statements of think tanks provides insights into the cultural order of the field of scientific policy advice in environmental and energy policies in France.

The study applies a content analysis to examine the 59 mission statements dating from the year 2015<sup>11</sup>. Firstly, the content analysis aims at identifying the justifications of think tanks as well as the qualities they use to describe their work and their expertise. The identified codes summarize the statements and structure them according to different

meanings. The second step is assigning the codes to Boltanski and Thévenot’s orders of worth as a framework. This follows a mainly deductive logic because the orders of worth structure the coding scheme. Nevertheless, the coding scheme is open to include new codes which seem to be important (Mayring 2014, 104).

The units of analysis are sentences or bullet points in the mission statements. In every single unit of analysis, each code is assigned only once so as to calculate the “emphasis” of each code in relation to the sum of all codes within a mission statement (Weber 2005, 241)<sup>12</sup>. Hence, the analysis discovers the “relative prevalence of different elements in an actor’s toolkit-in-use” (Weber 2005, 242). This approach respects the fact that organizations follow several logics which are not necessarily coherent (Weber 2005, 228). By assigning the codes to the orders of worth and by summarizing them, the analysis reveals the “relative emphasis” of the different orders of worth in the field (Weber 2005, 241).

As is shown in table 1, the majority of the codes can easily be assigned to the orders of worth, e.g. democracy and equality are essential qualities of the civic order, just as ecology and sustainability belong to the green order (Diaz-Bone 2015, 152-153)<sup>13</sup>. Other statements are more difficult to classify, mainly because they deal with the way think tanks produce their expertise. Scientific research as the basis for the expertise refers to different orders of worth: Numerous mission statements mention «fundamental research» as a code to characterize their work. According to a definition of the OECD, fundamental research is characterized as «experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or

11. The language of the mission statements is either French or English. The case selection is based upon numerous publications about think tanks in France (e.g. Boucher and Royo 2009; Huyghe 2013; McGann 2016; Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur de la Recherche et de l’Innovation 2017) as well as the advice of field experts. Nevertheless, it is possible that the study does not completely cover all the relevant think tanks working in this field.

12. „The measure of emphasis is the pervasiveness with which an element was used throughout a document” (Weber 2005, 241).

13. Diaz-Bone (2015, 152-153) systemized the orders of worth so as to apply them to the analysis of markets and fields. Following this systematization, the codes identified in the analysis rest upon the guiding principles of the orders of worth and the qualities that are typical of their products.

use in view» (OECD 1994, 50)<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, the defining aspect of fundamental research is the lack of purpose despite the generation of new knowledge. Fundamental research therefore belongs to the world of inspiration, because creativity, originality and purposelessness are core qualities that characterizes this kind of work (Boltanski and Thévenot 2014, 225; Diaz-Bone 2015, 145, 152; Gibbons et al. 1994, 9). In contrast, the code «applied research» is assigned to the industrial world because it is «directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective» (OECD 1994, 51)<sup>15</sup>. This refers to the aspect of functionality that both characterizes products with regard to the industrial order and the motives for conducting applied research (Diaz-Bone 2015, 152; Godin 2003, 69; Kaldewey 2013, 421). The different assignments of fundamental and applied research do not imply that the author follows the concept of the «linear model of science» (Pielke 2007, 76) in which fundamental and applied research are clearly separable (Godin 2003, 71; Pielke 2007, 76-96; Weingart 2003, 107-108)<sup>16</sup>. However, the terms fundamental and applied research imply different meanings (as is shown in the definitions) and were chosen deliberately by the think tanks to describe their work<sup>17</sup>. Because of their different meanings, it is appropriate to assign the terms fundamental and applied research to different orders of worth.

The mentioning of «know-how» and «innovation» to specify the working method of think

tanks has been classified as part of the world of inspiration. Whereas know-how refers to the think tanks' experience and skills, innovation – or rather: the evidence of how innovative their work is – is a quality that refers to the aspects of creativity and originality (Boltanski and Thévenot 2014, 225; Diaz-Bone 2015, 145, 152; Gibbons et al. 1994, 9). The code «independence» is tackled in a quite similar way. Ideological or political independence is a precondition for creativity and is thus assigned to the inspired order of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2014, 225).

The code «economic sustainability» cannot be assigned to one single order of worth because it represents a compromise between the industrial and the green order, which brings together different logics (Boltanski and Thévenot 2014, 367). It is the only noticeable compromise in the mission statements. As far as its meaning is concerned, it resembles ubiquitous compromises like «green economy» which have gained prominence during the past few years (Blok 2013, 500; Caradonna 2016, 208).

The content analysis identified 16 codes in the mission statements of the 59 think tanks (see table 1). Table 1 also illustrates the codes by showing some examples from the mission statements and reports the relative share of each code in all analyzed mission statements.

14. The OECD's definition (1994, 50) uses the term «basic research» instead of «fundamental research». Godin (2003, 57) shows that these terms are synonyms. The definition of the OECD reflects the common understanding of fundamental research, despite the divergent existing meanings of fundamental research in the humanities, the social or the natural sciences.

15. This refers to a definition of applied research by the OECD: «Applied research is also original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective» (OECD 1994, 51). Again, this definition of the OECD reflects the common understanding of applied research, despite its divergent existing meanings in the humanities, the social or the natural sciences.

16. Instead, it seems plausible that fundamental and applied research «can be seen as complementary» (Godin 2003, 71; cf. Weingart 2003, 108).

17. The differentiation between «Mode 1» and «Mode 2» also postulates that there are different kinds of doing science (Gibbons et al. 1994, 2-3).

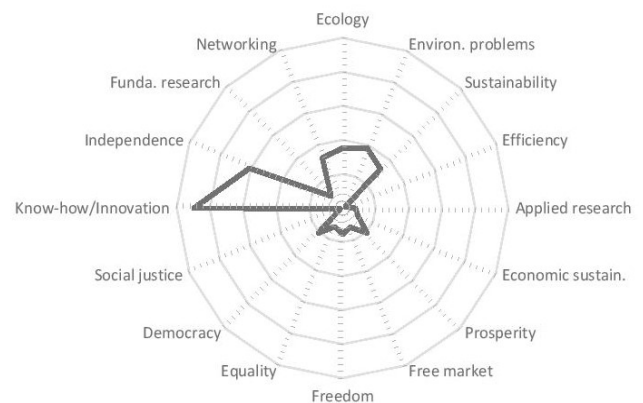
Table 1: Codes and the orders of worth

Code	Aims and qualities of think tanks and their products (examples from the mission statements)	Order of worth	Share (in %)
Ecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>la transition écologique</li> <li>the preservation of biodiversity</li> </ul>	Green order	8.80
Environmental problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tackling climate change</li> <li>fighting against environmental risks</li> </ul>	Green order	9.56
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>commitment to sustainability</li> <li>le développement durable</li> </ul>	Green order	8.08
Efficiency (economic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promotion of efficiency, e.g. energy efficiency</li> </ul>	Industrial order	0.45
Applied research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>penser pour agir</li> <li>carry out applied research</li> </ul>	Industrial order	1.91
Economic sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promoting economic sustainability, e.g. sustainable mobility etc.</li> </ul>	Compromise between green and industrial order	2.43
Economic prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fostering economic growth</li> <li>creating jobs</li> </ul>	Market order	5.21
Free market economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>en faveur de la liberté économique</li> <li>promoting entrepreneurial freedom</li> </ul>	Market order	3.06
Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relying on individual responsibility</li> <li>freedom and responsibility</li> </ul>	Market order	3.85
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>solidarity</li> <li>égalité</li> </ul>	Civic order	2.97
Democracy (and participation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribuer à l'animation du débat démocratique</li> <li>participation civique</li> </ul>	Civic order	5.21
Social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pour un monde équitable</li> </ul>	Civic order	0.34
Know-how/Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>centre of expertise</li> <li>imagining innovative solutions</li> </ul>	Inspired order	22.40
Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>un think-tank indépendant</li> </ul>	Inspired order	15.21
Fundamental research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>carry out fundamental research</li> </ul>	Inspired order	2.47
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>platform for deliberation and debate</li> <li>bringing-together experts and decision-makers</li> </ul>	Connexionist order	7.98

Source: Own elaboration.

## Results

The content analysis of the 59 mission statements illustrates the relative share of each code in relation to all identified codes (see figure 1) and the relative share of a specific order of worth in relation to all orders of worth mentioned (see figure 2) (cf. Kern and Nam 2013). By doing so, the results highlight the “relative emphasis” of the codes and the orders of worth in the field of scientific policy advice in France (Weber 2005, 241).



**Figure 1:** Relative share of each code in relation to all codes in the 59 mission statements (the interval between the axes represents 5%). Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the emphasis of the single codes in the mission statements (see figure 1), several findings are remarkable: “Know-how/Innovation” accounts for the biggest share of all codes. By emphasizing their skills and their innovative approaches, the think tanks demonstrate their technical knowledge for providing reliable knowledge and for applying scientific methods as the basis of their expertise. Accordingly, the emphasis on “independence” underlines that the expertise is not biased and relies only on scientific standards. In this view, “independence” relates closely to “universalism” as a core value of science (Merton 1968, 607-610). As discussed before, independence is also a crucial characteristic of the organizational form of think tanks (see chapter 2.1). This might also stimulate the references to “independence” in the mission statements.

“Ecology”, “environmental problems” and “sustainability” are codes that also occur frequently in the mission statements. This is not surprising and shows an at least moderate

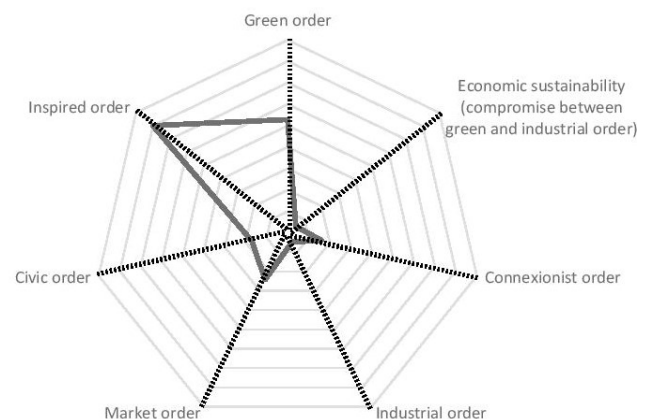
commitment of the think tanks in the field to ecological thinking. It is more surprising that “sustainability” holds only a mediocre share (8.08%) in spite of being an “ubiquitous” “buzzword” that has spread globally and occurs in different settings (Caradonna 2016, 1-3; cf. Neckel 2017, 46). Regarding this aspect, France somehow seems to be an exception to the rule.

The emphasis of “networking” is logical due to the role of think tanks as hybrid organizations. Nonetheless, it is not emphasized that strong (7.98%), as if it is a crucial characteristic. The mission statements also mention other codes as guiding principles for the work of think tanks, e.g. “prosperity”, “democracy”, “freedom”, “free market economy” etc., though not to a significant extent. For interpreting the meaning and the emphasis of these codes, the orders of worth offer a fruitful analytical framework.

Figure 2 illustrates the relative share of each order of worth represented in the think tanks’ mission statements<sup>18</sup>. The inspired order dominates the field of scientific policy advice in France with a share of 40.08%, followed by the green order with 26.44%. The market order accounts for 12.12% of the legitimations in the mission statements of the think tanks, the civic order for 8.52% and the connexionist order for 7.98%. The industrial order (2.36%) plays a marginal role only, but it is also present in the code “economic sustainability” that forms a compromise between the industrial and the green order of worth (Blok 2013, 500). “Economic sustainability” as a compromise is itself used only rarely in the missions statements for legitimizing the work of the think tanks and for qualifying their work (2.43%).

The marginal share of “economic sustainability” as the only identified compromise between two orders of worth represents the missing connection between two separate perspectives in environmental and energy policies so far<sup>19</sup>. Generally, “economic sus-

tainability” is part of a thinking that seeks to change the ways of producing and consuming towards an “economy that runs on renewable energy and does not support growth that would impair the ability of humans and other organisms to live in perpetuity on the Earth” (Caradonna 2016, 5). Such a vision promotes sustainability as the guiding principle to “redefine our society” in total, which also encompasses all social spheres (Caradonna 2016, 5; cf. Larrère 2018, 123; Neckel 2017, 47). This strongly resembles the concept of ecological integration as a reaction to environmental problems and climate change.



**Figure 2:** Relative share of each order of worth in relation to the other mentioned orders of worth in the 59 mission statements (the interval between the axes represents 5%). Source: Own elaboration.

The inspired order of worth provides the biggest applied repertoire for the legitimation of think tanks in the field. By referring to the inspired order of worth, think tanks in France follow the tradition of assessing scientific skills as a fundamental element of public administration and its government officials. By emphasizing their skills and the independence of their expertise, the think tanks present themselves as competent, neutral and creative experts for advising public policy in questions of environmental and energy policies. Again, the emphasis on the inspired order may also reflect the relevance of the organizational form of think tanks that stresses independence as a crucial feature (see chapter 2.1).

It is not surprising that the green order of worth is referred to in the field of scientific policy advice, even though ecological (Blok 2013, 500; Diaz-Bone 2015, 149).

18. “The world of renown” and “the domestic world” were not discovered in the mission statements (see table 1).

19. Due to their different principles and aims, compromises between the green and the industrial order of worth are not easily compatible and thus fragile (Blok



principles could be expected to assume an even bigger role. Instead of becoming a „masterframe“ (Eder 1996, 204) or an “ideal” (Neckel 2017, 46-47) for organizations and society, ecology and sustainability are applied as criteria for legitimating think tanks and their expertise on an average level only. The rather moderate relevance of the green order of worth might be ascribed to the rather weak social and political representation of ecological thinking in France.

The emphasis of the market order of worth is only weak in the field of scientific policy advice. Stimulating competition and prosperity as well as fostering freedom are not among the principles think tanks use frequently to legitimate themselves and their work. This is probably due to the fact that fundamental contradictions exist between environmental policy and market economy, which prevent the market order of worth to gain more importance in the field. Consequently, compromises including the market order of worth, such as “green capitalism” (Neckel 2017, 50) or other visions have not yet entered the field of scientific policy advice in environmental and energy policies in France.

The connexionist order is only infrequently used for qualifying the expertise and for gaining legitimacy. Activities such as assembling experts or building networks between different spheres do not receive much attention in the mission statements, even though think tanks as hybrid organizations participate in different spheres and (supposedly) mediate between them.

Furthermore, the think tanks refer only rarely to the civic order of worth in their mission statements. The low relative emphasis of equality, social justice and democracy illustrates a separation between environmental and energy issues on the one side and social questions on the other side. Environmental and energy policies seem to be depoliticized in France, although environmental and energy issues are strongly connected to social questions. The marginal relevance of the civic order of worth also fits the dominance of the inspired order of worth with its emphasis on independence and neutral expertise.

The industrial order of worth hardly has any relevance in the field of scientific policy advice. The think tanks simply do not legitimate themselves by referring to efficiency and applicability.

## Conclusion

The aims of this study were to explore and to identify the cultural logics in this field of scientific policy advice in France that guide the actions of think tanks and characterize their expertise. By referring to the cultural logics, the think tanks both legitimate themselves and signal specific qualities of their expertise to their potential clients. To describe the relevant cultural logics, the study applied the orders of worth by Boltanski and Thévenot as an analytical framework.

The analysis of the mission statements reveals that the think tanks refer to six orders of worth to legitimate themselves and to qualify their expertise. In this context, the inspired and the ecological order gain particular attention: the reference to the inspired order of worth resembles the roles of a “pure scientist” or a “science arbiter”. These roles stand for a clear separation between scientific research and political decision-making (Pielke 2007, 15-16). Thus the think tanks provide only neutral scientific expertise and information for politics without undermining politics’ task to seek for “collectively binding decisions” by democratic means (Schimank 2015, 421; cf. Collins and Evans 2017, 145).

Although the inspired order of worth captures the greatest share of legitimations in the mission statements, the references to the other orders of worth illustrate some other qualities of the think tanks’ expertise. The importance of the green order of worth is not surprising, and by referring to ecology and sustainability the think tanks may succeed in promoting ecological thinking further in public administration and in political decision-making in France (Schmid 2018, 43). Nonetheless, the role of think tanks in ecological integration is hard to define because the green order of worth is not dominant as the diagnosis of a “sustainability society” (Neckel 2017) in the making may predict.

The analysis identified only one compromise between the orders of worth. This is remarkable, because one could have expected think tanks as hybrid organizations to act as mediators between different spheres and therefore also combine different cultural logics (Grundmann and Stehr 2012, 20; Stehr 2003, 212). Finding compromises, especially between the green order and the other orders of worth, is elementary for proceeding in ecological integration.

The identification of different cultural logics in the field of scientific policy advice in France is just the first step when it comes to analyzing the field's structure. In a next step, the cultural logics built the base for cross-country comparisons and they can be applied to analyze the positions of the think tanks within the field and to explain these positions by referring to structural aspects.

## Appendix

**Appendix 1:** List of think tanks working in the fields of environmental and energy policy in France (with founding year)

	Name	Founding year
1	French Institute of International Relations (IFRI)	1979
2	Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI)	2001
3	Terra Nova	2008
4	Fondation pour l'Innovation Politique (Fondapol)	2004
5	GenerationLibre	2013
6	Fondation Jean-Jaurès	1992
7	Institut des Relations Internationales et Stratégiques (IRIS)	1991
8	Institut Choiseul for International Politics and Geoeconomics	1997
9	Institut économique Molinari	2003
10	La Fondation iFrap	1985
11	Europartenaaires	1994
12	Fondation Copernic	1998
13	Fondation Robert Schuman	1991
14	Fondation Ecologique	2013
15	Institut Montaigne	2000
16	Institut des recherches économiques et fiscales (IREF)	2002
17	Centre d'Études Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales (CEPII)	1978
18	Jacques Delors Institute	1996
19	La Fabrique écologique	2013
20	La FING (Fondation Internet nouvelle génération)	2000
21	Fondation Concorde	1997
22	Fondation Nicolas Hulot / Fondation pour la nature et pour l'homme	1990
23	Institut de Prospective du Monde Méditerranéen (IPEMED)	2006
24	Saf agr'idées	2014
25	The Shift Project	2010
26	France Stratégie	1946
27	European Climate Foundation	2008
28	Le club des juristes	2007
29	Confrontations Europe	1991
30	La fabrique de la cité	2010
31	Fondation pour l'agriculture et la ruralité dans le monde (FARM)	2005
32	Institut Kervegan	2000
33	Institut Thomas More	2004
34	Novo Ideo	2009
35	L'Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques (OFCE)	1981
36	Sol et civilisation	1991
37	Fondation Res Publica	2005
38	Institute of Ecology and Environment (INEE)	1939
39	Agence de l'environnement et de la maîtrise de l'énergie (ADEME)	1991
40	Agence nationale de gestion des déchets radioactifs (ANDRA)	1979
41	Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières (BRGM)	1959
42	Commissariat à l'énergie atomique et aux énergies alternatives (C.E.A.)	1945
43	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (IFREMER)	1984
44	IFP Energies nouvelles (IFPEN)	1944
45	Institut national de l'environnement industriel et des risques (INERIS)	1990
46	Institut de radioprotection et de sûreté nucléaire (I.R.S.N.)	2002
47	Institut national de recherche en sciences et technologies pour l'environnement et l'agriculture (IRESTEA)	1981
48	Institut Veblen	2010
49	Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD)	1984
50	L'Institut français des sciences et technologies des transports, de l'aménagement et des réseaux (L'IFSTTAR)	2011
51	Institut national de la recherche agronomique (INRA)	1946

52	Institut de Recherche pour le Développement France (IRD)	1943
53	Fondation pour la recherche sur la biodiversité	2008
54	Futuribles	1974
55	Institut Momentum	2011
56	Centre international de recherche sur l'environnement et le développement (CIRED)	1973
57	Centre d'études et d'expertise sur les risques, l'environnement, la mobilité et l'aménagement (CEREMA)	1945
58	Centre interprofessionnel technique d'études de la pollution atmosphérique (CITEPA)	1961
59	Association pour la prévention de la pollution atmosphérique (APPA)	1958

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