

THE ROLE OF SPANISH THINK TANKS/ LABORATORIES OF IDEAS IN SHAPING REFORM POLICIES

MANUEL PÉREZ YRUELA

THINK TANKS ARE PART OF KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

- Think tanks form part of the institutional networks that comprise knowledge society.
- **The institutional framework of knowledge society is, in itself, a large think tank.**
- It is not easy to delimit think tanks from among all of the institutions that make up knowledge society.
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- **Think tanks should conduct their activity in accordance with the rules of conduct governing knowledge production if their activity is to be legitimate and credible.**

- **To combat the problem of credibility, we must turn to the position of the sociologist Max Weber regarding the influence of values on social research.**
- **Researchers must choose their research topics in accordance with their values.**
- **Once these topics have been chosen and set out, research must be conducted in a rigorous manner, respecting the methodological rules shared by the scientific community.**

THINK TANKS IN SPAIN: ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Spain's experience in laboratories of ideas or think tanks is recent for two reasons:

- **The Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) did not favour this type of institutions.**
- **Spain has maintained a complex and problematic relationship with modern rational, secular and analytical thought.**

- **Institutions resembling think tanks were created under the Franco regime.**
- **One of the historical legacies to which Franco's regime contributed was the creation of departments in the core of the public administration, specialised in the study and analysis of the situation and problems of the competences of different ministerial departments.**

INSTITUTE FOR AGROSOCIAL STUDIES

Created in 1947, this institute has since disappeared. Dedicated to the study of the social situation of rural society in Spain, the study of proposals on agricultural development and rural territorial planning.

CENTRE FOR POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL STUDIES (CEPC)

Founded in 1939 with the name of Institute for Political Studies

The most important activities conducted by this centre are: “to develop and promote the study and research of the nature, evolution and function of social, political, constitutional and administrative systems...”

A number of experts in constitutional law who most influenced the interpretation of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 have worked at this centre. The CEPC is a national reference in matters related to political science and constitutional law

CENTRE FOR SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH (CIS)

Founded in 1963 with the name of Public Opinion Institute

The functions of the CIS include “... planning, designing and conducting studies which contribute to the scientific analysis of Spanish society...”

The CIS is the most important centre in Spain committed to public opinion research and is a national reference on electoral studies. Since its creation, the CIS has been a privileged witness to the far-reaching changes taking place in Spain and has contributed, through more than 1600 public opinion polls, to providing better insight into the country’s social and political reality over the last quarter of a century.

FOUNDATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL STUDIES AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY (FOESSA)

Some private think tanks were also created at that time. Among them, the FOESSA Foundation, which depends on the Catholic Church and is committed to attending to the needs of poor and excluded citizens. The FOESSA Foundation has issued several reports on Spanish society (six since 1967) focusing on social inequality, social problems, social policy and social services.

THINK TANKS IN THE LAST THIRTY YEARS

Since the restoration of democracy in Spain, the above public think tanks have become consolidated institutions, while other new ones have been created. There are currently 55 public foundations in Spain, some of which can be considered think tanks.

Examples of public foundations/thin tanks:

- Centre for Monetary and Financial Studies (Centro de Estudios Monetarios y Financieros).
- Observatory for Industrial Technology Foresight (Observatorio de Prospectiva Tecnológica Industrial).
- Foundation for Occupational Risk Prevention (Fundación para la Prevención de Riesgos Laborales).
- International and Ibero-American Foundation of Public Administration and Policies (FIIAPP). (Fundación Internacional y para Iberoamérica de Administración y Políticas Públicas).
- Spanish Science and Technology Foundation (FECYT). Fundación Española para la Ciencia y la Tecnología.
- Institute for Fiscal Studies (Instituto de Estudios Fiscales)

Examples of foundations/think tanks created under public-private partnerships:

- The Fundación COTEC for Technological Innovation, which I will refer to below.
- The Fundación Real Instituto Elcano (Elcano Royal Institute), which is dedicated to studying the interests of Spain and of Spanish people in international affairs. The Elcano Institute defines itself as “a non-partisan institution, which by means of multidisciplinary methods and approaches, seeks to develop political and social proposals having a practical application”.

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

- Important reforms have been undertaken in the last thirty years.
- Spain has followed the model of other countries in its same sphere with consolidated R&D&I systems.
- The concept behind these reforms was not developed by any specific think tank. In part, this concept was developed by the sectoral groups in charge of preparing the electoral programme with which the Socialist party won the 1982 elections.

The **COTEC Foundation for Technological Innovation** is the most well-known one. It has eighty-five public and private members. COTEC's mission is to promote technological innovation in business and society in general.

The **CYD Foundation (Foundation for Knowledge and Development)** was created at the end of 2002. This foundation has as its aim to analyse and promote the contribution of universities to development, foment entrepreneurial culture among Spanish society and further ties between universities and business. The CYD Foundation aspires to consolidate itself as a reflection group (think tank).

The **Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, FECYT** is a public foundation. Its mission is to provide an on-going and flexible service to the Spanish system of science-technology-society by identifying opportunities and needs and proposing courses of action

These think tanks carry out an important role:

- They have contributed to raising awareness among Spanish society of the importance of R&D&I.
- They have raised awareness among the business sphere of the importance of the fact that they dedicate part of their own resources to research and technological development.
- Through their reports, they foster debate on the situation of the country regarding this matter and aid in decision-making processes with a view to resolving pending problems.

SOCIOECONOMIC ISSUES AND SOCIAL POLICY

Spain has generally followed the lines set down in the policy models of neighbouring countries and member states of the European Union. Nevertheless, Spain has also developed and adapted its own policies to the particular characteristics of the country. There are a large number of think tanks dedicated to economic issues.

Examples of public think tanks:

- **The Bureau of Studies of the Bank of Spain**
- **Technical Bureaus of the Ministry of Finance and other Departments**
- **Institute for Fiscal Studies**
- **Centre for Monetary and Financial Studies (Bank of Spain)**
- **National Statistics Institute**

Examples of private think tanks:

- **FUNCAS Foundation (Foundation of the Saving Banks)**

- **Institute for Economic Studies (IEE):**

Founded with the aim of analysing “key economic and social issues and the creation and dissemination of lines of thought that orientate, and where necessary, modify public opinion on economic and social issues, under a framework of business freedom in the core of a market economy”.

Economic policy in Spain has been defined by successive governments in line with their programmes and ideological positions, following the model exposed above.

Public think tanks have played an important role, given that they have been at the service of the respective governments to provide technical aid in order to put this model in practice by means of the appropriate policies.

Fewer think tanks are dedicated to social issues.

A vast number of national-level studies and reports on social issues have been funded by non-profit and cultural foundations.

There has been an expansion of third-sector foundations and associations committed to providing specific social services in a direct manner or in collaboration with the public administration (there are some 15,000 volunteer organisations in Spain)

The enormous importance of this sector has given rise to studies on the organisational, social and economic characteristics of these foundations and associations. One of these foundations is the Luís Vives Foundation, whose objective is to provide support to and study the third sector.

POLITICAL PARTY THINK TANKS

The **FAES Foundation** (Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies) is aligned with the **Popular Party (PP)**.

This foundation is considered “a leading think tank committed to nurturing the political ideas and activities of the liberal and reformist centre... and seeks to reinforce the values of Western freedom, democracy and humanism... Ideas capable of offering political alternatives to socialism and ways of thinking that are different...”

The Socialist Party (PSOE) has several foundations:

- The **Pablo Iglesias Foundation**, which is committed to disseminating socialist ideas and studying the history of socialism.
- The **Jaime Vera Foundation**, whose chief aim is to form top socialist party officials.
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The Socialist Party plans to bring together all of its foundations under a single foundation with the name of IDEAS, although this has yet to occur.

The **ALTERNATIVAS Foundation**, which defines itself as a laboratory of ideas, was not created by the Socialist Party, although its most active members have close ties with the party and are even party members. This foundation is committed to proposing courses of action to political parties and other economic and social agents with the aim of including them in decision-making processes.

- **While these foundations carry out an important role for the political parties of Spain, party policies are not defined within this sphere, nor those of the government, in the case that the corresponding party comes into power.**
- **Instead, they serve as places of debate and encounter where opinions about problems are discussed in depth in order to enrich the knowledge of and provide resources to the party for decision-making purposes.**
- **Their role is most visible in debates on controversial issues between political parties regarding public opinion.**

THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL STUDIES (IESA)

- **The Institute for Advanced Social Studies (IESA) is dependent on the Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), that is the largest and most important public research body in Spain.**
- **The IESA is located in the autonomous community of Andalusia in the city of Cordoba.**
- **The IESA was founded with the mission of providing a public service by means of conducting applied research that is useful for identifying and solving social problems and aiding in political decision-making processes.**

- **IESA research topics: institutions, political culture and behaviour in contemporary democracies; public opinion polls; social problems and public policies in welfare states; public policy assessment; social change and development in rural and urban contexts; natural resources, the environment and sustainability; international cooperation and co-development.**
- **The IESA conducts the majority of its projects upon request of the different bodies of the Government of Andalusia, governments of other Autonomous Communities, or the Government of Spain. Also takes part in projects at international level.**
- **The IESA publishes its research results on a regular basis in different scientific mediums as well as on its own website.**

- **The IESA has an expert Technical Unit formed by staff specialised in quantitative and qualitative methodology, and its own field network for the gathering of data.**
- **The institute is also equipped with installations for conducting Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI).**
- **More than 200 people work at the IESA, one of the largest centre for applied research in Spain.**
- **Since its creation in 1991, the IESA has conducted more than 300 research projects and published more than 500 reports with the results of these projects.**

CONCLUSIONS

- **The reforms that have been undertaken in Spain in the last thirty years have not been the result of work specifically carried out by think tanks. Although the experiences of other countries have served as a reference, political parties and the heads of different ministries with the aid of their teams have ultimately been responsible for making decisions concerning these reforms.**
- **While institutionalised think tanks have played an important role, it has been a complementary one.**

CONCLUSIONS

- **Interim think tanks created 'ad hoc' have been more influential in certain matters. These think tanks are usually created by bringing together a group of experts on a specific issue who are asked to analyse the situation and propose a course of political action on it.**
- **The most important conclusion that can be drawn from the Spanish experience, and that of other countries, is that think tanks are a fundamental tool for the development of society and must therefore become consolidated if they are to form an essential part of modernisation programmes.**