

Swedish Advocacy Think Tanks as News Sources and Agenda-Setters

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A heterogeneous concept

‘Think tank’ is a heterogeneous concept, and is used to characterize ‘a remarkably diverse group of organizations’ (Stone & Garnett, 1998). As Stone (2004, p. 2) remarks:

Think tanks vary considerably in size, structure, policy ambit and significance. As a consequence of this diversity, alongside cultural variations in comprehending the role of these organisations, there are considerable difficulties in defining ‘think tank’.

Some think tanks present themselves as independent research organizations without any ideological or political agenda—‘universities without students’ (Weaver, 1989, p. 564). Others pose as policy experts and function as contract research institutions. Many publicly-known think tanks, however, have a more partisan role and are heavily engaged in political advocacy and the marketing of ideas (Schlesinger, 2009; McKewon, 2012).

A characteristic feature of think tanks is that they ‘work to influence agendas outside the regular decision making channels’ (Garsten, 2013, p. 142). Think tanks trade in ideas, influence public opinion, and develop ties with political elites. However, they do so without any formal role in the polity. Their funding base may vary, but donations and contributions from corporations, foundations, and organisations seem to be typical. In the USA, the organisation scholar Stephen Barley (2010) has shown that corporations in the 1970’s and 1980’s extended their contributions to think tanks, as part of an attempt to increase their influence on federal government decisions. Together with political spending, contributions to lobby organisations, and hired PR firms, corporations were able to build ‘an institutional field’ to mould the political environment (Barley, p. 794).

Advocacy think tanks, which are the subject of our media study, exist to influence public opinion, public policy, and political debates with a more long-term, strategic scope than day-to-day politics, that is, ‘they help to provide the conceptual language, the ruling paradigms, the empirical examples that become the accepted assumptions for those in charge of making policy’ (Stone, 1996, p. 110).

Such think tanks see themselves primarily ‘as advocates for specific solutions to public policy problems or for their own political worldview’ (Thunert, 2004, p. 77). Business groups or corporations usually fund market-liberal advocacy think tanks. Other advocacy think tanks are linked to political parties, while others are sponsored by trade unions and interest organizations.

One of the strategic aims of advocacy think tanks is to influence political opinion, both through mediated communication, and through more direct contact and dialogue with policymakers. Think tanks publish books, new reports, and commentaries, arrange debates and seminars, and are more than willing to function as media sources on a broad range of topics (Bjerke, 2015; McKewon, 2012; Stål & Tillegård, 2005).

In the past few decades, think tanks have appeared in a large number of countries, including in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. Of particular interest here is the large number of neoliberal think tanks that espouse a market- and business-friendly ideology (Djelic, 2014). Furthermore, think tanks have been active across Europe, and there has been an especially strong evolution of partisan and advocacy think tanks (Weaver, 1989). This development has also stimulated the establishment of transnational think tank networks (Plewe, 2007), one of the early examples being the London-based, neoliberal Stockholm Network (Miller and Dinan, 2008).

The Swedish think tank landscape

Several institutions in Sweden may be grouped into the diverse ‘think tank’ categories mentioned in the introduction above, including some academic and research institutes, and those think tanks primarily engaged in conferences and publishing. However, most institutions in Sweden that actively use the term ‘think tank’ to describe themselves and their societal role have an outspoken ideological and political platform. A report on Swedish think tanks in 2012 (Lindström, 2012) lists as many as 26 think tanks, including institutions and groups of quite different natures and public activities. Several of these are market-friendly organizations financed by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, including the most well-known and politically-outspoken neoliberal think tank, Timbro. We will describe Timbro and other advocacy think tanks in more detail below. However, it is important to note that the Swedish think tank landscape also includes several liberal research organisations without an outspoken partisan and advocacy profile.

One of the research-based think tanks sponsored by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise is *Ratio*, which is formally defined as “the research institute of business” and declared to be an

independent institution.²⁸ Its research projects are financed by contributions from different sources, including both private and public foundations. Another organisation of the same type is *Institutet för näringslivsforskning* (the Institute for Business Research), a non-profit foundation established by Swedish employers and industrialists in 1939. A third market-friendly research institution is *SNS* (the Centre for Business and Policy Studies), which defines itself as a network for leading decision makers in business, politics and public administration, sponsored by a broad range of Swedish corporations and organisations.²⁹ Its main activities are linked to publishing, research, and the organisation of seminars. Originally, *SNS* was founded by Swedish business interests, but its platform was later broadened, and today its leadership includes some academics and public officials.

Another relatively large think tank that differs from typical ideological advocacy think tanks, is *Global utmaning* (Global Challenge), which is not a market-liberal organisation, but an independent institution that focuses on economic and environmental issues relating to globalization processes.

The different publishing and conference activities sponsored by *Axess*, a foundation controlled by a wealthy Swedish industrialist family, the Ax:son Johnson family, is another example of a think tank with activities that lie outside the role of typical advocacy think tanks. The family and their foundation clearly have a strategic liberal agenda. However, they do not engage directly in public debates and policymaking, as do Timbro and other advocacy think tanks.³⁰ As our primary interest is think tanks with a clear political worldview and an outspoken ideological agenda, we chose to include the following 13 advocacy think tanks in the media study: Timbro, Frivärld (Free World Forum), Den nya välfärden (The New Welfare), Fores,³¹ Captus, Eudoxa, Civitas and Bertil Ohlininstitutet, Arena Idé (named Agora in 2006), Arbetarrörelsens tankesmedja (the Think Tank of the Labour Movement),³² Cogito, Seglora, and Katalys. As the media analysis will show, some of these think tanks are nearly invisible, both as news sources and public commentators, and therefore we will concentrate the presentation and discussion below on think tanks with a more active public role.

²⁸ Source: <http://ratio.se/>

²⁹ Source: <http://www.sns.se/artikel/om-sns>

³⁰ The Ax:son Johnson family finance the liberal magazine *Axess*, sponsor the weekly *Fokus* magazine, own the *Axess* TV channel, and finance the international-oriented *Axess Programme on Journalism and Democracy*.

³¹ The full name is Fores – Forum för reformer och entreprenörskap (Forum for Reforms and Entrepreneurship).

³² In 2014, the Labour Movement Think Tank changed its name to Tankesmedjan Tiden and, among other activities, published a magazine called *Tiden* (*The Time*).

The liberal advocacy think tanks

The oldest of the nine selected advocacy think tanks is *Timbro*, which was founded in 1978. It has a neoliberal—some would say *libertarian*—ideological profile, and is fully funded by a foundation established by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise: the *Foundation For Free Enterprise*.³³ Timbro also runs both the Timbro Media Institute and Stureakademin, the latter being an academy for the theoretical and ideological education and training of young politicians and public intellectuals, not to mention future editorial commentators. In 2013, a former chairman of the Centre Party, Olof Johansson, accused some of the Centre Party's liberalist politicians in Stockholm of being strongly influenced by Timbro.³⁴

Timbro is financially and organizationally independent of political parties, but many of its leaders and spokespersons have been members of the Swedish conservative party, the Moderates. Timbro also has had strong, informal links to the leading conservative morning paper, *Svenska Dagbladet*. However, the political background of Karin Svanborg-Sjövall, the present CEO of Timbro, is as a member of the Liberals.

For many decades, Timbro has been an active publisher, and its book list includes translated libertarian and neoliberal classics (written by Ayn Rand, Robert Nozick, Friedrich von Hayek, and Milton Friedman), and reports about current affairs. Timbro has played an active international role and has long cooperated with leading liberalist think tanks in the US (such as the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Atlas Network) and in the UK (such as the Institute of Economic Affairs). Karin Svanborg-Sjövall, CEO of Timbro, states that many of the ideas Timbro propagated in the last part of the 1970's 'are quite mainstream now'. However, in her opinion, the worldview of young people on the liberal and conservative side of the political spectrum today is a challenge for Timbro:

Young liberal politicians are quite uninterested in economic questions, of economic freedom, which are our core questions. The dominating tendency today is linked to problems concerning identity, gender, hbqt³⁵—in short pop politics—and from my political perspective this situation gives me an uneasy feeling. During the last years,

³³ In Swedish: Stiftelsen Fritt Näringsliv.

³⁴ Interview in *Flamman* January 16, 2013.

³⁵ Hbqt: Referring to homosexuals, bisexuals, queer, and trans persons.

it has become more difficult to convince young liberal politicians that government interference is a real problem.³⁶

The *2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index* ranks Timbro number 88 out of more than 6,500 think tanks worldwide.³⁷ In 1997, Timbro was one of the initiators of the London-based Stockholm Network, a European cooperation of free-market think tanks (Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 167; Dinan & Miller, 2007). Much more important for Timbro these days is the newly-founded European Policy Information Center (EPiCenter), run cooperatively by Timbro and five other libertarian think tanks from across the EU (from the UK, Italy, France, Spain, and Lithuania), all of which are privately founded and working to support ‘the principles of a free society’.³⁸ Timbro’s staff consists (according to their homepage www.timbro.se) of 15 people, supported by short-term employees working on different projects.

During the last decade, Timbro’s growth and political influence have led to the establishment of several other Swedish think tanks, a few of which are on the right-wing, liberal side, and others of which have a centre-left or social democratic profile.

Frivärld (Stockholm Free World Forum), because of its financier, location, and history, has been characterized as ‘an offshoot from Timbro’ (Lindström, 2012, p. 3), but this think tank, which champions ‘individual liberty’, specializes in foreign policy and defence questions.³⁹ It was founded in 2011 and is, just like Timbro, fully financed by the Foundation For Free Enterprise. The Stockholm Free World Forum is also located on the same premises as Timbro. The staff consists of one manager, a part-time board leader, and one intern. The think tank has three associated research fellows.

Fores (Forum for Reforms and Entrepreneurship) was founded in 2008 and uses two labels to characterize its activities: green and liberal. The founders are the Bertil Ohlin Institute, the Centre Party, and an adult education association.⁴⁰ Its work concentrates on four program areas: climate and the environment, migration and integration, entrepreneurship and economic reforms, and the digital society. Mattias Goldmann, the CEO since 2013, says that Fores ‘fills a gap, being a think tank that takes the two big challenges of our own time, climate change and migration, seriously enough and at

³⁶ Personal interview with Karin Svanborg-Sjövall, June 15, 2015.

³⁷ www.gotothinktank.com. The Think Tank and Civil Societies Program at the Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania, set up the list.

³⁸ Source: www.epicenternetwork.eu.

³⁹ Source: www.frivarld.se.

⁴⁰ Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan.

the same time being willing to use market economic solutions'.⁴¹ The Centre Party, which today has a liberal political platform, is still the largest of approximately 60 financial sponsors.⁴² The regular staff consists of 10 people, but depending on projects and needs, additional people are employed on a short-term basis. Goldmann describes the main target group as policymakers inside Fores' prioritized areas. Policymakers include both civil servants and academics; these categories are seen as more important than political decision-makers. In this strategy, 'the media is not regarded as a target group; we use the media to reach the target group'.⁴³

In terms of international relations, Fores is part of the European Liberal Foundation, which includes likeminded think tanks in the EU, the European Economic Area (EEA), and even some outside this area. In the Nordic region, Fores cooperates with Zero, a green foundation in Norway, the Danish think tank Concito, and the Finnish think tank Demos.

Den Nya Välfärden (The New Welfare Foundation) is a liberal think tank engaged in opinion-building relating to 'entrepreneurship' and 'free competition', and was established in 1988. The think tank claims that it is financially supported by 18,000 business owners.⁴⁴ It is a member of the European Small Business Association. The staff consists of seven people. This think tanks has, in the past few years, communicated its policy more through paid advertisements in the press than through news initiatives and commentary articles.

In addition to the above-mentioned advocacy think tanks are four small, liberal think tanks with more limited activities. *Stiftelsen Bertil Ohlin-institutet* (The Foundation Bertil Ohlin Institute) was established in 1993 with the aim of stimulating scientific research and liberal ideas, and their application to societal issues. The foundation is financed through contributions from liberal press foundations. The relatively limited activity of this think tank, compared with the leading advocacy think tanks, seems to be concentrated on seminar debates and lectures, more than public agenda-setting. As mentioned above, the Foundation Bertil Ohlin Institute has supported the think tank Fores financially.

Idéinstitutet Civitas (the Idea Institute Civitas) is a think tank based on 'Christian and humanistic ideas'. It claims to be independent, but on the personal level, maintains relations with the Christian

⁴¹ Personal interview with Mattias Goldmann, October 27, 2015.

⁴² According to Mattias Goldmann, the Centre Party was responsible for nearly half of Fores' yearly income in 2015. Personal interview, October 27, 2015.

⁴³ Personal interview with Mattias Goldmann, October 27, 2015.

⁴⁴ www.dnv.se.

democratic party. The activities of this think tank seem mostly to be concentrated around the publication of ideological books and booklets.

Eudoxa is a liberal think tank founded in 2000 and organised as a limited company. The think tank profiles itself as a representative of 'transhumanism', independent of both political parties and religious interest groups. Debates on emerging technology and challenges related to the environment are given priority. The 2014 *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* listed Eudoxa as a 'science and technology' think tank.

Captus, established in 2005, is a market-liberal think tank that demands lower taxes and less regulation for corporations. The activities of this think tank are mostly related to the publication of reports and booklets. Internationally, Captus has cooperated with New Direction – The Foundation for European Reform, a right-wing think tank based in Brussels, Belgium.

The red/green advocacy think tanks

The advocacy think tanks on the left and centre-left side of the ideological and political spectrum were all founded in the first decades of the new millennium.

Arena Idé (Arena Idea) is today the largest of the left-oriented think tanks, and is part of the Arena Group, which also includes a magazine (*Arena*), an online newspaper (*Dagens Arena*), and two publishing houses, Atlas and Premiss. The think tank was founded in 2000, but until 2006, it was called Agora. The Arena Group is organizationally independent of political parties, and defines itself as radical and progressive. The present leader, Boa Ruthström, characterizes its ideological platform as 'social democratic, with a liberal vein'.⁴⁵ In the period 2000–2013, Arena Idé was, according to Ruthström, a rather small organization with one employee and limited public activity. The think tank was later refinanced via support from some of Sweden's large trade unions, and today has, according to Ruthström, a yearly income of approximately 900,000 euros. Currently (2015), Arena Idé has five full-time employees, including a research leader and a chief economist. Timbro and Arena Idé have sometimes cooperated in terms of arranging political seminars and debates, and seem to look upon each other as 'favoured opponents' in the Swedish advocacy think tank sector. The most important target group is opinion leaders. 'Our strategy', says Ruthström, 'is long-term opinion formation, building on a wage earner and citizen perspective'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Personal interview with Boa Ruthström, June 9, 2015.

⁴⁶ Personal interview with Boa Ruthström, June 9, 2015.

Regarding international relations, Arena Idé has developed contacts with think tanks such as Cevea in Denmark, Agenda and Res Publica in Norway, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and Policy Network in the UK, and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Germany, a social democratic think tank that has established its own office in Stockholm.

Katalys is a radical, independent think tank founded at the end of 2012 by five trade unions, and is led by Daniel Suhonen and Victor Bernhardt, both with backgrounds as journalists and public intellectuals. Suhonen is also active in the left wing of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. The main aim of *Katalys* is to develop ideas and influence policy decisions in areas of interest and importance for the trade union movement, especially those concerning welfare, social economics, the labour market, and distributive issues. Suhonen describes the ideologically-conscious activists of the trade union movement as the main target group of *Katalys*: ‘People who are able to organize a strike, that’s the people we want to influence and give arguments’.⁴⁷

One of *Katalys*’ prioritized issues in the public eye relates to the possibilities for risk capitalists to harvest big profits through investments and ownership in the health, education, and kindergarten sectors. *Katalys* was shortlisted for *Prospect* magazine’s Think Tank of the Year for the EU area for its ability to ‘take on the policy establishment and push through new ideas’.⁴⁸ *Katalys* has two full-time employees. According to Suhonen,⁴⁹ the yearly income from trade union support is approximately 200,000 euros. The board consists of five representatives from the founding trade unions. In terms of relationships outside Sweden, *Katalys* has regular contact with the radical Norwegian think tank Manifest.⁵⁰

Arbetarrörelsens tankesmedja (the Think Tank of the Labour Movement) was founded in spring 2006 by the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, the Swedish Social Democratic Party, and other organizations in the labour movement. In 2014, it was renamed Tankesmedjan Tiden (the Time Think Tank). Its main aim is to stimulate debate about challenges faced by the labour movement. It publishes the magazine *Tiden* (Time) and reports about current affairs. The main activity of this think tank seems to be directed more towards the inner circles of the labour movement than towards the general public.

⁴⁷ Personal interview with Daniel Suhonen, June 10, 2015.

⁴⁸ *Prospect*, August 2015, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Daniel Suhonen, June 10, 2015.

⁵⁰ The full name is *Manifest senter for samfunnsanalyse* (Manifest Centre for Societal Analysis).

Cogito is a green foundation and think tank established in 2005 and financed by the Green Party⁵¹, but it formally declares itself to be independent when it comes to party politics. Their main aim is to stimulate debates concerning green politics, ecological questions, and global justice. *Cogito* is led by a board of six and has a large senior advisory board. However, none of these members seem to work for *Cogito* on a full-time basis. Besides support from the Green Party, *Cogito* also obtains some of its income from private donations.

Seglora smedja (the Think Tank Seglora) is a small, Christian institution. It was established in 2008 by two priests in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Sweden, Ewa Lindqvist Hotz and Helle Klein, the latter being the former political chief editor of the tabloid *Aftonbladet*.⁵² The think tank looks upon itself as an independent, critical voice inside the Swedish Church. One of its main aims is to organize opinion-building and raise the general level of education ‘in the intersection between the societal and the existential’.⁵³ Dialogue among religions and cultures is one of Seglora’s strategic aims, and the think tank’s anti-racist profile has led to attacks by supporters of the Swedish Democrats, an anti-immigration party. Seglora runs an online paper (dagensseglora.se) and arranges seminars, symposiums, and dialogues. It is based on the cooperation and support of the Stockholm diocese and donations from individual friends of Seglora.

Data and methods

Seven leading Swedish print newspapers with a paid circulation⁵⁴ were selected for a content analysis. The newspapers also have separate online editions. The print newspapers are, however, still important agenda-setters in terms of political news and commentaries, and opinion leaders normally give high priority to launching initiatives through these channels. Government ministers, opposition politicians, public relations consultants, and academics, for example, often use *Dagens Nyheter*’s prestigious debate page (DN Debatt) to launch initiatives and present results from new books and reports. The seven newspapers are *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* (both popular tabloids), *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* (both Stockholm-based morning papers), and two regional newspapers, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* (Malmö) and *Göteborgsposten* (Gothenburg), plus *Dagens Industri*, a financial morning paper, published in Stockholm.

⁵¹ The Swedish name is Miljöpartiet de Gröna. After the national elections in 2014, the Greens are, together with the Social Democrats, part of the government led by Stefan Löfvén.

⁵² Klein is now the chief editor of the trade union magazine and online news site *Dagens Arbete*.

⁵³ www.seglorasmedja.se.

⁵⁴ Excluding the free newspaper *Metro*.

The popular tabloid *Aftonbladet* is owned by the Norwegian media corporation Schibsted, a publicly-listed company. *Aftonbladet* was once a social democratic newspaper owned by the labour movement. The Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions still owns a minority of the shares, and according to the owner agreement, the editorial commentary page should be written from a social democratic perspective. For the last decade, Schibsted has also owned the conservative morning paper *Svenska Dagbladet*.⁵⁵ *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen*, and *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* are all liberal newspapers owned by Sweden's largest media corporation, Bonnier, which is a family-controlled company. Bonnier also owns the financial newspaper *Dagens Industri*. The liberal newspaper *Göteborgsposten* is owned by Stampen, a company controlled by the local Hjärne family. The epithet 'liberal' in the Swedish case means that the newspaper's editorial pages are market-friendly, pro-EU, anti-socialist, generally support liberal immigration policies, want Sweden to join NATO, and favour governments supported by a coalition of liberals and conservatives.

Unfortunately, official, audited circulation figures are unavailable for two of the largest newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Aftonbladet*, but according to their own figures, their 2013 circulation was 283,000 and 199,000, respectively.⁵⁶ The audited circulation figures on weekdays for the other newspapers in the study were as follows: *Expressen* (183,000⁵⁷), *Göteborgsposten* (190,700), *Svenska Dagbladet* (159,000), *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* (99,800) and *Dagens Industri* (89,100).⁵⁸

To collect relevant articles from the two selected years (2006 and 2013), we employed the electronic news archive Retriever. The names of the selected nine think tanks were used as search words, and every article in the selected papers mentioning or referring to these think tanks in 2006 and 2013 were copied and evaluated according to their relevance. Irrelevant 'hits' (for example, referring to an arena and not Arena Idé, or to the church Seglora, not the think tank with the same name) were excluded from the coding. The codebook included 20 variables. A few of the most interesting variables and results will be presented and discussed here.

⁵⁵ Traditionally, *Svenska Dagbladet* has been linked to the Swedish Conservatives; however, some would say that the present editorial line concerning commentaries might more correctly be characterized as neoliberal. However, in May 2015, it was announced that in the future, *Svenska Dagbladet* will be part of a newly-founded media corporation founded by the Swedish Mittmedia Foundation and Schibsted, with the Norwegian corporation as a minority partner.

⁵⁶ Source: http://www.dagspress.se/images/stories/Svenska_Mediehus_2014_2015.pdf.

⁵⁷ *Expressen*'s circulation includes separate editions in Malmö (*Kvällsposten*) and Gothenborg (GT). Source: TS-statistik.

⁵⁸ For *Dagens Industri* the circulation numbers are from 2014 and include digital publication of 5,200. Source: TS-statistik.

Advocacy think tanks in the press

In 2006, nine of the thirteen advocacy think tanks listed above existed: Timbro, The New Welfare Foundation, Eudoxa, the Foundation Bertil Ohlin Institute, Captus, Civita, Arena Idé, the Think Tank of the Labour Movement, and Cogito. For 2006, there were, all in all, 267 references to the nine think tanks in the seven largest Swedish newspapers (Table 1). Seven years later, in 2013, four new think tanks could be added to the list: Free World Forum, Fores, Seglora, and Katalys. In 2013 the thirteen think tanks were referenced 307 times. The limited increase was a result of the establishment of the four newcomers. In both years, references in the conservative morning paper *Svenska Dagbladet* were most frequent, and least frequent were references in the financial newspaper *Dagens Industri*. However in 2013, the references in the liberal popular tabloid *Expressen* increased and became close to the level of *Svenska Dagbladet*. The differences between the visibility of advocacy think tanks in the other newspapers were, however, marginal.

Table 1. References to one or more advocacy think tanks in seven leading Swedish newspapers during 2006 and 2013 (per cent).

Newspaper	2006	2013	Both years
Svenska Dagbladet	21	27	24
Expressen	12	24	18
Dagens Nyheter	14	13	14
Aftonbladet	12	14	13
Sydsvenskan	16	10	13
Göteborgsposten	15	8	11
Dagens Industri	9	4	7
Total	99	100	100
(N)	(267)	(307)	(574)

Regarding *genres*, less than one third of the articles mentioning at least one of the advocacy think tanks belonged to news genres (such as news reports, news interviews, news notes, etc.), while 71 per cent were commentaries and other types of opinion articles (op-ed articles, debate articles, and letters to the editor). Around half of the opinion articles were written by people *outside* the editorial staff, and nearly two thirds of them were signed by representatives of the think tanks themselves. The high priority of opinion material is also a general tendency in today's Swedish press (Nord & Stür, 2009). The leader of Katalys, Daniel Suhonen, says that his think tank often informs the leader of a prioritized media source, such as *Dagens Nyheter*'s debate editor, several months in advance about a planned report, and coordinates it with a planned 'news event' to make it more interesting. When the

report is nearly finished, they attempt to reach agreement about the publication date for a prioritized debate article.⁵⁹

Nearly half of the news stories were initiated by a think tank, most often based on a new report offered as an information subsidy (Gandy, 1982) to a favoured news organization. However, a think tank may also become news for other reasons. In October 2006, Timbro was mentioned extraordinarily frequently in the press as a result of a political scandal involving several ministers in Reinfeldt's new government. One of these ministers was the Minister for Culture, Cecilia Stegö Chilo, a former CEO of Timbro and member of the Conservatives. The main norm violation in her case was that she, for ideological reasons, failed to pay the public broadcasting license fee, and thereby broke the law. She was portrayed in the press as an aggressive, neoliberal hawk who was undermining the Swedish public broadcasting system, and she was forced to leave her position after a short, heated media debate (Pollack, 2009).

Table 2. References to nine market-liberal and red/green advocacy think tanks in seven leading Swedish newspapers during 2006 and 2013 (per cent).

Name of think tank	2006	2013	Total
Timbro	70	53	61
Frivärld	--	11	6
Den nya välfärden	13	1	7
Fores	--	10	5
Other liberal advocacy think tanks ⁶⁰	7	1	4
Sum market-liberal think tanks	90	76	83
Katalys	--	15	8
Arena Idé/Agora	8	2	5
Other red/green advocacy think tanks ⁶¹	2	6	4
Sum red/green think tanks	10	24	17
ALL	99	99	100
(N)	267	307	574

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Daniel Suhonen, June 10, 2015.

⁶⁰ These liberal think tanks included Captus, Eudoxa, Civitas, and Bertil Ohlininstitutet.

⁶¹ These red/green think tanks included the Think Tank of the Labour movement, Cogito, and in 2013, also Seglora.

As Table 2 shows, Timbro was by far the think tank with the most references in both years examined. In 2006, the dominance of Timbro was especially notable (70 per cent of all mentions), and the visibility of the red/green think tanks was correspondingly small (10 per cent). The picture was essentially the same in 2013, but was not as one-sided. The main reason was the establishment of Katalys, the most radical of the think tanks, which despite possessing fewer resources than most of the other advocacy think tanks, showed a strong ability both to launch news initiatives and participate actively in public debates. With 15 per cent of the references, Katalys also had a stronger presence in the media than the four other red/green think tanks combined. In the case of Arena Idé, one contributing factor seems to be that it was undergoing restructuring in 2013, and therefore its external activity was limited.⁶²

An analysis of the news angle tendencies (positive, negative, or neutral) shows that 19 per cent of the articles about all the selected think tanks were coded as positive, and 11 per cent were coded as negative. A majority of the news stories were either ‘straight news’ without any clear bias, or short news items where the question of tendency was irrelevant.⁶³ However, Timbro was not only mentioned the most, but was also ‘in the lead’ in terms of news stories with a negative angle (one third of the articles). This is not surprising given Timbro’s history and profile. ‘We were created to be at the outer edge of the debate. A high level of conflict has been one of Timbro’s characteristics’, says Karin Svanborg-Sjövall.⁶⁴

Concerning opinion material, half of the articles ‘favoured’ the think tank and its initiative, while only 20 per cent were negative, and the rest were neutral or the question irrelevant. Timbro was the most controversial, and was commented upon much more actively than other think tanks; one third of these commentaries had a negative angle. Advocacy think tanks with less influence do not arouse the same interest and debate. Most positive editorial commentaries on think tank initiatives were found in Svenska Dagbladet, Sydsvenskan, and Expressen.

Reports and other initiatives from advocacy think tanks create both news and public debates. However, the news stories in very few cases carry headlines referring to the name of the involved

⁶² Information from Boa Ruthström in a personal interview, June 9, 2015.

⁶³ The coding of news angles was based on an evaluation of a news report’s title and its lead, and differentiated between positive, negative, or neutral angles. To be coded as ‘positive’, the headline/lead had to signalize sympathy with or support for the think tank mentioned. To be coded as ‘negative’, the headline/lead had to signalize criticism of/opposition to the think tank mentioned. Straight news reports, balanced news reports, and all cases without any clear positive or negative bias were coded as neutral. A fourth category was reserved for news articles (mostly very short news items) where the question of tendency was irrelevant.

⁶⁴ Personal interview with Karin Svanborg-Sjövall, June 15, 2015.

think tank. An interesting issue relates to the think tank representatives' roles as *sources* in the news. Are they presented as representing special interests and 'marked' with an ideological label (like neoliberal, market-liberal, green, radical, left, or socialist)? Or are they presented as *experts* on different areas? The Norwegian study (Bjerke, 2015) in this special issue shows that in approximately two thirds of the news stories, the Norwegian advocacy think tanks act in an expert role. The same tendency is found in the Danish study in this special issue (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016). In Sweden, we found the same tendency, however less clear: Around half of Swedish think tank sources were, first and foremost, presented as expert sources, a slightly smaller share (45 per cent) as special interest sources, and the rest in peripheral references without any clear tendency. The think tank sources presented as experts often were academics engaged as think tank representatives or report authors.

However, concerning advocacy think tank representation in the media, opinion material (views) seem to be more important than news initiatives. Not surprisingly, representatives from Timbro are in the lead, even though Katalys leader Daniel Suhonen and the board leader of Free World Forum, Mats Johansson, also had an active role as media commentators.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Our first research question was: How often are Swedish advocacy think tanks referred to in the news? The answer is that media visibility varies a great deal among the studied think tanks. A few, like Timbro and Katalys in 2013, are referred to relatively often, but several think tanks are rather invisible in the news. Referring to our second research question, think tanks are active and important as debaters and opinion-makers. Commentary is their main genre, and the production of opinion material seems to be the easiest way to get into the newspaper columns. In answer to the third research question of how think tanks are presented as sources in the news: They play both an expert role and a 'special interest' role, but the first is a slightly more important one in the Swedish media.

Regarding the fourth research question related to the relative strength of market-liberal and right-wing think tanks versus red/green think tanks in terms of media representation and agenda-setting, the answer is not surprising. The four market-liberal advocacy think tanks in Sweden, with Timbro

⁶⁵ In 2006-2014 Mats Johansson was a member of Riksdagen, the Swedish parliament, for the Conservatives (Moderaterna), and his columns were mostly written in this double role as a think tank representative and a politician. Daniel Suhonen, Katalys, also combined the role of think tank leader with a role as activist on the left side of the Swedish Labour Party.

as the oldest and most established, have more resources, a larger staff, and were by far the most dominant in terms of media visibility and influence in earlier years. However, during the past few years, Fores seems to have made a breakthrough as an important source in the public debates about both climate change and migration. The activities of Katalys, which was established in 2013, indicate that a small, active, and radical think tank can be an agenda-setter. The restructuring of Arena Idé may also increase the relative strength of the red/green think tanks in the years to come.

As in the other Scandinavian countries, think tanks in Sweden are growing in number, and a few of them also in influence and political importance. However, only some of them have high media visibility. In addition, think tanks represent centres of influence in direct contact with policymakers. Swedish advocacy think tanks mostly depend on economic support from corporations or organized interest groups. They may be influential in strategic politics, but are at the same time a force outside mainstream political institutions. Think tanks are not, like the political parties and their youth organizations, based on membership and time-consuming membership activities. For this reason, they are often quick and efficient in terms of producing political arguments, and are free to take initiatives in different policy areas, but are also without any responsibility for further processes and outcomes. In the long run, the most interesting question is whether this development will stimulate democratic institutions and democratic processes, or whether it will reduce the development of political ideas to a specialized business for small, sponsored elites.

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