The Role of Think Tanks in Megatrends Analysis and Future Research

Berthold Kuhn[1], Dimitrios Margellos[2]

1 Freie Universität Berlin
2 ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the interconnection between megatrends analysis, future research, and the role of think tanks. Think Tanks are presumed to drive megatrends discourses and make significant contributions to future research and strategic foresight. However, relatively little attention has been paid to think tanks explicitly or implicitly working on megatrends and future research. This paper analyses discourses on megatrends and looks at the evolving global landscape of think tanks. It shines a spotlight on seven think tanks from different countries and world regions that apply diverse strategies of knowledge dissemination and policy advice. Policymakers, business leaders, and asset managers have shown a growing interest in megatrends analysis and future research which is leading to increased visibility for some think tanks. Furthermore, the dynamics of international cooperation and geopolitical developments have also contributed to the expansion and growing diversity of the think tank landscape, including in the Global South.

Berthold Kuhn[*]

Department of Political and Social Sciences

Freie Universität Berlin & InnovateCo Consultants

University Address: Ihnestrasse 22, 14195 Berlin

E-mail: Berthold.Kuhn@fu-berlin.de

Dimitrios Margellos

ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies

Norbertstraße 31

50670 Köln

Email: dimitrioslm@yahoo.com

[*]*Corresponding author*

Keywords: megatrends, future research, think tanks, strategic foresight, policy advice.

1. Introduction and Methodology

The main objective of this paper is to improve the understanding of the dynamic discussion around megatrends, as well as the essential characteristics of future research. Additionally, the paper seeks to highlight the contributions of think tanks in fostering future literacy and conceptual frameworks addressing major challenges for humanity.

Academic literature that is reflecting on the role and challenges of think tanks is relatively limited. One of the more recent books is an edited volume by James McGann (2021) who has been in charge of the flagship reports of the Global Go To Think Tank Index (GGTTI) of the Think Tank and Civil Society Programme (TTCSP) hosted by the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania for many years but ending in 2021(TTCSP, 2021). McGann invited leading think tank professionals to reflect on critical issues affecting the work of think tanks. The reflections of some authors of the book are worth quoting to introduce the relevance of the topic and the opportunities and challenges think tanks currently face.

> *"Often, academic work is far away from political realities. It can also be unsuited in its approach if it ignores institutional, legal, and governance constraints. Therefore, think tanks can play a role in translating findings as well as practicing applied research with a more policy-oriented focus that complements more academic work" (Wolff, 2021: 54)*

> *"Midway between academia and politics, these centres of thought have transferred rigorous studies to political praxis, both in terms of public discourse and policy. But is this link still valid at times of increased political contestation and of traditional power structures?" (Morillas, 2021: 59)*

> *"Think tanks are currently caught in a paradox. From environmental and climate injustice, to extreme inequalities and global pandemics, the world faces an extraordinary set of challenges that think tanks can contribute significantly to addressing. Yet, they must do this at a time when profound disruptions such as rapid technological advances, shifting centres of global power, decreasing levels of trust in experts, democratic disorders, and fake news are providing a myriad of new threats and opportunities that challenge the ways in which they currently operate." (Leach, 2021: 107).*

To begin, section two of this paper explains how megatrends analysis, future research and strategic foresight relate to and complement each other in understanding future developments while also pointing to some features which distinguish them from each other. Section three of this paper discusses the definition and the evolution of megatrends analysis and future research and explores how megatrends discourses and future research gained traction over the past decades. Section four defines think tanks and comments on the evolution of the global landscape of think tanks. With a purpose to illustrate the work of think tanks related to megatrends and future research in different ways, section five introduces seven diverse think tanks from different countries and world regions which either explicitly or implicitly engage in megatrends analysis

and future research.

This paper seeks to fill a gap in academic literature by analysing the evolution of megatrends and future research which has received limited attention. The limited interest of the profession to document and analyse its historical evolution could probably be attributed to an inherent preference of megatrends experts and futurists to looking forward rather than backward.

This paper references landmark publications in think tank analysis, particularly the TTCSP's "Go To Think Tank Report" series (TTCSP 2021), which maintained a global database of over 8,200 organisations from various countries and regions but is currently discontinued. It is referenced by leading media, especially in the United States of America (U.S.) (Chafuen/Forbes, Feb. 15, 2021).

The rankings are based on surveys. The list of almost 4000 voters includes university faculty and administrators, journalists, policymakers, think tank players, and donors. TTCP data set does not include a category for think tanks working explicitly on megatrends or engaging in future research. Furthermore, this paper gathers diverse evidence from various other sources to demonstrate the rising attention paid to megatrends analysis and future research and the growing number and diversity of think tanks in various parts of the world. Evidence includes academic papers, reports, and interviews with experts.[1]

The methodology also includes semi-structured interviews with leaders of various think tanks in different countries and world regions. While it is not a representative sample, attention was paid on criteria of diversity. Interviewed think tanks included organisations from different countries and world regions and organisations of different size and thematic focus. The interviews cover organisations with an explicit focus on megatrends and future research, while we have also included some others which do not explicitly use such frameworks, but are in fact doing analysis that is relevant to megatrends and future research discourses. Interview partners were also selected on the basis of their expressed interest in participating in the project.

2. Megatrends, Future Research, and Strategic Foresight

Megatrends, future research, and strategic foresight are interconnected and can provide a comprehensive understanding of future developments. However, there are also notable differences between them. While megatrends analysis is more explicitly based on factual data, future studies and strategic foresight rely more on methodologies that involve specific expert input and the use of tools like horizon scanning, road mapping, and scenario development.

Megatrends analysis focuses on identifying major trends and forces that will shape the future over the next decade and beyond, including how these trends intersect with one another. This approach aims to provide deep insights into the dynamics of global trends based on the analysis of data, discourses, and agendas of influential political, academic, and business institutions, social forces, and the media. On the other hand, future research is primarily focused on methodological approaches to forecasting, such as horizon scanning, scenario development, backcasting, and predictive

modelling. Both address challenges for humanity and aim to create awareness for the relevance of future literacy.

Strategic foresight, meanwhile, is a more proactive approach to preparing organisations, companies, groups, or individuals for change. It involves a structured and systematic process of exploring and creating possible futures, and developing robust strategies and plans that can handle a range of different scenarios. Strategic forecasting is influenced by a variety of tailor-made business approaches of different organisations and companies, which makes it difficult to generalise on its significance for addressing challenges for humanity and promoting the common good.

3. Definition and Evolution of Megatrends Analysis and Future Research

Global megatrends are trends that strongly influence different spheres of life in many countries and at different levels, covering political, economic, natural environmental, social, and cultural dimensions. They describe large-scale, long-term shifts with wide-reaching effects across different localities and world regions that attract attention from global leaders in politics, business, academia, media, and social affairs.

In their book "Global perspectives on megatrends" Kuhn and Margellos (2022) applied five criteria to prioritize big trends: (1) level of coverage by research activities, (2) level of political attention, (3) level of interest to global investors and business communities, (4) level of media coverage, and (5) attention paid by social movements. They adopted a comprehensive, global approach to megatrends, including political and social trends, such as rising inequality and migration.[2]

Figure 1. Pentagon Model Global Megatrends (Kuhn & Margellos, 2022).

John Naisbitt was a pioneer of megatrends and future studies. His book "Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives" was first published in 1982 (Naisbitt, 1982). It focused mainly on the United States but also attempted to present a global outlook. Naisbitt accurately predicted the change from industrialized to information societies. Megatrends was published in 57 countries and sold more than 14 million copies. Subsequently, Naisbit worked for several academic institutions and founded the China Naisbit Institute at Tianjin University in China in 2009.

Today, a large number of academic institutions, think tanks, researchers and analysts engage in learning, analysing, and forecasting future developments. Asset managers of many big investment fonds show a keen interest in megatrends research. Major consulting firms, including McKinsey, PwC, Deloitte, Roland Berger and many others as well as major think tanks like the World Economic Forum, Bertelsmann Foundation and Brookings conduct rigorous analyses of global risks and trends. Many other non-profit institutes, individual experts, but also international organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and national-level Ministries engage in future research. Megatrends and future research are also of vital interest for multinational corporations and asset managers. The German car-manufacturer Volkswagen runs a unit staffed with 27 future research experts. The number of academic publications on megatrends and future research has been steadily increasing over the years[3], as has the number of consulting firms and other organizations using foresight and scenario planning. We have also observed a growing interest in future-focused events and a rising popularity of foresight and scenario planning.

Though not explicitly related to megatrends, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) exhibits strong connections to megatrends discourses and is worth mentioning because it attracts widespread attention by think tanks and futurists. The 2030 Agenda covers aspects of economic, social, and environmental development and stresses the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships at different levels (SDG 17). The 17 Goals were adopted by all member states of the United Nations in 2015. The German Agency for International Cooperation, die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), states that "Global megatrends provide the backdrop for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (GIZ, 2017).

The differences between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and megatrends frameworks lie in the degree of formality. The 2030 Agenda has been adopted by states and consists of detailed and hierarchically-structured goals and processes, including defined roles of custodian agencies and formal arrangements for monitoring and reporting on 232 indicators associated with 169 targets. The megatrends framework is more fluid and anarchical and focuses more on opportunities rather than highlighting problems or pointing to deficits, especially when used by consulting firms.

4. Definition and Evolution of Think Tanks

The term think tank was first used in military jargon. According to Ladi (2023) it was first used during World War II to describe a safe place where plans and strategies could be discussed. There is no uniform definition, and the meaning has

changed over the past decades, especially in the context of the proliferation of private non-profit policy research organizations in the United States. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes a think tank as "an institute, corporation, or group organized to study a particular subject (such as a policy issue or a scientific problem) and provide information, ideas, and advice" (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022). The United Nations (2014) has published a report, "Thinking the Unthinkable: From Thought to Policy—The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping Government Strategy." Which refers to the increasing complexity and technical nature of policy problems, which play in favour of think tanks aiming to become more important in influencing policymaking.

However, "*what matters is not the label but the function, or functions, that think tanks fulfil* (Mendizabel, 2021). Think tanks typically conduct research, engage in policy dialogue activities, and provide advice. More specifically, "they inform and educate decisionmakers and the public, promote ideas, advocate for change, hold decisionmakers to account, train the next generations of decisionmakers and create and nurture spaces for informed debate on matters of public interest "(Mendizabel, 2021: 1). In many countries, especially in the United States and in the United Kingdom but as well as at the level of the European Union, think tanks have developed into prime actors shaping agendas of policymakers and influencing decision-makers in business and finance. While it has been acknowledged that focused intellectual groups have played an influential role in governance for centuries (royal courts, elite societies, and business clubs, for example), think tanks are considered "a distinctly 20th century invention." (Barham & Barham jun., 2021, 1).

The Center for China and Globalization (CCG), a leading think tank in China and well-networked in the global think tanks community, describes the function of a think tank as follows: "*Through research reports, seminars, forums and meetings, as well as symposiums and proposals, think tanks play a role in setting agendas and conducting policy interpretation and research in the public arena. They also reflect public opinion and provide policy recommendations to the relevant government agencies through national consultation and democratic mechanisms.*" (CCG, 2021)

Think tanks are sometimes perceived as elitist lobby organisations whispering recommendations to policymakers. Rand Corporation in the United States or Chatham House in the United Kingdom are two examples who have contributed to such images of think tanks among the general public in Germany and other countries. Whether or not think tanks are considered elitist organisations can depend on various factors such as their funding sources, their areas of focus, and the level of access they have to policymaking processes. Some argue that think tanks are elitist organisations because they are often funded by wealthy individuals or corporations, and their research and policy recommendations may not always align with the interests of the general public. Additionally, some think tanks may have a limited pool of experts who come from elite academic backgrounds or have ties to political elites. On the other hand, we have witnessed a proliferation of think tanks staffed with experts from diverse backgrounds which provide valuable research and analysis to help inform policy decisions. Many think tanks also prioritize engaging with a broader range of stakeholders and the public through events and publications. While recognising the growth of the think tanks sector, it is important to understand that the analytical capacity of many think tanks often depends on one or a few leading experts. In the field of future studies, the Association of Professional Futurists (APF) was founded in 2002 and has more than 500 members which act as analysts, consultants, and speakers and are affiliated to diverse think tanks, University departments and consulting firms.

Typologies of Think Tanks have been proposed by, among others, Weaver and McGann (2000) and Thunert (2006) who distinguished between (1) Academic Think Tanks, (2) Advocacy Organisations, and (3) Party Think Tanks. For example, in Germany, as in many European and Asian countries, academic think tanks are the dominant group while in Anglo-Saxon countries private think tanks which are registered as nonprofits play a more important role. Such findings of Thunert (2006) on the difference between the think tank landscape in continental Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries is still valid according to our observations and talks with experts. private advocacy organisations play a less significant role than in Anglo-Saxon countries (Thunert 2006). In Germany, political foundations also play a significant role. They are affiliated to parties represented in the German Parliament and are largely funded by the Government and exercise different functions, including implementation of development cooperation projects as well as managing scholarships. For example, Konrad Adenauer Foundation which is affiliated to the long-time ruling Christian Democratic Party (CDU), calls one of its five department, the Department Analysis & Consulting, a "think tank" while considering itself "more than a think tank".[4]

While the authors' own observations and exchanges with experts suggest that most established think tanks, are not much affected by the burgeoning megatrends discourse and analysis of future scenarios, there are some notable exceptions, such as the Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany, a leading private think tank, which has set up a Future Challenges team and publishes on megatrends (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2020).

More recently, we see a trend that non-profit organisations engaged in policy-oriented work prefer to work under the label of think tank rather than advocacy-organisations because advocacy work, especially involvement in campaign work, has become under scrutiny from government administration and courts in some countries, especially in the Global South and when it involved foreign funding. India and China are prime examples for this development. However, even some advocacy non-profit organisations in Western Europe face legal challenges. The Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financières et pour l'Action Citoyenne (Attac), an activist organisation originally created to promote the establishment of a tax on foreign exchange transactions, lost its tax privileges in Germany due its involvement in political work (Beck Aktuell Januar 28, 2021).

The TTCSP (TTCSP 2021) has published the most authoritative report on Think Tanks over many years until the project was discontinued around the year 2021 when lead author James McGann tragically passed away. The TTCSP's GGTTI Report was designed "to identify and recognise centres of excellence in all the major areas of public policy research and in every region of the world." (TTCSP, 2021). The report provides the following definition of think tanks:

> "Think tanks are public-policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy" (TTCSP, 2021).

The number of think tanks included in the TTCSP GGTTI database has increased steadily over the years, from just over 5,000 in 2012 to over 8,000 in 2020. Growth was also significant outside the U.S. which still hosts by far the largest

number of think tanks of any country in the world. Barham (2021, 2023) published a list of the most influential think tanks in academic influence which includes only one organisation in the U.S. among the top ten. Brookings, The Heritage Foundation and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) top the list.

We have witnessed a growth of think tanks in the Global South, especially in emerging markets and in countries which are looking toassert themselves in international relations. The Chinese government started to promote think tanks with Chinese characteristics soon after Xi Jinping took over as President in March 2013. Most Chinese think tanks are affiliated to single Ministries, but there are also more independent think tanks registered as non-profits and working on a variety of issues, with different Ministries and government agencies, especially on global issues. Xue, Zhu & Wanqu (2018) argue "*that the success of Chinese think tanks has been driven primarily by greater official recognition of their value, due to increasingly complex domestic and international problems stemming from a fragmented decision-making system….consequently, by late 2015, the new policies led to the selection of twenty five 'pilot high-end think tanks' and the establishment of the management system of think tanks in China." (pp. 49)*. Khan & Köllner (2018) analysed the growing role of Think Tanks in India and pointed out that "*India's foreign policy think tank sector has gained in visibility and vibrancy due to new demand in the wake of India's expanding international stakes…*" Other reasons for the rise of think tanks in India include better funding and access to information, especially in the case of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). (Khan & Köllner. 2018).

The landscape of think tanks in a country often reflects characteristics of the political system of this country. Many ruling parties or coalition governments across the world interact closely with think tanks. Chile and two of its major think tanks, Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP) and "Libertad y desarrollo" (LyD), are prime example for close political ties.

Many of the leading think tanks in the world, including Brookings (Washington D.C.), Bruegel (Brussels), Carnegie (Washington D.C.), Chatham House, (London), the Center for China and Globalization (Beijing), the World Economic Forum (WEF), and many others, have global outreach and focus more on global agendas than on national policy issues. The World Economic Forum (WEF), for example, has more than 13,000 members in 150 countries and supports the Global Shapers Community, a network of young people under the age of 30 working together to address local, regional, and global challenges. It convenes the Davos Forum and publishes the widely referenced Global Risks Report which has been extensively quoted by experts working in the field of megatrends analysis and future research.

Since the 1990s, we have seen a growing number of think tank reports and academic publications dealing with future analysis and megatrends. There are now many smaller and medium-sized institutes and associations that explicitly address megatrends, future research as ell as strategic forecast. The Association of Professional Futurists (APF) was founded in 2002 and has more than 500 members. It emerged as a network of practicing futurists who act as analysts, consultants, and speakers.

However, the TTCPS (TTCSP 2021) does not offer a category of think tanks with the thematic focus on megatrends, future research, or strategic forecast. There are many leading think tanks which employ a variety of methods and approaches to megatrends analysis, future research, and strategic foresight, and they play a critical role in shaping policy debates and influencing the direction of public discourse on the future

The number and diversity of organisations engaging in megatrends and future research is increasing. Expert opinion gathered in the context of our research also suggests that big data analytics and growing ICT capacities much facilitated megatrends analysis and future research and motivated smaller organisations to also engage with it. For example, we have come across a business case for developing AI based self-learning taxonomies for megatrends analysis. The Berlin-based start-up company Anacode is venturing into megatrends analysis based on big data and targets the financial industry and larger corporations with their product (Anacode, 2023).

5. Spotlights on Diverse Think Tanks

This section introduces seven diverse think tanks from different countries and world regions which either explicitly engage in megatrends analysis and future research or work on issues highly relevant for megatrends analysis and future research. We selected the think tanks based on criteria of diversity related to regional, thematic, and methodological focus and dependent on their interest in participating in this research.

Interviews were conducted with the following think tanks:

- The Millennium Project (MP), Washington

MP is an established global think tank with a strongly decentralized network of Nodes and an explicit focus on future research which is involved in the United Nations 2024 summit on the future.

- Copenhagen Institute of Future Studies (CIFS), Copenhagen.

CIFS is one of the earliest European think tanks with high-level expertise on future research and strategic foresight and is implementing projects with diverse stakeholders as well as offering training courses.

- Green Economy Coalition (GEC), London.

GEC is the world's largest alliance for green and fair economies and has 60 organisational members including trade unions, businesses, NGOs, United Nations agencies and citizen's groups and established eight green economy hubs in Brazil, India, Mongolia, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Caribbean region.

- Center for China and Globalisation (CCG), Beijing.

CCG is a well-established, globally recognised and well networked independent nongovernmental Chinese think tank with a broad agenda which focuses on economic, trade, and geopolitical issues and is engaged in dialogue with leading Chinese companies, universities and government departments of several ministries.

- Civil Society Institute (CSI), Delhi

CSI is an established and internationally well-networked advocacy-oriented non-profit organisation, and is shaping policy discourses in the field of social and economic development and influenced law-making processes in India.

- Cultural Infusion (CI), Melbourne

CI is considered a global leader in diversity research and is working on cultural issues in cooperation with many organisations and big companies, including UNESCO.

- 4Sing, Hamburg

4Singh is a for-profit think tank that offers consulting and coaching services in foresight and strategy development in the field of security and sustainability governance for public and private sector organisations across the world.

We examined their involvement in megatrends analysis and future research and their work on issues related to major discourses relevant for megatrends analysis and future research. We learned about their different orientations, approaches and changes in their strategies. The scope of this paper does not allow to present the work of these think tanks in detail. Thus, only brief summaries are provided focusing on how these organisations position themselves thematically and within the landscape of global think tanks and which strategies they adopt to maximise their impact.

5.1. Millennium Project (MP), Washington

MP has an explicit focus on megatrends analysis. Its 15 Global Challenges provide a framework to assess the global and local prospects for humanity and contribute much to knowledge dissemination on megatrends. The description of the trends is updated each year, since 1996.

MP, under the leadership of Jerome Glenn, puts a lot of emphasis on having a truly global approach, "a global representation" and aims to avoid ideological or country/region bias. MP works through and with "Nodes" (currently 71 across the globe) which enable the MP to quickly access intelligence and to collect analysis and assessments from around the world. It is involved in the preparation of the United Nations Summit of the Future in 2024 and has a strong motivation to guide and lead organisations and experts in providing policy advice in the field of megatrends and future studies.

5.2. Copenhagen Future Institute, Copenhagen

CIFS work contributes towards democratising future thinking and working for common goods. It stresses its ability to convene broadly and to engage with diverse stakeholders and is currently putting emphasis on engaging more with ethical dimensions of future developments. New projects relate to bringing future thinking principles to young people, inserting them into educational systems and developing open-source products for young generations. In cooperation with companies, CIFS stresses the importance of integrating anticipatory leadership thinking in corporate cultures rather than just creating well-designed but gimmick-like foresight tools. CIFS considers itself as a pioneer organisation in future research. It is aware of the current boom in forecasting and megatrends analysis which may provide opportunities for networking but also some quality related risks for the profession. CIFS hosts a UNESCO Chair in Anticipatory Leadership and Futures Capabilities.

5.3. Green Economy Coalition (GEC), London

GEC is an influential green economy network of organisations promoting the green economy and just transition to a sustainable future across countries and regions. Under the previous leadership of Emily Benson and the current leadership of Oliver Greenfield, the work of the coalition relates to the megatrends framework and to system risks. GEC puts a special focus on the intersection of megatrends. The organisation and its network contributed to make the Green Economy a megatrend in itself, and they aim to pro-actively shape megatrends by forging new alliances. Knowledge management is centred around its informative website which comments on recent developments, e.g., reflections on IPCC climate science reports. The GEC realises that policymakers will probably not move beyond incremental change. Thus, their strategy focuses more on new mechanisms of citizen engagement with a purpose to renegotiate social contracts for the green and just transition. GEC is realising that the climate imperative poses challenges to inclusive and democratic governance. Thus, it is crucial to find solutions addressing big social and political divides between and within countries for progressing with the sustainability transition and addressing systemic risks.

5.4. Center for China and Globalisation, Beijing

CCG has a broad agenda relating to many global megatrends and topics of future research with a focus on economic and trade policies. In the context of extended and sharpened interest in geopolitics and geoeconomics, CCG has got growing global recognition as a non-governmental Chinese think tank and is considered to have a huge knowledge base on internal relations. It benefited from the interest of the Chinese political leadership in policy-oriented academic work on global issues but considers itself as politically independent organisation. CCG is organising many dialogue events, contributes to books publications and publishes newsletters which reach a large audience in China and other countries. Policy advice is provided in the context of many high-level conferences and through direct contact to policymakers. CCG entertains good relations with the Chinese governments and works with several ministries and large companies. Under the leadership of co-founder and President Wang Huiyao, CCG has much contributed to disseminate the concept of think tank work in China and beyond.

5.5. Civil Society Institute, Delhi

CCS's mission is to "advance social change through public policy…" Its work is based on three pillars: education, livelihood, and governance. CCS provides policy training with the purpose to promote choice and accountability across the private and public sectors. To translate policy into practice, CCS engages with policy and opinion leaders through research, projects, and policy training.

Under the leadership of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Lakshmi Sampath Goyal who previously served as the CEO of the India Sanitation Coalition, the organisation has further strengthened its relationship with think tanks and other non-profit organisations networking on the national and international level.

CCS has influenced many policy-making and law-making processes in India, and closely follows and guides economic,

social, and political discourse on India's future. While CCS has no explicit focus on megatrends, future studies, or strategic foresight, it is interested in such topics and familiar with leading discourses related to megatrends. CCS emphasises that it always aims to stay on top of the agenda of key social and governance issues in India. It is internationally well-networked due to affiliations with various organisations, including liberal think tanks and foundations in the West which have provided funding support to CCS.

5.6. Cultural Infusion

Peter Mousaferiadis founded Cultural Infusion in Melbourne in 2002. The organisation has attracted some outstanding talents and established a good track record in the field of intercultural understanding. By 2015, Cultural Infusion expanded into the digital world, releasing award-winning apps, Joko's World and Sound Infusion. CI developed and promotes the Diversity Atlas, an online survey which is used as part of training programs to assess and monitor diversity within companies and organisations by measuring demographics and intersectional data across the four interconnected cultural diversity pillars: (1) Religion & Worldview (7,900+ religions, branches and denominations); (2) Country of Birth (UN list of countries and independent territories); (3) Language (7,900 + all spoken languages worldwide); and (4) Ethnicity & Race (8,000 + different global ethnic groups). It is developing comprehensive data sets on diversity and cooperation with governments and multinational corporations in their effort to more adequately recognize and promote diversity. CI has made contributions to promote the global megatrend of diversity and has participated in a megatrends project.

5.7. 4Sing, Hamburg

4Sing is a network of foresight experts working in different countries and guided by Adrian Taylor, a foresight expert, strategist, change agent and business coach with extensive and diverse international experience. 4Sing works about equal parts for the government and non-profit clients. 4sing experts focus on strategic foresight and strategy development targeting different industries, including the energy, utility, chemical, and automotive industry. 4Sing has worked in different countries across the globe, especially in Europe and Asia. It uses technological tools to enhance and visualise its scenario and system development work. While its scenario and strategic foresight work with public sector or non-profit clients sometimes involves external parties or is organised as a multi-stakeholder event, the more strategy-focussed consulting work with the private sector usually just involves different departments within one company as strategy development is sensitive in a competitive business environment. 4Sing cooperation and networking partners include organisations working in the field of design thinking, horizon scanning, action research and strategic foresight, especially EIDOS, the Global X network, Cognitive Edge, Futurescaper, futuribles, shapingtomorrow and 4strat.

6. Conclusion

Today it is easier to learn, analyse, and forecast future developments in different parts of the world as we live in a much more globalised world with better access to data, information and quick survey and networking tools. Thus, we are witnessing a significant growth of larger and smaller think tanks engaged in explicit analysis of megatrends, future studies,

and strategic foresight or working on issues which would qualify as megatrends issues. The many diverse think tanks are using different conceptual frameworks, methodologies, and tools. This may, at least in the long run, lead to a proliferation of new methodologies and enhance the quality of megatrends analysis and future research. Future literacy is likely to receive more attention by international organisations as well as universities and the education and consulting industry.

The majority of established think tanks, however, are not deeply affected by the burgeoning megatrends discourse and does not specifically engage in future studies or uses strategic foresight tools. There are some notable exceptions like the Bertelsmann Foundation, a large German think tank, which has recently taken-up megatrends analysis and forecasting.

Most of the leading think tanks are situated in the United States and EU countries but other parts of the world are catching up, including China and India. The knowledge management and policy advice strategies of think tanks usually follow their function and are diverse. Many of them concentrate on producing analytical reports including data analysis and policy recommendations, engaging in multi-stakeholder exchanges, and organising conferences and other dialogue events. The UN future summit 2024 reflects the growing attention paid by international organisations to future research and their interest to engage with think tanks and megatrends experts in exchanges and dialogue events on the future of humanity.

Author

Dr. habil. Berthold Kuhn is a political scientist and international cooperation advisor focusing on sustainability transitions, global megatrends analysis and future research. He works as adjunct professor at Freie Universität Berlin and as consultant to the European Commission, international cooperation agencies, think tanks and consulting firms. He has also worked as full and guest professor for several leading Universities in Europe and Asia.

Assisting author

Dimitrios L. Margellos holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the Freie Universität Berlin. Dimitrios is currently a Research Assistant at the ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies and works as independent analyst on political economy issues, as well as megatrends research. He contributed to this paper in his capacity as independent analyst.

Footnotes

[1] We have also made inquiries on the influence of megatrends discourses and think tanks to ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence language model developed by OpenAI (ChatGPT, Version March 14, 2023). We are aware of the ongoing discussion in academia to ban the use and citation of ChatGPT in academic works. We believe that the discussion has not come to an end. While we refrain from quoting our inquiries in the main text of this paper, we would like to draw attention that ChatGPT response are currently biased toward mainstream U.S. American think tanks as ChatGPT collects

its artificial knowledge and intelligence from big data analysis and the large majority of openly available reference to think tanks is found in the U.S.

2 The 12 megatrends identified in the book are: climate action and sustainability; digitalization; inequality; demographic trends, urbanization and smart cities; health and nutrition trends; green economy; sustainable finance; multipolar world order and the future of multilateralism; democracy and governance innovations; civilizational developments (diversity, individualization and loneliness, gender shift, and identity politics); and migration (Kuhn & Margellos, 2022).

3 According to Web of Science, the number of articles published on the topic of "megatrends" has more than doubled from 2010 to 2021.

4 Talk with Ariatani Wolff, a KAS scholarship holder on March 30, 2023.

References

- Barney, J.B., (1991) Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 99-120.

- Anacode (2023). Market Intelligence for the Future-proof Organization, Berlin, http://anacode.de/, accessed on March 31, 2023.

- Barham, J. & Barham J. jun. (2021). Top Influential Think Tanks Ranked for 2023, *Academic Influence*; https://academicinfluence.com/inflection/study-guides/influential-think-tanks

- Barham, K. (2021, 2023). Top Influential Think Tanks Ranked for 2023, in Academic Influence. https://academicinfluence.com/inflection/study-guides/influential-think-tanks, Jun 1, 2021, Updated: Mar 28, 2023.

- Beck Aktuell (January 28, 2021). BFH bekräftigt: Attac nicht gemeinnützig, https://rsw.beck.de/aktuell/daily/meldung/detail/bfh-bekraeftigt-attac-nicht-gemeinnuetzig-verein-will-karlsruhe-anrufen

- Bertelsmann Foundation 2019. Megatrend Report 1. The Bigger Picture, Gütersloh. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/the-bigger-picture-1

- Center for China and Globalization (CCG) (2021, November 4). CCG View. Newsletter.

- Chafuen, A./Forbes (Feb. 15, 2021). The Top Ranked Free-Market Think Tanks Today). https://www.forbes.com/sites/alejandrochafuen/2021/02/15/the-top-ranked-free-market-think-tanks-today/

- GIZ (2017). Trends and the Future of Development Cooperation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für international Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Eschborn. https://reporting.giz.de/2017/our-strategic-direction/strategy-and-outlook/trends-and-the-future-of-development-cooperation/index.html

- Khan, R. & Köllner, P. (2018). Foreign Policy Think Tanks in India: New Actors, Divergent Profiles; *GIGA Focus Asia*, February 2018; https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/foreign-policy-think-tanks-in-india-new-actors-divergent-profiles

- Kuhn, B. & Margellos, D. (2022). Global Perspectives on Megatrends. The Future as Seen by Analysts and Researchers from Different World Regions, Ibidem: Stuttgart, Columbia University Press, New York.

- Leach, M. (2021). Tackling Global Challenges in an Era of Disruption and Contradiction—The Changing Role of Think Tanks, in: McGann, James (2021). The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice Around the World, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 107-112.

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022): Definition: think tank. Available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/think%20tank [Accessed: 30.12.2022]

- McGann, J. (2021). The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice Around the World, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire.

- Mendizabal, E. (2021, August 4). The future of think tanks, OnThinkTanks, https://onthinktanks.org/articles/the-future-of-think-tanks/

- Morillas, P. (2021). Connecting Politics and Society: A Way Forward for Think Tanks, in: McGann, J. (2021). The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice Around the World, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 59-62.

- Naisbitt, J. (1982). Megatrends. Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives. New York: Warner Books.

- The Think Tanks and Civil Society Program (TTCPS) (2021). Global Go To Think Tanks Index Report (GGTI) (authored by James McGann), University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=think_tanks

- United Nations Development Programme (2014). Thinking the Unthinkable. From Thought to Policy – The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping Government Strategy. Retrieved from https://shop.un.org/zh/node/25520

- United Nations (2015). The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/ (regularly updated).

- Wang, H. (2021). Prospects and Possibilities for Think Tanks: A View from China's Non-Governmental Think Tank Sector, in: McGann, James (2021). The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice Around the World, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 217-224.

- Wolff, G. (2021). Artificial Intelligence: An Opportunity and a Challenge for Think Tanks. in: McGann, James (2021). The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice Around the World, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 53-58.

- Xue, L., Zhu, X. & Wanqu, H. (2018). Embracing Scientific Decision Making: The Rise of Think-Tank Policies in China, *Pacific Affairs* 91(1), March 2018 49-71, DOI: 10.5509/201891149