Differentiating Think-Tanks by Volume and Regularity of Research Output: An Eight-League Framework

Introduction :

Are all think-tanks of the same level?
No.

Just as companies are classified into small, medium, and large enterprises based on their number of employees or turnover [1],
restaurants are distinguished by the quality of their food [2],
hotels are categorised according to the quality of their services [3],
universities are ranked based on various criteria [4],
and football clubs compete in different leagues [5],
think-tanks, too, vary in calibre.

The purpose of this chapter is to define these different "calibres."

The aim is not to create a comprehensive ranking of every think-tank, like the "Shanghai Ranking of World Universities" [6],
but rather to propose a theoretical framework for categorising think-tanks.

In terms of the volume and consistency of research output, eight distinct categories emerge.

League 1 (L1) : "Leading think-tanks"
League 2 (L2) : "Promising think-tanks"
League 3 (L3) : "Rising think-tanks"

League 4 (L4) : "New think-tanks"
League 5 (L5) : "Inactive think-tanks"
League 6 (L6) : "Former think-tanks"
League 7 (L7) : "Time-limited think-tanks"
League 8 (L8) : "Non-existent think-tanks"

<u>Footnotes</u> :

[1] https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en

[2] https://guide.michelin.com/us/en/restaurants/3-stars-michelin

[3]
https://www.euronews.com/travel/2024/03/12/an-objective-anchor-in-the-sea-of-reviews-heres-how-hotel-star-ratings-work-and-why-they-m

[4] https://www.shanghairanking.com/

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_football_league_system

[6] https://www.shanghairanking.com/rankings/arwu/2024

The Eight Leagues :

The substance of their written publications is the only criterion taken into account.

L1 : "Leading think-tanks"

They frequently publish substantial research reports.

L2 : "Promising think-tanks"

They don't qualify for L1.

They frequently publish short analyses.

Notes:

- The top "student think-tanks" fall into this category, even though they could be considered for L1, as "students" are not regarded as real researchers.
- The best think-tanks with anonymous authors also fall into this category, even though they could qualify for L1, since "anonymous authors" are not considered real researchers

L3 : "Rising think-tanks"

They don't qualify for L2.

The frequency and substance of their written research output are at a low level.

L4 : "New think-tanks"

They are still in the project stage and don't have a long enough content history to determine which league they belong to.

L5 : "Inactive think-tanks"

They haven't published anything in a while.

L6 : "Former think-tanks"

Their closure has been officially confirmed.

L7 : "Time-limited think-tanks"

From its outset, this type of think-tank is designed to last only a certain number of months or years.

(Think-tanks in this category can also belong to one of the other seven leagues.)

Notes:

1. It is "time-related," not "goal-related," regardless of the time required to achieve the goal.

2. The best examples of L7 think-tanks are temporary research platforms (usually set up for around 2 to 3 years) created through EU-funded research programs.

Examples:

- [Fineprint](#), active from July 2017 to December 2022 ([About Fineprint](#))
- [PERITIA](#), active from 2020 to 2023.

L8 : "Non-existent think-tanks"

These think-tanks exist in name only.

An L8 think-tank doesn't have its own website or social media accounts to host its work. Unlike an L4 think-tank, its name is not new — old mentions of it can easily be found on the internet.
Its work is distributed across various opinion platforms (social media accounts, newspapers, other think-tanks, etc.) by an individual claiming to be its founder or someone associated with this (non-existent) think-tank.

Discussion :

The criterion of 'written publications' is an arbitrary choice.
Other criteria could be used to classify think-tanks by level.