

**Building a think tank: an
alternative, progressive public
space in Ireland**

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Abstract

From 2001 to 2010, the author founded and ran the first independent, progressive and evidence-based think tank in the Republic of Ireland. TASC – a think tank for Action on Social Change- is an independent, progressive think tank, based in Dublin, Ireland, whose core focus is economic equality and democratic accountability. TASC as an entity is the public work that forms the basis of the context statement. The themes explored concern the specific challenges involved in establishing an independent, progressive think tank in Ireland. To provide context, a short chronological account of the ten years from 2001 – 2010 is provided. This is followed by a discussion of how and why TASC is not only the first independent think tank in the Republic of Ireland, but acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a think tank field there. The issue of legitimacy is key to the evolution of both TASC and the space for think tanks so in Section 3, dimensions of this issue are examined. Many argue that because think tanks are founded and run by self-selected, small groups of individuals that at best they represent only these people and at worst serve the vested interests which fund them, while others argue that think tanks are an essential component of a pluralist society. Some of these arguments are explored in Section 4, which describes how TASC's unique structure and functioning impacted on the author, the wider group involved in TASC and TASC staff. In Section 5, the role of funding is discussed, identifying the importance of charitable foundations to TASC's establishment and survival in the first crucial ten years. Section 6 offers the authors concluding reflections.

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Glossary

AP	The Atlantic Philanthropies Charitable Foundation
CORI	Conference of Religious Institutions
DL	Democratic Left Political Party
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FEPS	Foundation of European Progressive Studies
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IIEA	Irish Institute of European Affairs
JRCT	Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
NERI	Nevin Economic Research Institute
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PCC	Public Communications Centre
ROI	Republic of Ireland
RTE	Radio Telefis Eireann
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UCG	University College Galway
S&D	Socialists and Democrats Group in the European Parliament
SVP	St Vincent DePaul Charity
TCD	Trinity College Dublin

Preamble

In 2001, I established the first independent, progressive and evidence-based think tank in the Republic of Ireland. In 2011, after 10 years with the think tank, I stepped down from the role of Executive Director. The Public Work I wish to submit is TASC the entity. TASC – a think tank for Action on Social Change- is an independent, progressive think tank, based in Dublin, Ireland, whose core focus is economic equality and democratic accountability.¹ The considerable body of research data, analysis and evidence-based arguments for more egalitarian public policies (in the form of books, reports, policy briefs and presentations) that we have put into the public domain are very important. But TASC as an entity is much more than its individual outputs. It is a means by which people who share an egalitarian vision of society can work together to achieve that end. I believe that in writing a full and reflective account of my experience of establishing and running TASC, I am making a contribution to the growing body of literature addressing the role of think tanks in society.

In selecting the themes I explore and develop in writing about TASC I have had to make choices. I do not provide a full account of the political, social and economic environment in which TASC was located, although I do make reference to relevant aspects of this as context for those issues I address. What I write about are the specific challenges involved in establishing an independent, progressive think tank in Ireland. How should I go about winning acceptance for TASC as a policy actor in a public policy environment where policymakers and policy influencers had no history of sustained engagement with groups outside of the official public policy making apparatus? How best could I reconcile the different motivations of the various actors on which the entity depended for realisation of its objectives? How could I meet the demands of a precariously-resourced organisation while optimising the full engagement of those working for it? These are the issues I have chosen to concentrate on in this context statement.

For me such insights are of importance to the extent that they provide a deeper

¹ See www.tasc.ie

level of understanding of what I have come to regard as the most meaningful achievement of my working life. But I also hope that they will prove of value to others who are planning to 'make' some kind of new entity, to mark their cards as it were on the issues that need to be addressed beyond, or in addition to, the check-list that can be found in a 'setting up your own business' manual. In particular, I hope that it will be of value to those considering taking a leadership role in an entity that shares the characteristics of TASC.

The standard approach to shaping a 'research' project is to first make explicit the intended outcome, which I have sketched in the above paragraph. The next step is to choose the collection techniques that elicit the necessary data. This is where I hit my first methodological challenge. As well as the analyst on this project I was also the primary source of data. However, because I had multiple sources of data, records of meetings, written organisational plans, independent external evaluation reports and so on, all converging on the same set of facts, I was reassured that I had sufficient checks on my own memory (Yin, 1984).

The second challenge emerged as I started to fulfil the primary data source role. How was I to reconcile the subjectivity of my account with the duty to provide an authentic account? What do I do about my awareness that my account of something would not be how other key actors would see it? Law (2004) suggests a way of addressing this concern that my account of different events and activities is almost certainly a different take on what others would truthfully provide when he points out that such variation of accounts does not mean that we are 'dealing with different and possible flawed perspectives on the *same* object' (2004, p.55). Differences in account of the same situation can be explained in ways that include the possibility that the different participants were actually making different interpretations.

A third methodological challenge arose from the question of how to account for an entity in a way that neither smooths out the zigzag nature of its evolution or despairs of making sense of an inchoate pattern of development.

Pains and pleasures, hopes and horrors, intuitions and apprehensions, losses and redemptions, mundanities and visions, angels and demons, things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change

shape or don't have much form at all, unpredictabilities, these are just a few of the phenomena that are hardly caught by social science methods (Law, 2004, p.2).

What should I include and what should I omit? How should I organise the material? Issues of staffing leaked into issues of deciding/implementing strategy. Funding decisions hit off questions of values. How should I reconcile differences between what I 'know' informally and what may be written in documents? I found that in fact the actual work of writing and rewriting the story of TASC was what helped to do just that, not just on the page but also in my head. In essence the account that follows is a narrative and a 'narrative approach to inquiry is most appropriate when the researcher is interested in portraying intensely personal accounts of human experience' (Gray, 1998, cited in Bell, 1999, p.16).

To provide context, I start with a short chronological account of the ten years I was Director of TASC. This is followed by a discussion of how and why TASC is not only the first independent think tank in the Republic of Ireland, but acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a think tank field in this country. The issue of legitimacy is key to the evolution of both TASC and the space for think tanks, so in Section 3 I examine dimensions of this issue. Many argue that because think tanks are founded and run by self-selected, small groups of individuals that at best they represent only these people and at worst serve the vested interests which fund them, while others argue that think tanks are an essential component of a pluralist society. I explore some of these arguments in Section 4, as I describe TASC's structure and functioning and how in turn this affected me as Director, the wider group involved in TASC and TASC staff. In Section 5, I look at the role of funding and the importance of charitable foundations to TASC's establishment and survival in the first crucial ten years. In Section 6, I offer some concluding reflections.

Section 1

Establishing TASC – A Short Chronological Account

TASC – A think tank for action on social change came into existence in 2001. In this section I provide a chronological account of its first ten years, the period in which I was director. I start by briefly situating its formation in the Irish political and economic environment into which it inserted itself. I go on to describe the particular circumstances and motivations leading to its establishment. This leads to an account of the development of the organisation over the ten years of my leadership and what I have learned from my reflections on this period in its history.

1.1 Political and economic background

Notable features of the Irish political system include the electoral weakness of the left together with a weakness in class-based politics and a similarity between the three main political parties in terms of their perspectives and policies (Hughes *et al*, 2007, p.242; Rafter, 2011). It was against this political background that I joined Democratic Left (DL), shortly after its formation as a political party in 1992. A product of a split from an older socialist party, DL defined itself as a democratic socialist party on the radical left of the Irish political spectrum (Rafter, 2011, p.42). Although, for reasons of organisational weakness and lack of resources, DL was propelled into a merger with the larger Labour Party in 1999, throughout the seven years it existed, one of the key drivers of party activists, of whom I was one, was the commitment to finding new solutions relevant to the economic, social and political conditions prevailing at the end of the twentieth century.

At that time, Irish public policy making tended to be both conservative and reactive, perceived to be a technocratic-managerial concern rather than a political one (Fitzgerald, 2003), strongly influenced on the one hand by the institution of social partnership and on the other by powerful vested interests, wealthy individuals and elite groups. At least in part because of a degree of public fatalism about the

manner in which such powerful vested interests skewed public policy in ways that favoured the interests of the few, public engagement with politics has been relatively low (Gallagher *et al*, 2005; Eurobarometer 67, 2007, p.5.).

Following a long period of economic difficulties, the decade immediately preceding our decision to establish TASC was a decade of unprecedented economic growth which lasted through what are known as the 'celtic tiger' years until the profound economic collapse in 2008. Predictably, Ireland's success during this period was widely welcomed and extolled internationally as attributable to its implementation of neo-liberal prescriptions including public spending cuts, tax cuts, curtailment of wage increases and deregulation. However, there are persuasive accounts that challenge this assessment, pointing to the positive role played by the state and *inter alia* by the trade union movement as well as the implications of a general uplift in the global economy and Irish membership of the EMU (Sweeney, 1998; O'Toole, 2003; Kirby, 2010). Moreover, it is now clear the seeds of destruction of the Irish economic miracle were present all along, exacerbated by poor policy decision-making in the five or so years immediately prior to the collapse of 2008 (Kirby, 2010; Clancy, 2012).

1.2 The circumstances of the decision to create TASC

In 1998, members of the Democratic Left political party² came together to organise a series of informal gatherings (Coffee Circle Papers, 1999). The particular context was the perceived need to develop a new and coherent intellectual response to seemingly intractable problems, including the economic inequality and other negative social indicators that persisted in parallel with strong economic growth. Taking place over a six month period from January to July 1998, informal as they were, these meetings were my first experience of serious discussion of political ideas at an intellectual level. Until then, my political engagement had been confined to issue-based, local activism.

In 1998, discussions about the possible unification of Democratic Left

² Democratic Left was one of the three party coalition government in office between 1994 and 1997.

(DL) with the Irish Labour Party began – a process completed in 1999.³ At around the same time, the idea of establishing what was then called a political foundation was first mooted in a persuasive paper by a long time DL member. It was this paper that led to the DL initiative to include a think tank in the newly-merged party structures.

As part of the merger discussions, both parties undertook to form a policy and research foundation associated with the newly-merged Party (Democratic Left, 1998). I was one of the DL-nominated members of the Taskforce established to develop the foundation and we produced a blueprint for its formation in December 1998 (Labour Party/Democratic Left Taskforce, 1998). Although the newly-merged Labour Party came into being in 1999 and the agreed document underpinning it included a commitment to form a think tank, in the event, this did not come to pass. It is not clear to me why this was the case and I can only assume that other elements of the agreement were given greater priority. However, the report of the Taskforce addressed the core issues involved in setting up and running a think tank⁴ and was hugely helpful to me in establishing TASC.

Notwithstanding the decision of the leadership of the newly-merged Labour Party not to go ahead with the party foundation, a number of people (academic and political friends and colleagues) continued to be convinced that some type of think tank organisational structure was required and, because I was willing to undertake the work of establishing TASC on a full time basis, the decision was taken in late 1999 to proceed with the project.⁵

DiMaggio (1988) defines an institutional entrepreneur as an actor who ‘mobilize[s] resources to create new institutions or transform the existing ones’ (cited in Battilana, 2006, p.654). Not everyone, however, is equally likely to act as an institutional entrepreneur (Battilana, 2006, p.659). Why did it fall to me to take the lead role and why was I personally drawn to the

³ The name the Labour Party was retained.

⁴ See also Appendix II for discussion of the concept of a think tank.

⁵ In January 2001, I took a one-year leave of absence from my position as Head of School of Business and Humanities in the Institute of Art Design and Technology (IADT). I resigned from that position with effect from 1 January, 2002.

task? Three factors that intersected at a particular point in time provide the answer. The first factor was a 'moment' in the Irish political environment where a small number of us who felt that 'something should be done about a particular problem or issue' (Harvey, 2000, p.58) were sufficiently resourced and motivated to do it.

...There are good reasons why an organisation such as TASC has a particular urgency... The new millennium provides a symbolic opportunity to reflect on the past, assess current conditions and create new solutions for the future. In addition, for those concerned with progressive change, Ireland faces a series of challenges: the apparent triumph of neo-liberal economics globally, the rise of the new right across Europe and the domination of the Irish political landscape by a conservative political and economic ideology. ... Through socially regressive taxation in four of the last five budgets, we have actually increased inequality in Ireland rather than narrowing the gap between rich and poor....(TASC (2002) *Introduction to TASC*. Internal TASC document. Unpublished).

The trajectory of my educational and career development combined with personal characteristics and motivations was the second factor. The idealist in me was drawn to study the social sciences in university. I majored in sociology to master's degree level, a subject which awakened in me a deep antipathy to the systematic inequalities and injustices in society and also provided both a thorough training in the techniques and tools of rigorous research and a commitment to their value. Sociology was a subject particularly important in providing the critical tools to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions which form the basis of popular beliefs and on which much political decision-making is based. After university, I worked extensively in public policy research and managed and/or authored a number of research reports and monographs in the field of education, arts and culture, industrial policy and development aid. Each public sector post I held, increasing in seniority, usually involved some element of research and/or research management. Thus, by the late 1990s, I had acquired a skill set that was very relevant to the work of a think tank – research, writing, research management, research consultancy and organisational management within various organisations whose goals were social rather than profit making. Additionally, throughout my work life I had an appetite for project and organisational innovation – for example, the job I left to found TASC had been to set up the first school of

business and humanities in a new third level institution in Dublin. And finally, I was drawn to political activism, politicised by what I had learnt at university and strongly influenced by those with whom I worked in my first job as a researcher on poverty. For many years, I worked on single-issue campaigns around issues of social justice, culminating in my joining the new Democratic Left party in the early 1990s. The third factor that led to my taking the lead role in establishing TASC was that, in the late 1990s, I was at a point in my own career, where I was seeking a new challenge and was in the lucky financial position of being able to take on a risky venture.

1.3 TASC from 2001 to 2011⁶

There were just three of us involved in the initial planning of TASC – Proinsias DeRossa,⁷ Jim O’Donnell and me. From a series of conversations over a period of months, the shape of the organisation we were creating came more clearly into focus as key decisions were taken. One of the most important of these decisions, signalling a clear distinction between this initiative and that of the by now defunct party- associated foundation, was that the new think tank should be independent of all political parties, albeit clear in its founding statement that its values were those traditionally associated with the political left. We felt that if there was to be a space for genuine new thinking, that it must be possible to involve those who would have an important contribution to make but would not wish to be associated with any one political party.

Following the planning period, in June 2001, TASC was formally incorporated as a not-for-profit limited company.⁸ Just seven people, of whom I am one, legally ‘owned’ the organisation and signed its original memorandum and articles of association. I was appointed Executive Director, accountable to the non executive directors. This group of seven

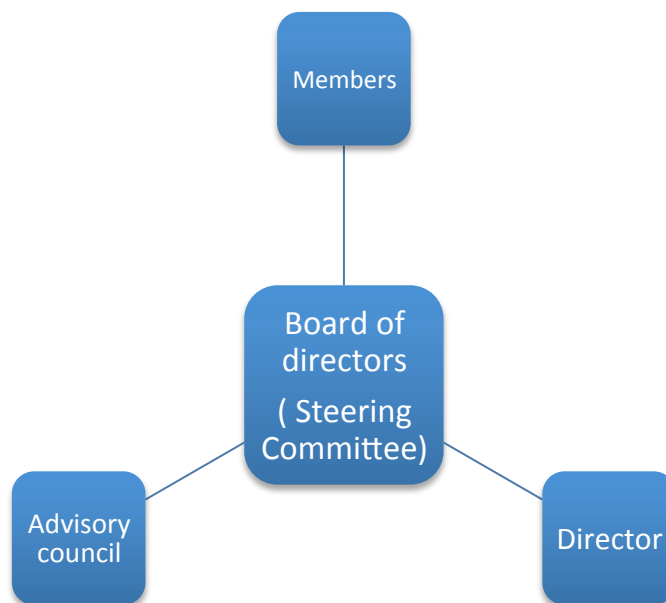
⁶ See Appendix 1 for major milestones in TASC’s development over the period.

⁷ Proinsias de Rossa was leader of the Democratic Left Party of which Jim O’Donnell and myself were members. It was his initiative, as part of the Labour Party/DL merger negotiations, to establish the working group to advise on a party linked think tank. Jim O’Donnell authored an internal DL paper on the purpose and functioning of such a think tank.

⁸ The original name for TASC was The Foundation for Policy Alternatives. In 2002, it changed to TASC – A Think Tank for Action on Social Change. It is registered in the Companies Office as Research and Organisation Services (ROS)/Trading as TASC.

appointed the first Board of Directors⁹ and each year at its AGM, formally approves changes to the membership of the Board. A Steering Committee comprised of the three Board Directors together with Fintan O’Toole, Chair of the Advisory Council, and my two co-founders, Proinsias DeRossa and Jim O’Donnell, and me met at my instigation as often as was required for the first five to six years of TASC’s existence and were the critical group overseeing its development in this period. As TASC evolved, this group gave way to a larger Board of Directors.

FIGURE 1 EARLY TASC STRUCTURE



By September 2001, small offices were leased in a building in Dublin’s city centre, close to both the Houses of Parliament (The Dáil and Senate) and to Government Buildings where all members of the Parliament had their offices. An administrative assistant was recruited. From the outset, identifying sources of funding for TASC was a major preoccupation. We were fortunate to begin with a number of contracts from the Socialist Group

⁹ The first Board of Directors comprised Des Geraghty, then General President of SIPTU, Prof John Horgan, academic and former Labour Party politician and trade unionist, John Curran.

(PES) in the European Parliament and research project work for Proinsias de Rossa as an MEP, together with a small amount of other project income and donations. These sources of income were crucial: without the likelihood of securing them the project of establishing TASC would never have been initiated. However, in essence these sources provided what amounted to seed funding, covering my salary that of an assistant and basic office facilities, and at almost every meeting of the Board of Directors and the more informal Steering Group, we discussed the fact that we had only sufficient money to cover three to six months of this level of operation. It helped prevent a sense of panic, certainly for me, that this was not unusual in NGOs.¹⁰ However, it also meant that the need to raise funds was ever present and a huge amount of time and effort went into identifying potential sources, preparing tailored explanations of what the organisation was about and trying to be persuasive to sceptical outsiders as to why they should believe that such an untried entity could deliver. This was all very energy consuming and for some time we had little to show for the effort.

Immediately following legal incorporation as a not-for-profit charity, our first initiative was to bring together a group of twenty progressive individuals who were leaders in the fields of politics, media, communications, academia, trade union movement and other civil society sectors.¹¹ All of these people agreed to sit on an Advisory Council to TASC, chaired by the journalist, critic and author, Fintan O'Toole, widely acknowledged as one of Ireland's leading public intellectuals (Finn, 2014). The inaugural meeting of the Advisory Council, critical to shaping our future direction, was held on 12 October, 2001. This meeting defined a programme, around two themes, economic inequality and democratic accountability.¹² We developed and implemented this two-pronged programme over the subsequent four years and, notwithstanding the major boom and subsequent bust that hit Ireland later in the decade, these two themes have been at the centre of TASC's programme of work right up to the present day.

¹⁰ Matthew Taylor, at the time the Director of the IPPR think tank in London, told me when we met that his organisation was always within three months of closing its doors.

¹¹ See Appendix III for list of membership of inaugural TASC Advisory Council.

¹² Minutes of meeting of TASC Advisory Council, 12 October 2001.

Looking back now on the development plan¹³ I presented to that first meeting of the Advisory Council, just four months after our formal incorporation, it is clear that in my anxiety to propitiate those members who were as yet unconvinced that the venture would succeed, I seriously underestimated what was involved in getting a think tank off the ground. An ambitious work programme, a communications strategy and a fundraising strategy, which included commercial research activity as a key component, were all to be implemented in less than two years. I also planned to grow a core staff complement from two people in early 2002 to nine by June 2004, which would also require moving to larger premises by June 2003. I did actually succeed in building this scale of operation but it was to take a further five years to realise. In the meantime a negative implication of setting myself such an unrealistic timescale was contending with the spoken and unspoken disappointment of those who had hoped for more rapid results, never mind the *Schadenfreude* of those cynical about the endeavour from the outset. From time to time, in the first years, I would be told of critical comments made to others about the absence of output or impact, which were not easy to hear given the intensity of effort I was making to get to that point. It was not until November 2003 that TASC published the first of 16 books/pamphlets under the TASC at NewIsland imprint.

An early and very valuable source of support to TASC, both strategically and operationally, was that provided on a pro bono basis by a not-for-profit company called Public Communications Centre (PCC). With the help of this company, TASC established the partnership with New Island Publishing, providing a crucial outlet for dissemination of TASC-derived materials in retail outlets throughout Ireland. Fintan O'Toole wrote 'After the Ball', a critical analysis of contemporary Irish society, as TASC's first statement in the public domain, a generous act of support to TASC.¹⁴ Because Fintan is one of Ireland's best-known public commentators, the publication of 'After the Ball' attracted significant media interest. As a direct result, the weekend following the public launch, at very short

¹³ TASC (2001) *Three Year Development Plan*. Internal TASC document. Unpublished.

¹⁴ See Appendix IV for list of TASC output between 2003-2010.

notice, I was invited by RTE Sunday lunchtime news, a major media news programme, to comment on government actions in relation to a specific issue of social policy. The invitation was my first experience of what the media would expect of a think tank, and of me as its only spokesperson. As I was not briefed on the specific issue and did not want to handle a high profile media interview without preparation, I did not take up this invitation. I tried to find a spokesperson on behalf of TASC among the members of the Advisory Council, but, again at short notice, was not able to do so. This experience provided me with an early and salutary lesson in the weaknesses of attempting such a groundbreaking project with just one person (myself) at its core.

Consistent with the decision to build TASC's work programme around two themes, economic inequality and democratic accountability, I began to explore how best to proceed on both fronts. The Democracy Commission was our first substantive and innovative project, initiated in 2002 as a joint project with the Northern Ireland think tank, Democratic Dialogue.¹⁵ This was a voluntary independent commission of eleven members aiming to 'make public engagement the cornerstone ... of democratic participation in decision making' (Harris, 2005, p.viii). I sought and received significant funding from the UK-based Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for this project (See Section 5 for discussion of TASC's relationship with this funder). Although two other people worked consecutively on the project in its establishment phase, Dr Clodagh Harris, a political scientist on secondment from University College Cork, coordinated the Commission's extensive public engagement and consultation work over the 2003-04 period and edited the Commission's report, published in 2005 (Harris, 2005). The structure and process of establishing the Commission was one I modelled on the type of independent commission the think tank IPPR had initiated in the UK as well as on the Opsahl Commission, a civil society initiative in Northern Ireland, which reported in 1993. In 2002, not only was TASC unknown as an organisation but there was no experience of this type of civil

¹⁵ Robin Wilson was the founding director of Democratic Dialogue and very helpful in assisting TASC get over the 'unknown' factor by linking the two organisations in projects.

society initiative in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) - up to this time such commissions of enquiry as there were had been government appointed. With TASC providing the secretariat, the take up of membership of the Commission was impressive: David Begg, the General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) was Chair, the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, acted as its International Counsellor and the other members included academics with acknowledged expertise in their field, NGO leaders and representatives of the three (at the time) biggest political parties. Since public, political and media engagement with the Commission was its defining feature, I had to make a strategic choice between building familiarity with TASC or the Democracy Commission. I opted for the latter, deciding to live with the fact that this would inevitably mean a delay in building awareness of TASC itself. Since most of TASC's resources, over and above the specific project funding supplied by the JRCT, went into the public promotion of the Commission's work which had its own branding, TASC's ability to establish its presence as an independent think tank was significantly delayed.

Following a protracted period of intense interaction involving many meetings and submission of documents, by 2004, discussions with The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP), a US-based charitable foundation, had borne fruit and TASC was funded to conduct a baseline study of democracy in Ireland (See Section 5 for discussion of TASC's relationship with AP).¹⁶ As part of this project, working with a team of in-house researchers, Clodagh Harris, Ian Hughes and Grainne Murphy, I managed a suite of research projects on democratic accountability; I was lead investigator on three of these and commissioned three others from external researchers, with the outputs listed overleaf published over the period 2005 to 2008.

¹⁶ The Audit Methodology was based on the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Assessment Framework (Beetham *et al*, 2001).

DEMOCRATIC AUDIT IRELAND: RESEARCH OUTPUT

Clancy, P. Hughes, I. and Brannick, T. (2005) *Public Perspectives on Irish Democracy*, Dublin, TASC.

Clancy, P. and Murphy, G. (2006) *Outsourcing Government: Public Bodies and Accountability*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Wilford, R. and Wilson, R. (2006) *The Trouble with Northern Ireland, Dublin*, TASC at NewIsland.

Wilford, R. and Wilson, R. (2007) *Power to the People? An Assessment of Democracy in Northern Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Hughes, I., Clancy P., Harris. C. and Beetham, D. (2007) *Power to the People? An Assessment of Democracy in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

O'Broin, D. and Waters, E. (2008) *Governing Below the Centre: Local Governance in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

In parallel with the work of establishing the Democracy Commission, I began to explore ways of progressing TASC's economic inequality agenda. The TASC Economist Network was formed as a result of a conversation between me and Paul Sweeney, an economist then working with Ireland's largest trade union SIPTU and subsequently as Chief Economic Advisor to ICTU. Paul is a long time political activist (member of DL and then of the Labour Party) and knew the economist community in Ireland very well. At my request, he contacted all those whom he believed would hold views that were consistent with TASC's aims and invited them to join a network of economists who would collaborate on work consistent with the TASC agenda. More than forty economists, including acknowledged leaders in their field, held their inaugural meeting as the TASC Economist Network on 27 June 2002 in a Dublin hotel.

Although a number of meetings of the whole Network were held in the first couple of years, it quickly became apparent that its biggest benefit to TASC was that it provided a pool of people sympathetic to associating their areas of research interest with TASC. Many of the Network members were also keen to have an opportunity to influence public policy by having their work made more publicly available in a more popular format. Because of our publishing partnership with an established publisher, we were able to offer such an opportunity. Five publications as listed overleaf, all tackling serious economic issues, were published by members of the Network during that early period.

PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIST NETWORK

2004-2006

Sweeney, P. (2004) *Selling Out? Privatisation in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Drudy, P. J. and Punch, M. (2005) *Out of Reach: Inequalities in the Irish Housing System*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Stewart, J. (ed) (2005) *For Richer, For Poorer: An Investigation of the Irish Pension System*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Jacobson, D., Kirby, P. and O'Broin, D. (eds) (2006) *Taming the Tiger: Social Exclusion in a Globalised Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Wickham, J. (2006) *Gridlock: Dublin's Transport Crisis and the Future of the City*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

From 2002 to 2007, although centred on the two themes of economic inequality and democratic accountability, TASC's work programme was entirely project-based. It had become clear that without a much greater proportion of its income base coming in as core funding, the organisation would be unable to develop. Project funding was never sufficient to cover administrative and development costs, nor would it cover costs of communications, including, critically, those associated with advocacy of the ideas and policy proposals that emerged from the research and analytic work. Moreover, while TASC was able to employ staff to work on these projects and as a result on average employed four staff, up to 2007 I was in effect the only person continuously employed in the organisation. A step change in the evolution of TASC as a think tank was needed and during 2006 I began discussions with AP about the possibility of their making TASC a significant core funding grant. Serendipitously, under its Human Rights and Reconciliation Programme, AP had made it one of its objectives to strengthen key non-governmental organisations (NGOS) to protect and promote rights. In 2007, following many further meetings and submissions to AP, as a precursor to considering if TASC would qualify as one of these key organisations, AP provided TASC with in excess of €400k to cover our core costs while we conducted a major strategic planning exercise. It is hard to overstate the importance of this grant to TASC's survival and subsequent development. It allowed for an extraordinary level of financial support to a small NGO, €90k of which was to be spent on consultancy expertise in the areas of strategic management, communications and fundraising. It also allowed me as director for a period of close to one year

to devote my time almost entirely to the work of planning the development of the organisation.

With this grant in place, the Board of Directors, the consultants led by Kathy Colgan of Deloitte¹⁷ and I worked on a strategic plan for TASC which we hoped would persuade AP to provide us with core funding over the following five years. Although enormously encouraged by the generosity of their support to this point, on-going core funding was by no means a foregone conclusion. To demonstrate future sustainability after the grant period, part of any core funding commitment from AP included a requirement to raise an ever-increasing level of matching funds, something we knew would be challenging in the Irish context. In the event, AP did offer TASC a grant of €2.1m to fund the implementation of our five year (2008- 2013) strategic plan¹⁸ representing on average close to two- thirds of TASC's income¹⁹ over that period. With this funding I increased TASC's staff complement to seven full-time positions and implemented fundamental changes in our internal structures, processes and outputs. (See Figure 2) Outwardly, the organisation looked the same. It retained its original name, legal and governance structure and leadership. Internally, however, as of mid-2009, TASC had shifted from an organisation accurately described as *ad hoc* and project led in its activities to an organisation with a permanent staffing structure²⁰ which included subject experts, communications/public relations expertise and fundraising expertise, all supported by an evolving set of governance, operation and management systems. Styurk (2006) has called the early *ad hoc* and project led phase Stage 1 in the development of a think tank. In other words, although legally and formally established in 2001 (and at least one year in the making prior to this date), it took eight years before TASC took on many of the recognised features of a think tank, an issue I will take up in the next section.

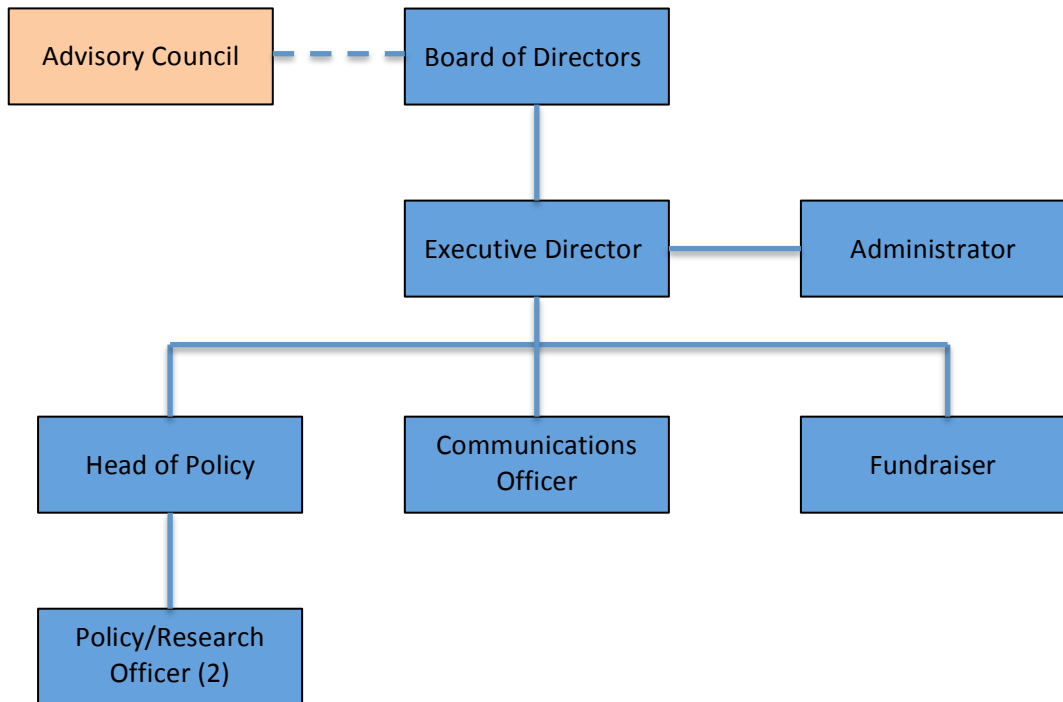
¹⁷ It should be noted that Deloitte discounted a portion of their fees as a contribution to TASC.

¹⁸ TASC (2008) *Strategic Plan 2008-2013*. Internal TASC document. Unpublished.

¹⁹ Based on an assumption that an additional €1m funding would also be secured over that period.

²⁰ The word permanent indicates that, although on fixed term contracts, staff would remain with the organisation subject to funding availability.

FIGURE 2 TASC's CORE TEAM²¹



The cataclysmic economic collapse in Ireland occurred in parallel with the receipt of the AP core grant so that almost immediately it was necessary to reshape our planned programme. The recession, combined with the related failures of public governance and regulation, meant that we decided to narrow our focus to address the critical issue of economic recovery but a recovery which would be much more egalitarian in nature. Because of the AP funding, we were now better placed to do this as we had the resources to put in place the necessary infrastructure.

²¹ TASC (2008)

From 2008 to early 2011 when I stepped down as director of TASC, I developed and implemented new systems to underpin this structure²² while I sought to develop structures for maintaining and increasing the involvement of external collaborators. TASC also embarked on an ambitious fundraising programme designed by Fran Brennan, our Fundraising Manager. A membership programme named TASCNet was an important initiative allowing TASC to regularly communicate with up to 500 interested citizens. In October 2009, Alex Klemm, our Communication's Officer, initiated TASC's first economic conference, which has since become an annual event, as well as the TASC Progressive Economics blog. In 2010, TASC also published a series of papers on economic policy issues written by Sinead Pentony, the Head of Policy, and Dr Nat O'Connor and Tom McDonnell, the two specialist policy staff. Based on work by the economic policy team, TASC made its first substantive submission to the national annual budget process with an analysis of how excessive use of tax expenditures in Ireland was a major contributor to both the inequity and the fragility of the Irish tax system. On the democratic accountability element of the programme, with Nat O'Connor and a research assistant Kevin Dillon, I conducted a major empirical study of overlapping directorships in Ireland and also developed a policy on appointments to public bodies, drawing on earlier work on this issue. During that time TASC continued to publish a significant number of research and policy outputs by members of the Economist Network and by others who wanted to associate their work with the TASC project.²³ The policy staff also worked with external collaborators on a number of commissioned projects. With all of this output to showcase and with a full-time communications officer in house, TASC's presence on mainstream debate programmes increased substantially over this period, including on high profile national TV programmes, and TASC's print media profile was also enormously enhanced. This level of media coverage made the task of

²² Deloitte provided support for designing and implementing a staff performance appraisal system. With additional funding from AP, we also engaged a consultant on governance to review our governance structures and assist us to implement a best practice framework.

²³ See Appendix IV for full list of TASC output over the period 2003-2010.

getting a hearing for our proposals that much easier, an example of which was the publication of the report Mapping the Golden Circle.

This report, published in May 2010, presented the findings of a research study that examined the widely-held perception that Ireland is run by a small pool of well-connected individuals sitting on the boards of Ireland's top companies. In the months following the well-publicised launch, the report was discussed in the Houses of Parliament, on national TV and radio and was also widely cited in national and local newspapers. TASC made a submission to the Irish Financial Regulator on the Irish Corporate Governance code. The report of the Regulator, published in 2010, included several elements that had been directly proposed by TASC. Furthermore, in an address made in November 2010, the Financial Regulator cited TASC's influence and the work of Mapping the Golden Circle in particular on his conclusions. The report is used as a course text both by the Department of Law at UCC and the Institute of Management Ireland. Independent evaluation concluded that that TASC has had a very direct and well-delineated impact both on public debate within Ireland and in terms of a specific shift in public policy.

With TASC now established on a firm basis, in January, 2011, ten years after I had begun to put the organisation in place, I stepped down as Director. One of TASC's policy analysts, Dr Nat O'Connor, was appointed to the position of Director.

Section 2

TASC: Catalyst for an Emerging Field

2.1 New organisation and new field

At the time TASC was established in 2001, there were limited alternatives to neoliberal discourse in the public sphere. Many reasons can be offered to explain this. One is that politics and political discussion in Ireland in the twentieth century significantly deviated from the European norm for reasons ascribed to the historical role of the ‘...national question, with its dominating impact on party political formation and allegiance’ (Labour Party/Democratic Left Taskforce, 1998). As a consequence, policy making tended to be reactive, perceived to be a technocratic-managerial concern rather than a political one. A second is that Ireland’s political system, with mostly centrist political parties, is very centralised. Think tanks of any kind were a rarity.²⁴ Understandably, in this environment there was little substantive discussion or debate on matters of public policy, either amongst the political class or the general public (Eurobarometer 67, 2007, p.5.). Moreover, Ireland was not immune from the global influence of the economic right. This was the period in the United States where there was a deliberate programme of building conservative think tanks committed to marketing neo-liberal economic policies; throughout the 1990s, spending by centre-right and far-right think tanks grew rapidly. Taken together with the absence of a similar level of spending by mainstream or left-of-centre think tanks,²⁵ this level of spending ‘allowed conservative policy entrepreneurs formidable power to define, direct and dominate policy and ideological debates’ (Commondreams.org, 1999; Rich, 2005). Influenced by these debates, strong neoliberal orthodoxies prevailed across Irish public policy spheres without the need to establish conservative think tanks of their own, and few genuinely ‘progressive’ or alternative socio-economic policy debates had been

²⁴ Harvey (2000) identified four in the ROI and one in N. Ireland.

²⁵ The Brookings Institute was a notable exception.

generated over the decades prior to TASC's establishment²⁶ it might have helped if I had understood back then just how unfamiliar was the very concept of the think tank in the Irish public policy making context - the term was simply not in use in Ireland in advance of TASC's arrival on the scene - and thus what a challenge it would be to communicate and make the concept legitimate.²⁷

When I began the work of establishing TASC, we were entering uncharted territory. I literally found myself staring at the proverbial blank page.²⁸ We knew that think tanks existed in other countries, but, in the absence of either comprehensive data or easily accessible analytic material on think tanks as an entity,²⁹ my understanding of the day-to-day specifics of their role and function was hazy to say the least. Even though I was aware of the spectrum of entities that were in the business of policy-oriented research and/or policy advice/advocacy, and of the range of actors in the world of policy influence that was already in play when TASC was formed, there was no sense that these individual organisations constituted a collective field of activity. The term think tank was not used in relation to any of these bodies and neither were they associated with a particular ideological orientation in the political sense. Thus, in creating TASC we were establishing a particular organisation and at the same time we were beginning the work of establishing the think tank as a recognised actor in the field of public policy in Ireland, occupying a particular social space. Our understanding, albeit implicit, that we were doing both these things was a critical if unarticulated influence on the actions we took, on the way in which we structured TASC and with whom we sought to connect.

By organisational field, I am using DiMaggio and Powell's (1991b) definition to mean '...those organizations that in the aggregate constitute a *recognized*

²⁶ It should be noted that The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was established in 1973 to advise government on economic and social policy. Its members are representative of a variety of interests including trade unions and community and voluntary organisations and as such represent a diversity of perspectives. To complement the NESC, in 1992 the Irish Government established the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) to advise it on how to combat long-term unemployment and, from 1997, on how to achieve greater equality and social inclusion in government policies.

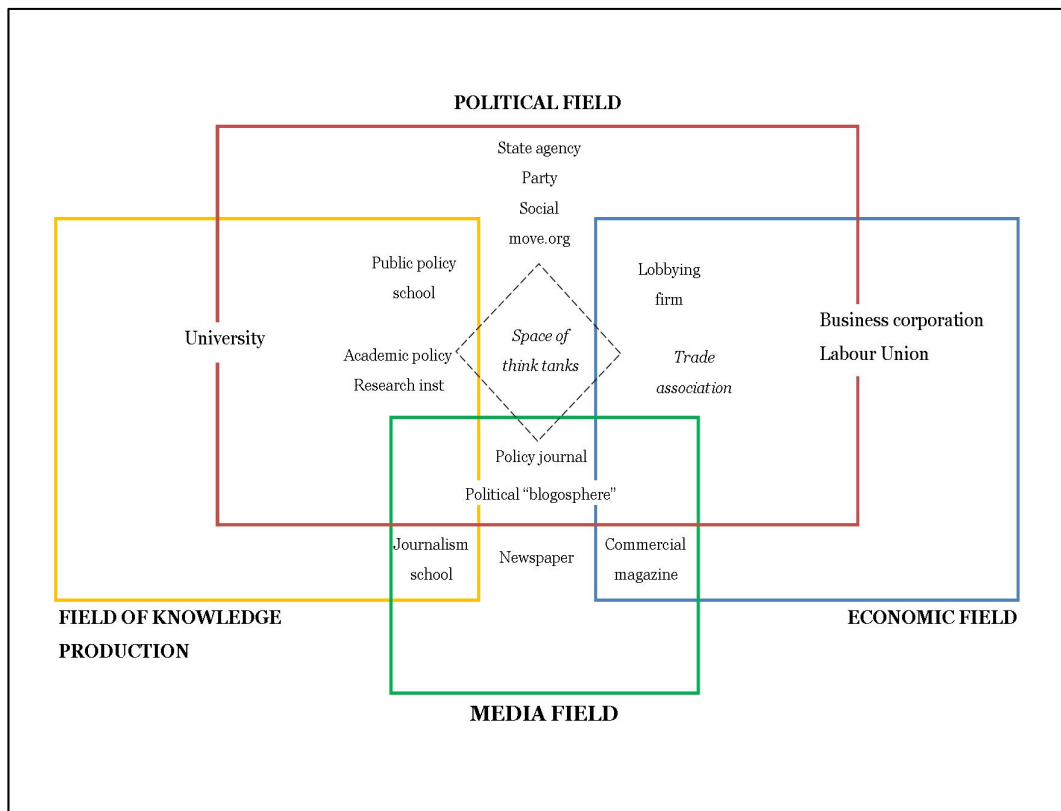
²⁷ Medvetz (2012) who provides the first major sociological account of the think tank as a phenomenon, takes issue with the prevailing tendency within the think tank literature to attempt to come to grips with the nature of a think tank through taxonomies and typologies, not least because '...there are not substantive properties shared by all members of the think tank category as the term is currently used in political discourse' (2012, p.33).

²⁸ This is not to discount the extremely valuable learning associated with my membership of the Task force on establishing a Labour Party related policy foundation.

²⁹ See Appendix II for a discussion of this.

[my italics] area of institutional life' (1991b, p.65). Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu, Medvetz (2012) uses the concepts of 'social space' and 'field of power' as tools to describe the unique world of the think tank while accounting for the diverse ways in which it intersects and overlaps with other fields. For Bourdieu (1990), (quoted in Battilana, 2006,), 'fields are structured systems of social positions within which struggles take place between individuals over resources, stakes, and access' (2006, p.656). Figure 3 below provides a visual representation of the field of public policy and the

FIGURE 3 THINK TANKS IN SOCIAL SPACE³⁰



space to be occupied by think tanks within this. The story of establishing this space in Ireland is a story of engaging with the holders of cultural and economic capital, i.e., academia, media, state agencies and political parties as well as the trade union movement, representative bodies for business and, finally, to some extent with others in the think tank field. It is also the story of how we determined with whom and in what ways we would win acceptance

³⁰ Medvetz, 2008, p.6.

for TASC, as an essential prerequisite for winning the 'battle of ideas'.³¹ In doing so, we found we had to simultaneously persuade our target audiences of the value of think tank type interventions in general *and* the value of TASC specific interventions.

2.2 TASC - a unique think tank in evolution

As I described earlier, when we started TASC we had somewhat hazy views (often divergent) of the specifics of how a think tank might work. I was also constrained by the very limited resources available, impacting on my capacity to give concrete expression to grand aspirations of radical social change. I was further hampered by the absence of familiarity in the Irish context with the very idea of a think tank. These obstacles notwithstanding, we were nonetheless determined that it would be something very new in the Irish context and we started with what tools and resources we had.

At its core, TASC creates a space for fresh and innovative thinking, leading to practical policy solutions, which will feed directly into the campaigning platforms of political and civil society activists (TASC, 2002 *Introduction to TASC*. Internal TASC document Unpublished).

The list of issues discussed at the inaugural meeting of the Advisory Council provide a very good insight into the mind set of those involved at this very early stage of development – including the energy and positive engagement with the concept: the name of the organisation; the kind of organisations we should model ourselves on; the policy issues with which we should be concerned; the audiences we needed to address; the means of communicating – the role of the website, types of publications, who should be TASC's spokespersons, etc; questions of how we should begin – a public launch with as much fanfare as we could muster or remain below the radar while we developed our thinking and our structures; questions of how to establish our credibility and our legitimacy; questions of the role of members of the Advisory Council and others in generating the work; and questions about whether to take an organisational position on issues or to be a conduit for a

³¹ According to Urrutia (2013) writing about think tanks the 'war of ideas describes a confrontation between opposing ideals, ideologies, representations and concepts'. (2013, p.23)

diversity of views.³²

Hasselbladh and Kallinikos (2000) developed a theoretical framework to analyse institutions in the process of formal organising which helps explain how our original ideas and intentions, together with somewhat 'haphazard modes of action' (2000, p.704), gradually gave shape to the evolution of TASC. First, it is necessary to conceive of and to constitute a delimited domain of action, i.e. think tank research and policy analysis. Second, following this delineation, performance principles, specified rules of conduct and devices are developed and embedded into the organisation. In this way, organisational action can be designed, carried out and controlled. Finally, all of this is sustained and given meaning and direction through the organisation's 'capacity to constitute distinctive forms of actorhood' (2000, p.701), for example the policy analyst. This framework translates into three analytically-distinct concepts which together comprise the process of institutionalisation, here applied to the case of TASC. The first of these analytic concepts is that of ideals i.e., our belief that not only was new, independent and progressive thinking needed but also some kind of institutional mechanism to provide a bridge between this thinking and public policy. These ideals are then transformed into a discourse, a distinctive way of defining and acting upon reality, the second concept. In the case of establishing TASC, this meant promoting the importance of ideas and alternative thinking for public policy making. Educating political actors, policy makers and policy influencers via policy research and analysis was our key 'domain of application' (2000, p.206). In those first years, this was primarily through seeking as much media attention as we could and also using more direct means to bring our work to the attention of those that mattered – circulating our documents, seeking meetings to explain our ideas, issuing invitations to our events. In later years, as we gained greater legitimacy, we were invited to appear before committees of parliament, our work was quoted in parliament and individual policy makers sought briefings from us. Rules of conduct included demonstrating independence, demonstrating evidence bases for ideas/policy proposals and

³² See Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the TASC Advisory Council, 12 October, 2001. Internal TASC document. Unpublished.

declaring our particular values. The third concept is that of establishing specific techniques of control, i.e., 'various systems of classification and measurement' (2000, p.705). Influenced by my own academic background, I elected to make our ideas credible through use of standard scientific method approaches to the work, supported by well understood techniques of validation.³³

The actual experience of putting this framework into practice was far from smooth. Within the TASC Advisory Council, early intense discussions about how we should proceed made clear that there were many different views on TASC's institutional shape, on the degree to which we wished to be regarded as politically partisan or independent, on our target audiences (see above) and on whether we should generate our own material or draw on data and analysis that already existed. In the first five years or so, our approach vacillated on these issues. For example, one of the objectives of the Democracy Commission was to engage directly with those marginalised from political activity, whereas with other projects we sought media attention as an indirect route to influencing policy. Although, we had broad consensus that we should use our limited resources frugally and avoid replication, the nature of project funding often drove us to engage in work that required us to gather primary data.

We also had to contend with varying responses to our initiatives. For example, at an early stage in the planning of the Democratic Audit Ireland project, I sought to engage with the political scientist community by a general notice via their academic association. I interpreted the non-response as a kind of academic dismissal of TASC's pretensions in taking on this subject. It should be noted however, that subsequent overtures to individual academics to both write specific sections of the audit and/or act as peer reviewer were met with great generosity. The response was also overwhelmingly positive to invitations to a whole range of people, academics, NGOS, politicians and

³³ All our technical work was subject to peer review, while our commentary on macro trends which drew on multiple indicators was subject not only to individual peer review by relevant discipline experts but also to broader groupings. For example, part of the methodology of the Democratic Audit was the conduct of a series of expert conferences, designed to allow the preliminary findings of the audit to be presented to specialists and practitioners and to allow critical external evaluation (Hughes *et al*, 2007).

public servants to comment on different sections of close to final drafts of the Democratic Audit Report.

2.3 Emerging field of think tanks

Medvetz (2012) defines the think tank as an interstitial field, a space between the fields of academic, political, economic, and media production. 'By depicting think tanks as inhabitants of an *interstitial field* we can arrive at a better understanding of both the considerable differences among think tanks and the unifying forces that draw them together in the practice of policy research' (2012, p.18).³⁴ Not only are the boundaries between think tanks and other kinds of organisations both porous and unclear but this fuzziness is itself a critical feature of what makes the think tank a unique entity (Medvetz, 2012). In fact, a primary characteristic of the think tank is its propensity to "become hybrid" (2012, p.135). As Medvetz (2012) puts it: 'Like a territorial buffer zone, this *space of think tanks*...has the paradoxical quality of being defined most readily in terms of what it is not, or in terms of its negative relationships with the more established institutions that it helps to separate and delimit' (2012, p.7). Crucially, in order to establish its own unique identity, a think tank must in fact establish its independence from each of these fields (Medvetz, 2012, p.24). Consistent with this account, at the outset it was difficult to articulate what was unique about TASC. In initial discussions with those I was seeking to engage in the project, I found myself describing TASC by how it differed from academic research institutions, advocacy NGOS or organisations affiliated with a political party or special interest group. In this I was not alone. The then deputy director of the IPPR based in the UK, where the contemporary think tank concept was said to have originated in the early seventies, put it like this 'think-tanks are neither part of the academic community, the media, government or voluntary sector...And while they are undoubtedly value driven, they do not represent a fixed cause or group' (Harker, 2002).

Referring to the need to both draw upon but also differentiate from each of

³⁴ As an aside, it would have also helped to know that think tanks elsewhere have 'long been sites in which the question of the social value of intellectual activity is posed most acutely' (Medvetz, 2012, p.27).

the four fields of academia, politics, media and economics, Medvetz (2012) says ‘The result of this “quadruple bind” is a precarious and never-ending balancing act, or a dynamic game of separation and attachment’ (2012, p.24). By his account, think tanks are oriented to a multiplicity of social universes. Most rely heavily on financial donations from private foundations, wealthy individuals, and business corporations. Some maintain loose affiliations with universities and research institutes, political parties and advocacy groups. Even those that have no such ties commonly enter into short-term partnerships with these organisations. Finally, many think tanks exist in a relation of ‘symbolic dependence on other institutions in that they borrow and incorporate their established forms, strategies, and procedures’ (Medvetz, 2008, p.5).

In a note on the evolution of think tanks in Appendix II, I describe the diversity of organisational types included in the term think tank and the general agreement in the literature on the virtual impossibility of arriving at a common definition by deriving a list of the think tank’s ‘essential’ properties. Without specifying the names of the organisations, McGann’s (2012, p.35) most recent survey reports that there are 14 think tanks in Ireland, using a very wide categorisation. He includes both quasi-independent and wholly-affiliated organisations in his definition. When TASC was founded, in my view just four organisations concerned with economic issues, had think tank characteristics. These were the long-established Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), by McGann’s definition a ‘quasi-independent’ entity, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), government agencies with broad representation among civil society and special interest actors, and CORI (subsequently known as Social Justice Ireland), a quasi-independent body associated with the Catholic Church. In addition, there were organisations concerned with specialist areas such as the Irish Institute of European Affairs (IIEA) which also share think-tank characteristics. Since TASC was founded, three new entities concerned with economic issues have been established, the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI), wholly-funded and formally affiliated to the trade union movement, PublicPolicy.ie, an organisation wholly-funded by

the Atlantic Philanthropies and The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, a government-appointed and funded body. Describing the evolution of TASC is a process of describing how all of these organisations, diverse in structure and operations, came to be seen, to borrow Medvetz' (2008, p.5.) phrase, as part of a collective in the Irish public policy environment in the period 2001- 2011 and the catalytic role that TASC played in this evolution.

2.4 Evolving field

Medvetz describes three aspects of what he refers to as the crystallisation of the space of think tanks:³⁵ the growth of interrelationships among organisations; the creation of new intellectual products and practices by the policy staff of these organisations; and, the growing familiarity with and discussion of the role of think tanks. Together he says 'these processes contributed to the installation of the think-tank category in the social world' (Medvetz, 2012, p.116). Given the constraints we were operating under, it was not until after 2008, that it could be said that TASC, both as an entity and as a member of the category, came to bear any resemblance to Medvetz's account. The outcome of the very intensive strategic-planning process undertaken in 2007/2008, described in the previous section, which included researching the operation of progressive think tanks in other jurisdictions, meant that for the first time I had both a 'blueprint' for shaping a think tank and the promise of resources to implement it. From mid-2009 to early 2010, I recruited expert staff and put in place new operational processes, added new products and engaged in new practices. Helping to consolidate the space of think tanks as an element of the public-policy sphere, NERI, a new trade-union backed economic think tank was founded in 2011.³⁶ Its first director had had a long association with TASC prior to taking up his post, staff from TASC have since shared platforms with NERI staff, collaborated on projects and, at time of writing, three of our former staff are employed by NERI. Thus, the growth of network ties and formal linkages among organisations (the first of the Medvetz criteria for the evolution of the think tank category) is in

³⁵ Medvetz' (2012) account refers to the United States.

³⁶ A recent conversation with a senior trade unionist made clear her view that NERI would not have been established if TASC had not preceded it.

place. New intellectual products and practices have emerged, considerably helped by the fact that TASC could 'borrow' products and practices from think tanks elsewhere. A good example of this is the policy brief, a typical think-tank output, contrasting with academic papers/monographs in that it will normally comprise concise analysis of a problem in the public domain and evidence-based policy recommendations of solutions to it.³⁷

The clearest indication that TASC, although still tiny by think-tank standards, was now recognisable as such to ourselves and to a wider community of think tanks, was our new capacity to engage on an equal footing with the international community of progressive think tanks. In 2010, TASC became an observer member of the Foundation of European Progressive Studies (FEPS) which has more than 60 members from across Europe. In turn, the FEPS has links with progressive think tanks in both the United States and Canada. Since 2010, TASC has run a number of events in partnership with FEPS, has addressed events sponsored by either FEPS or its member think tanks and has co-sponsored research projects with FEPS. More and more organisations are now identified as think tanks in Ireland³⁸ and what is of as much interest are the characteristics they share as well as those that differentiate them. I argue that increasingly there is a think-tank sector in Ireland which, as has already occurred in other places '...collectively... make up a structured social universe with its own "rules" and hierarchies' (Medvetz, 2012, p.169). This should not be overstated. In contrast to the maturity of the field in the US, UK and Europe generally, its emergence in Ireland can at best be described as nascent and still fragile. However, a small number of think tank type organisations are increasingly oriented to each other and TASC is also increasingly part of an international community of progressive think tanks. We did not start with the goal of bringing a think tank field into being in Ireland, laudable as such a purpose would be. The fact that this is what we ultimately ended up doing is essentially a story of navigating a path through the world of public policy making that would allow us to fulfil our original purpose i.e., to change the way issues of

³⁷ As part of its strategic shift, TASC ceased its publishing partnership with NewIsland and began to produce and disseminate its own products, primarily via the TASC website.

³⁸ In December, 2014, The Collins Institute was launched as the first political party-based (Fine Gael) think tank in Ireland.

economic inequality and democratic accountability are framed in Ireland.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AS A THINKTANK

As Ireland looks towards the 2011 Budget and as commentators and policymakers in Europe and North America debate the merits of different economic approaches, the 2010 FEPS/TASC Autumn Conference will build on the work done at two major events in 2009. In Washington, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and the US Economic Policy Institute hosted an economic seminar with experts drawn from think tanks (including TASC) in North America, Europe, South America and Africa. Shortly afterwards, in Ireland, the first TASC Autumn Conference set out to change the parameters of the Irish debate on the causes and responses to the current economic crisis. That conference posed a challenge to the austerity regime currently pursued in Ireland, and instead argued for an investment-led approach which can both grow jobs and reduce the deficit, while ensuring that the Irish economy is well-positioned to benefit from international recovery.

This year, FEPS and TASC have joined forces to organise a major international conference spread over two days. The theme of the 2010 FEPS/TASC Autumn Conference is Towards Recovery, and the conference will bring together a range of acknowledged experts to discuss specific issues and solutions.

We hope that this conference will generate debate about the policy choices facing us – and we hope you will be part of that debate.

Extract from brochure FEPS/TASC Autumn conference, Dublin 20-23 October. Dublin, TASC

Section 3

Creating Legitimacy

Along with the considerable challenges of scaling up a new entity, particularly one of an experimental nature, from the outset it was clear that to survive and to be successful we had to establish our legitimacy, both intellectual and political.

Entrants in...[a]...new sector have to overcome their lack of legitimacy: in the absence of solid records they can find it difficult to form alliances and to access resources, as stakeholders do not know whether or not they are trustworthy...This lack of legitimacy is compounded by the lack of clearly defined templates as potential entrants face the added costs of researching information on the activity and how it can be performed' (Dejean *et al.* 2004, p.743).

For TASC establishing our legitimacy meant we had first to address the newness of the concept of a think tank in order to gain what Bitektine (2011) calls cognitive legitimacy, a form of legitimacy accorded when the nature of the organisation is familiar (2011, pp. 156-157). Simultaneously, we also found ourselves trying to establish our right to exist, both as a left organisation within a deeply conservative environment and as a new type of organisational entity. Bitektine calls this sociopolitical legitimacy whereby a judgement is formed as to whether the organisation is acceptable and, hence, should be encouraged (or at least tolerated) or unacceptable so that efforts are made to close it down or at least change its activities to render it more acceptable (2011, p.157). If TASC was to get a hearing from policy influencers the notion of a think tank had to be familiar and TASC as a specific think tank had to be acceptable as a legitimate actor in the public policy sphere.

The think tank's first goal, even prior to that of exercising political influence, is to differentiate itself from its nearest neighbours in social space' (Medvetz, 2012, p.46).

In the context of not only a centrist, conservative policy environment, but also a small, closed and in many ways anti-intellectual political class, the first question posed to any new arrival on the scene was the question 'who are you?' There has never been a prominent 'left wing' in Irish politics

(even the Labour Party which has been a part of a number of coalition governments is more centrist than comparable parties in other countries). Accordingly, there has never been a coherent public voice promoting credible but fundamentally different progressive policy alternatives. In this environment, TASC found it necessary first to establish a level of general profile, principally to increase the likelihood of its target audience taking the time to thoroughly consider TASC's policy positions. However, what made this a complex challenge was that beyond these immediate considerations of familiarity and right to exist, we had to do much more. If TASC was to win not only sufficient financial support to survive, but also support in the form of recognition from key actors in the policy-making sector, I had to build its reputation for both independence and intellectual expertise.

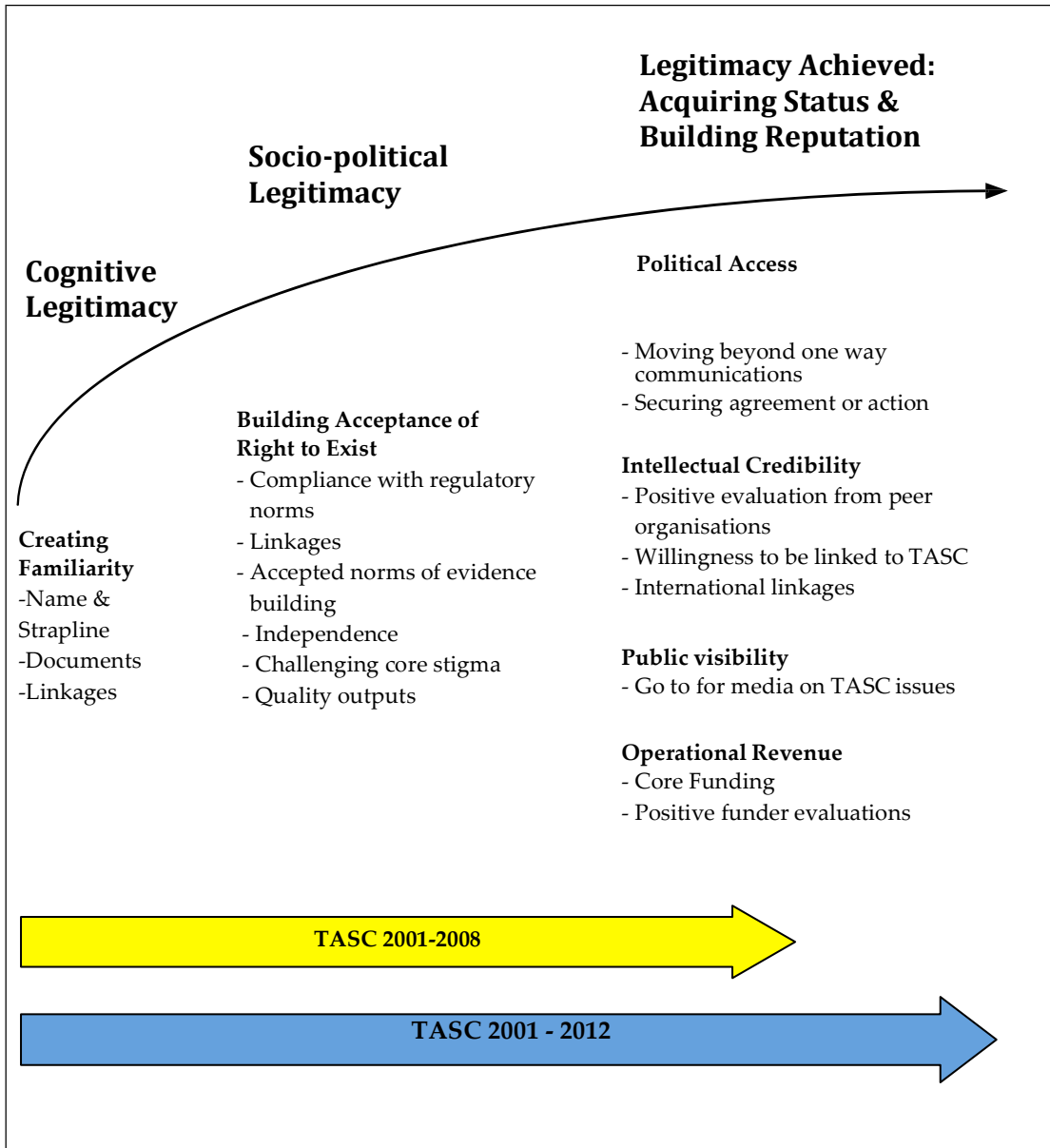
3.1 Legitimation strategies

Reviewing all the documentation I have on file around the initial actions to establish TASC, it is clear that, while vague as to the particular form and content of the entity that we were creating, I understood many of the critical issues and challenges that are generic to creating awareness and ensuring the acceptance of a think tank: attracting financial support from funders, securing acceptance by peer organisations and key influencers as the 'go-to' organisation on selected matters, getting a hearing from the media and from public policy-makers and so on (Medvetz, 2008). But to do all of this, I first needed to actively devise and implement 'legitimation strategies' (Bitektine, 2011, p.152).

All of the earliest structures and systems I put in place reflected efforts to implement such strategies. See Figure 4. I was conscious not only of the multiplicity of audiences we needed to address but, crucially, their varying perspectives on who we were and what we were trying to do, covering the spectrum from sympathetic to neutral to hostile. Achieving legitimacy was

made all the more difficult by the experimental nature of what we were attempting (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994). The first two columns of Figure 4 set out schematically the various strategies I implemented to address the dual

FIGURE 4 TASC'S LEGITIMACY CHALLENGE



challenge of building familiarity while acquiring the right to exist. The third column lists a series of indicators of growing status and reputation. While these three columns are presented as analytically separate, in practice the activities overlap and intersect with each other. I also draw a distinction between what took place up to 2008, by which time the foundation work of

establishing legitimacy was complete, and after the 2008 period when my attention was primarily given to building TASC's reputation.

Creating familiarity

In Ireland, TASC is almost unique in using the term 'think tank' as a descriptor; and it is only since the establishment of TASC that other entities are referred to as think tanks in media or political discourse. '...for those involved in the world of policy research and advocacy, the practice of calling one's organization a "think tank" is rarely a neutral act of self-description. It is also a strategic move in a social game...' (Medvetz, 2012, p.34). According to Medvetz (2008), how the think tank is defined is not merely of academic interest, but goes directly to the issue of credibility, essential if it is to deliver on its *raison d'être* of finding an audience for its ideas and policy proposals. 'For certain organizations, especially those that would otherwise be described negatively as interest groups, activist associations, or lobbying firms, the term brings a cache of intellectual authority. To become a "think tank" is to rise above mere interest-based politics and claim the symbolic dividends that accrue from membership among expert knowledge producers' (2008, pp.2-3). However, in deciding to use the term think tank in our name we were doing much more than this. It was in fact a kind of 'coming out', a declaration of intent and a claiming of a space.

In the first year of TASC's life, I also spent some time writing the document 'Introduction to TASC'.³⁹ The document quite consciously spoke to some of the questions we anticipated from our target audiences. The issue of independence was key to many, hence phrases such as 'free of obligation to established ideas and old ways of proceeding' and 'distance from political and financial pressure', along with 'openness and transparency' and 'committed to a diversity of perspectives'. We also made our claim for intellectual credibility, undertaking to follow academic norms by producing evidence-based research and analysis which would stand up to scrutiny. However, for many of our audiences, political parties and politicians on the left as well as a whole range of social justice activists, we also needed to make clear

³⁹ TASC (2002) *Introduction to TASC*. Internal TASC document. Unpublished.

that our intent was to produce ideas and proposals that were alternative to the mainstream, devised with the principles of social justice and solidarity at their heart and intended as the basis for action. In this context, the document used phrases such as ‘important link in the chain connecting ideas to action’, ‘contesting existing agendas’, ‘legitimising a counter discourse’ and ‘bolstering the campaigning platforms and actions of progressive political parties, trade union groups and other civil society groups who are pursuing an agenda for change’.

Building acceptance of the right to exist

As described in an earlier section, as a prerequisite to any claim we would make for legitimacy, I put in place all the legal and regulatory requirements of a new enterprise, extended in our case to meeting the requirements of a not-for-profit company that would qualify for charitable status. Charitable status not only provided a guarantee that TASC was a *bona fide* organisation, compliant with all state regulatory requirements, but it also conferred a kind of ‘certificate’ of independence since the very stringent requirements for charitable status included a rule that we demonstrate our activities were in the public interest only. Critically, it was also a requirement of the major funders.

Creating a ripple effect, many of the early collaborators with the project of creating TASC themselves generated an expanding network of contacts and supporters who lent their status and reputation to the project. Bitektine (2011) refers to this as linkage legitimacy, which is ‘legitimacy based on the organization’s linkages with highly legitimate social actors in its environment’ (2011, p.156). In order to ensure that the organisation would be taken seriously, many members of the TASC Board of Directors and its Advisory Council were chosen because of their public status. In approaching these figures, all strongly associated with progressive values and therefore most likely to be sympathetic to the ideals we were trying to pursue, we needed to first persuade them of our credibility as people engaging in an activity to which they could risk lending their own reputation. As more and more people of high status and credibility showed willing to be associated

with the project, it became easier to gain a hearing from yet others, including funders, politicians, academic 'experts' and media personnel.

Important as this strategy was, paradoxically I found myself confronted early on with a dilemma: highlighting our association with many of these people undermined our capacity to persuade some of our audiences of our independence, for many a defining attribute of the 'true' think tank. In the very early years, much of the limited media commentary there was on TASC reflected scepticism and hostility towards the idea of a think tank, as exemplified in this extract from a typically cynical article which appeared in the magazine *The Phoenix*:

The most politically correct entity in Irish public life has just been created....Named TASC –“a think tank for action on social change” – its first initiative has been to set up a commission, in conjunction with the northern group, Democratic Dialogue, whose remit is to take on the challenge of “reinventing democracy for 21st century Ireland....The group proclaims its deference to the “politics of feminism and class in the fight against inequality and poverty” but is anxious to assert that its “distance from political and financial pressure will protect the independence of its agenda and modus operandi”. However, a quick glance at the worthies who staff its Advisory Council – which will “furnish the critical impetus for new ideas and strategies” - quickly gives the game away (*The Phoenix*, 2003).

A more even-handed account of TASC's arrival, whimsically titled *Political Fictions*, was published in the *Dubliner's* 2003 Christmas edition. The journalist had this to say about TASC:

A new (sic) think tank called TASC is attempting to fill this gap in the democratic process...Leading lights of the trade union movement and left-leaning academia are among the members of TASC's cord- wearing advisory council, but we should not be too quick to dismiss it as a talking shop for do-gooders, as Brendan O'Connor predictably did in the *Sunday Independent*. Instead, we should welcome the fact that TASC is debating crucial issues of poverty inequality and social exclusion in an independent setting....If TASC can shake off the inevitable jibes about its progeny and carve out a position as an independent catalyst for fresh thinking, it will breathe much needed life into our jaded political culture (Brophy, 2004).

Although it may well have militated against our ability to get a hearing on many issues, mostly we opted to involve the people we believed were important to TASC because of their values regardless of any negative implications for political access, media commentary or funder approval.

3.2 Legitimacy achieved

By 2010, TASC's evaluators⁴⁰ were able to find evidence that TASC had achieved a degree of both cognitive and sociopolitical legitimacy and could point to a number of positive indicators of TASC's reputation and status, testimony to considerable progress over the intervening ten years. The evaluators reported that there was a general consensus right across the political, statutory, academic and NGO consultees that TASC was "a good idea" in terms of increasing the health and breadth of public debate in Ireland⁴¹ and that in general those interviewed believed that the 'TASC concept was a sound one that was healthy for Ireland's political and public administration systems'.⁴²

The evaluators concluded that TASC was filling an important gap in terms of substantive research 'on the left',⁴³ that TASC needed less introduction/explanation within the media and that TASC was being treated more like an established player. They found that the media were in fact very positive towards TASC noting that '...the vast majority welcomed the advent of a 'left-leaning' think tank'.⁴⁴ Media personnel were found '...to be more than willing to engage with and make space for TASC, and most indicated that TASC was their 'go to' source to balance out right-biased contributions from the standard corners'.⁴⁵ TASC had also made some impact on public consciousness: a 2009 TASC public opinion poll indicated that 31 per cent of respondents were aware of TASC, (with good age, gender, regional and social classification spreads), while the comparable ESRI figure was 76 per cent, reflecting both scale differences and the ESRI's 50 year history (and associated prominence in the media). Later public polls commissioned by

⁴⁰ As part of our funding agreement with the Atlantic Philanthropies, TASC engaged Boyd Associates to undertake an independent evaluation of TASC performance against objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan 2008-2013. At the outset, the evaluators agreed the data and records which they would need over the evaluation period and which TASC undertook to collect (media coverage, website usage etc). In addition to this material, all internal documents, operational plans, budgets, minutes of staff and board meetings and so on were made available. The evaluators conducted interviews with key external personnel in media, political parties, and the public service as well as with board and advisory council and economist network members and with staff.

⁴¹ Boyd Associates (2010) p.30.

⁴² *ibid*, p.30

⁴³ *ibid*, p.29

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.29.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.29

TASC showed TASC's recognition factor had jumped to about 47 per cent by 2012, while that of the ESRI had dropped from a high of 76 per cent to just 70 per cent. Thus, despite a huge difference in resources and state sponsorship, the recognition gap between the Goliath in the field, the ESRI, and TASC had reduced from 45 percentage points to 23 percentage points.⁴⁶ By 2012, TASC had made real inroads to being accepted as an independent organisation providing credible, evidence-based analysis with the result that key influencers and decision makers were increasingly willing to pay attention to what we had to say. TASC's evaluators were able to report that the organisation had '...definitely succeeded in changing the policy debate in Ireland'.⁴⁷ Some caveats were noted. From an academic perspective, TASC had still some way to go before 'gaining the respect of the research community', with the need for more transparent/robust peer review being raised on a number of occasions.⁴⁸ The evaluators concluded, however, that since neither politicians nor public servants cited a lack of technical rigour as a limiting factor on TASC's influence, TASC was successfully managing the balancing act between establishing credibility while retaining its core identity as an organisation committed to radical values.⁴⁹

In effect, there is now a virtuous spiral in place. The step change in TASC development enabled by the funding received from The Atlantic Philanthropies, allowed us to put in place a think-tank structure that in turn enabled us to employ the policy specialists and communications staff, that in turn facilitated our engagement with both the public policy sector in Ireland and on a wider canvas, the international community of progressive think tanks. This engagement has allowed TASC to hold major public events, co-sponsored by a range of organisations including a number of embassies with internationally renowned expert speakers and important actors on the national public policy stage – for example, the acclaimed French economist Thomas Piketty was the key note speaker at TASC's 2014 annual conference and his respondent was Patrick Honohan, the Governor

⁴⁶ Boyd Associates, 2012, p.13.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.42.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p.16.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.17.

of the Irish Central Bank.

3.3 Limits to legitimacy and implications for survival

Although I do believe that the think-tank field is now an established part (albeit fragile) of the Irish public policy environment, paradoxically, the strategies which helped to legitimate TASC as an organisation had the effect of undermining the acceptability of TASC proposals and ideas to some of our important audiences.

The TASC strapline, website and documentation are clear about our commitment to radical solutions to the challenge of economic inequality. Hudson (2008) uses the term 'core-stigma' to 'describe the negative social evaluation of an organization by some audiences because of some core organizational attribute, such as core routines, core outputs, and/or core customers' (2008, p.252). As he insightfully points out, using the example of trade unions in the United States, 'by considering core-stigmatized organizations, we begin to understand that perhaps all organizations are stigmatized by some social audiences at one time or another' (2008, p.254) and furthermore, that a core organisational characteristic can 'simultaneously be perceived positively by some audiences and negatively by others' (2008, p.254). The TASC mid-term evaluation report, covering the period between 2010 and 2012, provides some evidence of this. For instance, it points out that neither of the Government parties drew significantly on TASC analysis within Parliamentary debates and that government party politicians thought that TASC's proposals were too abstract and/or did not take sufficient account of short-term political constraints. On the other hand, opposition politicians were more enthusiastic so that the evaluators concluded that such divergent views represent 'the differing realities of being in government and being in opposition'.⁵⁰

The core stigma attached to TASC by some is not explicitly because of its professed concern with economic inequality but is rather attached to the idea that TASC is of the 'left'. In Ireland, for very many, the terms 'left wing'

⁵⁰ *ibid*, pp.13-14.

or 'socialist' are simply synonyms for at best hare-brained/impractical/wrong-headed ideas about how the world works and how it should work and at worst dangerous and perhaps even immoral designs to 'take' from deserving people that which they have rightfully acquired. In other societies, more ideologically diverse than Ireland, such attributions are of varying consequence, depending on the degree of such diversity. However, I have already noted the relative hegemony of Irish institutional and individual conservatism. For those so minded, simply to refer to TASC as left leaning is to imply that its views should not be taken seriously. Hence, in commentary to be found amongst those interviewed by the evaluators, phrases such as 'same old loony left dressed up in new clothes' were not uncommon.⁵¹

For others the very idea of an independent think tank is itself anathema, with those involved lacking legitimacy simply because they are not representative of those who carry some kind of official imprimatur from the holders of economic and cultural capital. Some of the relatively extensive media coverage of the public launch of the Democracy Commission offers an early example of this, making clear that the very idea of an independent think tank was unacceptable, as was the idea of an independent commission. Noel Whelan, associated with Fianna Fail, but also a journalist and influential political commentator, wrote in an opinion article in the *Irish Examiner*, one of the three Irish daily broadsheets: "I asked a question at the press conference. I wondered whether they were concerned that many would regard it as highly ironic that a self-appointed left-wing oligarchy has taken it upon itself to handpick 10 people to undertake a study of Irish democracy". Later in the same article, Whelan writes "Our democracy, for all its flaws, actually works very well. Criticism like that from TASC and other left wing groups often derives from their failure to persuade voters of the merits of their case" (Whelan, 2003). He goes on to make clear the kind of institution/actor whom he does regard as legitimate commentators on Irish democracy: elected politicians, parliamentary committees, the Central Statistics Office and university- based political

⁵¹ *ibid*, pp. 26-27

scientists.

Hudson (2008) discusses how core stigma can affect not only organisational image but also organisational identity. Organisational image is 'the perception of the organization that insiders wish to portray or project to outsiders' (2008, p.256). For TASC, this is as a value-driven, independent organisation, committed to producing evidence-based policy solutions. Organisational identity is the perception of insiders of 'what is central, enduring and distinct about their organization' (2008, p.256). For TASC, this identity is that of an organisation whose *raison d'être* is to bring about profound social change resulting in a more equal society. Depending on the power of the core-stigmatising audience, the capacity of the organisation to project its identity can be contested. In this situation the viability of the organisation will depend on how it responds to the stigma in order to reduce its impact. Medvetz, once again using the balancing act metaphor, says that to succeed in its mission 'a think tank must reconcile its pursuit of intellectual credibility with the pursuit of three temporal forms of power: political access, public visibility and financial support' (Medvetz, 2012, p.131).

Rather than deny its accuracy, as TASC director, I sought to challenge the basis for this core stigma; to the extent that the values and societal ideals TASC espouses can traditionally be thought of as 'left wing' then the attribution is not only accurate but desirable. However, as yet, TASC has not found many funders with deep pockets, other than the two charitable foundations already funding us, who are interested in supporting the development of policies to promote economic equality.⁵² To date, TASC has been adept in carrying out the complex balancing act that pairs a genuine intellectual autonomy with 'a more subtle willingness to abide by the established rules of the political, economic and media fields' (Medvetz, 2012, p.150). However, I believe that as a progressive organisation in a predominantly conservative society, and thus likely to be critical rather than approving of the public policies of centre/centre right governments, we will always face challenges in doing this while continuing to hold to our

⁵² Both the JRCT and the Atlantic Philanthropies are withdrawing from Ireland and will cease to fund TASC from 2016 and 2017 respectively.

core organisational identity. Medvetz (2012) suggests that 'the success of conservative think tanks [in the US] was based on an elective affinity between the content of their policy prescriptions and the interest of their allies in the market and the state, who sustained them financially and conferred on them the recognition needed to appear influential' (2012, p.129).

A second implication of such core stigma is the challenge TASC faces in both recruiting staff and in selecting those who will sit on its committees and support its operations. These are the people who identify and then carry out the research projects and develop the policy proposals; who make the strategic decisions on our Board; who provide analysis and research material through our Economist Network; who sit on autonomous groups working on a whole variety of issues, and so on. However, given the nature of the TASC mission and identity, many of these people were/are also associated with 'left-wing' ideas, organisations and/or causes. Together with our declared values, such associations have been sufficient to allow influential members of our audiences to dismiss our proposals. Over my tenure in TASC, I found myself confronting this 'strategic dilemma' (Medvetz, 2012) time and again. As a result, constant recalibration of the organisation, its structures, processes and outputs, is required to sustain the core identity as an organisation whose prime purpose is to contribute to a fundamental shift in Irish society to a more egalitarian one, while simultaneously persuading funders to provide sufficient financial resources to implement this vision.

In 2007, as part of the requirements from our main funder, The Atlantic Philanthropies, to consider providing core support to TASC in order to prepare the way for long term core funding for the organisation, we commissioned independent research on the way in which the organisation was perceived.⁵³ The resulting report provides evidence that at that point, the majority of TASC's audience perceived the organisation to be 'left-wing' and a significant minority (at least a third) associated TASC with the Labour Party, with a smaller proportion associating TASC with the Trade Union movement. Furthermore, this imputation of political or special interest

⁵³ Anne Colgan Associates (2007) *Perceptions of TASC*. Internal TASC Report. Unpublished. The report, commissioned by TASC, was based on a sample of 272 survey respondents, across the political, statutory, academic, NGO and media sectors.

alignment was sufficient for the funder to insist that we alter this perception by taking concrete action. In response to conditions set by the funder, TASC took a variety of steps to address the perception of political and trade union alignment. For example, we broadened membership of the Board of Directors by seeking out new members from the business world and we also more proactively broadened our networking reach. In particular, we made more stringent efforts to communicate TASC's independence (especially in terms of building the TASC brand and the associated primacy of analytical rigour over values).

In more recent years our task has been made somewhat easier by a changing international context. There is now a substantial international literature addressing the issue of growing economic inequality, and economic inequality has also been identified by many political and economic leaders as a major issue of global concern. Reflecting the impact of the growth in awareness of this issue on the Irish public policy environment, at TASC's international conference in June of 2014 the lecture hall for Thomas Piketty's keynote address could have been filled many times over. Not only did the Governor of the Irish Central Bank make clear his admiration of Professor Piketty's work (Honohan, 2014), but the attendance included many members of the Irish policy establishment. However, growing world-wide interest in the issue of economic inequality is not a cause for complacency. The strength of those forces espousing the neoliberal perspective are very strong, here in Ireland, elsewhere in Europe where business lobbyists have influence on European Commission policies which far outweighs the influence of the small number of pan-European think tanks, and in the anglo-american sphere where the power of libertarian voices continues to be in the ascendant.

Section 4

How TASC Worked

4.1 Introduction

At its core, TASC creates a space.....

TASC...provides a broadly-based forum in which citizens, academics, politicians, policy makers and civil society activists engage in dialogue, analysis and debate.

TASC...[is]...a knowledge-based network engaging with new ideas, promoting their dissemination and contributing to the shaping of political debate and public policy in Ireland.⁵⁴

A small number of collaborators put in place the legal structure for TASC that included a Board of Directors that in turn appointed me as director, giving me more or less a free hand to enact this vision. No other structure associated with TASC has or has had a decision-making function in relation to TASC – neither its Advisory Council nor its Economist Network, nor various *ad hoc* groups charged with a particular time-bound task. This structural form is more or less the norm for many think tanks, but has been criticised as inconsistent with the concept of a think tank as a vehicle for encouraging ‘policy pluralism, broad participation and involvement of policy actors’ (Madoka (2002) quoted by Pautz 2011, p.424). Bentham (2006) notes that the London-based IPPR and DEMOS are formally accountable to their Boards of Trustees, all of whom are drawn from elite networks, and their staffs are not directly accountable to those on whom their activities are intended to have an impact (2006, p. 172). Others writing from the perspective of elite theory argue that think tanks produce research and policy proposals that serve the interests of their financiers and/or exist to serve vested interests (Pautz, 2011, p.424).

However, think tanks are not homogenous entities (McGann, 2012) and the motivation behind TASC was in fact to act as a counterforce to the existing

⁵⁴ Extracts from TASC (2002)

hegemony. The fundamental principle behind the decision to establish a think tank was our conviction not only that new ideas were essential but that such ideas would be informed by the ambition to create a more egalitarian society. For this to happen a space for like-minded people from diverse backgrounds to come together was needed. Armed with new thinking and new policy solutions, we visualised TASC as a contributor to the Habermasian concept of the 'public sphere' (Habermas *et al*, 1974), an arena in which there is '...rational discussion of problems of public welfare in an atmosphere free of restrictions' (Hohendahl and Russian, 1974, p.47). Such an orientation is consistent with 'mainstream democratic theory which regards think tanks as an important contribution to the marketplace of political pluralism, filling important information deficits, as a source of ideas and debate essential to the smooth functioning of an efficient, open democracy' (Harvey, 2000, p.11).

The way in which TASC was structured together with our aspirations to bring together like-minded people to impact on public policy making had a series of implications for my role as director, for the way in which TASC functioned as a community and for the staff that worked in TASC. This Section explores some of these.

4.2 The job of director

TASC's tight decision-making structure meant that I had what was deemed to be a necessary level of control and authority in relation to all aspects of TASC. I was given the responsibility 'to provide the philosophical, academic, policy and managerial leadership of the foundation'. Not only was this a very common mode of think tank start up (Mulgan, 2006; Bentham, 2006; Denham and Garnett, 2006) but one we considered to be appropriate. Embarking on a project that would need to engage with many people, including those who were politically or personally distant, we believed it was important to guard against the project being taken in a direction which we did not favour and we were conscious too of the limited resources and time frame for making an impact which we believed required someone with

the authority to make rapid decisions. For my part, I shared this perspective; previous experience of working within volunteer-led, participative structures had made me wary of holding responsibility without having the associated authority. Thus, the scope and reach of my job was all embracing; in hindsight unrealistically so since no one person can be omniscient or omnicompetent.⁵⁵

‘...while think tanks ... function in very different political systems, their ability or inability to market their ideas effectively may have as much to do with how these institutions define their missions, *the directors who lead them* [my italics] and the resources and strategies they employ to achieve their stated goals, as with the political environment they inhabit’ (Abelson, 2000, p.215).

While the job of think tank founding director is such that a certain degree of isolation goes with the territory, in the case of TASC this sense of isolation was compounded by the fact that for the first year and a half, with the exception of an administrative assistant, I was the sole employee. A huge amount of effort and personal investment was put into the project by the small number of people who worked on the proposed structure, financing and rationale for TASC for at least a year prior to its legal incorporation and I could and did frequently call upon these individuals for advice and support. However, the reality of their own busy professional lives and the geographical distance between us meant that I often felt isolated, struggling with the need to be the source of all wisdom in what was an experimental and innovative project with extremely limited financial resources. It now seems to me that a structure that would demand much more substantive engagement from those who were at its collaborative core would have been more efficacious in establishing and communicating the TASC ethos and would certainly have relieved me of considerable pressure.

I took considerable solace that the full set of characteristics needed by a think tank leader are in fact unlikely ever to be found in one person and while I was confident that I had many of the competences and skills

⁵⁵ This degree of authority was by no means unusual at that time. When I visited the IPPR in London in 2001 and met its then Director Matthew Taylor, I asked him who determined the programme and output of the IPPR and he answered that final decisions rested with him.

needed to fulfill this role, I was also conscious of those I did not have (my background was in sociology rather than economics or political science and I had limited previous media experience).

Think tank Directors are expected to combine an impressive range of skills in diverse areas. Their role is to protect and develop the niche carved out by their think tank, crystallize new ideas, bring in funding and pursue new policy opportunities. Think tanks are crucially dependent on their directors as a source of ideas. The director, staff, board members and outsiders in that order develop areas of policy. Directors have to be thinkers, even though their role as managers may give them little time for thinking. They must be talented as academics, public speakers, commentators, fundraisers and contributors to the political debate. They are also expected to be personable, have excellent communications skills and be able to manage staff, committees and outreach work (Harvey, 2000, p.59).

One of the characteristics of the ideal think tank director, for example is that s/he is already a public intellectual. Notions of what this means vary considerably but a common and key dimension of the term is the idea of public engagement. Up to now my career profile was as someone in leadership but nonpublic positions. Harvey (2000) characterises the founding directors of think tanks as 'charismatic, often colourful personalities' (2000, p.58). I am not sure how common that characterisation is but certainly the role of think tank director requires a capacity to engage in public debate and to perform in the media. This more than any other of the requirements of the position of director was the one I felt least drawn to. Nonetheless, it was a role I grew into overtime, learning for myself that the critical factor was having something to say and being convinced of the value of the point to be made (Grayling, 2013).

Medvetz (2012) quotes Edwin Feulner the President of the Heritage Foundation, as saying: 'The key ingredient [for a successful think tank] is the person who heads it ... must be entrepreneurial enough to see the unique need [and] salesman enough to convince others (donor, professors to write the papers and policy makers and journalists) to listen to him (sic) and his people' (2012, p.157). While unlikely to agree with Edwin Feulner on any other matter, I share his view on the importance of these skills. As I now review what was needed to get TASC 'out of the traps' and to

grow and develop, I am convinced that there are at least two other key attributes. The first of these is a collaborative style of leadership. I describe in the next subsection how TASC operated as a space to bring together a coalition of interests with a shared commitment to a more egalitarian society. To make this work, however, it is essential to have one person willing and able to take the lead, to either initiate or proactively respond to others' initiatives and to find the ways and means of making good projects happen. It was in this activity that I believe I showed real flair, such that TASC's output was much higher than the size of our core staff would otherwise have allowed. The second key attribute is commitment to the project, as 'think tanks are generally founded by a key individual or a small group of individuals with a strong sense of organizational vision and common purpose' (Harvey, 2000, p.58). I believed in the power of ideas to upend conventional dogmas and to shape societal outcomes and I was convinced that political ideas needed to drive political actions. TASC was my first opportunity to put these convictions into practice. With the exception of my time in the Combat Poverty Agency, where I worked within a social justice-based political perspective, all my subsequent employment up to this point was within either a conservative or an apolitical environment. Words like zealous and tenacious accurately describe the intensity I brought to the work. Such traits turned out to be more valuable than I could have possibly foreseen when I took the decision to take on this project, particularly in the early years. The sheer weight of responsibility to find a way of raising the necessary funds, recruit appropriate staff and deliver impactful output, without losing sight of the original purpose, was frequently close to overwhelming and required both strong belief in the project and considerable staying power.

As it was, it was with some doubt that I took on the role. I struggled with multiple worries and dilemmas: about how TASC would be perceived, about our programme orientation, about the nature of our intellectual practices. Constant recalibration was the order of the day: TASC changed its name within a year; had three logos in the first ten years of its existence and as many straplines; and experienced high turnover of staff and roles, with periods of organisational expansion followed by periods of retrenchment.

Moreover, in those first years, although we called it a think tank and although we did a number of things traditional to think tanks, we had what was in fact an organisational shell with all its structures and processes yet to be designed and implemented. Thus, my job description described a role in an organisation that had yet to become more than a design concept – making it exceptionally stressful to inhabit this role before anyone, myself included, had any real understanding of what that might actually mean. Dejean *et al* (2004) put it like this: ‘If the industry is to succeed, somebody has to act to legitimize the new activity and to establish patterns of behavior’ (2004, p.743).

However, such stress is not unusual. While at the time it felt personal and unique to the circumstances of TASC, the literature on organisational innovation does make clear that my experience was in fact quite common, acknowledged as the ‘high price’ to be paid by leaders of innovation (Fitzgibbon, 2001, p.164). In the formative years of a new industry, an institutional entrepreneur such as I was has not only to deal with the normal pressures of a new entity but must also persuade its audiences of its value, raise funds from ‘sceptical’ sources, recruit staff who are not familiar with the nature of the entity and cope with a myriad of other difficulties that arise simply because of being a ‘new’ kind of organisation (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994, p.645).

With each passing year, as TASC won funding grants, took on staff and added to its body of output, the role of director became more concrete and questions about what TASC was and what we did become correspondingly easier to answer. As the organisation evolved, my role as director also became more complex. I found myself in the position of operations manager (including fund raiser, HR manager, lead researcher and project manager), primary policy strategist, entrepreneur and, as time went, on media spokesperson. Describing the job of a think-tank employee, albeit in much narrower terms, Medvetz (2012) says that ‘the multisided role implied by this structural location is doubly difficult to master, not only because each of its elements requires extensive social learning, but also because they are generally at loggerheads with one another’ (2012, p.166).

For the first seven to eight years of TASC's existence it was frequently said to me by many of those who supported or collaborated with TASC that there was no real distinction between TASC and Paula Clancy the person. This is clearly not desirable, inconsistent as it is with the aim of creating an institution, independent of any individual, capable of surviving into the long term. When in 2007, we expanded the Board of Directors to include people from more diverse backgrounds and altered our governance arrangements to make a division of responsibility between board and director more explicit, I did have a sense of loss of autonomy, having become very used to making all key decisions. However, this was counterbalanced with a welcome sense of separation between the organisation and me. I not only recognised that this was essential if TASC was to have a future when I stepped down as director but that limitations on autonomy were accompanied by a welcome sharing of responsibility. With the new staff structure I was working with a team of people whose expertise and judgement I could lean on, allowing me to step back from many of the operational decisions that had been on my desk. To avoid burnout of future directors this was an essential development but the transition from 'sole trader' to 'chief executive officer' was not without its own challenges. With the shift to more regular oversight from a board of directors on the one hand and the demands of ensuring a reliable and regular flow of information and direction to staff, a degree of conscious self-management in this changed environment was required. Long experience of working within bureaucratic structures was useful to me in making this transition, as was my own commitment to ensuring that TASC had the kind of systems in place which would remove an overreliance on an individual leader, but it was not without its moments of frustration.

4.3 TASC as community

Although technically I had the authority to initiate or veto any and all activities with which TASC was concerned and at times I did just that, I was much more often in the role of broker/coordinator/mediator (Shields, 2003, p.527), a role with which I found I had a real affinity. Much of my time

was spent in informing, persuading and negotiating with a whole range of people as well as responding to those who approached me with proposals. Core to our understanding of the way in which TASC would succeed in generating new thinking, and then injecting an alternative discourse into the public arena via publications and participation in public debate and discussion, was that it would draw in a very wide range of people to participate. While I am obviously not familiar with all think tank structures, from those I do know, TASC's use of core organisational resources to leverage this degree of voluntary involvement is a relatively unique feature. Within a couple of years of its founding, TASC could boast of around seventy to eighty people who contributed to the project in various, often multiple, ways. TASC's success in establishing itself as an actor in the public sphere rests to a very great extent on the collaborative work of these people in different sometimes overlapping groupings.

In an effort to more fully describe the kind of motivation/orientation of the people who engaged with the TASC project, I am drawn to Dewey's (1920/1948) concept of 'critical optimism', defined as 'the belief that the specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they completely bad or completely good, in any event may be bettered. It encourages intelligence to work to improve conditions...' (quoted in Shields, 2003, p.515). The concept of a community of inquiry (Shields, 2003) provides a very useful framework for analysing the nature of this engagement. As described by Shields, a community of inquiry has three components the first of which I have adapted in the way I apply it to TASC. I have also added a fourth component which I believe was important in the case of TASC.

Shared values

The first component is shared values.⁵⁶ It was to set out these values that I wrote the founding document, considered at the first meetings of both the

⁵⁶ One of the key elements of a community of inquiry as described by Shields (2003) is the idea of participatory democracy 'whereby the parameters of the problematic situation and approaches to resolution are shaped by the interaction of the community and the facts' (Shields, 2003, p.511), while also taking into account values such as equality as it determines goals and objectives. I have adapted this usage somewhat as I apply the concept to TASC to mean a group of people who are like minded in their concern to find egalitarian policy solutions.

Advisory Council and the Economist Network. This document was accepted as a statement of values with which all members were happy to be associated. While committed to ensuring that our ideas and proposals were evidence based, TASC's primary aim as a think tank was to impact on public policy through the creation of a more informed public.

Problematic situation

The second component of a community of inquiry is a focus on a problematic situation, which in the case of TASC was defined by the threat posed by a neo-liberal economic regime to the aspiration for a more equal society.

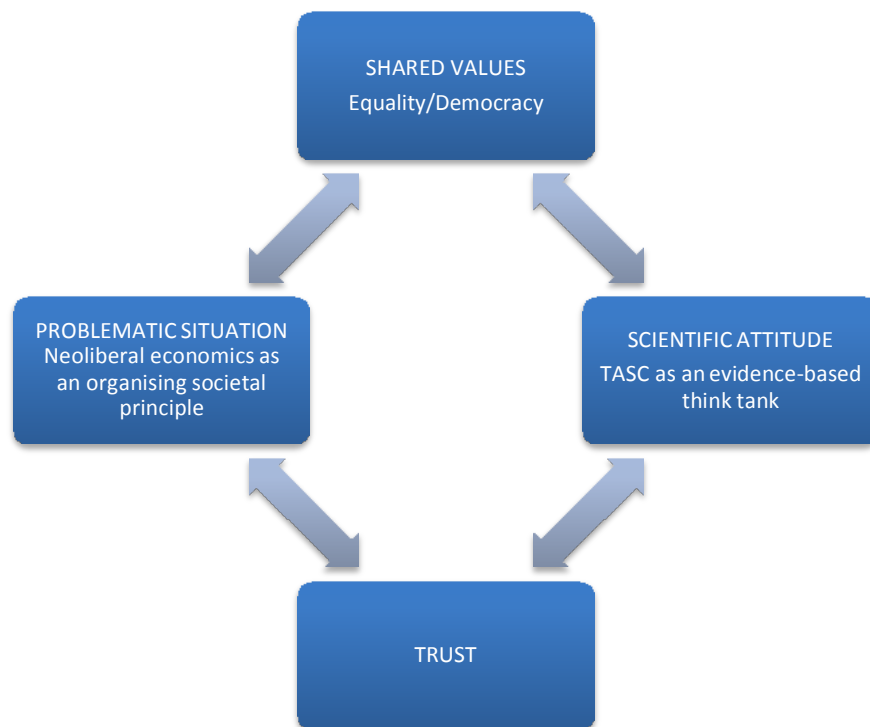
A scientific attitude

A scientific attitude to the problematic situation is the third component, i.e., the belief in the necessity of identifying working hypotheses that would guide the collection and interpretation of data or facts, to which TASC as an evidence-based think tank was committed. While it may seem as if a scientific attitude is a fundamental prerequisite of any think tank worthy of the name, documented trends in think tank development make it clear that frequently the reality is otherwise. For example, many of the think tanks that emerged in the US during the 1970s and 1980s were ideologically partisan, mostly associated with the political right. TASC aimed to reclaim the idea that a think tank could at one and the same time be clear about its values *and* pursue the means to achieve its aim of a more equal society through taking a scientific approach to the problem. In this regard, I think Medvetz' (2012) contention that as think tanks have engaged in the battle of ideas by selective use of data they have damaged the standing of academic knowledge, may be a particular trend in relation to American think tanks but is not an essential of think tanks in general.

TASC worked with the idea of a scientific approach in two distinct ways. First, as a community of citizens with a shared concern that Ireland would be a more egalitarian society, we believed that new thinking was required to identify policy solutions appropriate to 21st century Ireland and we were committed to seeking such solutions by subjecting our reflections and ideas

to scientific standards of critical evaluation and public scrutiny (Pardales and Girod, 2006; Marier, 2008). Thus TASC as a community in the broadest sense came together at different times in different, usually overlapping, groups to identify the priority issues to be addressed and then determined how these should be addressed in ways consistent with building an evidence base. I offer three examples of how we used this approach.

FIGURE 5 TASC AS A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY⁵⁷



In Section 1, I described the TASC Advisory Council and its defining role in shaping the orientation of TASC’s work when it was first formed in October 2001. Particularly in its early years, its function was to bring together all those interested in resolving the ‘problematic situation’ (Shields, 2005, p.512) of making Ireland a more egalitarian society. In those early years between 2001 and 2005 it met at least twice a year. Reviewing the very detailed minutes of those early years it is clear that, despite the ‘advisory’ in its title, the Council saw itself as a collective decision-making body. For

⁵⁷ Adapted from Shields (2003).

example, at its second meeting in January 2002,⁵⁸ following a long discussion about the first outputs from TASC, all agreed to contribute to a publication which would outline the 'state of play' in Ireland from a progressive perspective. The Chair, Fintan O'Toole offered to pull these contributions together into a publication, ambitiously aiming for release that Spring, prior to an anticipated general election.⁵⁹ The meeting also discussed communicating and positioning TASC and fundraising, airing many of the dilemmas discussed in Sections 2 and 3: political partisanship, worries about infiltration from the 'right' and worries about the implication of core funding on orientation and programme. Up to and including this meeting, the Advisory Council exhibited the characteristics of a community of inquiry. Over the following two years however, the orientation of the Advisory Council changed. The minutes of its meeting on 28 November 2003⁶⁰ record the members' agreement that their main function as a group was to act as a network and, moreover, that providing a space for this network and others was TASC's primary function. However, from then onwards, the Advisory Council did not play a major role in TASC's evolution, although at key moments, such as when we were preparing the five-year strategic plan during 2007/2008, members of the Council together with members of the Economist network came together in a workshop to review TASC's evolution to date and to help plan for the future. Following the first couple of years of relatively intense activity, I was fully preoccupied with trying to find the ways and means of implementing the broad directions set by the first discussions of the Council. Bringing together this group of very busy people to simply update them on these developments did not appear to be a useful use of either their time or mine. It was clear that while bringing the two groups together on occasion was valuable, agreeing solutions, deciding on actions points and implementation of these had to come from either TASC staff or individual members taking responsibility for specific projects. The last meeting of the Council was in 2009 when, based on a

⁵⁸ See Minutes of Meeting of Advisory Council, 25 January, 2002

⁵⁹ The outcome of this discussion was the publication *After the Ball*, although as it turned it was written in its entirety by Fintan O'Toole.

⁶⁰ See Minutes of Meeting of Advisory Council, 28 November, 2003.

presentation I made to them, the members adopted the following proposals for its continuation.

- It should be renamed as TASC Council and retain AC membership.
- The main functions of the Council would be to review the TASC work programme on an annual basis and to 'endorse' the TASC project through their membership.
- Autonomous groups should be established, initiated/championed by a member of the Council.

However, even this level of activity has been nominal, something made explicit when in 2010 the evaluators canvassed opinion about the appropriate role/value of the Council, receiving limited suggestions on how to address this, such that the evaluators concluded that the AC no longer fulfilled a useful role.⁶¹

The Democracy Commission (See Section 1 for more detail) is the second example of a diverse group of people acting as a community of inquiry. Political participation was identified by the Advisory Council as a theme in the first of its deliberative meetings. With no additional resources in hand to initiate work in this area, I needed to identify a project which would attract new funding. I was also conscious of the need to quickly establish our value as a think tank both internally (Advisory Council members and other supporters) and externally (policy makers and policy influencers) but was aware that projects of substantive value usually require a reasonably long lead-in time. To address this I proposed an independent commission to examine democracy in Ireland in partnership with Democratic Dialogue, a sister think tank in Northern Ireland. The JRCT were willing to fund what the Irish Secretary for the Trust regarded as an innovative project (in fact the Trust subsequently went on to fund a project using a similar model in the UK). The work of identifying the Commissioners was intensive and was an example of the type of collaborative leadership needed in TASC. Working closely with the then Board of Directors, I drew up a list of people who would meet our criteria and determined how they might be approached. This was not a trivial

⁶¹ Boyd Associates, 2010, p.47.

matter. TASC at this point was an unknown quantity – the work of building legitimacy just underway – and we would be asking a great deal of individuals in terms of their time and their reputation. Thus, it took almost a full year to put the necessary elements of the project in place before the first meeting of the Commission.

Once up and running, the Commission's work was fully independent with TASC providing the secretariat. The Commission composition ensured that its analysis and its recommendations were truly non-partisan. As the Commission Chair wrote in his foreword, 'What the Commission has not done is to offer a political analysis. We were too broad a church to accomplish this because, in order to ensure a dispassionate approach to democracy *per se*, a conscious decision was made to constitute the Commission on the basis of a diversity of political belief' (Harris, 2005, p.xi). This was not a decision, although one I shared in, that I was happy with. In my view, by including political representatives (albeit that they sat on the Commission in an independent capacity) of parties of the centre-right, one of which was then in government, we introduced an element of political partisanship into the discussions that had the effect of diluting some of the recommendations. Indeed it was an early compromise between the desire to win funding and widespread buy-in to the process on the one hand and the desire to provide a radical political analysis of political disengagement on the other.

The work of the Commission made what is I believe an important contribution to developing a culture of public discussion and debate about political issues in Ireland and elsewhere. Over the two years it sat, the Commission had meetings with the leadership of all the main political parties, as well as independent and local politicians, invited written submission from more than sixty organisations and had meetings with a number of these. It also put advertisements in the main broadsheets for submissions from the general public; a total of one hundred were received. Seven public meetings were organised in both parts of the Island, a number of papers were invited from academics, several workshops on academic issues were held and the findings of the Democratic Audit Ireland studies

were considered. The output of all of this activity was an agreed set of recommendations.

The third example is the Economist Network. The Network is more accurately described as an 'epistemic community' composed of scholars who share a unique linguistic system and norms of inquiry and who also investigate their 'own traditions, practices and projects' (Miller and Fox, 2001, p.669). From the beginning, the Economist Network has been fundamental to the TASC project. In an Ireland where the mainstream neoliberal economic analysis was rarely publicly challenged, it was a revelation, even to those of us involved in setting up TASC, that there were so many expert voices, many acknowledged leaders in their particular discipline, who were ready to articulate an economic analysis that represented a major challenge to the existing hegemony. Given their knowledge, prestige, and reputation, their formation as a group was timely, coming as it did at a time when the importance of expert knowledge was becoming more valued by those charged with framing public policy (Marier, 2008, p.516). Until then, dispersed throughout Irish academic institutions, public bodies, civil society organisations and private companies, these individuals were relatively isolated and voiceless. From the time of its inception in 2002, TASC published a number of substantive books on a range of socio-economic issues, authored mainly by members of this Network, members provided the speakers to many conference and seminars organised by TASC, TASC was able to call on individual members for advice and peer review of its outputs and others provided the intellectual content for TASC projects discussed below. Individual members have also engaged with or led TASC project groups on health and on industrial policy. Thus, the Economist Network has been critical to TASC in 'the battle of ideas', particularly in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Many members of the Economist Network were also members of the Advisory Council where they played a different role, bringing the insights from their own academic epistemic communities to helping to define or resolve the 'problematic situation' as defined by TASC (Shields, 2005).

Notwithstanding all this activity, TASC's Economist Network does not function as a single entity, but rather its value has been in providing an umbrella under which individual political activists with particular academic expertise could give expression to their desire to make a political contribution and could do so either individually, as a small sub-group of members or by drawing in specialists to work on a particular project. Although on paper the Network has more than 50 members,⁶² the substantive input generated has come from a smaller core of highly active members. Even these activities in the main required nurturing and engagement from Paul Sweeney as Chair (also a personal friend/political colleague of many), from me in my role as director and, from 2009, Sinead Pentony, TASC's head of policy.

One of the most important characteristics to note in relation to the Economist Network is its dynamic character. At times individual members have seen TASC as a place to bring an idea or proposal.⁶³ While often lying dormant as a collective, it has the capacity to generate sub groups at different times which engage in intense collaborative activity to product very substantial outputs. One of the most fruitful of these was the work undertaken on a pensions policy on TASC's behalf. In 2003, I asked Dr Jim Stewart, an academic with TCD and a member of the TASC Economist Network, to consider putting together a group to prepare a holistic analysis of the pension issue as it related to Ireland. Together with three others - an economist, a demographer and a social policy academic - who subsequently formed themselves into the TCD Pensions Research Group, Jim wrote two substantial books published by TASC, offering a radically alternative, evidence-based analysis of the Irish pension system to that available up to that point. Based on this analysis, TASC developed its first detailed policy document on an egalitarian approach to pension provision.⁶⁴

Because of these groups, in that critical first six or seven years, TASC could

⁶² For current list of members see the TASC website, <http://www.tascnet.ie/en.html>.

⁶³ For example, in 2008, Prof Terrence McDonough approached Paul Sweeney with an idea for a project that would communicate the difficult concept of income inequality in Ireland in a novel format. Paul brokered a partnership between TASC and ICTU to produce this project; TASC's role was to manage this work through to publication and dissemination in 2010. See McDonough, T. and Loughrey, J. (2009) *The Hierarchy of Earnings and Attributes and Privilege (H.E.A.P)*, Dublin, TASC.

⁶⁴ TASC (2008) *Making Pensions Work for People: A TASC Policy Brief*, Dublin, TASC.

engage in a level of activity, produce outputs and generate a presence that greatly exceeded that which could have been achieved by a small core of staff alone. Even after the major structural shift in the organisation from 2008/2009, when TASC doubled in scale and employed a number of policy, research and communications staff, we instituted the idea of autonomous working groups within the TASC structure. The intent was to find a way to allow a member of the Board, the Advisory Council or the Economist Network to initiate a project in a particular area consistent with TASC's focus on economic inequality. Such groups were to be given secretariat support by one of TASC's policy experts but were otherwise to find their own resources to produce a defined piece of work within a fixed period of time. At the point of my departure in 2011, three such groups were meeting and subsequently all three published significant pieces of work.⁶⁵

The second way in which TASC used the scientific approach and a way which separates our practice of this concept from that described by Shields (2003) was our reliance on it as a method of validation of our ideas among discipline peers who do not necessarily share TASC values. Among these would be those who would seek to dismiss TASC ideas and policy proposals as simply a reflection of a wrong-headed ideological orientation. Thus, via blogs, newspaper articles, appearances on broadcast media, via conferences and seminars and via publication of analytic papers presenting and reviewing the evidence, members of TASC epistemic communities – staff, economist network, autonomous groups –engage in debate and discussion with their discipline colleagues.

Trust

Trust, in my view, is an additional critical component to the three characteristics of a community of inquiry as described by Shields (2003), certainly in relation to TASC. Trust was an essential part of the story of how so many at the very early stages agreed to collaborate on the TASC project before TASC had succeeded in being accepted as a legitimate entity.

⁶⁵ O'Ferrall, F. (ed) (2011). *The Flourishing Society*, Dublin, TASC; Burke, S. and Pentony, S. (2011) *Eliminating Health Inequalities*, Dublin, TASC; Jacobson, D. (ed) (2013) *The Nuts and Bolts of Innovation: New Perspectives on Irish Industrial policy*, Dublin, Glasnevin Publishing.

Atkinson and Butcher (2003, pp.290-291) distinguish between the kind of (inter)-personal trust, based on the interaction within a particular relationship, which, for example, characterised my relationships with my co-founders, from the kind of trust which exists in impersonal form, also referred to as institutional trust. As we approached others outside our small circle, initial trust, based, *inter alia*, on 'institutional cues that enable one person to trust another without first-hand knowledge' became critical (McKnight *et al.* 1998, p.474). There were several such types of cue in play, including unit grouping, which puts the other person in the same category as oneself, for example membership of the same political party; reputation categorisation, whereby attributes are assigned to another person based on second-hand information about that person; and stereotyping, placing another person into a general category of persons (McKnight *et al.* 1998). In a small country, where 'everyone knows everyone else', employing such cues is relatively easy and forms a very common mode of assessment of either an individual or an organisation.

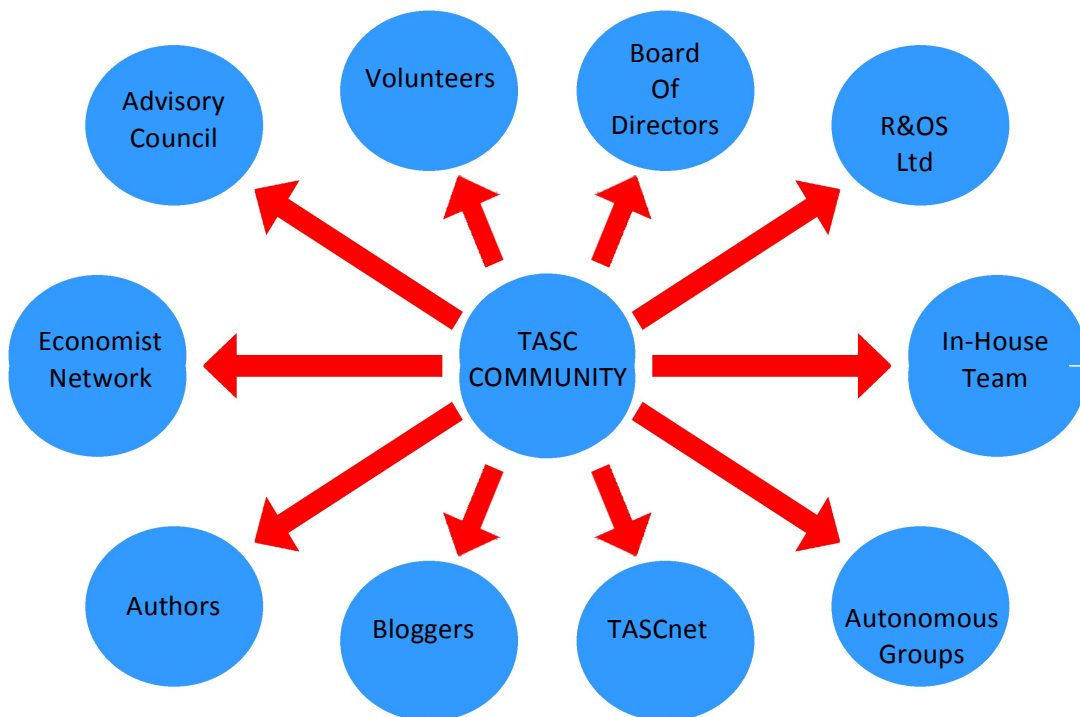
A note on personal contacts as a key element of the TASC community

Although not appearing anywhere in documents or discussions about TASC, one group in particular stands out as integral to the fabric of the organisation. From as early as 2002, three friends and former colleagues of Jim O'Donnell have filled a variety of roles in TASC: recruitment consultant, HR advisor, books editor, project manager, administrator, event manager, data entry, developing library and archive catalogues, and moving TASC offices on three occasions. Particularly, in those fallow periods between funded projects, their involvement played an important role in stitching the organisation together and making running repairs whenever holes appeared but they also supplied an essential presence when either staff turnover or degree of specialisation meant the temporary absence of a particular organisational competence or skill. Each had different skills and worked for TASC in different ways, mostly on an *ad hoc*, unpaid basis over short periods. The role of director was at different times either energising or stressful but mostly a solitary one. During many difficult interludes the

personal support of these women made a big difference.

In similar ways I drew on my own network and those of others close to TASC to identify a variety of providers of professional services (such as accountancy and legal services, media/PR advice, recruitment support, etc.), most of which were provided free of charge.

FIGURE 6 THE TASC COMMUNITY



4.4 TASC staff

To support the effective operation of TASC as a community as well as for organisational sustainability and consistent quality of output, I was convinced that TASC needed a cadre of professional staff at its core. It goes without saying it would have been impossible to build and sustain a think tank without the people who have staffed the organisation over its fifteen years of operation. Nonetheless, in the early years, my relationship with individual staff members was at times challenging and sometimes

conflictual. A considerable body of high-quality output⁶⁶ was achieved in this period, but there was little sense of a cohesive team, sharing a common purpose. It was not until the major structural shift in the organisation, resulting from the strategic planning process and the securing of core funding that this situation was to change. It is worth reflecting on some of the reasons why this was so.

First, the previous section describes in some detail the challenging political and policy environment in which TASC set up shop and pursued the process of professionalisation and legitimacy building, to which could be added the challenge of attracting staff in an era of economic growth and full employment. Fitzgibbon (2001, p.162) found that operating in an environment of uncertainty was a source of much greater stress for employer and employees alike than is normally acknowledged. Fitzgibbon (2001) is writing about the world of innovative arts organisations but much of what she finds, 'risk, uncertainty and (often) personal exposure' (2001, p.164), resonates with my experience of TASC and it is easy to agree with her when she says that this '...constitute[s] a heady cocktail that almost inevitably places a strain on organizational management and relations' (2001, p.164). This stress, she goes on to point out, manifests itself in many ways, including high staff turnover (2001, p.164). I was far from being clear on how to approach staff management in the TASC context. How autonomous should a 'policy expert' be to define the TASC message on particular subjects? How much leeway should a project manager have to define the scope of the project? And so on. And for the people whom TASC employed, since the think tank as a concept was an unknown quantity, as was I, what might happen to their careers and/or their reputations if the venture was to subsequently fail must have been a matter of considerable concern. Aldrich and Fiol (1994) put it as follows: 'Founders cannot easily convince others to follow their directives, as they have no tangible evidence that such actions will pay off. In established industries, founders can simply cite tradition to their employees and other stakeholders as a justification for

⁶⁶ See Appendix IV for chronology of TASC output 2003-2010.

particular actions. No such appeal is available to founders in new industries' (1994, p.651). In these circumstances, they ask, 'with no external evidence, why should potential trusting parties "trust" an entrepreneur's claims that a relationship "will work out," given that an entrepreneur may be no more than an ill-fated fool' (1994, p.650)?

Second, one of the benefits of working alone for the first eighteen months or so of operation, was that I was able to feel my way with more or less complete freedom of action, confident of the support of close collaborators; other people important to getting TASC on its feet did so on a part time, voluntary basis and were thus content to play a more reactive role, responding (or not) to initiatives and requests from me. Looking back, I can see that I was not yet prepared for the fundamental shift from this external orientation to known collaborators to an internal orientation to TASC staff, people as yet unknown. The issue of trust was a factor; as a 'careful' person, I had taken on not only a high risk venture but one with high visibility. As an unknown entity, TASC's capacity to recruit people who would have the skills and expertise to execute our organisational objectives, who would share our values and who would bring to their job the kind of commitment needed was a complex challenge; the people who came to work for TASC did so for diverse reasons with diverse skills and areas of expertise and with diverse expectations.

Added to these factors was my leadership style. According to Fitzgibbon (2001), theoretically, the ideal leader of an organisation that requires its staff to be creative and innovative is one who is supportive, participative and collaborative. Certainly, I aspired to provide this kind of leadership. However, the challenge of doing this in practice sorely tested this aspiration. I genuinely struggled to create an atmosphere of collaboration, often putting aside my doubts about the wisdom of some initiative or activity of a staff member in the interests of principles of motivation and participation. However, in keeping with my primary orientation to external collaborators, I was equally intent on ensuring that projects were delivered to the standard required by stakeholders and of managing the balance between establishing credibility with policy makers while staying true to our values. Moreover, I was acutely aware of the fragility of the whole venture, and I was concerned

about managing the tensions between legitimacy with funders and policy makers and meeting the expectations of not only those who had put their trust in me to get this venture off the ground but also the growing number of TASC collaborators from whom I was seeking support and engagement. Partly for these reasons, although mostly because of resource constraints, in these early years, I was personally involved in all TASC activities. Lewis (2000) suggests that paradoxical tensions, including this form of inconsistency between sentiments of autonomy and collaborative decision making on the one hand and practices of close oversight on the other, may be more likely or more intense in unstable environments. She quotes Cannon (1996, p.110) as saying 'Many paradoxes are caused by the hangover of one set of assumptions or beliefs into a new age or environment and proliferate when change is dramatic or rapid. Paradoxes emerge when beliefs or assumptions fail to keep up with external changes' (2000, p. 766). In the context of TASC, many of the staff (as well as myself) came as experienced professionals with their own set of skills and modes of handling themselves and their activities. Confronted with a very ill-defined environment, it is understandable that, while learning to work in new ways and in a new situation, we would find ourselves attempting to graft these skills and ways of working on to the new situation. However, as Lewis (2000) points out, 'the more actors stress their core capabilities, the more they invoke their flip side: core rigidities. Extant strengths offer routines that may guide innovative efforts. Yet, clinging to core competencies might inhibit actors from considering more drastic changes' (2000, p.766). Instead, she suggests that workers will blame management and *vice versa* as the source of the problem.

TASC was in essence a 'highly driven [organisation] with few signs of the laissez-faire atmosphere which informality' might suggest (Fitzgibbon, 2001, p.160). It provides me with considerable solace that Fitzgibbon's findings from her own empirical work on innovative arts organisations also finds the same disconnect as I experienced between the theory of collaborative employer/employee relationships and the *de facto* situation. She found in all three of her case studies the commitment to democratic and participative management coexisting with the reality of authority resting with the Director

(2001, pp.158-159). However, it is also the case that this cognitive dissonance between a participative ethos and the practice can only ever be damaging to staff relationships and it was critical to TASC's evolution that it emerged from this period.

2007/2008: opportunity to take stock

The funding secured from the Atlantic Philanthropies for a strategic planning process represented a step change in TASC's development and a welcome opportunity to take stock. In the context of staffing, it brought relatively huge resources to bear on the process of clarifying who we were as an organisation and in designing an appropriate and effective organisational structure to support this. The strategic plan, developed over an eight-month period, allowed for a staffing level of seven to ten people in the medium term, with greater staff specialisation, including specialist in-house policy analysts; staff that could deliver more streamlined operational systems of administration; fundraising/finance; dissemination through publication, database and web management, membership and PR/communications; and staff with a capacity to follow through on coalition building with other organisations, social movements and individuals. For the first time, this staffing structure was consistent with the international norm for a think tank. Critically, TASC as an organisation was now much further along the road of gaining legitimacy and credibility. Somewhat battle-scarred, I too had learnt a significant amount about the balance between collaborative and hierarchical working relationships with which I was comfortable as a leader. Thus, by 2009, when most of the new staff were in place, this learning resulted in a much happier working environment for all, with the first independent evaluation concluding that TASC's staff had confidence in the leadership provided by the director, that 'although workloads are generally heavy, morale is high'⁶⁷ and 'staff generally felt well supported in terms of management guidance and resources.'⁶⁸ Furthermore, as attested by the evaluators in their mid-term review, the impact of this cadre of professional staff was reflected in the quality and quantity of the

⁶⁷ Boyd Associates, 2010, p.45.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.13.

output.⁶⁹

This new think tank space and the way it functioned was yet another new phase of experimentation with which the board, the staff and myself had to come to terms in ways none of us appreciated at the time. As TASC started to implement its strategic plan, the staff, depending on their role, had either to perform well-established roles in the context of a new space, the space of think tanks (e.g., communications, fundraising and administration) or had to learn to inhabit the new occupational role of policy analyst (Medvetz, 2012, p.131) which came with the emerging field of think tanks in Ireland. Drawing on his empirical work, Medvetz (2012) argues that ‘think-tank affiliated policy experts face the difficult task of constructing an “occupational psyche” that combines several disparate elements, including the ability to “read” the political field strategically, anticipating its dynamics, the capacity to publicise their ideas widely and the capacity to raise money’ (2012, p.154). He goes on to say that ‘...it is in the never-ending task of juggling and reconciling these functions that we can find the core of the policy expert’s habitus’ (2012, p.155). As in the earlier waves, in this phase the people who came to work for TASC came from a wide variety of educational and occupational backgrounds. They had worked for NGOs, academia, public sector organisations, political parties, and research organisations, but once working with TASC each new employee had to learn to adapt his or her skills and credentials in new ways. Once in this new space their judgements and practices were shaped by TASC’s specific rules and constraints. Inevitably, not everyone found this an easy transition; different aspects of this new role challenged people in different ways (Medvetz, 2012, pp.39-40). The stress caused by a dissonance between the already acquired skill set and that required in the TASC context is reflected in the fact that the two staff concerns expressed to the evaluators were inadequate training and a need for clarification of staff development and appraisal processes.⁷⁰ Furthermore, each individual policy analyst had areas of specialism in subjects such as economics, political science and statistical

⁶⁹ Boyd Associates, 2012, p.18.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.45.

analysis and in policy areas such as housing, local government, etc. These specialisms were not always ones I or any other member of staff shared. This meant that external peer review became important not just as a tool for quality control of output but also as a support to the analysts in their work. It was in this phase also that the value orientation of the individual staff member became an important factor in each appointment I made for TASC. This was of less importance in the pre-2008 period, when I was personally involved in writing or editing virtually every document put out under TASC's name. However, in the post-2008 TASC structure, when staff other than me produced most of the research and policy output of the organisation, the issue of the will or agency of individual staff became more central. As before, specific questions were asked at each interview about the political and values orientation of each candidate and a judgement formed as to whether the person appointed would support TASC's values. However, value orientation was in fact not an issue for those who applied to work in TASC. TASC was by now a familiar organisation on the public policy scene and it seems likely that those applying to work in TASC would not do so if there were a values conflict.

Nonetheless, since the individuals appointed all came to their roles from different political affiliations and with different perspectives on priorities and on policy positions, it was to be expected that some differences would find their way into the documents TASC published and the media and other public interventions staff made as TASC spokespersons. In the main, however, while differences of orientation did emerge from time to time, the tone and position taken by staff in the documents they wrote, in their media and other presentations and in the subjects they recommended to form elements of the TASC programme, were consistent with TASC's vision.

What is of more interest, I think, is the way in which those coming from very different occupational backgrounds, in particular, those who came from academia or with academic ambitions, nonetheless, adapted their 'occupational psyche' to that of the policy analyst. Medvetz (2012) explains this by reference to the concept of *Illusio*, drawn from Bourdieu's work, which refers 'to an interested but largely preconscious acceptance of the

“rules” of a specific social game and the value of its stakes’ (2012, p.153). Surprisingly quickly, the set of individuals who came to work for TASC over the 2009 to 2010 period established a modus of their own. Once working as ‘think tankers’, each employee had a stake in establishing the value of his or her activity. According to Medvetz (2012), ‘Every field, we can say, implied its own set of interests, first because the field’s inhabitants have a stake in accumulating whatever form of capital is produced in that field, and second, because they have a common stake in increasing the value of that capital outside of the field’ (2012, p.153). In other words, those who work for think tanks both shape and abide by a set of rules for doing think tank work (2012, p.154).

Section 5

The Importance of Independent, Progressive Sources of Funding

Raising funds is always difficult, but particularly so for a think tank in Ireland (Harvey, 2000, p.75). Fundraising from donations had its problems because we simply didn't have the numbers to make small donations add up to a significant amount. Corporate donors wanted to see either tangible actions for their investment – for example, supporting charitable activities around health and/or children or research reports tailored to their specific business interests. Policy proposals in the interest of the common good as such didn't cut it for most of them. Moreover, pursuing 'high net worth' donors, including corporate donors, was not easy. Interesting such people in a progressive think tank was a fairly major challenge. Matters were further complicated by the fact that TASC had its own constraints on where we could source funds from, which further narrowed our potential funding base; being seen to be independent was critical to establishing our credibility with those we wanted to influence. For all these reasons, TASC would not have survived and grown without the support of two foreign-based charitable foundations, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) and the Atlantic Philanthropies (AP).

I was first introduced to Stephen Pittam, the then JRCT Secretary for Ireland (and subsequently Secretary to the Trust itself) by Robin Wilson, whom I had come to know when we both sat on the Labour Party/Democratic Left Taskforce for the political foundation. Robin was the founding director of Democratic Dialogue, the only think tank in Northern Ireland, and was also a founding member of the TASC Advisory Council and his practical support to me in establishing TASC was a very important factor in our survival.

Although JRCT has clear funding criteria and detailed information on application procedures, Stephen acted as a 'critical friend' in guiding me through the process. In 2003, he was promoted to JRCT Trust Secretary and was no longer handling the Ireland projects when I next applied, this time

unsuccessfully, for funding in 2006. When TASC successfully applied once more to the JRCT in 2008, this time for core funding to support a policy analyst in the area of democratic accountability, Stephen handled the application.

One of the rules of the Atlantic Philanthropies is that prospective grantees must be approached by one of their officers; however, in a small country like Ireland and a small city like Dublin, AP and its activities were an open secret. With an introduction from Stephen Pittam, I met Brian Kearney-Grieve and was fortunate to be able to interest him in the TASC project. I learnt that AP had already given some thought to the absence of think-tank structures in Ireland.⁷¹ Initially, Brian did not hold out much hope that funding a think tank would fit with AP's funding criteria. Nonetheless, I continued to be in contact with him and finally, in the course of searching for additional funds to allow us to undertake research into democracy as part of the Democracy Commission project, we identified a related research project, the Democratic Audit Ireland, which would fit with AP priorities. Following a relatively long period of discussions and submission of proposals and background papers, AP provided a generous grant for this project in 2004. Under the umbrella of the Democratic Audit Ireland project, TASC was able to undertake a suite of research projects on democratic accountability which complemented the work of the Democracy Commission. Subsequently, AP has provided the critical core funding that first facilitated TASC's development as a fully-fledged think tank and then supported us in its maintenance, a commitment which will continue through to 2017. See Section 1 for detail.

Both JRCT and AP were critical to TASC's continued development as a think tank and thus, indirectly, to the emergence of a think-tank field in Ireland. Both have now decided to withdraw from further funding in Ireland, with serious implications for our security about a future funding stream to TASC. JRCT took this decision because it intends to focus its grant making in the UK and the Atlantic Philanthropies because it took a strategic decision in 2002 to

⁷¹ Harvey (2000). This report was commissioned by AP to investigate a concrete, theoretical and practical basis for the possible establishment of a think tank in Ireland. The study was completed in 2000 and drew to a significant extent on the Labour/Democratic Left Taskforce (1998) report which produced the Themis proposal.

become a limited life foundation'. Each funder has a different take on social change which shapes the model of philanthropy that it employs. JRCT believes funding for social-justice issues will be an ongoing requirement. Once the grant is made, they take a hands-off approach, allowing the grantee to determine specific activities, accepting that any lasting outcomes may not be apparent for some time following the grant. AP is committed to a concentration of its grant giving in a small number of countries in order to make a major and discernible impact within a relatively short period of time on the issues for which it provides funding.

This model of social change has huge implications for the funding of an independent think tank such as TASC. The effect of AP's closing along with the withdrawal of JRCT, has been calculated and overall philanthropic funding [in Ireland] is expected to fall from about €60m a year in the early 2010s to €13m by this year (2015). It is also understood that some organisations are more at risk than others with a number predicted not to survive at all (Harvey, 2015, forthcoming, p.28.). TASC is one such organisation. Alternative non-tied sources of funding are very difficult to come by for the less tangible work of a think tank. The pressure for significant early impact also means that there is much greater pressure on all concerned to demonstrate that specified expected outcomes are achieved, demanding both an intensely interactive application process and, once the grant has been made, very detailed, yearly operational plans specifying activities and outputs together with yearly reports, detailing progress and explaining variances from the plan. The core grant conditions also built in an extensive, externally-conducted biennial evaluation process. For these evaluation purposes, detailed record keeping and systems to do this were required, much of which is of value to TASC, providing a significant level of 'corporate memory' and input into TASC's ongoing planning activities.⁷² But while acknowledging both the importance and value of these processes, it is also true that the time they consumed added considerably to the pressure I experienced as I struggled to ensure TASC met its very ambitious programme targets.

A very important feature of winning grants and entering into repeat

⁷² For example, I have been able to draw on this material in preparing this context statement.

relationships with both AP and JRCT was the multiplier effect it had on TASC's credibility. This was a factor which both were well aware of, as each explicitly encouraged me to use their support as leverage on others to also donate. An extremely interesting feature was the way in which the two funders interacted with each other. At various points, it was made clear to me that each would put pressure on the other to support a TASC application and that such pressure was an important factor in the success of the application. Thus, JRCT had been first to offer TASC support and to lobby AP on our behalf behind the scenes. In turn, when AP made its grant of core funding to TASC, JRCT felt obligated to also support TASC.

In the context of the importance of each of these two funders, particularly AP on which we depended for such a significant proportion of our income from as early as 2004, we had some concern that TASC's radical agenda would be deflected into something more anodyne. Overall, I believe that any dilution of our direct programme because of this funding was muted, although it is in fact hard to assess the degree to which our structure and operations were shaped by our relationship with and dependence on these two institutions. To the extent that we were affected it was more an outcome of self-censorship than any pressure from the funders. Any political concerns they might have had were always implicit, adduced around the margins of meetings and phone calls, rather than explicit conditions. AP made no comment on the content of the TASC programme when we made application for core funding and JRCT funded a post rather than a programme. Moreover, both funders were insistent that they had no interest in changing the activities of any organisation they funded.

However, while we did not have to contend with programme constraints as such, the *Realpolitik* of securing support from these two funders did involve compromises. First, in the early years the balance of attention to our two main thematic areas was to a significant extent a function of availability of funding: many of those interested in establishing TASC were primarily concerned with challenging the dominant, inegalitarian economic model, but the available funding (from both JRCT and AP) was for projects on aspects of democracy. Thus, by far the biggest part of TASC's work programme was

taken up with issues of democratic accountability. Moreover, our project choice in relation to the independent Democracy Commission was calculated to ensure the widest possible political support, which we believed would be an important consideration for JRCT.

We did face issues from each of the two funders in relation to the people who were considered acceptable as members of TASC's structures. My conversations with JRCT's Ireland officer made clear that it would not be acceptable to have elected Labour Party members and/or officials on our Advisory Council or on the Board. This is consistent with the Trust's requirement that everything it funds is compatible with UK charity law. At the time of our first application to JRCT, both Mike Allen, the then General Secretary of the Labour Party and Proinsias De Rossa, Labour Party MEP, were members of the TASC Advisory Council. This presented us with a real dilemma. We were very concerned that those shaping the programme direction of TASC would be people with an expressed commitment to the values set out in our founding document. In the context of the socio-political environment we were in, we were also very concerned about the potential for ideological drift. Add to these concerns our efforts to address the legitimacy and credibility question through having well-known and authoritative figures associated with TASC, and it is clear that the pool we had to draw from was limited to say the least. However, not only the funding but also the legitimacy to be garnered from being a grantee of JRCT outweighed these concerns. In sympathy with the constraints we were operating under, both political members of the Advisory Council resigned.

The issue of political independence arose again in the context of our application to the Atlantic Philanthropies for core funding. The background to this was important in that it shows the real potential for the emasculation of efforts to offer counter-perspectives to the mainstream. In 2006, funds were withdrawn from the AP funded Centre for Public Inquiry amidst public controversy. The Centre for Public Inquiry (CPI) was established in February 2005 as a non-governmental body to '...investigate matters of public importance in Irish political, public and corporate life". It was to have been funded by Atlantic Philanthropies to the amount of €4 million over five

years. It closed in April 2006 following the withdrawal of this funding. In December 2005 the Executive Director of the CPI, Frank Connolly, was subject to allegations that he had used a fake passport to gain entry to Colombia, although he was never charged with the offence. The allegations were published in the Irish Independent after then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Michael McDowell leaked them to a journalist. Connolly denied the allegations, describing them as "false and malicious". He was backed by the CPI's board which stated that: "The Board of the Centre for Public Inquiry reiterates its full confidence in its Executive Director, Frank Connolly and his integrity" and said "...the claim made in Dáil Éireann by the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, that either Frank Connolly or the CPI, or both, could pose a threat to the security of the State is entirely without evidential basis, unsustainable, and totally untrue." The Director of Public Prosecutions DPP decided not to prosecute Connolly. It further went on to say that "a private and public blackening of his character has been unleashed by the Minister. This shows a signal departure from principles of fair dealing and respect for justice to the individual citizen by the State which are absolute, save in the most exceptional cases and where legislated upon by the Oireachtas. The methods adopted by the Minister may well have undermined the status, authority and the statutory independence of the DPP".⁷³ The same minister was reported to have made representations to the leadership of AP, concerning the activities of the Centre's Director, causing AP to withdraw its support for the Centre.⁷⁴ As a direct consequence and causing considerable worry, at a very late stage in our application process for funding for 2007, when the very survival of TASC was in question, consideration of our funding application was deferred and TASC was asked to have independent research conducted to ascertain the extent of its perceived association with the Labour Party. We were asked to take measures to diversify the membership of the Board of Directors and Advisory Council

⁷³ (Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centre_for_Public_Inquiry#Closure)
[Accessed at 8 February 2015]

⁷⁴ <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/75343>. [Accessed on 23 January 2015].

so as to address the [mis]perception that TASC was in essence an arm of the Labour Party, or indeed that the Labour Party has any particular influence on the work of TASC. Two of our three Board Directors, Des Geraghty and John Horgan, both strongly associated with the Labour Party, resigned from the Board of Directors⁷⁵ and TASC held an EGM of its trustees to change its Memorandum and Articles of Association, inserting a provision that no officer or elected representative of a political party would sit on its Board of Directors or on its Advisory Council. This requirement to remove ‘party-political’ people was in fact the only real constraint placed on our capacity to be autonomous in our decisions about programme and structures and while in principle it appeared to be a major concession, in practice it had no discernible impact on our ability to follow a progressive agenda.

Moreover, while at the time our motivation to change our rules on Board and Advisory Council membership were taken to comply with the funder’s requirements, this move did have a positive unintended consequence. As discussed earlier, evaluations showed that perceived links with the Labour Party were damaging to TASC in its quest to establish its credibility as a source of independent analysis. At the outset, particularly in the context of the political associations of those who were most involved in founding TASC, we were somewhat ambivalent about our links to the Labour Party. As the only one of the three largest political parties that came close to sharing our vision for Irish society, it seemed to make sense, and was certainly argued for, that we would have strong links to the Labour Party. Although there were a number of members of TASC structures who were prominent members of the Labour Party, and although individual Labour Party politicians attended TASC events and drew on TASC material, the Party betrayed little interest in TASC for many years and many of the backbenchers seemed oblivious of our existence. This is not surprising, as described in Section 2, it took some time for the concept of a think tank to embed itself in the political culture. While this display of lack of interest from members of the political party whom we would have assumed would

⁷⁵ Prof. John Horgan also resigned from the Advisory Council in 2007 on his appointment as Press Ombudsman because of the potential for a conflict of interest.

have greatest affinity with both our values and our work was disconcerting, it had the benefit of leaving us completely independent to pursue our own agenda. Now in its fifteenth year of operation, TASC has a good relationship with all of the major political parties, including but not especially, the Labour Party.

Section 6

Concluding Reflections

This exercise of reflection on the building of the first independent, progressive think tank in Ireland has provided me with a welcome opportunity to review its first ten years, the period of my tenure as founding director. In so doing I have explored some of the reasons why it has survived and, according to all the evidence, made a significant difference to the process of public policy making in Ireland. In this final section, I will set out some thoughts on why TASC was a valuable initiative; offer some conclusions on my own relationship to TASC; and identify some of the key things I learned during the ten years of building the organisation. The process of writing this context statement has allowed me to bring these to the fore. Finally, I will identify unresolved issues I believe are critical to the future of an independent think tank in Ireland.

6.1 Why TASC?

When I founded TASC in 2001 it was a first. It was the first independent think tank in Ireland and, outside of party politics, it was the first formal space in which to develop alternative ideas to the prevailing neoliberal discourse. TASC provided a new institutional vehicle for generating new thinking on the big economic, social and economic questions. For me - and I believe for others - the impetus was in essence a response to frustration with the capacity of the traditional political party to do this effectively. I was very conscious that we didn't have persuasive and coherent solutions to economic, social and political problems in Ireland; for those of us who were members of political parties, the normal demands of running the party left little space or resources for the work required to engage seriously with these issues. Unquestionably, while providing a persuasive narrative that is consistent with greater equality is still challenging, globally and not just in Ireland, TASC continues to make a worthwhile contribution to a developing world-wide counter discourse.

As I have shown in this context statement, TASC effectively established the think tank field in Ireland. That's not to say that there weren't think tank type organisations in place before TASC or indeed that those who have come after us

wouldn't have done so in the absence of TASC, but the difference between 2001 and 2011 (when I stepped down) is that think tanks are now an accepted voice in the political/ policy sector and are embedded in the process of policy making – one indicator of this is that TASC, along with the ESRI and PublicPolicy.ie, was invited in the month of January, 2015 to make a presentation to a committee of parliament on the subject of social protection.

'So what?' one could ask. There are those that question the value of think tanks, arguing that they exist to serve some political or business or other vested interest and that as such are a threat to the public sphere – closing down rather than opening up discussion and debate. There is basis for this concern. Many think tanks fit this kind of profile. But it is not a characteristic of think tanks *per se*. In the case of TASC I can honestly say that the opposite was true. My motivation and that of those who worked on its founding, was to open up debate and discussion, a motivation clearly reflected in the shape of TASC. In the text I use the concept of 'community of inquiry' to explain how we approached matters– much of the way we worked in TASC was through some form of a community of inquiry to work out solutions that would lead to a more egalitarian society, conscious that we did not have, a priori, answers to how best to achieve this.

6.2 My relationship to TASC

David Begg, one of those who was involved in the TASC project almost from the beginning and, as leader of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions throughout the 2000s, a very astute observer of the Irish public policy making arena, he described TASC's success as 'improbable'. The use of this word is apt and raises a number of personal questions: why did it fall to me to take the lead role; why was I drawn to the task; and how did my positionality, in translating the concept of a think tank into an operational reality, give TASC its particular shape? Writing this account of TASC's foundation and evolution has helped to disentangle the web of circumstance, opportunity, connections, mindset at a particular period in time, personality and personal values that help to answer these questions. Four dimensions of my background can be highlighted. First, I was educated as a social science researcher. Second, in career terms I had worked extensively in public policy research. I had held a number of public service positions, each one increasing in seniority and usually involving some element of research and/or

research management. By the late 1990s, I had acquired a skill set that was very relevant to the work of a think tank – research, writing, research management, research consultancy and organisational management. Third, throughout my work life I had an appetite for project and organisational innovation. And fourth, in parallel, I had been a political activist since my thirties, as evidenced by my initial choice of subjects at primary degree level and my first job in the mid-1970s as a researcher on poverty with the newly-established National Committee for Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty. A belief in equality underpinned this political activism.

6.3 Articulating the internal dialogue and learning.

Trying to make sense of the development path of TASC, messy and unpredictable as it was, is a difficult task. During the ten years, like background noise, I had an ongoing internal dialogue with myself as well as with others, questioning and debating issues about the way in which we were structuring the organisation, about its direction and about its activities. My preoccupation with the day-to-day running of TASC inevitably left little time for active reflection (a significant exception was the six month period during 2007/2008 when I was given the resources to prepare a strategic plan for the organisation). Thus, the process of writing this context statement was a valuable opportunity to interrogate and make sense of some of these issues. It was also personally cathartic. Some of the challenges and stresses I had experienced had remained with me, undigested. Writing about them in an iterative way and contextualising them in the literature or in others experiences put them into perspective and allowed me to both take account of them and leave them behind. The interaction with the literature was also very different. Starting with my own experience and then searching for literature which would help make sense of that was a very different analytic approach for me. Moreover, writing about the process of building TASC is a contribution to what is still a fairly sparse discourse about the role of think tanks. The existing literature tends to focus on think tanks as a type of policy actor, their form, their value etc. I am not aware of any other serious first person account of the setting up of a think tank; there is very little analytic work done on the social and political category of think tankers, people who work in think tanks and even less that I have found on leaders of think tanks.

TASC evolved in a particular configuration of policy landscape, political and funding developments so that much of the learning is specific to the experience of founding and leading TASC. In this sub section, I review the four that I believe are most salient: style of leadership; lead-time for impact; resources needed and the importance of an evidence-based approach.

Leadership – need for a collaborative style

In writing this context statement, I explore the question of what constitutes the most appropriate leadership style for a progressive think tank. Many argue convincingly that a directive style is inappropriate in any complex organisation, conflicting as it does with the idea of intellectual freedom and the creative environment necessary for the generation of new ideas. Moreover, the innovative nature of the tasks makes it difficult to specify in advance either the process or the output (Kahn and Kram,1994, p.18). This in turn means that a successful think tank is hugely reliant on a shared ethos, a high degree of skill amongst staff members and an organisational capacity to withstand failure. What must also be considered, however, is that a precariously-funded organisation such as TASC, struggling with multiple stakeholder demands to quickly embed itself in the culture cannot easily create this environment without serious risk to its capacity to attract the necessary external resources for survival. Over the ten years I learnt that at times it is necessary to sacrifice a desirable level of shared decision-making in the interests of such survival. I also believe, however, that great care must be taken to minimise hierarchical decision-making and to put every effort into creating an environment in which all staff are actively engaged rather than passively compliant (Fitzgibbon, 2001, p.170). One of the critical components of such an environment and one which is not always easy to achieve, is the capacity to recruit skilled staff who have a high tolerance of the uncertainty and fluidity that is at the heart of the small, independent think tank world.

A collaborative leadership style is essential also for engagement with the wider ‘community of inquiry’. As I describe in the text, the fact that TASC was and is able to produce a very large volume and high quality of output, notwithstanding its small resource base, is attributable in large part to the various voluntary groupings that make up the TASC structure. To be effective in this process is to be able to mediate between the legitimate personal or group objectives of those

engaged in these activities on the one hand and the overall objectives of TASC as an entity on the other.

Lead-in time for impact

When we began to consider setting up a think tank as a space for the generation of new ideas to provide a counterpoint to the conservative and neo-liberal hegemony of the time, none of us anticipated the length of time that it would require. Indeed some, while supportive, were sceptical of the chances of survival beyond a short timeframe. Two or three years after its incorporation, when I was completely immersed in the project of building TASC, I began to understand the scale of what we were seeking to achieve and the length of time that would be needed for an independent, progressive think tank to become embedded in the wider society.

Furthermore, although TASC, along with other think tanks, is now regularly at the policy-making table, achieving implementation of its proposals is much more challenging. This is not to say that we have not had our successes. As well as broadening the basis of debate on economic inequality and democratic accountability at a macro level, TASC's research and analysis contributed directly to a number of specific policy 'wins', particularly in the post 2008 period. These include influencing the Irish Financial Regulator's new Corporate Governance Code for financial institutions; reversal of the minimum wage cut, (albeit that TASC's contribution here was one part of a much wider push across the civil-society spectrum); and substantial restoration of the Irish Freedom of Information Act (FOI), including elimination of FOI fees. However, I have also learnt that the gap between first putting proposals in to the public domain and their eventual adoption as public policy tends to be a rather lengthy one. For example, it was only in November 2014 that TASC proposals for an independent system of appointments to public bodies were implemented, although our work on that issue was first put into the public domain as far back as 2006. Similarly, TASC's detailed analysis of the contribution of tax expenditures to a regressive tax regime in Ireland has just recently seen the Minister for Finance announce a series of measures to produce regular cost-benefit analysis to monitor and limit the use of these instruments as part of economic policy, although TASC's critique of the

structure of taxation dates back to 2009.⁷⁶

Resources needed

We also significantly underestimated the level of income that would be needed to build and sustain a think tank to a scale that could make any meaningful impact, as well as the never-ending task and enormous effort required to raise the level of funds required to make the organisation sustainable. The early advice of one of the members of the inaugural TASC Advisory Council summed it up. Based on his years' of experience heading up a Brussels-based think tank, he advised not 'to underestimate the amount of never-ending effort needed to raise funding for an independent think tank and the impossibility of achieving anything without it'. We were fortunate, as outlined in Section 1, to have access to sufficient funds to get started on a professional basis and also to win sufficient project funding over the following six or so years to keep going, building familiarity and acceptance and producing a significant level of output while doing so. But as I point out in Section 1, it became clear that this was not sustainable, even in the medium term. The step change in organisational funding in 2008, providing the capacity to put in place what was effectively a think-tank structure, was itself predicated on our raising substantial additional, matching funds. The presence of two charitable foundations committed to fostering a vibrant civic culture and a diversity of ideas proved critical to TASC's survival and growth. The Atlantic Philanthropies had by far the larger resources available and it was both the scale and longevity of their support—effectively from 2004 through to 2017 – that has been the single most important factor in TASC's survival. It is also arguably what allows us to be genuinely independent of vested interests, whether these were state, corporate, or interest groups in civic society.

There is an obvious direct link between scale of financial resources and realisable organisational scale. In 2008, the strategic plan we put in place allowed TASC to build its core staff to seven people. However, in 2012, in the context of a much more challenging external funding environment than had been anticipated when drafting the 2008-2013 strategic plan, it became necessary to radically reduce the

⁷⁶ It is important to note that it is in the nature of social change that it is not possible to claim cause and effect between any one action and the eventual outcome.

number of staff to four, on lower salary levels. This was the number which the Board considered was the maximum that could be sustained in the near to medium-term future. Recent experience shows that an organisation of this scale can do impactful work but the insecurity of funding does make it a difficult ongoing challenge to both recruit and hold high quality staff. Moreover, no matter how ethically the task of downsizing is handled, as it was in 2012, there is considerable negative impact on both the individuals directly affected and those remaining, with attendant disruption to the work of the organisation and its ability to build corporate memory. All of this highlights the importance of both the quantity and reliability of income streams.

An evidenced-based approach is critical

To allow TASC to claim intellectual freedom in generating new ideas and policy solutions, a commitment to acting in the interests of the wider society, in accordance with explicitly-stated values and clear objectives, has been essential. This commitment enables us to refute the argument that think tanks can ever only represent the views of the handful of self-appointed individual citizens who found them and the people who staff them. TASC provides a space for a whole group of citizens to make a contribution to the public sphere, i.e., to put their arguments to the test of public and expert opinion. Specific policy proposals are important at particular junctures, but this notion of a 'public sphere' is constant and enduring. For me, the extent to which TASC has contributed to the public sphere is the most meaningful test of its value. Ensuring that the research, from which the arguments and proposals flow, is rigorous, evidence-based and peer reviewed addresses legitimate concerns about partisanship. My own background in the social sciences meant that an evidence-based approach, motivated by the desire to identify truly robust solutions to policy problems, was built into TASC's processes as a first principle from the start. Moreover, the subsequent experience of seeking a hearing for our work, often from sceptical or hostile audiences, showed that such an approach was equally important as a critical tool in the strategic task of legitimacy building.

6.4 Issues for the future – ongoing dilemmas

All through the first ten years of TASC, I was trying to carve a space for innovation in a real life context with all its demands and expectations, a process leaving little time for reflection. Unsurprisingly, when I stepped down as TASC's founding Director in early 2011, there still remained unresolved dilemmas, three of the most important of which I highlight here.

Location in the policy-making process?

From the outset, TASC sought to be an agent of social and economic change. However, and particularly in the context of limited resources, the question of where precisely TASC should locate itself in the policy-making terrain came to the fore at a very early stage. Should TASC limit itself to the production and general dissemination of proposals and ideas based on evidence-based research, leaving it to TASC's allies to undertake advocacy work driven by TASC's policy ideas? Or is it important that TASC engage in the direct advocacy of these ideas and proposals to the point where they are reflected in policy and ultimately social change? Both resource constraints and the importance of non-partisanship would point to the first strategy, while a sense of urgency to create clear impact – internally-driven and also something demanded by funders – suggest the second.

The question of values

Explicitly articulating our values is one of the touchstones of the way TASC works. However, this necessary willingness to declare a value orientation has meant an ongoing difficulty of getting a hearing for TASC's work, as some commentators to dismiss our findings use it. We were not naïve about this. We understood it was going to be an issue – I use the concept of 'core stigma' in the text to talk about this. My problem is not that TASC is perceived to have a particular world view but rather that others - and this would include establishment think tanks, individual economic commentators and so on - are regarded as somehow neutral. Recent examples of individual journalists and commentators labeling TASC as 'left' or 'trade union backed' show that this is not going to be overcome easily and remains a concern for the organisation.

Linked to this question of values is the notion of partisanship and the constant balancing act required to establish TASC as an authoritative and non-partisan

source of new ideas at the same time as remaining true to the values of equality and to the community that shares these values. TASC's insistence on an evidence-based approach has significantly assisted the organisation in overcoming this challenge. What TASC can also hope for is that these ideas cease to have their outsider status as the work of the growing global community of think tanks, academics, civil society activists and politicians working to supplant the neoliberal edifice begins to have its impact on the dominant narrative.

Financial sustainability

The question of TASC's sustainability continues to be central. Limited domestic funding sources combined with our unwillingness to compromise our independence means that a very large portion of the quantum of energy available to TASC will be devoted to the quest for adequate funding. Moreover, prudent management of our existing sources means that we are constrained in our capacity to grow the scale of the organisation, even back to that achieved in 2008. TASC is now in its fifteenth year of operation and from some perspectives has arguably made limited difference to the core task of moving Irish society to a more egalitarian orientation. At the beginning of 2015, following a series of austerity budgets and the profoundly negative social consequences arising from continued high unemployment and radically reduced incomes and public services, the disconcerting reality is that Irish society is tending to move away from rather than towards equality.

Given the financial challenges likely to continue into the future, does this mean the project was not worth doing? I would strongly contend that it was very much worth it. In addition to the growing global debate about economic inequality, of which TASC is now part, it is arguable that the alternative policy solutions that TASC put into the public domain helped to halt the drive towards even greater levels of austerity than those actually imposed following the financial crash of 2008. At that time, TASC was one of the few organisations offering evidence-based and costed measures demonstrating that it was possible to reconcile solving the crisis effects of the financial crash and increasing economic equality. It was in a position to do this only because of the ground work undertaken in the previous seven years. I believe that it is vital that TASC survives to continue its work and, indeed, that it is joined by others with similar and competing outlooks. There is

now a realistic possibility of a paradigm shift, albeit still somewhat in the future. The challenge for TASC is to survive in the interim in order to keep alive the fact that there are alternatives consistent with a more egalitarian society available to Irish society, at which point it is to be hoped that new sources of funding will more readily be available.

Final Note

TASC has continued to develop since I left in 2011. I've continued to play a role on the board of TASC and briefly took over the role of director again for a number of months between September, 2014 and April of this year. We have just started a new chapter with a new director; Dr David Begg retired as General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions just this March and joined TASC at the beginning of April.

Fifteen years later if TASC is to be judged on how successful it has been in moving Ireland to being a more equal society, it is clear that it is very much a work in progress. Persistence in contributing to the narrative is key. I read a recent newspaper interview with the economist Joseph Stiglitz – one of the staunchest critics of austerity policies. I thought his way of assessing current efforts to effect a paradigm shift insightful. He says that the current state of play is '...both depressing and hopeful. Depressing because you can have a really bad idea sold for a very long time. It's hopeful because you can always hope that somebody will come along and tell a different story, and win a better contest of ideas' (*Irish Times*, Thursday 4 June, 2015). Telling a different story and winning a better contest of ideas is the worthy game in which TASC is engaged.

Appendix I: TASC Major Organisational Milestones 2001-2011

- 2001 Legal Incorporation
Advisory Council formed
Initial project funding secured
- 2002 Economists Network Formed
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust Funding secured
Professional staff recruited
- 2003 First meeting of Democracy Commission
Publishing partnership with New Island Publishers – TASC imprint
TASCatNewIsland
First of a series of major socio-economic publications
- 2004 Atlantic Philanthropies funds Audit of Irish Democracy Project
2007 Funding from Atlantic Philanthropies to conduct a strategic plan
- 2008 Atlantic Philanthropies provides TASC with a grant of €2.1m over 5 years to support core organisational development.
- 2009 TASC begins to implement the strategic plan, recruiting policy , communications, fundraising and administrative staff.
First TASC Economic Conference generates significant media coverage
Initiation of TASC Progressive Economics Blog.
- 2010 TASC publishes a series of papers on economic policy issues and makes its first substantive submission to the annual budget process
TASC annual economic conference now an international event involving think tanks from the UK, France, Belgium, US and Canada, in association with FEPS.
TASC's presence on mainstream debate programmes increases substantially.
TASC now providing direct assistance to national NGOs and/or NGO coalitions, whilst also building significant relationships with international partner organisations.
- 2011 Polling data indicates relatively high public awareness of TASC - 46% in 2011, which has increased from 31% in 2009.
Founding Director steps down.

Appendix II: The Think Tank as a Concept - History and Definitions

Globally, the concept of the think tank is a relatively recent phenomenon. Now present in 182 countries, the term think tank has become more codified in public discourse; only in the last couple of decades or so has an academic literature emerged along with numerous think-tank directories (Medvetz, 2012, p.28; McGann, 2012, p.17). Although the UK is widely credited with the invention of the modern think tank in the 19th century and although many countries had organisations which could be regarded as think-tank forerunners, the field in its current form emerged in the 1970s in the UK and in North America (Traub-Merz, 2011; Thunert, 2011; Garnett, 2011, Goodman, 2005). According to McGann (2012, p.32) there is now something in the order of 6,500 think tanks in the world, following a major worldwide growth spurt in the 1990s.⁷⁷ North America and Western Europe still dominate the scene: almost two-thirds of all think tanks are located in these two geographical areas. By McGann's (2012, p.15) calculation, there are 1,823 think tanks in the US, more than 90 per cent created since 1951. The number has more than doubled since 1980 but growth reached a peak in 2000 with a slowdown in rate of establishment evident between 2001 and 2007 (2012, p. 17).

Despite this growth in numbers, the research literature on think tanks is still relatively thin (Medvetz, 2008) and those researching and writing about the think tank struggle with definitions and with categorisations (Stone, 2007a). 'For the scholar who wishes to understand the think tank ...the fundamental problem is that the central concept is fuzzy, mutable, and contentious....' (Medvetz, 2012, p.23). There is in fact huge variation in think-tank structure and size, the policy issues they address and their importance as a policy player (Stone and Denham, 2004) and in their ideological orientation (Stone, 2007b). In Ireland, for example, fourteen organisations are identified as think tanks by McGann (2012), but these include not only organisations

⁷⁷ It should be noted that McGann's (2012) definition includes think tanks formally associated with the state, political parties and other special interests. Medvetz (2012, p.33) makes a telling point about the wide variation in what is counted as a think tank and the implications of this for understanding the think tank arena as a separate field.

that are categorised as autonomous and independent (the critical characteristic of a think tank in its usage by many) but also those where a donor or contracting agency provides a majority of the funding and has significant influence, as well as university, political party or government affiliated or wholly-funded entities. Legal foundations and modes of funding are in fact important distinguishing characteristics: think tanks can be state, public or private establishments; many have a non-profit orientation (Traub-Merz, 2011, p.3).

Richard Struyk (2006), author of a practical handbook for the management of think tanks, technically categorises think tanks according to three stages of development. The vast majority fall into either Stage 1 (typically fewer than 10 full time researchers, low level of activities and a low level of financial support) or Stage 2 (more staff, funders and clients and more specialisation in research and educational activities) (2006, p.vii).

Others categorise think tanks by function, distinguishing between those who conduct empirical research similar to research institutes and those who base their work on existing findings in an effort to influence policy outcomes similar to lobbyists.

An important dimension by which think tanks are differentiated is their ideological orientation (real or perceived). Rich (2005) argues that think tanks in the US in the last decades before the turn of the century were established with a clear ideological (right or left) orientation. He finds that conservative organisations outnumber liberal ones by a ratio of 2 to 1 and outspend them by a ratio of 3 to 1 (Medvetz, 2007, p.272). Stone & Denham (2004) acknowledge the US model (which can also be said to apply in the UK), but also list three other geographically-based models: the traditional European understanding that think tanks represent the academic arm of a legislature, with governments willing to fund ideologically diverse policy proposals; the traditional Sino-Russian understanding of 'policy workshops', sitting almost entirely within government; and the traditional far-eastern understanding (particularly in Japan) of commercially-sponsored policy generation, where the line between think tank and business lobbyist is very hard to draw. On this dimension, TASC fits most closely with the US/UK

model in that its *raison d'être* is to orient its work towards finding policy solutions which if implemented would create a more equal society.

FIGURE 7 TYPES OF THINK TANKS⁷⁸

Academic Think Tanks	Research Institutes Working on Contracts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasise the quality of university research and the provision of objective analysis; • staff members are academics, and typically hold doctorates; • examples: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • similar to academic think tanks, but they differ according to their funding sources, which come from contracts with government agencies or corporate support/memberships. • examples: Notre Europe, Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI).
Advocacy Think Tanks	Political Party Think Tanks/Foundations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to serve a cause, they produce ideas and recommendations that conform to particular values and a certain view of the world; • their interest lies in winning the 'war of ideas' (i.e., seeing their positions accepted at the expense of contrasting alternatives); • examples: Lisbon Council (LC), Centre for European Reform (CER). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • similar to advocacy think tanks but overtly organised around a political party. Although intellectually autonomous, their work is often of direct use to the party; • think tank activity may only comprise a small part of their overall budgets; • examples: The German 'Stiftungen', which are funded from the federal budget, but independent of the government and political parties.

⁷⁸ Boyd Associates (2010, p.7).

Other commentators focus their classification in terms of what it is the think tank is trying to achieve. Boyd Associates (2010, p.6) cite Boucher & Royo (2009) who not only categorise think tanks in this way, but also highlight a relatively recent observable shift beyond the generation of ideas, towards the championing of ideas (i.e., actively and directly driving their acceptance by decision makers). See Figure 7.

Appendix III: Members of the Inaugural Advisory Council

As at 10 October 2001

Fintan O'Toole (Chair), Journalist, writer and critic

Mike Allen, General Secretary Labour Party

Prof. Ivana Bacik, TCD

David Begg, General Secretary of ICTU

Roisin Callender, Women's Officer, SIPTU

Paula Clancy, Director, TASC

Proinsias De Rossa, MEP, Labour Party

Eithne Fitzgerald, former Labour Party, T.D. and former Minister for Labour,

Des Geraghty, President of SIPTU

Prof. John Horgan, Dublin City University DCU and former Labour Party, T.D.

Prof. Kathleen Lynch, University College Dublin(UCD)

Rosaleen MacDonagh, Student

Mary Murphy, Policy Analyst, SVP charity

Prof. Pat O'Connor, University of Limerick (UL)

Jim O'Donnell, Senior Administrator, GUE/NGL Group, European Parliament

Cathleen O'Neill, Community Activist

Prof. Bill Roche, University College Dublin (UCD)

Greg Sparks, Partner, Farrell Grant Sparks Consultants

John Sutton, Managing Director, Public Communications Centre (PCC)

Robin Wilson, Director, Democratic Dialogue

Maev-Ann Wren, Health Policy Analyst

Appendix IV: Chronology of TASC Output 2003-2010

Published books and pamphlets available in retail outlets listed in date order:

1. O'Toole, F. (2003) *After the Ball*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
2. Sweeney, P. (2004) *Selling Out? Privatisation in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
3. Drudy, P. J. and Punch, M. (2005) *Out of Reach: inequalities in the Irish Housing System*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
4. Stewart, J. (ed) (2005) *For Richer, For Poorer: An Investigation of the Irish Pension System*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
5. Harris, C. (ed) (2005) *Engaging Citizens: The Case for Democratic Renewal in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
6. Kinsella, T. and O'Toole, F. (2005) *Why America Can't Rule the World*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
7. Wilford, R. and Wilson, R. (2006) *The Trouble with Northern Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
8. Jacobson, D., Kirby, P. and O'Brien, D. (eds) (2006) *Taming the Tiger: Social Exclusion in a Globalised Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
9. Wickham, J. (2006) *Gridlock: Dublin's Transport Crisis and the Future of the City*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
10. Clancy, P. and Murphy, G. (2006) *Outsourcing Government: Public Bodies and Accountability*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
11. Wilford, R. and Wilson, R. (2007) *Power to the People? An Assessment of Democracy in Northern Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
12. Hughes, I., Clancy P., Harris. C. and Beetham, D. (2007) *'Power to the People? An Assessment of Democracy in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
13. O'Broin, D. and Waters, E. (2008) *Governing Below the Centre: Local Governance in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
14. Barry, U. (ed) (2008) *Where are we now? New Feminist Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
15. Hughes, G. and Stewart, J. (2008) *Choosing Your Future: How to Reform Ireland's Pension System*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.
16. Bisset, J. (2009) *Regeneration: Public Good or Private Profit?*, Dublin, TASC at NewIsland.

Publications available from TASC listed in date order:

1. Clancy, P. Hughes, I. and Brannick, T. (2005) *Public Perspectives on Irish Democracy*, Dublin, TASC.
2. TASC (2008) *Making Pensions Work for People: A TASC Policy Brief*, Dublin, TASC.
3. Clancy, P. (2009) *Beholden to No One: Public Bodies Patronage and Probity*, Dublin, TASC.
4. McDonough, T. and Loughrey, J. (2009) *Hierarchy of Earnings, Attributes and Privilege*, Dublin, TASC/ICTU.
5. Clancy, P., O'Connor, N. and Dillon, K. (2010) *Mapping the Golden Circle*, Dublin, TASC.
6. TASC (2010) *Submission to the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland*. Dublin, TASC.
7. TASC (2010) *Investing in Recovery, Jobs, Equality: TASC Analysis and proposals for Budget 2011*, Dublin, TASC.
8. TASC (2010) *Failed Design: Ireland's Finance Acts and their Role in the Crisis*, Dublin, TASC.
9. TASC (2010) *Life and Debt 2010: Financial Exclusion in the Age of NAMA*, Dublin, TASC.
10. O'Connor, N. (2010) *The Role of Access to Information in Ireland*, Discussion Paper, Dublin, TASC.
11. O'Connor, N. (2010) *An Economic Argument for Stronger Freedom of Information*, Discussion Paper, Dublin, TASC.
12. TASC (2010) *The Solidarity Factor: Public Responses to Economic Equality in Ireland*, Dublin, TASC.

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