

Research project report ¹

'Knowledge is power': The boundaries of political advising and lobbying in the political decision-making process – political expert culture in a Polish-German comparative perspective

Artur Kopka, *European University Viadrina (Frankfurt/Oder, Germany)*

E-mail: kopka@europa-uni.de

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7220-713X>

Abstract

This paper presents the assumptions, the implementation process and the results of the research project: *'Knowledge is power': The boundaries of political advising and lobbying in the political decision-making process – political expert culture in a Polish-German comparative perspective*, carried out between 2020 and 2022. The main objective of the project was to analyse the perception of political advising and lobbying within political decision-making processes by politicians and their advisers in Poland and Germany. The basis for the project was empirical material obtained in 150 standardised in-depth interviews with MP's and experts involved in political advisory processes in both countries.

Keywords: political advising, lobbying, political expert culture, Poland, Germany.

Raport z realizacji projektu badawczego *'Wiedza to władza': Granice doradztwa politycznego i lobbingu w politycznym procesie decyzyjnym – polityczna kultura ekspercka w polsko-niemieckiej perspektywie porównawczej*

Streszczenie

Niniejszy raport prezentuje założenia, proces realizacji oraz wyniki projektu badawczego pt. *'Wiedza to władza': Granice doradztwa politycznego i lobbingu w politycznym procesie decyzyjnym – polityczna kultura ekspercka w polsko-niemieckiej perspektywie porównawczej*, przeprowadzonego w latach 2020–2022. Głównym celem projektu była analiza percepcji sposobu funkcjonowania doradztwa politycznego i lobbingu w ramach politycznych procesów decyzyjnych przez polityków oraz ich do-

¹ This report is based on a summary publication of the project containing a full description of the project's objectives, implementation and results (Kopka, Piontek 2022a).

radców w Polsce i w Niemczech. Badanie zostało zrealizowane na podstawie łącznie 150 wywiadów pogłębionych z parlamentarzystami oraz ekspertami uczestniczącymi w politycznych procesach doradczych w obu krajach.

Słowa kluczowe: doradztwo polityczne, lobbying, polityczna kultura ekspercka, Polska, Niemcy.

The research project '*Knowledge is power: The boundaries of political advising and lobbying in the political decision-making process – political expert culture in a Polish-German comparative perspective*' was carried out between April 2020 and December 2022 in cooperation between the Department of Comparative Political Science at the Faculty of Cultural Studies of the European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder (EUV), and the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (AMU). It was managed by Artur Kopka and Dorota Piontek owing to a grant from the *Polish-German Foundation for Science*, and with the financial support from the Small Projects Fund of the Euroregion *Pro Europa Viadrina*.²

The project presented here was a continuation of a research project running from 2016–2018³, with its result summarised and published in Polish by ToC publishing house in the book edited by Artur Kopka, Dorota Piontek, and Michael Minkenberg, entitled: *Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w parlamentarnym procesie decyzyjnym. Polska i Niemcy w perspektywie porównawczej* (ang. *Political advising and lobbying in the parliamentary decision-making process. Poland and Germany in a comparative perspective*).⁴ The results of the second part of the project were presented at the conference held on 1 June 2022 at the *Collegium Polonicum* in Stubice, and published in the same year by the Publishing House of the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, in the collective work edited by Artur Kopka and Dorota Piontek, entitled: *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i Niemczech. Politycy, doradcy i lobbyści w perspektywie porównawczej* (ang. *Political expert culture in Poland and Germany. Politicians, advisers and lobbyists in a comparative perspective*).⁵

Project assumptions and research questions

The aim of the first part of the project was to analyse the perception of political advisory and lobbying processes by politicians in Germany and Poland, based on the assumption that each country has specific arrangements in this area, depending on the existing socio-political conditions. The initial research interest was related to the differences between political advisory and lobbying and their practical role in the

² The project received funding from the German-Polish Science Foundation (GPSF: 2019-14) and the Small Project Fund in the Euroregion *Pro Europa Viadrina* (KPF-042/20).

³ The first part of the project received funding from the German-Polish Science Foundation (GPSF: 2016-12) and the Small Project Fund in the Euroregion *Pro Europa Viadrina* (KPF-016/18).

⁴ A German-language version of the book was published in 2019 by *Springer VS* with the title: *Politikberatung und Lobbying im parlamentarischen Entscheidungsprozess. Polen und Deutschland im Vergleich*.

⁵ A German-language version of the book was published in 2024 by *Springer VS* with the title: *Politische Expertenkultur in Deutschland und Polen. Politik, Beratung und Lobbyismus im Vergleich*.

political decision-making. The study conducted in the first part of the project allowed for a multifaceted analysis of their structures and their function, as well as the criteria of legitimacy and legality of the different political advisory and lobbying processes in the perception of MP's as recipients of various types of expertise in both countries (Kopka et al. 2018; Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

The analysis conducted in a German-Polish comparative perspective was aimed not only at identifying similarities and differences in the relationship between experts and politicians involved in the decision-making processes in the two political systems. It also focused on the legal framework and the relevant procedures, as well as the practices that do not originate in various types of regulations, and finally, on the way politicians acquire expertise and how they use it in their political decision-making. The conducted research led us to propose the concept of a political expert culture (*pec*), which we defined, based on relevant theoretical approaches, "as a system of norms, procedures and instruments regulating the relationship between experts and political decision-makers, resulting from diverse systemic, political, institutional, legal, historical, and cultural conditions in individual countries" (Piontek, Kopka 2018: p. 80–81). This concept implies the existence of different *pec* models reflecting the shape of the relationship between the two sides of political consultancy determining which experts and which advisory procedures are considered credible and legitimate. Based on our research, we proposed also a tentative typology of *pec*, taking into account the findings on the institutional framework of political advisory and lobbying processes in Poland and Germany, the perception of the boundary between political advising and lobbying by actors involved in the consulting processes, the functioning of substantive and strategic advice, as well as the political advisory and lobbying market in either country (Kopka, Piontek 2022d).

The analysis of the interviews with Polish and German parliamentarians provided comprehensive insight into the politician-adviser relationship, and led to vast knowledge of their cooperation, the rationale behind it, and its effects. The research conducted in the first part of the project became a starting point for the study of more groups of participants in the political advisory and lobbying processes. Therefore, in the next step, in order to verify the conceptual assumptions and to clarify a typological classification of the *pec* in Germany and Poland, the politicians' perception was supplemented with the perspective of experts on various fields (substantive and strategic), and different interests (advisors and lobbyists) as the other side of advisory interaction. The analysis was focused on how experts understand their role within the political advisory and lobbying process, and how they perceive the existing legal framework. Furthermore, we were interested in the subject of advice and its functions, the mode of recruiting experts, and how they work, the channels of communication between politicians and advisors, and how they gain access to political decision-makers. In order to explore the adopted research area in the most comprehensive way, in addition to the central research themes, other aspects of political advising and lobbying were also analysed. These included the increasing role of the media in the political advisory and lobbying processes, the differences in the structure

and advisory resources of MPs' offices, the perceptions of the so-called "revolving door effect", and the opportunities for citizens to participate in political consultations in either country (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

Project implementation and research methodology

The project was conducted by a team of researchers representing renowned universities and research centres from Germany and Poland. In addition to representatives from the EUV and AMU as the main partners of the project, the team included representatives of the University of Warsaw, the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, the University of Wrocław, the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, the University of Heidelberg, and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies in Potsdam. The researchers involved in the project participated in several workshops, which provided an opportunity for a collaborative conceptual development of the project's assumptions, to analyse the collected empirical material within the adopted research areas, and to present and discuss the results of the analysis.

The basis for the project was empirical material obtained through 150 standardised in-depth interviews with parliamentarians and experts involved in political advisory processes in Germany and Poland. In the first part of the project, 39 interviews were conducted with Polish, and 19 interviews with German parliamentarians, adequately representing all the parties in the parliaments (Kopka et al. 2018).

In the second part of the project, 28 interviews were conducted with German, and 18 with Polish experts. The sample was selected on the basis of specific eligibility characteristics. According to the adopted selection criteria, survey respondents had to fulfil the following conditions: "as individual experts, team members or employees of a company or institution, formally or informally, they provide advisory services to politicians in the framework of substantive advice, image consulting, strategic advice, election campaign advice, etc., or carry out lobbying activities on their own or on behalf of other entities, to influence the legislation within the political decision-making processes" (Kopka, Piontek 2022b: p. 13). The information regarding the participation of the experts concerned in the legislative process was based on lists of advisory and lobbying bodies registered with the Sejm and the Bundestag, lists of experts participating in parliamentary committees, as well as information from parliamentarians or individual declarations from the experts. The respondents had extensive experience and a high reputation for their expert activities. They represented a wide range of actors offering a diverse catalogue of advisory services and active in the field of various sectoral policies. The group of experts included representatives of federations, trade unions and associations, foundations, NGOs, academic and research institutions, lobbying offices, political marketing and communications consultancies, and opinion polling centres. The experts surveyed were mainly directors, presidents, attorneys and managers of communication and public relations departments, spokespersons, academics, freelance advisors and lobbyists. A smaller group consisted of clerks, consultants and political relations specialist. Due to the prominent positions

held by the respondents from both countries, and their extensive practical knowledge of expert activities, the empirical material obtained from the interviews provided significant insight into the political advisory and lobbying processes and the way they function in Poland and Germany (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

The survey also involved employees of MPs' offices as a specific group of individuals with advisory functions in the political decision-making processes. Regarding their duties, they provided an excellent source of information on how parliamentarians obtain expertise, which also allowed comparing the role of office staff as advisory support to politicians in both countries. The survey covered 27 employees of the Bundestag, and 19 employees of the Sejm (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

The interviews were recorded and anonymised. Using computer software, transcription protocols were created as the basis for the subsequent analysis. The collected data were coded according to the research objectives, and then filtered in the process of a structured content analysis in search for information related to the experts' perceptions of the selected issues (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

In order to ensure the validity of the research results, a follow-up survey was conducted in March and April 2022. Again, it involved 34 MPs representing all the parties in the German Parliament. The interviews were carried out in the form of a short questionnaire on their assessment of the provisions of the 'Lobbying Act', which came into force in Germany on 1 January 2022 (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

Project results

One of the main goals of the project was to identify the factors shaping the specific types of *pec*, determining the way, in which political advisory and lobbying affect the process of acquiring expertise by policy-makers, and to create an analytical model for comparison in different political systems. In the course of the study, four types of *pec* were identified, distinguished on the basis of two categories of the differentiating criteria: institutional (formal-legal), and cultural. The juxtaposition of these two categories creates a model of norms and relationships between the policy-makers, and expertise providers unique to each system.

The following were identified as types of the *pec*:

- 1) institutionalised, content-oriented *pec* (i-c),
- 2) institutionalised, strategy-oriented *pec* (i-s),
- 3) non-institutionalised, content-oriented *pec* (n-c),
- 4) non-institutionalised, strategy-oriented *pec* (n-s) (Kopka, Piontek 2022c).

The interviews with experts provided a broader picture of the system of norms, instruments and procedures that define the relationship between experts and political decision-makers. This required specifying the institutional criteria of distinction and taking into account more significant factors. In the initially adopted set of categories, the identification of a specific type of *pec* in this dimension depended primarily on the scope of the legal arrangements for the operation of political advising and lobbying. Based

on the analysis of the expert interviews, the institutional category was expanded to enable a more adequate categorisation of the individual countries to a specific type of *pec* (Kopka, Piontek 2022c).

The refinement of the differentiating criteria resulted in the creation of a typology grid for *pec*. The previous institutional distinctions related to:

- 1) the existing regulations of advisory and lobbying processes,
- were supplemented by the following criteria:
- 2) the degree of formalisation of the politician-expert relationship,
 - 3) the degree of availability of institutionalised forms of advice,
 - 4) the level of the professionalisation of expert knowledge providers,
 - 5) the demand for expertise regardless of its nature,
 - 6) the use of expertise in political decision-making.

The differentiating criteria in the cultural dimension include the following factors:

- 1) the types of expertise desired by politicians ('policy advice' vs. 'political consulting'),
- 2) the politicians' goals related to the use of expertise (rationalisation vs. post-rationalisation/legitimisation),
- 3) the distance between politicians and experts, consisting of:
 - a) the degree of trust in expert knowledge,
 - b) the position of the expert as a participant in the decision-making process,
 - c) the politicians' preference for experts (internal vs. external),
 - d) the degree of proximity of the views required.

We also found that the perception of the boundary between political advising and lobbying in the institutional dimension, and the level of mediatisation of expertise in the cultural dimension can serve as complementary criteria for the typology of the *pec*. However, we do not treat them as foregrounded, and the assessment of their ultimate suitability should be based on further research (Kopka, Piontek 2022c).

The analysis based on the above comparative matrix allowed to assign the political expert cultures of Poland and Germany to two different types of the *pec* (Kopka, Piontek 2022c). The results of the research on the various aspects of political advising and lobbying, which identified the type of the *pec* in both countries within the adopted differentiation criteria, are detailed in the articles contained in the publication summarising the project (Kopka, Piontek 2022a).

Conclusions

The analysis of the institutional-legal framework of political advisory and lobbying processes was carried out on the basis of the available source material and literature on the subject. However, in order to analyse norms, dependencies, evaluations, and expectations as factors of real impact on their functioning, it was necessary to include in the study the perspectives of both politicians and experts involved in the consultation processes in the two countries studied. The experts' perspectives on political advisory and lobbying processes have enriched our understanding of advisory practices, and

the ways and channels of cooperation between politicians and experts, as well as the politicians' expectations of the advisors and their opinions. Comparing this information with the results of the interviews conducted with the politicians in the first part of the project resulted in identifying the subjective beliefs of either side of the advisory interaction between the politicians and experts in Poland and Germany (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

Based on the findings of the research on politicians' attitudes towards the most important aspects of policy advice and lobbying in the political decision-making process and the juxtaposition with experts' perceptions of these phenomena, we modified the original proposal for the typology of the *pec*. The result was a more elaborate model, clarifying the different categories of distinction. The institutional changes, which occurred since the first part of the project, led to placing a greater emphasis on this dimension, and the treatment of the formalisation factor as a component of more broadly defined institutionalisation (Kopka, Piontek 2022c). On the basis of the distinction criteria adopted, Poland and Germany were assigned to two different types of the *pec*, thus reflecting the clear differences between political advising and lobbying function in the two countries (Kopka, Piontek 2022d).

The project results have encouraged us to formulate three leading recommendations that open up new research perspectives in political advising and lobbying based on the *pec* concept. The first recommendation highlights the need for constant monitoring of the institutional and cultural factors that define the different types of the *pec*, as well as their attribution to specific countries. The other recommendation relates to further research on how the political actors in the decision-making processes perceive the boundaries between academic-based policy advice and interest representation-oriented lobbying. The last recommendation concerns the mediatisation of expertise as an analytical category related to political, expert-lobbying and media practice (Kopka, Piontek 2022d).

'*Knowledge is Power*' was a pilot study. There is still limited knowledge about how the existing institutional and legal conditions are perceived by actors in the political advisory and lobbying processes (politicians and experts), or how they function in terms of the flow of expertise within the political decision-making processes in a specific political system. Moreover, we know too little about the strategies and practices of maintaining balance between the desired independence and objectivity of the expertise offered as a basis for rationalising political decisions in line with the idea of working for the general good, and taking into account the specific interests of various social groups, coupled by the desire for accuracy and feasibility of the advisory opinions formulated. The aim of adopting a Polish-German comparative perspective was to analyse the differences in the structures and functioning of political advising and lobbying in Western European countries and the so-called 'new democracies', represented by Central and Eastern European countries. Taking the example of Poland and Germany as a case study has resulted in identifying the most relevant issues and problems for comparison in the political advisory and lobbying processes. In our view, the presented concept of the *pec* creates the basis for a broader comparative research aimed at filling the research gap generated by the growing importance of expertise in political practice, and the increase of interest in this topic in the political science debate (Kopka, Piontek 2022b).

Artur Kopka – PhD in political science, head of the project 'Knowledge is Power' at the Department of Comparative Political Science of the Faculty of Cultural Studies of the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), assistant professor at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Research interests: political advising and lobbying in political decision-making, democracy and political culture in (post-)transition societies, populism and political radicalism in modern democracies. Selected publications: Kopka A., Piontek D., Minkenberg M. (eds.), *Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w parlamentarnym procesie decyzyjnym. Polska i Niemcy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Kraków 2018; Kopka A., Piontek D. (eds.), *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i w Niemczech. Doradcy, lobbyści i politycy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Poznań 2022.

Artur Kopka – doktor filozofii w zakresie nauk o polityce, kierownik projektu „Wiedza to Władza” w Katedrze Porównawczych Nauk Politycznych na Wydziale Kulturoznawstwa Europejskiego Uniwersytetu Viadrina we Frankfurcie nad Odrą, adiunkt w Uniwersytecie im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Zainteresowania badawcze: doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w politycznym procesie decyzyjnym, demokracja i kultura polityczna w społeczeństwach (post-)transformacyjnych, populizm i radykalizm polityczny we współczesnych demokracjach. Wybrane publikacje: Kopka A., Piontek D., Minkenberg M. (red.), *Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w parlamentarnym procesie decyzyjnym. Polska i Niemcy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Kraków 2018; Kopka A., Piontek D. (red.), *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i w Niemczech. Doradcy, lobbyści i politycy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Poznań 2022.

➔ References:

- KOPKA Artur, PIONTEK Dorota (eds) (2022a), *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i w Niemczech. Doradcy, lobbyści i politycy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Poznań.
- KOPKA Artur, PIONTEK Dorota (2022b), *Wprowadzenie: Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w polsko-niemieckim porównaniu*, in: A. Kopka, D. Piontek (eds), *Politycy, doradcy i lobbyści w perspektywie porównawczej*, Poznań.
- KOPKA Artur, PIONTEK Dorota (2022c), *Koncepcja „politycznej kultury eksperckiej” jako model analityczny w porównawczych badaniach politycznych procesów doradczych*, in: A. Kopka, D. Piontek (eds.), *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i w Niemczech. Doradcy, lobbyści i politycy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Poznań.
- KOPKA Artur, PIONTEK Dorota (2022d), *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i w Niemczech: wyniki badań i rekomendacje*, in: A. Kopka, D. Piontek (eds), *Polityczna kultura ekspercka w Polsce i w Niemczech. Politycy, doradcy i lobbyści w perspektywie porównawczej*, Poznań.
- KOPKA Artur, PIONTEK Dorota, MINKENBERG Michael (eds) (2018), *Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w parlamentarnym procesie decyzyjnym. Polska i Niemcy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Kraków.
- PIONTEK Dorota, KOPKA Artur (2018), *Koncepcja kultury eksperckiej w problematyce doradztwa politycznego i lobbyngu*, in: A. Kopka, D. Piontek, M. Minkenberg (eds), *Doradztwo polityczne i lobbying w parlamentarnym procesie decyzyjnym. Polska i Niemcy w perspektywie porównawczej*, Kraków.