Consultants and academic advisers compete on the market for economic advice. Consultants have a larger market share and usually they ask higher fees than academic advisers. However, they are criticized by academics for their overpayment, shallowness, and quick-and-dirty research methods. Do clients attract the wrong kind of advisers?

This thesis presents an in-depth analysis of argumentation used in advice reports on the growth of Schiphol airport and the liberalization of the electricity market, and a study of the differences in the way consultants and academic advisers reflect on their own professional ethos. The research shows that argumentation by academics is less balanced than argumentation by consultants who pay more evenly attention to both positive and negative effects of growth and of liberalization. Another result is that academic advisers do not reach consensus regarding the measurement of indirect labor effects in the growth debate, whereas consultants give fairly consistent estimates.

Academics claim to be better researchers and more neutral advisers, but in the context of economic advice they cannot meet their own standards, nor the standards practiced by consultants. Therefore they make themselves vulnerable to the criticism of hypocrisy. Why then claiming so much? Why not admit, like consultants do, that advice is less based on scientific truth and more on convincing argumentation? What conception of advice is needed, to make academic advice more persuasive? This thesis compares the advice approaches of consultants and academic advisers, in order to reach a better understanding of economic advice and so to enrich advice theory.