

# Technology Assessment in Transition: Mapping the Interplay of Policy Paradigms and TA in Flanders and Wallonia

M van Oudheusden - N Charlier  
B Roskamp - P Delvenne  
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# Entry point: 3 dynamics

- Since the 1980s: convergence around particular STI regimes or models
- G8, OECD, WTO, EU...
- **STI and “innovation” as drivers for economic and social growth**

1

**Int’l policy  
context**



- Rise + institutionalization of **strategic science** (Rip, 2002)

2 interlinked dimensions:

- **relevance**: science that contributes to real-world problem solving
- AND **excellence**: the advancement of science for the sake of science (knowledge).

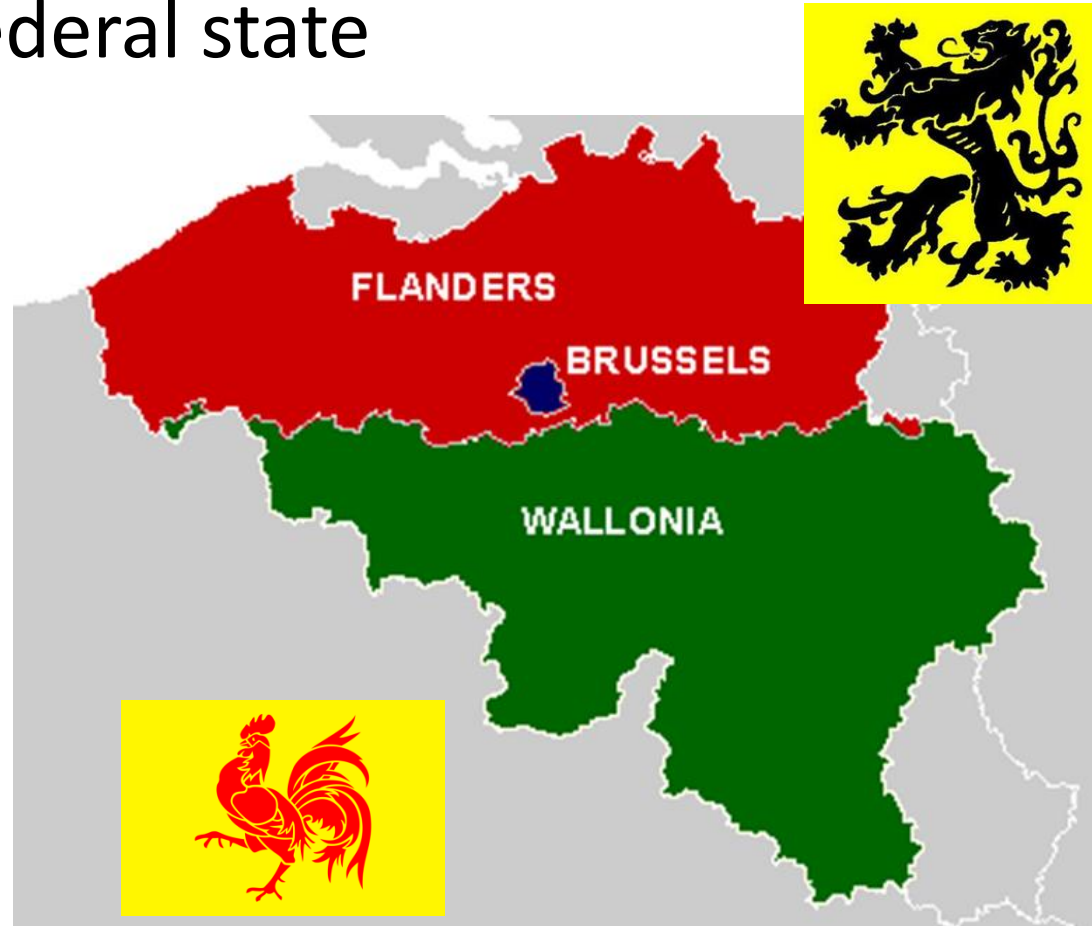
- Demands for relevance and excellence tied together in **KBE narrative**

2



Samenspel tussen Economie,  
Wetenschap en Innovatie voor  
een betere samenleving

- 1980s: **constitutional reforms** in Belgium
- unified state → federal state
  - Regions
  - Communities
  - Language areas



# 1 + 2 + 3

- Our research inquires into **how Flanders and Wallonia have each adapted** to these changing economic, political, and sociotechnical realities
- By empirically assessing **how these macro-level changes are enacted** on the micro- and meso-levels of research programs, government policies, R&D processes...
- **Particular focus on Technology Assessment programs and processes**

# Why TA?

## What can examination of TA tell us?

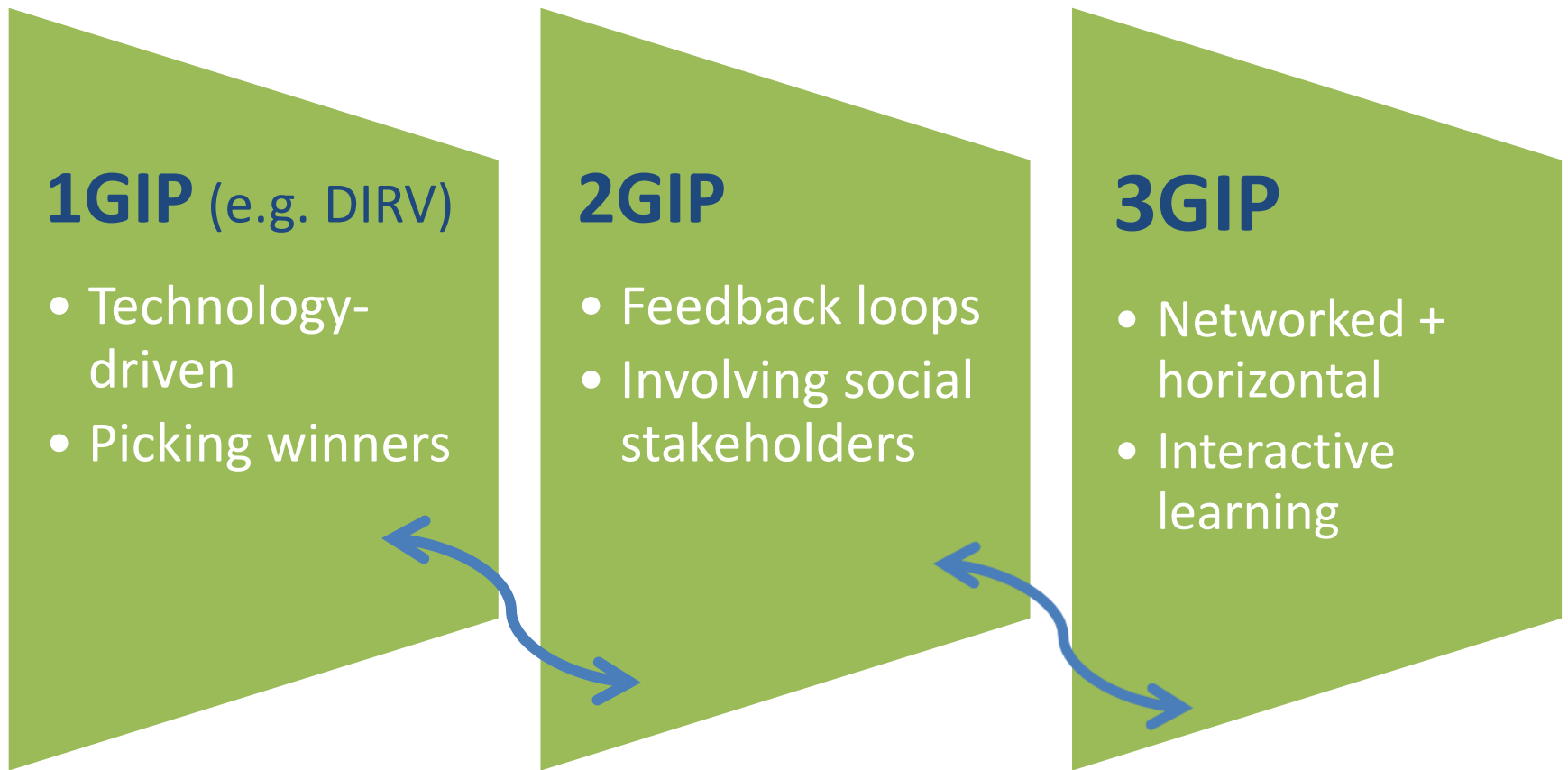
- TA = a **knowledge actor (broker)** in strategic science - KBE regime
- As TA **opens** science/technology to society
  - By bringing in new issues and actors to bear on STI
  - By providing new rationales (e.g. participation) for STI decision making
  - By tapping into KBE rationales
    - e.g. knowledge-based policy making



# Flemish TA

- 1980s: TA **extended** economic, reductionist understanding of “innovation” in DIRV program:
  - Social and ecological concerns
  - Trade unions, parties on the left, sociologists of labor





- Successive TA waves facilitated innovation policies, thus smoothing transition to strategic KBE regime
- Push for TA institutionalization (2000)



# Walloon TA



- Wallonia did not fully embrace strategic science policy until recently: the shaping of regional STI policy has been a slow, incremental process (successive building blocks, 1980-2000)
- There's a strong influence of the 3<sup>rd</sup> dynamic: region vs. community = applied vs. basic research

# Walloon TA (cont'd)

- 2 failed Walloon TA attempts:
  - In the (late) 80s: study on the opportunity of a Walloon TA institute
  - 94-2002: TA mission institutionalized in the CPS with the social partners (// STV)
- But yet, broadening of STI policy much in line with an extended KBE narrative
  - Recent years: Marshall Plan, PM2.green, Creative Wallonia
  - Endogenous process w. policy programs, but no TA commitment/mediation?
- TA institute in 2013?



Creative Wallonia

PlanMarshall  
2.vert

[www.wallonie.be](http://www.wallonie.be)

# Conclusion

- Macro-level STI policy analysis illuminated by micro- and meso-level analysis of TA
- Flanders: TA record as mediating instrument, mixed record as tool for MPs (IST)
- Wallonia: TA mobilized differently?
- In both regions: TA taps into + aligns itself with strategic science and dominant KBE narrative
- Only in acting capacity as **knowledge broker** can/will TA remain strategically relevant



# Conclusion (cont'd)

- Raises questions about **TA's politics**:
  - Challenge dominant discourses? Align with STI? Transformative potential?
  - Using ostensibly “neutral” tools + methods?
  - How is TA understood and positioned by policy makers and innovation actors?
- Consider closure of Flemish Parliamentary TA institute, IST (2012). One can ask: Flemish TA still **relevant**? Measure of success or conversely, failure?
- Wallonia: institutionalization in a STI regime that is already responsive to “social and ecological concerns”? What kind of knowledge broker role?



michiel.vanoudheusden@ulg.ac.be  
ncharlier@ulg.ac.be

**[WWW.SPIRAL.ULG.AC.BE](http://WWW.SPIRAL.ULG.AC.BE)** → TASTI