

# STI narratives in Wallonia

A complex interplay

Eu-SPRI Forum Early Career Researcher Conference

- 2014 INGENIO PhD Days -



*My PhD research subject:*

- Studying the evolution of regional STI regime in Belgium

*Today's paper:*

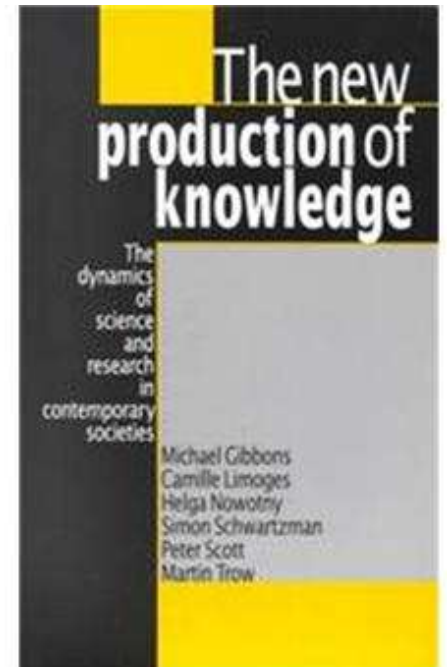
a conceptual framework, a research agenda.

Compare the STI policy narratives in Wall.



# STI systems in transition

- Broad literature: Science and Technology Studies, Innovation Studies
  - “mode 2 production of knowledge”, “post normal science”, “strategic science”, “academic capitalism”, ...
- A dichotomous conception: old vs. new regime



# Old vs. new regime? It doesn't fit...

- Exploratory interviews, policy analysis in Wallonia:
- There is one evidence: Walloon STI system is complex, with different features, multiple discourses and multiple trajectories
- A complex landscape made of multiple, overlapping institutions and diverse policy instruments aiming at different goals

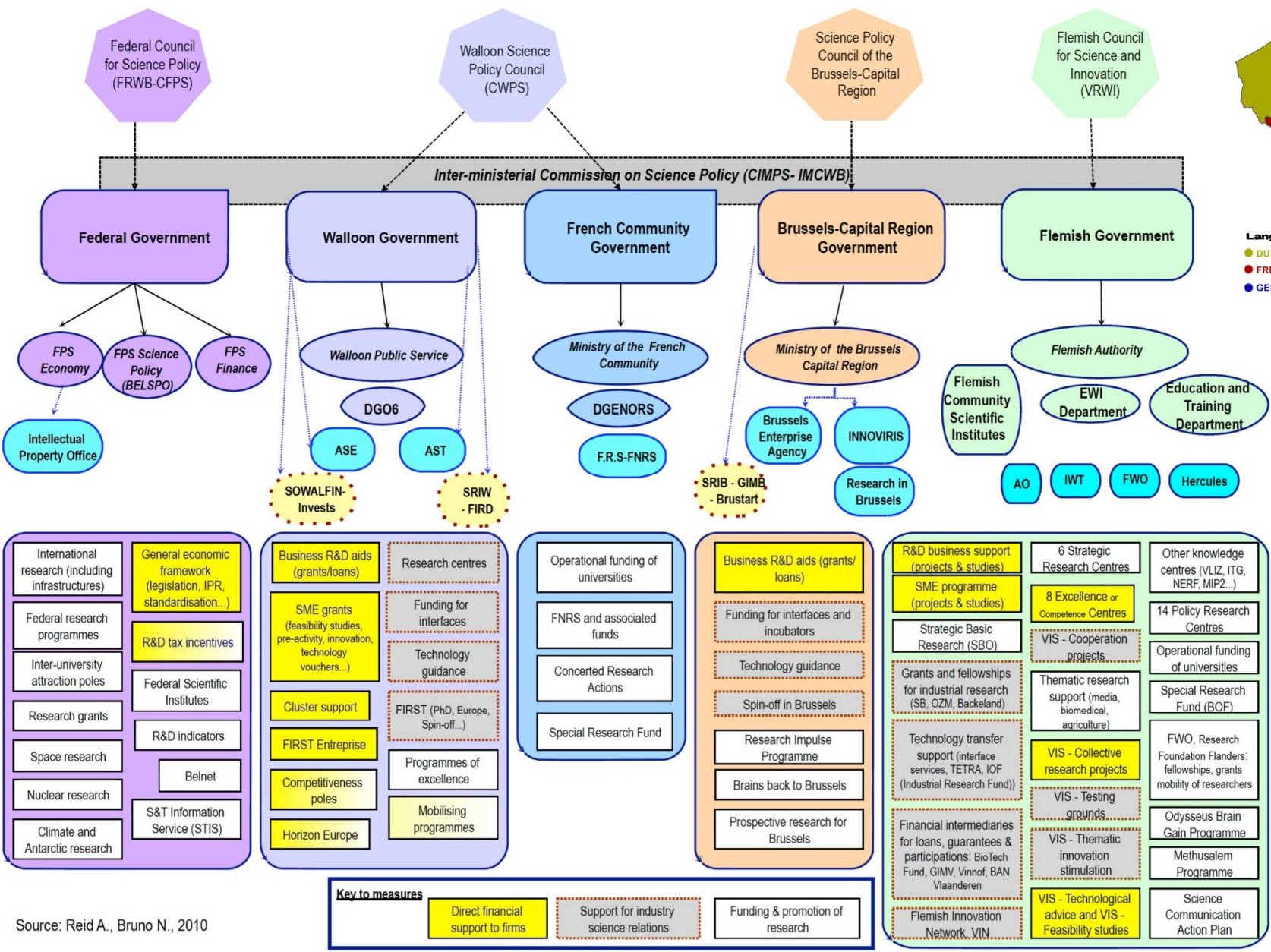


Advisory bodies

Governments

Principal administrations and agencies

Principal instruments and measures



Source: Reid A., Bruno N., 2010

# Research questions

- How is the global transition of STI systems taking place at the regional level?
- How can science and technology policy studies give a better account of the transition, regarding local specificities?

# My proposal : a dynamic narrative approach

- Studying the coexisting policy narratives that circulate as rationales for STI policies
- Public policies as narrative: problem, intervention, solution... a *plot*
  - With a temporal sequence
  - Narratives help to make sense of thing
  - Descriptive + prescriptive / explanatory + mobilizing resources
  - Convince and enroll: narrative are related to power relations
    - Attention for context of speech – how is a narrative conveyed: who is speaking, to whom, with which purpose...

# Four master-narratives as ideal types

How should scientific research be organized and funded ?

- Accountability, relevance, strategic research: two “recent” narratives

The “Knowledge-based economy”

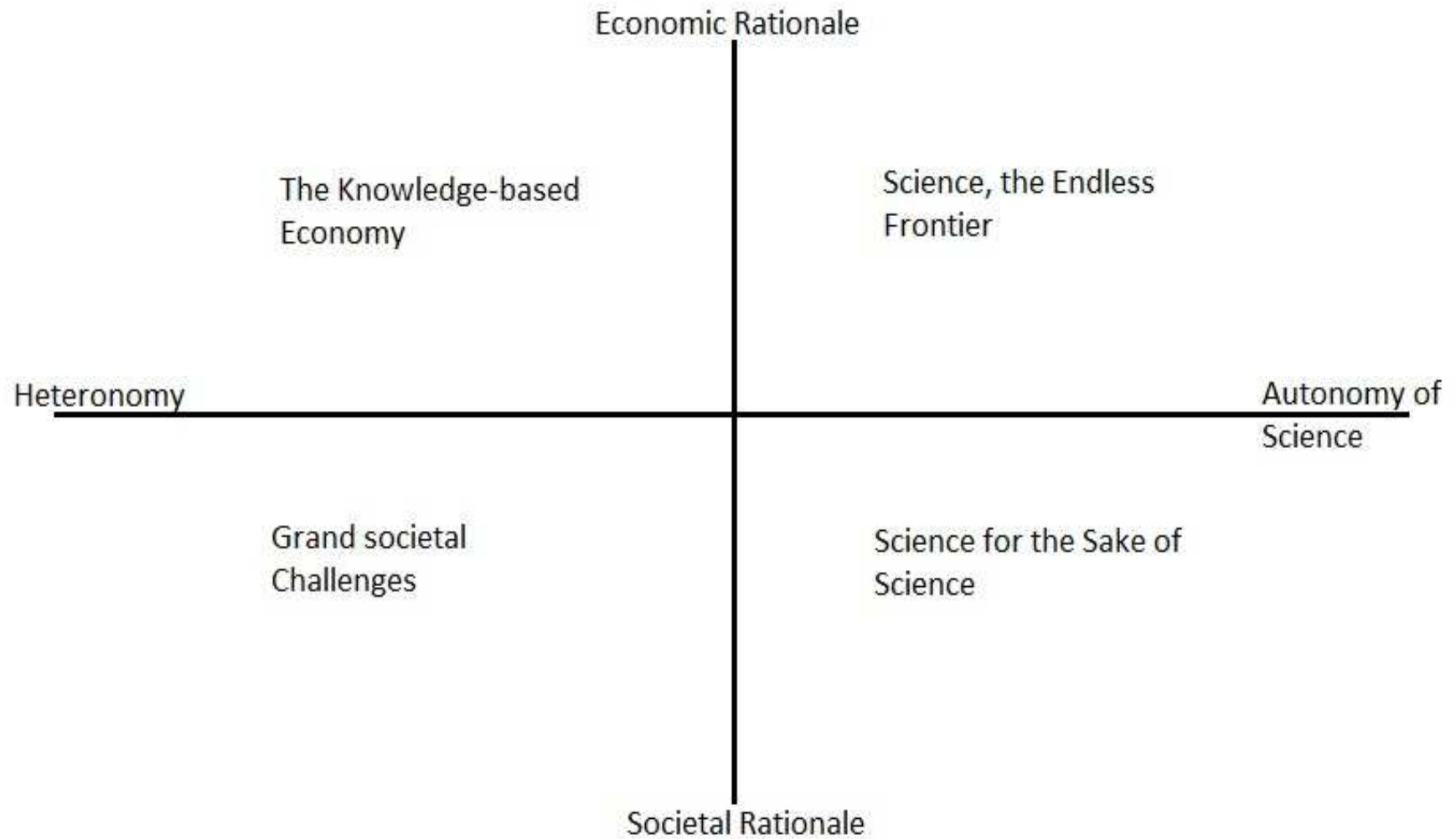
The “Grand societal Challenges”

- Autonomy of Science: two “older” narratives  
(“older” doesn’t mean “old fashioned”)

“Science, the endless Frontier”

“Science for the sake of Science”





# Main hypothesis - a research agenda

- Dynamic use of narratives as resources:
  - one narrative is not tied with one (group of) actor(s)
- Multiple narrative can be conveyed to make sense of the STI system:
  - In different situations, stakeholders use different (combination of) narratives, regarding the policy instrument they are defending or the reform they are calling, regarding the audience and the context, etc.

# Preliminary illustrations: following the actors in various situations

- University Rector praising the work of the technology transfer office – proud of the spin-offs and patents

*“It was an innovative concept in 1989”, remembers the rector of the University of Liège, Bernard Rentier. “Only ten years had passed since the idea to valorize University know-how was born in the USA. We had plenty of unexploited things in our drawers and boxes.”*

Interview of B. Rentier, Le Soir, 14th of March, 2009, p.9

- A clear example of KBE

## Preliminary illustrations (2)

- A contrasting situation: public mobilization against a new criteria for selection of research project
- “potential societal impacts” for bottom-up, basic research

*“predicting social impact is extremely complex in basic research. Examples of major developments stemming from research devoid of societal goals are countless.” [...] “potential applications are [...] only speculations, it belongs more to literature than to science”*

# Conclusions

- From regime to narrative : analysis of narrative in context = enriched description for local situations
- Linear conception of innovation and distinction between basic vs. applied research are still very powerful narratives in certain situations
- Multiple variants of master-narratives are intertwined, and if they compete, they also are used by various actors in different contexts
- Next steps: generalize – interviews and analysis of other situations

Thank you for your attention

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