

Institutionalization of policy evaluation in Flanders

Paper for the INTEVAL(*) meeting, June 4-6 2008, IOB, Antwerp

Peter Van Humbeeck ()**

Abstract

In this paper, we show that policy evaluation in Flanders is becoming increasingly institutionalized through a series of interlinked processes and developments. First assessments of these developments and a meta-analysis of fourteen policy evaluation studies in the environmental sector however reveal that there is still a long way to go to strengthen the policy evaluation culture and structure. We think measures are necessary for (1) the improvement of quality and capacity, (2) a better coordination and programming of policy evaluations, (3) an improved evaluation processes and (4) a new policy culture.

Content

<i>Institutionalization of policy evaluation.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>A policy evaluation paradox</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Relevant generic trends within the Flemish government</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Overview of initiatives and developments</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>First evaluations of recent initiatives and developments</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Meta-analysis of environmental policy evaluation research (2005-2007)</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Conclusions and recommendations.....</i>	<i>18</i>

(*) INTEVAL stands for INTernational research group on policy and program EVALuation. Since 1986, the research group holds one meeting every year with evaluation experts from national governments, audit institutions, universities and the private sector. Its present membership covers more than 20 countries across four continents. See <http://www.inteval-group.org/>

(**) Peter Van Humbeeck is heading the coordination committee of the Flemish Platform for Policy Evaluation. In normal life, he is working for the Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV). SERV is a public agency that acts as an advisory body and think tank for the Flemish government and parliament. He is former advisor to the Regulatory Management Unit at the services of the prime minister and presently part time researcher at the University of Antwerp and i.a. member of the board of the Flemish Interuniversity Centre for Legislation.

This paper draws to a large extent on Tieleman and Van Humbeeck (2007)

Contact: pvhumbeeck@serv.be | Social and Economic Council of Flanders | Wetstraat 34-36 | 1040 Brussel | www.serv.be

Institutionalization of policy evaluation

1. In this paper, we give an overview of trends and developments in the institutionalization of policy evaluation in the Flemish government in Belgium. By '*institutionalization*' we mean the extent to which cultural (values, norms, habits...) and structural components (instruments, procedures, institutions, capabilities...) are available that contribute to a situation where policy evaluation is planned and carried out well and has an impact on policy practice. It is supposed that a high degree of institutionalization guarantees that more and better policy evaluation - in whatever form - will take place and that this will increase the quality and effectiveness of the policymaking.

2. To measure the degree of institutionalization several indicators can be used, e.g. the number of people in the administration involved in policy evaluation, the budget for policy evaluation, the number of laws and decrees containing provisions which refer to evaluation, the number of policy evaluations which have actually been carried out, etc. (Varone et al., 2005). At a higher level, there are indicators such as the existence of formal structures and organisations within and outside the public authorities which are involved in policy evaluation and the existence of an 'epistemic community' (informal and formal networks) which support policy evaluation.

Since at present such information is not systematically collected in Flanders - and that some indicators are difficult to measure anyhow (e.g. because policy evaluation also occurs informally, not through policy evaluation research but with other policy evaluation methods) - our analysis is mainly descriptive and focused on recent trends and developments.

3. We show that policy evaluation in Flanders is becoming increasingly institutionalized through policy planning, evaluation procedures and instruments, by creating institutions and forums and assigning competences to certain bodies, and by new policy processes and networks. First assessments of these developments and a meta-analysis of fourteen policy evaluation studies in the environmental sector however reveal that there is still a long way to go to strengthen the policy evaluation culture and structure. We therefore conclude with some recommendations.

A policy evaluation paradox

4. In modern times of 'good governance', policy evaluation is a constant concern within the OECD, the European Commission, university courses on public administration, etc. Today, policy evaluation is regarded as a central task of a modern, professional government. Policy evaluation contributes to a policy practice which is based on facts and scientific data and supports an innovative, open and responsible government. Hence, policy evaluation regularly offers an answer to the growing demand from politicians and policy makers as well as media and citizens for information on the results of the measures taken and the government budgets used. At the same time, it is an essential tool for policy learning and the further professionalization of policy making (table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of a professional government and professional policy making

A 'professional government' ...	'Professional policy making is ...
clearly defines the results it wants to achieve and works from a long-term perspective;	FORWARD LOOKING
takes into account the national, European and international situation and developments within society;	OUTWARD LOOKING
reaches across the traditional boundaries in order to reach strategic goals between policy areas and levels;	HOLISTIC
is prepared to question habits and routines and encourages new and creative ideas;	INNOVATIVE
is based on and makes use of the best available empirical information regarding effects to be expected, in the broadest sense;	EVIDENCE BASED
involves all stakeholders in the implementation of the policy;	OPEN
constantly asks itself whether existing policy measures still 'work' and whether they do not lead to unwanted side-effects;	REVIEWED
is aimed at policy learning and adapts policy practice to that	FOSTERING LEARNING

Source: based on www.policyhub.gov.uk, quoted in Vancoppenolle & Brans (2005)

5. In the Flemish government as well, policy evaluation is increasingly accepted. A survey conducted in the summer of 2004 among civil servants at the highest level of the ministerial cabinets and the Flemish administration showed that two thirds thought that the top of the political and administrative structure is convinced of the usefulness of policy evaluations (Vancoppenolle & Brans, 2005). However, at the same time the researchers point out a *paradox*: in practice, few policy evaluations are carried out. Moreover, out of all the items related to policy-making capacity included in their questionnaire, the three most negatively rated statements all had to do with policy evaluation: the worst score was obtained by the capacity of the Flemish government to organise and carry out its own evaluation research projects; the second worst score was related to the fact that new policy measures are not always thoroughly and systematically evaluated; the item with the third worst score had to do with the lack of adequate measuring systems to follow-up policy achievements and the effects of government policy on society.

6. Since then, quite a few things have been achieved in a rather short time. We now give a short overview of the developments, after mentioning first a few more general trends within the Flemish government that have had a major influence on these developments.

Relevant generic trends within the Flemish government

7. We see three major general trends that can be seen as drivers the institutionalization of policy evaluation in Flanders. First, there is the project 'Better Administrative Policy' (BBB: 'Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid'). The content and significance of this reform is often underestimated or reduced to the mere restructuring of the Flemish public administration. But it is far more than that. Through 'Better Administrative Policy', Flanders aims to implement principles from 'New Public Management': measures have been designed for a more logical distribution and a better organisation of policy areas (policy councils in each department, mandates and management agreements...), more solid policy planning and follow-up (planning, evaluation, advice and involvement, participation, vision...), better financial management (multi-year budgeting, structural financing...), more 'evidence-based policy making' (data collection, reports on policy effects, indicators, statistics, audits...), encouraging responsibility and better service provision (management responsibilities, transparency of the administration ...), more transparency and accountability (financial transparency, ESA obligations, reporting to the Flemish Parliament, internal control and

internal audit...) and better cooperation (with other policy areas, other authorities, actors...). Over the past years, a lot of time and work was spent on the preparation of this reform. For the coming period, the focus is on the actual implementation and consolidation of these reforms; and, in addition to structures, there will be more emphasis on 'people and culture'.

8. A second important trend is the *sustainable development policy*. The Flemish Government has recently approved the first Flemish sustainable development strategy. This strategy also pays attention to a series of administrative facilities which have to contribute to a less compartmentalised policy preparation and policy areas which better take into account the effects on and synergies with other policy areas, and to avoiding a short-term vision and more transparent and open policy-making. One of the instruments which have been proposed to this end is policy evaluation through 'sustainable development effects evaluation'.

9. A third series of relevant initiatives stems from the Flemish *regulatory policy*. With this policy, the Flemish Government aims to join leading countries that are trying to improve the quality of their legislation. The discourse shifts from 'deregulation' (less rules and less government) to 'regulation management' (better regulation and making better regulations), and from a project-oriented approach (ex post, ad hoc) to a governance approach (emphasis on ex ante and on processes, structures, organisation, transparency, accountability...). As the regulatory policy is shifting further towards the broader policy process, there are obviously clear links with ex ante and ex post policy evaluation.

Overview of initiatives and developments

10. Policy evaluation in Flanders is becoming increasingly institutionalized through a variety of instruments, procedures and processes. In order to illustrate these developments, we will sometimes use environmental policy as a case in the next overview.

Institutionalization of policy evaluation through policy planning

11. The Accounting Decree of 2004 describes the basic principles and instruments of policy planning within the Flemish government. The *policy planning process* consists of policy notes (each five years), policy letters (each year) and long-term as well as annual budgets. All policy notes and policy letters from Ministers must contain, among other things, the indicators and figures against which the achievement of the strategic goals is measured. The Flemish Government moreover has decided that as of 2007-2008 all policy notes and letters are to contain an appendix with a list of all planned regulation and policy initiatives which might lead to regulations. These lists will evolve into a '*unified regulatory agenda*' that will have to be updated periodically and will be used, among other things, for the planning of (ex ante) regulatory impact analyses (RIA) and other types of policy evaluations.

12. There are specific rules and provisions for policy planning and policy evaluation in other decrees. In the *environmental sector* for example the Environment Report (MIRA) and the Nature Report (NARA) have always paid attention to policy evaluation. Their role in policy evaluation has been established by decree. Both at MIRA and NARA personnel has been hired in order to encourage and extend the practice of policy evaluation. The publication of the first policy evaluation report by MIRA provided an introduction to policy evaluation by proposing a set of terms and examples of policy evaluations (MIRA-PE 2003). Hence, MIRA and NARA have at least put environmental policy evaluation on the table (Loots & Leroy, 2006). The next MIRA-PE report of 2005 had an even stronger ambition to be a work of reference for policy evaluation. At its presentation, in the presence of specialists from the

European Environment Agency, strong emphasis was put on the importance of environmental policy evaluation as an essential part of environmental reporting.

13. Policy evaluation has also been used for some time now in environmental policy planning. The Environmental Policy Plan (MINA plan) has traditionally not only been based on an evaluation of the implemented policy, but it also functions – together with the yearly environmental programmes – as the basis for drawing up inventories, planning and programming of (both ex ante and ex post) policy evaluations within the Flemish environmental authorities. The same applies for a whole range of other policy plans, reduction programmes and action plans, e.g. in waste policy, climate policy, air policy, water policy and nature policy.

14. The programming of policy evaluation research within the Environment Department is also done through the yearly TWOL (Applied Scientific Environmental Research) programme. Proposed research topics have to pass a selection procedure before they can be studied. Ideas and proposals are mainly based on surveys within the environment department, but can also be the result of *evaluation provisions in the legislation*. Such evaluation provisions are still relatively rare. An inventory by the Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) has shown that they are used especially in the area of education policy, but are becoming more common in other policy areas as well although their overall use remains limited. For the area of environment policy for example, the inventory contained only two evaluation provisions: in the legislation on manure and in the decree on water for human consumption.

Institutionalization through evaluation procedures and instruments

15. Since 2005 there is – besides the already existing environmental impact assessment for projects – the obligation to make environmental *impact assessments* for plans and programmes as well, and to draw up regulatory impact analysis (RIA) for proposed regulations. RIA is meant to be a structured analysis of the envisaged objectives and expected positive and negative effects of a planned regulation, while compared to alternative approaches. Although reporting on environmental effects often results in long and very technical documents and the RIAs also suffer growing pains (Van Humbeeck, 2007), these instruments and procedures contribute to better policy preparation and better regulation.

16. In addition, the Accounting Decree determines that the Flemish Government must present annual *reports on policy effects* (policy effects assessment) on the level of a policy domain as a whole to the Flemish Parliament. A policy effect report is a report which examines and evaluates the achievement of policy options during the past financial year by means of indicators and key figures which are linked to strategic policy objectives (social outcomes) and operational objectives (policy output). Furthermore, all agencies have the obligation to draw up a management agreement to justify their activities. This kind of agreements forces the administration to monitor and evaluate its activities (e.g. using indicators).

17. In the framework of the Flemish sustainable development strategy the introduction of sustainable development impact assessment is being studied.

Institutionalization through institutions and forums

18. As a result of the 2003-2005 Better Administrative Policy reforms, the policy-supporting role of the administration has been revalued. *Departments* now play a more important role in policy preparation and evaluation, based on structured cooperation and agreement with agencies. The *policy councils*, where the responsible minister sits together with the heads of his or her administration, coordinate the policy for each policy area. One of the explicit tasks of the policy councils is the preparation of policy evaluations and policy adjustments. An explicit task of the departments is to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the instruments used and the relation between performance and the intended and observed effects. An explicit task of the *agencies* is the evaluation of the policy implementation process, performance and the instruments used, and the collection of indicators of the real world effects.

In the environmental sector for example, a *policy preparation and evaluation service* was created within the Environment, Nature and Energy Policy division of the central department. This service works with a network of contact persons in the other divisions of the policy area and in the Agencies. The division has a leading and coordinating role when it comes to environmental planning and evaluation. The latter includes the expansion of policy evaluation through incentives for, for instance, determining and following up indicators, providing an economic basis for the environmental policy and coordinating the programmes for scientific research within the policy area.

19. In addition, the Flemish Government decided at the end of 2006 to create one or more *Regulatory Quality Units* in each policy area. A Regulatory Quality Unit is a unit mainly involved in the organisation of the regulatory process and the drawing up of regulations. Some of the concrete tasks of these units have aspects that are closely related to policy evaluation: the management of a regulatory agenda, the monitoring of the legislative process, the development of a RIA-policy within the policy area, the encouragement of better data collection and use when carrying out regulatory impact analyses, the preparation, coordination, follow-up and monitoring of (ex post) evaluation of regulations and the promotion and monitoring of the use of evaluation provisions in legislation.

20. Apart from the creation of Policy Divisions and Regulatory Quality Units in each policy area, some measures have been taken at the centre of government as well to support quality of policy and to provide training and support for the whole of the Flemish administration. For RIA (ex ante) and ex post regulatory evaluation this is done by the central *Regulatory Management Unit*. Specifically for RIA an interinstitutional agreement is being prepared between the Flemish Government, the Flemish Parliament, SERV and the strategic advisory boards with the intention to boost the quality and the use of impact analyses in Flanders. The Policy Divisions within the departments are backed by the central *Study Division of the Flemish Government*. The task of this Study Division is to prepare, follow up and evaluate the policy. On the one hand, it carries out evaluation research itself on topics spanning several policy areas. On the other hand, it stimulates other services to register the impact and effects of the policies and perform high-quality policy evaluations. For instance, one of the tasks of the Study Division is to study methods for measuring effects and select these in function of the needs of the government management, as well as try to help coordinate these recommended methods with other instruments which are already being used in the framework of the global policy and management cycle. In this context, one of the functions of the Study Division is to act as a link between the Flemish government and the university support centres which perform methodologically innovative and deepening work.

The Study Division puts that knowledge at the disposal of the departments and agencies by distributing manuals, organising workshops, giving advice and guiding processes.

21. Furthermore, there are a number of *other government institutions and services* which have competences when it comes to policy evaluation or which carry out policy evaluations: i.a. Inspection of Finance, Internal Audit, the Court of Audit, SERV, the strategic advisory councils, the Flemish Ombudsman Service and ViWTA (the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment). These either carry out policy evaluation research themselves, or formulate recommendations and take initiatives to encourage policy evaluation by the departments. In this context, we can refer to e.g. the workshop organised by SERV and the Mina Council in 2006 on environmental policy evaluation, in collaboration with the University Support Centre for Environmental Policy Sciences.

22. The Flemish Government indeed finances several *university support centres for policy-related scientific research*. Whereas older programmes worked more with single projects, the Policy Research Centres initiative emphasizes more structural financing of policy relevant research over a time period of 5 years. Centres are mostly formed by a consortium of research centres from universities. Their role is threefold: (1) data gathering, analysis and diffusion of policy relevant information; (2) to conduct policy relevant research and (3) delivery of scientific services, e.g. topical advice, workshops. In the environmental sector, the Support Centre for Environmental Policy Sciences (2000-2006) belonged to the first 13 ‘first-generation support centres’. One of the aims of the Support Centre was to carry out environmental policy evaluations and develop a network of expertise for the environmental authorities. In the new generation of support centres environmental policy evaluation research has moved to the background. It is now mainly present in the Support Centre for Sustainable Development. More generic or methodological topics in policy evaluation are dealt with in the Policy Research Centre “Governmental Organization in Flanders 2007-2011”. Table 2 provides an overview of the different research centres.

Table 2: Policy Research Centres in Flanders, by topic

• Foreign Policy, Tourism and Recreation	• Mobility and Public Works
• Governmental Organisation	• Entrepreneurship and International Entrepreneurship
• Culture, Youth and Sports	• Research and Development Indicators
• Sustainable Development	• Spatial Planning and Housing
• Tax Systems and Budget	• Study and School Curriculum
• Equal Chances Policy	• Labour and Social Economy
• Environment and Health	• Wellness, Public Health and Family

23. As far as the *local governmental* level is concerned, there is a reinforced attention to strategic planning together with reference to policy evaluation in the newly introduced Municipality Decree and Province Decree (2005). The municipal secretary and the clerk of the province received responsibilities on the field of evaluation of policies, and a management team has to support the coordination of services during the evaluation processes.

Institutionalization through policy processes and networks

24. Besides policy evaluation research, the departments also take part in more *implicit policy evaluation*, through all kinds of interaction and work processes. In the environmental sector, one example is the target group policy for industry, agriculture and consumers, which is aimed at a better participation of target groups in the preparation, implementation and

evaluation of the environmental policy. Another example is the Flemish ‘climate conference’, where the Flemish government, employers’ and employees’ associations, environment and nature associations, local authorities, scientists and other actors regularly meet in order to evaluate the climate policy and make recommendations. A last example are the evaluations carried out in the context of new forms of policy development, such as the transition management for sustainable living and building (DUWOBO) and the transition network for sustainable materials management (Plan C), or in the context of new forms of institutional cooperation, such as the environment and energy technology innovation platform (MIP). Policy evaluation is an inherent part of the work processes of such initiatives, even if there is not always evaluation research involved.

25. *International institutions* such as the European Commission, the OECD and the World Bank often have a strong evaluation culture. They carry out frequent evaluations of their own policy and that of the member countries. Those evaluations often serve as an example from which governments can learn and get inspiration for their own policy evaluations. At the same time, they actively promote ‘good and rational governance’. The OECD does this for instance by proposing methods (e.g. for indicators, RIA, cost-benefit analysis, instrument choice ...) and by distributing ‘best practices’ and organising the exchange of experiences between member states. The European Commission has more or less the same role. In addition, the Commission in its capacity of policy initiator and finance provider has a strong interest in the extent to which goals are achieved and in a good use of available resources. That is why member countries are obliged to evaluate their policies. In Flanders quite a few public authorities and administrations have hands-on experience with evaluations for Europe, e.g. in the areas of environment and nature, rural development, agriculture and fisheries, employment and regional development (De Peuter et al., 2007).

26. As a result of the preceding initiatives, we are witnessing the development of a *network* around policy evaluation in Flanders, with a growing group of people who possess a basic set of skills, concepts, methods and techniques. In recent years, MIRA has actively contributed to learning from policy evaluation and the creation of a network of expertise for policy evaluations (MIRA-PE 2005). The Support Centre for Environmental Policy Sciences acted as a catalyst for environmental policy research in Flanders and published both an environmental policy evaluation manual (Crabbé et al., 2006) and a reflection of experiences (Leroy & Loots, 2006). The Environment Department had an evaluation framework developed for the evaluation of environmental subsidies and other financial support for environment-related projects (De Jaegher et al., 2005). Researchers of the Policy Research Centre for Governmental Organization in Flanders have written a manual on policy evaluation (De Peuter et al., 2007). From 2001 to 2006 there was a specific chair at the University of Antwerp in environmental policy evaluation. The Public Management Institute periodically organises two-day training courses on policy evaluation and, stimulated by a series of workshops organised by the Flemish Association for Government and Policy (VVBB) around policy evaluation in 2006, there was the launch of a Flemish Evaluation Platform (VEP) at the end of 2007. The initiative came from different directions (VVBB, the universities, the Study Centre of the Flemish Government, the Court of Audit, SERV and MIRA) but is open to all. Following the example of similar foreign evaluation associations, the Platform aims at building, strengthening and spreading an evaluation culture, increasing the evaluation capacity of the different actors, improving the quality of policy evaluations and stimulating the use and impact of policy evaluations. The idea is to provide a forum for experts and parties interested in policy evaluation where ideas, experiences, knowledge and information on policy evaluation can be exchanged through a website, workshops and publications (See box 1).

Box 1: Mission and activities of the Flemish Evaluation Platform (VEP)

Mission

The Flemish Evaluation Platform (Vlaams Evaluatieplatform - VEP) is an open network oriented at:

1. organizing and promoting the exchange of ideas, experiences, knowledge and information with regard to policy evaluation
2. between the relevant actors - government, academic world, nonprofit organizations, advisory bodies, foundations, think tanks and consultancy - within all policy sectors and governmental levels.

VEP aims:

- to build, strengthen and diffuse an evaluation culture
- to enhance the evaluation capacity of the different actors
- to rise the quality of policy evaluation
- to stimulate the influence and use of policy evaluation

VEP also aspires to be the contact point for international exchange within the field of evaluation theory and practice.

History

Policy evaluation increasingly attracts attention of policy makers; abroad but also within the public sector in Belgium. This trend is common to a broad array of policy sectors and for all governmental levels. In 2006, the Flemish Association for Public Administration and Policy (Vlaamse Vereniging voor Bestuur en Beleid – VVBB) took this observation as a starting point to organize an array of three symposia titled: “Evaluation, an added value to policy?” Respective aspects addressed in this triad were supply and demand of evaluation, practical experiences with evaluation methods and tools, and the evaluation of cross-sectoral policies. During the third symposium a first step was made to initiate the launch of a Flemish Evaluation Platform.

In 2007 this initiative has been further developed behind the scenes by a number of organizations: the Flemish Association for Public Administration and Policy, the Public Management Institute (K.U. Leuven), the Higher Institute of Labor Studies, The Institute of Development Policy and Management (University of Antwerp), The Centre for Social Policy Herman Deleeck (University of Antwerp), The Study Centre of the Flemish Government, the Belgian Court of Audit, the Social-Economic Council of Flanders, the Flemish Environmental Administration, and the Management School of the Province of Vlaams-Brabant.

On December 7th 2007 the Flemish Evaluation Platform was officially launched in the presence of more than 200 people during an inauguration event that took place in the Flemish Parliament.

The Flemish Evaluation Platform is framed within the VVBB and steered by a coordination committee with functional autonomy with regard to the mission, objectives and activities of the VEP. The secretariat of the VVBB delivers the website management, the communication and documentation for VEP-activities and also provides financial support. The VEP can also rely on logistic support from the other organizations which are involved at the set-up and coordination of the network.

Membership

In order to fully accomplish its mission, the Flemish Evaluation Platform presents itself explicitly as an open and accessible network. It is open to everyone interested in evaluation, within all policy domains and governmental levels. The VEP also opts for a structure without membership fees.

Members of the VEP-community obtain the e-newsletter and stay the best informed on news from the evaluation world in Belgium and abroad, by announcements of VEP-activities and activities organized by others related to evaluation.

To become member of the VEP, one only needs to register for the e-newsletter (only available in Dutch). During registration, one can opt to have his or her name and organization mentioned in the member list. At present, VEP has some 850 members, mainly coming from government (civil servants, politicians, government institutes at all levels (Flanders, Federal, local, other regions in Belgium, international... 74%), academics (10%), NGO's and private sector (stakeholders and stakeholder organizations, consultants, private companies... 13%) and others (individual members, 3%).

Activities

The Flemish Evaluation Platform (Vlaams Evaluatieplatform - VEP) aims to support networking in the field of evaluation theory and practice by:

- taking initiatives to organize VEP-activities: workshops, breakfast sessions and symposia
- referring to activities by others: congresses, symposia, workshops, education and training.

Three times a year - in spring, summer and autumn- the VEP organizes a workshop during half a day on varying themes. The intention is to present a practical case, followed by reflections by two discussants and a debate with

all participants. On an ad hoc basis, the VEP organizes meetings for a small group of participants with national and foreign personalities from the world of evaluation. The objective is to have short and more informal meetings and exchange of ideas, during a breakfast. Once a year in the winter season the VEP organizes a conference day on a central and actual theme in policy evaluation. Several speakers present their vision and experiences, with sufficient opportunities for interaction with the public. The VEP also gathers information on activities organized by others. A calendar on the VEP-website provides an oversight of all (known) events on evaluation, both the VEP-initiatives and other activities. Members receive periodically the e-newsletter (in Dutch) to stay informed on events and news from the evaluation community in Belgium and abroad.

VEP-Website

In addition to all the information above, the VEP-website www.evaluatieplatform.be contains references to literature and cases on policy evaluation: manuals, textbooks, cases, journals, evaluation standards and glossaries. The website also has links to other evaluation networks in Belgium and abroad.

Contact

Vlaams Evaluatieplatform – VEP, p/a Instituut voor de Overheid, Parkstraat 45 bus 3609, 3000 Leuven
 contact@evaluatieplatform.be ; Tel: 016 32 32 70; Fax: 016 32 32 67

First evaluations of recent initiatives and developments

27. Although many of the initiatives and developments described above are quite recent, the first evaluations have already taken place. We can refer to Conings et al. (2005), Crabbé & Bruyninckx (2006), Van Humbeeck (2006), an internal evaluation by the Flemish environmental administration (2007) and De Peuter (2007).

28. Conings et al. (2005) examine the policy notes and papers against the requirements of the Accounts Decree and the Framework Decree on Administrative Policy. They found that the importance of policy evaluation is recognised in the policy documents and that policy planning, follow-up and evaluation are central themes, especially in the policy documents on Planning and Statistics, Town and Country Planning, the Environment, and Youth. The evaluations turned out to be related especially to individual policy measures and to a lesser extent to the whole policy area. The study also discovered an increasing interest in techniques to make the choice of objectives more rational and objective, a trend which is related to the evolution towards ‘evidence-based’ or scientifically-based policy development.

29. In their report, they also make a few recommendations. Firstly, they find that there is a need for the further development of methods and techniques for policy planning, follow-up and evaluation, and for tools for both evaluations at the level of the policy area and impact measurements across policy area boundaries. In this respect, the researchers point out the common confusion of terms related to the policy effects assessments and ask that reporting on policy effects be supported by in-depth evaluation research. Besides the development of methods and techniques, there is a need, according to the researchers, for more coordination of policy planning, follow-up and evaluation. The top-down process of strategic planning must be linked to the bottom-up process of operational planning. They ask that the policy cycle, the financial cycle and the contract cycle be tuned to each other and to the cycles of the other government layers, especially the local governments. A possible inflation in effects reports across policy area boundaries (e.g. youth effects report, child effects report, volunteer effects report, environmental effects report, effect on the capacity of local governments ...) should be avoided. Thirdly, they ask that attention be paid to planning processes for the implementation of the Accounts Decree and the Framework Decree on Administrative Policy. Which actors should be involved in the drawing up of reports on policy effects? According to what procedures are the reports built up? Who guides the process? The roles of the central actors in the guidance and support of policy planning, follow-up and evaluation should be further outlined and adapted as well.

30. Crabbé & Bruyninckx (2006) specifically looked at the institutionalization of environmental policy evaluation in Flanders. They point out a number of achievements, but regard these as insufficient. According to them, Flanders is lagging behind compared to other countries. They give at least two reasons to invest more in policy evaluation. Firstly, (environmental) policy evaluation remains essential to meet the old (but still relevant) requirement of ‘accountability’: each use of government funds for a policy, and especially for environmental policy (which, according to the researchers, is especially scrutinised in the current socio-economic and political climate) must be (able to be) accounted for. Secondly, policy evaluation can contribute to better dosing of policies in the future. They refer to the tendency in the Flemish environmental policy to introduce new legislation (too) quickly and add new regulations before the previous ones have been thoroughly implemented, let alone evaluated. Better ‘dosing’ of regulations and policy fits in with a trend of Regulatory Management, and, on a broader scale, the debate on the task and role of the government. According to the researchers, policy evaluation can make an important contribution in this respect.

31. Crabbé and Bruyninckx state that there are certain obstacles in the process of further institutionalization of policy evaluation which need to be tackled. First of all, they mention a lack of capacity: ‘the number of employees involved on a full-time basis in the promotion of policy evaluation is small, and, in addition, these employees work in different organizations, which leads to organisational fragmentation. Secondly, it is still unclear what the exact content of environmental evaluations should be, and hence the organisational distribution and form of policy evaluation. One of the questions they raise is whether policy evaluation is a reporting task for those in charge of environment and nature reports, or a task belonging to environmental policy planning. Depending on the answer, this has implications for the kind of policy evaluation product and the organisational location and form. Thirdly, Crabbé and Bruyninckx are of the opinion that the interest shown by those at the top of politics and the administration in investing in policy evaluation is not very strong, because it judges their work. However, policy evaluations can also stop ‘attacks’ on policies by openly and systematically accounting for costs and benefits, objectives and results. In this sense, they state that while, in the short term, environmental policy evaluation seems self-torture, having well-documented policy information at one’s disposal also makes a policy area stronger. In other words, they see environmental policy and environmental policy evaluation as objective partners. They express the wish for the cooperation between ‘fragmented services’ within the administration and cooperation with academics which existed with the Support Centre for Environmental Policy Sciences to be continued with a view to the consolidation of an evaluation system and knowledge, expertise and capacity for environmental policy evaluation. Flanders would also need to be visible and active on forums on policy evaluation within the EU and the OECD.

32. Van Humbeeck (2006) has analysed the initiatives and challenges for better governance in Flanders in the framework of the recent experiences with the Flemish climate conference, the Flemish strategy for sustainable development and the Flemish regulatory policy. He has drawn up a list of bottlenecks to be resolved with respect to institutional capacity for good governance (table 2). He concludes that, in the context of Better Administrative Policy, sustainable development and legislative policy, policy evaluation is being worked on, but that there is little mutual cooperation or cohesion. In addition, a lot of energy within the Better Administrative Policy project has gone to outlining a new organisation model for the Flemish administration (the hardware), but too little attention has been paid to the policy evaluation software. This includes policy culture, leadership and strategic intelligence (knowledge, abilities, techniques, networks and processes necessary for

professional policy implementation and evaluation). According to Van Humbeeck, the Flemish strategy for sustainable development does not fill that gap, and there are still certain weaknesses in the Flemish regulatory policy as well. For instance, the quality of many executed RIAs leaves a lot to be desired and ex post decree evaluation is not making a very good start either, in spite of the creation of a parliamentary commission with competence in this area.

33. In addition to the findings in table 3, a central message from the investigation is that an adjustment of the prevailing policy culture is needed, as well as a change in long-standing methods and patterns. Today, the speed of political decisions is more important than the quality of the policy. Changing that policy culture requires an approach in which different actors, such as the Government, Parliament, civil servants and political parties, but also advisory councils, target groups, citizens, media, courts of justice and academics ('countervailing powers') are given responsibility and a role as a promoter of better governance and good regulation. Several of the more concrete recommendations from the study are now being implemented (legislative agenda, tasks of the Study Centre of the Flemish Government for policy evaluation, creation of a Flemish network for strategic intelligence ...).

Table 3: Bottlenecks for institutional capacity for good governance

	structures / processes / procedures	competences / culture
agenda-setting, information and knowledge base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy-supporting research is often compartmentalised, too little problem- and demand-oriented and insufficiently available to policy makers ▪ Data collection, management and supply mainly take place ad hoc, when a concrete policy problem arises. There are few structural policy measures. • Still too little attention is being paid to the development of popular support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In Flanders, there is no culture of strong policy-oriented research institutes or of investment in policy-supporting scientific research and data. ▪ The scale is often less than optimal to develop the necessary capacity within a specific policy area.
strategy development - long-term vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Too often, Flanders still limits itself to mere administrative-political strategy development with traditional advice procedures and public research. • The relationship between different plans and planning systems is not always clear (e.g. policy plans vs. sustainable development strategy, policy documents, budget cycle, the Vilvoorde Pact...). ▪ The determination of positions at international forums should be more transparent and well-founded and be the result of more consultation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Flanders there is no tradition of long-term vision ('we solve problems as they come'). • There is still very little experience with new ways of thinking and working, such as transition management, which can differ considerably from the traditional policy approach and planning.
evidence based - ex ante evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerations are often too ill-founded (e.g. choice of objectives and instruments, distribution of efforts over sectors of society...). • There is a lack of data to base the policy on. Especially information related to costs and benefits of measures is not always sufficiently available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competences, data, time and resources to perform good ex ante evaluations are often limited. • In the political culture, more value is attached to fast solutions than to good solutions. The regulatory process is seen as a waste of time.
implementation - execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Except for the impact on the government budget and personnel organisation, no structural attention is given to the implementation and execution of policy measures. • The monitoring of the transposition of international to regional policies could be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is normally little political interest in operational details. However, precisely those are the ones which often pose practical problems, give rise to complaints, and determine policy results

	improved.	
monitoring - ex post evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political interest often stops as soon as a decree or decision has been approved. The reception of signals in relation to their execution is rarely regulated. • A lot of progress has been made with respect to policy indicators and evaluation. Nevertheless, evaluation research remains limited and fragmented. Monitoring often only encompasses content-related aspects and objectives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scientific research in the area of public administration in Flanders has too little effect on policy practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too often, evaluations are used to criticise (or destroy) policy makers because of the results, instead of using them as a learning opportunity in order to do better in future. • Too little is learnt from evaluation research and practical experience. Especially from experience in other policy areas (e.g. poverty congresses, urban policy, consensus conferences ...).
coordination - cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination is usually too formal and comes too late in the decision-making process (inter-cabinet work groups). • The organisation of the Flemish government is fragmented. • Information exchange and consultation between (and sometimes also within) policy areas is hardly developed. • Within the policy areas there are rarely people with the mandate and the means to carry out functions related to policy coordination. • Cooperation is often made difficult due to a lack of a proper planning cycle in some policy areas. • The Flemish and the federal policy and the policy in the other regions are sometimes too incoherent. • Cooperation with local governments is sometimes too limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrations sometimes adopt a defensive attitude when they insist on their (strictly defined) competences. • Cooperation is made more difficult if ministers compete between them. • In Better Administrative Policy the emphasis was on the distribution of tasks and the assignation of responsibilities (the hardware). Policy (and other software) coordination is neglected. • The results of the scientific research in the field of public administration in Flanders (e.g. SBOV) are too little known. The distribution has remained more or less limited to the administrative top.
transparency - consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision-making process often lacks transparency. • Possibilities for participation often come (too) late in the decision-making process and are sometimes organised too formally through advisory boards and public research. • On a global scale, the organisation of the government does not allow for a real policy dialogue to be set up with the stakeholders. • Feedback on the way in which participation was taken into account remains insufficient. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The political and administrative elite is not convinced yet of the added value of transparency and consultation. A similar fear is present among the traditional interest groups in society. • The knowledge of new forms of participation is still limited. This leads to missed opportunities.
knowledge management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In practice, policy implementation is dominated by 'technocrats' and ministerial cabinets which can change fast with a change in government. As a result, it is difficult to build up an 'institutional memory' in Flanders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic analysis and policy-making instruments such as studies of future evolutions and scenario analyses are rarely used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic intelligence (or methodological knowledge and capacity) is only scarcely present and highly fragmented in Flanders. • Sometimes there is a lack of ability, both among researchers (to carry out quality evaluations) and commissioning bodies (to interpret the results).

Source: Van Humbeeck (2006)

34. The environment Department carried out an internal evaluation in 2007 with a view to updating and extension of MINA plan 3 (LNE, 2007). There, it is announced that in the coming period some measures to which insufficient attention has been paid up to now (in the absence of Better Administrative Policy), including policy evaluation, will be tackled in a more intensive way.

First of all, the environment department wants to be able to provide better answers to questions related to policy evaluations (e.g. a more in-depth evaluation of MINA plan 3 in 2009, evaluations initiated by MIRA and NARA...) by further tuning data collection, policy planning and policy reporting to one another. Concretely, MINA plan 4, the line of approach for the coalition agreement, the policy document and the yearly environmental programmes will be further developed in a direction in which they create a framework for policy evaluations and form a basis for the elaboration of a programme for in-depth policy evaluations. At the same time, the Environment Department wants to embed policy evaluation as a fixed element in the policy cycle. In this context, it will be looked at how reports on policy effects can be drawn up and how they can be coordinated with MIRA-PE, e.g. with respect to the impact of findings and needs from the policy preparation for MIRA-PE.

A second objective is to streamline the current fragmented efforts. Better clustering (via thematic research programmes) and structured consultation have to remedy the fragmentation of the research. During the elaboration of the annual TWOL programme, it will be looked at how the (strategic) research programmes of other institutions can be mutually coordinated, taking into account the management agreements (2008-2010) between the Flemish Government and those institutions. In this framework, a link is being planned with the research which takes place within the new Support Centres for Sustainable Development and Environment & Health. The same applies for European research programmes (framework programmes).

A third objective for the environment department is to give more attention, in each research project, to the translation of the results into policy recommendations. To that end, an effort will be made to complete information on closed research projects, so that these can be made available through the Internet.

35. Finally, there is an assessment by De Peuter (2007). He uses a set of nine indicators suggested by *Furubo e.a.* (2002, see box 2) to assess the maturity of the evaluation culture in Flanders (and Belgium). De Peuter affirms that evaluation takes place in many policy domains – the *first* indicator - although evaluation may be relatively limited still, and there are leaders and laggards. In Flanders, policy sectors such as education, labour and environment have a longer tradition and broader experience with evaluation than other sectors. A *second* indicator constitutes the supply of evaluators specializing in different disciplines who have mastered different evaluation methods and who conduct evaluations. According to De Peuter, this condition does not yet fully apply to Flemish practice. On the one hand, the number of evaluation functions and evaluators within government organisations is limited (but increasing). On the other hand, the supply of external evaluators is partly covered by academic research centres but the number of private sector consultant organisations offering evaluation services remains limited. There is anecdotic evidence that some consultants are often the sole applicants for an evaluation put out to tender by the Flemish government. *Thirdly*, De Peuter states that there is up to now no real national discourse concerning evaluation. Methods are mostly based on imported ideas or procedures. *Fourthly*, regional evaluation associations or societies have been established: the ‘Société Wallonne d’Evaluation et de Prospective’ (SWEP) in Wallonia already in 2000 and since recently in 2007 there is the Flemish Evaluation Platform (‘Vlaams Evaluatieplatform’). A *fifth* indicator concerns institutional arrangements in the government for conducting evaluations and disseminating their results to decision makers. Here De Peuter mentions instruments such as the strategic environmental assessment for projects and programmes, the regulatory impact assessment procedure the anchoring of evaluations in the policy cycle by the Accounting decree and the creation of specialised cells or task forces. A *sixth* indicator Furubo introduced is the presence

of institutional arrangements in Parliament for conducting evaluations and disseminating them to decision makers. When applied to Flanders, De Peuter observes no major initiatives in this regard, with the exception of the regulatory impact assessments being discussed regularly (and the interinstitutional agreement that is underway). On indicator *seven* about pluralism, i.e. within each policy domain there are different people or agencies commissioning and performing evaluations, De Peuter stressed that although this might be the case to a large extent, the (external) supply side on the market remains rather small. Indicator *eight* is the presence of evaluation activities within the Supreme Audit Institution. Here, De Peuter points out that the Court of Audit of Belgium has seen an extension of its duty by the law of 1998 so that it became competent for a check of the good spending of public money and to verify that the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness are complied with. However, while these so-called ‘performance audits’ take only a small share, they mostly use an indirect approach to the assessment of effectiveness, by a judgement whether the conditions for effectiveness are fulfilled, the performance and the extent to which the target group is reached. A *last* indicator refers to the focus of evaluations and the requirement that part of the evaluations carried out are focused on outcomes. According to De Peuter, this ‘condition’ is fulfilled in Flanders since the more recent initiatives to embed evaluation into the policy and legislative process described above, have a focus on effects or outcome of policy measures and programmes.

Box 2: Measuring the presence of an evaluation culture (Furubo e.a., 2002)

Indicators of maturity

1. Evaluation takes place in many policy domains
2. Supply of evaluators specializing in different disciplines and mastering different methods
3. A national discourse on evaluation
4. A profession with its own societies
5. Institutional arrangements in the government
6. Institutional arrangements in Parliament
7. Pluralism of evaluators in each policy domain
8. Evaluation activities within the Supreme Audit Institution
9. Part of the evaluations with a focus on outcomes

36. De Peuter concludes that in Flanders, there is evidence of a maturing evaluation culture. He sees some remaining challenges such as (1) the development of new information systems, which is linked to the need for quality standards for information and better data exchange between public organisations and governmental levels; (2) the consolidation of results and experience, in order to build up knowledge along a well planned strategy to take stock of results from several evaluation reports and scientific research; (3) the need for evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of policy across policy domains; (4) the necessity to involve members of parliament in a more structured way in major evaluation procedures; (5) the difficult relationship between expertise-based evaluation and experience-based evaluation and (6) the challenge to not only change structures but also culture.

Meta-analysis of environmental policy evaluation research (2005-2007)

37. In addition to these first assessments of the developments in policy evaluation in Flanders, there are some interesting results from a recent meta-analysis performed by Tieleman and Van Humbeeck (2007) of the fourteen policy evaluation studies that were carried out in the environmental sector in the period 2005-2007.

The method for the meta-analysis was based on similar work by Jacob & Varone (2003), complemented with the viewpoints of Stufflebeam (1999). For each study a systematic reconstruction was made of the objectives, the start, the course, the end result and the policy impact. Data collection took place through analysis of the evaluation reports and interviews with involved parties. Both the commissioning body and the service provider were interviewed following a fixed pattern (table 4). In addition, during the interviews participants were not only asked about experiences with a specific study from the inventory, but also about their experiences with policy evaluations in general. In fact, many of the interviewees have many years of extensive experience with policy evaluation research, either as the party carrying out the research or the one taking the initiative for it. In total, approximately twenty in dept interviews were conducted.

Table 4: Method for the meta-analysis

aspect of the policy evaluation	analysis	elements to be considered
reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ history: administration involved, political context ... ▪ (choice of) executing part(y)(ies) of the evaluation 	n.a.
start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ preparation of the evaluation with strict research plan, negotiable aims or on one's own initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identification of involved parties ▪ stakeholder analysis ▪ political acceptance ▪ quantity and quality of data ▪ formal description of the process (e.g. planning) ▪ identification of conflicting interests ▪ clear research question
course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ guidance (supply of data, involvement of the administration) ▪ method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ respect evaluating / evaluated party ▪ quality (qualitative and quantitative) ▪ data and sources ▪ transparency of criteria ▪ difficulty of the procedure
research report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reader process, text revision ▪ form and content (summary, length, language) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ complete and objective
impact (at the administrative and the political level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ target group ▪ strategy announcement ▪ presentation ▪ distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clarity and completeness of the report ▪ (impartial) presentation of the report and timing ▪ availability ▪ motivated conclusions

Source: based on Jacob & Varone (2003)

38. From the interviews it is clear we cannot yet speak of an 'institutionalized policy evaluation practice' in the Flemish environment department. First, the inventory of environmental policy evaluation research contains fourteen policy evaluations, and only eight of them were commissioned by the government. Moreover, real effectiveness evaluations are a minority. The great majority of publications examine whether the so-called 'conditions for sound policy' have been fulfilled. Finally, the testimonies from the interviews concerning everyday experience highlight several bottlenecks in the current evaluation practice (see below nr. 34).

39. The findings from the meta-analysis can be summarised as follows:

- Policy evaluations are carried out either by order of a commissioning body or on an institution's own initiative. In both cases, a good preparation includes, among other things, the following: drawing up clear research questions, making sure that sufficient data are available, contacting experts and stakeholders to guarantee the follow-up and impact of the research. Open and honest communication about those elements seems very important in order to achieve a good final result.
- Both commissioning bodies and researchers appreciate good support. This means: a contact person who is clear about what is needed, communicates in a transparent way and reacts quickly to unforeseen circumstances; data suppliers which are quick to deliver data; guidance groups which steer contents in a professional way and readers who read and comment on the report from a critical perspective.
- Policy evaluations related to complicated matters or policy evaluations that involve more than one department seem to create more difficulties. If there is no sense of responsibility or people feel that they are called to account, collaboration and a good information flow cannot be taken for granted. A person in authority who can convince people to cooperate proves to be very useful. However, awareness that policy evaluations are instructive and necessary seems to be even more important.
- The authors of the evaluation studies explicitly wish their reports to be read. Several persons say they use 'scientific jargon' because this contributes to credibility, but that they attach equal importance to readability and accessibility. Some studies from the inventory did not contain a summary and were very long, without a clear structure and with texts which were not easy to understand at all.
- The supply side of the policy evaluation market would welcome transparent (multi-year) programmes for policy evaluation research. Currently, they experience problems to plan their research activities. Despite an interest in carrying out certain evaluations, this is not always possible due to other obligations. Moreover, there is no systematic control or follow-up of policy evaluation studies. This gives rise to a risk of part of the work being repeated or left out.
- Most participants are positive about the policy impact of the work they have performed or guided. Especially the fact that policy work is rendered more objective by policy evaluation is widely appreciated. Others point out the instructive aspect of the studies. The measure of political impact (the extent to which an evaluation influences policy decisions) is less clear. It was mentioned that a different logic is used by the average civil servant at the cabinet and someone from the administration involved in policy-making. Another point made was the limited interest on the part of the Members of Parliament.
- Research on an institution's own initiative (by e.g. SERV, Mina Council, Court of Audit) does not necessarily have less policy impact. In these cases, there is more freedom when it comes to the choice of the subject to be evaluated. Moreover, there is more follow-up activity after the publication of the study, for instance by raising the awareness of Members of Parliament or other persons with a political interest in the findings.

Conclusions and recommendations

40. The key question in this paper was how policy evaluation has evolved over the past few years: to what extent can the Flemish Government's policy evaluation practice be considered to have been institutionalized?

41. Our general impression is that of a beginning institutionalization and professionalization that should be further developed in the coming years. We therefore end with a few recommendations aimed at reinforcing the policy evaluation culture and structure in Flanders, clustered around four areas: the further improvement of quality and capacity, better coordination and programming of policy evaluations, improved evaluation processes and a new policy culture.

42. There exists already a whole range of initiatives aimed at further **quality improvement and capacity increase**. We can mention for instance manuals and training courses. But there is still a wide gap between the knowledge of evaluation methods and the concrete practical performance or steering of policy evaluation research. Therefore, the further development of methods and techniques is necessary, together with a methodological reference framework. This framework must provide quality standards, general guidelines or checklists, which at the same time respect the desired methodological pluralism and allow for the necessary tailor-made approach within each individual evaluation. In combination with this, a better follow-up of the quality of policy evaluation research should be worked on, so that we can learn from experience. More (accessible) data for policy support and evaluation are needed. In addition, evaluation research often also requires skills related to participation and interaction processes, data analysis, use of language, presentation, etc. In this sense, not only the further development of methods and techniques and more and more accessible data are needed, but also the development of *strategic intelligence*. This implies knowledge, skills, techniques, networks and processes for professional policy evaluations, both on the side of the researchers and on the side of the commissioning and guiding bodies of policy evaluation research. It is clear that all of this cannot be left to individual researchers or commissioning parties. A specific policy seems necessary, developed by a central service or department within the administration (e.g. the Policy Preparation and Evaluation Unit at the Environment Department for Environmental Policy, the Study Centre of the Flemish Government for the whole of the administration), backed by experts and zeroing in on national networks on policy evaluation (cf. VEP) as well as international forums (e.g. EU, OECD).

43. Better **coordination and programming** of policy evaluations have to provide a solution to different problems, such as a lack of long-term planning of policy evaluation research, a short-term vision when it comes to the choice of evaluated themes, a shortage of policy evaluations in some areas, insufficient coordination with other policy evaluations, fragmentation of activities and resources, and low predictability. Solutions can probably be found in a better combination with the process of strategic and operational planning, monitoring and data collection, more administrative cooperation between fragmented departments, clustering policy evaluation programmes, etc. All that should lead to a publicly available list of planned and completed policy evaluations, to be updated periodically. The already obligatory legislative agenda which is attached to the annual policy document as an annex can serve as a valuable starting point.

44. From the interviews it is clear that there is still a lot of room for improvement of the **evaluation processes** or the way in which evaluations are carried out in practice. It concerns questions like: Who chooses the approach and the work method? Based on what

considerations? According to what procedures is the evaluation organised? Who guides the process? Who will be involved when? What is the role (if any) of policy departments or study centres of the Flemish Government in the guidance and support of environmental evaluations? What should be especially taken into account in order to enhance the impact of evaluations? Based on the meta-analysis at least some important points can be mentioned. One is that a good preparation of policy evaluation research is desirable, with a well-founded analysis of the problem or evaluation need, clear research questions, a realistic plan and a clear idea of the data need and data availability. Guidance must be professional, which means that high standards can be applied to persons in charge of the research project. Open communication and a good relationship between the commissioning body and the research team throughout the project have proved essential. It does not seem advisable to mix functions which are too different within one steering group (supplying information, ideas, data, literature,...., steering and following-up the (application of the) evaluation method, tracing factual mistakes, functioning as a basis of support with a view to impact...). Attention for enhancing the policy impact of an evaluation should not come after the evaluation has been concluded, but much sooner. This supposes, among other things, careful consideration of the timing of policy evaluation to make sure they are properly linked to the policy and political cycle, good stakeholder analysis and involvement, smart 'lobbying' or 'expectations management' with respect to policy makers and media, good availability and accessibility of the research results, and a proper follow-up.

45. Finally there is a clear need for a **change in political culture**. There is still a deeply rooted distrust of policy evaluations among public authorities. Policy evaluation is still seen mainly as a threat or a way to criticise policy makers and not as an opportunity to learn and improve. Transforming that policy culture is not easy, and is probably a long-term goal. There is a need for both success stories and good examples and experiences, and much stricter regulations, programmes and procedures, so that every policy is evaluated sooner or later and politicians or departments do not feel targeted. On the other hand, there is also a need for advocates among politicians and top representatives of the administration for whom quality is a number-one priority and who are prepared to invest in a 'learning organisation' and see policy evaluation as an inherent part of good governance.

References

- Conings V., Sterck M., Van Dooren W. & Bouckaert G. (2005) Beleidsnota's versus Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid. Een toetsing van de beleidsnota's aan het Comptabiliteitsdecreet en het Kaderdecreet Bestuurlijk Beleid, Support Centre for Administrative Organisation in Flanders, Leuven.
- Crabbé A., Gysen J. & Leroy P. (2006) Vademecum Milieubeleidsevaluatie, Vanden Broele, Bruges.
- Crabbé A. & Bruyninckx H. (2006) To BE or not to BE? De institutionalisering van milieubeleidsevaluatie in Vlaanderen. In: Leroy P. & Loots I. (eds.) (2006) Vlaams milieubeleid: in staat van/tot vernieuwing? Vanden Broele, Bruges, 159-177.
- De Jaeger S., Eyckmans J., Van Biervliet K. & Van Puyenbroeck T. (2005) Ontwikkeling van een coherent beleidskader voor de evaluatie van leefmilieugerelateerde subsidies en toepassing op een aantal cases, EHSAL, Ecolas, Brussels.
- De Peuter B., De Smedt J. & Bouckaert G. (2007) Handleiding Beleidsevaluatie, Support Centre for Administrative Organisation in Flanders, Leuven.
- De Peuter B. (2007). Evidence-Based Policy: An Exploration of Drivers and Challenges in Belgium. Paper for the Symposium on Evaluation in the Knowledge Society, Odense, DK, 18-19 October 2007.
- Furubo J.-E., Rist R.C. and Sandahl R. (eds.) (2002). International Atlas of Evaluation, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- Jacob S. & Varone F. (2003) Evaluer l'action publique: état des lieux et perspectives en Belgique, Academia Press, Ghent.
- LNE (2007) MINA-PLAN 3. Evaluatie van de resultaten, Environment, Nature and Energy Department, Brussels.
- Loots I. & Leroy P. (2006) Vlaams milieubeleid: kansen en hindernissen voor vernieuwing. In: Leroy P. & Loots I. (eds.) (2006) Vlaams milieubeleid: in staat van/tot vernieuwing? Vanden Broele, Bruges, 177-199.
- Stufflebeam D. (1999) Program Evaluations Metaevaluation Checklist. Evaluation Checklists Project, www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists.
- Tieleman, Barbara and Peter Van Humbeeck (2007). Evolution in evaluation? Analysis of Flemish environmental policy evaluation practice. Mechelen, MIRA, Flemish Environment Agency (VMM).
- Vancoppenolle D. & Brans M. (2005) De Vlaamse beleidsvormingscapaciteit: een (zelf)evaluatie, Support Centre for Administrative Organisation in Flanders, Leuven.
- Van Humbeeck P. (2006) Beter Bestuur in Vlaanderen: boeken we voldoende vooruitgang?, Vlaams Tijdschrift voor Overheidsmanagement, 11(2), April-May-June 2006, 40-49.
- Van Humbeeck P. (2007) Best practices in regulatory impact analysis: a review of the Flemish Region in Belgium, Working paper SERV for European Network for Better Regulation, Brussels, <http://www.enbr.org>.
- Varone F., Jacob S. & De Winter L. (2005) Polity, Politics and Policy Evaluation in Belgium, Evaluation, 11(3), <http://evi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/11//253>.