



# THE ART OF COUPLING

## Multiple streams and policy entrepreneurship in Flemish transition governance processes

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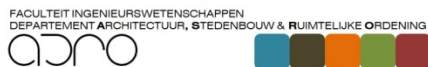
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# Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1. <b>Multiple streams at work during policy formation</b>	<b>3</b>
2. <b>Episode one. Transition management becomes a new policy approach in Flanders</b>	<b>6</b>
3. <b>Episode two. Plan C and the change from a Flemish waste regime to a materials regime.</b>	<b>12</b>
4. <b>Episode three. Transition management breaks through in the hard core of policy, 'Flanders in Action' (ViA)</b>	<b>16</b>
5. <b>Conclusions</b>	<b>19</b>
6. <b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>24</b>

## Abstract

Inspired by the Dutch transition management policy, the Flemish Government decided in 2004 to start experimenting in its environmental policy with transition management (TM). Transition management is intended as an innovative form of governance to reorient societal systems towards sustainable development and to develop a long-term orientating framework for regular policy. Flanders started two TM-processes: one in sustainable housing and building (in 2004), and one in sustainable materials management (in 2006). This paper uses the multiple streams framework of Kingdon to analyse three episodes of experiences with this new governance approach: the establishment of TM in Flanders between 2004 and 2006, the way it influenced the shift from Flemish waste policy to sustainable materials policy, and the breakthrough of TM in the central socio-economic innovation programme of the Flemish Government.

An analysis with the multiple streams model shows how policy change does not proceed in neatly separated stages or phases, but depends on continuous, messy and often hard to realise couplings of different kind of streams (problems, policy solutions, political events and trends). So-called policy entrepreneurs play an important role in preparing and realizing these couplings, often during policy windows. The paper shows that this model is useful for gaining insights in the actual strategies that actors use in transition governance processes and the circumstances under which they have to take practical day-to-day decisions. Such insights do not only provide information about how transition governance works in practice, but may also be useful in formulating additional ideas for the influencing of transitions. Our analysis thus complements the currently existing guidelines for transition management.

# Introduction

Over the last decade, the challenge of sustainable development has prompted different researchers and policy-makers to start framing the debate as one of ‘sustainability transitions’ and ‘transition governance’ (Grin *et al.*, 2010). Transitions can be defined as deep changes in the structure, culture and practices of societal systems, such as the energy, mobility or agro-food system. Such deep and system-wide changes are deemed necessary for putting these systems (and society as a whole) on a more sustainable track. A transition is inevitably a complex process: it involves a lot of actors with different, often conflicting interests and with different ideas about what exactly the problems are and what acceptable solutions are. Given this complexity, one of the logical questions is: can such sustainability transitions be steered, and if so, how and by whom? The answer of most researchers in the young research field of sustainability transitions is ‘yes, but’: it should be possible to influence these systems, but straightforward steering - either top-down by a strong government or bottom-up only through market mechanisms - will not be enough. We will have to search for combinations of these well-known governance forms with innovative governance approaches.

Guidelines for the development of such innovative governance approaches are currently often based on preceding research into the characteristics of transitions. This kind of research analyses in a first step for example the characteristics of change processes in socio-technical systems (Schot & Geels, 2010) or in complex adaptive systems (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2010) and, next, tries to draw guidelines from these characteristics for informing the governance of transitions through approaches such as ‘strategic niche management’ or ‘transition management’ (TM). The resulting guidelines are often quite general and seem to apply largely independent of the context of the specific transition governance process.

While this line of reasoning may be informative for the overall strategic orientation of transition governance, it gives no insights in the actual strategies that actors use when ‘doing’ transition governance processes in practice, and the circumstances under which they have to take practical day-to-day decisions. Such insights may not only provide better information of how transition governance works in practice, but may also be helpful in formulating different and additional guidelines for the influencing of transitions. This paper builds on several years of empirical research, grounded in interpretative policy analysis, of two transition management processes in Flanders, one in the field of housing and building (called DuWoBo) and one in the field of waste and materials management (called Plan C).<sup>1</sup> The research started from a general interest in understanding and evaluating the potential of transition management as an approach for stimulating policy change towards sustainable development. How does transition management as a form of governance work in practice? Does it lead to policy change in a particular domain (housing and building, waste and materials management)? How can this change be characterised and how can TM’s influence, or lack thereof, be explained? The research uses the broad analytical framework of the multi-level perspective of transition studies (Geels, 2005) the policy arrangements approach of policy studies (Arts *et al.*, 2006, Arts & Leroy, 2006) to capture the different dimensions that are relevant when trying to understand the characteristics of policy change, such as the role of structural changes in the context

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<sup>1</sup> From here on we will use the acronyms by which the two processes are known in Flanders: ‘DuWoBo’ for the transition process sustainable housing and building (DuWoBo stands for ‘Duurzaam Wonen en Bouwen’) and ‘Plan C’ for the transition process in sustainable material use. Plan C derives its name from the idea that a Plan B is no longer enough to reach sustainable material management, but that a Plan C is needed. The DuWoBo website is [www.duwobo.be](http://www.duwobo.be). The Plan C website is [www.plan-c.eu](http://www.plan-c.eu).

around these processes, and the role of changes in discourse, in rules of the game, in actors, in resources and power. In 2011 and 2012, two papers were published that analysed the experiences of DuWoBo and Plan C along these lines (Paredis, 2011 & 2012).

This paper focuses only on a particular aspect of trying to realise policy change through transition management, namely the work that has to be done by entrepreneurial individuals in TM processes to establish TM as a new form of governance and to gain wider influence for the results of TM processes.

During the previous empirical research, it became apparent that some of the most active proponents of the two processes (DuWoBo & Plan C) were constantly laying connections between the TM-process and different other policies, projects, actors and so on. In fact, one of the most important activities to get a transition management process on the agenda and diffuse its results, seems to be this coupling work. We therefore decided to make use of the multiple streams framework of John W. Kingdon, developed in his famous book *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (2011 [1984]), to help in understanding what happens in the processes and which kind of work is being done.

Part 1 of the paper introduces Kingdon's theory of agenda setting and his most important analytical concepts. In the next parts, we use this framework to analyse in detail three episodes of the experiences with transition management in Flanders. The first episode (Part 2) is the establishment of transition management in Flanders as a new governance approach between 2004 and 2006. The second and third episode relate to how the results of the TM-processes DuWoBo and Plan C gained wider influence during 2010 and 2011. The second episode (Part 3) recounts the shift in the Flemish waste regime to a sustainable materials orientation. The third episode (Part 4) analyses the breakthrough of transition management in *Vlaanderen in Actie* (ViA, 'Flanders in Action'), the central and ambitious socio-economic innovation programme of the Flemish Government. We conclude (Part 5) with some reflections on lessons learnt and the usefulness of Kingdon's streams model in understanding the role of transition management as a governance approach.

Although during the discussion we provide some brief information about transition management, the paper presupposes that the reader has a basic knowledge of transition studies and transition management. Readers are referred to previous working papers for the *Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling* where this is treated in detail (Paredis, 2009 & 2010) and of course to the international literature (such as Grin *et al.*, 2010; Loorbach, 2007; Geels, 2005).

# 1. Multiple streams at work during policy formation

Kingdon (2011 [1984]) tries to explain how policy issues reach the *governmental agenda*.<sup>2</sup> The governmental agenda is the list of subjects to which people in and around government are paying serious attention at any given time. In fact, Kingdon distinguishes between two agendas (ibid. P 142). The governmental agenda we just defined and the *decision agenda*, which is the list of items that have become so pressing that they move into position for some sort of authoritative decision, such as legislative action or ministerial choice. He makes a further distinction between agendas and *alternatives*. The set of alternatives is the set of different policy proposals from which government officials can choose to address a certain subject or problem. Agendas and alternative specification are influenced by two kinds of factors: *participants* that are active in and around government, and *processes* that bring subjects to prominence (ibid., p. 19).

Kingdon distinguishes between two broad categories of actors or participants (p. 69): a visible and a hidden cluster. The *visible cluster* are participants that receive a lot of press and public attention, such as ministers, prominent members of parliament, media figures. The relatively *hidden cluster* consists of different kinds of experts: academics, civil servants, parliamentary staffers, and not in the least in the Belgian context the personal advisors (cabinet) of the Minister. Interest groups travel between the two, with some activities very public and other hardly visible. In his research, Kingdon found that in general the visible participants are most involved in agenda-setting, while the hidden cluster mostly affects the alternatives. 'To generate alternatives, some degree of expertise and willingness to concern oneself with minute details is required' (p. 70), so this is typically a task of specialists. In the visible arena, publicity and re-election are the main incentives. Politicians are therefore inclined to discuss general directions and leave details to their staff. 'The broad-brush approach of such actors (...) is much better suited to agenda setting than to generation of policy alternatives' (p. 70).

The second factor of influence on agendas and alternative specification are three process streams that flow through the system: a stream of problems, of policies and of politics. The *problem stream* contains all conditions that become interpreted as problems. There is thus an important interpretive element here. Conditions attract attention through all sorts of indicators, through focusing events (crisis, personal experiences, and symbols) or feedback from experiences. But they only become perceived as problems when interpreted against the background of for example values of policy-makers, comparisons between groups of people and with other countries, or classification of a condition in a particular (problem) category. Agendas are influenced when some participants succeed in getting more attention for one problem than for another. In the *policy stream*, ideas, proposals and alternatives float around in what Kingdon compares to 'a primeval soup' (p. 117). Here, a community of specialists is active that interact and discuss a whole range of problems and solutions. Ideas surface, are rejected, mature, are recombined and evaluated against criteria such as technical feasibility, value acceptability, tolerable cost, anticipated public acquiescence, chance of receptivity among decision makers (p. 131). A viable alternative facilitates high placement on the governmental and decision agenda. With the functioning of the policy stream, Kingdon stresses the importance of

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<sup>2</sup> Kingdon analyses decision-making at the level of the federal government of the United States. In our discussion of his theory, we have adapted some of his descriptions to the Flemish situation. For example, when he speaks of presidential decisions, we use ministerial decisions; Congress becomes Parliament. While some of his specific observations may be only applicable to the American situation - such as the role of the President - the conceptual framework is broad enough to apply it to other industrialised countries (see also Zahariadis, 2007).

ideas as an integral part of decision-making. Policy-making is thus not only a matter of interests, power and strategy, but also of ideas and their influence. The *political stream* is determined by elections, changes in government, a new balance of power in parliament, swings in the mood of the public, interest group pressure campaigns. Developments in this stream have powerful effects on agendas. When for example a government changes, new items move up the agenda more easily.

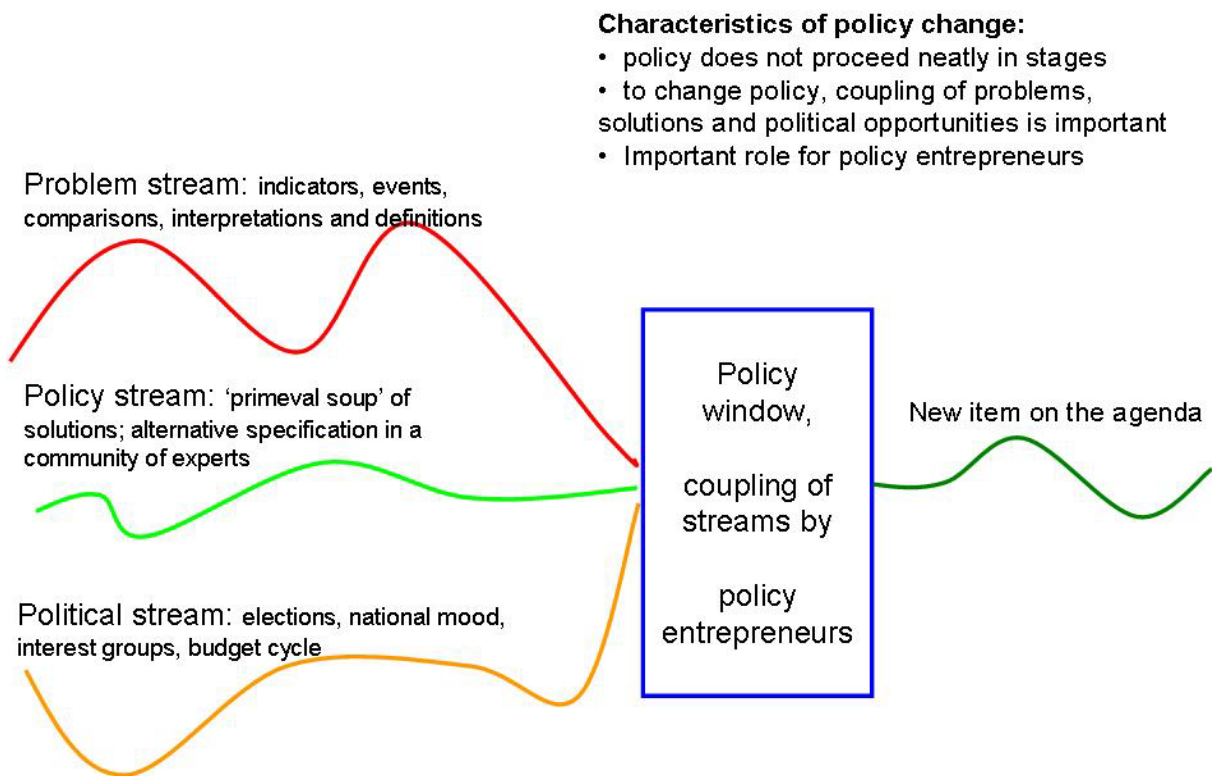
The three streams develop and operate largely independently of one another, governed by different forces, different considerations, different styles, and different people (p. 88). The governmental agenda is set in the problems or political stream (usually by the visible actors), while alternatives are generated in the policy stream (usually by the hidden actors) (p. 194). Then when do new items gain importance and how do agendas change (or translated for this paper: when does transition management as such or when do the results of TM-processes reach the agenda)? According to Kingdon, *coupling of the streams* is essential for moving items up the agenda. Often, partial couplings are possible, for example a problem demands attention and a policy proposal can be coupled to it as a solution, but it might well be that the political climate is not ripe to take a decision. But when the three streams can be coupled in a single package - a problem demands attention, a policy solution is available, and the political climate is receptive – then the chances are ‘dramatically increased’ that an item rises on the decision agenda (p. 178).

Here, a particular kind of moment and a particular kind of actor play a crucial role. The moment and opportunity for pushing change, is called a *policy window* by Kingdon. A policy window is the period of time during which it becomes a lot easier for advocates of particular policy solutions or of particular problems to push their ideas. Policy windows are relatively scarce and are only open for a limited time period. They are the result of developments in the political or in the problem stream (p. 174). A problem window opens when decision makers become convinced that a problem is very pressing and needs action. A political window results from political events such as elections or a change in government, when political actors are receptive for developing new initiatives. These kind of moments are indeed scarce, yet Kingdon also mentions other possible windows such as renewal of government programmes that expire, the budget cycle and regular reports or addresses (p. 186). Such windows are often relatively well predictable.

During these windows, so-called *policy entrepreneurs* play an important role. Policy entrepreneurs are advocates of certain problems or solutions that are willing to invest resources (time, energy, reputation, money) to promote their cause, either because of their concern for specific problems, their policy values, or for personal benefits. Policy entrepreneurs can come from very different corners. Kingdon mentions elected officials, civil servants, lobbyists, academics, lawyers, journalists. No one type of participant dominates the pool of entrepreneurs, but in most cases it is often possible to pinpoint one or at most a few persons (p. 180, 204). Policy entrepreneurs can spend years in softening up the system for their ideas. More, they do not only push for their conception of problems or for policy alternatives, they are also central in the coupling of streams: ‘They hook solutions to problems, proposals to political momentum, and political events to policy problems (...) Without the presence of an entrepreneur, the linking of streams may not take place’ (p. 182). In general, a policy window only opens for a short period of time, so entrepreneurs have to be ready with their ideas and act fast. If they miss their chance, they have to wait for another window to come along. In the second edition of his book, Kingdon has amended the role of policy windows somewhat. Although the time of an open policy window remains crucial, Kingdon concedes that ‘there are some links between these streams at times other than the open windows and the final couplings’ (p. 229). Consequently, policy entrepreneurs may also be able to make couplings and force an item on the agenda outside policy windows.



Figure 1 A schematic version of Kingdon's multiple stream model



In general, Kingdon stresses that his model shows how policy change does not proceed neatly in stages or phases. There is some 'messiness, accident, fortuitous coupling, and dumb luck' involved, so that 'subjects sometimes rise without our understanding completely why' (p. 206). Still, it would be wrong to view the process as completely random: the different streams have their own internal logic (e.g. not every proposal will surface in the policy stream because selection criteria are at work), there are limits on coupling possibilities (e.g. because of timing) and various rules of the game and institutions provide a basic structure for the actors that are involved.

We now use this framework to analyse in detail three episodes of the experiences with transition management in Flanders: the establishment of transition management in Flanders as a new governance approach between 2004 and 2006 (Part 2), the shift in the Flemish waste regime to a sustainable materials orientation (Part 3), and the breakthrough of transition management in *Vlaanderen in Actie* (ViA, 'Flanders in Action'), the central and ambitious socio-economic innovation programme of the previous and current Flemish Government (Part 4).

## 2. Episode one. Transition management becomes a new policy approach in Flanders

Inspired by the Dutch transition management policy (VROM, 2001), the Flemish Government decided in 2004 to start experimenting in its environmental policy with transition management. It was decided that the expertise of Prof Jan Rotmans and his team would be hired to give transition management a start in Flanders. This means that the approach to transition management that is tried out in Flanders, is the one developed by ICIS-MERIT and later on further refined in DRIFT. We cannot go into detail here as to the specifics of this approach, but it is relatively well-known and has been described extensively elsewhere (see e.g. Rotmans, 2003; Loorbach, 2007, Rotmans & Loorbach, 2010). It usually employs a so-called transition arena with niche-players and forward-thinking regime-players to develop a common problem structuring of the system under discussion, and then moves on to develop a transition agenda. The transition agenda contains a future vision for the system, transition paths towards that vision, and a series of experiments to test and initiate the paths in reality. In Flanders, the first transition process to adopt this approach was initiated in October 2004 in the area of sustainable housing and building (DuWoBo), and Dutch researchers were directly involved in this process. This process was initiated by the environmental administration LNE (at the time called Aminal). The second process, in sustainable materials management (called Plan C), followed the same transition management approach, and started in June 2006, but without Dutch involvement. The process was initiated by the Flemish waste agency OVAM. How did this establishment of TM as a new governance approach come about and what work had to be done to realise it?

Transition management in Flanders originated in the environmental policy domain, where since the late nineties there had already been some experimentation with innovative policy strategies. For example, in order to remedy some of the deficiencies of existing policies - in particular the lack of integration between environmental policy themes and the lack of participation in policy design and implementation - the Environmental and Nature Policy Plan 2 (MINA-plan 2, 1997-2001) advocated the use of integrated region-oriented policies and target group policies (Verbeeck & Leroy, 2006). When after the 1999 elections, the green party Agalev entered the Flemish Government and provided the Minister of the Environment,<sup>3</sup> the political stream became more supportive of a long-term orientation for environmental policy and of a broadening of the environmental discourse to thinking in terms of sustainable development. This found its expression amongst others things in the Policy Note, 1999-2004 of Minister Dua. A few years later, during the preparations for the third MINA-plan, 2003-2007, transition management surfaced as an approach that could remedy some of the problems in environmental policy-making, in particular a lack of a long-term sustainability perspective that meant a break with existing trends, and a lack of integration with industrial and innovation policies. These problems were not only felt at political level, but had also been mentioned in the advisory councils SERV and MINA-raad. However, in both cases - DuWoBo as well as Plan C - the link with the strategic policy plan MINA 3 was only one element. The breakthrough of TM became possible by additional links to domain-specific policy objectives, either for controlling the

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<sup>3</sup> The green party Agalev was one of the winners of the 1999 elections at federal and Flemish level. Green ministers entered both governments, with minister Vera Dua at Flemish level responsible for Environment and Agriculture. However, during the 2003 federal elections, Agalev lost all its parliamentary seats. At Flemish level, Dua resigned and was succeeded by Ludo Sannen (26 May 2003 - 17 February 2004). Early 2004, Sannen left Agalev and was succeeded by Jef Tavernier (18 February 2004 - 20 July 2004). After the Flemish elections of June 2004, Agalev did not return in the government.

environmental and health consequences of the construction sector (for DuWoBo) or for controlling the waste problem (for Plan C). Plan C also benefited from the administrative BBB reform that seemed to assign OVAM a new task of resource flow management. This combination of factors shows how a new policy arrangement such as TM does not suddenly appear out of nothingness. Using Kingdon's insights, we can see how for the start of DuWoBo and Plan C different streams had to be combined. We now treat them in more detail (for a schematic, somewhat simplified, representation of the detailed account, see Figure 2 for DuWoBo and Figure 3 for Plan C).

Let's first have a look at the problem stream. In the case of DuWoBo, there were three problems in the problem stream. First, there was a long-standing demand from the government to start a project on sustainable housing and building. In 1999 and 2000, the Flemish Parliament had already discussed two proposals for resolutions (Quintelier c.s., 1999; Decaluwe c.s., 2000) that demanded that the government take action to promote sustainable building. Before the resolutions were approved, the Flemish Government approved a proposal from Minister Dua (9 March 2001) to start a research project that was intended to lead to the establishment of a societal platform for sustainable housing and building. By 2004, this decision was still not executed. The two other problems were related to each other and circled around the need, first, to develop long-term sustainability policies for Flanders and, second, to promote the integration of innovation policy and environmental policy and set the Flemish economy on a path of ecological modernisation. Even though the UNCED-conference dated from 1992 and governments had been called upon to develop sustainable development plans, Flanders still had no specific sustainable development policy in 2002. Sustainable development policy was always treated in the margin of environmental policy. During the preparatory phase of MINA 3 and the public consultation about the plan, the advisory councils SERV and MINA-*raad* warned that this led to a lack of a long-term perspective on societal development, a lack of urgency to promote profound change and a lack of integration with other policy fields, such as industrial and innovation policy. Because of the lack of connections between innovation and environmental policy, opportunities were missed to innovate the Flemish economy, create jobs and boost eco-efficiency. These problems were also discussed in studies of SERV and of the innovation agency IWT (Van Humbeeck, 2003; Van Humbeeck *et al.*, 2003; Boekholt (ed.), 2002; Larosse, 2004).

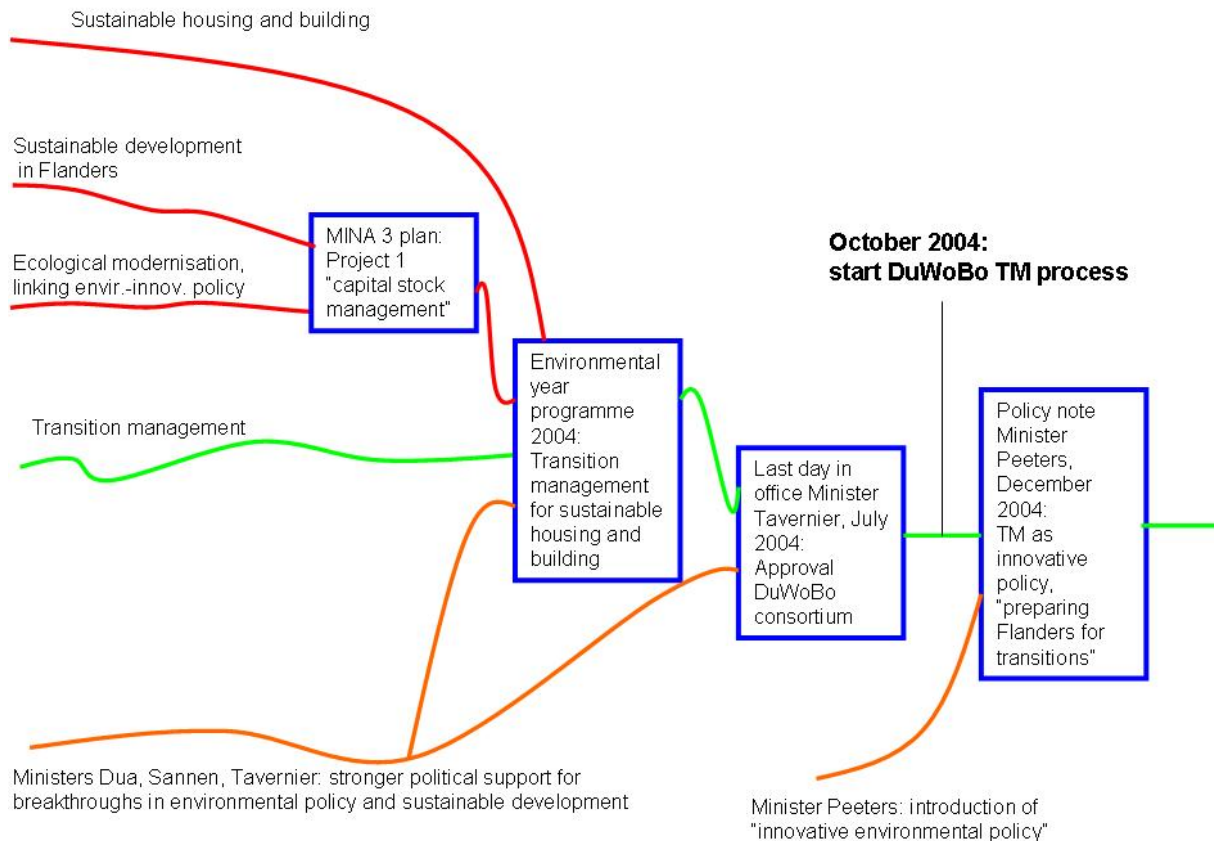
In the case of Plan C, there were two problems in the problem stream that demanded attention. First, since the turn of the century there was an ongoing discussion within OVAM about the long-term orientation for waste policy, in particular the further development of the waste hierarchy and prevention policies. At the beginning of the 21st century, Flanders had succeeded in creating a well-performing waste system and it was (and still is) considered top of the European class in selective collection and recycling. However, the fact that the total amount of household waste remained high and that industrial waste was not under control, had led to a realisation at the political level and with several OVAM officials that, in order to further reduce waste amounts, a new step in waste policy was needed. Second, during the administrative BBB reform at Flemish level, OVAM had been assigned the task of 'resource flow management' This was in fact a manoeuvre from OVAM supported by the Minister of the Environment to keep waste prevention policies in the task description of OVAM (under the disguise of 'resource flow management'), instead of losing it to the general environmental department LNE.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the new description initiated new expectations and it was unclear what the contents of the new field were to be, how it should be organised and what its

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<sup>4</sup> Under the new public management logic of BBB, each possible task is uniquely allocated to a specific department or agency. Since 'waste prevention' can be interpreted as a form of general environmental policy, focused on more sustainable production and consumption patterns, it need not necessarily be allocated to an executive agency such as OVAM.

relation was with existing waste policies. In the follow-up discussions, OVAM started interpreting the new task as 'materials policy' and as a possible translation for its long-term policy. But still, the contents of the new field remained unclear.

**Figure 2 A schematic, simplified representation of how coupling of streams led to the start of the DuWoBo-process in 2004**



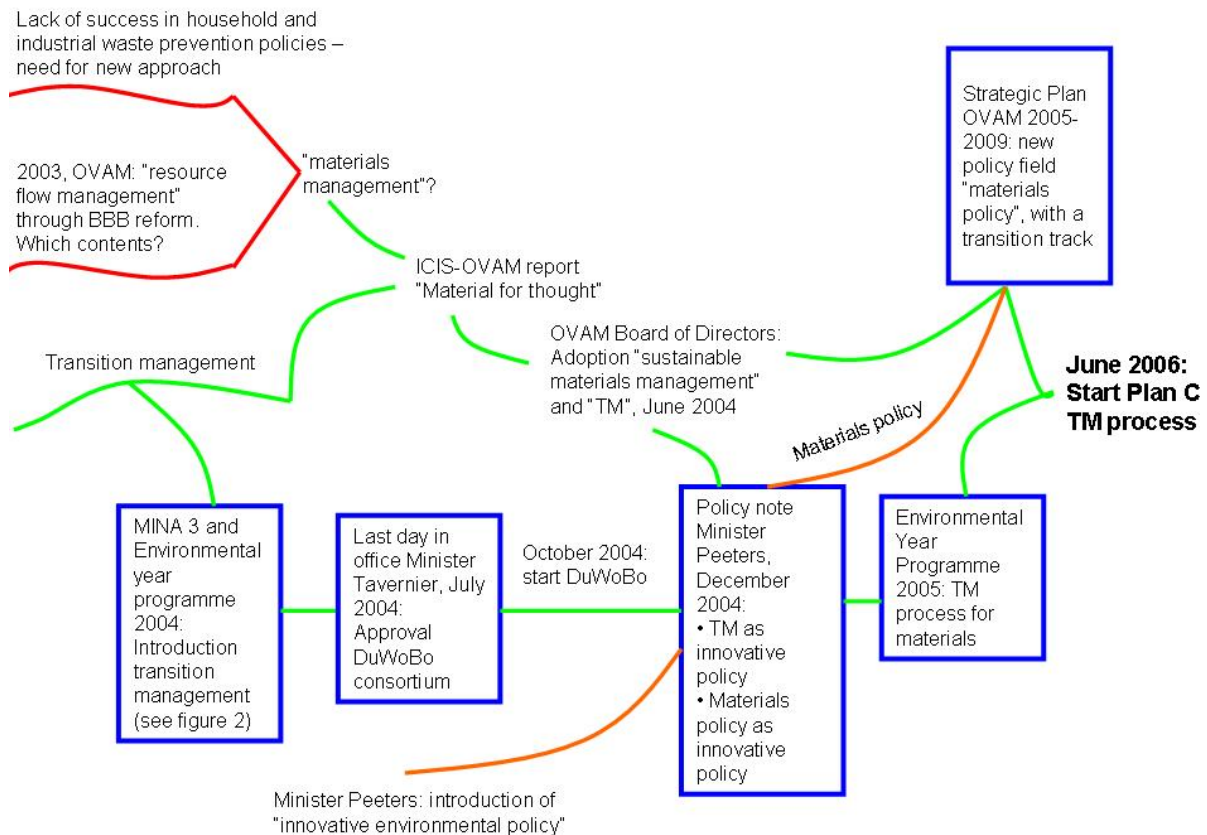
\* Different problem streams (in red) in Flemish environmental policy combined with the policy stream transition management (in green), with a political stream supportive of long-term and sustainable development policies (in orange). The policy window (in blue) consists of a combination of moments. See the text for details.

So, in the problem stream several problems were waiting for a solution. What happened meanwhile in the policy stream? During the preparation of MINA 3, transition management had surfaced in several studies (De Jonge, 2003; Van Humbeeck, 2003; Van Humbeeck *et al.*, 2003) and in the advice of the advisory councils SERV (advice 10 June 2002) and MINA-raad (advice 4 July 2002) as a potential solution for the problems of long-term sustainable development policy and the integration of environmental and innovation policy. SERV and MINA-raad pleaded for radical innovations under the form of long-term system innovations and asked the government to study the possibilities of framing these as transitions and transition management. Between 2002 and 2004, several researchers (such as Walter De Jonge at CDO/UGent), civil servants (such as Walter Tempst at OVAM, Ilse Dries at LNE, Jan Larosse at IWT) and policy advisors (such as Peter Van Humbeeck at SERV) had come in contact with the concepts of transitions and transition management through research reports or in the preparation of policy advice and had started regarding them as promising concepts for policy renewal. In this period, several of them also went to visit Jan Rotmans and his team at ICIS Maastricht to discuss the new concepts. These civil servants and policy advisors actively promoted

transition thinking as a policy option by bringing it up during the preparation of policy advice or the preparation of new policy plans (MINA 3 Environmental Year Programme, 2004 & 2005, OVAM Strategic Plan, 2005-2009). Specifically for the case of Plan C, under the impulse of Walter Tempst OVAM ordered a study from ICIS Maastricht (Rotmans; Loorbach) about the potential of transition management for the reorientation of waste policy. The study concluded that a sustainable materials perspective had potential to tackle the existing problems in the waste system and that transition management was a promising concept to initiate renewal of policy. In June 2004, OVAM's Board of Directors adopted the conclusions of the report and decided to defend them with the new Minister of the Environment.

What about the political stream? Here, over the years different political decisions were taken that in combination led to the start of the TM processes. As mentioned, the overall mood in environmental policy-making became more supportive of long-term policy-making and sustainable development after green Ministers entered the Flemish Government in 1999. The separate policy decisions that together would open up a space for TM, were all taken during the legislature of a Minister from the green party Agalev: the decision to start a platform on sustainable housing and building (minister Dua in 2001), the decision during the BBB-reform to allocate the competence 'resource flow management' in OVAM (Minister Dua in 2003), inclusion of transition management in the Environmental Year Programme 2004 (Minister Sannen, 2004), the approval of the consortium with DRIFT that was to guide the DuWoBo-process (Minister Tavernier in 2004). This last decision shows some of the contingency of policy windows. The contract was already several weeks at the cabinet of the minister, waiting to be signed, but the head of the cabinet was unwilling to take the decision because the Greens had just lost the Flemish elections of June 2004 and the fruits of the decision would be reaped by the next government. It was only during the very last day at office of Tavernier, and after several contacts between LNE and the cabinet, that the contract was signed. The Greens did not return to the Flemish Government after the elections and the christian-democrat Kris Peeters became Minister of the Environment. There were some doubts in LNE whether Peeters, who had a centre-right profile and a background in the employer's organisation UNIZO, would support transition management, but he retained the idea of transition management and introduced it in his Policy Note 2004-2009 (published in December 2004) as an experiment in policy. One of the strategic goals of the Note is indeed formulated as 'innovative environmental policy', which is intended to lead to a definition of long-term policy goals 'to prepare Flanders for transitions'. Optimisation of socio-economic systems is not enough to remain within the carrying capacity of the planet; system innovation is needed, according to the Note (Peeters, 2004, p. 51-52). Its very last operational goal stipulates that sustainable building and housing will be used as a testing ground for TM in Flanders. The specific wording of these parts of the Note is influenced by proposals from the environmental administration and advisory councils SERV and MINA-*raad*. The next year, Minister Peeters also approved the start of a transition management process in sustainable materials management.

**Figure 3 A schematic, simplified representation of how coupling of streams led to the start of the Plan C process in 2006**



\* Different problem streams (in red) in Flemish environmental policy combined with the policy stream transition management (in green), with a political stream supportive innovative policy approaches for experimenting with TM and materials policy (in orange). The policy window (in blue) consists of a combination of moments. See the text for details.

The coupling of the different streams happened in consecutive steps. In the case of DuWoBo, the approval of MINA 3 and in particular its operationalisation in the Environmental Year Programme 2004 opened a policy window to insert transition management as a potential solution for the three mentioned problems at once, namely by taking sustainable housing and building as the theme for the first transition management process. As said, under the green Ministers of the Environment, the political stream was supportive of a long-term orientation for environmental policy and a broadening to thinking in terms of sustainable development. The particular form that was eventually chosen for filling in this political choice was a transition management process in sustainable housing and building, which was mainly due to the preparatory groundwork of civil servants (such as Ilse Dries at LNE) and policy advisors in advisory councils (such as Peter Van Humbeeck at SERV). Under the new government, this choice is also politically approved in Minister Peeters' Policy Note. In Kingdon's terms, this can be understood as the difference between the agenda-setting (choice for long-term and sustainable development), which is here mainly a case of political priorities from the Minister, and alternative specification (choice for transition management), which is mainly prepared at the level of experts.

Something similar happened in the case of Plan C. As mentioned a few paragraphs earlier, in June 2004 OVAM's Board of Directors accepted the idea of materials policy and the potential of transition management as a policy approach. Half a year later, Minister Peeter's Policy Note introduced 'the

development of materials policy' under the heading of innovative environmental policy. More than a year later, in its Strategic Plan 2005-2009 OVAM introduced a new and separate policy field alongside waste management, namely materials policy. The Plan takes as one of its operational goals the realisation of a transition process, and mentions that this choice is furthermore an execution of the Minister's choice to test the implementation of TM in Flanders. The coupling of the streams is once more confirmed in the Environmental Year Programme 2005. Again, we notice how agenda-setting at political level (choice for materials policy and long-term policies for sustainable development) is translated under the form of transition management (alternative specification). The policy window opens in the combination of the Minister's Policy Note, OVAM's Strategic Plan and the operationalisation of MINA 3 in the Environmental Year Programme 2005.

All in all, the introduction and establishment of TM in Flanders is thus not the story of a master plan of visionary politicians who initiate a grand new policy. It rather is the story of a bottom-up process, slowly growing and finding its way in small, partly informal and parallel networks between civil servants, researchers, policy advisors in advisory councils and others. On the one hand, these people saw the need for the development of long-term environmental and sustainable development policies and for system innovations in a broad societal perspective. In the discourse of transitions and transition management which had recently gained ground in the Netherlands, they found a conceptual and operational approach that could voice these concerns in a coherent storyline. On the other hand, this storyline also had to be made concrete in practical decisions to start experimental processes in transition management, such as the assignment of studies and consultancy tasks (where Ilse Dries at LNE took the lead for DuWoBo, Walter Tempst at OVAM for Plan C). In searching for political and administrative policy windows and translating them in operational policy decisions, the role of these different civil servants has undoubtedly been important, backed-up by the approving judgement of the advisory councils SERV and MINA-*raad*. However, all this might have been futile without developments in the political stream, where we first saw an orientation favourable for and supportive of sustainable development and long-term policies (under Minister Dua), and later a support for innovative, experimental policies in thinking about long-term goals (under Minister Peeters).

The emergence of TM in Flanders is not only an illustration of converging streams but also of the work that has to be put into connecting these streams by so-called 'policy entrepreneurs', people that recognise a possibility for change, see the opportunity to combine agendas, are in a position to do so and are able to convince others to go along. Simultaneously, it is obvious that the outcome of such initiatives is often hard to foretell. The 'launch' and establishment of a new governance approach such as TM is in fact a construction in itself: it seems to be strongly dependent on potential connections between different streams and the work that is necessary for creating these connections.

### 3. Episode two. Plan C and the change from a Flemish waste regime to a materials regime.

The relation of Plan C to the evolutions in the Flemish waste/materials regime presents a second interesting example of coupling of streams and policy entrepreneurship. This is no longer a question of establishing TM, but of gaining wider influence for the results of the Plan C TM-process. From the point of view of Plan C, it can be interpreted as a form of anchoring the ideas developed at the level of a policy niche to the regime level, making smart use of passing streams. From the point of view of the regime level, it looks more like a typical example of agenda-setting. Since our focus is the influence of TM, we describe the evolution mainly from the perspective of Plan C.

With Plan C, OVAM introduced a new governance approach in 2006. OVAM's purpose with Plan C was giving content to the new competence of materials policy and developing a long-term policy orientation for the waste system (see also Part 2). The TM-approach was successful in creating a policy niche with characteristics that distinguished it from the existing waste regime, such as a group of frontrunners from various backgrounds with the ambition to lay the foundations for a sustainable materials system and new interaction rules inspired by transition management. Probably the most important result of Plan C was the discursive renewal it realised in Flanders between 2006 and 2008: it formulated a discourse on sustainable materials management in which waste is part of a broader materials system. Certainly until 2008, Plan C was the main voice in Flanders on sustainable materials management. Plan C was not able to keep that position after 2009, which can partly be explained by problems in the internal functioning of the network (such as limited funding and a lack of entrepreneurship for realising experiments). However, the changed position of Plan C over the last years is mainly due to striking changes in the waste regime itself: not only the regime discourse itself shifted to materials orientation, but also new legislation - the Materials Decree - was installed in 2011 that further institutionalises the discourse and lays foundations for new rules of the game. Kingdon's model is again helpful in understanding how the coupling between problem formulations, policy solutions and political opportunities has been crucial for realising this policy change (for a schematic representation of the following discussion, see Figure 4).

Let us start from the observation that Plan C succeeded in creating a new discourse for Flanders about sustainable materials management and in starting a network of frontrunners that at least until 2008 was the main voice in Flanders on sustainable materials management. Several OVAM policy officers (such as Walter Tempst, John Wante, Roos Servaes, Victor Dries) were not only participants in the Plan C process, but were also involved in internal OVAM discussions on the translation of the results and their implications for OVAM's own policy orientation and organisation. As already mentioned in Part 2, the first traces of a materials discourse can be found in internal OVAM documents as early as 2003 in the context of the BBB administrative reform. It then appeared in the strategic plan of OVAM for 2005-2009 - around the same time that the Plan C process was prepared - as a third policy line for OVAM along with waste and soil management. Parallel to the Plan C process and under impulse of Walter Tempst, OVAM installed an internal learning forum during 2007-2008, called *The fifth floor*,<sup>5</sup> where the new developments and the results of Plan C were discussed and

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<sup>5</sup> The OVAM office in Mechelen has only four floors. The idea of a fifth floor was that the initiative did not belong to a specific OVAM department, but tried to form a bridge between departments where the new concept of sustainable materials management could be discussed.



where the insight grew that materials management should not be regarded as a third policy line, but that the waste system should be regarded as part of a 'higher' system, the materials system.

A crucial breakthrough was the realisation within OVAM that this line of thinking implied that the obligation, coming from the EU-level, to translate the Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC) into new Flemish legislation, should not simply lead to a new Waste Decree, but that the new Decree should somehow reflect the materials storyline. In fact, the EU Directive's main aim is to strengthen the waste hierarchy in the waste policies of the EU member states and to reduce the discrepancies in waste policies between member states. But inspired by the experiences with Plan C and by similar discourses at EU and OECD level, OVAM proposed to the Flemish Minister of the Environment to translate the Directive into a Materials Decree instead of into a new Waste Decree, in that way going several steps further than the EU required (and then the ambitions of most EU member states). Although the ideas of how this should be done, were far from mature, this argumentation found a sympathetic ear at the cabinet of the then Minister of the Environment Hilde Crevits,<sup>6</sup> amongst others with political advisor Hugo Geerts, who has an OVAM history and who had closely followed the Plan C process during the first years. During the negotiations for the new Flemish Government in 2009, the cabinet succeeded in inserting the idea into the Governmental Declaration where it is stated that the new government will 'broaden waste policy to sustainable materials policy (...) The translation of the new Waste Framework Directive will amongst other things anchor the evolution from waste to integrated materials management' (Vlaamse Regering, 2009, p. 58-59). The coinciding streams of the EU-level and the Flemish elections thus opened a policy window where the sustainable materials storyline could be inserted. The preparatory work of OVAM's entrepreneurial civil servants, including the translation of the discourse development in Plan C, shows throughout the case, but also here the combination with the adoption by the political level (such as during the governmental negotiations of 2009) was an essential factor.

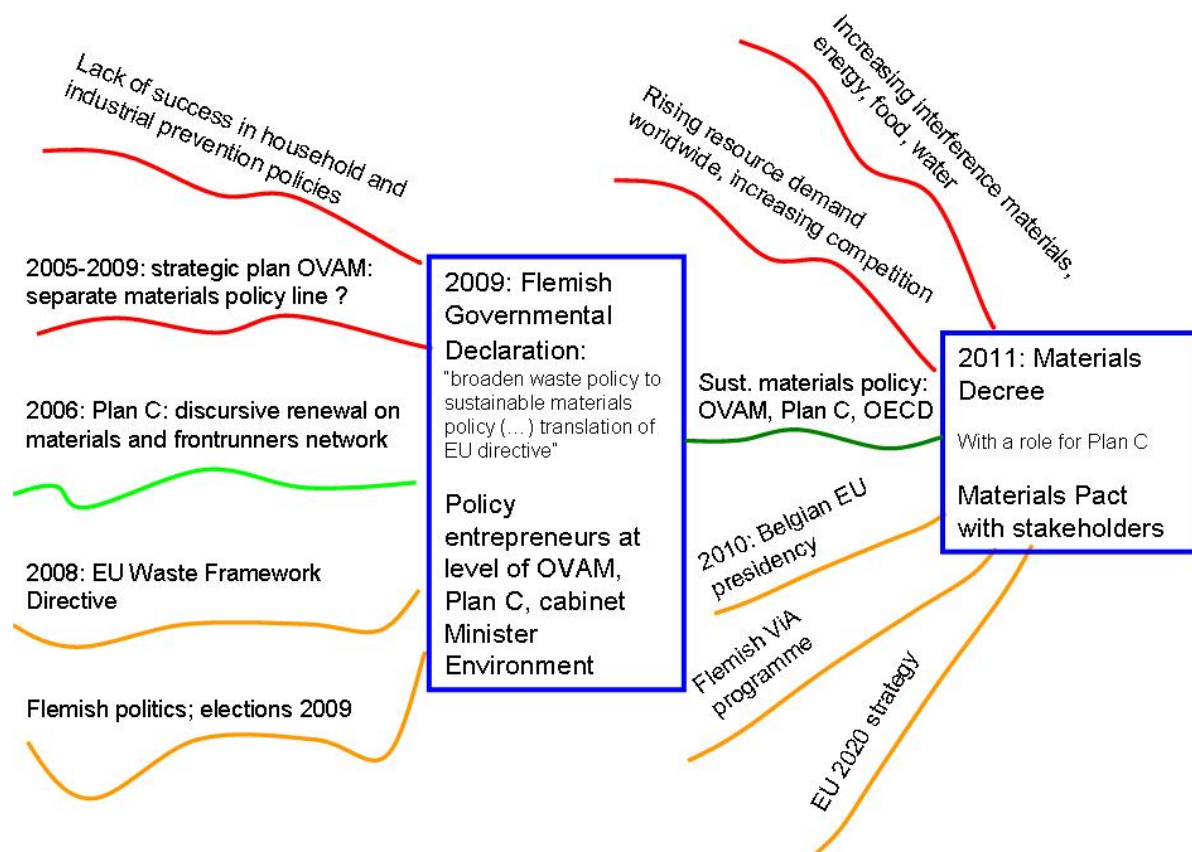
The shift from waste to materials policy had now reached the governmental agenda, but it took two more years to rise on the decision agenda and make it ripe for an 'authoritative decision' (in Kingdon's phrasing). What is interesting here, is that Flanders had no choice but to translate the EU Waste Framework Directive into regional legislation. So, the decision moment would come anyway, and could perhaps be interpreted as a kind of 'enforced policy window' through the influence of a higher authority.<sup>7</sup> Flanders was however not obliged to take the step to a Materials Decree and go beyond well-known waste policies and the waste hierarchy. But after the Governmental Declaration of July 2009 and during the next two years, different opportunities arose and different streams could be coupled that strengthened the adoption of the materials discourse and anchored it further at political and administrative level.

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<sup>6</sup> Kris Peeters became Minister-President of the Flemish Government in June 2007. In that capacity, he also became responsible for the coordination of sustainable development policy. Hilde Crevits succeeded him as Minister of the Environment. After the Flemish elections of 2009, Joke Schauvliege became Minister of the Environment (July 2009 - present).

<sup>7</sup> This obviously differs from the cases on which Kingdon's theory is built, i.e. agenda-setting at US federal level. No higher authority can oblige the US federal government to adopt legislation.

Figure 4 Plan C and the Flemish materials transition



\* A schematic, simplified presentation of coupling of problem streams (in red), policy streams (in green) and political streams (orange) during policy windows (blue). See text for details.

One evolution is situated in the problem stream, where in the course of 2009 and 2010 we see a fast rising awareness of the urgency of addressing the resources and materials problem. This can be labelled as landscape pressures, such as the rising demand for resources worldwide (e.g. from China), the import dependency of EU-countries, and the rising prices of resources. Apart from OVAM itself and Plan C, important new players in the Flemish materials system such as the sector federations Agoria (technology industry) and Essenscia (chemical industry) actively drew attention to these problems and demanded government action. Also EU initiatives such as the Raw Materials Initiative (EC, 2008), which grew out of anxiety over the availability of resources for the European economy, increased the awareness for the problem.

Another element, part of the political stream, was the preparation and development of the new Strategic Plan 2010-2014 for OVAM. Under coordination of OVAM's strategic team, headed by Victor Dries, a broad consultation process with stakeholders was set up. This process deepened the understanding of a sustainable materials orientation within OVAM. *'In a sense, the plan is a consolidation of all preceding developments, such as those around the reorientation towards sustainable materials management'*, says an OVAM official. In the strategic plan, waste and materials are no longer regarded as separate policy lines - as was the case in the previous Strategic Plan 2005-2009 - but waste policy has become part of sustainable materials policy. The new plan was accompanied by an internal reorganisation of OVAM, meant to prepare the organisation for its role in the future materials economy.

A further opportunity was the Belgian presidency of the EU during the second half of 2010. Because Belgium is a federal state, the preparation of a task such as a European presidency requires

a lot of coordination between the federal and the regional level. During the preparation process, the presidency of each EU policy domain is divided between ministers of the different Belgian policy levels. In this way, Joke Schauvliege, Flemish Minister for the Environment became responsible for the presidency of the EU Environment Council. It is a tradition at European level that each presidency formulates several own priorities, so during the preparations for the environmental presidency at Flemish level, OVAM proposed materials policy as one of the priorities. Because materials policy was already politically relevant with its introduction in the governmental agreement and because of OVAM's good reputation for its European policy work - with John Wante, first-hour member of Plan C's transition arena, as head of OVAM's EU division - the ministerial cabinet was in favour of the idea and formulated 'sustainable materials management' as one of the environmental spearheads for its Belgian presidency. In July 2010 an informal Environmental Council in Ghent was devoted to sustainable materials management, which gave Minister Schauvliege an opportunity to present herself nationally and internationally with the theme. During the formal EU Environment Council in December 2010, she succeeded in introducing language that links the EU 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiative on resource efficiency to 'system innovation' and 'the creation of a multi-actor transition platform on resource efficiency'. An OVAM negotiator: *'It is partly thanks to Plan C that this reached the conclusions. The line is very direct: OVAM prepared the conclusions, we wield the pen, so we put these concepts in there. You can see a clear causal link between what lives in Plan C and what was discussed at the Council.'*

Furthermore, exactly during the presidency, OVAM organised and hosted a high-profile OECD workshop on sustainable materials management. The result and visibility during the EU presidency together with the OECD workshop, contributed to a political confidence in the potential of the materials storyline. Early 2011 Minister Schauvliege proposed sustainable materials management as her flagship for the socio-economic innovation programme Flanders in Action (ViA), in that way positioning materials as an essential part of the transformation and innovation of the Flemish economy. This resulted at 6 June 2011 in a Round Table on Sustainable Materials Management where industry, knowledge centres and other societal partners signed a Declaration in which they engaged themselves to work towards a Materials Pact and an operational plan on sustainable materials.

By the time the Materials Decree was approved by the government on 24 June 2011, the combination of all these streams had laid a solid political and administrative foundation for the new orientation. Furthermore, the whole process and the different evolutions had also led to active involvement of all important stakeholders. There do not seem to be any major voices that oppose the shift from a waste to a materials orientation. What is moreover noticeable, is that most of these actors cannot be categorised as small players or niche actors. The regime actors themselves, often larger companies, are moving: the traditional actors in the waste sector are trying to reposition themselves; the traditional technology and chemical industry want to reposition themselves as partners in more sustainable, closed-loop economy; universities and knowledge centres are presenting themselves as pioneers and partners in knowledge development for materials. This is confirmed by the approval mid 2012 of the *Vlaams Materialenprogramma* (Flemish Materials Programme), a collaborative programme between government, industry, science and civil society, coordinated by OVAM.

## 4. Episode three. Transition management breaks through in the hard core of policy, ‘Flanders in Action’ (ViA)

For our final episode, we turn to the central socio-economic innovation programme of the last three Flemish Governments, namely *Vlaanderen in Actie* (ViA, ‘Flanders in Action’). Here we have an example of how it is not the substantive result of DuWoBo or Plan C that gains wider influence, but how the TM approach as such attracts attention and gains wider acceptance. During 2011, transition management as a governance approach found its way to the agenda of Flanders in Action (ViA), even in so far that 13 transversal transition management projects were introduced<sup>8</sup>. This breakthrough in the ‘hard’ policy core of the government can also be understood through the coupling of different processes and streams. It furthermore resembles another of Kingdon’s concepts, namely ‘*spillovers*’ (Kingdon, 2011, p. 191-194): the success of introducing a theme in one area and setting the agenda there, increases the chance of introducing it in adjacent area. When in a policy arena new principles are introduced, this can act as a precedent for other areas, for example because the coalition that introduced the policy change is transferred to the new policy environment, or because an analogous argumentation is built for that new environment.

So, what is ViA and how did transition management reach ViA (for a schematic representation see Figure 5)? ViA was introduced in 2006 under the Leterme government, was revived under the Peeters I government (2007-2009) and gained with the start of Peeters II (2009-present) and its integration in the current Governmental Declaration 2009-2014 even more strategic importance. ViA wants to be a future plan for the Flemish society, aimed at propelling Flanders in the top 5 of Europe in different domains. The ViA process started as a large-scale consultation process between the government, all important interest groups and a few hundred ‘captains of society’, and agreed already in 2008 that ‘major breakthroughs’ were necessary to make Flanders a Top 5 region in Europe by 2020. Although there are also social and environmental objectives, these fit in an underlying logic of increased competitiveness through innovation. The ViA-process resulted amongst other things in January 2009 in the *Pact 2020* between the government and all important interest groups. Next, the major themes of ViA also structured the July 2009 Governmental Declaration of the current government Peeters II. Remarkably, transition language entered these two documents. *Pact 2020* mentions that important steps are needed ‘for a transition towards a sustainable energy system, sustainable materials management and sustainable mobility’ (Vlaamse Regering, 2009a, p. 16). The Governmental Declaration mentions the continuation of DuWoBo and Plan C, but also uses related discourse such as ‘breakthroughs’, ‘economic and industrial transformation’ and ‘big projects for societal renewal’ (Vlaamse Regering, 2009b). Interestingly, some of this wording - such as the use of the word ‘transition’ in *Pact 2020* or the mentioning of DuWoBo and Plan C in the Governmental Declaration - can be traced back to the attentiveness of ‘policy entrepreneurs’ such as Peter Van Humbeeck (at SERV, who was co-responsible for the drafting of the *Pact 2020* text) or Tom De Saegher (vice-head of cabinet of Peeters, who was one of the negotiators of the governmental declaration).

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<sup>8</sup> The themes of the 13 projects range widely: (1) new industrial policy; (2) gazelles, fast-growing firms; (3) social innovation; (4) the learning Flemish, everybody active; (5) child poverty; (6) Flanders’ care; (7) renewable energy and smart grids; (8) sustainable housing and building; (9) sustainable materials management; (10) spatial planning; (11) smart mobility; (12) towards a sustainable and creative city; (13) acceleration of investment projects.

In spite of the intentions with ViA, by mid 2010 it was obvious in government circles that the ViA-process had trouble in keeping its dynamics and finding a suited policy approach that fitted the high ambitions. A lot of administrative processes and projects had been launched in particular on the level of planning and monitoring, but involving business and civil society was much more difficult than foreseen. By mid 2010, ViA had mainly become an internal administrative process with the aim of realising the governmental declaration, but the connection with activities from and involvement of societal partners had been lost. Furthermore, the transformational changes that ViA aimed for, required more than business-as-usual policy, but the policy stream seemed to run into limits to formulate these new kind of solutions.

Using the multiple streams model as an interpretive lens, we see a first problem stream of making Flanders Top 5 in Europe by realising breakthroughs and a second problem stream of keeping ViA dynamic and carried forward by a broad front of societal actors. In the political stream, the current Flemish Government made the ViA discourse and ViA framework the centre of the governmental declaration. But in the policy stream there did not seem approaches available that were strong enough to tackle the ViA breakthroughs and create a broad multi-actor framework around them.

Meanwhile, however, as explained above (Part 2 & 3), experiences with transition thinking and transition management were being built up with DuWoBo and Plan C, and the approach gained more and more acceptance as a promising policy approach for developing long-term policies for sustainable development. During 2010 the transition discourse became the central element of the second Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy<sup>9</sup> (VSDO). Here already, several elements had converged that led to a decision to make 'transitions' the central theme in the new strategy. These elements included: the past experience with DuWoBo and Plan C and the realisation that the transition discourse had a strong appeal for strengthening and reframing the sustainability debate, a new team leader (Ilse Dries) for the administrative Team Sustainable Development who was also project leader of the DuWoBo-process and was thus familiar with the transitions discourse, the input from the scientists of the Policy Research Centre on Sustainable Development who had amongst other things been working on sustainable development policy and transitions,<sup>10</sup> and the cabinet of Minister-President Peeters that was supportive of a new approach for sustainable development policy. A lot of people that were involved in the participative process that led to the VSDO,<sup>11</sup> were also somehow involved in the ViA-process. *'The ideas that were discussed during the VSDO process, have intellectually been picked up by a number of people present, on a kind of cognitive level, and the two [transitions and ViA - EP/TB] have somehow become coupled'*, according to an interviewee.

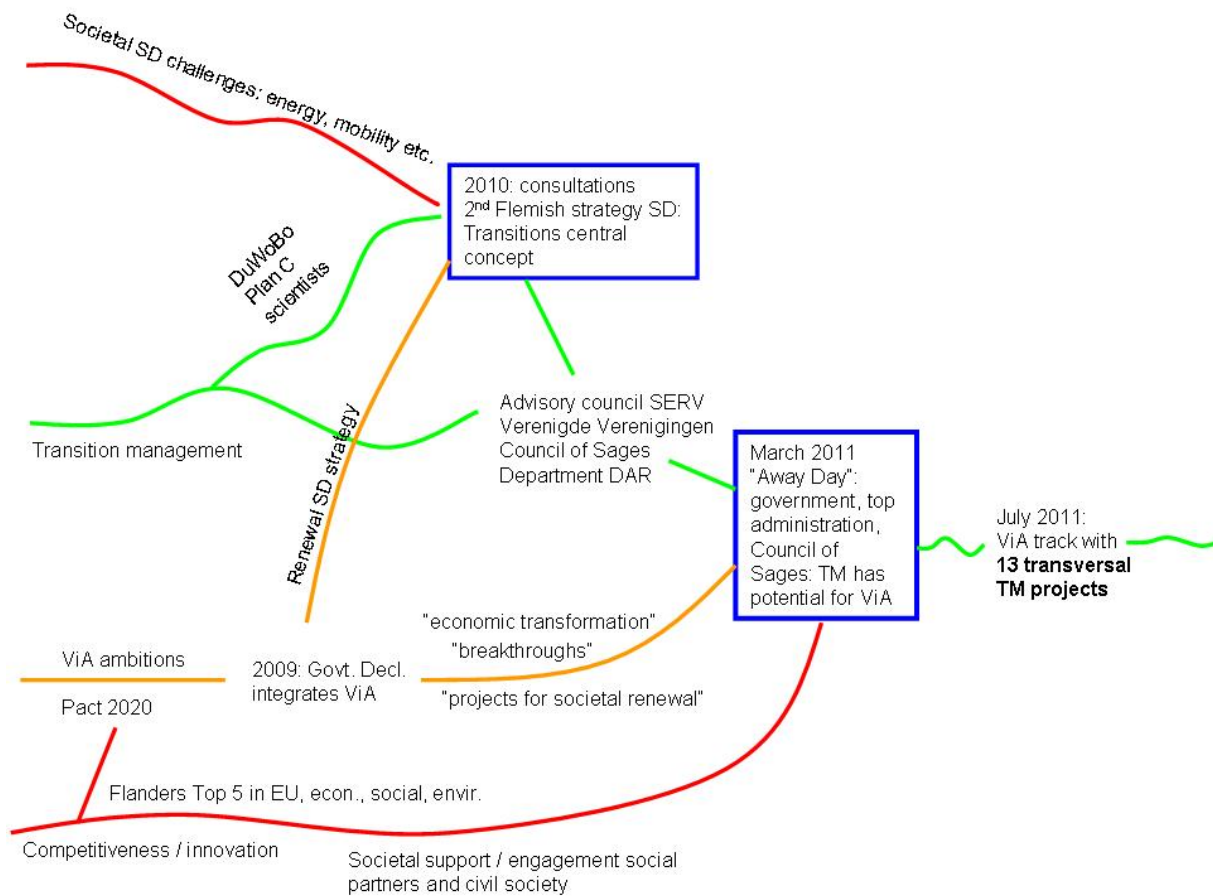
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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion of the different aspects of Flemish sustainable development policy, we refer to Spillemaeckers and Bachus (2009), Happearts (2011) and Bussels and Bachus (2012a & 2012b).

<sup>10</sup> Such as Prof Hans Bruyninckx (KU Leuven, promotor of the Policy Research Centre) and one of the current authors, Erik Paredis (Ghent University, researcher working on transitions and transition governance).

<sup>11</sup> All administrative departments and all advisory councils were present in the preparatory workshops for the VSDO during 2010.

**Figure 5 Transition management reaches 'Flanders in Action' (ViA)**



\* A schematic, simplified presentation of coupling of problem streams (in red), policy streams (in green) and political streams (orange) during policy windows (blue). See text for details.

The fact that the Flemish Government decided in July 2011 to strengthen the ViA-process by introducing 13 transition management processes is the result of a complex process in which the different streams became connected and where the activities of policy entrepreneurs were again crucial. One element that played an important role in translating the transitions discourse between VSDO and ViA, is their institutional embedding. ViA and VSDO both fall under the competence of Minister-President Peeters and as a consequence are both coordinated from within the department *Diensten Algemeen Regeringsbeleid* (DAR, Department of General Government Policy). This has considerably simplified contacts, exchange of information and ideas, and cooperation between ViA (with Brigitte Mouligneau as general coordinator of ViA) and the administrative Team SD (with Ilse Dries as head).

Another element is the fact that the advisory council SERV and a coordinating body of civil society organisations (*De Verenigde Verenigingen*) had both advised to investigate whether transition management had potential to revive ViA. This idea had also been voiced in the so-called *Raad der Wijzen* (Council of Sages), an advisory body of stakeholders and scientists, with amongst others members of SERV, civil society organisations and scientists (Hans Bruyninckx being one of them). One more element is that the consultant (Jim Baeten of TriZone) who supports the whole ViA-process, is familiar with transition thinking and open to these kind of approaches. Several of our interviewees agree that a final breakthrough was realised during the 'Away Day' of 25 March 2011, a moment that can be regarded as the 'policy window'. The cabinet of the Minister-President had organised this full day to discuss the relaunch of ViA between ministers, administrative coordinators of ViA processes and the Council of Sages. During the day, in particular members from the Council of Sages stressed

the potential of transition management. The main conclusions from the day were that ViA should strengthen its focus on big societal challenges in partnership with all interest groups, and that should be investigated whether TM is a way of taking on this challenge. In the following months, a small team under coordination of Brigitte Mouligneau (with amongst others Ilse Dries and Jim Baeten) prepared a conceptual note for the government in which a two-track approach was proposed: one track of regular policy to strengthen the ongoing implementation of ViA under the governmental agreement, and one track for developing 13 transversal policy themes with transition management and working towards long-term policy options and partnerships with stakeholders (amongst the themes were also sustainable housing and building, and sustainable materials management). The note was approved by the government on 8 July 2011. For each transversal project an ‘integrator’ (usually a high-level official) and a ‘transition manager’ (usually a mid-level official) were appointed by the Government. In the Fall and Winter of 2011-2012 the coordination team started the preparation for the start-up of 13 transition projects. The challenges are however formidable and relate to at least four big questions. One is the enormous diversity of the projects and the suitability of transition management as an approach for all of them. Two is the political willingness to go for deep changes that aim for more sustainability in all these systems (or parts of systems). Three is the willingness to involve new actors and work with frontrunners alongside regime actors. Four is the availability of organisational and substantial capacity to guide all these processes.

## 5. Conclusions

Using Kingdon’s multiple streams model, we have tried to shed light on the complicated dynamics that influence whether and how new governance approaches such as transition management can be established and gain wider influence. We think that the streams model was really useful in analysing events and explaining evolutions. So, which insights can be drawn from the episodes we analysed? We see at least seven interesting points from the Flemish experiences so far:

1. coupling of transition management to ongoing developments in and around the relevant policy domain is necessary in order to gain influence;
2. transitions and transition management hardly make it as such to the political agenda; they seem rather an example of ‘alternative specification’, as Kingdon formulates it, in the sense that they surface as the answer to a political problem or decision;
3. gaining influence for transition management is strongly dependent on factors that are not under the control of TM-actors. Policy entrepreneurs can try to prepare and ‘ride the waves’ of passing events and structural trends, but success is not guaranteed;
4. discourse development can be an important and influential result of transition management, but ideas do not work at once; they need active promotion. Our cases show a diverse set of supporting practices;
5. the form and content TM gets in practice, is structured by the context in which it is embedded. This may lead actual practice away from what transition management was intended for;
6. building up capacity and networks for strategic thinking in and between different departments, with civil servants interested in innovative forms of governance, can be a good investment for forward-looking governments;
7. from a scientific as well as a practical point of view, the analysis shows that TM as an approach captures only an early phase of transition governance (visioning, network building) and is inade-

quate for understanding the practical work of influencing regular policies. A broader concept of transition governance, in which TM can have a place alongside or even be replaced by other strategies, is necessary.

We now elaborate on these different insights in some more detail.

1. Transition management in Flanders is not a policy approach that was somehow suddenly introduced by a visionary Minister or a progressive government agency, nor did its results easily flow through and gain wider influence. The analytical lens of the streams model helps in showing how problems, policies and political streams develop alongside each other and how at certain moments (policy windows) they can be coupled, in that way pushing policy change. The establishment of TM as a new approach to policy in Flanders was not only possible because there was a felt need to develop long-term integral sustainability policies, but also because the approach could be coupled to domain-specific policy problems, either for controlling the environmental and health consequences of the construction sector (for DuWoBo) or for controlling the waste problem (for Plan C). For spreading the ideas developed in the arenas and gaining wider influence, this coupling is even more important. It is very unlikely that the two TM-processes by themselves could have gathered enough power to change the waste regime into a materials regime or to break into the ViA-process. These kind of changes can only be explained through coupling to events in the political stream (such as the obligation to implement the EU Waste Framework Directive) or in the problem stream (such as the lack of societal involvement in ViA).
2. Closely related is a second insight, namely the fact that, at least in these Flemish cases, the choice for transition management seems an example of 'alternative specification'. It is not 'transitions' or 'transition management' as such that reaches the government agenda. During the establishment of the DuWoBo and Plan C process, the main preoccupation was developing integrated and long-term sustainable development policies (in housing and building or in waste policy) and developing solutions for domain-specific problems. The form that was chosen and that had surfaced during the preparatory work of advisory councils, civil servants and scientist was transition management. In the case of ViA, the political challenge on the agenda is the transformation of the Flemish economy, preparing it for the top 5 of Europe, and that in cooperation with societal actors. The form that surfaced in the policy stream was again transition management. From a different angle, this reconfirms the first point: TM can be presented as a policy solution when it is coupled to other streams.
3. However, gaining influence for TM-processes seems strongly dependent on conditions external to the processes, a context which consists of events and structures that are not under the control of the TM-process or the individuals in it. Developments at EU-level or in the ViA-process were clearly outside the control of TM proponents. Yet, policy entrepreneurs in the TM-processes can try to be ready to hook their ideas and approaches to policy windows that come along. As Kingdon remarks: 'Individuals do not control waves, but can ride them. Individuals do not control events or structures, but can anticipate them and bend them to their purposes to some degree' (Kingdon, 2011, p. 225). This is nicely visible in the Plan C case and the shift to a materials regime. The Plan C process was important in Flanders in maturing the minds of relevant actors for the sustainable materials discourse. When the EU Waste Framework directive came along, entrepreneurial civil servants in OVAM saw a possibility to connect this European obligation with the materials discourse. As said earlier, this work of policy entrepreneurs is essential, because the coupling does not fall out of the air. It is the result of a lot of preparatory work that is usually done without a clear view of the final result and without certainty of success. The same can be



said about the breakthrough of transition management in ViA. Nobody could have foreseen this evolution when TM was introduced in 2004. Tracking the history of this decision reveals a process with a high degree of contingency, resulting from a series of small, incremental steps, without a master plan in mind.

4. The examples further show the important role of ideas or discourse in explaining the potential influence of TM. In fact, when analysing the TM-model that was worked out by Rotmans and Loorbach (2010) and following the consecutive steps that are advised in the so-called 'transition management cycle' – which was followed almost perfectly by DuWoBo and Plan C – it becomes obvious that on the substantive side mainly one thing happens: different forms of discourse construction. DuWoBo has gone through this TM cycle between October 2004 and December 2006, Plan C between June 2006 and May 2008, with as main substantive result on the table: a transition agenda that consists of an analysis of the current system, a vision for the future with transition pathways towards this vision, and ideas for experiments. But ideas do not work at once. They move around for some time, are discussed and reconsidered, are introduced in different forums and organisations. Kingdon calls it 'softening up' of the system and making it susceptible to new ideas. In our examples, a diverse set of practices can be discerned of how TM proponents try to promote their case: studying and getting acquainted with the concepts of transition and transition management, organising internal and external learning forums and workshops, bringing in external expertise and use scientific reports, writing policy notes for senior officials or for the Minister's cabinet with different paths that can be followed, 'telling the story' in a diversity of forums, trying to convince actors to set up projects and experiments in the vein of that story, and of course searching for opportunities to couple TM to regular policies. From this perspective, transition management looks like one gigantic discursive exercise. The use of a discursive analytical lens (such as used e.g. by Kern (2009) in his analysis of the Dutch energy transition) could teach us more about how these discourses work out in the TM-processes themselves and about their influence on policy, but that was not the purpose of this paper.<sup>12</sup> Suffice it to say that it is obvious that neither the substantive ideas that were developed in DuWoBo (the transition agenda for housing and building) and Plan C (the transition agenda for materials management), nor the ideas about the governance of transitions find their way untouched to regular policy or to wider encompassing regime processes such as ViA. They are moulded and reinterpreted when they enter such a new context.
5. There is an obvious fifth point that arises from the previous ones: the context in which TM gets established and the way the goals of TM-processes are framed in and through this context, co-determine its potential role and impact. When DuWoBo and Plan C were introduced, the ambition was really to try out in Flanders the 'pure' TM approach and, consequently, the typical transitions discourse was omnipresent: sustainability, regimes and niches, radical change, front-runners and so on. The two leading agencies (LNE and OVAM) and the responsible Ministers of the Environment were also willing to go along with these 'experiments in innovative environmental policy', as they were labelled. When we look at the recent breakthrough of TM in ViA, it is clear that the context is much more ambiguous. ViA originated in the context of economic competition between European regions and has become the central socio-economic innovation programme of the current Flemish Government, with competences for the 13 TM-projects distributed over all Ministers and departments. Discussions with involved civil servants and other actors, as well as results from our interviews, teach that people look at these developments with

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<sup>12</sup> It is, however, part of the PhD research of Erik Paredis, that is expected to be finished half 2013. Paredis (2011 & 2012) discusses some aspects of discursive politics.

a mixture of expectation and scepticism. The way ViA has developed, leads some to the conclusion that the government's ambition is not to initiate a structural transition process, but rather to initiate co-creation networks for the renewal of policy. In this interpretation, the use of the transition storyline shows how the government is searching for more flexible governance approaches (or new rules of the game), but not necessarily for transitions such as interpreted in transition studies, namely deep changes in structure, culture and practices. This interpretation finds support in the fact that some themes seem hardly translatable in transition thinking and/or sustainable development objectives. The fact that several themes have to work with limited means and that the transition idea is implemented top-down also feeds scepticism. Other observers follow an interpretation that stresses the felt need for breaking through existing deadlocks in regular policies and going beyond business-as-usual. They notice in different domains a remarkable turn to long-term objectives, attempts at integration with other policies and inclusion of non-traditional stakeholders. Also the fact that the government has installed a coordination structure for the implementation of transition management in the different projects feeds a cautious optimism. Since all projects are still in a relatively early phase, it is too early to comment on actual results. In any case, the 'interpretative flexibility' of TM, that was already discussed by other analysts (Kern, 2009; Scrase & Smith, 2009), surfaces here once more: the flexibility of the transitions storyline allows for connecting it to the ViA transformation agenda focused on competition and innovation, but it also threatens the commitment to deep, transformational change.

6. Our results can also be viewed from the point of view of a government that wants to remain innovative in its governance approach and in that way work towards a more sustainable society. Such a government needs people in its departments that are capable of formulating problems and potential solutions, that are willing and also have the freedom to experiment, that are open-minded enough to cooperate between departments as well as with societal actors. And crucial in the light of the analysis above and the necessity of coupling streams: people that are capable of connecting their practical terrain knowledge with a helicopter perspective that makes them aware of the ongoing changes and opportunities in the context in which they operate. Grin (2010) has aptly called this 'dual-track governance'. Such capacity demands investment in people to build up pro-active capacity as well as investment in networks where such people can meet and learn from exchanging expertise and experiences.
7. Finally, from a scientific point of view, but with important practical implications, Kingdon's multiple streams framework allowed us to start from research in the everyday practices and strategies of policy-makers, civil servants and other societal actors during their involvement in transition governance. It allowed us to make sense of their work in the context of wider ongoing contextual developments. One of the things it showed is that the current understanding of how transition management works in practice and how it influences regular policies is far from adequate. The current TM approach and associated guidelines are in fact restricted to the early phases of transition work (such as gathering frontrunners and developing visions in a transition arena). These are certainly important, given the influence discourse can have and the role engaged network participants can play, acting as policy entrepreneurs. However, realising this influence and these roles in practice demands activities that go far beyond what is conceived of in current TM. The work by researchers such as Meadowcroft (2009), Grin (2010), Smith and Kern (2009), Hendriks (2009) or Avelino (2011) on a broader concept of transition governance, in which TM can find a place alongside or even be replaced by other strategies, is of high relevance here. Something of this is already happening in practice, where the Flemish Government finances

processes that engage with transitions - such as a civil society network (*'Transitienetwerk Middenveld'*) and a network of the cultural sector (*'Pulse, Transitienetwerk Cultuur'*) - that do not use the TM approach and where the government remains in the background. With our own contribution to the work of rethinking TM and embedding it in a broader conception of transition governance, we hope to have responded somewhat to Meadowcroft's call on political scientists 'to develop a politically oriented literature on sustainability transitions equivalent in sophistication, to that produced by our innovation-oriented colleagues' (Meadowcroft, 2011, p. 70).

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