Interview with Mr Jean-François DELAIGLE

President of the Science Policy Pôle (PPS), Wallonia

What are the missions of the Science Policy Pôle?

The Science Policy Unit is a consultative body whose main mission is to provide advice on science, research and innovation policy. Bringing together players from different backgrounds who are keen to work together, the PPS adds real value to Wallonia's RDI policy through its work, studies and opinions. Charged with evaluating Wallonia's science policy every two years, it publishes a report that carries out an in-depth examination of the Walloon research and innovation system, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses and making recommendations.

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What is your assessment of the Walloon Government's R&D&I policy?

The PPS has analyzed the Regional Policy Declaration 2024-2029. It found that many of the Walloon Government's priorities coincide with those highlighted by the PPS in the CESE Wallonie memorandum.

Among these priorities, three seem unavoidable as they respond to challenges that the Walloon R&D&I system must take up:

- Restructuring the innovation landscape by improving the coordination of players and instruments in order to make the ecosystem clearer and simpler;

- Strengthening value-adding through better coordination of players, actions and stabilized funding, and improving the research continuum (fundamental, applied, development, innovation);
- Further digitalization and administrative simplification.

The Government's program is also based on a desire to evaluate support measures and certain structures, which is essential if an efficient R&D&I policy is to be put in place.

On what topics do you plan to submit own-initiative opinions?

At the end of 2024, the PPS formulated proposals to enhance the value of R&D&I in Wallonia. These proposals focus on five areas: continuing to improve the functioning of the intermediation system, strengthening listening and dialogue in order to develop collective intelligence, encouraging more SMEs to innovate, facilitating market entry and strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit. The PPS will continue its work to refine the proposals put forward.

The PPS will also be paying close attention to the future of the regional R&D&I ecosystem, particularly in view of the end of the financial resources earmarked for innovative projects under the Recovery Plan.

Finally, at the start of this legislature, the PPS will also analyze the concrete measures that will be taken by the Walloon Government to operationalize the objectives of the DPR.

What other challenges does Wallonia face in terms of R&D&I?

In addition to the challenges identified above (restructuring of the landscape, reform and simplification of the policy mix, strengthening of exploitation), two others should be highlighted. The first is the need to increase the participation of Walloon players in European research programs, and the second is the need to attract more young French speakers to the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) professions.

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Participation in European programs has positive effects on Walloon players and on the regional R&D&I system as a whole, particularly through integration into international networks and access to additional funding. As part of the Horizon Europe program, complementary and coordinated actions should be implemented to further strengthen the participation of Walloon stakeholders and increase their success rate.

The participation of young Walloons in STEAM fields has been identified as one of the weaknesses of the regional R&D&I system and of the regional economy as a whole. It is therefore essential to continue the momentum by going beyond coordinating synergies between the various STEAM promotion structures and implementing a genuine regional strategy bringing together the various STEAM stakeholders and supporters under a single umbrella.