Why we need a gap between science and practice

Some personal notes of an applied scientist

Pieter de Wolf, 28 Sep 2016

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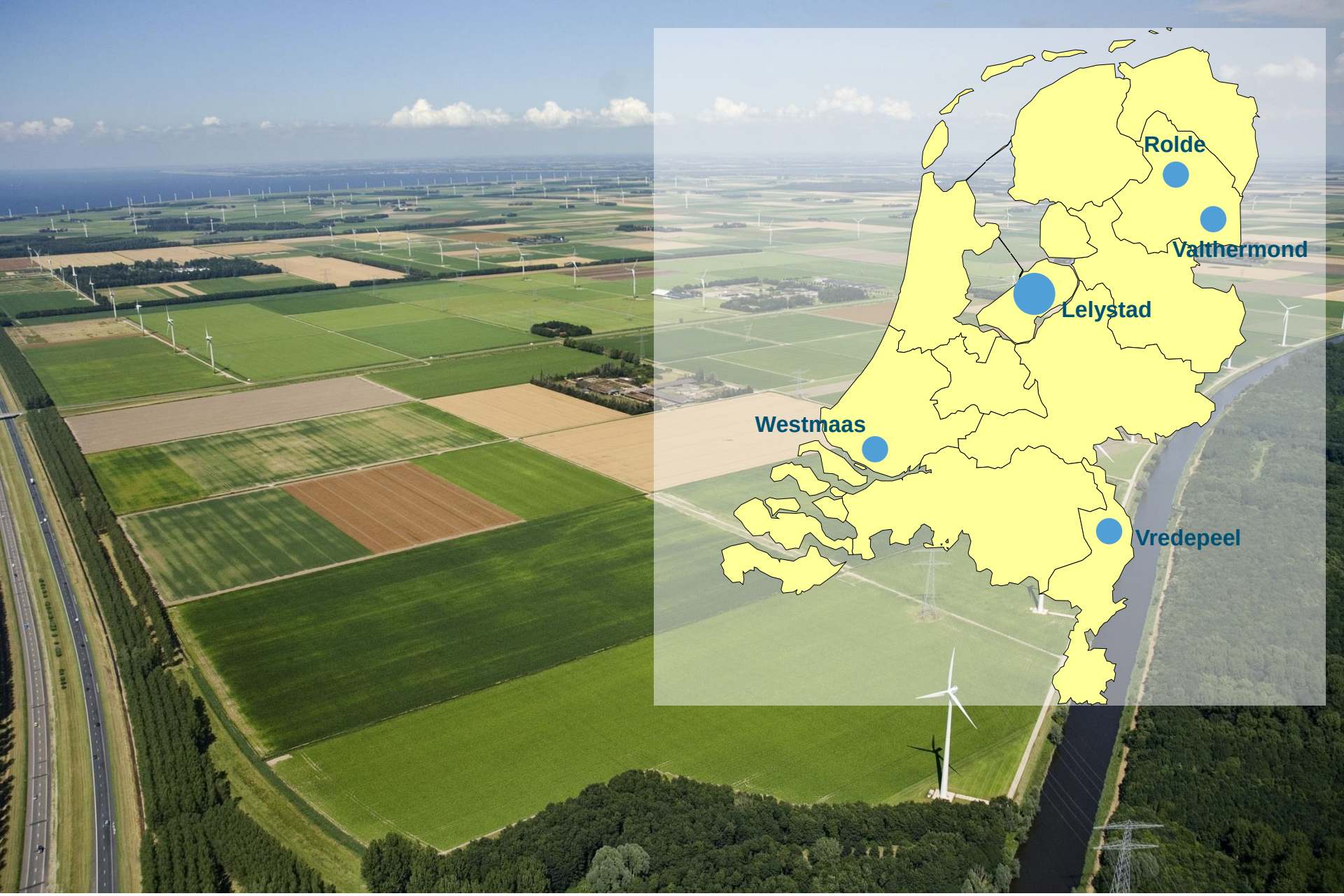

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Stakeholder interaction

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The case of Valerie (FP7)

- Two main goals
  - Access to scientific knowledge to drive innovation in agriculture and forestry
  - Valorisation of EU research
- Activities
  - WP2 Identify research output for several themes and put it in a database
  - WP 4/5 Develop a search engine beyond Google
  - WP 3 Case studies for reality check and systems testing
  - WP1 management & WP 6 Communication

The case studies I

- Stakeholder networks in different EU countries on different topics in agriculture and forestry
- The CS leader is partner in Valerie (advisor, applied research institute)
- 4-year process of articulating questions, feed them into Valerie, get relevant information back, test it in practice

The case studies II

- Three examples
  - Wheat chain – Northern Italy
    - Simple pre-harvest quality assessment
  - Onion chain – Netherlands
    - Quality problems in storage
  - Forest management – Spain
    - Re-introduce commercial forest management

The case studies III

- Some observations and suggestions:
  - The advisor plays a crucial role in the project and in the process – target Valerie at the advisor?
  - Cases are not only about technological challenges – what if most research programmes are about technology development?
  - The role of formal knowledge is not 'answering questions' only – single Q/A frame is limiting the use of Valerie?
  - It is very difficult to provide relevant information without understanding the context – is a network approach helpful?
  - Learning processes are not knowledge driven, but problem/opportunity (or curiosity?) driven – analysis of the problem/opportunity is also a research skill!

The role of knowledge

- Learning processes are not only depending on knowledge input, but also on...
  - Stakeholder interaction
  - Economic, practical, social or legal issues
  - Other normal human aspects...

- If projects are limited to knowledge only, progress could be very limited

So – the practical implications

- Develop the facilitator role
  - Formal role in projects and project organisations
  - Skilled people
- The features of the facilitator
  - Supportive
  - Networking skills
  - Basic understanding
  - Generalist
  - Analytic, good in asking questions
- Suitable role for advisors and applied researchers?
  - Conflicting interests?

The role and value of science

- Two examples:
  - Arable farming without pesticides (DK)
  - Decision support system for soil borne pests (NL)

- Don’t blame fundamental/strategic research – you could need the results in the future
- Don’t ask ‘innovation projects’ for scientific output – they should excel at other indicators

<u>Let’s maintain the gap between science and practice!</u>

Thanks for your attention!

- Feel free to ask your questions or give your comments

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