

PHD RESEARCH

LYVIA DISER

**Civil servants in white coat.
Laboratory science in the Belgian
government policy (1870-1940) -**

[Original Title : *Ambtenaren in witte jas.
Laboratoriumwetenschap in het Belgisch
overheidsbeleid (1870-1940)*]

KU Leuven, 2013. Supervisor : Johan Tollebeek.

Today, the laboratory is one of the most visible and well-known manifestations of science. The man or woman in white coat holding a test tube against the light or peering through a microscope in a background setting of glass tubes is the iconic representation of science. In the second half of the century the rise of the modern laboratory gave rise to new ways of practicing science. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, laboratory science also entered government policy. In my doctoral thesis, I explore the emergence and development of the laboratory as the authoritative management tool for the modern Belgian state. I studied cultural transfers between representatives of the state and laboratory scientists. The question I wanted to answer was what made the laboratory so appealing to the government, what the scientists' interests were, and how both institutions created a new identity for themselves and the other. This identity also raised the question of authority: how did the laboratory change the authority of the state? And furthermore, how did the laboratory itself benefit from state authority?

In approaching the state laboratory as an embedded institution, my doctoral dissertation also sheds a light on the social tipping points, such as the knowledge society, "expertocracy", the professionalisation of science and the development of the modern bureaucracy.

Throughout the period under study, the laboratory developed into a new and separate model: the state laboratory. This laboratory had very specific cultural characteristics of which the key words were objectification, social pacification, instrumentality and standardisation. This distinguished it from other laboratories during that period. The well-prepared, bureaucratic laboratory worker was the exemplification of it.