Toward more effective regional networks

A multi-method study on top-down stimulated networks within the Dutch public-policy areas of education and employment

Esther Klaster

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TOWARD MORE EFFECTIVE REGIONAL NETWORKS:
A MULTI-METHOD STUDY ON TOP-DOWN STIMULATED NETWORKS WITHIN THE DUTCH
PUBLIC-POLICY AREAS OF EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

Governing society through networked arrangements

Introduction

Governing society through networked arrangements

Imagine being the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in the Netherlands, or for that matter, in any other Western country. You are facing a challenging problem, a particular social issue that is tough and difficult to tackle. Let's say this social issue does not limit itself to a single level of the educational system, but involves them all- primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education. This means that internally within your ministerial department the policy officers of multiple directorates will have to be engaged, and perhaps several other ministerial departments as well. It is Monday morning, and you need to have them all working together by Wednesday at noon, when you have to testify in a Parliament commission on the progress you are making on the issue at hand. How can you accomplish this feat?

You may initiate a project, or form a new thematic directorate, or simply try to have them work together whilst staying within their home directorates. Either way, you will have to cross (horizontal) departmental and policy boundaries. Moreover, you know that externally, within the field, the social issue you are facing cannot conceivably be confronted let alone tackled by one type of (public-sector) actor alone. Schools may influence one part of the issue; local governments, employers, parents, and youths are responsible for other parts of the associated problems and/or the path to solutions. This means that you will have not any choice but to cross (vertical) intergovernmental boundaries. As a minister, you may enlist those actors by making laws and regulation, spending money, giving out information or purposively spreading a message (management by speech). Often your interventions will involve all four policy instruments. The question that needs to be asked is basic: How may you use the instruments in such a way that they actually stimulate effective collaboration among those actors? In other words, how can you stimulate external actors to cross their own organizational boundaries? And to complicate things further, an indefinite series of complex questions are bound to be raised: How to measure the results of your efforts? How to make sure that the new policy does not frustrate other existing policies? Does that even matter, or are the results in your own policy field more important than possible negative effects on those of other ministers? These are all legitimate questions that will be addressed in this dissertation, although not all will be decisively answered.

This PhD-thesis is, in short, about crossing public-sector boundaries through collaboration: Collaboration within the central government, within regional networks of public and private actors, and between the central government and such regional networks. This introductory chapter is structured as follows. First, the global and national developments that have fostered the need for both boundary crossings within the central government and within regional networks will be sketched. After reflecting more broadly on these international paradigm shifts, we zoom in on a concrete example: The case of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science illustrates how these general developments resulted in a series of reforms. One of these reforms resulted in an increased reliance on regional networks, as a form of cross-boundary work. As these regional networks are the central subject of this thesis, an introduction into regional networks is presented next. This chapter ends with a presentation of the research questions and structure of this PhD thesis.

A GROWING NEED TO WORK ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Over the past decades, central governments in Western societies have advocated and have been engaged in efforts to work across organizational, sectorial and policy boundaries. Such boundaries exist within and between central governmental departments, and between central government and local governments as well as non-governmental actors. In literature, several rationales have been distinguished that illustrate why working across governmental boundaries has been rising sky-high over the last decades. These rationales or stories, which apply to most Western countries, include the fragmentation rationale; the coordination rationale; the complexity rationale; the better value rationale; and the *modus operandi* rationale (O'Flynn, 2014).

The fragmentation rationale emphasizes that coordination issues have changed as a result of compensating for dysfunctions of the New Public Management (NPM). The coordination rationale takes a slightly different angle and stresses that cross-boundary work is a response to the enduring issue of coordination in a fragmented domain and is, in other words, nothing new. From the perspective of the complexity rationale, social issues have become more complex, due to demographic changes, globalization, environmental challenges, technology, et cetera, which enhanced the need for coordination and collaboration across boundaries. The better value rationale entails the belief that cross-boundary working improves effectiveness, efficiency, or quality of service provision. Lastly, the *modus operandi* rationale reflects the subjective belief that "collaboration is the future." This has also been described as a rhetorical function which reflects a 'fashion' that is suitable for political and administrative leaders, while there may be a gap between talk and action (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007).

In many Western societies, these rationales have led to changing relations between government and society: from hierarchies (TPA), via governance forms of mimicking markets (NPM), to networks (post-NPM).¹ The next sub section reflects on these international paradigm shifts. Within the context of the Netherlands, the fragmentation, coordination, complexity and better value rationales are prominently present in scholarly and practitioners' literature and debates – notwithstanding the fact that below the surface of the general debate, the *modus operandi* rationale may also play a role. Hereafter, we discuss these rationales, all leading to an increased need to work across extant formal public-sector boundaries.

International paradigm shifts: From TPA via NPM to Post-NPM

From TPA to NPM

The last decades have shown substantial paradigm shifts across nations; in both the way central governments are organized and how the relation between central governments and society is organized. Internationally as well as in the Netherlands, there has been a shift from hierarchical central governance toward more horizontal modes. The traditional relation between government and community is shaped via hierarchical and bureaucratic structures and central steering. This is known as the Traditional Public Administration (TPA) paradigm. In this view, it was assumed that a central government could manage society, by planning and controlling the primary processes via vertical structures. This perception started to crumble in the early 80's as societal issues became too complex to be addressed through segmented, top-down steered policy processes. This was the start of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm (Hood, 1991).

¹ Chapter 2 also addresses the developments from TPA to Post-NPM, from the perspective of what resulted from 40 years of grand reforms in the Netherlands. Since Chapter 2 was published as a book chapter, this redundancy is inevitable.

NPM emerged in the 1980s, as a reaction to TPA, and was introduced by some as the solution for practically all shortcomings of the traditional government. At the heart of the NPM movement was the notion that business-like principles should be adopted in the public sector. Consequentially, NPM is characterized by privatization, decentralization, separating policy making from execution, and outsourcing. Here business-like ways of working like steering for measurable results and focusing on efficiency became the dominant pattern (Kickert, 2000). All these changes were attempts to both reduce the size of the central government and to cut costs, while improving the quality of policy making and implementation.

A limitation of the NPM is that the public sector lacks the counterpart of having stakeholder value, like the private sector does, leading to a situation in which policy goals are split up into various sub goals (Moore, 1995). The consequence is that there is little attention and insight into the actual community-level outcomes. Duplication of services, a lack of cohesion, and fragmentation are among the most often reported shortcomings of the NPM approach (Williams, 2000; Moore, 1995). The strategies for coping with these shortcomings led to a new paradigm that can best be perceived as a slight adaptation of the NPM approach, rather than anything radically new. Moore's (1995) introduction of the Public Value Framework (PVF) can be regarded as one of the path-breaking models in this regard. His intention was not to replace the NPM, but to ameliorate its shortcomings. According to the PVF, complex societal issues should be tackled by collaboration via networks and interorganizational cooperation. Moore believed that NPM tends to be most effective for relatively simple policy issues, with objectively measurable goals, whereas PVF does a better job if issues are not to be broken down into smaller pieces. This 'third paradigm' is sometimes referred to as (good) governance, Public Value Framework (Moore, 1995), New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010), or simply 'Post-NPM.'

From NPM to Post-NPM

In a way, NPM gave way for a joined-up government approach (Newman, 2000). The fragmentation characteristic of both the traditional and NPM-style of organizing fostered a need for more integral solutions. Basically, governments were looking for more holistic and horizontal ways of coordinating public sector policy making and service delivery. This need of course is not exclusive for the Dutch situation. Post-NPM practices were embraced especially in countries that were most radical in adopting NPM, in particular the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Well-known foreign examples are the Joint-Up Governance in the UK (Newman, 2000); Horizontal Management in Canada (Bakvis & Juillet, 2004); Whole of Government in Australia and New Zealand (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007); and Collaborative Governance in the USA (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

Joint-up governance was first introduced by the Blair government in 1997 as a means of addressing 'wicked issues' (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007). It was presented as a counterpart of vertical silos and aimed to eliminate situations where different policies undermined each other (Pollitt, 2003; Christensen & Laegreid, 2007). Post-NPM, as a collective name for joint-up governance, whole of government etc., may focus on policy development or service delivery. It is characterized by a focus on external parties for the development and implementation of public policies. The central government adopts (or should adopt) the role of process manager; in order to stimulate and facilitate external actors to collaboratively address a particular policy issue.

Post-NPM can be seen as an umbrella term for a set of responses to the problem of increased fragmentation of the public sector (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007; Ling, 2002). In short, post-NPM is characterized by networked arrangements. From the point of view of this map, societies consist of networks of actors (Van der Steen, Peeters, & Van Twist, 2010; Castells, 1996), and the relation between central governments and society takes place via networks. The result, intended or otherwise, is that the

internal organization of the central government itself is becoming more and more network-like as well.

In order to make the above more concrete and also show the variety, let us sketch two real life examples of Post-NPM practices. Buick (2014) describes an example of working across boundaries in Australia, where the government has instigated regional coordination centers for indigenous Australians. In these centers, representatives from various governmental organizations are integrally concerned with issues such as education, employment, health, community services and legal aid. Crossing boundaries in Norway takes a whole different approach and focuses on the organization of the central government. Norway has strong sectoral ministries and relatively weak super-ministries which have coordination responsibilities across ministerial areas (Christensen, 2014). Although the central government is characterized by strong specialization, it is supplemented with a variety of other features, such as internal team work, collegial network-based working, and project groups working across hierarchical levels and sectoral boundaries.

Issues of fragmentation and coordination

After World War II the Dutch central government rapidly expanded; between 1942 and 1964, the number of civil servants doubled (Van Twist et al., 2009; Hovestadt, 2007). Normally when organizations grow, a natural consequence is increased division of labor and specialization and this was not any different for the Dutch central government. Until the 1970s, this specialization and fragmentation did not cause severe problems. But prompted by developments such as emancipation of citizens, globalization and growing welfare, specialization and fragmentation started to collide with public problems that grew in complexity. Contemporary society began to pressure the government to deliver seamless public services, one-stop-shop solutions, and efficient processes. As in every organization, tasks that were split up into a hierarchy eventually needed to be reintegrated. This process of splitting up tasks into specialized policy units and reintegrating them calls for coordination across specialized units (Thompson, 1967; Crowston, 1997; Heath & Staudenmayer, 2000).

More recently, in response to the expansion of the central government, many political party coalitions have promulgated the goal of slimming government down. Such plans often involve reducing the number of personnel in addition to decreasing the public sector's financial expenses. In order to respond to this retrenchment, government departments are encouraged to find more efficient ways to develop and implement public policy. One response is to rely more heavily on other governmental layers (e.g., municipalities); executive agencies (i.e., governmental agencies that operate at arm's length of the core department) or other public-sector actors (e.g., schools). A second way of reducing expenses is to increase interdepartmental collaboration, especially when several departments operate in overlapping domains (such as youth and healthcare, or education and employment). And a third response is simply ending some extant programs and policies and being hesitant to starting any or at least fewer new ones (Program 'Andere Overheid', 2004; Program 'Vernieuwing Rijksdienst', 2007). In brief, the increased size and dynamics of the central government and its need to slim down afterwards, fostered the need to cross boundaries within central government and between the central governments and its outside world.

A growing complexity of social issues and need for better value

The growing complexity of societal issues induced the need for cooperation and coordination across sectors and policy areas. As social life became more complex, problems have become 'wicked' (Weick, 1995; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004), which basically means that there is neither a consensus about the definition and character of a problem nor about the direction of a solution. When no single actor can address such a wicked problem single-handedly, a network of actors may be the best way to tackle complex

problems (Van Twist, 2010). For example, in the case of youth with multiple behavioral, educational and social-emotional problems, these networked actors may include schools, institutions for youth care, local governments, and many more. This leads to a society that some refer to as a 'networked society' (Castells, 1995; Van Twist, 2010).

In the same vein, policies for such complex problems cannot always be developed effectively within functionally fragmented, centralized ministerial departments (Ryan, 2001). As a result, various departments are involved in dealing with these problems (for example, youth care involves the cooperation of central departments for education, health, employment, and justice). Claims about inefficiency and the inability to effectively solve complex issues within fragmented silos have led to new organizational solutions such as intra- or interdepartmental program directorates that aim to cut across the traditional departmental silos and focus on a single issue.

An example: Crossing boundaries within a Dutch ministry

Organizations tend to assemble themselves into organizational silos, so as to be manageable and accountable. Social problems – the real difficulties and pathways of actual people, on the other hand, tend not to stick to these organizational boundaries. For example, the educational sector is organized into primary education, secondary education, vocational education, and higher education, and central governmental departments are often organized accordingly. Yet serious difficulties occur often in various educational sectors simultaneously, such as teacher shortages, which occur in both secondary and vocational education. Moreover, some social problems may occur at the intersection of educational sectors. For example, many school drop-outs leave the educational system immediately after graduating from secondary school, when they should be applying for and pursuing vocational education leading to productive careers. This means that the actual 'dropping out' takes place in neither of the school systems, but at their very intersection. And finally, social problems may occur at the intersection of departmental fields, such as education and employment. The policy fields of education and employment are closely interrelated in the sense that education should prepare pupils for their future employment, and should therefore meet the requirements of employers.

Our case context comprises the policy fields of education and employment, and especially the sub areas where these policy areas are intertwined. As we will show in this section, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has been struggling to deal with the increasing need for collaboration for years, both within and across departments. From 1999 to 2007, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science underwent four consecutive change programs, with the common aim to cope with issues including fragmentation; weak cooperation across directorates or departments; a lack of external orientation; and the need to respond more quickly to changing demands in the societal or political environment (see Table 1 for an overview).

Its first program (1999-2001) aimed to locate bottlenecks and formulate recommendations for improvement. It concentrated on two major issues: creating a stronger external orientation and improving internal organization, communication and cooperation. The stronger external orientation derived from the ministerial need to have a better notion of what it is that society wants and ensuring a permanent ability of this ministerial organization to adapt to the many external changes. The recommendations involved thematic or interactive approaches, in order to facilitate a more intensive cooperation between directorates.

Criticism	Coping mechanism	Disruption	Change program
Limited external orientation and limited internal organization, communication and cooperation	Thematic and interactive approaches to policy making (e.g., program or project teams)	--	Sprong ('Leap'), 1999-2001
Limited accountability for performance and actions	Improve the quality and efficiency of primary processes and supportive functions. More responsibilities to directors	Staff reduction target of 30%	KOCW (Quality Education Culture Science), 2001-2003
Unclear structures of authority and responsibilities of directors, lack of cooperation among directors, lack of thinking and working 'from outside in'	Centralizing power and responsibilities back to the departmental top. Introduction of shared services and increased mobility among civil servants	Fraud scandals	Apollo, 2003-2005
Follow-up and execution of the initiatives developed during previous change program	Introduction of thematic directorates; harmonization of educational legislation	--	OCWV! (Education Culture and Science is changing!), 2005-2007

Table 1. Core issues addressed in four change programs within one ministry

This ministerial second change program (2001-2003) began as a response to the pressure that the ministry felt from politics and society to be more accountable for its performance and actions. The change program aimed to improve the quality and efficiency of primary processes (policy development, implementation and inspection) as well as supportive functions. During this change program, the cabinet Balkenende II introduced an efficiency aim: all ministries had to reduce their number of employees, cutting employee costs by 11%. During the cabinet Balkenende IV this target was even expanded to a reduction of 30%. This resulted in an increased need for a flexible (i.e., high internal mobility), fast responding and cooperative organization, since significantly fewer people were required to conduct ministerial work.

With the arrival of a new Secretary General (SG) in 2003, a third change program was introduced. At the time of his arrival, the ministry was plagued by negative publicity. Two scandals (the 'Jamby affaire' and the 'HBO fraud') made painfully clear that the authority and responsibilities of directors were not at all clear. The SG held the limited accountability of Directorate Generals and increased responsibility of directors responsible for this lack of clarity. He also claimed that the then current organizational structure of thirty managers had led to fragmentation of policy and a lack of collaboration between directorates. The SG changed course and centralized power and responsibilities back to the SG, the vice-SG and the three DGs. Other criticisms were that civil servants were not thinking and working 'from outside in' and that newly developing policies did not correspond to what society needed. Solutions for that were sought in terms of shared services and increased mobility among civil servants so as to create a so-called learning environment. Along with these internal changes, the SG also announced changes in the relationship with 'the field'. Organizations had to become self-steering mechanisms, through deregulation and supporting of autonomy. Clear performance indicators about what the organization has to accomplish, along with an improved control system, would presumably decrease the amount of rules that tell the organization how to get there. One objective was to become responsive to changing social and political priorities. Another was to reinforce a governance philosophy which includes the reduction

of number of rules, strengthen internal control and responsibilities for organizations, and intensify interactive policy-making. In order to adapt to changes in public demands, OCW had to make its organization and personnel more flexible, as stated in the change program's final report. These plans were further elaborated in the next change program.

The fourth change program (2005 – December 2007) was a follow-up and execution of the initiatives developed during the third program. It entailed amongst others 1) the turnaround of the organizational structure and primary process; and 2) harmonization of educational legislation. These two interventions are the subject of the case study research in Chapter 2 of this PhD-thesis. The turnaround was defined as a fundamental shift in the ministry's focus from supply driven to demand driven policy, which required a basic change in the organizational structure and primary processes. The main problem that the Ministry faced at that time was that it could not respond adequately to changing demands of the external environment, both political and societal. Issues requiring a joint solution of multiple governmental parties were especially difficult to tackle. Also within the department itself difficulties arose as problems did not stick to the boundaries of directorates. Generally speaking, the fact that people usually continue their education through various stages of the educational system (i.e., from primary to secondary to vocational or higher education) did not fit with the internal organization that was structured in fairly separate operating silos.

During this fourth change program, a structural solution was found for the issue of fragmentation and limited responsiveness in the form of so-called thematic directorates. These temporary directorates focused on a single high priority social and/or political problem, such as the scarcity of school teachers or the aforementioned school drop-outs. They were made up of employees from several fields, as the complexity of major social problems usually affects multiple directorates. Thematic and silo-based policy directorates were supposed to remain closely aligned. Silo-based directorates would be dedicated to the continuation of existing policy and, if necessary, slightly adapt to changes in the social or political environment. The ostensible advantage of this distinction was that the maintenance and slight adaptations of the extant system and policy innovation were now separated across directorates. The idea was that this would support policy innovation, which tended to routinely be snowed under by the maintenance of the system.

In itself, thematic directorates were not an entirely new phenomenon. Close to a quarter of a century ago, in 1988, the policy for financial student support (a highly sensitive subject at that time) was organized into a thematic directorate, although it was coined differently. Although other departments initiated projects that focused on a single issue, in the Netherlands the Ministry of Education was the first to form actual directorates organized around a policy theme, next to silo-based directorates. This change led to an organizational chart looking like the one presented in Figure 1.

By 2010, the Ministry of Education had introduced the thematic directorates: 'School Drop-Outs'; 'Teacher Policies'; 'Lifelong Learning' (a collaborative directorate between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment); 'Youth Education and Care' (a collaborative directorate between the Ministry of Education and the program Ministry of Youth & Family); and 'Knowledge and Innovation' (a collaborative directorate between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economic Affairs).

Figure 1. Simplified representation of the organizational chart of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science with silo-based and thematic directorates

* Interdepartmental directorate with the Ministry of Economic Affairs
** Interdepartmental directorate with the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs

Several of these directorates address social issues by gathering regional actors together around a specific public policy issue and then stimulating them to form networks in which they collaboratively attempt to tackle the issue at hand. The functioning of these thematic directorates is addressed in one of the case studies of Chapter 2. The functioning, dynamics and added value of the regional networks that they facilitated is the subject of study in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. As an introduction to these regional networks, the next section defines regional networks; presents a brief history of regional networks in the Netherlands; and elaborates on how regional networks emerge.

REGIONAL NETWORKS: AN INTRODUCTION

Defining regional networks: Different meanings in different contexts

‘Regions’ mean different things to different people. In some contexts, it may refer to the sub national level of, for example, Eurasia or the NATO (Vayraynen, 2003), or to the level between local governments and provincial governments (e.g., in the Dutch context), or between local governments and states (e.g., in the US context). When discussing literature on regional networks, especially international literature, it helps to have a clear definition of what constitutes a regional network in the Netherlands and in other Western countries, respectively. In brief, regional networks in the Dutch context refer to the existence of an informal layer situated between the local and provincial level,² without a formal regional level authorities nor elections.

In some countries, regions are formal administrative and political bodies, with elected officials. For example, in Italy, the region is a formal administrative division, further subdivided in provinces and

² The formal institutional arrangement in the Netherlands exists of three administrative layers: the central government, the 12 provincial governments, and local governments consisting of 431 municipalities.

municipalities. Italian regions have elected councils and are – often in complex entanglements with central, provincial and municipal governments – concerned with public-policy issues such as transportation, health care, social services, education and housing (Vespirini, 2009). Similarly, in France, regions are formal layers with elected councils, and they are further subdivided in departments and municipalities. These regions do not have legislative tasks, but they do have budgets (derived from regional taxes and central government’s grants), to address issues such as economic development, spatial planning, environment, and secondary education (Smith & Heywood, 2000; Laughlin, 2008). And lastly, Spain has formal regions, which are subdivided in provinces and municipalities; its regional councils are directly elected. Between these regions, there are many variations in level of autonomy, institutions, and tasks. These tasks include planning, agriculture and tourism, and in some cases (for so-called ‘high autonomy’ regions) health, education and policing (Smith & Heywood, 2000).

Yet in other countries, the notion of regions exists, but refers to a rather informal layer, based on historical and cultural grounds within which various public (and sometimes private) actors collaborate. In some of these countries, debates are vivid on whether to evolve these informal layers into actual formal administrative layers. Especially in the UK, which does not employ a formal regional level, much debate has been going on, whether central governmental power should be decentralized to formal regional bodies. In the USA, an (intrastate) region is not an elected governmental layer – with the exception of Portland. The region is situated between the level of the state and the county, which is composed of municipalities. Sweden, Norway, and Finland have regions that do not have an administrative function, and which are further subdivided in provinces and counties or municipalities. Regional collaboration between, for example, municipalities, firms and universities takes place to promote economic development and innovation in various areas. For example, in Sweden, clusters or networks of firms and public institutions (e.g., universities) are stimulated and funded by central and local governments, to enhance regional economic development, innovation and regional competitiveness (Lundequist & Power, 2002).

A brief history of regional network development in the Netherlands

There has been a long-term debate on how and to what extent central government should stimulate regional collaboration. In brief, the discussion of and development of regional networks may be summarized as follows (Boogers, Denters & Sanders, 2015):

- ❖ 1950s: Proposal to install districts as a formal legislative layer³
- ❖ 1960s: Revival of the proposal to install districts
- ❖ 1970s: Proposal to install mini-provinces
- ❖ 1980s – 1990s: Efforts to install city regional governance⁴
- ❖ 2000s: Introduction of Daily Urban systems⁵

Plans to install a formal fourth governmental layer at the regional level were never accepted nor executed. For example, in 1947, the Committee Koelma suggested to install ‘districts’ as a fourth governmental layer; in 1974 a bill proposed to divide the country into 44 regions; in 1975 another bill suggested to downscale provincial governments so as to prevent an extra layer while still acting at the regional level. These proposals were never accepted, mainly due to resistance of either local or provincial

³ In Dutch: *gewesten*

⁴ In Dutch: *stadregionaal bestuur*

⁵ In Dutch: *stedelijke regio’s*

governments, who feared the hollowing out of their positions (Korsten et al., 2006). It did lead, however, to the acceptance of a bill to leave the three governmental layers intact and stimulate intermunicipal collaboration, via the so-called Law for Common Regulations (WGR). This situation has largely remained the same up to 2014.

In brief, most of the aforementioned plans and proposals did not follow through. This is not to say that nothing happened. The plans resulted in an instrument to facilitate intermunicipal collaboration (voluntary via the WGR and mandated via the WGR+ regulation), as well as various decentralizations and municipal rearrangements. Instead of administrative reorganizations, regional collaboration and regional networks emerged in other ways, as an indirect result of country-wide centrally stipulated decentralizations and as a deliberate strategy by the central government, often around a specific policy area.

The discussion and developments of regions have evolved from a focus on regional governance – which includes merely local governments – to a focus on regional collaboration, which focuses on policies and actions instead of institutions, and involves various public and private actors (Hajer, Van Tatenhove & Laurent, 2004; Boogers, Denters & Sanders, 2015; Jonas, 2012).

Why and how do regional networks emerge?

Three stimuli can be identified for the emergence of regional networks (see Figure 2). First, regional networks may arise bottom-up. Municipalities may decide that they need to collaborate with each other at a regional level around a certain subject. They may decide to do so, because some issues cannot be effectively addressed at the local level as they transcend the local level and occur mainly at the regional level. Examples are issues concerning the environment, infrastructure or employment (Briffault, 2000). Moreover, collaborating at a regional level offers an increased economy of scale, which may lower the costs for municipalities to buy, develop or implement goods or services (Van Tatenhove, 2009; Korsten et al., 2006). In addition, regional collaboration may provide an alternative to municipal reorganization or annexation. Such regional collaboration is voluntary, often structural, and may be either policy *rich* (e.g., with the aim to develop a regional, strategic policy agenda for employment issues) or policy *poor* (e.g., an operational shared service center for municipal tasks). Often, they are based on the aforementioned WGR regulation.

Figure 2. Three stimuli for the emergence of regional networks

Second, regionalization can be an indirect consequence of central governmental actions, specifically decentralizations. In the Netherlands, central government has been and still is decentralizing tasks and responsibilities to local governments (e.g., in health care and social services), including a devolution of tasks from provincial to local governments (e.g., in youth care). Regional collaboration may be necessary when local governments are too small to address particular issues effectively on their own. As local governments do not always possess the required capacity and competence to execute decentralized tasks and responsibilities, they naturally seek neighborly, intermunicipal collaboration with each other and with other (public) actors (Van Tatenhove, 2009; Cigler, 1994; Boogers, 2015). Such regional collaboration is voluntary, often structural, and usually policy rich.

And third, regionalization may be directly stimulated by the central government, as a deliberate strategy to stimulate the emergence of regional networks in a policy field (SZW, 2013; BZK, 2014). For the central government, regional networks are a means to simultaneously realize policy objectives at the national level (such as stimulating lifelong learning or reducing youth unemployment) as well as facilitate tailored services to end users, clients or citizens. Such regional networks are often (financially) stimulated by central government for a specific period of time, in order to tackle persistent wicked issues. The regional networks central in this thesis are examples of this latter type.

Regions have been described as the most complete unit of economic, social and ecological structures (Briffault, 2000; Keating, 1999; Lagendijk, 2006). Briffault argues that resistance to regionalism is due to political reasons rather than theoretical ones. In other words, people generally do not disagree with the notion of the region as a socio-economic and ecological entity, but they do tend to see regionalism as a step toward centralization and a shift of power from local governments. Therefore, Briffault argues, resistance to regionalism usually stems from the self-interests of local officials, firms, and other interest groups who may benefit from local autonomy and regional fragmentation. In the Dutch context, some scholars and practitioners state that regionalism lacks political legitimacy (see, for a discussion, Van Tatenhove, 2009; Stamsnijder, 2010). As the Netherlands is arranged according to three elected governmental layers (i.e., the central government, the provincial governments and the local governments), decisions made in regional networks, that are not directly elected, raises the question whether democratic and political supervision is guaranteed (Van Tatenhove, 2009; Stamsnijder, 2010). Opponents of Dutch regionalism question the democratic legitimacy of regional networks and the declining local authority. They point to unclear structures of regional arrangements, resulting in what is often called 'administrative spaghetti.' Proponents, however, emphasize the fitness of the regional level for issues that transcend the local levels of municipalities, and point to potential benefits such as increased efficiency and economy of scale. We distinguished between bottom-up collaborations and top-down collaborations, which means that for the first type, tasks, responsibilities and means from local governments are transferred to the regional level. In the second type, tasks, responsibilities and means from the central government are transferred to the regional level. We expect that issues of legitimacy are more acute in bottom-up type of regional collaborations, compared to the top-down stimulated regional networks that are central in this thesis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE OF THIS DISSERTATION

Although we start this dissertation by addressing issues of cross-boundary collaboration at the central governmental level, the core focus of this dissertation is on 'regional networks in education and employment.' The need to cross departmental and policy boundaries has on the one hand resulted in an increased use of regional networks, and on the other, the increased popularity of regional networks also reinforces the need to cross departmental borders at the central governmental level. Figure 3 presents

a visual map of the empirical papers and the specific research questions of this thesis. The central research question that will be answered in this dissertation is:

“In order to effectively address complex social issues in the public-policy areas of education and employment, when and how is (temporary) central government’s stimulation of collaboration between regional actors effective and meaningful?”

This central research question has been split up in a series of sub questions, some of which were determined beforehand and others formulated over the course of the entire PhD-research process.

Figure 3. Structure of this PhD-thesis, including chapters and research questions

In this introductory chapter, we described and discussed relevant national and international developments that led towards an increasing need for collaboration, both between and within central governmental agencies and between central governments and other regional (public and private) actors. The first empirical paper (Chapter 2) continues to explore these developments: In it, we analyze four recent attempts to overcome departmental boundaries within the central government. The accompanying key question is:

- I. “Placed within a historical context of governmental reforms, how does the Dutch central government stimulate working across boundaries within and between central governmental departments, and what lessons can be learned from analyzing examples of such attempts?”

In order to effectively tackle wicked issues, cross-boundary work at the central government level should go hand in hand with stimulating cross-boundary work at the levels where policies are implemented. Therefore, after Chapter 2, we shift the focus of the thesis from collaboration at the central government level to collaboration within *regional* networks. In preparation for the empirical studies, Chapter 3 reviews the literature on networks as well as literature on regionalism, developing an integrated framework for analyzing regional networks. Chapter 3 addresses the question:

- II. “Given that there is not one single, overarching network theory, what aspects of the origins of network theory and regional theories may be used to best shape a powerful lens through which we can observe and explain the dynamics in regional networks in the public sector?”

In addition, we recognize that networks occur in all shapes and forms. In order to specify the types of networks that are central in this study (i.e., their common grounds or similarities), as well as identify dimensions based on which they differ from each other, we review extant network typologies and dimensions and aim to develop an overall categorization of networks. By doing so, we shape a ‘lens’ through which we observe the networks in the empirical papers that follow.

- III. “Given that ‘networks’ may refer to a wide range of theoretical and empirical concepts, what practical overall classification of extant network typologies may be developed?”

Chapter 4 looks at the core concept of stimulating regional networks at the network level. It presents an empirical study on regional networks, exploring what constitutes and affects regional networks effectiveness. For this, we draw heavily upon the existing literature on network and project effectiveness. Chapter 4 comprises two distinct studies. The first is a small but in-depth comparative case-study of two regional networks within a single public policy field. The second is an ensuing empirical study of eleven similar regional networks that span across four public-policy fields. The key question that is answered in this chapter is:

- IV. “Given the temporary character of governmental stimulation of network formation and the preferably enduring effects of this stimulation, is there a tension within regional networks between obtaining short-term results, on the one hand, and the establishing of potentially enduring network relations, on the other?”

The difficulty for central government to work across departmental boundaries (see Chapter 2) has resulted, amongst others, in an amalgam of regional networks. During the execution of the two empirical studies of Chapter 4, we did note a side effect of stimulating the emergence of regional networks: Regional networks that were organized around various public policy issues seemed to overlap and affect each other. Chapter 5 presents a follow-up study concerning the same eleven networks reported on in the previous chapter: Instead of looking at the effectiveness of each of the regional networks separately, we explore how these distinct networks affect each other, using the literature on similar phenomena such as ‘project networks’ and ‘network portfolios.’ From this expanded point of viewing regional networks, it becomes useful to refer to overlapping regional networks as a ‘regional meta-network,’ which leads to posing the following question that guided this chapter:

- V. “How may regional meta-networks affect the formation, effectiveness and endurance of their underlying component networks?”

The added value of stimulating regional networks, especially when this financial stimulation is meant as a temporary impulse, is debated by both the central government and by regional actors. Chapter 6 explores the conditions under which regional network actors find temporary stimulating regional networks to be of added value. This chapter addresses the final, and quite practical, specific question of this thesis:

- VI. “Under what conditions is the stimulation of regional networks perceived as meaningful and what comprises this perceived added value?”

While Chapter 6 discusses the added value of the current use of regional networks, Chapter 7 presents and discusses several strategies for making more optimal use of regional meta-networks so as to facilitate more effective and efficient regional networks. In addition to a synopsis, Chapter 7 discusses limitations of the conducted research as well as future research that this thesis recommends.

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CHAPTER 2

Stumbling across boundaries:

Four recent efforts of the Dutch central government to cross departmental boundaries⁶

⁶ A slightly adapted version of this chapter has been published as:

Klaster, E., Wilderom, C.P.M. & Muntslag, D.R. (2012). *Stumbling over boundaries: Four recent efforts of the Dutch central government to cross boundaries in education and employment*. In: J. Halligan, J. O'Flynn en D. Blackman (eds.), *Crossing boundaries in public management and policy*. Routledge: London.

In order to match the format of this thesis' chapters, several tiny changes to the original book chapter have been made, such as the inclusion of an abstract and a theoretical framework.

Stumbling across boundaries

Four recent efforts of the Dutch central government to cross departmental boundaries

ABSTRACT

Like many other Western governments, the Dutch central government has been experimenting with new organizational approaches to deal with complex public-policy problems. In this paper we describe four recent attempts to cross functional boundaries in the public-policy fields of education and employment. Each of the four cases reflect a specific approach to the crossing of boundaries: 1) change a ministry's organizational structure; 2) synchronize several ministries' policy instruments; 3) stimulate people to think in terms of broader, boundary-crossing policy topics; and 4) harmonize legislation. Although the four cases are different in nature and scope, they show that there are certain common enablers and barriers for the Dutch central government to work successfully across boundaries. We conclude this paper with gained insights.

INTRODUCTION

As a direct effect of division of labor and specialization, coordination is inherently necessary, since every task that has been split up by a hierarchy eventually needs to be reintegrated (Thompson, 1967; Crowston, 1997; Heath & Staudenmayer, 2000). When the task at hand involves a complex process, such as public-policy making, the process of dividing and reintegrating may become particularly complex. Dividing up public sector tasks creates boundaries between those tasks. Boundaries are defined here as the social, structural or symbolic lines that divide governmental departments, directorates, and public policies. As contemporary societies pressure governments to deliver seamless public services, one-stop-shop solutions, and efficient processes, those boundaries need to be crossed. Crossing boundaries means: looking and working beyond organizational (between departments and directorates) and policy lines so as to solve complex and high priority policy issues and/or increase efficiency. The research question that is addressed in this paper is: Placed within a historical context of governmental reforms, how does the Dutch central government stimulate working across boundaries within and between central governmental departments, and what lessons can be learned from examples of these attempts?

We start this paper by sketching how the Dutch central government has evolved over the past forty years, with regard to intra- and inter-departmental cooperation. Between 1969 and 2011, a series of governmental reforms were introduced, which provide the context within which the four cases evolved. In this paper, key characteristics of the policy fields of education and employment are being noted, and we describe the utilized methods of data collection. Next, we present our four case analyses. We conclude the paper with a synthesis and gained insights, as well as suggestions for future research.

Coordinative challenges: A brief overview of forty years of grand reforms

After the Second World War, the Dutch central government grew rapidly; between 1942 and 1964, the number of civil servants doubled (Van Twist *et al.*, 2009; Hovestadt, 2007). This growth led to an increase

of specializations. Until the 1970s, this did not cause severe problems. But prompted by developments such as emancipation of citizens, globalization, and growing welfare, specialization and fragmentation started to collide with public problems that grew in complexity. The Dutch government realized that changes had to be made.

What followed was a long tradition of Dutch governmental reforms (between 1969 and 2011). Although the Dutch public sector reforms vary in nature and scope, they address three recurring themes: 1) The government's inability to be responsive to societal changes; 2) Its inability to coordinate effectively across departments; and 3) A government that had become ever more overweight. The three problems are interrelated; the larger a government grows and the more policies and regulations it makes, the greater the need to divide tasks into small bits and pieces, which increases the need for coordination across boundaries. Throughout the years, there has been an increasing need for smarter inter-departmental coordination. Appendix I summarizes the core challenges and proposed solutions of the various grand reforms. As we will explain in this section, the reforms largely resemble those of other Western societies, but they have also some distinctive characteristics.

1970s: Departmental reorganizations

The reforms during the early '70s reflect the struggle with traditional bureaucracy. The core problem at that time was that policy areas were not divided efficiently across departments (Committee Van Veen, 1971); this was the result of public problems that had grown in complexity and that subsequently started to cross the boundaries of traditional departments. The early reforms sought solutions via drastic departmental reorganizations (MITACO, 1977). Although this temporarily tackled the problem, departmental reorganizations did not provide a solution in the long run, because society and its problems kept changing. Moreover, many reform plans required large investments, and were often not executed at all (Van der Steen & Van Twist, 2010).

1980-1990s: The introduction of NPM

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, several governmental advice committees (e.g., Committee Vonhoff, 1980; Committee Verbaan, 1983) found that the level of fragmentation at the central government was still too high and the government was still unresponsive to society. The solutions these committees suggested included a smaller cabinet, outsourcing, decentralization, a higher mobility among civil servants across departments, and managing for results. The reforms that followed comprised a range of new public management (NPM) practices, including outsourcing, decentralization, privatization, separating policy making from execution, and an increased focus on results and efficiency (Kickert, 2000). These changes were attempts to reduce the size of the central government and to cut back costs, as well as an attempt to improve the quality of policy making and implementation (Kickert, 2000). The result of these efforts was that vertical accountabilities were strengthened and that incentives were aligned with the outputs of distinct departments and units within those departments, which is counterproductive in terms of inter-unit cooperation (Perri 6, 2004; State Services Authority, 2007). Outputs that were the result of cooperation across departments were much more difficult to define and measure, and were therefore given a lower priority. So, although NPM increased the public administration's efficiency, it reinforced the already built-in issues of fragmentation, duplication of services and a lack of cohesion (Williams, 2000; Moore, 1995).

1990-2010: Post-NPM in the Netherlands

Between 1990 and 2000, the central government still faced the old familiar problems: a too large and too fragmented central government, as a result of having too many civil servants, tasks, divisions and

functions, unresponsiveness to society, and inefficient use of means. In short, departments had become unmanageable for ministers. Again, solutions were sought in terms of a smaller government, separating policy and execution, and having few core departments (Committee Wiegel, 1993). Moreover, additional solutions were suggested, including having fewer policies and rules, ending policies and being reserved to start new ones, creating less overlap between departments, and increasing coordination (Program 'Andere Overheid' 2004-2006; Program 'Vernieuwing Rijksdienst' 2007-2010). These recent reforms show characteristics of a post-NPM approach. A popular solution was sought in terms of interdepartmental program directorates and departmental thematic directorates. These program and thematic directorates cut across the traditional silos and focus on a single societal issue.

Dutch developments in an international context

When we compare the recent Dutch reforms to post-NPM approaches elsewhere in Western countries, we notice two main differences. First, while for example joined up government in the UK was primarily politically driven (initiated by the Blair government), the latest reform in the Netherlands was initiated and led by top civil servants rather than politicians (Vernieuwing Rijksdienst, 2007). This reform concerned the coordination of support units, and not of policy units. Top civil servants leading the change program sought solutions in terms of shared services for information and communications technology (ICT) and human resource management, reasoning that fragmentation in business processes may foster fragmentation in policy processes (Vernieuwing Rijksdienst, 2007). Three of the four case studies that we will present in this paper are departmentally – and not politically – driven, although they concern policy units, and not operational systems.

Second, the Dutch approach tends to focus on organizational structural solutions. During the 1990s, solutions to deal with complex public policy problems were sought in making use of additional structures instead of inter-departmental rearrangements. Examples of such additional structures are program ministries, thematic directorates, and task forces, which existed next to the traditional bureaucratic structures. The underlying argument is that the difficulty is not so much how to stimulate specialists and professionals to cooperate, but how to make sure that these people and their organizations are flexible enough to respond to political and societal changes (Van der Steen & Van Twist, 2010). Our first case study is an example of such a structural approach to overcome organizational boundaries.

This historical overview clearly reflects the persistence of the problems at hand. Large reforms at the level of the overall central government often did not have the outcome one hoped for – and may not be the best way to address stubborn issues such as fragmentation. But next to these large reforms, there have been more, smaller scaled efforts to cross boundaries within and between departments as well. We take a closer look at four of these efforts, all situated in the area of education and employment, involving the Ministry of Education Culture and Science and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. We first explore the need to cross boundaries in the policy areas of education and employment; as the characteristics of these fields prompt the need for the aforementioned departments to work together.

Crossing boundaries in education and employment

Working across boundaries in the policy fields of education and employment has received a lot of attention by the Dutch central government, for several reasons. First, the policy fields of education and employment are interrelated fields. They are interrelated because the education offered should meet the requirements set by employers. Education and employment are also intertwined by 'lifelong learning':

the principle that adults should engage in lifelong learning activities in order to increase the overall educational level of the working population. The interaction between the two policy areas requires them to be mutually adjustable and thus demands inter-departmental collaboration.

Second, crossing boundaries within the policy field of education is important, because policy problems occur in various educational sectors simultaneously, or emerge at the intersection of various educational sectors.⁷ School drop-outs are an example of such a policy problem: Not only do school drop-outs occur in various educational sectors; they also frequently drop-out when moving from one sector to the next, for example from secondary to vocational education. This leaves the problem of whose responsibility this is; that of the secondary schools or of the vocational schools? Tackling such a problem requires close cooperation and shared responsibility of both school types and, subsequently, of both governmental directorates.

The third reason involves the organization of the fields of employment and education in which decentralized networks have become a common practice for central government to translate national level ambitions into regional and local level action. These networks consist of, amongst others, representatives of local governments, schools, social security providers, and firms. In another study, we learned that the same individuals tend to be involved in projects that were developed in distinct parts of the central government (Klaster, Wilderom & Muntslag, 2010). As a consequence, these actors notice fairly quickly when the policies and objectives of those separate projects do not gel well. Distinct projects may reinforce each other, but may also conflict. To illustrate, a project for school drop-outs (developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) and a project for youth unemployment (developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) reinforce each other in the sense that certain instruments- such as coaches- can be used for both target groups. However, the two projects may also conflict at some level. The project for youth unemployment encourages schools to enroll unemployed youth. But because these youths have a heightened chance to drop-out again, this complicates the policy objective of decreasing school drop-out rates. Hence, in order to simplify the execution of policies and increase their effectiveness, well harmonized objectives at the central governmental level are essential.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ‘post-NPM’ paradigm has, under various labels,⁸ made crossing boundaries its core concern. There are a vast number of ways of ‘crossing boundaries’ or ‘joining up’. One may focus on horizontal or vertical linkages (e.g., between governmental layers), or involve groups outside the government; and it may concern policy development and/or policy implementation (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Pollitt, 2003). In addition, crossing boundaries may be fostered via pooled budgets, organizational mergers, joint teams, or informal agreements (Ling, 2002; Hunt, 2005). It can also occur via new accountabilities and incentives, such as shared outcome targets and regulations, or even via shared service deliveries (Ling, 2002). Table 1 provides a framework for categorizing Post-NPM practices, together with concrete examples.

⁷ The Dutch education system consists of primary education (for children from 4 to 12 years old); secondary education (from 12 to 16-18 years old); either followed by vocational education (non-academic, basic level of professional education); higher professional education (sometimes referred to as ‘universities of applied science’); or academic education (research oriented universities).

⁸ Such as Joined up Government in the UK (Newman, 2001); Horizontal Management in Canada (Bakvis & Juillet, 2004); Whole of Government in Australia and New Zealand (Christensen & Lægreid 2007); Collaborative Governance in the USA (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003); New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010); and Public Value Framework (Moore, 1995).

Type of solution	Examples
Structural solutions	Mergers; thematic directorates; project or working groups; super ministry with coordinating tasks; shared service centers
Culture/people solutions	Effects of individual characteristics (e.g., gender; tenure; education); informal agreements; joint training
Regulations/performance solutions	Integrated regulations; pooled budgets; shared outcome targets

Table 1. Three types of solutions for crossing boundaries

Structural solutions

One approach to crossing boundaries is via so-called structural solutions. For example, a joining up approach via structural interventions can be seen in the strengthening the position of the prime minister's office, undertaken as a means of making sure that no conflicting policies are developed (Halligan & Adams, 2004). Other examples of structural interventions are the creation of interdepartmental teams, thematic directorates, new cabinet committees, task forces, and the like (Halligan & Adams, 2004). These cross-cutting groups often focus on a singular issue, replacing or existing next to functional silos. They may be organized based on a specific *purpose* or task, such as developing a specific regulation; based on a *process* or function, for example, policy development, accountancy or communication; be based on *clientele*, such as unemployed youth or children with learning disabilities; or be based on *place*, that is, a specific geographical area (O'Flynn, Halligan & Blackman, 2010; Kelman, 2007).

Culture/people solutions

From a cultural perspective – as opposed to the structural perspective described above – the goals of joining up cannot be fulfilled by structural changes alone. Cultural change that affects processes and attitudes is also necessary (Christensen & Lægheid, 2007). Although cultures are notoriously stubborn and persistent, a culture that stimulates cross-boundary work can be fostered via the right incentives and leadership behaviours. Culture/people solutions focus on enabling people to work across boundaries, via interventions such as joint learning, physical closeness, allowing for errors, supporting pattern-breaking behaviors, and making sure that incentives support crossing boundaries instead of incentives focused on the individual or home organization's core tasks (Blackman, 2014). In addition, making use of individual characteristics may enhance the culture of cross-boundary work, by making sure that 'the right people are at the right table,' based on characteristics such as role, attitude and networking skills (Christensen et al., 2014).

Regulations/performance solutions

In literature on Post-NPM approaches, most attention is given to structural and cultural solutions and perspectives on crossing boundaries. One can, however, think of interventions that affect regulations, performance and targets and the like, as means to foster input and incentives for working across boundaries. Examples are integrative regulations, instead of having silo-specific ones, pooled budgets, and shared outcome or performance targets (Paun & Blatchford, 2014).

Enablers and barriers for working across boundaries

We review extant literature on Post-NPM practices, including Joint Up Governance, Whole of Government, but also more traditional interorganizational relations literature, so as to provide a framework of enablers and barriers that is of use when analyzing case studies. In these literatures, many enablers and barriers have been put forward by scholars and practitioners, usually derived from case studies. The

presence of enablers is not enough; there should be a lack of barriers as well (Blackman, 2014). We clustered the enablers and barriers into five categories: 1) goals; 2) people, culture and leadership; 3) structures and processes; 4) resources; and 5) incentives, accountability and performance measurement. This framework was used for analyzing and interpreting the data of the case studies, that are introduced in the next section.

Enablers		Barriers	Sources
Goals	Clearly defined, mutually agreed shared goals; shared purpose or goal that cannot be achieved alone	Narrowly defined goals for each unit	Pollitt, 2003; Ling, 2002; Parston & Timmins, 1998; Linden, 2002; Victorian State Services Authority, 2007; Glasby et al., 2011; Blackman, 2014
People, culture and leadership	Long term relationships to facilitate trust and participation; culture of trust and joint problem-solving; feedback and communication; boundary spanning skills Clear mandate and central leadership; having the right people at the table (those responsible for implementation should be involved) Desire (not force) to pursue collaboration; freedom to 'break the rules'; experiment and innovate	Staff turnover Lack of decision making power and capabilities (location and level of those involved); shifting or lack of political support and prioritizing Issues of turf; perceived threats to status, authority and legitimacy; uneven power balance between actors	Pollitt, 2003; Bardach, 1998; Buick, 2014; Victorian State Services Authority, 2007; Blackman, 2014; Ling, 2002; Linden, 2002; Parston & Timmins, 1998; Paun & Blatchford, 2014; Perri 6, 1997; Glasby, et al., 2011; Talbot & Talbot, 2014
Structure and processes	Structures that support cross-boundary work, such as; interdepartmental working groups, strong central prime minister's office	Clashing and persistence structures and procedures; tension between core business and collaborative tasks	Perri 6, 1997; Glasby, et al., 2011; Blackman, 2014; Halligan & Adams, 2014
Resources	Sufficient and appropriate resources (including time and money)	Lack of aligned budgets with cross-boundary targets	Victorian State Services Authority, 2007; Ling, 2002; Bardach, 1998; Paun & Blatchford, 2014
Incentives, accountability and performance	New incentives and reward structures; tolerance for failure; appropriate incentives and rewards Sense of shared responsibility; accountability for joint working; clarity of roles and responsibilities Focus on measurable outcomes; shared performance targets; system to measure and evaluate progress toward goals	Incentives or financial rewards focused on the own area; lack of evidence that cross-boundary work will add to tackling the issue Lack of accountability and performance targets	Parston & Timmins, 1998; Glasby et al., 2011; Perri 6, 1997; Paun & Blatchford, 2014; Ling, 2002; Victorian State Services Authority, 2007

Table 2. Enablers and barriers for crossing boundaries (partially derived from O'Flynn, 2014)

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASES AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The type of joined up government that we describe in this chapter concerns policy development within the Dutch central government. They reflect four different attempts to cut across boundaries (both within and between ministerial departments) within the policy areas of education and employment. Table 3 sums up the key characteristics of the four case studies: their core objectives, their scope (whether intra- or inter-departmental), and their policy area.

	Intervention type	Core objective	Scope
Case I	Structural	Realize an integral approach to policy problems that occur in several functional units	Inter- and intra-departmental
Case II	Structural/policy instruments	Realize an integral approach to regional employment policies in order to avoid overload and conflicting policies	Inter-departmental
Case III	Culture/people	Formulate common threads that function as guidelines along which cross-boundary policies should be developed	Intra-departmental
Case IV	Regulations	Develop one integral educational law in order to reduce fragmentation and overlap	Intra-departmental

Table 3. Key characteristics of the four change programs

Case I describes a *structural* solution to crossing boundaries. Specialized directorates were installed to deal with complex and high priority policy problems, both within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (intradepartmental) and between this ministry and others, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (inter-departmental). Case II describes the efforts of an inter-departmental committee concerned with regional employment and education policies. The committee's objective was to harmonize and integrate *policy instruments*, such as integrating funding towards regional actors. Herewith, this case reflects a structural solution combined with a specific focus on policy instruments. Case III entails an attempt to cross organizational boundaries based on the content of policies, by defining common threads at the top level of the ministry and test whether new policies fit these common threads. This case may be best understood as a *culture/people* solution, as it affects leadership and ways of thinking. Finally, case IV describes a *regulation* solution to crossing boundaries: by trying to establish a single educational law out of five distinct sector-based laws.

The study was carried out between January 2007 and August 2011, when the main author was situated within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. During that period, several forms of data related to the cases were collected, ranging from interviews, archival documentation (e.g. research reports; minutes from meetings; audit reports), and participant observation. Table 4 illustrates which sources were used for which case study.

	Interview data	Archival data	Participant-observation data
Case I	25 Interviews: with policy makers, change managers, directors, and the Secretary General	Action plans, audit reports, minutes of Management Team meetings	--
Case II	Two group interviews: one with 12 civil servants from various ministries prior to the start of the committee; and one with 14 regional network actors to discuss the solutions proposed by the committee	Research reports and advisory reports; minutes of meetings between top civil servants from various departments	Participation in inter-departmental committee for ten months (two-weekly meetings)
Case III	Eight interviews: with the Director General in charge of the common thread program, two directors, and five policy makers	Action plans, progress reports	--
Case IV	Two interviews: with two civil servants; one in 2008 and one in 2011	Letters to parliament, action plans	--

Table 4. Sources of data collection of the four case studies

THE CASE STUDIES

Case I. Thematic directorates- a structural solution

In 2005, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science initiated a change program in order to address two core challenges: 1) responding to the changing demands of the external environment and 2) tackling problems that required a collaborative effort between various directorates. One of the change program's components was the introduction of seven intra- and inter-departmental thematic directorates. These thematic directorates were to focus on a single, high priority public policy problem that occurred in various school types simultaneously. An example of an intra-departmental thematic directorate was the directorate for School Drop-outs; an example of an inter-departmental one was Lifelong Learning. With the thematic directorates focusing on new, changing, or high priority policy issues, the traditional functional directorates remained focused on their core tasks: to manage standing, ongoing policies. This separation was expected to reduce the workload of civil servants. Note that the structural solution implied that a topic was lifted out of the standing organization into a specialized unit, meaning that boundaries were shifted rather than crossed.

Descriptive findings

Between 2005 and 2008, five thematic directorates were introduced. The thematic directorates succeeded with regard to the first, externally oriented, objective: Responding to the changing demands of the external environment. They were able to address a high priority issue and responded effectively to the external environment. They were praised, both by internal and external actors, for really putting issues on the agenda and for turning plans into action. In addition, they appeared to have symbolic value; the mere fact that a specialized directorate was initiated was a sign to relevant external parties (such as schools or interest groups) that a specific problem was given high priority. However, an interesting paradox emerged. External actors saw inter-departmental directorates as an illustration that departments were collaborating intensively. At the same time, the new thematic directorates were criticized for developing policies and funding that were too narrowly defined (i.e., solely within their own boundaries). They were seen to show little synchronization with the policies and funding of other thematic directorates – even when the social issues interrelated.

The second objective of thematic directorates, tackling problems that required a collaborative effort between various directorates, reflected an internal matter. Were thematic directorates better at

addressing complex policy problems that required working across boundaries than functional directorates? Because of the thematic directorates, less cooperation was needed between functional directorates. Instead, cooperation between thematic and functional directorates became crucial for effective policies. Some thematic directorates functioned as a catalyst for collaboration between directorates, yet others had an opposite effect. In these instances, the thematic and functional directorates were felt to grow further apart from each other, because the thematic directorates built a wall around themselves, and functional directorates left the subjects at hand entirely to the thematic directorates. Moreover, cooperation between thematic directorates was almost non-existent, despite the fact that thematic subjects often affect each other. In other words, thematic directorates seemed to create new boundaries of their own: thematic ones. What seemed to be missing was a natural reflex to look beyond the borders of one's own directorate- whether functional or thematic- to see how other directorates' policies affected their own.

Some negative side effects occurred. First, the perceived workload went up instead of down, due to the extra coordination that was needed between thematic and functional directorates. Functional directorates still needed to cooperate with each other, but now also had thematic directorates to cooperate with. Second, the struggle about who was responsible for what was intensified (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2009). And finally, closing the- temporary- directorates down caused stress and insecurity for civil servants, as this took place in a time of personnel cutbacks. Mainly based on these three side-effects, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science decided not to start up new thematic directorates and to close three extant ones. Instead, he claimed, thematic policy problems should be addressed in lighter organizational forms than formal directorates, such as projects within existing functional directorates. In conclusion, thematic directorates were quite successful from an external actors' point of view, but less so from an internal organization perspective and did not notably contribute to a culture of cross-boundary working.

Case II. An inter-departmental committee- an structural/instrumental solution

In 2009, the department heads of the ministries for Social Affairs and Employment, Education, Culture and Science, Nature and Agriculture, and Economic Affairs had come to realize that people who work at the regional level of the education and employment field experienced an overload of separate governmental projects, overlapping or conflicting objectives, and managerial stress. Together, these ministries installed an inter-departmental committee whose task was to make recommendations about how to remove and avoid fragmentation and duplication in regional employment policies.

Descriptive findings

The inter-departmental committee chose five key organizing issues that together were to provide better harmonized or even integrated regional employment and education policies. These five key issues are summed up in Table 5, and include an outline of the advice given by the committee.

In brief, the advice focused on harmonizing and integrating policy instruments; from funding regulations to account managers (i.e., civil servants who functioned as linking pins between the central government and the regions). The first issue was the extant amalgam of specific and often temporary funding regulations (the accompanying recommendation being a suggestion which funding to integrate and which one to end). The second issue concerned the fact that 'a region' was not a formal entity and every departmental directorate used its own delimitation. The third issue concerned account managers: every directorate had its own account managers, which meant that regional actors had to deal with multiple account managers around often partially overlapping themes. The committee's recommendation included a three-fold solution: 1) account managers were to *inform* each other; or 2) *cooperate* with

each other; or 3) account management should be *integrated*, so that every region would have a single account manager responsible for various related topics. The fourth issue concerned communication from departments and politicians toward the regions, which was at times conflicting. Moreover, similar sets of information were collected by distinct sections of the central government, instead of shared internally. The fifth, finally, involved avoiding duplicating or conflicting policy objectives.

	Situation at the start (2009)	General advice of the committee
1. Funding regulations	Amalgam of specific, temporary funding regulations	Integrate some in bulk budgeting and end others
2. Regional delimitation	A region is not a formal entity and every department uses its own delimitation	Less differentiation or even a uniform delimitation of regions
3. Account management	Every directorate and department had their own account managers (civil servants who act as a linking pin between a region and the central government for a specific topic)	1) account managers have to <i>inform</i> each other; or 2) have to <i>cooperate</i> with each other; or 3) account management has to be <i>integrated</i> , so that every region will have a single account manager responsible for various related topics (this latter intervention only makes sense if the same regional delimitations are used)
4. Communication and information	Departments and politicians may have conflicting messages; and several sections of the central government collect the same sort of information from the same external actors	Communication from various departments out to the region is better adjusted; more information from the region is shared between departments and executive agencies
5. Policy objectives	Duplicating or conflicting policy objectives	Better coordinated objectives and policies toward the regions

Table 5. Summary of the five key organizing issues of Case II

When the committee began in 2010, it faced an amalgam of governmental projects, funding and national level ambitions. The reason for this amalgam was that there had been enough money and political approval to develop all kinds of specific projects. But during the committee's existence (from 2010 to 2011), the tide changed drastically. The former cabinet fell and after seven months of political vacuum, a new liberal and right-wing cabinet was installed. Faced with great economic challenges, this cabinet announced major savings in almost all policy areas. Many projects were to be terminated and temporary funding regulations were either slashed or had to be integrated in the standard bulk budgets of departments. Despite the fact that reducing the number of distinct governmental projects had been one of the committee's ambitions, the new cabinet's drastic approach undercut the relevance of the committee. The committee reasoned that since many projects were to end, trying to coordinate and integrate policy instruments was not relevant anymore – at least to these specific projects. Instead, the committee evolved into a platform for a limited period of time, whose members came together every two months to exchange information about what each department was working on; in order to detect possible conflicting policies. After a while, however, when the new Cabinet had announced its plans for every department, all policy makers retreated to their own core departments and the platform died a silent death. Reflecting on the process, six months after the formal abolishment of the committee, one of its members declared:

"Although we started of hopeful, after the cabinet change, everybody retreated to their own departments. From collaborating, we went back to just informing. Last month, the committee has been officially declared dead. If the need resurrects, we will just build new coalitions." [policy advisor, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science]

Interesting to note is that even within this interdepartmental committee, which core task was to stimulate integral policies, it was hard to withstand the reflex to defend own turf. A concrete example occurred when one of the members was preparing a working visit in the municipality of Rotterdam for the Minister of Social Affairs. The Minister was to address several issues during this working visit, including an education-related topic. The civil servant of the Ministry of Education heavily objected, as this was 'clearly' the turf of the Ministry of Education and she was not about to let the Minister of Social Affairs 'receive the credits for that.'

Despite the committee not having the effect that had been hoped for, some gains were obtained. First, information exchange between departments was intensified and persisted for some months after the actual committee was abolished. Second, two 'no-regrets'⁹ were implemented: the intention to use a single regional delimitation used by both the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the sharing of information about schools between several executive agencies and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Case III. Common threads- a culture/people solution

During the political silence of 2010, civil servants from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science wrote their policy agendas in preparation for the yet to be formed cabinet.¹⁰ Instead of writing separate ones for each of the educational sectors- which would have been common practice- the departmental executives insisted that the agendas showed congruity and that so-called 'common threads' across sectors should be identified. When the political agenda of the new coalition cabinet was published months later, civil servants incorporated these new political priorities and objectives into the extant policy agendas. Based on this renewed document, eight common threads were identified; such as simplifying and integrating funding, and increasing the number of qualified teachers. The plan was that for each of the common threads a rather informal working group would be installed, led by a director and consisting of policy makers of various directorates.

Descriptive findings

In practice, only one common thread was translated into a working group: the common thread that concerned the integration of funding regulations. For the other seven common threads, there were no working groups at the tactical level of policy makers. Instead, these common threads were discussed once a month at a strategic level in a steering committee, which comprised two Directors-General and several directors. As a result, the common threads evolved into quite abstract guidelines, rather than becoming a concrete policy tool.

One reason for the limited follow-up of the initial plans was the lack of political attention that was given to the common threads. When the new minister and vice-minister were appointed, their primary concern lay with realizing the budget cuts and realizing quick wins, because the elections for the Senate were approaching rapidly. In addition, presenting well-harmonized policy or legislation, means that there

⁹ 'No regrets' are those propositions that are likely to be accepted by any coalition, regardless of its political color.

¹⁰ The former Cabinet had resigned; new elections took place, and a new Cabinet had to be formed, which took seven months: the longest period in the history of the Netherlands. During this period, there was no actual political steering, which is usually a period in which civil servants reflect on the central government's roles and steering philosophy.

is one publication moment, whereas several smaller pieces provide multiple opportunities to gain political attention. The result was that directors and policy makers felt trapped between the priorities of their political and their departmental leaders. The minister also looked at the common threads with suspicion: Weren't civil servants doing things that actually belonged to politicians? Via the common threads, Directors-General gained more influence over policy content, which may have added to the politicians' initial resistance. After the Senate elections, their resistance declined and the political priorities became more congruent with the common threads' policy objectives. However, when one of the Director-Generals – who happened to be the main advocate – left the department for another job, the common threads grew silent.

This case has in common with Case I that the basic idea was to lift a relevant topic out of the standard organization and create a specialized unit for it; in Case I these were formal directorates, in Case III these were the, much less formal, working groups. A director, who was opposed to the idea of lifting a topic out of the standing organization, argued that crossing boundaries is more valuable than shifting them. Others, who favored the idea of specialized units, indicated that the common threads were too soft to be an effective intervention. Although the 'intensive variant' of working groups was never implemented for many of the common threads, the program did lead to an increase in information sharing and ad hoc cooperation between directorates.

Case IV. An integral educational law- a regulation solution

In 2005, the then Minister of Education announced the desire to 'harmonize the extant legislation'.¹¹ At that time, five educational laws existed, for primary, secondary, vocational, special education for pupils with disabilities, and higher education, which overlapped substantially. Some of these laws required modernization- the oldest one dated back to 1963. Instead of modernizing each of the sector laws separately, the minister wished to harmonize the similar or overlapping parts into a single integrated education law. Only sector specific subjects would have distinct legislation (such as regulations for doctorate studies, which is a matter exclusive to higher education). The minister wished to integrate the several laws for two reasons. The first reason was an ideological one: it fitted in the good governance philosophy, because the new law was to be less detailed. Also, harmonized legislation was thought to support a smoother flow of pupils throughout the educational system. The second reason was a more practical one: future changes should be processed more efficiently.

Descriptive findings

In 2007, the Good Governance program, including harmonization of legislation, started to lose political support, due to several incidents at schools. The political atmosphere became one of steering and control and the new law ended up in a ministerial drawer. The new Coalition Agreement later that year largely neglected harmonization of legislation and also the new vice-ministers of education did not seem to be particularly interested in an integrated law. One of the reasons being that 'education' had been split up amongst them: the minister was responsible for higher education; one vice-minister was concerned with primary education; and another vice-minister with secondary and vocational. With each of them having their own concerns and objectives, the topic of harmonization of educational legislation was given little attention.

Confronted with the economic crisis, the cabinet that was installed in 2010 announced major

¹¹ Harmonization of legislation was part of a broader program called 'Good Governance.' This program entailed the central government withdrawing, focusing on outcomes rather than process (the 'what' instead of the 'how'), giving more autonomy to schools, and reinforcing horizontal control, for example by separating supervision from administration.

cutbacks, both in terms of reducing expenses and the slimming down of the ministerial departments and executive agencies. These cutbacks gave a new boost to the harmonization of legislation discussion. The more detailed a law is the more adjustments it requires, which means more work for civil servants. In other words, less detailed legislation is more sustainable. Simplifying the execution of legislation was also necessary for the executive agencies that operate at arm’s length from the ministry. So, a third reason was added to the previous two: an efficiency gain.

The cutbacks made it possible to discuss things that were not open for discussion before, such as changes regarding the diffusion of tasks and responsibilities between the core department and the executive agencies. Thus far, the attempts to implement a single educational law have not succeeded, and it may likely not come that far. The program did, however, foster incremental changes to the several sector specific laws, in that they became better synchronized and conflicting policies were removed.

SYNTHESIS

We have described four different approaches towards establishing working across boundaries. Each of the four studies had a specific angle; focusing on structures, policy instruments, culture/people, and legislation. The four cases were independent from one another- they were not part of any overarching program- yet they reflect the spirit of time. As a result, the distinct cases showed overlap. For example, the program for harmonizing legislation (Case IV) had the same objective as the common thread case for simplifying funding regulations and execution (Case III). And at the same time, simplifying funding regulations was also one of the topics of the inter-departmental committee (Case II). The previous sections sketched the descriptive findings for each of the four cases presented. Table 6 below summarizes the enablers and barriers that we found throughout the four cases.

Case	Enablers	Barriers
I Thematic directorates	Initial top management support Resources (e.g., for personnel, communication, funding) Clear mandate (directorate for thematic issue)	Reflex of building new walls Lack of incentives for crossing thematic boundaries Unclear dividing of responsibilities on issues that touch functional directorates Shifting top management support
II Interdepartmental working group	Top management support Incremental cut backs (need for efficiency) Resources (e.g., for research)	Shifting political focus Turf issues (defending turf of the ‘own’ minister/policy area) Radical cut backs (retreat to departmentalism)
III Common threads	Top management support Momentum (political vacuum)	Political desire to ‘score’ on own political area Cut backs (retreat to departmentalism) Staff turnover
IV Integral educational law	Political support Cut backs (need for efficiency)	Shifting political focus Lack of political incentive (due to dividing political dossiers over multiple individuals)

Table 6. Enablers and barriers for the four case studies

In this section, we reflect on the cases with the purpose of identifying patterns throughout the cases in terms of enablers and barriers for working across boundaries and defining lessons learned.

Throughout the studies we noticed that the motivation of key actors- or lack thereof- had a major influence on whether the programs were implemented and succeeded. In literature on joined up government, whole of government and other post-NPM approaches, a lot of attention is focused on the factors that determine success, including resources (e.g., time and means), incentives, leadership, skills and behaviors, and communication. Such incentives, resources, and skills may be different for different key actors. We therefore start this section with an actor analysis of the key actors- ministers, directors-general, directors, and policy makers- asking ourselves the following question: What drivers do they experience for working across boundaries and what inhibits them?

An actor perspective on enablers and barriers for working across boundaries

A common barrier throughout the cases was a shifting political attention, and a build-in incentive to 'score' on the own policy territory – and subsequently having civil servants who focus on just doing that. Despite the four cases being initiated by departmental actors, political actors had a large influence on whether the initiatives went through. In particular, we noticed that political changes, such as a new cabinet, foster a reflex to retreat to departmentalism (Case II and III). When the initial political or top management support and priority shifts, the initiatives die. In principle, a minister is responsible for all the policies from his or her department, which means that he or she benefits from a well-harmonized set of policies- but the everyday reality is more complex. In case III and IV it appeared that having multiple vice-ministers for one policy field hampered the emergence of harmonized or integrated policies. Also, political pressure to score 'quick wins' attracted politicians' attention toward sub areas. Inter-departmental collaboration may be even more complex, because politicians usually prefer well-defined agendas for which they are solely responsible and recognizable. In contrast, crossing boundaries is inherent to a Director-Generals' function. As one Director-General put it:

"My directors are the experts in their fields. My added value is to make sure their fields are well harmonized." [Director General, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science]

According to other civil servants, Directors-General stimulate the politicians to think and act across sectors- rather than the other way around. The result is that directors and policy makers have to deal with two different priorities; those of their political and their departmental leaders. Generally speaking, directors and policy makers seemed to lack clear incentives to work beyond borders. Directors' prime responsibilities are their own sector, and the internal incentive structure encourages directors to focus on what happens within their own directorate. Policy makers often lack the time to seek cooperation across the boundaries of their own directorate and department. What motivates them to work across boundaries is 1) the knowledge that trying to harmonize policies that are nearly finished is more troublesome than adjusting those during earlier stages of policy development; 2) making use of scarce resources (e.g., cut backs in personnel); and 3) a genuine wish to do what is best for the public field. However, when the time pressure is high, the reflex of most directors and policy makers will be to focus on their own fields.

Shifting boundaries versus crossing them

One should keep in mind that no matter how one chooses to pull up boundaries – whether they are based on functional silos, processes, clientele or otherwise – public policy issues hardly ever stick to boundaries. In practice new boundaries will inevitably emerge, and invariably need to be crossed. To deny this aspect of life in the Netherlands is utopian or wishful thinking. Structural solutions for addressing public policy issues invariably will fall short if not accompanied by a cultural awareness of the necessity to cooperate and coordinate across the boundaries of respective units (e.g., a directorate or department), and to keep improving the ways in which policy-making and implementation actually evolve and

are actually organized.

This finding is nothing new. As an illustration, a Dutch central government advisory committee acknowledged in 1977 that: 'No matter how you change the departmental structure, inter-departmental coordination is and will always be of utmost importance.' (MITACO, 1977: 13; translated from Dutch). Case I illustrated that structural solutions may benefit the content of the policy at hand, but may also create new isolations. Such structural solutions are likely to fall short if they are not accompanied by a cultural awareness of the necessity to cross the boundaries of one's own unit, as well as having the right incentives and skills (e.g., being able to collaborate, trust, and mobilize teams) to do so (Ling 2002). In comparison, whole of government initiatives elsewhere are often more concerned with working together pragmatically than about formalized collaboration (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). We conclude that organizational structures may work as a precondition, but they are not sufficient. 'Structure is not enough to fulfill the goals of whole of government initiatives. Cultural change is also necessary, and processes and attitudes need to be addressed' (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007: 1062).

For cross-boundary work to succeed and last, the following ingredients were found to be inevitable across the cases: political and managerial beliefs that well-harmonized policies are more important than visibility for distinct politicians or projects; incentives for directorates to invest in cross-boundary information-sharing, collaboration and joint policy-development; awareness on the work floor that working across boundaries is relevant and appreciated; and last but not least, structural arrangements that support these efforts. The gained insight that we can draw from these cases is:

1. Structural solutions (such as lifting a topic out of the standard organization into a specialized unit) that are not accompanied by an awareness and incentives that working across boundaries is needed, may benefit the policy content, but does not necessarily improve cross-boundary collaboration (Case I)

Ideological versus economic drivers of change

Pollitt (2003) described four rationales for joined-up governance, which can also be applied to the Dutch situation. Three of those could be regarded as ideological or content-driven. These are: a) situations whereby different policies that undermine each other can be eliminated; b) it becomes possible to offer citizens seamless rather than fragmented access to a set of related services; and c) synergies may be created by bringing together different key stakeholders in a particular policy field or network. The last is an economically driven rationale: d) making better use of scarce resources.

Financial cut backs were found to be an interesting factor, as they both stimulated as inhibited cross-boundary work. Throughout the cases we saw that an economic drive was stronger than an ideological one. Initiatives that had stagnated in earlier years found their way back into current events under the pressure of the cut backs in expenses and personnel (Cases II and IV). Rather than addressing wicked policy problems or fostering seamless services, increasing efficiency had become the main driver of collaboration across boundaries in the Dutch case. We therefore postulate that:

2. Economic motives are stronger incentives for change than are ideological and content-based motives (Cases II and IV)

When the economy recovers and the central government has opportunities to invest in new projects again, it should be interesting to see whether the initiated changes (as presented in Cases II, III and IV) prove to be the result of a paradigm shift or merely the result of budget cuts. A paradigm shift would imply that the government will continue its reduced role and continue to strive for harmonized policies, funding regulations, and legislations. If the changes turn out to be primarily based on economic

motives, the chance is that the government will return to initiating silo-based policies and funding, without considering what is going on across unit and departmental borders. Between these two scenarios there is a third alternative: budget cuts may actually be a driver of gradually making a paradigm shift.

Incremental versus radical changes

Incremental changes are usually associated with continuous and evolutionary change, whereas radical changes are associated with discontinuous and episodic change (Mintzberg & Westley, 1992; Beer & Walton, 1987; Weick & Quinn, 1999). However, in our view and experience, incremental changes may be the result of planned, radical changes. In all four cases, something was set in motion, but none of them succeeded in their exact aim. Throughout the cases we noticed that the aim often entailed an intensive collaboration or integration, while the actual outcome was information exchange or cooperation.¹² In other words, radical change initiatives resulted in incremental changes. One way to look at it is that the goals are formulated too ambitious or that grand reforms and radical changes in the public sector do not work and should be omitted entirely. Another perspective is that maybe ambitious goals are needed to realize incremental changes. We believe that without these radical change programs, the incremental changes would not have been accepted and implemented – deliberately leaving out the matter of investment versus gains. In psychology this is referred to as the ‘door in the face’ technique: a large request is made in order to realize a smaller one. We therefore postulate that:

3. Grand reforms may be a necessary means to achieve incremental changes (Cases I and IV)

Interestingly, several of the cross-boundary initiatives demonstrated what can be called a ‘lagged effect:’ For a while – usually a couple of months – after the formal ending of a project civil servants continued to be engaged in a more informal information sharing cooperation, until also these effects faded away due to day-to-day concerns, leak effects due to new priorities, and staff turnover (Cases II and III). This lagged effect has also appeared in other case studies of cross-boundary efforts (Paun & Blanchard, 2014). We therefore postulate that:

4. After the formal disabling of a change project, a ‘lagged effect’ of incremental improvements occurs. However, without follow up, these incremental improvements tend to fade away over time (Cases II and III)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Dutch central government is stumbling over its intra- and interdepartmental boundaries; trying to climb some fences and tearing down others. Overall, we believe that the Dutch central government is making slow, yet continuous progress regarding crossing boundaries in education and employment, so as to facilitate harmonized and more effective policies and less duplication for both the government and the field. To rephrase Paun and Blanchard (2014): Working across boundaries is not a one-off problem that a clever structural reform can solve in a permanent sense. Rather, it is an ongoing task that must adapt to the changing nature of policy priorities and external challenges. The primary gain of the several change initiatives may be that crossing boundaries and fighting fragmentation was given a permanent place on the departmental and political agendas. Although it may seem paradoxical at first sight, the economic crisis provides a ‘window of opportunity’ (Kingdon, 1984), which both departmental and political actors may use in order to gradually pursue a paradigm shift.

¹² We use a continuum for the intensity of cooperation, ranging from least to most intensive: informing, cooperating, coordinating, collaborating, and integrating.

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Appendix I Overview of 40 years of grand reforms in the Netherlands

Reform	Challenges	Objectives/solutions
1970 – 1980		
Committee Van Veen (1971); Scientific Council for Government Policies (1975)	Inefficient division of policy areas across departments	A coordinative political and administrative top; A more active role of the Ministry of General Affairs (the department of the prime-minister)
MITACO (1977)	Inefficient division of policy areas across departments	Rearranging departmental portfolios
1980 – 1990		
Committee Vonhoff; Committee Hoofdstuur Rijkdienst (1980-1982)	Fragmentation and complex social problems Increased the need for cohesion Unresponsive to society	Departmental rearrangement along 5 key policy areas, thus smaller cabinet; Outsourcing and decentralization; Coordination at political level via the appointing of project ministers; Higher mobility among civil servants across departments
Committee Rijkdienst en Regeringscommissie Rijkdienst (1982-1986); Committee Verbaan (1983)	Unresponsive to society	Less bureaucracy and less control; More harmonization of governmental policies across departments; Higher mobility among civil servants across departments; Managing for results
1990 – 2000		
Committee Wiegel (1993)	Too large and too fragmented central government (too many civil servants, tasks, divisions and functions); Unresponsive to society; Unmanageable for ministers	Smaller government; Separating policy and execution; Having few core departments
2000 – 2011		
Program 'Andere Overheid' (2004-2006)	Unresponsive to society; Too large government; Inefficient use of means	Less policies and regulations; Outsourcing to other governmental layers; Ending policies and being reserved to starting new ones; Less overlap between departments and better coordination
Program 'Vernieuwing Rijkdienst' (2007-2010)	Unresponsive to society; Too large and too fragmented central government	Smaller government; Fewer rules; Results driven

CHAPTER 3

On the origins of network and regionalist literature:

Toward an overarching conceptual framework for studying regional networks

On the origins of network and regionalist literature

Toward an overarching conceptual framework for studying regional networks

INTRODUCTION

The network concept is derived from an abundance of theories in organizational science, economics, sociology, policy studies and political science (Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006; Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). When referring to the specific type of networks that are central in this PhD thesis, regional network literature can be added to develop an overarching theoretical framework for studying regional networks.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part sketches the origins of network literature and combines these network perspectives with theories on regionalism, in order to develop a theoretical framework for studying regional networks. It addresses the following research question: *“Given that there is not one single, overarching network theory, what aspects of the origins of network theory and regional theories may be used to best shape a powerful lens through which we can observe and explain the dynamics in regional networks in the public sector?”* This lens will be used in the subsequent empirical chapters, when studying and analyzing the networks central in this thesis.

The second part discusses specific network types. Networks come in all shapes and sizes. In order to pinpoint the specific types of networks that are studied in this thesis, and also to identify relevant dimensions based on which they differ from each other, this chapter discusses literature on network categorizations. Within the public sector literature, it seems that every scholar means something different by the term ‘network,’ even when they are using the same adjectives such as ‘policy,’ ‘governance,’ ‘public sector,’ or ‘collaborative.’ Both in academia and in the practitioners’ literature, many similar though not quite identical concepts have emerged, including collaborative governance (Huxham & Vangen, 2000); governance networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009); collaborative networks (Rethemeyer, 2005); public management networks (Agranoff, 2007); policy networks (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997); and service-delivery networks (Provan & Milward, 2001), to name but a few. Each of them provides a different perspective with varying criteria of what constitutes a network (its actors, goals, and level of organization), and in particular they differ with regard to the level of analysis (concrete or abstract). It is not that strange that there are different definitions and concepts of what constitutes networks, when taken into account that the network concept is derived from an abundance of theories in organizational science, economics, sociology, policy studies and political science. Despite these differences, it seems that scholars are building on each other’s literatures, without acknowledging relevant conceptual differences. This chapter discusses extant categorizations of networks and their underlying dimensions, in order to create some order in the conceptual chaos. The following research question will be addressed: *“Given that ‘networks’ may refer to a wide range of theoretical and empirical concepts, what practical overall classification of extant network typologies may be developed?”*

PART I. ORIGINS OF NETWORK LITERATURE

The earliest organizational scholars in their theories paid little attention to an organization's environment. Rational organization theories (e.g., Taylor, 1947; Fayol, 1949; Weber, 1947) generally focused on the internal organization, functioning and management of organizations. Later contingency theories (e.g., Thompson, 1967; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burns & Stalker, 1961; Mintzberg, 1979; Emery & Trist, 1965) first began to explicitly take into account the external environment of organizations. Subsequently, over the years scholars paid increasing attention to the relation between an organization and its environment – variously defined as a network, a population, or a sector (Davis & Powell, 1992).

Several theories emerged that aimed to explain how organizations behaved in their local environments. Contingency perspectives, transaction cost economics, and resource dependence theory characterized the relevant environment in terms of other organizations, describing how the organization interacts (i.e., exchanges resources) with other organizations. The main focus was still on the focal organization, and the environment was taken into account in order to explain the focal organization's behavior. These theories took dyadic relations as their primary unit of analysis. Later, network perspectives focused on how an actor's position (an individual or an organization) in a network affected its behavior. Ecological and institutional theories, finally, shifted the main focus to the environment itself (Davis & Powell, 1992; Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006).

We proceed by discussing these and other theoretical perspectives on networks. The first theories that we address are described because of their impact on other theories. They illustrate a development toward looking at organizations' environments not as an external factor, but as an integral part of an object of observation. The theories discussed in the subsequent section are used for the purpose of shaping a lens through which we observe regional networks. We formulate building blocks that together provide this lens. Table 1 provides an overview of the core characteristics of the theories that are discussed in the next section.

Theory	Perception on environment	Main focus	Main dependent variables	Main independent variables	Sources
Toward an orientation on organizations' environments					
Contingency theory	Organizations can anticipate on the environment; environment is defined in terms of competing firms	Organizations	Efficiency, organizational performance	Strategy, technology, task, organizational size, structure, and culture	Thompson, 1967; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burns & Stalker, 1961; Mintzberg, 1979; Emery & Trist, 1965
Transaction costs economics	Inter-organizational relations are driven by negative factors	Dyadic relations	Governance structure, outsourcing, inter-organizational coordination and collaboration	Transaction costs, risks, asset specificity, uncertainty, trust	Commons, 1934; Williamson, 1985; 1994
Resource dependency theory	Inter-organizational relations are driven by positive factors	Dyadic relations	Power of one organization upon another	Resource importance, alternatives (for the	Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Connor, 1991

					resource), discretion
Toward an orientation on networks of organizations					
Social capital	--	Networks of individuals	Social benefits, Performance	Trust, network (structural) diversity, network size, demographic diversity	Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1986; Granovetter, 1983; Putnam, 1993
Social network theory and analysis	Focus on methodology; unit of analysis differs, e.g., individuals, groups or organizations	Networks of individuals and organizations	Centrality, density, strength of ties	Nodes, links	Simmel, 1971; Granovetter, 1985; Burt, 1992
Policy networks	Environment is embedded within policy networks itself	Networks of government and external stakeholders	Policy outcomes	Organization size, sector, number of organizations involved	Mayntz, 1997; Scharpf, 1978; Klijn, 1997
New institutional theory	Attention for history, path dependence and other forces that create inertia	Networks of organizations	Institutional emergence, conformity, conflict, change, isomorphism	Processes that establish schemas, rules, norms and routines	Powell & DiMaggio, 1991
Ecological theories	Networking is driven by organizational needs and resources in niches	Networks of organizations	Institutional emergence, conformity, conflict, change, isomorphism	Processes that establish schemas, rules, norms and routines	Hannan & Freeman, 1977; White, 1981

Table 1. Summarizing the origins of network theory

Toward an orientation on organizations' environments

Contingency theory

Contingency theory is based on the notion that there is no one best way of organizing (Fiedler, 1964), and that the optimal organization is contingent upon various internal and external constraints. The contingency theory (e.g., Thompson, 1967; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burns & Stalker, 1961; Mintzberg, 1979; Emery & Trist, 1965) was the first to explicitly take into account the external environment of organizations. Meanwhile, in the real world the external environments of organizations had grown more complex and changed, due to technological development, competition, governmental regulation, and a host of other factors. Organizations were viewed as 'open systems', interdependent with environments over which they had little control (Thompson, 1967). Still, the environment was seen as a 'factor', which could be stable or turbulent, simple or complex, or munificent or scarce (Davis & Powell, 1992). Organizations could anticipate their dynamic influence on this factor so as to create the best 'fit' between the organization and the environment (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). Figure 1 shows a simplified model of how the environment was seen within this theory.

Figure 1. An organization's environment from a contingency perspective

Since the mid-1980s, there has been little advance in the contingency theory, mainly due to its lack of explanatory power. However, the contingency perspective had a historical role, laying the basis for later theories, including transaction costs economics, resource dependency theory and institutional theory.

Transaction cost economics

Transaction cost economics theory (Williamson, 1981) is nested within the rational choice theories. In this theory, the external orientation is fully incorporated, becoming the core of the theory. Transaction costs (sometimes called coordination costs) are the costs of searching for partners, negotiating, coming to agreements, monitoring their performance, and so on. Transaction cost economics suggests that the costs and difficulties associated with market transactions sometimes favor hierarchies (or in-house production) and at other times markets as an economic governance structure. Networks have emerged between these two extremes as a new governance structure.

The core idea of transaction cost theory with reference to network relations is that they are predominantly driven by *negative* factors, such as the pressure to reduce costs and the imperative to avoid failures. Transaction costs theories, like rational choice theories in general, assume individuals and organizations engage in inter-organizational relations to pursue their own interests (Williamson, 1985). They can be expected, from the point of view of these theories, to exploit the networks to maximize their interests and minimize transaction costs (Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006). For theorizing about networks, this theory falls short as it neglects other critical incentives for collaboration, however, it did lay the basis for other theories on inter-organizational collaboration.

Resource dependency theory

Resource dependency theory states that all organizations have resources such as capital, skills, personnel and knowledge (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Connor, 1991). In order to acquire necessary resources, organizations seek interaction with each other. These interdependencies create networks of organizations (Benson, 1978; Aldrich, 1979). In resource dependency theory, organizational success is defined as organizations maximizing their power (Pfeffer, 1981). The links between organizations are characterized as a set of power relations based on exchange resources. In this view, organizations are triggered to minimize their own dependence or to increase the dependence of other organizations on them. Organizations that form inter-organizational coalitions or network may be constantly immersed in altering their interdependence and power structures.

Resource dependency theory has in common with transaction cost economics the assumption that the incentive for inter-organizational cooperation is to gain individual and organizational competitiveness or advantage. Like transaction cost economics, these theories tend to devote little attention to the role of norms and values of individuals and organizations (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997).

Toward an orientation on networks of organizations

Social capital theory

The concept of social capital is used in several strands of literature (e.g., social network theory, institutionalism), which explains why scholars generally do not perceive it as a distinct theory at all (Perri 6 et al., 2006). Social capital is embedded in relations and cannot be attributed to individuals (Coleman, 1988); it exists only as long as the ties between actors exist. Social capital theory focuses on networks of *individuals*, often characterized by expectations of reciprocity (i.e., the expectation that in short or long term kindness and services will be returned) and trust (i.e., that others will respond as expected). It maintains an underlying assumption that the relationships between individuals are durable (Bourdieu, 1986). The broad and diverse literature on social capital aims to understand how social capital affects patterns of power and social status of individuals in a network (Bourdieu, 1986), and how it serves as a resource for individuals in order to achieve goals that otherwise would not have been achieved (Coleman, 1990). Most research on social capital is based on the assumption that relations between individuals may provide benefits to these individuals (White, 2002), and that these benefits may be either: social, psychological, emotional or economical (Lin, 2000). Social capital theory laid the basis for social network theory and analysis.

Social network theory and analysis

A strand of literature that has explicitly focused on the behavior of social actors (individuals or organizations) within networks is social network theory (Simmel, 1971; Granovetter, 1983; Burt, 1992). Researchers in this tradition combine sociological theories with a new methodical approach to study patterns of interaction between nodes (i.e., actors) and ties (i.e., relations between actors). A social network is basically a map of the ties between the nodes that are under study. Nodes may be individuals, units, or organizations. Ties are usually characterized by content (the type of relation, such as information, friendship or power) and form (the strength of the tie). Social network theory assumes that the attributes of actors (such as the resources of an organization) are less important than the relationships between the actors in the network.

The core idea of social network theory is that rather than variables like transaction costs or control over resources, it is interpersonal relations between individuals that explain inter-organizational relations. This means that individuals are expected to act based on individual motivations, instead of organizational ones – except when individual and organizational motives are aligned (Perri 6 et al., 2006).

The social network approach did not lead to a single overarching theory, but rather multiple small ones. These theories build heavily on social capital theory. Well-known examples are the theory of the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), the structural hole theory (Burt, 1992), and the ‘Simmelian tie’ (Simmel, 1971).¹³ Another example of a theory developed from a social network perspective is Coleman’s theory of dense networks (1988, 1990). While Granovetter, Burt and Simmel focused on advantages for *individuals* within a network, Coleman focused on what is best for the *network as a whole*. We used these key insights to formulate the first building block for shaping a lens through which to observe regional networks. Social network theories shape the way we think about network relations and network effectiveness:

¹³ Strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973): Actors who are close to you, since they have access to the same resources, such as information and contacts, may be less valuable than actors with whom you have a weak tie, because they may offer you access to resources you otherwise would not have. Structural hole theory (Burt, 1992): An actor (a ‘broker’) who connects several other actors – who otherwise are not connected with each other – has a strategic advantage since he controls information flows. ‘Simmelian tie’ (Simmel, 1971): This is an alternative to structural holes theory. It assumes that an individual who holds a brokering position (i.e., in between actors who are not connected otherwise) is at a disadvantage, as those actors may ‘pull’ the central actor in different directions, thus leaving him in a static position.

1. Inter-organizational networks consist of individuals who represent organizations, which means that both interpersonal and inter-organizational relations should be taken into account. In addition, when measuring network effectiveness, one may look at both the benefits for individual members (individuals or organizations), as well as at the benefits for the network as a whole.

Social network theory has also been used to study how organizations interact and are interconnected through executives or individual employees. There is a large archival literature rooted in board-interlock theory, detailing the effects of having the same individuals sitting on the board of directors of multiple organizations. Board interlocks reflect a similar phenomenon as our regional meta-networks, studied in Chapter 5. This theory is among those we used to hypothesize about possible effects of regional meta-networks, and led to the formulation of the second building block for our lens:

2. Individuals who interconnect networks by participating in multiple networks, may affect those networks, and create an overarching network of their own.

Policy and collaborative network literature

Policy networks refer to relations between the state and industry (public or private), with the purpose of influencing policy making. Policy network literature emerged from three established traditions: organizational science, policy science and political science (see Kickert, 1997). Early policy network literature evolved around a core question: are policy networks a concrete platform where stakeholders and various interest groups interact, or are they a more abstract mode of governance? Borzel's (1998) influential paper on policy network literature distinguished two main traditions: the interest mediation school (the US school) and the governance school (the European school).¹⁴

In policy network theory, especially in the European governance school, there seems to be a bias toward horizontal networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2005; Klijn, Koppenjan & Edelenbos, 2009). Other scholars claim that (policy) networks may indeed be horizontal and uncoordinated, but that networks often are more likely to consist of a multitude of different relationships, labeled variously as authoritative, competitive, chain relationships and equal partners (Larson, 1992; Provan & Milward, 1995; Kenis, 2005). The following distinction may help to make sense of this discussion.

An often employed distinction regarding public sector networks distinguishes policy networks from collaborative networks (Rethemeyer, 2005; Isett et al., 2011). Policy networks are concerned with influencing public policy or political decision-making by societal actors (Klijn, Koppenjan & Edelenbos, 2009). They are usually stable, horizontal, lack clear boundaries and are concerned with influencing policy-making processes. Collaborative networks, on the other hand, are more concrete and clearly defined. They are usually coordinated by some steering mechanism, and often are concerned with producing goods or public services (Isett et al., 2011).

In 2006, after the initial 'gold rush' on networks, Perri 6 and colleagues (2006) took on the ambitious task of developing an integrated theory on networks. Building on the often used distinction between hierarchy, market and networks, they argue networks do not necessarily form a distinct category, but rather may still derive from hierarchical regulation and market relations. Perri 6 developed a framework for looking at networks by cross-tabulating two dimensions (derived from Durkheim's classic *Le suicide*, 1967): 1) Social

¹⁴ The interest mediation school perceives policy networks as a generic term for all sorts of relationships between central government and interest groups. The governance school treats policy networks as a specific form of public-private interaction, primarily based on horizontal coordination. It perceives policy networks as a distinct mode of governance and a new relationship between states and societies, as an alternative to hierarchies and markets as modes of governance (Kenis & Schneider, 1991; Mayntz, 1997; Scharpf, 1978; Klijn, 1997; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). While governments were largely associated with hierarchical command and control, governance was seen as a more horizontal, cooperative form of steering. In this respect, policy networks may be seen as policy instruments.

regulation or discipline, the level to which a network and the behavior of network actors are subject to rules and given facts; and 2) social integration or attachment, the level to which network actors are bonded to others. These dimensions led to four basic forms: hierarchies, isolates, individualists, and enclaves (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Four basic network forms (after Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006)

At the top right quadrant of Figure 2 we find *hierarchy*, characterized by high regulation and high integration. An example is a bureaucratic organization, but also in inter-organizational networks hierarchical forms may occur, for example, a stable and structured coalition of firms. Such a hierarchical network has clear boundaries and has a central core of one or few organizations. At the bottom right we find the *enclave*, where typically formal rules are largely absent, but there is a high level of social integration and clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Examples are groups of friends or – in inter-organizational terms – cartels or trade organizations. At the bottom left we find *individualism*, characterized by low regulation and low integration. Here network ties are sparse and small cliques are brokered by boundary spanners. Network actors are entrepreneurial, tend to seek exploitation and aim to maximize influence. The best timeworn example is a market or spot contracts between organizations. And at the top left quadrant, we find the *isolate*, characterized by high regulation but low social integration. Such a network has a periphery, but no core, and its actors are familiar with each other, but are not committed or interdependent. This leaves merely sparsely bonded organizations. Examples are independent firms with limited cooperation or competition among them (Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006).

On at least two levels this perspective on networks is interesting. First, it is an initial attempt at an integrated theory on networks. It does not see networks as a distinct form from hierarchies and markets, but merges these typologies into a new framework for looking at any social system (e.g., networks of individuals or organizations). From this perspective a network may include ‘pure’ network relations (based on trust and equity), market-like relations, hierarchical relations and as well isolates. Secondly, this theory suggests that these forms may on the one hand be part of the network design, and on the other hand be formed by actual network actors’ behaviors.

Following the line of reasoning that a network may experience steering, instead of being completely horizontal, Provan and Kenis (2008) identified three ideal type coordinative mechanisms that govern (collaborative) networks: *lead-organization* governed networks, in which one of the network members functions as a leader; a *Network Administrative Organization* (NAO) governed network, in which a relatively neutral, external actor coordinates the network; and a *shared-participant* governed network, which is gov-

erned completely by the organisations that comprise the network. These governance forms can only partially be pre-designed: In practice it may evolve into a different form by network actors' behaviors. This perspective leads to a building block that is used in Chapter 4.

3. Public sector networks are not horizontal per se, but may be management from within (e.g., lead-organization or NAO governed networks) and from outside (by, e.g., central government).

Network effectiveness may be diminished when the chosen or emergent governance form of the network (e.g., lead-organization, NAO-governed, or participant governed networks) does not correspond with the institutional beliefs or expectations of network members. In Chapter 4 we study networks that experience varying governance forms and study how this relates to network effectiveness and inter-organizational and interpersonal relations.

New institutional theory

The archives contain a vast number of scholarly studies and theories that can be placed under the flag of 'institutionalism'. The core idea of new institutional theory is that the way networks emerge and develop is limited by organizational constraints, such as institutionalized patterns of authority, history, and path dependence (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006). These constraints leave little room for flexibility – normally considered a core characteristic of networks.¹⁵ This is referred to as 'inertia.'

New institutional theory also differs from rational choice theories in the sense that the institutional approach views environments in cultural terms: Organizations and individuals are seen as embedded in cultural systems of rules, norms and taken-for-granted assumptions. The underlying puzzle is how organizational practices are developed and legitimated, adopted and come to be taken for granted (or, in other words, are *institutionalized*), and eventually fall into decline and disuse (Davis & Powell, 1992; Scott, 2004). From an institutionalist perspective, social structures and organizational practices are reinforcing: New actors (individuals, organizations) adopt – often subconsciously – norms, rules and behaviors through a socialization process. Although diffusion and adaption are also relevant within the life cycle of organizational practices and social structures, it remains the case that vital issues of change have received far less attention than factors of stability and the admittedly all-important role of path dependence. While population ecology and the new institutionalism of organizations pay a lot of attention to matters such as inertia, the most prominent difference may be that ecologists focus on the effects that the environment has on organizational demographics (i.e., organizations' life cycles- births, transformations and deaths), while institutionalists focus on the effects of the environment on the internal structure of organizations.

Institutional theory can be used to explain patterns of inter-organizational relations. There has been longstanding focus on industries that are characterized by a high dependence on a stream of inter-organizational projects, such as the construction sector (Eccles 1981) and the film industry (Robins, 1993; Windeler & Sydow, 2001; Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). In these industries, routine and binding patterns of formalized contracting have led to relatively stable networks of actors, for example among communities of producers, directors, actors and musicians. Chapter 5 recognizes and details the phenomenon of long-term networks that evolve around temporary projects.

4. Subsequent temporary networks create a durable, overarching network of their own.

Ecological theories

Like institutionalists, ecologists are interested in the structure and composition of the environment, but

¹⁵ For example, networks have often been presented in the literature on private sector inter-organizational relations as flexible and innovative (Bardach & Eccles, 1989; Powell, 1990; Alter & Hage, 1993).

tend to pay less attention to the efforts of organizations to manage and control their environments (Davis & Powell, 1992). Scholars from both fields emphasize inertia rather than organizational change and adaptation. Although originally seen as competing theories, it was recognized they may in fact have more similarities than differences (Davis & Powell, 1992). Ecological theories describe how a population of organizations evolves over time, where new organizations are born and older ones die. This theory seeks to answer the question: Why is there such a wide variety of organizations out there? (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; White, 1981). While economic theories assume that organizations act and cooperate in order to optimize, population ecology theory assumes that it is the environment that optimizes by letting organizations change and die, or enabling new ones to be born – as a result of limited resources.

With reference to inter-organizational relations and networks, ecological theory argues that networks are formed in ‘niches’, defined as temporarily combined clusters of resources (Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006). From an ecological perspective, the inherent resulting path dependence affects the behavior of organizations, inasmuch as the internal patterns of behavior and the evolutions in the environment limit the combinatory space and degree of freedom – something that is clearly not recognized in rational choice theories such as transaction cost economics. When we project this approach on networks we begin to grasp how and why networks as well have a past and a future which likely affects their current functioning. This subtle perspective is exploited in Chapter 5 to theorize about the effects of regional meta-networks.

5. Networks have a past and a future, which may affect the current behavior of network members.

To complement these *network* literature-based perspectives, the next section explores literature on *regional* collaboration.

ORIGINS OF REGIONAL COLLABORATION LITERATURE

The most prominent strand of literature concerning regional collaboration is the new regionalism literature. The difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism refers to the difference between inter- and postwar perspectives on metropolitan growth and the accompanying need of more flexible governance to deal with these developments (Kipfer & Wirsig, 2004). The development toward new regionalism may be described as depicted in Table 2 (Wheeler, 2007).

Over the years, the notion of what constitutes a region has grown from the level of a city and its surrounding areas to a much larger geographic entity, constituted by multiple cities (Wheeler, 2007). The early literatures have focused on spatial planning issues and economic development, although their insights and findings can be used for regional networks around other policy fields as well. New regionalism, on the other hand, is characterized by a more holistic, public-administration approach of planning, environmental, social and economic themes. In addition, the notion of what constitutes the region has shifted from a notion of territory and place to the region as consisting of relations (Jonas, 2012). This is why we focus on the school of new regionalism for the remainder of this literature review on regional network theory.

Period	Name	Key themes	Influential scholars
Early 20 th century	Ecological regionalism	Overcrowded industrial cities; region as the city and surrounding areas	Geddes
1940s	Regional science	Regional economic development; region as a larger, less defined territory	Friedman
1960s	Neo-Marxist regional economic geography	Power and social and economic movements within the region	Castells
1980s	Public choice regionalism	Region as a free-market economy	Ostrom
2000s	New regionalism	Economic and environmental development	Katz

Table 2. Strands of literature in regionalism

New regionalism

The discourse within new regionalism has evolved from a focus on regional government structures concerned with merely local governments, to a focus on more fluid forms of regional collaboration, involving local governments, public agencies, interest groups as well as private sector businesses. Under the umbrella of new regionalism three main theoretical perspectives can be distinguished: Institutional Collective Action; Collaborative Governance; and Regional Regimes (Boogers, 2013). The table below summarizes the key elements of these perspectives regarding effective regional networks.

Theoretical perspective	Scope of the region	Factors stimulating effective regional networks	Influential scholars
Institutional collective action	Collaboration between municipalities	Characteristics of the good or service; institutional factors; network factors	Feiock; Ostrom
Collaborative governance	Collaboration between municipalities, public and private actors	Starting conditions; process factors; institutional factors; leadership factors	Ansell; Emerson
Regional regimes	Collaboration between municipalities, public and private actors	Incentives; involvement of civic and private sector; broad community support; regional public institutions; overlapping regional networks	Stone; Hamilton

Table 3. Key characteristics of three perspectives on regional networks

Institutional Collective Action

Institutional Collective Action (ICA), sometimes also referred to as regional governance, refers to two or more local governments who act collectively to capture the gains from providing or producing services across a supra-local level (Feiock, 2007). From this ICA perspective, regions comprise collaboration between municipalities. Its focus is on regional level administration and governance. It stems from second generation rational choice¹⁶ and transaction cost theories, indicating that voluntary regional collaboration will occur when the benefits exceed the costs of bargaining for agreement (Feiock, 2007; Ostrom, 1990). These

¹⁶ First generation rational choice theories assumed that actors have complete information, consistent preferences regarding outcomes, and seek to maximize individual benefits. Second generation rational choice theories (Ostrom, 2005) take the context of collective decisions into account, by systematically addressing how context affects decision making (Feiock, 2007).

benefits may be defined as collective benefits (e.g., efficiency gains or economy of scale) or selective benefits (e.g., political or career incentives of local leaders). The costs are often defined in terms of transaction costs, including information/coordination costs, negotiation/division costs, enforcement/ monitoring costs; and agency costs. In addition to these costs, the ICA theory stresses the negative outcome of reduced local authority as a consequence of regional collaboration.

Based on this theoretical perspective, several assumptions can be made with regard to the expected success of regional collaboration (Feiock, 2007). The first assumptions refer to the characteristics of the good or services that are to be jointly produced or provided: The more complex and the less clear the benefits for each of the contributing municipalities, the higher the transaction costs will be and the less likely the regional collaboration will be successful or even fully occur. Stated the other way around: Goods or services that are hard to define and measure tend to increase the transaction costs.

Secondly, the institutional and political local and regional characteristics matter: The fewer municipalities that comprise a region, and the more they are alike (i.e., demographic homogeneity), the lower the transaction costs will be and the more likely regional collaboration will be successful. This is because large numbers of heterogeneous municipalities are expected to have more diverse needs and larger political and economic power asymmetries, which would increase the transaction costs to achieve a common agreement. In addition, fixed regional borders enhance regional collaboration, as they require repetitive collaboration among neighboring municipalities, and thus the lower transaction costs involved in building trust and commitment. Fixed regional borders also increase the prospect of future collaboration, which constraints opportunism (Miller, 1992). Finally, it is known that national legislation that enables interlocal and regional agreements reduces transaction costs and facilitates regional collaboration (Feiock, 2007).

Thirdly, regional network characteristics play a role. If two local governments collaborate with each other, but also have agreements with other local governments, these embedded relationships may accumulate into a regional network over time (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999). The existence of such a regional structure of collaboration reduces transaction costs as more information is available and a reputation for reciprocity and trust has been built.

Collaborative Governance

In Collaborative Governance, regional collaboration is defined as collaboration between local governments as well as other public and private sector actors, aimed to achieve agreements on policy formulation and implementation. Collaborative Governance is closely linked to policy network literature and the literature on public-private partnerships. The main difference between collaborative governance and policy networks – which are conceptually quite alike – may be that regional governance refers to formal and deliberate strategies for incorporating stakeholders into decision-making processes, while policy networks may remain informal and implicit (Ansell & Gash, 2007). The main difference between collaborative governance and public-private partnerships is that the latter's primary focus is often a concrete, functional relationship (i.e., with a focus on output), while the first is aimed to achieve consensus-based decision-making (i.e., with a focus on process). The collaborative governance literature is not limited to but may be applied to regional level collaboration.

From the theoretical perspective of Collaborative Governance, several factors that stimulate or impede regional collaboration may be distinguished (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson *et al.*, 2011). First, the starting conditions may indirectly affect processes and outcomes. Such starting conditions may include the history of cooperation or conflict; the incentives for collaboration (e.g., problems, resource needs, opportunities, interdependence or uncertainty); and homogeneity of the public and private network actors with regard to power and means.

Second, relational and process factors are relevant: trust; commitment; shared beliefs and problem-definitions; frequency of contact; internal legitimacy; and intermediate outcomes (e.g., celebrating small wins and developing shared plans) (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson *et al.*, 2011).

Third, institutional factors affect the success of the regional network, such as the level of openness (i.e., all actors who may benefit from the collaboration should be involved; getting the “right” people to the table); process transparency (i.e., negotiation is “real” and there are no backroom private deals); and the presence of deadlines and timetables (Ansell & Gash, 2007). The presence of deadlines may be necessary, because collaboration may otherwise be a never ending story (Glasbergen & Driessen, 2005), but may also undercut the incentive for long-term cooperation (Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987; Gunton & Day, 2003).

And fourth, leadership characteristics matter. A regional network leader may either emerge from within the regional collaboration, or be a neutral outsider. Ansell and Gash (2007) postulate that when trust is low but commitment is high, a neutral, external broker may be the best way for the network. When, on the other hand, trust is asymmetrical (i.e., high trust in some members, but low trust in others) and commitment is low, a leader from within the network may be best; such an organic leader may have more influence to motivate the network members.

Regional Regime Theory

Regional Regime Theory builds on the Urban Regime Theory. Urban Regime theory was developed by Hunter (1953) and Stone (1989), who both studied the development and governance of Atlanta. Hunter claimed that a small group of business leaders controlled the city. Stone found that the prosperity of Atlanta was due to a strong coalition between local governments, the unions and the local industry. He referred to this coalition as an urban regime: A long-term collaboration in which local government, interest groups and private-sector industries combined their resources in order to achieve common goals (Stone, 1989). The Urban Regime theory can be transferred to the regional level: The Regional Regime (Hamilton, 2002; Leo, 1998; Boogers, 2013).

From the perspective of Regional Regimes several success factors for regional governance can be distinguished. First, a crisis or opportunity is often required to mobilize the public and especially private-sector actors. The actors thus should feel a sense of urgency. The second is the involvement of the civic sector. An active network of individuals and civic agencies typically balances the interests of one group with those of other groups (Hamilton, 2002). The civic sector can also be seen as a neutral zone between the government and business actors – although, such civic agency leaders are often former politicians or business leaders. A third factor is the presence of nongovernmental leadership. Many Urban and Regional Regime theorists stress the importance of the involvement of the business sector, as well as their preferred role as the network leader (Foster, 1996; Hamilton, 2002; Kantor, 2000). Fourth, regional collaborations are more successful if they gain broad support from sectors, community agencies and citizens, because pressure of these groups can help overcome political and commercial conflicts of interests. Fifth, some public institution at the regional level should be present. According to Hamilton (2002), the region usually lacks a public institution with regional authority with which the private sector can partner. The extent of a regional network is then determined by the willingness of local public leaders to work with other public and private organizations to address social issues. Such a public institution does not have to be a formal authority, but some form of institutionalized collaborative effort of local governments will help regional collaboration and decision-making processes with other public and private actors. And lastly, overlapping or interconnected networks at the regional level will help create stronger ties and ongoing interactions, which facilitate broad coalitions (Boogers, 2013).

AN OVERARCHING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the literatures of networks and regional collaboration, we selected perspectives, propositions and findings into an overarching conceptual framework of regional networks. Table 4 summarizes this thesis' overarching conceptual framework: the theoretical lens based on network and regional literature that shaped the way we analyzed regional networks. It entails six perspectives on regional networks relevant for this thesis: network effectiveness indicators and predictors; network relations and governance; emergence and effects of regional meta-networks; and added value of regional networks.¹⁷

1. Perspectives on network effectiveness indicators

Network and project literature distinguish between objective network effectiveness defined, as the realization of pre-determined targets (Bazzoli et al., 2003; Shortell et al., 2002; Conrad et al., 2003; Weiss et al., 2002), and subjective network effectiveness, in the eyes of relevant stakeholders (Turini 2009; Klijn 2007; Provan & Brinton Milward, 2001; Turini et al., 2009; Ferlie, Fitzgerald & Turini, 2009; Sydow & Windeler, 1998). For addressing these stakeholders' perspectives, an often made distinction is between the effectiveness for the participating organizations (e.g., access to resources); clients or community (e.g., better service provision); and the level of the network as a whole (e.g., reaching stated goals; enhanced inter-organizational relations; sustainability of the network) (Provan & Brinton Milward, 2001; Selden, Sowa & Sandfort, 2006; Bazzoli et al., 2003; Shortell et al., 2002; Conrad et al., 2003; Weiss et al., 2002; Mandell, 1999; Meier & O'Toole, 2003; Herranz, 2010; Putnam, 1993; Scott, 1991; Gray et al., 2003).

New regionalism studies have not been very concerned with measuring the effectiveness of regional networks. The discussion in those studies tends to be normative in character, and such research has been usually descriptive and focused on factors that affect regional collaboration, without clearly defining and operationalizing the concept of effectiveness itself. Based on the ICA perspective, Boogers (2013) operationalized regional network effectiveness in the Dutch context in terms of local and regional benefits. This subjective measure consisted of the variables: Effectively addressing local and regional problems; high quality services at the local and regional levels; and a proper set of facilities at the local and regional levels. These benefits may apply especially to bottom-up type of regional networks: Such networks involve tasks that originally belonged to local governments. Top-down stimulated regional networks usually involve new tasks and responsibilities that are directly addressed at the regional level. As a result, differentiating between local and regional problems, services and facilities are not applicable to the type of top-down stimulated networks central to this thesis. For defining and operationalizing network effectiveness, we therefore mainly draw on network literature and conclude that: When defining and operationalizing network effectiveness, both objective and subjective measures, and both benefits for network members and for the network as a whole, should be taken into account.

¹⁷ In order to avoid repetition, this chapter did not introduce literature on network effectiveness' criteria (i.e., how network effectiveness is defined), indicators (i.e., how network effectiveness is measured) or predictors (i.e., those factors that affects network effectiveness), since these specific literatures are detailed in Chapter 4. We do, however, make use of these literatures in the remainder of this chapter.

	Network literature	<i>This thesis' overarching conceptual framework</i>	Regionalist literature

1. Network effectiveness indicators (Chapter 4)	Indicators may include: goal attainment and stakeholder's perspectives on effectiveness (e.g., for organizations, clients, and the network as a whole)	<i>Regional network effectiveness includes both (objective and subjective) benefits for network members and for the regional network as a whole</i>	Indicators for regional collaboration effectiveness include local and regional benefits
2. Predictors for regional network effectiveness (Chapter 4)	May include network composition; relations; network management; institutionalization; context	<i>Institutional, relational characteristics, and external factors are potentially relevant predictors for regional network effectiveness</i>	May include characteristics of the good or service; incentives; network composition; relations; leadership; and context
3. Regional network relations (Chapter 4)	Inter-organizational networks consist of individuals who represent organizations, which affects reliability, trust and commitment	<i>Regional network relations involve both interpersonal and inter-organizational relations</i>	Regional networks consist of various organizations: Local governments, public agencies, and private actors, who may have different values, interests and expectations
4. Regional network governance (Chapter 4)	Collaborative networks are not horizontal per se, but may be managed from within	<i>Regional networks may experience internal and external leadership</i>	Regional collaboration may involve an internal network leader or an external network manager
5. Emergence of regional meta-networks (Chapter 5)	Individuals who interconnect networks create an overarching network of their own	<i>Regional meta-networks emerge as a result of sequentially and simultaneously overlapping networks</i>	Repetitive regional collaboration facilitates the emergence of an overarching regional network
6. Effects of regional meta-networks (Chapter 5)	Overlapping networks have a past and a future, which may affect the current functioning of and relations within networks	<i>Regional meta-networks may affect the relations within and the effectiveness of collaborative networks</i>	Interlocking networks may lead to higher trust and commitment, but higher complexity may also lead to lower effectiveness
7. Added value of regional networks (Chapter 6)	Examples are service quality; efficiency; learning; client satisfaction	<i>Regional networks may have added value for regions; organizations; and clients</i>	Examples are service quality; efficiency; learning; regional strength

Table 4. An overarching framework for studying regional networks

2. Perspectives on network effectiveness predictors

Network literature provides a wide range of criteria that can be expected to or have been proven to affect network effectiveness. Regionalist literature, despite its difference in perspective, largely suggests similar criteria – although some notable differences stand out. Both strands of literature point towards the relevance of institutional (e.g., size, sector) and relational factors (e.g., trust, commitment, contact), network governance, and external factors (e.g., environment): as factors that affect regional network effectiveness. We discuss these factors in more detail, while comparing network and regionalist literatures.

Both literatures suggest that smaller networks are more effective, although some regionalist scholars emphasize the need for scale, regarding what can be achieved at the local level (Smyth, Reddel & Jones,

2004). Where network literature emphasizes the relevance of having heterogeneous actors within the network – for reasons of resources, knowledge and contacts – (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Gazley & Brudney, 2007), regionalists emphasize the need for homogeneity among actors, regarding demographic characteristics and power between governments and other (public) organizations (Olson, 1965). Interestingly, despite the need for homogeneity, more recent regionalist literature does recognize the need for including private-sector organizations (Foster, 1996; Hamilton, 2002; Kantor, 2000).

Regarding network relations, both strands of literature point to the relevance of trust, commitment, norms of cooperation, direct contact, and previous relations. In network literature, the presence of an NAO is regarded a positive influence on network effectiveness. Also in regionalist literature, having an external, neutral actor to coordinate the network is considered to stimulate effectiveness, in particular when trust is low, but commitment is high. When, on the other hand, commitment is low, but trust in one or few actors is high, internal leadership (lead-organization network) is preferable.

Lastly, regarding network context or environment, network literature mentions the relevance of having both internal network stability and external stability and access to resources, while regionalist mainly point towards the need for community support and legislation that allows for regional collaboration. In brief, we conclude that when studying regional network effectiveness, institutional factors, network relations, network governance and environmental factors should be taken into account.

3. Perspectives on network relations

In network literature, many scholars argue that traditional measures of effectiveness (such as achieving goals) should be complemented with intangible outcomes, such as trust, reciprocity, involvement and commitment of stakeholders, and contact frequency (Mandell & Keast, 2008; Sydow & Windeler, 1998; Klijn, Steijn & Edelenbos, 2010). Network literature also points to the fact that inter-organizational networks consist of individual actors who represent organizations. This implies that interactions between representatives may suffer from inconsistency when individuals' beliefs do not correspond with those of the organizations they represent. As a result, these individuals may experience tension between loyalty towards the network and loyalty towards the organization. And, in addition, other networks may perceive individual network actors as non-reliable partners. Regionalist literature points to the fact that networks consist of local governments, public agencies and private actors, who are likely to have different values, interests and expectations, which affects network relations. So, when studying and measuring network relations, both inter-personal and inter-organizational relations should be taken into account.

4. Perspectives on network governance

Network literature has illustrated that networks are not horizontal per se, but may be managed from within (e.g., lead-organization or NAO governed networks). Both network and regionalist literatures have stressed that network coordination through a central core agency may enhance network effectiveness (Provan & Milward, 1995; Provan & Sebastian, 1998; Conrad, 2003; Jennings & Ewalt, 1998; Ansell & Gash, 2007) – given that the central core agency is trusted and its role is seen as legitimate by all network members. Both strands of literatures also indicate that network effectiveness may be diminished when the networks' chosen or emerging governance forms do not correspond with the institutional beliefs, expectations, trust levels or commitment of network members. Some regional network scholars claim that regional network leadership is best entrusted with a private sector actor (Foster, 1996; Hamilton, 2002; Kantor, 2000). Such a specific assumption cannot be found in the network literature. Nevertheless, the sectoral backgrounds of network members and leaders are likely to be relevant. We therefore claim that when studying network governance, different types of internal and external leadership should be taken into account, as well as network actors' public or private sector backgrounds.

5. Perspectives on the emergence of regional meta-networks

Regional networks may overlap and are part of larger entities, which we will refer to as 'regional meta-networks.' In the public sector, the notion that networks may interrelate has been picked up fairly recently. Concepts similar to this has been variously framed as a network system (Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2008), network portfolios (Ysa, 2010), or – in the private sector – as project networks (Windeler & Sydow 2001; Sydow, 2008). Figure 3 schematically illustrates the emergence of a regional meta-network.

Figure 3. Simultaneously overlapping networks through interconnected network members

Network theory (e.g., social network theory and board interlock theory) suggests that individuals who interconnect networks by participating in multiple networks, may affect those networks, and create an overarching network of their own. Moreover, these networks may have a past and a future (Population Ecology), and subsequent temporary networks can create a durable, overarching network of their own (New Institutional Theory).

Such regional meta-networks may not emerge in every region to the same extent, but depend on various institutional, historical, cultural and social factors (MacLeod, 2001). For example, regionalist theories predict that regions with a history of economic hardship invest more in regional collaboration and regional economic development (Ostrom, 1990; Feiock, 2007), possibly resulting in a multitude of regional arrangements and subsequently in regional meta-networks. Also, fixed regional borders enhance the emergence of regional meta-networks, as these require repetitive collaboration among neighboring municipalities, herewith lowering transaction costs involved in building trust and commitment. Fixed borders also increase the prospect of future collaboration, which constraints opportunism (Miller, 1992). Finally, when a region has a public institution with regional authority, chances of continuous and repetitive regional collaboration between public and private actors will be larger (Hamilton, 2002), which also stimulates regional meta-networks.

In conclusion, findings and perspectives from both strands of literature suggest that: Regional meta-networks emerge as a result of sequentially (repetitive) and simultaneously (interlocking individuals) overlapping networks, depending on idiosyncratic regional characteristics (e.g., institutional, historical, cultural and social factors).

6. Perspectives on the effects of regional meta-networks

Both network and regionalist literatures suggest that due to past experiences – in which trust may have been built – as well as the expectancy to collaborate again in the future, regional meta-networks may lead to higher quality network relations (e.g., trust, commitment and collaboration) (Bakker et al., 2009; Das &

Teng, 1998; Axelrod, 1981; Kreps & Wilson, 1982; Mitchell & Shortell, 2000; Bryson, Crosby, & Middleton-Stone, 2006; Weber & Khademian, 2008; Windeler & Sydow, 2001; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Ostrom, 2005; Emerson *et al.*, 2011).

Both strands of literatures are less clear on how meta-networks may affect overall network effectiveness. Although regionalist scholars assume that interlocking networks may lead to higher trust and consensus and lower transaction costs, they also think that such higher complexity may lead to lower effectiveness (Feiock, 2007). On the other hand, Boogers and colleagues (2013) found that an amalgamation of interlocking regional networks actually was associated with higher effectiveness, although there was a negative relation to democratic legitimacy. Network theory does not provide a single clear answer to the question of the effects of interlocking networks either. Some scholars argue that effectiveness of a network may be larger when its members are focused on here and now; forgetting the past and neglecting the future (Miles, 1964). But there is also some preliminary evidence that meta-networks reveal friction between component networks, which would otherwise have gone unnoticed (Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2008). In this thesis we report on the precise direction of the effects of regional meta-networks. In advance, we neutrally state that: Because of past experiences and the shadow of the future, regional meta-networks may affect the relations within and the effectiveness of collaborative networks.

7. Perspectives on the added value of regional networks

For the question what entails the added value of central government's temporary stimulation of regional networks, we draw from regionalist literature as well as literature on temporary projects. Examples of regional networks' added value from regionalism include, for example, a higher quality of services; increased knowledge sharing; less mistakes; higher efficiency; a less vulnerable position for small municipalities; competitive strength to other regions; and bridging local differences (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg). Project literature suggests that the added value of temporary projects include, amongst others, improved efficiency and effectiveness; learning; growth; client satisfaction and loyalty; impact to environment/community; and higher quality products or services (Atkinson, 2002; Shenhar, 2001; Kenis, Janowicz & Vermeulen, 2009). The exemplar types of added value from the two strands of literature largely overlap. Overall, three categories can be distinguished: added value for organizations; for clients/customers; and for the region/regional collaboration.

PART II. AN OVERALL CLASSIFICATION OF NETWORK TYPOLOGIES

At the start of his book *'The Order of Things'* Foucault presented a classification system that supposedly came from of an ancient Chinese encyclopedia entitled 'Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge.' One of the gifts offered is a classification of the animal kingdom which is divided into 14 types.

❖ Belonging to the Emperor	❖ Included in the present classification
❖ Embalmed	❖ Frenzied
❖ Tame	❖ Innumerable
❖ Sucking pigs	❖ Drawn with a very fine camelhair brush
❖ Sirens	❖ Et cetera
❖ Fabulous	❖ Having just broken the water pitcher
❖ Stray dogs	❖ That from a long way off look like flies

This classification and the dimensions on which it is based seem very estranged to our modern, western eyes. But actually this classification probably would not have made any sense to the people in ancient China either, as is in fact the work of the Argentine poet, Borges.¹⁸ Though fictional, this marvelous classification of the animal kingdom illustrates well how no classification system is ever true, absolute or definitive. Instead of aiming to develop a new, absolute network typology, we aim to develop a classification of extant network typologies. Such a classification may help scholars to consider which theories and empirical evidence from extant literatures are conceptually close enough related to apply to the specific network under study.

A swollen middle

Numerous public and private sector authors, especially during the 1990s, considered networks one of the most promising organizational modes. In both sectors, networks were presented as a distinct organizational form, next to – or more specifically between – hierarchies and markets. This perspective has been the focus of intense scholarly debate (see, e.g., Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997; Bardach & Eccles, 1989; Hennart, 1993; Pitelis, 1993; Powell, 1990; Ring & Van de Ven, 1992; Simon, 1991).

Characteristics	Hierarchies	Networks	Markets
Resource flows	Resource pooling	Repeated exchange of resources	Infrequent and discrete acts of resource exchange
Coordination	Authority	Negotiation and consensus	Bargaining and competition
Expectations regarding relation	Wider, reciprocal, mutual expectations	Wider, reciprocal, mutual expectations	Narrow, confined to terms of contract
Duration	Longer term, unspecified duration	Longer term, finite duration	Short term, finite duration

Table 5. Core characteristics of three main modes of governance (Ebers, 1999; Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997)

¹⁸ Foucault cites the Argentine poet and short story teller Jorge Luis Borges, who describes this categorization in a short story, called 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', and presents it as being from an ancient Chinese encyclopedia. Although Foucault acknowledges that it is fictional, the classification gained a life of its own and has often been presented since as a fact rather than fantasy.

Markets are characterized by processes of competition and bargaining, followed once the partners have come to an agreement by a phase of exchanging resources. In a hierarchy (in private sector literature often referred to as 'firm') actors pool their resources in a distinct organization, such as a joint venture. Inter-organizational networks institutionalize recurring, partner specific exchange relationships among a limited number of actors of either finite duration (often based on goal accomplishment) or of unspecified duration. Because inter-organizational networks establish recurring exchange relationships, actors, as in hierarchies, develop reciprocal obligations and mutual expectations about the nature of the cooperation (Bardach & Eccles 1989; Ring & Van de Ven 1992; Ebers, 1999).

This typology takes an ideal-typical approach, as hierarchies, networks and markets are fairly generic terms. As Ebers (1999) so aptly put it: a barber's shop differs from a multinational enterprise, a supplier network from a consortium, and an auction from long-term contracting. Note that this distinction is far from fine-grained, as it leaves too many cases lumped together in inclusive categories. Basically, anything that is not a hierarchy or a market can be considered a 'network', which invariably leads to a 'swollen middle' (Perri 6, Goodwin, Peck & Freeman, 2006). In practice, there may be market like relations in networks, as well as hierarchical ones – which we will take notice of in Chapter 4. Thus, networks are likely to be complex forms of hierarchical, market like, and 'pure' network type relations (i.e., defined as being based on mutual trust, dependence and equity).

In order to break down or specify this 'swollen middle,' we discuss several network typologies based on numerous dimensions. In the process of doing so, we realized there seems to be little in-between the highly general account of networks and the highly differentiated network types that we will turn to below. While the former tend to neglect important differences in network types, the latter is often so specific that one may well wonder whether research findings are generalizable at all. That doubt is legitimate and worth articulating, inasmuch as on the one hand they would only apply to a very specific network type, or on the other that there are enough commonalities among the different network types that the research findings may be applied to other, similar networks. We will construct a classification that reflects how network typologies interrelate, one which may enable us to determine whether the assumptions or findings about one type of network might also validly and reliably apply to another type.

Dimensions and extant classifications

Networks may be classified along a variety of dimensions (see Table 6 for a summary on the dimensions and exemplar typologies that will be elaborated in this section). The first four dimensions are used to form a classification for relevant network typologies. The lower part of the figure identifies five additional dimensions that can be used to detail specify types of collaborative networks. Figure 4 presents our classification of extant network typologies.

Dimensions		Sources
<i>Dimensions for classifying network typologies</i>		
Noun or verb	Networks or networking	O'Toole & Meier, 1999; 2003
Node		Sorensen & Torfing, 2009
Intra-organizational or inter-organizational networks;	Plant, supply chain, intra-firm, inter-firm networks	Rudberg & Olhager, 2003
Metaphor or policy instrument	Networks as an abstract mode of governance or as a concrete organizational phenomenon	Borzel, 1998
Policy or collaborative network	Policy development, policy implementation	Sorensen & Torfing, 2009
<i>Dimensions to further specify collaborative networks</i>		
Intensity, function and formality	Cooperation, coordination, collaboration; Informational, developmental, outreach and action networks; Formal or informal; ad hoc, platform, or organization	Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Keast & Mandell, 2008; Rhodes & Marsh, 1992; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Groot et al., 2010
Coordination	Presence or absence of a coordinative mechanism (lead-organization network, shared participant network, NAO-governed network); Relatively closed or relatively open; tightly knit or loosely coupled; number of participants restricted or open	Provan & Kenis, 2007; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Jordan & Schubert, 1992
Incentive	Mandated from above or bottom-up formed	Sorensen & Torfing, 2009
Sector	Public, private or multisectoral	Herranz, 2008
Duration	Short lived/temporary or long lived/ permanent; Stable or unstable	Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Rhodes & Marsh, 1992; Jordan & Schubert, 1992

Table 6. Dimensions along which network types may be categorized

Figure 4. A classification of extant network typologies

Noun or verb

When looking at the most cited studies in the field of public sector networks, some relevant dimensions immediately jump out at the astute reader. The first to pop-up is the grammatical distinction between networks as a noun or as a verb. In other words, networks can be understood as a specific organizational form or institution, or networking can be understood as an activity employed by individuals.¹⁹ The first is the most common type of inquiry-- studying networks comprised of individuals representing organizations (thus inter-organizational networks) as an entity, whether or not with clearly defined boundaries. The second is of course infinitely more fluid, focusing on the individual who is networking with relevant others outside his own organization. O'Toole and Meier (1999, 2003), for example, perceive individuals as the unit of analysis (e.g., school principals) and explore the effects of their networking behavior on the performance of students. In this thesis, we assume a nominal focus on networks as a specific organizational form, rather than networking as an activity performed by individual actors.

Node

Our interest is in the most basic form, to construct a classification of networks based on the characteristics of the nodes. A node may be an individual, a division, or an organization, which means that there are social networks (between individuals), intra-organizational networks (between individuals in an organizational setting or between organizational divisions), and inter-organizational networks (between distinct organizations, at either the organizational or individual level) (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). Rudberg and

¹⁹ In Dutch, this distinction is even harder to draw because both 'networks' and 'networking' are translated by the Dutch phrase 'netwerken.'

Olhager (2003) present an example of a classification of this type in their identification of four types of networks from an operational management perspective, based on the number of parties involved and the extent of internal differentiation.

	Single site per organization	Multiple sites per organization
Single organization	Plant	Intra-firm network
Multiple organizations	Supply chain	Inter-firm network

Table 7. Classification based on nodes (adapted from Rudberg & Olhager, 2003)

As we are interested in inter-organizational networks, this distinction at first appears helpful because it excludes a vast literature that focuses on intra-organizational networks. However, inasmuch as it tells us very little about the distinct types of inter-organizational networks, it is imperative to continue to explore other categorizations of inter-organizational networks.

Metaphor or policy instrument

With regard to the strand of literature on ‘policy networks,’ there are several traditions for looking at inter-organizational networks. The first tradition views networks as a mode of governance: a horizontal, cooperative form of steering via networks of interest groups, as an alternative to hierarchies and markets (Borzel, 1998). The second tradition defines and studies policy networks as concrete policy instruments, as something which takes place in an empirical setting. They may involve decision-making processes, implementing public policy, service delivery, or involving stakeholders in policy making processes. This leads to the distinction between networks as a metaphor or as an instrument. In this thesis, when referring to networks, we refer to networks as a policy instrument and a concrete organizational phenomenon, rather than an abstract mode of governance.²⁰

Policy development or service delivery

An often employed distinction regarding public sector networks divides policy networks from collaborative networks (Rethemeyer, 2005; Isett et al., 2011). Generally speaking, in Europe the term ‘policy network’ is more accepted, while in the USA ‘collaborative networks’, ‘collaborative governance’ or ‘collaborative partnerships’ are more commonly used (Rethemeyer, 2005; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Provan & Kenis, 2007). However, we prefer to distinguish between the two based on more content-based characteristic, namely the distinction between a networks’ focus on policy development, or on policy implementation or service provision (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009).

Policy networks are concerned with influencing public policy or political decision-making by societal actors (Klijn, Koppenjan & Edelenbos, 2009). As such, they may consist of governmental actors, interest groups, and private actors. Policy networks have been defined as ‘a set of public agencies, legislative offices, and private sector organization that have an interest in public decisions within a particular area of policy because they are interdependent and thus have a “shared fate”’ (Isett et al., 2011, p. 158). Another definition describes policy networks as: ‘webs of relatively stable and ongoing relationships which mobilize and pool dispersed resources so that collective action can be orchestrated towards the solution of a common policy’ (Kenis & Schneider, 1991, p. 36). There is a scholarly consensus that policy networks are usually

²⁰ In policy network literature, several network typologies have been developed, based on combinations of dimensions – including many of the dimensions that are discussed in this paper. As the focus of our thesis is on collaborative rather than policy networks, it is beyond our scope to discuss these typologies here in detail. However, for the interested reader, a brief overview and discussion is included in Appendix I.

stable, horizontal, lack clear boundaries and are concerned with influencing policy-making processes.

Collaborative networks are more concrete and clearly defined. They usually coordinated by some steering mechanism, and often are concerned with producing goods or public services. Collaborative networks have been defined as: 'collections of government agencies, nonprofits, and for-profits that work together to provide a public good, service, or value when a single public agency is unable to create the good or service on its own and/or the private sector is unable or unwilling to provide the goods or services in the desired quantities.' (Isett et al., 2011, p.158). Isett claims these networks may be formal and orchestrated by a public manager or may be emergent, self-organizing, and ad-hoc. Other widely used labels that reflects a similar, if not identical, concept are public service network or service implementation network (Provan & Milward, 1995); provider groups (Benson, 1982); managed networks (Addicott & Ferlie, 2007); and community care networks (Wagner et al., 2000; Turrini et al., 2010). In short, collaborative networks are concrete, possibly temporary and often concerned with public policy implementation or service provision. We incorporate this distinction between policy networks and collaborative networks to the classification of network typologies.

Dimensions to further classify collaborative networks

The previous dimensions provided us a classification for network types. Next, we can more finely-grained specify different types of collaborative networks. When analyzing collaborative networks, one can focus on various characteristics. We present the most common dimensions that may be, based on prior research, relevant factors for studying and explaining differences in, for example, network success or development. These dimensions are: the intensity of the cooperation; its duration of the network; incentive for cooperation; modes of coordination; and the type of sector that the network actors represent.

Intensity

The dimensions intensity of the collaboration, function or purpose, and the level of formality are closely related to each other. In brief, the function of a network may be to inform; to coordinate so as to prevent overlap or increase efficiency in service provision; or to develop and/or provide new products or services in close collaboration (Agranoff, 2007; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Mandell & Keast, 2008; Kaats, Van Klaveren, & Opheij, 2005). With each subsequent type of function, the intensity level of the collaboration increases, and usually, the level of formality as well. Network typologies based on intensity, function or formality show great resemblance. Therefore, we collapse these dimensions into one.

Network typologies based on the level of intensity of the cooperation are all fairly similar. The typologies of Himmelman (1996), Mattessich and Monsey (1992), and Mandell and Keast (2008; Keast, 2003; Keast, Brown & Mandell, 2007) are all based on a continuum: from low intensive cooperation to highly intensive collaboration (see Table 8). At the low end of the continuum individuals or organizations may inform each other, while at the high end they may actually do things together. In the middle of the continuum actions are coordinated and aligned, but the vast bulk of tasks are still performed within each organization. The intensity of the collaboration depends on the extent to which three limitations – time, trust, turf – are absent or overcome, and extent to which agreement can be achieved about common vision and goal, sharing power, and responsible and accountable actions (Himmelman, 1996).

<div> <div>Low intensity</div> <div>←————→</div> <div>High intensity</div> </div>				Source
Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	<i>Himmelman, 1996</i>
Cooperation	Coordination		Collaboration	<i>Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, Keast & Mandell, 2008</i>
Informational networks	Developmental networks	Outreach networks	Action networks	<i>Agranoff & McGuire, 2001</i>
Ad hoc, informal meetings		Organized platform	Special organization	<i>Groot et al., 2010</i>

Table 8. Various network categorizations based on intensity, function and formality

Agranoff and McGuire (2001; Agranoff, 2007) defined four types of networks, based on the network's main function. They distinguished networks that were set up for mere information sharing (informational networks); networks that offer network-based services, such as training (developmental networks); networks that share resources in order to create new products or services (outreach networks); and networks that actually develop and deliver a joint service, or adjust services in order to avoid duplication and increase efficiency (action network). In addition, the level of formality entails whether the cooperation occurs, for example, during informal meetings, in an organized platform or in a special organization (Groot et al., 2010). High intensive, formal networks have clear boundaries, are relatively closed, and will often be coordinated. Low intensive, informal networks are usually loosely coupled, relatively open, and less often coordinated by a central actor (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Provan & Kenis, 2007).

Incentive

Although motives for engaging in networks may vary greatly, the lists of motives can easily be boiled down to two main categories: mandated and voluntary networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). For example, Oliver (1990) proposed a set of six motives for inter-organizational collaboration. The first two reflect mandated incentives: 1) Necessity: Organizations are mandated through law or regulation by higher authorities to establish relationships; and 2) Asymmetry: One organization exercises power or control over another one or its resources. In addition, Oliver defined four voluntary motives: 3) Reciprocity: Through cooperation organizations can pursue common or mutually beneficial goals or interests; 4) Efficiency: Through cooperation organizations can achieve higher input/output ratios; 5) Stability: Through cooperation organizations can better forestall, forecast, or absorb uncertainty affecting their activities; and 6) Legitimacy: Through cooperation organizations can establish or enhance their reputation, image, prestige, or congruence with prevailing norms. This simplified distinction in networks that are either mandated from above (i.e., central government) or developed bottom-up may be a relevant factor for explaining network success in the public sector.

Duration

Another distinction that we would like to incorporate is based on the duration of a network. We have already noticed network definitions routinely consider stability and long-term existence a precondition to depicting something as a 'network', while of course some believe network duration a characteristic that may vary across networks. Just as there are long-lived or ongoing networks, there may be temporary or short-lived networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). Long-lived networks can include, for example, platforms that are involved in a wide range of policy issues (Rhodes & Marsh, 1992), or continuous service delivery.

Short-lived networks may be set up as temporary vehicles for tackling a specific policy issue during an ex-ante determined amount of time. And then, to be sure, there are networks where it is unclear at the start whether they will be temporary or permanent, short-lived or long-lived. The duration of the network may affect the way network members behave. It may, for example, prompt opportunistic behavior that results in rewards on the short-term, or behavior that serves benefits and inter-organizational relations on the longer term.

Coordination

The distinction regarding coordination involves determining whether a network is or is not coordinated by a steering mechanism (Provan & Kenis, 2007; also see Figure 4). A network that is not coordinated is typically horizontal, often informal and loosely coupled. Such networks are more or less coordinated by their participants, and named shared-participant governed networks (Provan & Milward, 1995). Networks that do have a steering mechanism may be coordinated by one leading participant, and are referred to lead-organization networks. This system of classification includes external organizations that are concerned with coordinative tasks, known as a network administrative organization (NAO) governed network. This distinction will be elaborated further in Chapter 4.

Sector

Finally, the sectoral backgrounds of the organizations that a network comprises can be regarded as a dimension to classify networks. In short, networks may consist of public actors, private actors, or may be multisectoral. Actors from distinct sectoral background may differ regarding their institutional logics and their motives for engaging in a network (Herranz, 2007; Saz-Carranza & Longo, 2012). Differences between public and private organizations have been well documented (Ring & Perry, 1985; Dahl & Lindblom, 1953). Public organizations face different challenges than do private organizations. For example, they are inherently subject to policy ambiguity, while private organizations are concerned with – equally difficult yet more stable – goals, such as continuity, growth, profitability, and market share. Also, public organizations have to act in an environment with governmental (political and/or administrative) influence, whereas private sector organizations are relatively autonomous in their decision-making (Ring & Perry, 1985).

When we focus on the consequences of this divide for inter-organizational collaboration, we can conclude that networks of private actors often arise from firm-level cost-benefit analysis regarding transaction costs, acquiring resources, reducing risks or strengthening strategic opportunities. Public actors may be obliged to participate in a network, due to governmental mandates, funding requirements or just plain mundane political considerations (Herranz, 2007). On the other hand, private actors are not totally free from governmental and political pressure. Not only are they bounded by rules and regulation, the fact is that good political and administrative relations with relevant governmental actors are important to private actors. They can and do affect their image with stakeholders, seriously affecting possibilities of contracting and thereby the all-important metric of growth. More and more, private sector organizations conduct the work that had previously been the exclusive territory of public actors, in areas such as social work, adult education, and reintegration of unemployed people. Overall, the net consequence is that public and private actors have to compete on numerous levels, for example successfully gaining governmentally funded assignments. Consequentially, private actors heavily depend on governmental funding, while public actors have to incorporate private sector-based managerial and organizational processes and logics in order to win open tenders and thereby survive. An example in the area of social work are private-sector companies (such as the company where the main author is employed) that conduct traditional public services in social work. In general, it is reasonable to argue that although differences between public and private sector

actors undoubtedly exist and will endure, these differences are declining and may over time become progressively less important.

More interesting than differences in public and private sector networks are the dynamics in multi-sectoral networks, in which public, private and hybrid actors operate. Saz-Carranza and Longo (2012) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of a multisectoral network and found that between public and private actors tensions arose due to two types of institutional logics: strategy and control mechanisms. In terms of strategy and tempo, public actors valued the legitimacy of the process and result most, while private actors valued efficiency most and tended to trace and monitor their goal in a straight line. Regarding control mechanisms, while private actors experienced strong internal authority, public actors experienced a divide in political and administrative control. This made them in the eyes of private actors less reliable as a partner in terms of decision-making and authority.

A brief analysis of current citation behavior in network literature

In a nice attempt to analyze network literature via the means of social network analysis, Hwang and Moon (2009) found several clusters of network scholars that often cite each other's works see Figure 5). They found one cluster strongly concentrated around the work of O'Toole (1997), which implicates a focus on social networks. However, this cluster also included Klijn (2006); Klijn and Koppenjan (2006); and Edelenbos and Klijn (2006), which strongly represents a focus on policy networks within the same cluster.

Figure 5. Network analysis of network literature between 1992 and 2007 (Hwang & Moon, 2009)

The second cluster was primarily organized around the works of Provan and Milward (2001) and those of Agranoff and McGuire (2001). These authors treat networks as collaborative networks. In addition, it also included Klijn (1996); Borzel (1998); and Meier and O'Toole (2003). These authors resemble quite a mixed audience: where Klijn studies policy networks, Borzel's paper is on the difference between policy networks (governance school) and collaborative networks (interest mediation school), and Meier and O'Toole study social networks.

The third cluster did not show a clear center. Relatively central in this cluster were Lienhard (2000); Klijn (2001); Tijsman and Klijn (2002); Klijn and Koppenjan (2000); and Milward and Provan (1998). Also in

this cluster, both scholars on policy networks and collaborative networks are included.

The fourth cluster centers around Lyn (2006), and also includes a large number of other articles such as O'Toole and Meier (2004); Kickert (1995); Bogason (1998); Raab and Milward (2003); and Ansell (2000). The work of Lyn focuses on Public Private Partnerships, which can be seen as a specific type of collaborative networks that includes both public and private actors. Ansell studies collaborative governance, which is a form of regionalism.

Interestingly, O'Toole and colleagues (social networks) and Klijn and colleagues (policy networks) are represented in all four clusters. Provan and Milward (collaborative networks) reappear in three of the four clusters. On the one hand, this is positive as scholars make widely use of theories and empirical findings in the broad area of public network literature. On the other, this stresses our point that scholars should be conscious about whether it is appropriate to transport findings and theories from one concept to another.

Applying the classification for the networks in this thesis

Based on our classification for categorizing extant network typologies, we conclude that the networks studied in this thesis were collaborative networks, as they 1) concerned networks as a *noun*, 2) were *inter-organizational*, 3) were a concrete *policy instrument*, and 4) were predominantly engaged in translating policy into *service provision*.

Furthermore, our collaborative networks were moderately *intensive*: the organizations in the networks shared information, developed new or adjusted extant services, but the actual services were still provided within the participating organizations. They were also relatively formal: the network members signed a covenant, were granted governmental funding and have to account for these means. The networks were all stimulated top-down, by central government, although not all to the same extent. For the School-Drop-Out networks and the Youth Unemployment networks, participation was mandatory, while engaging in the Lifelong Learning and TEE networks was voluntary for network members.²¹

All networks were temporary and relatively short-lived: they received funding for a one-year period, with a maximum of four years. The networks did differ, however, with regard to their longevity, varying from one to three years of existence. In addition, the networks varied with regard to sector. The networks for the issue of School-Drop Outs were public, while the other three networks were multisectoral, including both public and private actors. Moreover, the networks varied based on the dimension *coordination*. Within networks, the coordination mechanisms vary from lead-organizations, to NAO's and shared-participant governed networks. Therefore, these latter three dimensions – longevity, sector and coordination – are used as independent variables in the empirical investigation of network effectiveness in Chapter 4.

²¹ Chapter 4 provides further details and insights about the purpose and organization of these networks.

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CHAPTER 4

Balancing results with relations:

National public-policy implementation through regional networks²²

²² Previous versions of this paper have been presented as:

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Klaster, E., Muntslag, D.R., Ehrenhard, M.L. & Hicks, J.N. (2010). *Implementing National Policy at the Local Level: Assessing the Effectiveness of Local Implementation Networks in the Netherlands*. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Conference, Montreal, August, 2010.

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Balancing results with relations

National public-policy implementation through regional networks

ABSTRACT

When implementing national policy, central governments are increasingly offering funds for projects, in which regional actors create a network in order for spending those monies on centrally stipulated goals. Although it is an assumption in most inter-organizational relations and network literature that high goal attainment is associated with high quality collaboration, there is evidence that networks can be ineffective as they are torn between obtaining short-term goals and establishing enduring network relations (Human and Provan 2000). This paper reports the empirical results of two studies on regional networks in the public-policy areas of Education and Employment in the Netherlands. Multiple methods were used: Interviews; surveys; archival records; social network data; and participatory observations. The initial study suggests that regional networks with high output may have troubled network relations, while networks with positive relations are less effective regarding targets. Also, in eleven similar networks, support was found for the tension between realizing *results*, on the one hand, and the perceived quality of network *relations*, on the other. The paper concludes with a number of reflections on the findings, including a future research agenda and practical implications.

Key words: collaborative regional networks; network effectiveness; results orientation

INTRODUCTION

Despite a vast amount of literature on networks, network *effectiveness* has received surprisingly little attention (Provan, Fish and Sydow 2007; Vollenberg, Raab and Kenis 2007). Empirical studies on network effectiveness typically looked at the effectiveness of the participating organizations, rather than at the effectiveness of the network as a whole. Studies with network effectiveness as the dependent variable stressed the determinants of network effectiveness – such as network structure, coordination or management (Powell 1996; Burt 2000; Provan and Sebastian 1998; Klijn, Steijn and Edelenbos 2010; Sorenson and Torfing 2007; Lemaire and Provan 2009) – rather than the effectiveness construct itself (Kenis and Provan 2009). This paper addresses network effectiveness in the public-sector; we take a specific, practical and relevant angle, thereby recognizing time-frames in governmental interventions. Recently, the Dutch central government stimulated the emergence of regional²³ networks: the aim was to translate national-level ambitions into regional-level accomplishments. Such networks are sets of nonprofit as well as for-profit organizations working together to provide a public service (Isett et al. 2011). Although this stimulation is temporary, its effects are desirably long-term. This means that the network actors are expected to continue their collaboration after the central-governmental funding is spent. This paper reports two empirical studies based on the question: Given the temporary character of this governmental

²³'Regional' refers to a collection of villages and/or towns. In the Netherlands, this is not a formal administrative layer with elected officials; it is a rather informal, flexible level comprised of varying collaborating local actors, such as municipalities, public agencies and private firms. Regions, therefore, lie somewhere between provinces and municipalities.

stimulation, to what degree is there any tension between obtaining short-term results and establishing inter-organizational relations?

To address this question, two subsequent studies were conducted. The first study aimed to explore effective network dynamics of two opposite cases with a wide range of research methods. Every network member of both networks was interviewed. Moreover, social network survey data were collected, archival records were studied and two network meetings were attended so as to assemble participant observation data. This enabled in-depth insights into effective network issues, behaviors and patterns. The first study focused on networks' processes, governance, and outcomes. The second study examined whether the same findings would hold in a larger study with less extreme cases and would provide explanations for the counter-intuitive findings of Study I. The nature of this second study is not a social network analysis in the classical sense, but a mixed-methods explanatory study of similar networks.

The regional networks in this study have an unusual character: formally, they are temporary. The functioning of temporary systems has been studied mostly under the rubric of project management. Therefore, literature on networks and projects were combined, so as to develop some preliminary understanding of the dynamics involved in network effectiveness. One of the reasons why network effectiveness is hard to define is that it is context-dependent (Kenis and Provan 2009; Sydow and Windeler 1998). At its very basis, network effectiveness refers to the context-specific question: 'Have the pre-determined goals of the network been realized?' (Bazzoli et al. 2003; Shortell et al. 2002; Conrad et al. 2003; Weiss et al. 2002; Turini et al. 2009). The network effectiveness concept was initially analyzed in Study I by using a quantitative measure for goal attainment. We learned during the interviews that network members often questioned whether this single measure of goal attainment covered the process of how well the network was functioning as a whole. Therefore, Study II used an additional measure for network effectiveness: By capturing network members' perceptions of network effectiveness.

This paper is structured as follows: First, we develop a theoretical framework, tying together the issue of network effectiveness with theories from projects and temporary organizations and network governance: to use as a lens to look at the dynamics of network effectiveness. Then, the methods and results of the initial study are presented, leading to two refined preliminary propositions in the empirical Study II. The closing section of this paper discusses the findings and presents a future research agenda. This paper contributes to the public-sector network literature in two ways. By demonstrating that high quality collaboration may in fact lead to initially lower output, this paper sheds a new light on the often assumed positive correlation between collaboration and effectiveness. Moreover, it contributes to the literature on network management, by illustrating the relevance of two specific roles of a so-called Network Administrative Organization (NAO): Provan and Kenis (2008) defined a NOA as a more or less separate administrative organization that governs a network. The present study illustrate that such NAOs may have either a mere coordinating role, or adopt a leading role in which they concern themselves with decision-making and execution. Depending on this specific role, NAOs are found to affect both network relations and network effectiveness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Defining network effectiveness

To a large extent, network effectiveness is 'in the eye of the beholder.' Networks involve many participants and other stakeholders, each with their own specific objectives and interests (Klijn 2007). Project literature offers an interesting take on this matter. Traditionally, project effectiveness was defined as meeting the qualifications regarding cost, time and quality (Olsen 1971). These effectiveness criteria, referred to as the 'iron triangle', have long dominated definitions of project effectiveness. Over the last few decades, scholars

and practitioners have realized that the failure of a project may have less to do with its formal results, but with the criteria used (Atkinson 1999; Shenhar, Dvir, Levy and Maltz 2001; Cooke-Davies 2002; Lim and Zain Mohamed 1999). A famous example of a project that was a failure on paper, as it largely exceeded time and budget, but is now widely seen as a tremendous success, is the Sydney Opera House: it became the city's main tourist magnet (Lim and Mohamed 1999; Shenhar, Dvir, Levy and Maltz 2001). Since then, scholars have offered alternative ways to define project effectiveness. For example, Cooke-Davies (2002) distinguished between *project management success*, measured against the traditional criteria of time, costs and quality; and *project success*, measured against the overall objective of the project, as perceived by relevant stakeholders. Shenhar, Levy and Dvir (1997) proposed four distinct foci of project effectiveness: project efficiency, impact on the customer, success of the organization, and preparing for the future. The network effectiveness literature has adopted this point of view. A frequently used approach when incorporating a stakeholder's perspective on network effectiveness is to distinguish between network, organization, client, and community level effectiveness – or combinations thereof (Provan and Milward 2001; Turini et al. 2009; Ferlie, Fitzgerald and Turini 2009; Sydow and Windeler 1998; Klijn 2007). Thus, project and network scholars have been taking a stakeholder perspective when defining and measuring project or network effectiveness. Depending on the specific (research) questions, stakeholders may be defined as network members, funders, clients and the general public. Since this study pivots on the dynamics between establishing intra-network relations among its members and realizing predetermined objectives, network members' perceptions of effectiveness are included.

Organizations are partially driven by self-interest; they consider what the network may do for *them*. Network membership may offer for instance access to resources; reduced costs; a positive effect on reputation (Provan and Milward 2001); or it may result in better services for their clients (Selden, Sowa and Sandfort 2006). Organizational level effectiveness affects the likelihood that organizations will continue to invest resources (time, other means and people) in a network. While organizational-level effectiveness may result in high outcomes for some organizations, at the expense of others, effectiveness for the whole network refers to attributed outcomes and benefits for the whole network. Examples of network-level effectiveness criteria in the literature are: the ability to reach stated goals (Bazzoli et al. 2003; Shortell et al. 2002; Conrad et al. 2003; Weiss et al. 2002); enhanced service provision (Mandell 1999; Meier and O'Toole 2003; Provan and Milward 2001; Herranz 2010); better inter-organizational relations (e.g., through social capital building, shared learning, common purpose and trust) (Putnam 1993; Selden, Sowa and Sandfort 2006); and network development (e.g., sustainability, network growth, strength of ties between network members) (Scott 1991; Provan and Milward 2001; Gray et al. 2003).

The relevance of network relations

The connection between network effectiveness and relations has been heavily debated among network scholars (Kenis and Provan 2009; McGuire 2006; Herranz 2010). An often stated criticism of network effectiveness studies is that effectiveness *indicators* are used as effectiveness *criteria*, compensating for the lack of more objective outcome criteria. Examples of effectiveness criteria are 'soft' indicators such as trust and shared learning (Kenis and Provan 2009). The network can mistakenly be seen as effective when participants are merely 'collaborating well' (McGuire 2006; Herranz 2010). According to McGuire (2006, 39):

"Because collaboration is the new form of governance, it follows that collaboration in and of itself must be desirable. Thus, many studies, perhaps wrongly in some cases, equate the presence of collaboration with the success of a program without adequate empirical verification."

Other scholars argue that traditional measures of effectiveness may not apply to networks (Mandell and Keast 2008) whereby there is an emphasis on the need to build strong relationships and achieve intangible outcomes, such as trust and reciprocity, which do not belong typically to assessing organizational effectiveness. Sydow and Windeler (1998) defined traditional organizational effectiveness in terms of achieving goals, productivity or profitability whereas network effectiveness can also take intangible outcomes into account and focuses on evaluating the resulting state of affairs in terms of the extant processes induced by the network. Others have combined the two perspectives and described network effectiveness as consisting of both 'hard' performance measures (e.g., innovativeness, problem solving capacities of the results, robustness of results, and efficiency) and 'soft' performance measures (e.g., trust, involvement and commitment of stakeholders, contact frequency, support for results, conflict resolution, and absence of deadlocks or stagnation) (Klijn, Steijn and Edelenbos 2010; Sydow and Windeler 1998).

Regardless of whether network relations should be seen as a criterion or indicator of network effectiveness, scholars seem to agree on the importance of the concept of network relations. Literature on determinants of networks effectiveness tends to underline the positive effect of network relations on network effectiveness. Determinants such as trust, reciprocity, cooperation, communication or information sharing and commitment to the common purpose of the network, are claimed to enhance the network's internal integration, which in turn, is regarded as benefiting the overall network effectiveness (Ferlie and Pettigrew 1996; Vangen and Huxham 2003; Provan and Sebastian 1998; Provan and Milward 2001; Agranoff and McGuire 2001; 2003; Conrad et al. 2003; Mitchell and Shortell 2000). In the specific context of the networks in this study, it is likely that network relations form a necessary – albeit not sufficient – condition for network continuity after external, governmental funding ends. When network relations are problematic during the funding period, it is more likely that the actors will not continue working cooperatively without external stimulation.

Network governance and the role of NAOs

Closely tied to the issue of network relations is the concept of network governance. How networks are governed is either a result of how network actors interact, or of the chosen design. Networks may be brokered by a single entity: a network leader or an external, administrative organ (Provan and Kenis 2008). In a brokered network, a single organization governs the network and few direct organization-to-organization interactions occur. The brokering organizer can be one of the network members, taking the lead in managing the network, known as a *lead-organization* governed network, or it may be outside administrators, forming a *Network Administrative Organization* governed network (NAO). If a network is not brokered, it is governed only by members from the organizations that comprise the network: a so-called *shared-participant* governed network, typically resulting in a dense and highly decentralized network.

Network coordination through a central core agency has been found to enhance network effectiveness (Provan and Milward 1995; Provan and Sebastian 1998; Conrad 2003; Jennings and Ewalt 1998), because there is a higher level of control over the behaviors of network members. Also, communication and decision-making processes may be more efficient, as the central core agency coordinates all the members' job processes. Crucial in this is that the central core agency is trusted and its role is seen as legitimate by all network members. The three network-governance types may be seen as ideal types. In practice, variations and combinations may occur.

METHODS – STUDY I

Research context

With the aim to upgrade the educational level of the Dutch working population, by encouraging adults to engage in ‘lifelong learning’ activities, the Dutch government stimulated the emergence of regional networks. These networks were comprised of various actors, including local governments; schools for vocational and higher education; and employers’ organizations. The Dutch central government merely funded the networks for a maximum of four years. After that period, the regional networks were expected to continue their services without financial aid from the central government.

Research design and sample selection

In exploratory-type studies, it is common practice to study extreme cases (Eisenhardt 1989; Pettigrew 1990). Initially, two opposite regional network cases were compared within the universe of 37 regional networks in the Netherlands: North, a low performing network; and South, a highly performing network. They were comparable in terms of regional size (the number of citizens) and network maturity (both had operated for two years) but we expected to see contrasting relational-type patterns in the data. The main selection criterion was the extent to which networks met their predetermined, quantitative targets (i.e., goal attainment): a criterion used by the central government for network performance.

Methods of data collection and analysis and measures

This extreme-case study is mainly qualitative (using data from twenty in-depth interviews), supplemented with quantitative data (Jick, 1979; Sydow and Windeler 1998; Martinez et al. 2003). When every member of the two networks was being interviewed (i.e., a 100% coverage) survey data on network relations was also collected, including social network data. Moreover, archival records were analyzed and two network meetings were attended and scrutinized (see Table 1). Hence, the rich body of data focused on several dynamics of the networks: goal attainment; network relations; and governance, over time.

	Interviews (n=20)	Participatory observation (2 meetings)	Survey (n=12)	Social network analysis (n=12)	Archival data (approx. 75 pp.)
Network effectiveness	X	X	-	-	X
Network relations	X	X	X	X	-
Network governance	X	-	-	X	-
Network development	X	-	X	-	X

Table 1. Triangulated data collection: Study I (*X: aspect was captured within the data source*)

Goal attainment

The criterion variable ‘goal attainment’ was based on archival records, provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This measure was defined as the extent to which networks met their predetermined, quantitative targets.²⁴ In order to capture evolving network developments, data were collected at two points in time: in

²⁴ These targets included the number of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Work-Based Learning trajectories (WBL). RPL is a method for inventorying and acknowledging an employee’s competences gained through ways other than formal education. WBL is a trajectory in which learning and working are combined and takes place predominantly on the employee’s work floor.

the first and second year of existence.

Network relations

To get a good understanding of the network relations, they were assessed not only through twenty semi-structured interviews (ten interviews in region North, six in region South, and four key informants in the relevant central governmental directorate), but also with a survey. The interviews addressed a range of aspects, including respondents' definitions and perceptions of network effectiveness; network structure and governance; and network developments over the past two years, including the quality of network collaboration. These semi-structured, face-to-face interviews took 75 minutes, on average, and were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and sent to the interviewees for approval, after which they were coded using NVivo 8.0 software. After each interview with a network member, a written survey was handed out. Twelve of the sixteen distributed questionnaires were returned. The survey measured the perceived quality of cooperation (including commitment and trust); eight items were adapted from Chatman and Flynn (2001), with a 5-point Likert scale. Exemplar items are: 'There is a high level of cooperation between network members,' and 'I trust the other network members to do as promised.' Since we were interested in how the two networks had developed in their two years of operation, both real-time and retrospective data were collected, by asking respondents to answer each question twice: for the past situation (2006/2007; Cronbach's alpha .95), and for the then-current situation (2008/2009; Cronbach's alpha .94).

Network governance

Network governance was assessed with interview data as well as participant-observation and social network data, using Provan and Kenis' (2008) ideal types on: lead-governed networks; shared-participant governed networks; and NAO-governed networks. The interviews offered insights into the leading actors in the networks; how decision-making processes generally took place; and what developments occurred regarding network governance. The participant-observation data was collected, by attending two randomly selected network meetings, one in each region, during which the main author took notes and observed intergroup behavior. Such observations included which actors led the meeting and which were most actively involved in decision-making. Finally, social network data were collected, by showing respondents a complete list of the network members and asking them to indicate on a four-point scale 1) how often they interacted with each member and 2) how much influence they thought each member had on the decision-making process. The networks' overall density was calculated (i.e., the sum of all direct ties, divided by the maximum possible number of direct ties), as well as the in-degree centrality (i.e., an indication of how central an organization is within the network, based on the perception of the other network members). Ucinet (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002) and Visone (Brandes and Wagner 2004) were used to analyze and visualize the networks.

FINDINGS – STUDY I

Albeit organizational scholars often assume that high-quality collaboration leads to high output and problematic collaboration to low output (see, for example, Das and Teng 1998, Bakker 2010), we found different patterns. Both interview and survey data showed that in the highly performing network (South) their inter-organizational collaboration was particularly troublesome, while North had built quite solid inter-organizational relations (see Table 2). We examined two explanations for this contra-indication. First, the contrast between high-quality collaboration and low goal attainment was smaller in the second year, suggesting that the maturity of the network may play a role. Second, the data uncovered differences in terms of network governance. These findings are illustrated and further refined below.

	First year		Second year		Third year	
	North	South	North	South	North	South
Goal attainment work-based learning (WBL)*	77%	307%	88%	165%	247%	217%
Goal attainment Recognition of prior learning (RPL)*	62%	140%	72%	83%	100%	104%
Relations**	3.7	2.4	3.9	2.9	--	--

Table 2. Network performance of two networks, across three years

* As a percentage of the targets (based on archival data)

** Mean score on a reliable five-point scale (based on eight items in a survey)

A cross-case comparison per developmental phase

Table 3 summarizes the key findings of both networks in four developmental phases: 1) the situation prior to the start of the project; 2) network formation; 3) implementation; and 4) evaluation and adaptation.

Phase		North	South
Prior to start	<i>Actions</i>	No prior LLL activities	Prior LLL activities
	<i>Relations</i>	Prior collaboration	No prior collaboration
Network formation	<i>Actions</i>	Covenant signed	Covenant signed
	<i>Relations</i>	Building relations and commitment	Little investment in building relations and commitment
Implementation	<i>Actions</i>	Results seen over time	Immediate high results
	<i>Relations</i>	Shared decision-making and shared execution	Little cooperation
Evaluation and adaptation	<i>Actions</i>	Rewriting of funding proposal	-
	<i>Relations</i>	-	Increased involvement of other actors

Table 3. Developments in two regional networks

1. Pre-network situation

Prior to the initiation of South's central government's lifelong learning project, an organization was engaged to provide Recognitions of Prior Learning (RPLs) to employees. No such organization existed in North's structure; there, lifelong learning activities had to be constructed from scratch. However, several of North's network members had previously worked together: on other governmental projects.

2. Network formation phase

In order to gain the funding for the lifelong-learning project, South's RPL-provider had to substantially broaden its focus.²⁵ For this to succeed, it needed to collaborate with other partners, such as a municipality and a social-security agency. However, while the network members in South had committed to the network (by signing a covenant with the Ministry), in practice the RPL-provider continued its routine activity. Little effort was put into building inter-organizational relations, and the actors went straight into implementation mode. In contrast, the network formation in North was pursued more seriously and took considerably longer than in South. This was in part due to the fact that North had more network members than South (ten versus seven, respectively), including several (competing) schools. Thanks to a number of individual

²⁵The RPL-provider had to broaden its focus by including: 1) job seekers as a target group (in addition to those already employed); 2) sectors beyond the industrial sector; and Work-Based Learning trajectories (WBL).

schools' representatives who got along well and trusted each other, the North network was eventually able to make consensus-based agreements and establish good relations among the network actors, including all schools. The North network members felt that personal trust among the schools' representatives compensated for an initial lack of institutional trust between the organizations.

3. Implementation phase

During its first year, South rapidly gained its advantage point: By realizing over 200 percent of its targets. This was in part due to serendipity, inasmuch as several large firms in the region bought large numbers of RPLs for their employees, thereby boosting the realization of the network's initial targets. Another factor was that the RPL-provider pushed hard to achieve the set targets. However, in order to do so, it took on many tasks that traditionally belonged to schools (e.g., the intake and testing of candidates), causing friction between the schools and the RPL-provider. Also, the focus on operational tasks left the RPL-provider little time to build collaborative relationships with other network members, such as local governments. Local governments, the social-security provider, and the schools felt the distance; they did not even perceive themselves as part of the network. They understood their relation with the RPL-provider to be a vendor-customer type of relationship, rather than an equal network partner.

The numerical results in North lagged behind. One reason was due to the aforementioned focus on establishing inter-organizational relations, which meant it took a rather long time before the consensus-based decisions reached the implementation phase. An example of North's cooperative approach during implementation was that all partners contributed equally, by means of supplying employees to a front office for lifelong-learning clients. In comparison, although South had a similar front office, it was staffed by a single, externally hired employee.

4. Evaluation and adaptation phase

At the start of the second project year, the networks were evaluated by the central government. Regarding South, central government decided that the largest municipality in the region should become more involved in the project, and ordered this local government's alderman to take a seat on the RPL-provider's board of directors. The RPL-provider still played a central role, but the local government was now involved in its location as well. A second intervention was that the manager of the RPL-provider was replaced. The new manager delegated many of the operational tasks to schools and other network members, and focused on improving inter-organizational relations and commitment at the strategic level.

At the beginning of the second year, North's funding request was denied by central government. This request had been written by an external person, and after the rejection the network members decided to write a fresh proposal. To this effect, four representatives of the entire network locked themselves in a hotel for a few days. According to the participants of this high-pressure team, they also learned much in that process about each other's objectives, organizational values and perspectives. That better level of understanding made them think of issues from a group perspective. This joint strategic writing had a positive effect on both the quality of the proposal, their collaboration and their commitment toward the proposal.

Propositions

South's first year was characterized by strong initial results, but its rapid commencement, based on past experiences with an earlier similar project, led to network difficulties that threatened its continuity. North's network building efforts led to low quantitative results at the end of the first year. It seems, therefore, that investing in the realization of quantitative targets can take time away from building good, trust-based relations among network partners. However, investing time and energy in establishing inter-organizational

relations may take time away from gaining quick visible wins. We postulate therefore that:

P1A. High goal attainment may be obtained at the expense of building high quality network relations, and high quality network relations may be obtained at the expense of attaining goals.

In the second year, South still performed better than North, in terms of attaining its quantitative targets, while North still scored higher than South on cooperation satisfaction. However, during this period the differences between the two networks were less extreme. In other words, in many respects the two networks became more alike. These findings led to the proposition that network relations and goal attainment may be at odds with each other: only in the early life of a network. In their in-depth study of two inter-organizational networks, Human and Provan (2000) found a similar pattern, in the sense that the network that appeared to be most successful in the early stages of its existence, experienced most difficulties regarding perceived legitimacy of the network, network relations, commitment and trust later on – eventually leading to its demise. The second proposition therefore is:

P1B. As networks mature, the tension between obtaining high goal attainment and establishing high quality network relations may diminish.

In terms of network governance, the two networks differed substantially. Both the interview and network data showed that South was a centralized network with a strong NAO (the RPL-provider), that not only coordinated the network, but also made most decisions and was largely responsible for their execution. In contrast, North resembled a shared-participant network; data on the frequency of network interaction showed that the network center was comprised of: two vocational schools; a local government; a social security provider; and a provincial government. Similarly, network data on influence in decision-making showed that this was almost equally distributed among these actors (Figure 1).²⁶

Figure 1. Visualization of two regional Lifelong Learning networks

South (Density: 45%)

North (Density: 70%)

²⁶The networks' visualizations in terms of influence in decision-making were highly similar to the ones based on frequency of interaction. They are, therefore, not presented in the paper.

The network literature suggests that in order to reach and implement decisions while simultaneously keeping members involved and committed, a shared-participant network requires a high level of cooperation and communication (Provan and Kenis 2008). Networks led by a single leading actor may be more efficient and effective, in the short run, because implementation can start sooner due to shorter decision-making and discussion time (Provan and Milward 1995; Vollenberg, Raab and Kenis 2007). This led us to postulate that:

P2A. Decentralized networks are associated with perceptions of high quality network collaboration and a relatively low level of goal attainment; centralized networks are associated with high goal attainment and perceptions of low quality network collaboration.

In addition, regarding the specific role of the NAO organization in South, which took on many of the decision-making tasks and executions, an additional proposition is:

P2B. Network Administrative Organizations that have mere coordinative tasks are associated with high quality network relations; NAOs who take on a leading role in decision-making and/or executing tasks may be associated with a high level of goal attainment but low quality network relations.

These latter propositions provide alternative explanations for the pattern shown in Study I: that South obtained higher goal attainment but lower network quality rates, due to either the central governance of that region's network or the specific role of the NAO.

Although we were not able to see how contextual factors possibly explained the variance, the available data (collected through interviews; archives; field notes; questionnaire and social-network analyses) provided consistent evidence, corroborating the insights that both network maturity and type of governance may explain the patterns found. In order to examine the developed propositions, a second, larger empirical study was conducted.

METHODS – STUDY II

Research design and network sample selection

Regarding the second 'cross case analytical' study (Barzelay et al. 2003), the number of policy areas was extended to four: Lifelong Learning (LLL), School Drop-outs (SDO), Youth Unemployment (YU), and Technology, Education and Employment (TEE).²⁷ Each is concerned with education and employment, and regional networks were used during their implementation. Since we were particularly interested in whether Study I's findings would hold in a sample of non-extreme cases, the networks were not preselected based on performance levels. Eleven randomly selected regional networks within four regions (North, East, South and West) were investigated. These regions, taken together, can be seen as representative of the Netherlands as a whole – which adds to the generalizability of the findings.²⁸

Methods of data collection

While broadening the array of research foci to eleven networks, concerned with four public-policy issues,

²⁷Lifelong learning (LLL) aims to increase the overall educational level of the Dutch working population, by encouraging adults to engage in lifelong learning activities. The purpose of the 2011 School drop-out project (SDO) was to reduce the number of pupils who leave school before they obtain their basic qualifications by 40 percent, within four years. The objective of Youth Unemployment (YU) was to slow the increase of youth unemployment rates – a result of the economic crisis – in the Netherlands. And the objective of Technology in Education and Employment (TEE) was to increase the number of students and employees in the technical or technological sectors – where, despite the 2008 crisis, there were still shortages.

²⁸Even though the sample of networks was drawn randomly, the regions appeared to be comparable in size (i.e., each region included a city that is one of the G32: the 32 largest Dutch cities).

Study II narrowed down its number of research methods: Archival records; interviews; and surveys were found to provide the richest type of data on network governance; processes; effectiveness; and relations. Therefore, these three sources were chosen for the second, main study.

Archival records consisted of various official records and reports, provided by the central government; regional actors; and some that were freely available on the Internet. To select interviewees, we first obtained expert opinions (Burt and Minor 1983; Scott 1991) from key central governmental actors and the regional project leaders. Next, snowball sampling (Goodman 1961) was used while interviewing regional network actors, to include more respondents. In total, 55 interviews were held: 39 semi-structured interviews with members of the various network-participating organizations (e.g., schools, local governments, firms, social security agencies) of the eleven regional networks. These interviewees included regional network leaders and network members at both the strategic and tactical levels. The interviews dealt with the perceived effectiveness of the networks; their governance; and network relations. A further 16 interviews were held with central government's directors and policy officers, during which notes were taken, in order to collect relevant background information about the networks, such as funding regulations and policies, goals and targets, and relevant developments during the existence of the regional networks. On average, each interview took 75 minutes and was audio-taped, transcribed in full, coded and then subsequently analyzed, using the QSR NVivo 8.0 software package.²⁹

A survey was also distributed among members of the eleven networks: in two waves. First, each of the 39 interviewees was handed a copy. Second, each of the eleven regional network leaders was given 5-10 questionnaires to distribute among the network members who had not been interviewed. The survey was pre-tested during two network meetings of two different projects (Lifelong Learning and Youth Unemployment, both in region East) for clarity and completeness, after which several changes were made. Of the 100 questionnaires that were distributed, 37 were returned. After eliminating two questionnaires that were filled out for networks operating outside the scope of the research, 35 questionnaires were used that detailed the dynamics of nine regional networks (see Table 4 for an overview of the available data sources for each of the regional networks).

Network		Interview data (number of interviews)	Survey data (number of valid, returned questionnaires)
1	North SDO	4	10
2	North YU	3	0
3	East SDO	4	2
4	East YU	4	2
5	East LLL	3	5
6	East TEE	4	6
7	South SDO	4	1
8	South YU	2	2
9	South TEE	2	1
10	West SDO	6	3
11	West YU	3	0

Table 4. Available data sources for each regional network

²⁹The interviews were conducted, coded and analyzed by the main author and two advanced MSc students.

Dependent variables

Goal attainment and perceived effectiveness

When looking at network effectiveness, we distinguished between goal attainment, defined as the actual realization of predetermined targets, and perceived network effectiveness. Goal attainment was based on archival records provided by the central government.³⁰ The initial study had illustrated that goal attainment was not seen as the single objective of each network. In order to develop a proxy for the networks' perceived effectiveness by members, a survey measure was developed that was not only based on the interview data of the first study, but also on theoretical indicators of network effectiveness. Factor analysis showed that these eleven items (answered on a 5-point Likert scale) formed a single factor: perceived network effectiveness (Cronbach's alpha .91). Table 5 shows both the eleven items of perceived effectiveness and the ten items of network relations, including their sources in the literature.

Effectiveness criteria	Number of items	Items	Source
Perceived effectiveness	11 items		
Overall	1 item	Overall success/ effectiveness	McGuire & DaSilva (2009)
Organization level effectiveness	3 items	Added value for the organization (e.g., means, clients, services); Added value for clients; Translation of network-based decisions to operational levels of organizations	Provan & Milward (2001); Klijn (2007); Study I
Network level effectiveness – current	5 items	Realizing predetermined targets; Congruency of organizations' actions; speed of decision-making; joint actions; innovativeness	Provan & Milward (2001); Study I
Network level effectiveness – future	2 items	Expected continuation of services after funding ends; Expectation that measures will continue to be effective	Provan & Milward (2001); Klijn, Stein & Edelenbos (2010); Study I
Network relations	10 items		
Trust	4 items	Partners generally live up to their agreements; Partners are generally honest to each other; Not taking advantage; Doing more than strictly necessary	Sako (1998); McEvily & Zaheer (2006); Mayer (1995); Rousseau (1998); Klijn, Stein & Edelenbos (2010)
Organizational commitment	2 items	My organization is willing to invest time and money in this project; Commitment to agreed operational actions	Allen & Meyer (1990)
Individual commitment	2 items	This project's objective matters a great deal to me; I'm willing to make an effort beyond what is expected of me	Allen & Meyer (1990)
Communication	2 items	Frequency of formal and informal contact	Klijn, Stein & Edelenbos (2010)

Table 5. Questionnaire items measuring perceived effectiveness and network relations

³⁰As the networks concerned four projects, each with its own specific targets, the goal attainment of each network was compared to the Dutch national average performance of that particular project. Networks performing at the Dutch national average were given a score '3.' Those performing within the top twenty percent of highest performing networks received a '5,' those performing at the bottom twenty percent were given a '1.'

Network relations

We are interested in how regional network actors perceived their network relations. Because Study II did not include social network data, but relied on interview and survey data instead, the initial measure was broadened by including items on communication, such as frequency of contact. In all, the survey consisted of 10 items regarding trust, collaboration, communication, and commitment (Sako and Helper 1998; McEvily and Zaheer 2006; Rousseau 1998; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Klijn, Steijn and Edelenbos 2010). Factor analysis revealed that network relations consisted of two distinct factors: 1) Personal relations (Cronbach's alpha .81), which consisted of six items on individual commitment and frequency of contact; and 2) Inter-organizational relations (Cronbach's alpha .75), incorporating four items on organizational commitment and trust (see Appendix I).

Predictive variables

Based on the first study, we defined two predictive variables: Network maturity and type of network governance. Network maturity (i.e., number of years in existence) was assessed through archival data. Type of governance was determined based on interview data that elicited recollections on the development of the networks from the beginning (e.g., who took the initiative, which actors wrote the subsidy request) and how they are currently governed (e.g., who is involved in the decision-making, who organizes and chairs the meetings).

Control variables

Based on archival data, we determined network size (i.e., the number of participating organizations), sector (i.e., 'public' or 'multi-sectoral'), and idiosyncratic regional environmental characteristics.³¹

Methods of data analysis

We first explored whether the four effectiveness criteria (goal attainment, content type effectiveness, personal relations, and inter-organizational relations) are at odds with each other. We compared the mean scores of the eleven networks, and the correlations of the four effectiveness criteria. In order to explore how the predictive variables (network maturity and network governance) and control variables (size, sector and environmental situation) affected network effectiveness, we conducted a series of regressions, testing several models. The nominal data on governance types were transformed into a binary data-set for one model: 'centralized' and 'decentralized' networks. Lead-organization and NAO-governed networks, where the decision-making NAO's operate as centralized networks, were labelled 'centralized.' Participant networks in which the NAO has merely coordinative tasks were labelled 'decentralized.' Considering the other compared model, dummy variables were formed for the four types of network governance (participant governed networks were chosen as the referent variable). The qualitative data offered an even better understanding and illustration of the findings.

³¹ A region's environmental characteristics were assessed with four criteria: Unemployment rates; youth unemployment rates; educational levels; and school drop-out rates prior to the start of the networks. These data were collected from various official archival records and were compared to the national Dutch average. Each region received a score from 1 to 5: '1' indicated that the region had a highly disadvantaged position compared to the national Dutch average, and a '5' indicated that a region was comparatively highly advantaged. A '3' meant that a region's situation was similar to the national Dutch average, et cetera. Scores were given independently by both the main author and two MSc students, and discussed and concluded afterwards.

FINDINGS – STUDY II

Tension between results and relations

Proposition 1A postulated that high goal attainment may be obtained at the expense of building high quality network relations, and high quality inter-organizational relations may be obtained at the expense of attaining goals. During the Study II interviews, several respondents indicated that a strong focus on realizing targets collided with collaboration or long-term results.

“The aim of region West, to establish a sustainable infrastructure for lifelong learning, is – in my view – at odds with realizing targets quickly.” [School representative in West]

“Quantitative targets can have a negative effect when people do not invest in culture and lack a long-term vision. Targets must be realized now; since that is what the network gets paid for.” [School representative in East]

Table 6 presents an overview of the descriptive statistics (i.e., mean scores and standard deviations) and correlations between goal attainment, perceived network effectiveness, personal and inter-organizational network relations, network maturity and network governance; it includes the control variable sizes, sector, and environmental situation.

	Mean	S.D.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Goal attainment	2.92	1.04								
2. Perceived effectiveness	3.45	.09	.03							
3. Personal relations	3.81	.64	-.36*	.44**						
4. Inter-organizational relations	3.49	.59	-.18	.68**	.50**					
5. Maturity	.60	.50	-.22	.45**	.23	.34				
6. Type of network governance	2.60	1.06	-.57**	.36*	.37*	.49*	.64**			
7. Size	.29	.46	-.02	-.10	-.25	-.23	.00	-.42*		
8. Sector	.54	.51	.52**	-.40*	-.41*	-.40*	-.75**	-.79**	.45**	
9. Environmental situation	.11	.32	.37*	.16	.09	.01	.11	-.29	-.23	-.21

Table 6. Descriptive statistics and correlations for the quantitative variables (dependent, predictive and control)

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Data showed that there was actually no significant correlation between the objective measure of goal attainment and the subjective measure of perceived effectiveness. Overall, perceived effectiveness was higher than goal attainment. Studies on organizational and managerial performance have shown that individuals’ perceptions often overestimate the level of performance (Meier and O’Toole 2012; Bazerman 2005). When comparing the objective and subjective data, case-by-case, we noted that in the studied North and South networks, the perceived effectiveness was relatively high compared to goal attainment; while in the relatively strong performing region East the perceived effectiveness appeared to be underestimated

(West had quite similar results for both measures). An explanation for such a presumed 'false positive' may be that network actors value other indicators higher when objective results are lacking; while actors that are confident about the actual output dare to be more critical about other effectiveness indicators.

As with Study I, the correlation analysis showed that goal attainment correlated negatively with personal relations ($r=-.36$, $p<0.05$). Goal attainment and inter-organizational relations also had a negative correlation, but this correlation was not statistically significant. Therefore, proposition 1A is partially supported: In network-settings, high goal attainment may be obtained at the expense of building high quality personal relations, or building high quality personal relations may be attained at the expense of attaining goals. However, when network effectiveness is defined as a stakeholder's perspective, through the construct of perceived effectiveness, there is a positive correlation between both personal ($r=.44$, $p<0.01$) and inter-organizational relations ($r=.68$, $p<0.001$). An explanation for these findings is that high quality network relations add to the anticipated continuation into the future, which was an important part of the perceived effectiveness measure. This indicates that network actors are able to establish network relations and be effective at the same time, when effectiveness measures include, amongst others, anticipated continuation into the future, as opposed to merely attaining goals here and now.

The aging effect

Proposition 1B states that as networks mature, the tension between high goal attainment and high quality network relations may diminish. Therefore, we compared one-year old networks (of which there were six) to two-year old ones (of which there were five). The difference between one-year and two-year old networks may seem insignificant, but the first year was by no means just a start-up. The networks were funded for one-year at a time, and could re-apply, with a maximum of four years, with the stipulation that they had to deliver by the end of the first year in order to secure their continuance.

Goal attainment was higher in the first-year than in the second-year networks. Interview accounts of what was going on in the networks showed goal attainment was often higher during the first year, due to 'easy pickings.' For example, during the first year, the networks concerned with reducing school drop-outs were largely involved in bringing recently dropped-out youths back into the school system, which was relatively easy. In subsequent years, much more effort had to be extended because the more persistent school-avoiding youths had to be identified and redirected to schools. In order to test proposition 1B, the tension (i.e., difference) between goal attainment, on the one hand, and personal and inter-organizational network relations, on the other, was calculated. Two models were compared, via regression analysis (see Table 7). The first one included only the control variables: size, sector and environmental characteristics. Model two included the variable maturity. The control variables explained little variation in tension between goal attainment and personal relations (Adjusted R square=20%, $F(4.32)=3.707$, $p<0.05$), but when maturity was included, the explanatory power rose to 36.7% ($F(4.32)=5.645$, $p<0.001$). These results showed that two-year old networks that were smaller in size, multi-sectoral, and had above-average environmental characteristics, experienced less tension between realizing goals and establishing personal relations, compared to younger ones operating in a less fortunate context. As expected, based on the results of the correlational analysis, no significant models were found for the tension between goal attainment and inter-organizational relations. There is thus support for the following refined proposition: The tension between obtaining high goal attainment and establishing *personal* relations diminishes as networks mature.

	Model I	Model II
Network sector	-.41	-1.33**
Network size	.52	.99**
Environmental situation	-1.01*	-.97**
Network maturity		-1.01**
Constant	1.01**	1.98**
F-stat	3,72*	5.65**
Adjusted R ²	20.2%	36.7%

Table 7. Regression results of network maturity on tension between goal attainment and personal relations

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Centralized versus decentralized networks

Proposition 2A stated that decentralized networks are associated with perceptions of high quality relations and low levels of goal attainment, while centralized networks are associated with high levels of goal attainment and perceptions of low quality relations. In order to address this proposition, lead-organization networks and NAO-led networks were redefined as centralized networks, and participant and NAO-coordinated networks as decentralized networks. Again, several models were tested for each of the four factors: goal attainment; perceived effectiveness; and personal and inter-organizational relations. Significant models were only found for goal attainment. This means that the level of network centralization did not affect network relations nor the stakeholder perceptions of network effectiveness.

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Network sector	1.37**	1.42**	1.31**
Network size	-.50	-.45	-.09
Environmental situation	1.39**	1.45**	1.64**
Centrality		.49	
NAO-led (ref = participant)			-1.15*
NAO-coordinated			.43
Lead organization			.89**
Constant	2.27**	1.83**	2.01**
F-stat	12.72**	10.94**	24.38**
Adjusted R ²	50.9%	53.9%	80.5%

Table 8. Regression results of network centrality and type of network governance on goal attainment

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

The first model in Table 8 shows the effect of the control variables (size, sector and environmental characteristics) on goal attainment. The control variables explained much variance (Adjusted R square = 51%, p<0.001). As it was a multi-sectoral network in a region with better than average environmental characteristics, the goal attainment was higher; public and environmentally less fortunate networks led to less goal attainment. When adding the variable centralization, the explanatory power increased, but not significantly, to 53.9%. Therefore, we found no statistical support for proposition 2B. In other words, the level of centralization did not affect the dependent variables: goal attainment and network relations.

Type of governance and the role of an NAO

In proposition 2B goal attainment and network relations rates are affected by type of governance, more specifically by the precise role of the NAO. We postulated that NAOs with merely coordinative tasks are associated with high quality network relations, and those that take on a leading role are associated with a

high level of goal attainment but the network relations are low quality.

When analyzing the qualitative interview data of Study II, a recurring pattern was noted, similar to the one found in Study I. Networks with an external agency (an NAO) operated either far better or far worse compared to lead-organization or participant-governed networks, in terms of perceived effectiveness of the network members. The crucial factor appeared to be: The precise role of the NAO. In regions where the NAO had a coordinative role, but left important decision-making to the actual network members, both network members and central government were very satisfied: three networks in East and one in West. In East, a single NAO (representing all municipalities in the region) was responsible for coordinating three networks (Youth Unemployment [YU]; Technology in Education and Employment [TEE]; and Lifelong Learning [LLL]), and was frequently mentioned as an important factor for success. In West, an independent agency coordinated the School Drop-Out network.

"There are a lot of employment-related initiatives in [East]. Luckily, we have a good structure here where many of these projects come together. [Name NAO] employs the project leaders who coordinate the network and chair meetings, et cetera. As we literally share a hallway, we [the project leaders of the LLL, YU and TEE networks] are able to connect our overlapping project goals and see how we can help one another."
[Project leader, East]

"Collaborating with other schools and municipalities is not always easy. [...] It helps a lot that [name NAO] acts as a mediator to make sure we meet on a regular basis, actually, to reach decisions and also checks whether we all do the agreed tasks." [Vocational school, West]

In contrast, instances were found in which an NAO acted as the network leader – quite similar to what was found in Study I. In the Youth Unemployment network in South, the central government pulled the NAO out of the project, after the first year.

"The external agency that managed the network slowly took over. More and more externals were shipped in and as they did most of the necessary work, the network partners became less involved. After a while, the results were poor and central government decided to intervene. I was then asked to become project leader, also as an external actor, but with the explicit instruction to coordinate and stimulate rather than to make decisions." [Project leader, South]

An initial comparison of the four types of governance (see Table 9 for their descriptive statistics) revealed that participant-governed networks did not do well in terms of goal attainment ($F(3,34)=26.3$, $p<0,001$), but they had solid inter-organizational relations ($F(3,32)=3.0$, $p<0,05$), which is similar to what was found in Study I. In contrast to Study I however, NAO-led networks underperformed in both respects. NAO-coordinated networks and lead-organization networks did relatively well on realizing goals and establishing network relations at the same time.

Next, we examined how network governance type affected goal attainment, after controlling for sector, size and environmental characteristics. Again two models were tested: One with the control variables only (Model I in Table 8) and one with added governance types (Model III in Table 8). The first model explained 51% of the variance, and when type of governance was included, the explanatory power rose to 81% ($p<0,001$). NAO-led networks attained fewer goals (compared to participant-governed networks as the referent variable), while lead-organization, multi-sectoral networks and networks with a better than average social environment resulted in higher goal attainment scores ($F(6,34)=24.4$, $p<0,001$). NAO-coordinative networks did not differ significantly from participant-governed networks. Neither did we find an effect for network size. Network governance-type only affected goal attainment; no significant statistical effects were found for perceived effectiveness, personal and inter-organizational relations. Hence, partial support was found for proposition 2B: Coordinating NAOs are associated with both high goal

attainment and high inter-organizational relations, while leading NAOs are associated with both low levels of goal attainment and low inter-organizational relations.

Variable	Type of governance	N	Mean	S.D.
Goal attainment	<i>NAO-led</i>	4	2.50	1.00
	<i>NAO-coordinated</i>	17	3.76	.56
	<i>Lead organization</i>	3	3.33	.58
	<i>Shared participant</i>	11	2.00	.00
	<i>Total</i>	35	3.03	.95
Perceived effectiveness	<i>NAO-led</i>	3	2.75	1.13
	<i>NAO-coordinated</i>	17	3.40	.69
	<i>Lead organization</i>	2	3.75	.49
	<i>Shared participant</i>	11	3.74	.49
	<i>Total</i>	33	3.47	.70
Personal relations	<i>NAO-led</i>	3	3.50	.90
	<i>NAO-coordinated</i>	17	3.61	.59
	<i>Lead organization</i>	2	3.75	.35
	<i>Shared participant</i>	11	4.10	.62
	<i>Total</i>	33	3.77	.64
Inter-organizational relations	<i>NAO-led</i>	3	2.78	.63
	<i>NAO-coordinated</i>	17	3.36	.53
	<i>Lead organization</i>	2	3.83	.00
	<i>Shared participant</i>	11	3.72	.55
	<i>Total</i>	33	3.45	.58

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of network effectiveness and network relations

An interesting effect was found for the control variable, type of network sector. Multi-sectoral networks did better in terms of goal attainment ($F(1.34)=11.9$, $p<0.01$), while the public ones performed better in personal ($F(1.32)=6.3$, $p<0.05$) and inter-organizational relations ($F(1.32)=6.0$, $p<0.05$) as well as perceived effectiveness ($F(1.32)=5.8$, $p<0.05$). This is intriguing, as authors often assume that multi-sectoral collaboration is more effective, since knowledge and resources of several sectors are combined (Selsky and Parker 2005; Gazley and Brudney 2007). However, multi-sectoral collaboration can be less effective when there is tension between institutional logics (Herranz 2008; Andrews and Entwistle 2010). Our findings suggest that collaboration is easier among public actors, while private actors may propel networks to attain their goals.

DISCUSSION

Collaborative regional networks that are financially stimulated by the central government for a limited period of time face tension between realizing pre-determined targets and establishing relations among its members; On the one hand, they must realize goals in order to ensure their existence while, on the other, they must invest in network relations, culture and processes in order to enhance the continuation of their joint efforts once the stimulation of the central government ends. Indeed, our initial empirical study put forward that pre-determined targets and collaborative network relations are at odds with each other. It was conjectured that centralized networks may be related to high goal attainment, whereas decentralized networks are linked to highly cooperative personal and inter-organizational relations. As time goes by and a network matures, the noted tension between goal attainment and network relations should diminish. The

second main study found support for the proposition that there is a tradeoff between a network's goal attainment and personal relations. This finding is noteworthy, inasmuch it is often assumed in the literature that 'good cooperation' is associated with higher network effectiveness. Network maturity is found to play a role in affecting the tension between results and relations: specifically, two-year old, public and smaller networks that act in a region with munificent environmental characteristics (e.g., low unemployment rates) experience less tension between realizing goals and establishing collaborative network relations.

Regarding network governance, we found that it is not important whether a network is coordinated by a single actor or a decentralized collaboration of actors: Network centrality did not affect network effectiveness or the quality of network relations. Moreover, we found that when a NAO coordinates a network, the results are numerically high and the quality relations are good, whereas if a NAO takes on a leading role it leads to both low results and low relations. It should be borne in mind that in the past, 'network governance' type has hardly been a matter of design, but rather of circumstance – based on prior relations; emerging practices; relative position; and power. So, although the precise network governance design can be manipulated to some extent, it is not always possible to configure it beforehand. An additional finding is that the sectoral background of networks (i.e., public or multi-sectoral) matters; the evidence suggests that inter-organizational relations are easier to build within purely public-sector networks, while multi-sectoral networks (i.e., networks which also include private actors) score higher in terms of goal attainment.

Limitations, future research, and implications

The relative small sample size can be regarded as a key limitation of Study I. However, that initial study formulated propositions (rather than examined them empirically, which occurred in Study II), and the established evidence is consistent and meaningful. Also, drawing from both the quantitative and qualitative data, Study II offers richer insights into the organizing and functioning of regional networks for central-policy implementation.

Another research limitation involves the measures of network effectiveness. In order to assess network effectiveness, two measures are used: 'Goal attainment' (an archival-based, objective measure of the number of targets realized) and 'perceived effectiveness' (the network members' perceptions of effectiveness). As expected, these measures do not behave identically. While goal attainment is at odds with personal relations, perceived effectiveness correlates positively with both personal and inter-organizational relations. Although the reliability of the measure is high (Cronbach's alpha is .91), no significant models are found with perceived effectiveness as the dependent variable in the regression analyses. Most network members rated the perceived effectiveness of their networks relatively high, even when goal attainment was low. When using perceptual survey data on organizational or network performance, false positives and false negatives may occur (Meier and O'Toole, 2012). Still, we believe that including stakeholder perceptions about performance provides a much more complete picture, when used concomitantly with more objective, archival data. In terms of the measure of perceived effectiveness, several improvements are recommended. First, we measured the predicted rather than the actual continuity. For future studies it would be particularly valuable to determine what incentives foster long-term results; using longitudinal network data-sets, also after the termination of central-governmental funding. However, such data will be harder to collect than those from networks that still have a formal operational status. Second, we included the network members as stakeholders, and asked them to rate the network on multiple areas, including the added value for their own organization and for clients. It would be better to include data obtained directly from stakeholders, for instance from clients: to rate the services. Moreover, future research on perceived network effectiveness should not only use multiple criteria, but should also ask the various actors to evaluate

the relative importance of these criteria (Klijn 2007), especially when only a survey is being used for networks and contexts.

Network maturity and governance as well as the control variables, sector and environment, affected project attainment: They explained 40 to 80 percent of the variance of network effectiveness. This suggests that additional factors are at work in network effectiveness. Based on signals received during the interviews, we expect that within a single region, multiple networks may affect one another; the public issues they address are often interrelated and (representatives of) network actors are routinely involved in other, similar networks. Follow-up studies would need to address how the networks overlap or how 'inter-organizational interlock' affects network effectiveness.

We conclude by underlining several implications of the investigation for researchers and practitioners. First, putting too much pressure on a network to achieve numerical results may counteract long-term network objectives. Funding and network actors should thus be cautious about realizing high goal attainment at the expense of good network relations, because 1) the commitment and involvement of multiple actors are needed to enable effective continuity of its activities after the funding ends; and 2) the established regional relations may be necessary for similar future projects. High goal attainment may be the result of a single organization pushing hard while others are either uncommitted or simply uninvolved. In times of external governmental funding this is not negative *per se*. However, if the activities need to be continued, after a one-off funding, all network actors have to be involved. Networks tend to outsource crucial tasks to an NAO-like organization within the region; while this may enhance short-term output, it also reduces the likelihood that the network activities will become integrated within the regular operations of all the network members; this can seriously undermine the continuity of the activities. The results suggest that having an NAO in a network is beneficial, as long as the role is merely coordinating.

The shown tension between results and relations means that funding by the central government and other actors should not be merely based on goal attainment, but also on a check of actual involvement. Networks that hire external actors should be viewed with caution because the chance that the activities become integrated at the operational levels of the network members is low. Future research on network effectiveness should incorporate multiple measures that are suitable for the short-term and long-term objectives of the particular networks' contexts. These objectives should be measured longitudinally, as we revealed that reaching quantitative targets and developing stable network relations are likely to develop non-synchronously. Regional networks that are translating and implementing national policies, should be given the time to develop and evolve, while, at the same time, should be studied carefully so that both short-term results and network relations are balanced while sparking sustainable results.

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APPENDIX I. Factor analysis on the survey items of Study II

Item	Perceived effectiveness (.91)	Inter-organizational relations (.81)	Personal relations (.75)
Overall effectiveness	.85		
Speed of decision making processes	.83		
Effectiveness for clients	.75		
Translation of decisions in actions	.74		
Objectives realized	.72		
Congruency of organizations' services	.71		
Expected continuity	.67	.48	
Joint actions	.65		
Expected future effectiveness	.59	.49	
Effectiveness for own organization	.56		.57
Innovative	.41		
Taking advantage		.74	
Living up to agreements		.74	
Honesty		.68	
Doing more than strictly necessary		.57	
Commitment to agreed operational actions	.46	.51	.48
Organization's commitment to project		.43	
Contact informal			.80
Making an effort			.77
Contact formal			.73
Individual's commitment to project			.56

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Rotation converged in 6 iterations

Explanatory power: 60%

CHAPTER 5

Regional 'meta-networks' for Dutch public-policy implementation: A mixed-methods field study³²

³² An earlier version of this paper (on the first pilot study) has been presented as:

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Regional ‘meta-networks’ for Dutch public-policy implementation

A mixed-methods field study

ABSTRACT

Although organizational network research typically examines whole, dyadic or ego-networks, the more complex inter-organizational networks are no isolated entities; most of them overlap and are part of even larger entities. This study focuses on such overlapping regional networks in the Dutch public-policy field of education and employment. With both qualitative and quantitative data, obtained from eleven so-called component networks, we examine the emergence and effects of four regional meta-networks. Based on two-mode affiliation data, we also visualize the, normally imperceptible, regional meta-networks. The emergence of regional meta-networks was affected by idiosyncratic institutional; cultural-historical; and social factors. Regional meta-network dynamics were found to affect both goal attainment and personal relations: Larger and more centralized regional meta-networks stimulated goal attainment, while smaller and decentralized meta-networks were associated with higher quality personal relations. In addition, potential negative side-effects of meta-networks are identified. The paper ends with recommendations for future research on more effective regional network for high public-policy implementation performance.

Key words: network interlocks; project networks; network effectiveness; regional networking

INTRODUCTION

Regional networks have become a popular way for the Dutch central government to translate national ambitions into regional policies and actions. These networks often consist of a select number of regional actors, which has led to the emergence of regional meta-networks. Many network scholars study networks as if they were isolated entities. However, networks tend to overlap with each other and are therefore most often parts of larger entities. This paper explores the emergence and effects of these regional meta-networks on the collaborative networks that they are comprised of, around the key question: How may regional meta-networks affect the dynamics and effectiveness of their underlying component networks?

First, we define what regional meta-networks are and how they emerge. Then, several strands of literature are reviewed that led to the specific research questions about how meta-networks may affect their underlying component networks. The methods section details the mixed-methods approach taken. The empirical findings contribute to the theoretical notions of temporary organizations, project networks, and network systems; specifically in the public sector in which notions of embedded networks are relatively new. As we illustrate how meta-networks may affect the dynamics and effectiveness of their underlying component networks, this paper also offers a new angle to notions of network effectiveness. We conclude with a discussion of the findings; practical implications; and recommendations for future research.

How do regional meta-networks emerge?

More and more, public-policy issues in the Netherlands are being addressed in regional collaborative networks.³³ The emergence of regional networks is stimulated in at least two ways. Top-down, the Dutch central government purposively stimulates the emergence of regional collaborative networks in order to translate national level ambitions into effective regional level policies and practices. In recent years, many regional collaborative networks have been developed, around various public-policy issues in the public-policy area of education and employment, addressing school drop-outs, youth unemployment, and lifelong learning. And bottom-up, regional networks emerge because local governments may lack the required capacity and knowledge to effectively tackle social issues at the local level. Therefore, single municipalities seek collaboration with others in their vicinity to accomplish the tasks they cannot adequately carry out on their own (Van Tatenhove, 2009; Cigler, 1994). Often, these tasks involve decentralized ones (e.g., from central to local governments) (Kickert, 2000; Van Twist, 2010). Given that this decentralization trend continuous for various social policy issues in the Netherlands, it is relevant to understand the organizational dynamics of such networks.

Normally regional collaborative networks in the policy area of education and employment involve a limited set of organizations – schools, local governments, social security providers, and firms – which are represented in networks by a limited set of individuals. Given these finite network contexts, these individuals keep ‘bumping into each other.’ We designate this kind of routine and thus taken-for-granted overlap of networks a ‘regional meta-network,’ which we define as: An informal, long-term network consisting of actors who, in varying constellations, form advisory committees and working groups for various public-policy issues through temporary, issue-specific component networks. Figure 1 presents a schematic model of what a meta-network looks like. The three circles represent three distinct collaborative networks, consisting of organizations that are represented by individuals (e.g., CEO’s or aldermen at the strategic network levels; and policy advisors at the tactical network levels). Some of these individual representatives (i.e., the rectangles) are involved in multiple networks at the same time: Together, these representatives form a regional meta-network.

Figure 1. Schematic composition of a regional meta-network

³³ The term ‘regional’ refers to an informal governance layer, in-between local governments (of which there are 431 in the Netherlands) and provincial governments (of which there are 12).

The relevance of regional meta-networks

Meta-networks acknowledge the fact that presumably distinct networks may in reality be intertwined. We assume that these networks may affect – reinforce or impede – each other's performance. The regional collaborative networks that are studied in this paper are facilitated and stimulated by the central government. In different centralized departments, the overall objectives for the regions are determined. These departments are traditionally predominantly interested in the results of their own – narrowly defined – policy objectives. They tend to overlook the possibility that their policies and objectives are affecting those of other departments. Since regional meta-networks imply that a limited set of individuals participate in multiple governmentally-induced networks, these individuals may play a crucial role in connecting the various policy objectives that are developed in the rather fragmented silos of the central government: Either because these actors easily identify conflicting objectives, or because they may be able to combine and strengthen practices that are developed in, formally, distinct networks.

For example, a network with the purpose to reduce the number of school drop-outs may both reinforce and impede a network that aims to reduce youth unemployment. The networks reinforce each other in the long run, as preventing school drop-outs is likely to lead to fewer unemployed youths. On the short run, however, the networks' objectives may impede each other. Schools receive a significant financial reward when they reduce their number of school drop-outs, which implicates that they are less prone to enroll youth with a high risk of dropping out. However, the youth unemployment-network has an objective to lead unemployed youth to work or back to school, and thus encourages schools to enroll high risk pupils with complicated problems.

THEORY

Extant concepts similar to meta-networks

Although in network theory the whole network is usually regarded as the highest abstraction level, literature does acknowledge the existence of what we called meta-networks. In the private-sector literature, the notion that networks are part of larger entities is not new. Some industries largely or fully operate in a project-mode. Instead of having large enterprises, these industries consist of changing cooperative constellations of individuals or small firms. Well-known examples of such industries include the cultural industries, such as the movie, television or music industries (Petersen & White, 1981; Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Sydow, 2001), the construction sector (Eccles, 1981), and regional economies and industrial districts (see Powell, 1990, for an overview). Although these industries appear, on the surface, to be highly dynamic and flexible, scholars have found that these industries in practice have a strong tendency for recurring collaboration and preference for stability (Peterson & White, 1981; Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). Based on prior successful relations, there appeared to be dramatic patterns of partner inclusion and exclusion (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). Eccles (1981) also found such stable and continuous patterns, and believed they were sufficiently systematic as to deserve the label 'quasi firms'.³⁴ More recently, Sydow (2001; 2008) came to the same conclusion when studying the television industry in Germany. He found that subsequent inter-organizational projects depended on the viability of longer-term, more sustainable networks, which he named 'project networks.' Hence, in industries that are characterized by a project-mode, overarching networks of temporary constellations (i.e., meta-networks) are a well-known phenomenon, albeit it may not always be readily visible to outside observers (Peterson & White, 1981).

In the public sector, the notion that networks may interrelate has been noted fairly recently.

³⁴ A quasi firm can be defined as a loosely coupled arrangement, created to achieve long-lasting cooperation among actors for joint, strategic purposes (Roice, Begun & Pointer, 1989).

Rethemeyer and Hatmaker (2008), for example, found that what appeared to be distinct networks – which they called component networks – were actually interconnected through few network managers. They referred to this larger entity of interconnected networks as the ‘network system.’ Ysa (2010) used the term ‘network portfolios’ (an adaptation of the private sector concept alliance portfolios) to refer to the embeddedness of multiple networks in a larger system. Multilevel or nested networks (Moliterno & Mahony, 2010) accentuate that each node in a network is a network in itself at a lower level of analysis. Rephrasing this statement, one could argue that each network is a part of a larger network at a higher level of analysis.

Finally, in regionalist literature the notion of regional meta-networks can also be found, albeit implicitly. For example, Gulati and Gargiulo (1999) describe that when two local governments collaborate with each other, but also have agreements with other local governments, these embedded relationships may accumulate into an overall regional structure of collaboration forms over time. Such a regional structure is said to reduce transaction costs as more information is available and a reputation for reciprocity and trust has been built. Similarly, Boogers (2013) suggests that overlapping or interconnected networks at the regional level will help create stronger ties and ongoing interactions.

Summarizing the above, the notion that networks may overlap and accumulate into larger entities that may, in turn, affect what goes on in these networks, has been noted across various strands of literatures. However, no systematic research into the precise emergence and effects of such meta-networks is present. For the next sub sections, we will draw from these and other strands of literature for the purpose of formulating the research questions.

Factors that stimulate the emergence of meta-networks

Within the guidelines of the Dutch central government, it is largely up to the region to decide which actors to include in a policy implementation type of network. As a consequence, meta-networks may differ from region to region and their dynamics may depend on specific regional characteristics, including institutional, historical, cultural and social factors (MacLeod, 2001). Literature on regionalism offers several of such factors that may play a role in stimulating regional collaboration in general, and the formation of regional meta-networks in particular (see Table 1).

Institutional factors include the size of the region and homogeneity of actors; fixed regional borders; and the presence of a regional level public institution. The fewer municipalities that comprise a region, and the more they are alike (i.e., homogeneity with regard to demography, power and means), the lower the collaborative transaction costs will be and the more likely it is that regional collaboration will be successful (Feiock, 2007; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011). This is because large numbers of heterogeneous municipalities are expected to have more diverse needs and larger political and economic power asymmetries, which would increase the transaction costs to achieve a common agreement. Fixed regional borders can be expected to enhance regional collaboration, as they require repetitive collaboration among neighboring municipalities, and thus lower the transaction costs involved in building trust and commitment. Fixed regional borders also increase the prospect of future collaboration, which constraints opportunism (Miller, 1992). In regions with a fixed geographical border, actors are more likely to continuously bump into each other in distinct arenas, and are therefore more likely to stimulate regional meta-networks. In the Netherlands, regions are not fixed, formal entities: Some regions have highly similar regional delimitations across networks, while others use a different geographical scale for every network. Lastly, the presence of a public institution with some regional level authority is likely to facilitate regional collaboration and the establishing of regional meta-networks. Such a public

institution does not have to be a permanent, regional authority, but some form of institutionalized collaborative effort of local governments will help regional collaboration with other public and private actors (Hamilton, 2002). In regions that lack such a public institution, regional collaboration depends on the willingness of local public leaders to work with other public and private organizations to address social issues at the regional level.

Type	Factor	Sources
Institutional factors	Size of the region	Feiock, 2007
	Homogeneity of actors	Feiock, 2007; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011
	Fixed regional borders	Feiock, 2007
	Regional level public institution	Hamilton, 2002
History	History of cooperation or conflict	Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011
	History of economic hardship	Ostrom, 1990; Feiock, 2007
	Incentives for regional collaboration	Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011; Hamilton, 2002
Social factors	Right people are involved	Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011
	Trust; commitment; shared beliefs and problem-definitions; frequency of contact	Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011

Table 1. Factors that may stimulate the emergence of regional meta-networks

A second regional collaboration factor concerns a region's history and culture. A region's history of cooperation and economic hardship are associated with more intensive regional collaboration (Ostrom, 1990; Feiock, 2007; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011). In regions that have gone through economic hard times, municipalities and private sector organizations have become dependent on each other; whereas regions with more prosperous times may have stimulated the emergence of strong, independent cities. In addition, the incentives for regional collaboration are likely to be of influence: In regions where actors feel an urge for regional level collaboration (e.g., shared problems; resource needs; opportunities; interdependence; uncertainty; or a crisis), the likelihood of the emergence of a regional meta-networks will obviously be larger than in regions where regional collaboration is regarded redundant. And thirdly, a regional meta-network consists of individuals, so social or human-touch type factors may play a role. Examples of such factors include having the right people at the table; having them trust each other; be committed; interact frequently; and have shared beliefs (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011). In sum, these and other regional factors may determine the shape and dynamics of a meta-network. This leads to the first research question of this study:

Q1. What specific regional factors affect the emergence and dynamics of regional meta-networks for public-policy implementation?

The effects on component networks' relations and future expectations

For theorizing about the possible effects of regional meta-networks on component networks relations and future expectations, we draw on several strands of literature, including Temporary Organizations literature, game theory, interorganizational literature and board interlock literature. Literature on Temporary Organizations (TOs) pays attention to the social embeddedness of systems in a larger system. A

TO is defined as a group of two or more non-temporary organizations (also coined ‘parent’ or ‘permanent organizations’) that jointly carry out a task, with the duration of this collaboration being explicitly and ex ante fixed (Janowicz-Panjaitan, Kenis & Vermeulen, 2009). According to this definition, TOs are temporarily bounded and can therefore be viewed as ‘protective bubbles,’ isolated in time and space, having no ‘shadow of the future’ nor a burden of the past (Miles, 1964). Others, however, have distinguished between ‘pure’ forms of TOs and forms that are embedded in past and/or future relations (Bakker, Chambé & Provan, 2009). Figure 2 shows four types of temporal embeddedness of TOs.

Figure 2. Temporary organizations’ (TO) embeddedness in time

		Past collaboration between parent organizations	
		No	Yes
Expected future collaboration between parent organizations	No	I: Pure TO	III: TO as ‘closure’
	Yes	II: TO as a test case for future collaboration	IV: TO as part of an ongoing collaboration

Type I is a ‘pure’ TO: it exist in a ‘protective bubbles,’ with no history of collaboration between the parent organizations, and no expected future encounters. Type II can be seen as a test case for future collaboration. It cannot build on past experiences, but the actors involved expect to collaborate again in the future. Type III, on the other hand, is affected by previous collaborations. However, the parent organizations do not expect to form any new TOs together in the future; and it can therefore be regarded as the final of a series of collaboration forms. Type IV, finally, is highly embedded in time: There has been prior collaboration between the parent organizations, and the actors expect to collaborate again in the future. For the latter two types, literature on Temporary Organizations suggests that past experiences may affect their performance. Trust may have been built during past encounters, in which also quarrels may have occurred. Key players trust others with whom they have worked in the past and whom they found to be reliable (Bakker et al., 2009; Das & Teng, 1998). Inter-organizational relations literature also points to prior relations fostering inter-organizational and interpersonal trust, commitment, and willingness to collaborate (Mitchell & Shortell, 2000; Bryson, Crosby, & Middleton-Stone, 2006; Weber & Khademian, 2008). Similarly, game theory assumes that individuals adopt cooperative strategies when meeting each other repeatedly in similar situations (Axelrod, 1981; Kreps & Wilson, 1982; Ostrom, 2005). When individuals repeatedly cooperate in linked situations, they develop a ‘reputation for reciprocity’ (Ostrom, 2005). Since this reputation provides credibility in new situations, individuals are tempted to use this reputation for reciprocity by actively approaching these individuals for new collaborations. And finally, literature on regionalism suggests that the existence of an overarching regional network reduces transaction costs as more information is available and a reputation for reciprocity and trust has been built (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999).

Several strands of literatures also suggest that, in addition to prior relations, the expectancy to work together in the future may affect the current collaboration. Literature on TOs suggests that the shadow of the future may increase network members’ commitment to the current collaboration for type II and IV TOs (Bakker et al., 2009; Das & Teng, 1998). When network partners know they will be working together again in the future, they are more likely to adopt cooperative strategies. This shadow of the

future may stimulate cooperative behavior, as partners may be more willing to do each other a favor, knowing they will get something in return (Axelrod, 1984; Powell, 1990). Windeler and Sydow (2001, p. 19) summarized this as follows:

"Project networks [...] are more than just temporary systems, because every new project is based upon the experiences of collaboration in earlier ventures and are carried out in the face of the shadow of the future."

Meta-networks may occur via sequential networks, but also via simultaneously occurring networks: in which a set of organizational representatives meet each other around multiple arenas at the same time. In addition to effects from earlier encounters and the prospect of future ones, the fact that actors interact with each other in multiple arenas, simultaneously, is also likely to affect the relations. Board interlocks literature provides a good example of the dynamics that occur when actors meet each other in various settings. A board interlock occurs when a director sits on the board of directors of another organization, herewith creating a tie between two organizations (Gulati & Westphal, 1999). The social embeddedness of board interlocks have been found to foster higher trust levels between individuals, reduce uncertainty, and act as a mechanism for interfirm cooperation (Koenig, Gogel & Sonquist, 1979; Burt, 1983; Mizruchi, 1996). A key challenge for the central government with regard to temporary-component networks is to make sure that the measures taken by a network during the funding period will be sustained after the funding ends and the formal network is adjourned. The reason for this need for policy continuity is that social issues are hardly ever temporary; the temporary funding of such networks are meant as an incentive to intensively tackle a specific social issue at the regional level. More specifically, it is not the network itself that needs to be continued, but the client-oriented measures developed by the network should be sustained and integrated in the participating organizations. Although there is little literature on this specific subject, we postulate that regional meta-networks may stimulate the continuation of prior developed measures, because the meta-network members meet in new constellations which lowers the transactions costs for ongoing adjustments and stimulates social control regarding prior made commitments and agreements.

Summarized, regional meta-networks imply that there is recurring collaboration among its members. Regional meta-networks may therefore foster regional actors' cooperative attitude, resulting in trust; commitment; and an expectancy to continue future collaboration. The second research question therefore is:

Q2. What key aspects of regional meta-networks foster a) high quality personal relations and b) expected continuation of (desired outcome of their) component networks?

The effects on component networks' goal attainment

Compared to the effects on personal relations, there is less known about possible effects of regional meta-networks on their component networks' goal attainment. According to Miles (1964), goal attainment of a TO may be greater compared to a non-temporary organization, because its members are focused on here and now: forgetting the past and neglecting the future (type I TOs). This suggests that collaborative networks of members who do not have a common past and do not expect to engage in future collaborations, may be most effective in terms of goal attainment (i.e., realizing temporary shared goals). Following this line of reasoning, component networks that function under an overarching meta-network would be associated with lower goal attainment than networks that occur in a 'protective bubble.' Others, however, argue that it is the result of the past that stimulate high performance in new settings. Earlier achievements may lead to higher trust and, as a result, to higher autonomy and discretion over resources, which have been found to contribute to effectiveness (Bakker et al., 2009; Das &

Teng, 1998). Similarly, in regionalist literature, little consensus exists about the relation between meta-networks and network effectiveness. Although some scholars argue that an overarching regional network may lead to higher complexity and, as a consequence, to lower effectiveness, others have found that a higher complexity is not associated with lower effectiveness per se: Boogers (2013) found a positive relation between complexity (i.e., the number of distinct networks in a region) and perceived effectiveness. Thus, although the precise direction of the link is unclear, meta-networks do affect their component networks' goal attainment. In addition, meta-networks can be expected to make it easier to notice when different component networks create friction. Rethemeyer and Hatmaker (2008) studied multiple networks in the area of vocational education. To their surprise, they found that certain network managers of what appeared to be distinct networks were interconnected, and that using the datasets of all networks together gave a more complete picture of the environment than when they would have studied each network separately. Therefore, Rethemeyer and Hatmaker argued that network managers should have a perspective broader than their 'home' network and should be sensitive to friction between component networks; detecting and removing potential friction in an early state may foster high goal attainment in the end. This reasoning leads to the following research question:

Q3. What key aspects of regional meta-networks foster goal attainment for their component networks?

Potential negative effects of regional meta-networks

In order to balance the previous two research questions that focused on the 'bright side' of meta-networks we also explore potentially 'dark sides.' Although an often claimed characteristic of networks is their flexibility (Emery & Trist, 1965; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004), studies have repeatedly shown that networks may suffer from inertia, lock-in effects and a lack of flexibility (Sydow, et al., 2009; Kim, Oh & Swaminathan, 2006). Possibly, meta-networks enhance these effects of inertia and lock-ins within their component networks: in two ways. Firstly, the tendency to depend on recurrent patterns of collaboration contains a risk, known as a relational lock-in effect (Gergiulo & Ertug, 2006; Manning & Sydow, 2008). A relational lock-in can be described as a bias toward the usual suspects, which may lead to the exclusion of potentially relevant actors. A relational lock-in effect may be self-reinforcing; The more partners repeatedly work together and form a dense meta-networks, the harder it will become for outsiders to get involved. Another possible downside is that the 'usual suspects' grow tired of each other. One of the criticisms on the board interlock literature is that the bulk focuses on positive ties and their effects on for instance exchange of information, while relations might also be characterized by, for instance, distrust or dislike. Uzzi (1997) argued that 'overembeddedness in relational embeddedness' (by which he meant having many strong ties and few weak ties), can lead to feuding. Thus, through the regional meta-network, issues and quarrels may be transported from one component network to the next.

In addition, a relational lock-in may induce another type of lock-in effect; known as a cognitive lock-in (Gergiulo & Ertug, 2006). Even though a relational lock-in may benefit the *process* of network collaboration, content-wise it may be detrimental to network effectiveness. If network members rely heavily on measures that have proven to work in previous projects, novel information may be chocked, or new interventions may be excluded beforehand as 'not invented here' (Uzzi, 1997). To put it in social network terms: Overreliance on strong ties tends to develop tight and relatively isolated cliques that are not well integrated in the rest of the region (Granovetter, 1973). The last research question therefore is:

Q4. To what extent may meta-networks result in potential negative side-effects, such as the exclusion of potentially relevant others, feuding among meta-network members, a positive bias for known measures and solutions, or a negative bias toward measures that are invented elsewhere?

METHODS

Research design

A comparative-case study was conducted on four distinct regional meta-networks, that comprised in total even component networks. In the below, these regions are referred to as: North, East, South and West. The four regions were non-randomly picked from a total of approximately 30 Dutch regions; they represented different contextual circumstances, specifically their geographical position and their sectoral characteristics (e.g., agricultural, industrial or metropolitan). The eleven component networks concerned four central governmental projects in the area of education and employment: School Drop-outs (SDO), Youth Unemployment (YU), Lifelong Learning (LLL), and Technology, Education and Employment (TEE). They were chosen because of their common interest in education and employment, even though induced by different departments of the Dutch central government. The core characteristics are listed in Table 2.

	Department	Overall objective	Regional network members	Regions in which the network was studied
School Drop-outs	Min. of Education, Culture and Science	Preventing pupils from dropping out of school; getting drop-outs back into school	Public: Local government (lead); schools for secondary education; schools for vocational education	North, East, South, West
Youth Unemployment	Min of Social Affairs and Employment	Getting unemployed youths back to school and/or to work; keeping youths longer at school	Public and private: Social security agency (lead); local governments; schools for vocational education, employers	North, East, South, West
Lifelong Learning	Min of Social Affairs and Employment & Education, Culture and Science	Increasing the educational level of the Dutch working population	Public and private: Local government; social security agency; schools for higher education; schools for vocational education; employers	East
Technology in Education and Employment	Min. of Economic Affairs; Education, Culture and Science; Social Affairs and Employment	Stimulating people to choose a study and career in the technical or technological sector; target group includes pupils and employees from other sectors	Public and private: Schools for higher education; schools for vocational education; employers; local and provincial governments	East, South

Table 2. Characteristics of the central governmental projects analyzed at the regional meta-network level

Processes of data collection and analysis

Since the concept of regional meta-networks is relatively novel, we chose to conduct first a pilot and then a main study. In the pilot study, we interviewed seven network members whom we knew were involved in two or more similar networks (Klaster, Wilderom & Muntslag, 2010). Mainly, we probed for recognizability of the concept ‘regional meta-network,’ as a bridge for framing the interview questions for the main study. In the main study, we collected not only qualitative, but also quantitative data via

three methods: Interviews; archival records; and a questionnaire (including social-network data).

Interviews

In the pilot study, the seven meta-network members operated in six different regions. Two extra, randomly picked regions were added in this pilot study, in order to ensure that the existence of regional meta-networks would not be exclusive to the four regions of our core interest. The pilot study indicated that meta-networks were a recognizable phenomenon in regions outside the four-region sample as well. Since the interviews from the pilot study covered to a large extent the interview topics in the main study, these pilot data were included in the main study's data analysis, insofar the respondents originated from the four focal regions. The main study consisted of thirty-two semi-structured interviews held in four regions. This resulted in an interview data-base of thirty-seven interviewees located in four regions. Fourteen of these interviewees were active at the strategic level of their organization (e.g., CEOs, city aldermen, top level managers) and twenty-three were active at the tactical level (e.g., policy makers of local governments or schools).

The interviews queried about four themes: perceived effectiveness of the component networks; collaboration within the component networks; relevant regional characteristics; and experiences (positive and negative) with how one network affects the performance of another. The interviews offered a lot of opportunity to explore in-depth the characteristics that mattered for a particular network or region. The interviews took one-and-a-half hours each and were audio-taped, transcribed in full, coded and analyzed using the NVivo 8.0 software package. Coding and analyzing the data were conducted by the main author and two graduating MSc students.

Questionnaire and social-network data

A written questionnaire was used to measure personal relations and expected continuity, as well as to collect social-network data. The regional networks leaders received ten copies: to distribute to their members in the networks. In addition, every interviewee was handed a questionnaire. Of the 100 questionnaires that were distributed, 37 completed ones were returned. Regional meta-networks were measured and visualized based on social-network data. These data were collected and analyzed as follows. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate in which networks they were or had been active in the last five years. The response generated a two-mode affiliation network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Borgatti & Halgin 2010). Affiliation data consist of a set of binary relationships between members of two sets of items, in our case organizations and networks. These binary data can be written as an $N \times A$ matrix with N rows and A columns, where N represents the individuals and A the networks that these individuals are (1) or are not (0) affiliated with. This original data-set was then computed into two distinct matrices: " $N \times N$ " and " $A \times A$," using UCInet 6 (Borgatti, Everett & Freeman 2002). This gave us the opportunity to see how strongly (i.e., via how many component networks) individual actors in a given region were interconnected, as well as how strongly (i.e., via how many individuals) component networks were intertwined. The regional meta-networks were visualized using NetDraw.

Archival records

Various official records and reports, mostly provided by the central government, enabled us to assess the degree of component networks' goal attainment: i.e., the extent to which networks realized their predefined, quantitative targets.

Independent variables

The main independent variable is the regional meta-network. Four indicators of meta-networks were used to measure the relative strength of a meta-network: Density, centrality, size and congruency. Density was calculated dividing the number of *actual* connections in a network by the number of *potential* connections. Centrality usually refers to the position of a single node in a network, based on its number of connections to other nodes. Freeman's degree centrality, however, calculates the *overall* centrality of the network.³⁵ Meta-network size was calculated as the number of actors that were part of a regional meta-network: based on the aforementioned affiliation data. Meta-network congruency, finally, calculated the extent to which distinct component networks used the same regional delimitations. For example, Region East had identical regional delimitations for each component network, and thus scored a 100 percent. This means that around every network, the same municipalities were included. Meta-network congruency was based on freely available data from the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs.³⁶

In addition, to get an impression of network actors' awareness of possibly being part of a regional meta-network, three survey-type questions were added. Answered on a five-point Likert scale, these questions queried about whether these actors met their fellow network members also around other networks; the extent to which they believed that being in multiple networks caused friction; and the extent to which they believed that being in multiple networks actually strengthened the subsequent networks.

Dependent variables

Personal relations and expected continuity

Personal relations were assessed via a written survey that consisted of 9 items, measuring frequency of communication and levels of individual commitment (Cronbach's alpha .85). Expected continuity regarding the component networks' activities, after the governmental funding ends, was measured via two items (Cronbach's alpha 0.86), including: "To what extent do you expect that the network activities will be continued after the governmental funding ends?" The interviews probed for explanations and examples of within-network relations and expected continuity.

Goal attainment

Goal attainment was measured based on archival records that indicated to what extent the eleven component networks realized their predetermined targets. As the networks concerned four distinct projects, each with their own specific objectives and targets, we compared the goal attainment of each component network to the Dutch national average performance for that particular project. Networks performing at the Dutch national average were given a '3'; networks performing within the top twenty percent of highest performing networks received a '5', networks performing at the bottom 20%, were given an '1', and so forth.

³⁵ This measure compares a network to the perfect star network of the same size, in which there is one central actor (who's centrality degree is equal to the number of actors, less one) versus many non-central ones (who's centrality degrees are one). A star network has the most extreme differences in centrality among actors. Freeman's degree centrality thus calculates the degree of inequality in a network as a *percentage* of that of a perfect star network of the same size. The higher this percentage, the higher the centralization or unequal distribution of connections in the network.

³⁶ <http://www.regioatlas.nl/>

FINDINGS

In order to get an idea what meta-networks look like, we first describe variations among regional meta-networks and present and discuss their visualizations. We then explain how meta-networks emerged and what regional characteristics appeared to be responsible for the variations found (RQ1). Next, we explore whether and how meta-networks may affect their underlying component networks, in terms of personal relations and expected continuity (RQ2), and in terms of goal attainment (RQ3). Lastly, we report about meta-networks' possible negative side effects (RQ4).

An initial exploration of the survey data showed that 79% of the respondents indicated that they met their fellow network partners also in other projects (see Table 3). This is a first indication that a majority of the respondents was more or less aware of being a part of a regional meta-network that comprised multiple component networks. Network actors who have a strategic level position in their home organizations (for example, a CEO of a vocational school or private sector company, a city alderman, or a top-manager from a social security agency), report more often to be part of multiple networks, compared to network actors who hold a tactical level position, such as policy makers ($F(2,33)=5.45$; $p<0.01$). Despite being a member of multiple overlapping networks, only a minority seemed to actively use this strategic position of being part of multiple networks: 42% of the respondents felt strongly that by being in multiple networks, they could create synergy. However, 84% experienced some level of tension between objectives of multiple networks. This initial exploration suggests that a large part of the respondents appeared to be part of regional meta-networks, and that most of them are more aware of the possible tensions or overlapping networks, than of opportunities to foster synergy.

Questionnaire items	Largely applicable	Somewhat applicable	Not recognizable
Meeting fellow members around other networks	79%	15%	6%
Synergy across networks	42%	58%	0%
Friction across networks	9%	75%	16%

Table 3. Initial exploration of awareness among network members about being part of a regional network

What do regional meta-networks look like?

The social network data showed that all four regions had in fact quite dense meta-networks, although they varied greatly in size. Table 4 summarizes the density, centrality, size and congruency levels of the four regional meta-networks.

	Density	Centrality	Size	Congruency	Personal relations	Expected continuity	Goal attainment
North	88.5%	19.1%	13	55%	3.89 (.53)	3.45 (.88)	2.3 (.62)
East	68%	22.8%	18	100%	3.43 (.53)	3.19 (.71)	3.6 (.81)
South	100%	25.0%	7	87%	3.31 (.63)	2.90 (1.24)	3.0 (.71)
West	80%	27.2%	10	83%	3.63 (.40)	3.67 (1.04)	3.5 (1.0)

Table 4. Dependent and independent variables for four regional meta-networks

Size

Size refers to the number of actors in a meta-network. The number reflects the number of respondents to the questionnaires: insofar the analysis showed that they were connected to others, via one or more projects. Actors who were only involved in a single component network (i.e., isolates) were excluded. The largest meta-network was found in East, with eighteen members, followed by North (thirteen), and West (ten). South (seven) had the smallest size.

Density

Size and density had a strong negative correlation ($r=-.91$; $p<0.001$): the larger the meta-network, the lower its density is. The densest meta-network was found in South (i.e., 100%, which means that *all* actors were connected via one or more projects), which was largely due to its small size: the chance that all actors are interconnected becomes smaller in a larger sample size. North had quite a high level of density; the lowest density level was found in East. Because of the limited response from South and the abnormal high density that resulted from this, we chose to exclude this region from the empirical analysis; however, the qualitative data were still valuable for explanations and illustrative purposes.

Centrality

A partial correlation test (controlling for size) showed a negative correlation between centrality and density ($r=-.93$; $p<0.01$; see also Table 5); which means that centralized meta-networks score low in density, while decentralized regional meta-networks have a much higher density. In such centralized regional meta-networks, few central actors function as linking pins for several component networks, which means that, consequently, overall density is low. Region West had the highest overall centrality, which means some actors (e.g., the CEO of a large vocational school) had quite central positions in the regional meta-network, while others were more in the periphery. In contrast, the position of actors in regions North and East was much more dispersed. In these regions, actors were often involved in a similar number of component networks, resulting in more similar information positions.

	Density	Congruency
Congruency	-.698***	
Centrality	-.929***	.914***

Table 5. Partial correlations among regional meta-networks’ dynamics (controlling for ‘size’)
*** $p < 0.001$

Congruency

The more each component network used the same geographical delimitation of the region, the higher the meta-network congruency is. East had the highest congruency level: Every network in that region had the same geographical delimitation, which means that the same municipalities are included. The lowest congruency was found in North. Congruency and centrality showed a positive correlation ($r=.91$; $p<0.001$, controlled for size): The more the geographic borders are alike across networks, the more chance that few actors have central positions in the meta-network – and, consequently, the lower the region scores in density ($r=-.70$; $p<0.001$).

Visualizations

Appendix I presents the visualizations of the regional networks in two ways: based on how individual actors are interconnected through component networks (i.e., actor x actor), and based on how component networks are interconnected through individuals (i.e., project x project). For the main empirical analyses, the data on actor x actor networks were used, as the core focus of this research is on *individuals*

who form a regional meta-network through their interactions across component networks. Still, the project x project visualizations are offered as well, as they present interesting insights into differences across regions, with regard to which component networks are most closely linked. We start by reporting the actor x actor meta-networks, followed by the project x project meta-networks.

The meta-network of North resembles an almost perfect, all channel network, in which all actors are interconnected. Only one organization is somewhat at distance from the rest of the meta-network, which indicates that North is highly decentralized. Similarly, the meta-network of East is an all channel network, with one central clique consisting of five organizations, which means that East is quite decentralized, but has a slightly higher centrality level compared to North. The meta-network of South only included local governments, schools and NAO-type organizations, due to non-response from other actors. Despite the high density of this network, centrality was also high: Only a few actors, especially those from the involved schools, were active in more networks than others. The meta-network of West reveals three interconnected cliques: one mainly consisting of a regional platform, one consisting of the local governments, and another one consisting of schools and NAO-type of organizations. The local governments function as a gatekeeper between the other two cliques. Herewith, West is much more centralized than the other meta-networks, with the local governments holding a key position.

The project x project meta-networks include projects that were not among the four core projects that were studied. The meta-network in East reveals a strong clique for employment and economy dominated projects: Lifelong Learning, TEE and Youth Unemployment. School Drop-Outs is positioned somewhat distance from these. The meta-network also includes various other employment and economy related projects. The reason that the first three projects formed an employment-focused clique is because a single platform for employment issues functioned as the overall steering committee for these three projects. The meta-network of region South, on the other hand, shows an education-dominated clique of School Drop-Outs, Special Education and Youth Unemployment. Lifelong Learning and TEE were somewhat distant from these three projects, in the periphery of the meta-network. The meta-network in North also shows a focus on educational projects as School Drop-Outs, Special Education and Youth Unemployment formed a clique, but at the same time, there is a strong link to Lifelong Learning. This means that in North, education and employment projects are quite intertwined. TEE in North is an isolate, since this network had not actually started yet and only existed on paper. Lastly, in West, only six projects were reported, based on which little insights can be drawn. It does show, however, a strong linkage between the Youth Unemployment and School Drop-Out projects.

Variations among levels

What the visualizations did not show, but what we learned during the interviews, was that meta-networks could emerge at the strategic or at the tactical level, or both. All four regions had meta-networks at the strategic level. Since the number of individuals at these strategic levels is quite limited, the chance that they meet in various network-settings is high. At the tactical levels, however, the regions varied the most in terms of the presence of a regional meta-network. Since the tactical levels of organizations generally comprise more individuals than the strategic levels, the chance that the same individuals who operate at the tactical organizational level meet each other in more than one component network is smaller. In North, East and South, meta-networks existed at both the strategic and the tactical level. In West, a meta-network existed at the strategic level, but no evidence of a meta-network was found at the tactical level. To illustrate, within a large vocational school in West, distinct divisions were unaware of the networks that their coworkers were active in, resulting in the launching of a project that existed already. The next section explores the factors in such variations among the regional meta-networks.

What factors affect the emergence of regional meta-networks?

When analyzing the interview data, patterns emerged regarding the factors that appeared to stimulate or impede the emergence of meta-networks in the four regions. These factors were labelled as institutional, cultural-historical, and social factors. Table 6 provides an overview of these factors.

Likelihood of emergence of a meta-network		
Institutional factors	Enablers	Barriers
Congruency of regional delimitations	Similar delimitation of the region for all/most projects (high congruency)	Varying delimitation of the region (low congruency)
Regional level public institution	Presence of a regional level public institution	Absence of a regional level public institution
Organizational characteristics	Small organizations; heterogeneous municipalities; presence of a single vocational school	Large organizations; homogeneous municipalities; multiple competing vocational schools
Cultural-historical factors		
Culture	Tradition of collaboration; ‘natural network’	Forced collaboration as result of central governmental delimitation of the region
Economic history	History of economic hardship that led to regional collaboration	Prosperous economic history that led to strong, independent cities
Social factors		
Interpersonal relations	Right people at the right places who advocate regional collaboration	Tribal wars between or within organizations

Table 6. Factors affecting the emergence of regional meta-networks

Institutional factors

Three types of institutional factors were encountered that seemed to affect the emergence and the strength of regional meta-networks: Congruency of regional delimitations; the presence or absence of a regional level public institution; and organizational characteristics (number and size of organizations). In addition, we discuss the factor ‘regional size,’ since this is mentioned in the regionalist literature as an influential factor.

Evidence was found for the idea that meta-networks emerge more easily if regional delimitations are congruent. Dutch regions are not fixed formal entities, as different parts of the central government use different delimitations of what constitutes a region. In East, the delimitations of various projects were identical, while in North, the regional delimitation varied the most from project to project. When a region is defined by a single delimitation, it is easier to coordinate across component networks and, for example, make use of each other’s facilities. So, when a school collaborates with municipality X in the Youth Unemployment project, but with municipality Y in School Drop-outs, it is much more complicated to use the measures or means of one project for the other one, than would the school be dealing with the same municipality regarding both projects. Indeed, literature on regionalism also suggests that fixed regional borders add to network effectiveness, as these require repetitive collaboration among neighboring municipalities and increase the prospect of future collaboration (Miller, 1992; Feiock, 2007).

In some regions regional level public institutions had an active role in coordinating the component networks, but also functioned as an overall coordinative mechanism for multiple networks in a region. In East, two regional level public institutions played a central role for three component networks (YU, LLL and TEE). One of these NAOs, a regional platform for employment issues, functioned as an overall steering group at the strategic level. The other one, a joint venture of the fourteen collaborating

municipalities of East, delivered the project leaders for these three projects, herewith connecting the three component networks at the tactical level.

"We are lucky that three project leaders of TEE, YU and LLL are on secondment to the same organization and even share a hallway. Because of the regional platform structure, these three distinct projects have come together. On top of that, we happen to be three women who are not afraid to find each other when combining our strengths is convenient." [NAO, East]

In the other regions, such an institution was either not present (in North) or did not have an active role in interconnecting the multiple networks (in South and West). Regionalist literature also points to the relevance of having a public institution with regional authority, but explains their added value primarily as a having a regional-level, public sparring partner for private sector actors (Hamilton, 2002). However, we found that having such an institution is particularly valuable for establishing and strengthening regional meta-networks and connecting formally distinct projects.

Finally, various organizational characteristics were found to affect the presence of regional meta-networks: Organizational sizes; heterogeneous municipalities; and the presence of a single vocational school. First, the smaller the organizations, the greater the chance that the same individuals will be in multiple networks together. The strategic level of organizations usually contains few individuals, regardless of the size of the constituting organizations. Therefore, organizations' sizes mainly affect the emergence of a meta-network at the tactical level. In large organizations, projects may end up in distinct divisions of schools or municipalities. Those divisions are not always aware of initiatives elsewhere in the organization, which may lead to double initiatives and confusion about who does what. School representatives in West – the largest vocational school in the four regions – frequently mentioned the size of their organization as a burden for effective and efficient projects. In East, actors within the smaller vocational school were able to coordinate across networks:

"Every now and then we discover that we are doing similar things at different places within our school. Usually, we notice this fairly quickly and gather people around the table. Youth Unemployment, Life-long Learning, and TEE are initiatives that have a lot in common. Since there is a limited number of people involved in these projects within our school, connecting them is done very quickly." [Vocational school, East]

Second, collaboration between homogeneous, similar sized municipalities appeared to be more complicated, compared to collaboration between heterogeneous municipalities, that is, a large city and smaller neighboring municipalities. In regions North and West, the smaller municipalities, that lacked the means and the people to tackle issues solo, accepted the consequence that cooperating with a large city meant giving up some of their own autonomy. In regions with similar sized municipalities, however, these municipalities tend to struggle for power and are less prone to accept the leading role of one of them. Examples of this were found in South and even in East: Even though in East regional collaboration was generally described as smooth, there was tension between the two largest cities of the in total fourteen collaborating municipalities. The underlying assumption is that if actors – in this case municipalities – are less willing to collaborate on a regional level, regional meta-networks are less likely to occur. Our findings contradict regionalist theories that suggest that the more municipalities are alike with regard to demographic homogeneity and power positions, the lower their transaction costs and the more regional collaboration is successful (Olson, 1965; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011).

A factor that is quite specific for the context of these education and employment related networks is the number of vocational schools present in a region. Vocational schools played a crucial role in each of the component networks. In the Netherlands, vocational schools operate on a regional level

(they are even called ‘*Regional Educational Centers*’) and regions usually have one or two of those schools. In East there was a single school for vocational education, which made it very easy for local governments and firms to make region-wide agreements. In the other three regions two vocational schools were present. These schools often competed for students and did not always agree on how to run projects. As local governments had to make distinct agreements with each of the schools, this led to a division in two sub-regions. Therefore, we found that having a single vocational school facilitates the emergence of a regional level meta-network.

Finally, we discuss regional size as a factor, as literature suggests that regional size matters, but we did not find such a pattern. Since meta-networks emerge when individuals continuously bump into each other, one would assume that they emerge more easily in smaller regions, that is, regions that encompass a smaller geographical area and therefore fewer municipalities. Indeed, regionalist literature suggests that having fewer municipalities that comprise the region facilitates lower transaction costs and higher effectiveness (Feiock, 2007). However, we did not find such evidence. When we compare the regions with regard to their number of municipalities, West was smallest with 5 to 9 municipalities, depending on the specific project. South was the largest with 14 to 21 municipalities. East had a constant number of 14 municipalities across projects, while North varied the most: from 8 to 27 municipalities. Theory would then assume that West had the strongest regional meta-network. However, we found the opposite: West had, at least at the tactical level, the least apparent meta-network, due to the fact that the organizations (both municipalities and schools) were significantly larger compared to the organizations other regions. This suggests that organizational sizes may be more influential for the emergence of regional meta-networks than regional size.

Cultural-historical factors

The qualitative data revealed two cultural-historical-type factors: Having a history of regional collaboration and, related to this, having a history of economic hardship. The history and traditions regarding regional collaboration determined the current situation and appeared hard to change. Similarly, regionalist literature stresses the importance of having a history of cooperation rather than conflict as a facilitator for regional collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011), from which regional meta-networks may emerge. In North and East regional collaboration was described as logical and natural. Respondents in South and West, on the other hand, were particularly critical about regional collaboration. They felt that the region was too diverse to be regarded a single entity and that ‘regionalism’ was forced upon them by central government. In response, they subdivided the region, resulting in three sub-regions in West and two sub-regions in South. Between the sub-regions little cooperation occurred. A respondent from South stressed that actors in both sub-regions do their own thing, including writing monitoring reports that are subsequently stapled and provided with a front page that says ‘Region South.’ Another respondent from the same region claimed:

“It just doesn’t work to form regions in which actors do not naturally collaborate with each other already. Schools and municipalities meet each other at the sub-regional level, not at the level of [region South]. That is the scale on which people have been discussing about education and employment issues for years.”
[Vocational school, South]

A prominent reason for why some regions had developed a regional tradition, while others had not, was described in terms of the economic history of a region. Regions that had known times of economic hardship, such as North (an overly agricultural region, with high unemployment rates) and East (a result of the ceasing of the textile industry), have resulted in municipalities and firms that had to rely on each other. Regions with economically more prosperous times, such as South (with a strong technical

and industrial basis) and West (which includes one of the four largest cities of the Netherlands) have resulted in strong, independent cities. In summary, these two cultural-historical-type factors, having a history of regional collaboration and of economic hardship, were thus found to accommodate the existence of regional meta-networks.

Social factors

Having the right people at the right places was often mentioned during the interviews as a factor that stimulated collaboration at the regional level. For example, in East, an alderman, the CEO of the vocational school and the director of the agency intermunicipal cooperation were described as strong advocates for keeping a regional perspective over local ones. Even in South, an alderman of the largest city was described as being able and willing to look beyond his direct interests, and not only 'score' in his own city. This was said to be the primary reason that intermunicipal collaboration worked out, despite the historical power struggle between the two largest cities. Likewise, regionalist literature emphasizes aspects such as having all actors who may benefit from the collaboration involved and getting the "right" people to the table, as factors that affect the success of regional collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011).

Data patterns showed that in regions that were divided into sub-regions, respondents were particularly critical about the performance of other sub-regions. Though it seems reasonable to assume that the diversity within a region caused the split-up in the first place, it might also be the case that due to the split-up, differences were perceived to be larger than they actually were. Literature on intergroup relations claims that the simple act of dividing a single group of individuals into two or more groups has a negative impact on the relations between members of different groups, fostering distrust, perceptions of intergroup conflict (Kramer, 1996; Brewer & Miller, 1996; Labianca, Brass & Gray, 1998) and negative attitudes toward the members of the 'out group' (Gaertner et al., 1989; Messick & Meackie, 1989). Summarizing all of the above, the four regional meta-networks varied in size (i.e., number of actors spanning across component networks), density and centrality. We found explanations for these differentiations in terms of various institutional, cultural-historical, and social factors.

Regression models for personal relations, expected continuity, and goal attainment

The second research question is whether regional meta-networks may foster personal relations and expected performance continuity within component networks, as a result of prior relations and the 'shadow of the future.' The third research question is whether meta-networks lead to higher goal attainment for component networks, as a result of early detection of friction and opportunities for creating synergy. We first present the results of the quantitative analyses and then proceed with the qualitative findings for both questions. Regression analysis showed no significant model for expected continuity; and statistically significant models for personal relations and goal attainment. Table 7 presents the results of the regression analysis of personal relations and goal attainment.

The first regression model shows that of the four independent variables, meta-network centrality and size have a negative impact on personal relations ($F(2, 29)=3.49$; $p<0.05$). These factors explain a relative small part of the variance of personal relations; 15%, suggesting there are other factors that affect personal relations. So, to some extent, a decentralized and not too large meta-network stimulates commitment and contact between regional actors.

	Personal relations	Goal attainment
Centrality	-.51	.20**
Size	-.82*	.12*
F-stat	3.49*	10.7***
Constant	6.21***	-3.02*
Adjusted R ²	15%	34%

Table 7. Regression results of regional network centrality; size; density; and congruency on personal relations and goal attainment

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The regression model for project goal attainment revealed that both meta-network centrality and size positively affect goal attainment ($F(2, 29)=10.7$, $p<0.001$). Together, these factors explain 39% of the variance of goal attainment. In highly centralized regional meta-networks, few actors are active in many formally distinct projects while others are only involved in one or two. These few actors thus play a major role in connecting the distinct projects, for example by identifying friction or suggesting ideas that may create synergy across projects. Network theory suggests that centralized networks in which few trusted central actors coordinate the communication and collaboration are most effective, compared to decentralized networks (Provan & Milward, 1995). The same appears for meta-networks; having few actors with a good overview across projects lead to better results than having many actors being active in many projects. Network density and congruency did not affect personal relations and goal attainment, which was similar to what Provan and Milward found, with regard to density (1995). In sum, these findings point out that larger regional meta-networks with a few highly central actors are associated with higher goal attainment for their underlying component networks. But at the same time, such large and more centralized regional meta-networks are also associated with lower quality personal relations.

Qualitative findings and explanations

Personal relations and expected continuity

In the qualitative interview data support was found for the proposition that meta-networks foster higher levels of personal relations. Respondents acknowledged that in situations with prior relations trust was built more easily, resulting in smoother collaboration.

“We have become quite a close group. [Name network leader] joined later, but [four network members] and I knew each other from previous projects. That makes a huge difference. You can find each other more quickly. If there is a problem, we work it out based on trust and transparency. For example, if one of us has trouble meeting his target, we discuss this as a group and see if someone else can chip in.” [Vocational school, North]

Similarly, instances were reported in which prior relations resulted in higher commitment levels. The start of the project for Youth Unemployment, which fell – quite inconveniently – during a summer break, is an example of this:

“Mobility is quite low in this region, so people tend to be in the same position for a long time. So you meet the same people over and over again. That works out quite well. For example, last summer, when the central government required the regions to write a subsidy proposal at a very short notice during the school holidays, people were willing to postpone their vacations in order to assist – even though they did not have to.. People are just more willing to do that sort of thing when they have a personal relationship,

based on prior relationships.” [NAO, North]

The quantitative data found no significant relation between regional meta-network characteristics and expected continuity. An explanation may be that regional meta-network actors reflect on future continuation from the perspective of the specific project: once the external funding ends, how large will the chance be that current actions are continued by each of the network members separately, rather than reflecting on the possibility to integrate the project with other ones. The interview data, on the other hand, showed some examples of how a regional meta-network may lead to higher expectations regarding the continuity of project-related activities.

“Because TEE, LLL and YU are coordinated from a single steering committee, we are able to use our networks to combine the most successful parts of the projects, in order to enable their continuity. For example, both LLL and TEE will make sure that the new service center for the construction sector will be continued.” [NAO, East]

Lifelong Learning in West provided an opportunity to actually see what remains of a network’s legacy after the governmental subsidy ends and the formal project is dismantled. At the strategic level, lifelong learning continued to be on the agenda of another committee.

“We recently said to each other, since we meet everywhere and there is a thematic overlap, we might as well try to integrate this steering committee [for Lifelong Learning] into the regional employment platform.” [Vocational school, West]

The fact that the same organizational representatives who met around Lifelong Learning still met around other topics and in other constellations, kept the issue alive. This case provides some support for the proposition that a meta-network may add to the continuity of a network’s valued resources after it is no longer supported by an external party. These efforts resulted in a business plan for the continuation of the lifelong learning services between 2013 and 2015, including a physical front desk, jointly financed and staffed with personnel by all the network members.

Goal attainment

In the interviews, accounts were found for the added value of the regional meta-network for connecting distinct projects. Various concrete examples of how this led to better results and/or higher efficiency were given:

“I do think that being involved in both projects is mutually beneficial. If there would be something developed around the project of Youth Unemployment, that could collide with School Drop-Outs, I would notice that immediately. And we make use of each other’s instruments. For example, we used data on school drop-outs for the YU-project. [...] Currently, there is a shortage of coaches for youths that have a high chance of dropping-out. So we arranged that YU coaches would step in, since preventing SDO is also preventing YU.” [Municipality, South]

“Many services of distinct projects are being combined, such as the front desks for Lifelong Learning and Youth Unemployment – especially in the smaller municipalities.” [NAO, North]

The added value of regional meta-networks was thus illustrated with examples such as making use of other networks’ data-sets or developing joint instruments and interventions, which were, according to respondents, to lead to higher effectiveness for each of the component networks.

Meta-networks' potential disadvantages

The fourth and last research question is whether meta-networks may induce negative side-effects, specifically relational and cognitive lock-in effects. For addressing this research question, we looked for patterns in the interview data, as we were unable to find current literature based on which we could develop a reliable survey. The interview data revealed two overall types of negative side effects: At the network and the individual level. On the network level, negative side effects were the anticipated relational lock-in effects, relational lock-outs due to feuding, and unclear authority. Contrary to what we expected, little concrete evidence of cognitive lock-in effects was found. On the individual level, role conflicts and a reliance on the usual suspects, based on knowledge rather than network skills, were mentioned as negative side effects.

Relational lock-in

The interview data provided evidence of relational lock-in effects. On the plus side, meta-networks shortened a networks' start-up phase: Prior relations fostered the process of identifying partners. Respondents indicated that, because they have worked with each other before around other projects, they knew exactly which schools or firms and which individuals were passionate about a certain topic. This made it much easier to collect a group of enthusiastic individuals to engage in the specific network setting. A rather extreme example of this was found in North, where a working group for labor market policies met every six weeks. When the network for Youth Unemployment was to be formed, this group was asked to gather around at a higher frequency; *"and there, we had everybody we needed"* (Local government, North). However, the consequence was that actors who were not involved in a prior network, were also not included in the new one. Employers and institutions for youth care were among the organizations that were most frequently mentioned as partners missing in the current networks.

Relational lock-out

Through the regional meta-network, feuds in one network can be transferred to another one, which may even lead to the deliberate exclusion of an actor in a new network: A so-called relational lock-out. In West, an ongoing power struggle – by some even described as a 'tribal war' – between the municipal departments of education and employment led to the exclusion of the educational department in the Youth Unemployment project. A respondent claimed that the Youth Unemployment project had been 'snatched away' by the employment department, herewith alienating the education department. As a result, the School Drop-out project, in which the educational department had a leading role, was organized separately from the Youth Unemployment project. Many respondents referred to this as 'a missed chance,' because combining the two projects would have benefitted both. In this realm, one respondent claimed that:

"Sometimes it is easier to get things done with the same department of another municipality than with another department of your own municipality." [Local government, West]

Unclear authority

Intertwined networks often led to discussion about which bodies had decision-making authority over a particular issue. In South two networks existed – one for the School Drop-Out project and one for a project around various educational issues – with largely the same actors. According to the municipalities, the SDO-network had decision-making authority, but the schools disagreed. Occasionally, this lack of clarity resulted in competition and a struggle for power. In East, two networks (one outside the scope of our research) had similar objectives, that is, to increase the number of students and employees in the technological sector. The two networks also partially had the same members. Because of this overlap,

and a scarcity of resources, even network members who were involved in both networks chose sides and accused the other network of being primarily concerned with gaining power, while realizing little measurable output.

Cognitive lock-in

Some respondents noted that being involved in similar topics with largely the same group of people may create blind spots; while new members may provide a fresh approach to long-existing problems. However, very few concrete examples could be given. When inquired, respondents found it easier to mention examples of positive rather than negative side-effects of regional meta-networks. Although we expected that prior relations and the shadow of the future might motivate network members to protect and become less critical to one another, respondents repeatedly mentioned the opposite effect:

"During the course of the subsequent networks, schools and municipalities have become familiar and comfortable with each other to criticize one another. This was 'not done' beforehand." [Vocational school, South]

External role conflicts

Being part of multiple component networks may lead to a multiplexity of goals and create conflicting interests for network members (McCarter & Northcraft, 2007; Van Twist, Schultz, Kastelein, & Canté, 2003). Specifically, it may lead to an external role conflict when an individual has difficulty balancing between expectations of and loyalty toward distinct networks as well as toward his or her home organization. In psychology, this is referred to as an external role conflict: in which the roles that are expected of different positions (e.g., a network member and an employee) lead to conflicting interests. A peculiar example of this was found in South. Here, two educational networks in the area of school drop-outs largely comprised the same members, with the exception of two actors who were only engaged in one network. One of them happened to chair one of the networks. Despite the common composition, the two networks came to opposite conclusions regarding a single proposal. This was possible due to the fact that the strongest advocate of this proposal chaired the first network, while the strongest opponent participated only in the second network. Among the participants, this led to the joke that one should be really consistent about his opinion across various network settings:

"When you are engaged in multiple network settings with overlapping themes, you should be really consistent about your values and preferences. Otherwise, you end up writing letters of discontent to yourself, rather than to others." [Municipality, South]

The usual suspects

A final negative side-effect concerned the issue of 'the usual suspects.' Respondents claimed that often actors were selected based of their functional knowledge and expertise: while not necessarily having the required set of collaborative skills. Moreover, members of the meta-network are very busy, since they are by definition active in multiple component networks, simultaneously. Therefore, a negative side-effect of making use of meta-networks is that people who participate in multiple component networks may not necessarily have the best qualifications, but are recruited nonetheless.

DISCUSSION

Not only in the Dutch public-policy field of education and employment, but also in other public-policy fields, regional collaborative networks have become a popular way for the central government to implement policies and tackle social issues. In practice, these networks overlap in terms of their members and their goals; hence, they form what we coined 'a regional meta-network.' This paper explores the role

that regional meta-networks may play with regard to the dynamics and functioning of their underlying component networks. In all four Dutch regions studied, evidence of a regional meta-network was found. The regional meta-networks varied with regard to their levels of density, centrality, size and congruency. Moreover, they varied with regard to the organizational level at which meta-networks were formed: All regions demonstrated strategic level meta-networks (consisting of, amongst others, CEOs), but only three of the four also had meta-networks at the tactical level (which comprised, among others, policy advisors).

Several factors were found to affect the emergence of regional meta-networks: institutional (e.g., heterogeneous network actors, presence of a regional level public institution); historical-cultural (e.g., history of economic hardship); and social factors (e.g., having ambassadors for regional collaboration at strategic places). Statistical analysis showed that meta-network centrality and size affected goal attainment and – to a lesser extent – personal relations between meta-network actors: Larger and more centralized regional meta-networks fostered higher goal attainment, while smaller and decentralized meta-networks were associated with higher quality personal relations. Qualitative data provided support for both the effects of meta-networks on personal relations, mainly as a result of prior relations and trust, and higher goal attainment; cooperating component networks were shown to make use of each other's assets. Moreover, one region provided a concrete example of how a regional meta-network facilitated the continuation of a formally abolished component network. In addition, several negative side-effects were identified, including a relational lock-in effect; role conflicts for meta-network members; and recurrent participation by actors based on functional knowledge, but not on collaborative skills.

Implications for practitioners

Currently, the multiple departments that are involved in the Dutch education and employment field (e.g., the Ministries for Education; Employment; and Economic Affairs) are primarily interested in the effectiveness of their own policy objectives, and tend to overlook that objectives of other departments may affect their own. For practitioners within the central government, the notion that there is such a phenomenon as a regional meta-network increases the need to have ambitions, policies and funding regulations that are well adjusted, despite the fact that they are developed within distinct divisions of that central government. Not only does a regional meta-network make visible when the underlying ambitions are not congruent to one another, a meta-network may be actively used to foster synergy across component networks and increase efficiency when starting up new ones. Actors who are active in one or more component networks were not always aware that they were in fact part of a larger entity. Knowing that this larger entity may be deliberately used to their advantage, as well as recognizing the potential disadvantages, may help both regional and central governmental actors make extant and new component networks more effective.

Limitations and future research

One limitation of this study regards the size of the data set: when inter-organizational networks are the unit of analysis, a small sample size is often an inevitable limitation. Despite the small number of returned questionnaires, we feel that the combination of using three types of data sets (archival and collected qualitative and quantitative data) gives valid insights to network effectiveness. The visualizations of the meta-networks in particular provide snap shots of their presence within the four studied regions. By distributing the questionnaires as widely as possible among network members – also among those we did not interview – we tried to gain a representative picture. However, people who did not receive or return the questionnaire were by definition not included in the meta-network. Future studies should

collect longitudinal data, in order to gain more insights into the development of regional meta-networks, which remains invisible in a one-time snap shot. The qualitative data already suggested that inter-organizational relations that started ad hoc became more solid and structural as a result of continuous, project-based relations.

In network literature, the *whole network* is usually regarded as the highest level one can study. Scholars who study public-sector networks have only recently began to recognize that networks may be parts of larger entities that have an effect on how networks and their members behave (see, e.g., Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2008; Ysa, 2010; Boogers, 2013). For future research, it will be interesting to systematically take into account the level of institutionalism of meta-networks and the relative flexibility of each of their component networks. A final suggestion for follow-up studies is to include the operational level employees who participate in inter-organizational settings. We focused at the strategic and tactical levels, mainly because operational level individuals were particularly hard to identify: They were not part of the formal networks as depicted in covenants and project reports. Nonetheless, they do interact inter-organizationally, albeit on a more informal and ad hoc basis. We suspect that regions differ to the extent that operational level employees of various organizations can find each other easily. Hence, network relations among members at all levels should be included in future studies on regional meta-networks.

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Appendix I Visualizations of four regional meta-networks

Regional meta-network of North (based on actor x actor data)

Regional meta-network of East (based on actor x actor data)

Regional meta-network of South (based on actor x actor data)

Regional meta-network of West (based on actor x actor data)

Regional meta-network of North (based on project x project data)

Regional meta-network of East (based on project x project data)

Regional meta-network of South (based on project x project data)

Regional meta-network of West (based on project x project data)

CHAPTER 6

Regional networks' added value:

Laddering type-interviews with tactical and strategic regional actors

Regional networks' added value

Laddering type-interviews with tactical and strategic regional actors

ABSTRACT

As a result of top-down stimulated projects by central government, regional collaboration between local governments and other public and private actors is becoming increasingly important. For instance, large sums of money are invested in regional networks as a means to tackle complex issues in the area of education and employment. Little is known about the precise terms or conditions under which such interventions are most meaningful. Moreover, the precise added value of such interventions remains largely unknown. This study addresses the question to what extent and under what conditions temporary stimulation of regional networks are perceived – by regional network actors – as meaningful and of added value. Qualitative data on 39 regional network actors, from eleven regional networks, resulted in effective conditions for regional networks, in terms of the role of the central government (e.g., the perceived legitimacy of central governmental action); project characteristics (e.g., clear goals and monitoring); and regional characteristics (e.g., the perception that regional networking is natural and logical). The study also revealed three types of added value: added value for clients; organizations; and regions. Interestingly, the added value for the regional network as a whole was more convincingly illustrated than the added value for clients and organizations. Practical implications of the results and limitations of this study's design are sketched as well.

Key words: regionalization, regional networks, policy implementation, added value

INTRODUCTION

In the public area of education and employment, policies are increasingly implemented through cooperation of various local public and private-sector actors, through regional networks (Commissie Bakker, 2008; VNG, 2008; RWI, 2006; Ministry of Education Culture and Science, 2006; Jongerius, 2009; Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2013). Regionalization, in the Dutch context, refers to the emergence of an *informal* layer situated between the local and provincial level: to jointly address issues that occur at the regional level. Herewith, regional collaboration takes place via varying projects and programs, and not, for example, through a democratically controlled regional body of chosen politicians. Regional networks may arise bottom-up; as a result of local governments who seek collaboration with each other, for example, for efficiency reasons or because they cannot effectively address certain tasks at a local level (Van Tatenhove, 2009; Korsten et al., 2006.; Briffault, 2000; Cigler, 1994; Boogers, 2015). Regional networks may also arise as a result of top-down stimulation by the central government. The types of regional networks that are subject of this study are examples of the latter type. They receive governmental funding for a limited period of time: to jointly address a particular issue, for example, reducing the number of school drop-outs or youth unemployment. Since networks are generally defined as being long-term constellations that are formed informally or bottom-up (Powell, 1990; Kenis & Schneider, 1991;

Gerlach & Lincoln, 1992; Larson, 1992; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004), these regional networks are characterized with two atypical features: They are stimulated from above and they are temporarily supported.

Central government stimulates the emergence of regional networks in various constellations and around various subjects. In order to get an idea of the financial means that are concerned with collaborative networks in the policy areas of education and employment, Table 1 provides an overview of the temporary governmental funding regulations meant for supporting such regional networks concerned with education and employment.

Funding regulation	Period	Budget (x 1 mln Euros)
Ministry of Education Culture and Science		
<i>Regeling durven, delen, doen</i>	2004 – 2010	2,8
<i>Kaderregeling Technocentra</i>	2006 – 2010	10,0
<i>Aanvalsplan laaggeletterdheid</i>	2006 – 2010	4,0
<i>Maatschappelijke stages</i>	2007 – 2010	100,0
<i>Afstemming onderwijsarbeidsmarkt risicoregio's in het voortgezet onderwijs</i>	2008 – 2011	7,4
<i>Subsidie voor experimenten passend onderwijs</i>	2008 – 2010	1,2
<i>Tijdelijke subsidieregeling plusvoorzieningen overbelaste jongeren [SDO]</i>	2009	47,6
<i>EVC en maatwerktrajecten werkend leren in HBO [LLL]</i>	Until 2009	4,8
<i>Onderwijstijdverlening basisonderwijs in samenwerkingsverband</i>	2009	13,1
<i>Startsubsidie veldinitiatief passend onderwijs</i>	2009 – 2011	16,0
<i>RAAK (Regionale Aandacht en Actie voor Kenniscirculatie)</i>	2009	4,2
<i>Tijdelijke stimuleringsregeling leren en werken 2007 [LLL]</i>	Until 2009	23,0
<i>Tijdelijke stimuleringsregeling leren en werken, werkende jongeren zonder SK, werkzoekenden [LLL]</i>	Until 2010	24,0
<i>Tijdelijke stimuleringsregeling Leven Lang Leren in het HBO [LLL]</i>	Until 2011	9,8
<i>Stimuleringsregeling Krachtig Meesterschap</i>	2010	5,0
<i>Uitvoeringsregeling bestrijding VSV en regionale meld- en coördinatiefunctie VSV [SDO]</i>	Until 2012	49,8
Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment		
<i>Maatregel EVC / EVP bij dreigend ontslag [LLL]</i>	2010	25,0
<i>Actieplan jeugdwerkloosheid [YU]</i>	Until 2011	150,0
<i>Tijdelijke subsidieregeling raakvlak onderwijs en arbeidsmarkt</i>	Until 2012	12,0
<i>Structurele financiering leerwerkloketten [LLL]</i>	Ongoing	8,0
<i>ESF (structuurfonds ter bevordering van regionale werkgelegenheid)</i>	Until 2013	275,0
Ministry of Economic Affairs		
<i>Regionale ontwikkelingsmaatschappijen</i>	2004 – 2010	9,1
<i>Sterktes in de regio's</i>	2009	21,9
<i>Beroepsonderwijs in Bedrijf</i>	Until 2010	50,0
<i>Taskforce Technologie Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt [TEE]</i>	Until 2010	2,5
<i>Pieken in de Delta</i>	2010	54,4
Total		930,6

Table 1. Funding regulations aimed at regional collaboration within the policy fields of education and employment (data from 2010, based on SOR, 2010; Internal memo, 2011)

Based on this overview of funding regulations of the Dutch central government, 931 million Euros were spent on regional collaborative projects in the areas of education and employment (36% of the total amount of 2,575 million Euros that were spent by the three central departments on temporary funding regulations). Since then, financial stimulation of regional collaborative networks has become under pressure, especially temporary, project-based funding. Partly as a result of budgets cuts, and partly because an amalgam of temporary funding was not found to be effective nor efficient, due to project overlap; fragmentation; and substantial time investment of both the central government and regional actors (Jongerius, 2009; Interdepartmental Committee Regional Stimulation, 2010).

The vast amounts of money that are concerned with these networks, as well as the relevance of the public-policy issues that these networks are expected to address and the current debate on funding regional networks, raises the question how regional actors perceive this stimulation. From a regional actors' perspective, this paper addresses the question: "Under what conditions is the stimulation of regional networks perceived as meaningful and what comprises this perceived added value?" Combining literature on project management and regional collaboration resulted in a framework that was used for analyzing and interpreting the interview data collected for the empirical study. Whether any network will be successful depends on many characteristics, varying from conditions for collaboration to process factors of the actual collaboration itself. This study's core focus is on the circumstances under which regional networks are likely to be a meaningful vehicle for addressing public-policy issues. This means that critical success factors are taken into consideration that affect the starting conditions of regional networks, rather than process factors, such as project management and leadership, trust, competence, support and commitment, planning, or communication (e.g., Martin, 1976; Locke, 1984; Baker, Murphy & Fisher, 1983; Pinto & Slevin, 1989; Hamilton, 2002; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011).

THEORY

In regionalist literature, the notion of what constitutes a region has evolved from the level of a city and its surrounding areas to a much larger geographic entity, constituted by multiple cities (Wheeler, 2007). While the early literature focused on spatial planning issues and economic development, new regionalism is characterized by a more holistic, public-administration approach of planning, environmental, social and economic themes. In addition, the notion of what constitutes the region has shifted from a notion of territory and place to the region as consisting of relations (Jonas, 2012). Within new regionalist literature, the focus evolved from regional government structures concerned with merely local governments, to a focus on more fluid forms of regional collaboration, involving local governments, public agencies, interest groups as well as private sector businesses.

Conditions for meaningful regional networks

This study aims to identify the conditions for and perceived added value of effective temporary governmental stimulation of regional networks. For the purpose of constructing a theoretical framework or lens to look at these networks in practice, two key characteristics of these networks are leading: their *temporary* character and their *regional* level. Table 2 summarizes the potential conditions for regional networks, based on regional and project literature, distinguishing three levels: characteristics of the (role of the) central government; project characteristics; and regional characteristics.

	Conditions for regional collaboration	Conditions for temporary projects
<i>Central government's role</i>	Sense of urgency; momentum; occurrence of a disaster (Van de Laar, 2010; Cigler, 1994)	Urgency; absence of bureaucracy; adequate funding (Belassi & Tukul, 1996; Baker, Murphy and Fischer, 1983)
<i>Project characteristics</i>	Congruency of objectives between actors (Van de Laar, 2010)	Task is complex and non-routine/standardized; uniqueness (Grabher, 2002; Belassi & Tukul, 1996)
<i>Regional / partner characteristics</i>	Regional level issue; visible advantages of cooperation for participating actors; choosing the right partners; limited number of actors (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg, 2010; Cigler, 1994)	Interdependence between actors (Grabher, 2002)

Table 2. Potential conditions for temporary stimulated regional networks

Regarding the role of the central government, who initiates the projects taken up by regional networks, regional network literature first and foremost points to a sense of urgency as a necessary condition for successful regional collaboration (Van de Laar, 2010; Cigler, 1994; Belassi & Tukul, 1996; Hamilton, 2002). This sense of urgency may be initiated by incentives for collaboration (e.g., problems, resource needs, opportunities, interdependence or uncertainty) or by a crisis or occurrence of a disaster (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011). Absence of bureaucracy around a temporary project has also been identified as a condition for successful project-based collaboration (Baker, Murphy & Fisher, 1983). And finally, national legislation that enables regional agreements (Feiock, 2007).

Moreover, with regard to the characteristics of the public policy issue for which the regional collaboration is meant to provide an answer, congruency of objectives between actors (Van de Laar, 2010), uniqueness of the project, and available resources (Grabher, 2002; Belassi & Tukul, 1996; Martin, 1976) are conditions for effective regional collaborative projects found in literature. Although the presence of a complex and non-routine task has been identified as a condition for regional collaboration (Grabher, 2002), a task that is too complex is known to be counterproductive. The goods or services should be clearly defined and measured: The more complex and the less clear the benefits for each of the contributing organizations are, the higher the transaction costs will be, and the less likely the regional collaboration will be successful or even fully occur (Feiock, 2007). Finally, the presence of deadlines and timetables may be necessary, as some scholars emphasize that regional collaboration may otherwise be a never ending story (Glasbergen & Driessen, 2005); although others stress that the presence of deadlines undercut the incentive for long-term cooperation (Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987; Gunton & Day, 2003). In our own research (see Chapter 4), we also noted that a strong focus on output and deadlines may impede the development of high quality relations between network actors.

Conditions concerning the level of the region refer to the situation that an issue should actually take place at the regional level, rather than, for example, be a local or sector-specific issue (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg, 2010). Regarding the regional collaboration itself, conditions include the presence of visible advantages of cooperation for participating actors; choosing the right partners (based on, e.g., trust and reputation, history of cooperation or conflict); and interdependence between actors (Cigler, 1994; Van de Laar, 2010; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011; Grabher, 2002). Often, literature points to the size of the network: The fewer municipalities that comprise the region, and the more they are alike (e.g., homogeneity with regard to demography, power and means), the lower the transaction costs will be and the more likely the regional collaboration will be successful (Feiock, 2007; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011). Fixed regional borders may enhance regional

collaboration, as they require repetitive collaboration among neighboring municipalities, and thus the lower transaction costs involved in building trust and commitment (Miller, 1992). Fixed regional borders also increase the prospect of future collaboration, which constraints opportunism. On the other hand, the level of openness is regarded as a condition for success, which means that all actors who may benefit from the collaboration should be involved (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Lastly, the existence of, what we in a previous chapter called the regional meta-network (see Chapter 5), has been referred to as a condition for successful regional networks. If two local governments collaborate with each other, but also have agreements with other local governments, these embedded relationships may accumulate into a regional network over time (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999). The existence of such a regional structure of collaboration forms reduces transaction costs as more information is available and a reputation for reciprocity and trust has been built. These overlapping or interconnected networks at the regional level will help create stronger ties and ongoing interactions, which facilitates broad coalitions (Boogers, 2015).

Potential added value of regional networks

In addition to the question under what circumstances regional networks are perceived (by regional actors) as being of added value, we are also interested in what this perceived added value actually implies. Based on literature on regionalism and projects three categories can be distinguished: added value for organizations; for customers/clients; and for the region/regional collaboration. Table 3 summarizes potential types of added value and conditions for regional and temporary networks, as found in literature.

	Advantages of regional collaboration	Advantages of temporary projects
<i>Clients/ the public policy issue</i>	Higher quality of services to external actors (Van de Laar, 2010)	Client satisfaction, impact to community; client impact, loyalty; higher quality products or services (Kenis, Janowicz & Vermeulen, 2009; Atkinson, 2002; Shenhar, 2001)
<i>Organizations</i>	Higher quality of services to internal actors; increased knowledge sharing; less mistakes; efficiency; small municipalities become less vulnerable (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg, 2010)	Improved efficiency; effectiveness; profits; learning; market share; growth (Atkinson, 2002; Shenhar 2001)
<i>Region/ regional collaboration</i>	Increased regional thinking and acting; competitive strength to other regions; bridging local differences (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg, 2010)	--

Table 3. Potential types of added value of temporary stimulated regional networks

Literature on regionalism and regional collaboration indicate that the added value of regional collaboration for organizations (mostly local governments) include a higher quality of services to internal actors; increased knowledge sharing; less mistakes; higher efficiency; and a less vulnerable position for small municipalities (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg, 2010). In addition, project literature suggests that the added value of temporary projects for participating organizations include improved efficiency, effectiveness, profits, learning, market share and growth (Shenhar 2001; Atkinson, 2002).

Regarding the potential added value for customers/clients, often reported aspects include higher quality of services to external stakeholders; client satisfaction and loyalty; learning; impact to environment/community; higher quality products or services (Atkinson, 2002; Shenhar, 2001; Kenis, Janowicz & Vermeulen, 2009). With regard to potential added value for the region, aspects include increased regional thinking and acting; competitive strength to other regions; and bridging local differences (Van de Laar, 2010; Castenmiller, Keur & Woudenberg, 2010).

METHODS

Research design and sample

For the purpose of this study, 39 network members of eleven Dutch regional networks were being interviewed. These networks were focused on one of four central governmental projects: Lifelong Learning (LLL), School Drop-outs (SDO), Youth Unemployment (YU), and Technology in Education and Employment (TEE). These governmental programs differed in the way instruments, such as goals and targets, funding, and account management, were used, and what regional delimitation was chosen. Table 4 provides an overview with the core characteristics of the four projects. Regional networks were responsible for the translation and execution of these centrally conceived projects.

	Overall objective	Quantitative targets and relation with funding	Type and amount of funding
School drop-outs	Preventing pupils from dropping out of school; Getting drop-outs back into school	10% decrease of new drop-outs each year, 40% over four years. Funding is based on results.	Fee for every drop-out less (€ 2500,-). Total amount of available funding: 97.4 million Euros.
Lifelong Learning	Increasing the educational level of the Dutch working population	Quantitative targets set by regions: number of work-based learning and RPL. Funding is based on targets, not on results.	Subsidy for stimulating regional networks as well as execution. Total amount of available funding: 84.8 million Euros.
Youth unemployment	Getting unemployed youths back to school and/or to work; Keeping youths longer at school	No quantitative targets set by government, sometimes determined by regions. Funding is based on population, not on results.	Population-based funding. Total amount of available funding: 150 million Euros.
Technology in Education and Employment	Stimulating people to choose a study and career in the technical or technological sector; Target group includes pupils and employees from other sectors	No quantitative targets set by government. Amount of funding is not related to results	Funding for coordination. Total amount of available funding: 2.5 million Euros.

Table 4. Core characteristics of the four projects studied

The regional networks comprised of two distinct bodies: strategic level steering committees, which was represented by CEOs, aldermen and the like; and tactical level working groups, comprised of policy advisors of the various organizations. In-depth types of interviews were held with representatives of both network levels: 14 with strategic network members, and 25 with tactical level network members (among which 13 with network leaders who were primarily concerned with the working groups, but who

were also involved in the steering committees). The interviews lasted on average 90 minutes.

Methods of data collection and analysis

In the interviews, several topics were addressed, some of which are outside the scope of this paper.³⁷ The part of the interview that addressed the perceived added value of temporary stimulated regional networks was structured by using a laddering technique (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). In a laddering technique, the interviewer seeks for causes and deeper motivation of an initial response. So, when a specific type of added value was mentioned, the interviewer would ask questions such as: “Why is that element important to you,” “What does that element consist of” and “What caused this element?” We were interested in the underlying reasons of what was mentioned spontaneously. For the purpose of exploring conditions for and examples of added value, respondents were thus not asked directly about the elements presented in the conceptual models. The qualitative interview data were audio-taped and transcribed in full. So as to find patterns throughout the data-set, on amongst others types of and conditions for the added value of regional networks, the data were coded and analyzed using the QSR NVivo 8.0 software package.

RESULTS

Conditions for added value

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed three patterns of conditions for added value of temporary stimulated projects that are addressed in regional networks: 1) characteristics of the (role of the) central government; 2) project characteristics; and 3) regional characteristics. Each of the conditions are discussed, illustrated with examples and quotes. Figure 1 summarizes both the conditions and the types of added value.

Central governmental conditions

Four characteristics regarding the central government’s role or actions were identified as conditions for whether the temporary stimulation of a regional network was seen as beneficial to network members. They are: 1) the perceived legitimacy of governmental action; 2) a limited administrative burden; 3) adequate funding; and 4) well-coordinated policies across distinct ministerial departments and directorates.

In literature on regionalism and projects, the sense of urgency is consistently regarded as a condition for effective regional collaboration or effective projects. Indeed, we found this sense of urgency to be a relevant predictor for perceived added value of regional networks, but also found that network actors explain this factor primarily in terms of the perceived legitimacy of governmental action – a result of the mandatory character of the networks. The interference of central government was perceived as legitimate when the social problem was *urgent*; and when actors expected that it was not going to be solved *without* interference. For example, the project of Youth Unemployment received little perceived legitimacy, for a number of reasons. First, because network members regarded this problem as a cyclical issue that should solve itself when the economy would improve. Also, youth unemployment was not regarded by network members as the most urgent problem at that time (which was, according to many network members, unemployment for adults over 45 years old). And finally, compared to other countries, the Netherlands’ youth unemployment rates were rather low at that time. Similar concerns were raised

³⁷ Data on network effectiveness and regional meta-networks were used for the purpose of two other papers: as Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

for Lifelong Learning and TEE. Of the four, School Drop-Outs was the only program that gained unanimous support with regard to the perceived legitimacy of central governmental action – even though school drop-outs were seen as a structural problem which should receive structural and not temporary investments. Regardless of the soundness of these arguments, the perceived limited legitimacy of governmental action can be expected to affect network members’ commitment toward projects.

Figure 1. Perceived added value of temporary stimulated regional networks

inter-organizational, regional cooperation and joint measures.

The last condition concerns the perceived lack of alignment between distinct governmental projects taken up by regional networks. Respondents complained, for example, about having to send similar sets of information to multiple governmental directorates. Instead of providing similar information to various departments and directorates separately, they argued, information requested from the central government should only have to be provided once and subsequently shared internally. Similar remarks were made about regional delimitation, account management and program-specific policies.

“What is inconvenient is that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment uses other regions than the Ministry of Education Culture and Science. As an individual local government, you are working yourself to the ground trying to organize it all. For [region West] it means that we have to collaborate with partners in two distinct employment regions.” [Municipality, Region West]

“Every Ministerial directorate uses its own policies, delimitation of regions and, if you are unlucky, also its own account managers.” [Municipality, Region South]

Respondents gave examples of projects, or parts thereof, that could have been combined, which could have – according to the network members – have added to the effectiveness and efficiency of the projects.

“If at the national level there would have been contact between both [the projects of Technology in Education and Employment and Lifelong Learning], TEE could have easily integrated RPL as a program part. Since everything in East is coordinated by [name institution] it all comes together again. But as a central government, you could steer for this.” [Regional institution, Region East]

The alignment of distinct governmental projects that use regional networks as their main vehicle for tackling policy issues, was regarded as a condition for meaningful regional networks stimulation.

Project conditions

With regard to of the projects’ characteristics and objectives, two conditions stood out. Temporary stimulating regional networks was seen as meaningful when 1) the project has clear goals and measurable output; and 2) the measures that are developed during the project by the network members have a fair chance of sustaining beyond a project’s lifetime.

The project goals should be clear in order to generate commitment and enable the measuring of output and defining success, if to be perceived of having added value. The project Technology in Education and Employment, for example, was seen as ‘too vague.’ At the national level no clear quantitative targets had been formulated and the qualitative objectives were regarded general and rather abstract. As a result, the effectiveness of the project was difficult to define and measure and few examples could be given as concrete output and successes generated by the project (Regioplan, 2009). As a result, respondents questioned the legitimacy and added value of TEE.

“For many organizations, it is still rather abstract what happens there. It [TEE] is harder to connect to all of those other projects. If I speak for myself and compare them, TEE means less to our school than the other projects, despite the fact that they are interconnected.” [School, Region South]

The second factor that emerged as influencing the perceived added value of temporary regional network stimulation was the type of measures that are to be developed by the regional network. Specifically, the extent to which the measures are expected to sustain after the funding period ends. In general, the chance of continuation is largest when the measures are incorporated in the regular organization processes. Some measures were quite successful, but were executed by externally hired actors, which lowered the chance of continuation. For example, in some YU-networks, external coaches were

hired to individually support unemployed youths. Although was a highly appreciated and effective measure, it was financed with temporary funding and the respondents in this study were sceptic about the likelihood of its continuation. A measure such as a CRM-system for pupils can more easily be sustained. In more general terms, measures that were based on existing activities were thought to have a higher probability of being continued than entirely new ones.

Regional conditions

The arguments for choosing regional networks for this purpose – different from funding specific schools, sector-based networks, or networks at other geographical levels – vary from perceptions that an issue actually takes place at the regional level (e.g., the objective of TEE, attracting technological students and employees, was seen as a regional level issue); to wishing to give an extra impulse to regional collaboration (e.g., one of the reasons to organize the YU-project in regional networks was to provide a new impulse to regional collaboration, after a previous initiative, the formation of regional employment platforms, had lost momentum); to simply following existing structures (as was the case for the SDO-project). And other times, the formation of networks is completely left to actors, whether local, regional or sectoral (with the LLL-project, actors were free to form networks however they wanted; which resulted in mostly regional networks and a few sector-based ones).

Across the four projects, the delimitations of what constitutes regions differed. For SDO, YU and TEE, the geographical definition of the regions was based on existing structures of the Ministries for Education; Social Affairs; and Economic Affairs, respectively. As mentioned in the above, for LLL, a new, bottom-up regional delimitation was formed, based on the preferences of local actors. Although one would expect network members to prefer the latter approach, in practice, it led to frustration. A few years into the project, the Ministry of Social Affairs decided to connect to their existing regional delimitation (the so-called ‘labor market regions’), so as to diminish an amalgam of regional delimitations and an ‘administrative buzz.’ The result of this new layout was that some local service counters had to close – as the Ministry had decided to finance only one service counter per labor market region. Obviously, this led to quite some protest and frustration with regional network members who had invested in these service counters.

Temporary stimulating regional networks was found to have added value when 1) the regional level is regarded as *logical* for the issue at hand; and 2) when the regional level is perceived as *natural* level for collaboration. Interestingly, the argument of the region being a natural level for collaboration was mentioned more frequently than whether the region was logical level to address the issue at hand. Whether the region was perceived as the *logical* level to address employment and education issues depends on the specific issue at hand. Across all of the four projects central in this study, regional network members generally perceived the regional level to be preferable over the local or national level. Although in some regions, a sub-regional level was considered a more natural level, which brings us to the second condition.

Whether the region was regarded a *natural* level for collaboration was influenced by institutional, cultural-historical and social factors. Institutional factors included, for example, the presence of an existing agency for regional collaboration and the absence of competing municipalities or schools. Cultural-historical factors refer to regional collaboration as a common practice, as illustrated by the following quote:

“It just doesn’t work to form regions in which actors do not naturally collaborate with each other already. Schools and municipalities meet each other at the sub-regional level, not at the level of [region South]. That is the scale on which people have been discussing about education and employment issues for years.”
[Vocational school, South]

Social factors basically refer to ‘having the right people at the right places’ and ‘involving the right stakeholders.’ For example, since the project for Youth Unemployment took off during the summer holidays, schools could hardly be involved. The action plans were written by local governments, agency’s for regional employment policies, or by externally hired consultancy agencies. As a result, school representatives’ roles were not entirely clear and they often expressed that for them, the regional network for YU had less perceived added value, compared to other networks.

The perceived added value of temporarily stimulating regional networks

Patterns in qualitative data revealed two distinct views on the added value of the temporarily funded regional networks. Participants at the strategic level, such as CEOs from schools or firms and aldermen, were particularly critical about the relative added value of efforts to ‘temporarily support a project in order to address a structural problem.’ Network members at this level generally expressed ‘project fatigue;’ they emphasized the administrative burdens of applying for subsidies; monitoring; and reporting, and stressed the amalgamation of local and regional networks that they had to participate in, creating what they called ‘administrative over crowdedness.’ At the tactical network levels, which comprised, for example, policymakers from schools; local governments; or social security providers, network members were generally more positive about the added value. The types of perceived added value of temporary stimulated regional networks are categorized by added value for 1) clients and the public policy issue; 2) organizations; and 3) regions.

Added value for clients/public-policy issue

This type of added value refers to services to clients, in this context: pupils, job seekers or employees, and on a higher abstraction level, the contribution to tackling the public-policy issue at hand. Three specific types of added value were found: 1) an increased awareness and sense of urgency among network actors and the general public about the public-policy issue at hand; and 2) improved processes and services due to external pressure.

Increased sense of urgency

An increasing awareness of the problem that the regional network is asked to address was among the most frequently mentioned added values of the regional network. This was not limited to noticing or acknowledging the problem, but also actually addressing it. A respondent from a school for vocational education, in the context of School Drop-Outs, explained that as a result of the network, there was much more attention for and willingness to support students who needed extra support, while the primary focus had previously been on offering quality to business:

“It wasn’t long ago that we said, when a student didn’t feel up to his education anymore: ‘Well, go do something else, because you’re not fit for this profession then.’ And that’s where our care ended. We were very preoccupied with delivering good professionals, not with making sure that the youths ended up well. I think that it is not fully acknowledged in the general debate, but there is a true paradigm shift happening right now: The schools for vocational education have built a tremendous care and support system.” [School, Region West]

The awareness and sense of urgency led to a higher level of priority, within the network members’ organizations as well as third parties, as is illustrated by the next quote, which was mentioned in the context of Lifelong Learning.

“The political attention and campaigns from the central government regarding ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ made it easier for us to approach employers and convince them to get involved.” [Project leader Lifelong Learning, Region East]

Improved services

According to interviewees, temporary projects with external funding have the advantage that the external pressure makes adjustments to current processes, resulting in more concretely formulated plans and the opportunity to transform extant processes. The following quote shows an example.

“For years, we had the rule that a pupil could only be accepted when all necessary data were complete, such as a signature from the parents. From the school’s and the administration’s point of view, this was a logical sequence. In practice, however, in those few crucial months, many pupils disappeared from sight. Under pressure from the project, we turned the procedures around. Now we first offer the pupils a placement in their education of choice. And meanwhile, we try to complete the needed paperwork more actively. If necessary, I drop by their parents’ houses.” [School, Region West]

Added value for organizations

Added value for organizations was primarily found in terms of an enhanced information position about the current functioning of organizations. Effectiveness (e.g., higher output) and shared learning were mentioned far less frequently.

Enhanced information position

Temporary funded regional networks may lead to increased insights in the current functioning of the own organization. Respondents, often from schools and local governments, described how they thought they had always done well, or did not really bother about the current functioning, until the project made visible that there were actually a lot of wins to gain.

“Before the covenant [i.e., start of SDO] was signed, we didn’t bother too much about all of these numbers. We thought we did well enough with all the efforts that we were making. However, looking into and analyzing the data did provoke initiatives for improvement – we’re still in the middle of that phase” [School, Region South]

Making visible how successful the network members had been prior to the program, thus works as an incentive to set things in motion. An often-heard example from the schools was that the SDO-project led to an increased social control and (positive) competition between divisions of a single school. Measuring made visible what school divisions were doing well and what divisions were lagging behind, proved to be a powerful force for successful implementation of measures that were to prevent students from dropping out.

Higher output

Surprisingly infrequently, the actual realization of more output (e.g., a reduction of the actual numbers of school drop-outs or unemployed youth, or increasing the number of adults who engage in lifelong learning activities) was mentioned as the added value of the stimulation of the regional networks. When they did, it often regarded the SDO- or the LLL-project.

“Reducing the number of school drop-outs has always been important to us and [Region East] has always had relatively low drop-out rates. Incentives like the 2500 Euro bonus for every drop-out less do stimulate enormously. We thought we were on a low rate already, but it turned out that we were able to do even better.” [School, Region East]

The most prominent reason that higher output was not frequently mentioned for the other projects, had to do with the way the overall objectives had been formulated. The primary aim of the TEE-project was to connect and reinforce extant initiatives; therefore, it was difficult to verify whether concrete results in terms of a higher number of technical students and employees could be credited to the project. For YU, the overall objective was to slow down the inevitable growing numbers of unemployed youths.

Since there was no objective measure to know how youth unemployment rates would have evolved without the YU-project, output was not among the first types of project-value mentioned by interviewees.

Knowledge sharing/shared learning

Knowledge sharing and shared learning were – like effectiveness – less frequently spontaneously mentioned by network members, compared to the enhanced information position. The project leaders of the various networks, were the exception: They often referred to shared learning as an important type of added value of the networks, because they did not only interact with actors within the regions, but were also involved in national level meetings with network leaders, central government representatives and experts, for the purpose of exchanging ideas and experiences. This does not mean that shared learning did not take place within the regional networks. For example, in the context of the school drop-out program, respondents indicated that municipalities and schools used to have their own separate networks. The regional network that was constructed for the SDO-project integrated these networks, which resulted in an increased knowledge sharing on, for example, factors that predict dropping out. However, the fact that it was scarcely mentioned by regular network members does indicate that knowledge sharing and shared learning was not a process that took place consciously.

Added value for the region

The added value of temporary stimulating regional networks for the region as a whole, was described as 1) intensified collaboration between organizations around a shared concern; 2) growing perception of a joint issue. The next quotes illustrate how the regional network boosted the cooperation among schools and municipalities, especially in those regions where intermunicipal collaboration was not axiomatic yet. The quotes also illustrate that the cooperation seems to be in an early state.

“Instead of addressing these type of issues in the traditional local meetings, we demand from the city alderman that he makes arrangements with other municipalities. We aren’t quite there yet. Maybe we need a couple more projects to fully get to that point, although that shouldn’t be necessary.” [School, Region South]

“More and more, agreements [between municipalities] are made jointly. You do notice that there is this tension from smaller municipalities toward the bigger one in the region. For us it is a major advantage if there is more collaboration among them. Now, I have to go to each municipality separately. You are around the table with several people – but never at the same time.” [School, Region West]

Also, respondents reported changes in the nature of the collaboration. As lines became shorter and interaction more frequent, it became easier to address issues and speak frankly to one another.

“There is a culture growing that allows us to be critical towards one another. That schools made remarks about the local government and the other way around, was something that was not tolerated initially.” [Vocational School, Region South]

Joint problem solving

Another result of the regional networks reported was that the issues at hand were increasingly seen as a joint problem, requiring inter-organizational measures, instead of a problem of only, for example, a school, a firm or a social security provider. To illustrate, around the SDO-project, school drop-outs was increasingly seen as an issue in which not only schools for vocational education, but also secondary schools had a responsibility:

“The schools for secondary education were always under the impression that they did just fine. Nearly everyone leaves secondary school with a diploma, so they never felt that they had a responsibility in the

transfer to vocational education. [...] Now, secondary schools are actively involved in realizing a successful transfer as well.” [Municipality, Region South]

Many of the examples and illustrations in the above regard the interaction between vocational schools and municipalities, and the project School Drop-outs in particular. This is not a coincidence or a matter of partial reflection. The project for School Drop-outs was overall seen by network members as the project that had the most added value.

DISCUSSION

Regional networks are an increasingly frequently used but also heavily debated, vehicle for the Dutch central government for translating national level policies or objectives into regional and local action. Little is known about how regional network actors perceive the relevance and added value of such networks that are (financially) stimulated by central government for a specific period of time. By collecting, coding and analyzing qualitative data of regional network members of various networks in the area of education and employment, this study aimed to distinguish patterns of conditions for valuable regional networks, as well as specify what comprises the added value, in the eyes of the key stakeholders.

Three types of conditions for valuable or meaningful regional networks were found: regarding the role of the central government; characteristics of the project; and characteristics of the region. In regional networks that emerged from direct stimulation by the central government, legitimacy is not an issue of being accountable towards the city council, as is an often heard criticism of regional networks (Van Tatenhove, 2010; ROB, 2015): Although local governments were involved as partners in the network, the democratic or political legitimacy of being involved in regional networks was hardly an issue. The main reasons being that funding came directly from the central government; and that the projects' impact on standing local government's policies was limited. Instead, a different type of legitimacy-issue came up: The perceived legitimacy of central government's action. In addition, a limited amount of administrative burden; adequate funding; and alignment between distinct projects that are targeted at the region (e.g., in terms of regional delimitation, funding or communication) were found to be conditions for valuable regional networks.

At the level of the project, three conditions emerged that directly relate to the public policy issue and organization of the project: The project must have clear goals; a well-functioning monitoring system should be present, without too heavy of an administrative burden; and the measures developed during the course of the project should be expected to sustain beyond the funding period. Interestingly, clear goals and a monitoring system, which implies the presence of measureable targets, had in a previous study (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation) found to be a risk for establishing network relations, when too much pressure is set on realizing targets in the early stages of a network's formation. However, absence of clear goals and targets was consistently mentioned as a reason for little added value for regional network stimulation, which suggests there may be a gap between perception and practice.

And lastly, regional characteristics were a condition for the relative added value of stimulating regional networks: The level of the region had to be perceived as 'logical' for the purpose of the particular issue at hand; and 'natural' in terms of regional collaboration between partners; which means that the perceived added value of regional network stimulation is likely to differ from region to region.

Regarding the question what exactly entails the relative 'added value' of the temporary stimulation of regional networks, three categories were found. Mentioned most often, added value for the region as a whole was found in terms of intensified collaboration between organizations and an increased prioritization of a joint issue that requires joint efforts. The added value for organizations was

mostly explained in terms of an enhanced information position about the current functioning of organizations; and also as higher effectiveness and shared learning, although mentioned less frequently. Outcomes such as increased efficiency or stronger relative positions, as suggested in literature on projects and regionalism, were not found – possibly because the studied projects only marginally affected the organizations' core businesses. Added value for clients comprised an increased awareness and sense of urgency among the relevant regional actors involved in the public-policy issue at hand; as well as improved services to clients.

The latter forms a main impetus for more effective and more customized service-provision that took place in the most effective projects analyzed herein. Since the actors that participate in the networks have an interest in these networks, the fact that they find these networks of added value for the regional collaboration (of which they are a part) and the own organization may not come as a surprise. However, added value for clients was not among the first things mentioned by network members, nor were there many concrete examples of how services for clients had improved. A reason may be that we spoke mainly to tactical and strategical level actors, who usually do not directly with clients (students, youths, employees) on a daily basis. On the other hand, this finding is not exclusive for these four networks studied. In a recent study on educational networks in three regions the same result was found (Klaster, Schol & Monod de Froideville, 2015). The added value of the educational networks was first and foremost described by (tactical and operational-level) network actors in terms of added value for the region (e.g., strengthened regional collaboration; information sharing); and added value for the participants and their organizations (e.g., increased urgency; information position); while the added value for clients (in this case, primary and secondary school pupils) were scarcely mentioned or convincingly illustrated. This does not mean that these regional networks do not have an effect on the end users – but it does illustrate that 1) these effects take time to occur, while effects for regional collaboration emerge sooner; and – as a result – 2) the added value for clients are less visible to the network actors, which is also partly affected by the fact that tactical and strategic level actors do not interact with clients directly and thus not observe results first-hand. Nevertheless, given the sums of money spend on stimulating such networks, with the aim to improve situations for clients, the added value for clients should be an integral part of network monitoring; not only in terms of output (numbers of clients reached), but also in terms of outcome (what has changed for clients).

Practical implications

These findings point to several practical implications for the central government. At the moment, for each project, central government formulates national level ambitions (quantitative or qualitative) and offers funding to regional organizations for translating these ambitions into regional goals and action. Taking into consideration that, for some projects, network members stressed that there were other, more pressing issues to address in their region, than the central governmental projects; and that the temporary character of the projects that were perceived as highly urgent was criticized, a practical implication for the central government is to consider offering a more permanent interdepartmental, regional budget for education and employment (or other coherent policy areas) issues (see also Chapter 7 of this thesis). In this realm, the central government lets go of temporary project-specific funding and assigns a budget for employment and education issues for each region. Regional actors will then have to show, based on regional analysis, what the key issues of that region are; how they want to address those; what effects they may be held accountable for; and how and for what period of time monitoring will take place.

If, however, the current situation of issue-specific, temporary stimulation were to be sustained,

several improvements may be considered: regarding the definitions of regions; inter-departmental collaboration; and funding. Regarding the choice for regional delimitation, the region seems to be of most value as an informal and flexible layer, which delimitations may differ, depending on the subject, requiring changing coalitions among relevant local actors, and a cautious choice for scale (Stamsnijder, 2010). However, regional network members first and foremost referred to their history of regional collaboration ('natural'), and only after that referred to whether the regional level was proper for the policy issue at hand ('logical'). This suggests that the legitimacy for particular regional delimitations may be less dependent on the specific issue than generally presumed, and more dependent on extant relations between local actors. In other words, if a regional delimitation is found in which the relevant actors feel comfortable, it may be used for multiple related policy-areas, which enhances the opportunity to create synergy among distinct programs. This does imply an extra challenge: The more regional boundaries are alike around multiple projects, the greater the need for well-aligned policies from the central governmental directorates and departments, so as to avoid colliding policies and enhance synergy. And lastly, although an earlier study (see Chapter 4 of this PhD-thesis) showed that steering too strongly on goals goes at the expense of building network relations during the early years of a regional network, having no quantified goals or targets at all may inhibit the perceived legitimacy and relevance of the governmental program – as was the case in Technology in Education and Employment project and, to a lesser extent, in the Youth Unemployment project.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations of this study need to be addressed. The conditions and types of added value found, were based on four governmental projects, carried out in eleven regional networks. They varied in scope and form, which enhances the generalizability – but still, other projects may provoke other perceptions of added value and other conditions. Second, the respondents at the tactical level of the networks outnumbered the respondents at the strategic level. This may have led to an overly positive view on the role of the central government and the added value of temporary stimulation of regional networks, as we learned in our interviews that strategic level network members were more critical than were tactical level network members. Moreover, this study draws on the perceptions of network actors. Clearly, there are more stakeholders than regional network actors, such as central government's politicians and civil servants, as well as clients who are served by these networks. These stakeholders may feel differently about the perceived added value of central governmental stimulation of regional networks. Future research must explore these perceptions as well. In particular because we noted that the perceived added value for clients was not frequently nor convincingly described or illustrated by network members. Only after tracing a new central policy over time, to those who comprise the beneficiaries of such a measure, one can better judge to what extent and how these regional-level efforts help or hinder.

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CHAPTER 7

Toward more effective regional networks:

Discussion, conclusions and suggestions for future research

Toward more effective regional networks

Discussion, conclusions and suggestions for future research

This dissertation reports research on regional networks in the public-policy fields of education and employment. These networks consist of multiple organizational actors, including schools and local governments. With subsidies/grants, these networks are formed or stimulated by the central government for a limited period of time, with the aim to realize concrete goals/targets and with the (central government's) ambition to continue these efforts after the subsidy period. We approached the subject of regional networks using the theoretical lens of cross-boundary work, by studying three levels of working across boundaries: 1) working across boundaries within the central government, so as to foster more aligned policies and services; 2) working across boundaries within regional networks of public and private actors, with the aim to create solutions for social issues; and 3) working across boundaries between the central government and regional networks of actors, for stimulating and influencing these networks. This chapter summarizes the key findings of this thesis, by subsequently addressing each of its sub research questions, followed by addressing its main research question. Next, we present our main conclusions. We sketch the contribution of this work to theory and practice, note its limitations, and present an agenda for future research.

KEY FINDINGS PER CHAPTER: ANSWERING THE SUB QUESTIONS

Working across boundaries: A central governmental perspective (Chapter 2)

The first empirical paper (Chapter 2) addresses the sub question:

"Placed within a historical context of governmental reforms, how does the Dutch central government stimulate working across boundaries within and between central governmental departments, and what lessons can be learned from analyzing examples of such attempts?"

The growing complexity of social issues, persistent issues of fragmentation and coordination, and the decentralization and regionalization of tasks and responsibilities to lower tier governments have led to an increased need to work across boundaries. Internationally, this is referred to as the rise of the Post-NPM paradigm. These developments shape the context for our research and are discussed in Chapter 1. Subsequently, Chapter 2 presents an historical overview of grand governmental reforms that took place in the Netherlands. This overview illustrates the persistence of the problems, among which the issues of fragmentation, inefficiency and unresponsiveness to societal problems. Large reforms at the level of the overall central government often did not have the outcome one hoped for: they often involved major departmental restructurings, only resulting in shifting, but not crossing boundaries, let alone solving pressing societal issues. Next to these large reforms, smaller scaled efforts to cross boundaries within and between departments took place. We analyze in this thesis four recent attempts to work across departmental boundaries within the central Dutch government, all situated in the public-policy areas of education and employment, involving both the Ministry of Education Culture and Science and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Analyses of the four cases showed that *structural* solutions for addressing public policy issues

(e.g., by installing a thematic directorate or an interdepartmental working group) are likely to fall short if not accompanied by the cultural awareness and political/managerial incentives to cooperate and coordinate across the boundaries of the respective units. The cases consistently demonstrated that new structures mostly create new boundaries; which are not effectively crossed due to, amongst others, political and managerial focus on realizing objectives for each directorate. On the other hand, efforts to stimulate a culture of thinking and working across boundaries (e.g., by formulating a directorate-transcending policy-agenda) without a structural back-up and political support are likely to fall short as well, as these depend heavily on the commitment of individuals and momentum.

Throughout the four cases it was demonstrated that, despite all good intentions, the ambitious goals were never absolutely met – although all initiatives did lead to relevant incremental improvements. For efforts to facilitate cross-boundary work to succeed and last, the following ingredients seem inevitable: political and managerial beliefs that well-harmonized policies are more important than visibility for distinct politicians or projects; accompanied by incentives for directorates to invest in cross-boundary information-sharing, collaboration and joint policy-development; which should lead to awareness on the work floor that working across boundaries is important and appreciated; and only then structural arrangements that support these efforts will have their desired effects.

The studied cross-boundary work efforts for policy development at the central government level go hand in hand with stimulating cross-boundary work at the levels where these central policies are implemented; that is, in networks of relevant local and regional actors. This means that social issues that are addressed in distinct departments or directorates at the level of the central government, may come together at the regional level. Therefore, the next chapters address the dynamics and functioning of regional (policy-implementation type) networks.

Network origins and typologies (Chapter 3)

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on networks, exploring its origins so as to shape a sharp lens through which we observe the networks in the empirical papers. In addition, we offer a classification to arrange extant network typologies. The paper addressed two sub questions. The first is:

“Given that there is not just one overarching network theory, what aspects of (the origins of) network theory may be deployed to shape a lens through which we can observe and explain the dynamics in regional networks?”

With regard to regional network relations and effectiveness (studied in Chapter 4), the literature review of social network theory and policy network theory drew our attention to incorporating both personal and inter-organizational relations, and to study the benefits for both individual network members and the network as a whole, as well as to study the effects of the various ways that networks may be coordinated. Furthermore, this chapter’s review of not only the literature on social network theory, but also relevant parts out of population ecology and new institutional theory broadened our view on networks, so that we could conceive of so-called meta-networks (studied in Chapter 5). The second sub question of this chapter is:

“Given that ‘networks’ may refer to a wide range of theoretical and empirical concepts, what practical overall classification of extant network typologies may be developed?”

Rooted in the extensive literature on inter-organizational and network research and theory, a classification of extant network typologies was developed, based on the dichotomies: noun versus verb, inter-organizational versus intra-organizational, metaphor versus instrument, and policy development versus service provision. This classification lead to the distinction between social networks, intra-organizational

networks, networks as a mode of governance, policy networks and collaborative networks. Furthermore, variety within collaborative networks can be distinguished based on dimensions, including duration, coordination, sector and size. In the first empirical study, presented in Chapter 4, these dimensions were used as the dependent variables for explaining network effectiveness.

Effective and collaborating regional networks (Chapter 4)

Chapter 4 is comprised of two subsequent studies: A small, in-depth comparative case-study of two regional networks within the policy field of lifelong learning; and an extensive main study of eleven regional networks that span four public-policy fields. The sub question that is answered in this paper is:

“Given the temporary character of governmental stimulation of network formation and the preferably enduring effects of this stimulation, is there a tension between obtaining short-term results, on the one hand, and the establishing of potentially enduring network relations, on the other?”

These studies found that, during the early years of a network’s existence, reaching both pre-determined targets and well-functioning regional network relations are at odds with each other. This finding is noteworthy, inasmuch it is often assumed in the literature that ‘good cooperation’ is associated with higher network effectiveness. Putting too much pressure on a network to achieve numerical results in the short run, may counteract long-term network objectives. Funding and network actors should thus be cautious about realizing high goal attainment at the expense of good collaborative relations among individual network members.

In addition to objective, numerical results, we also measured network actors’ perceived effectiveness via a written survey. When effectiveness was measured via this construct, no tension between results and relations was identified. This was due to the fact that this construct included the anticipated continuation into the future, which is different from merely attaining goals here and now. This suggests that, besides measuring goal attainment, a check on actual involvement and intentions and concrete plans for continuation should take place.

Many of the studied networks were coordinated by an external administrative organization (a so-called NAO). The specific role that such an NAO adopted was found to affect both output and network relations. NAOs that took on an active role in decision-making or executive tasks are associated with both lower network effectiveness and lower quality of network relations, compared to NAOs that limited their role to coordinating and facilitating other network participants’ involvement and actions, and compared to lead-organization or shared-participant governed networks. The results suggest that having an NAO in a network is beneficial, as long as its role is merely coordinating.

Turning abundance into an opportunity: Making use of regional meta-networks (Chapter 5)

The empirical study reported in Chapter 5 focused on an interesting side effect of stimulating the emergence of regional networks: Regional meta-networks emerge as the result of the typical amalgam of temporary projects and networks in the policy fields of education and employment. As there are a limited number of organizations and individuals involved, these actors keep ‘bumping into each other’ in various networks, subsequently creating what we called a ‘regional meta-network. We explored how these distinct regional networks affect each other, addressing the question:

“How may regional meta-networks affect the formation, effectiveness and endurance of their underlying component networks?”

In all four regions that we studied we found evidence of such a meta-network, however, they varied with regard to their levels of density, centrality, size and congruency. These variations were affected by factors such as region’s institutional, cultural-historical and social backgrounds. They also varied with regard to

the organizational level at which meta-networks were formed: All four regions demonstrated strategic level meta-networks (consisting of, amongst others, CEOs); three also had meta-networks at the tactical level (which comprised, among others, policy advisors). Quantitative data showed that larger and more centralized meta-networks fostered higher goal attainment, while smaller and decentralized meta-networks were associated with better network relations. Qualitative data illustrated how meta-networks affected network relations, mainly as a result of prior relations and trust; and occasionally also affected higher goal attainment, by cooperating component networks that were found to use each other's information and instruments.

Knowing that formally distinct, temporary networks may affect each other, brought the idea that a meta-network level can be regarded as an additional level on which effectiveness of its component networks can be examined. Effectiveness at the meta-network level can then be defined as having component networks that reinforce rather than conflict one another. Moreover, they may influence network actors' perceptions of the relative added value of temporary network stimulation by the central government.

Meaningful interference of central government in regional issues (Chapter 6)

While Chapter 4 explored temporary project networks' effectiveness, Chapter 6 addressed the question when and how stimulating such networks is perceived valuable and meaningful. We explored the pre-conditions under which regional network actors perceive temporary stimulating regional networks to be of added value. Chapter 6 addresses the final sub question:

"Under what conditions is the stimulation of regional networks perceived as meaningful and what comprises this perceived added value?"

Three sets of conditions were found that affect the added value of temporary central government's stimulation of regional networks. These conditions included characteristics of the central government (e.g., the perceived legitimacy of central governmental action), project characteristics (e.g., having clear goals), and regional characteristics (e.g., the level of the region had to be perceived by regional network actors as 'natural' and 'logical'). This suggests that before implementing a project that stimulates regional networks, to address a certain social issue, a decentral exploration among relevant actors should be undertaken: inventorying the urgency for this specific issue (in relation to other regional issues) as well as what the most logical and natural level is to address them. Data patterns also revealed three types of added value: added value for clients; organizations; and regions. Increased attention and priority for a wicked public-policy problem was among the most frequently mentioned types of added value. Occasionally, this increased attention also led to service improvements for clients. For organizations, a better information position; higher output; and shared learning were reported as added value. The increased intensity of regional collaboration and an increased joint problem-solving were seen as the added value at the regional level. Other results that are often mentioned in literature, such as efficiency or client satisfaction, were not among the types of added value noted by regional network members. The issue with many of such relatively short-lived impulses is that it stimulates information sharing, shared learning and network relations, but that the benefits for the end-users (e.g., scholars, employees, unemployed youths, clients) are less convincingly seen by the network actors; partly because these benefits take time to occur, and partly because many of these actors are not the ones that directly interact with the end users.

SYNERGY: DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Having shed light on each of the sub questions, we now address the main research question:

“In order to effectively address complex social issues in the public-policy areas of education and employment, when and how is (temporary) central government’s stimulation of collaboration between regional actors effective and meaningful?”

This question is addressed by sketching different strategic approaches that the central government may take in stimulating regional networks, in order to tackle issues in the policy area of education and employment. Chapter 4 examined the effectiveness of distinct projects in the policy fields of education and employment. From this study we learned that there is a tension between realizing short term targets and establishing network relations. Chapter 5 illustrated how relations on the level of regional meta-networks may increase the effectiveness of distinct projects. These regional meta-networks usually evolve unintendedly, as a side-effect of a series of temporary projects, stimulated by central government as well as regionally initiated projects. Regions with relatively large and centralized meta-networks appeared to have a positive influence on the effectiveness of their underlying component networks. Knowing this, central government may take advantage of their existence. Subsequently, Chapter 6 focused on the question when such temporary projects are perceived as valuable and meaningful, by regional actors. The urgency of the issue at hand, together with a perception that the region is the logical and natural level to address this issue, were among the most imperative conditions for valuable regional projects.

Taken together, these findings point towards two approaches in which the central government may organize more effective ways to develop regional public-policies: As alternatives to stimulating a series of temporary, regional projects. First, central government may choose to deliberately make use of and stimulate the existence and functioning of regional meta-networks, by identifying and mobilizing such actors in each region. Second, the central government may choose to stimulate, what we like to call, the regions’ policy strength. In the case of a series of temporary stimulated projects with predetermined national policy goals, the policy strength of the region is relatively limited. When regional actors are – within an outline – free to determine what issues they want to focus on, a larger appeal to their policy strength is made.

Figure 1. Four strategies for stimulating regional networks in policy implementation

Stimulating regional meta-networks and stimulating region's policy strength can be considered as two axes, which results in the matrix presented in Figure 1. Each of the quadrants reflects strategies or scenarios for the central government on facilitating regional collaboration as a means to tackle public-policy issues in education and employment.

Four strategies for stimulating regional networks

The projects that were studied in this PhD thesis are examples of the quadrant in the bottom left. For each project, central government formulates national ambitions and offers funding to regional organizations for translating these ambitions into regional goals and action. Although these actors are often the same across distinct networks, central government does not steer deliberately to involve meta-network actors.

In the bottom right quadrant, central government still makes use of temporary, project-specific subsidies. However, the central government makes deliberate use of regional meta-networks, by approaching and mobilizing meta-network actors (both organizations and specific individuals within these organizations). This way, the extant meta-network is put to use and is reinforced, with the aim to foster cohesion and synergy among multiple temporary projects. Sometimes, when initiating new temporary projects, the regional approach is already chosen to boost the extant regional collaboration. An example was the Youth Unemployment project. Years before that project, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment had been stimulating regional collaboration by funding regional platforms for employment issues. However, in many regions these platforms had become less active. One of the reasons for the vice-Minister of Social Affairs and Employment to organize the Youth Unemployment project regionally – instead of, for example, sectoral – was to provide regional collaboration with a new impulse. So in this case, there was a deliberate choice for the regional level, based not only on content but also on relational arguments. If the Ministry would have chosen, subsequently, to mobilize those organizations and individuals that had been involved in earlier regional employment platforms before, this would have placed Youth Unemployment in the bottom right quadrant.

In the top left quadrant, the central government lets go of temporary project-specific funding and assigns a budget for employment and education issues for each region. Within the region, actors are free to form coalitions and apply for the available funding for topics that, based on a regional analysis, are relevant in that region. Central government does not stipulate who these actors should be or what coalitions should be formed. This will result in varying coalitions with large amounts of freedom regarding the use of available means. Following this strategy, central government invests in the policy-implementation strength of a region, without directly stimulating the regional meta-network.

In the top right quadrant, the central government stimulates the collaboration within a regional meta-network directly. Instead of funding distinct projects, it funds the regional meta-network as such. The actors within the meta-networks determine how, when and on what subjects measures are taken – based on an analysis of the region and a subsequent regional policy agenda. The result is an active and strengthened regional meta-network, with a high degree of policy-implementation power.

Implications for practitioners

When the central government chooses to continue temporary project-based funding – the bottom left of the aforementioned matrix – this thesis' chapters offer several practical implications for making these efforts more effective. In addition, we discuss three strategies to move from the bottom left quadrant to each of the three other quadrants in the matrix.

Moving toward the bottom right quadrant

When aligning new policies and network stimulations with extant ones, within and between central-governmental departments, managers should be aware of factors that stimulate or impede civil servants' cross-boundary work. Incentives, turf issues, political pressure and leadership behaviors are likely to affect the success of working across boundaries, with the purpose of delivering seamless policies to regional actors. When starting up new projects that should be implemented by regional networks, central governmental actors should pose and answer the following questions, regarding legitimacy, regional delimitations and meta-networks, alignment, and relations and effectiveness.

Legitimacy for interventions (Chapter 6):

- ❖ Is this issue, that is relevant to central government, as highly relevant to every region or are there more pressing issues for them? This requires a decentral exploration among relevant actors of urgency for this specific issue (in relation to other regional issues).

Regional delimitation and regional meta-network (Chapters 5 and 6):

- ❖ In order to complement existing projects and to make use of existing meta-networks, what regional delimitation is logical and natural?
- ❖ And following from this, which regional actors should be mobilized?

Alignment with other governmental initiatives (Chapters 2, 5 and 6):

- ❖ What are adjoining policy areas and social issues that may conflict or overlap with the issue at hand or, in a positive sense, may create synergy?
- ❖ Are there extant funding regulations, governmental account managers, and information flows from neighboring ministries that can be used for this particular project?

Network relations and effectiveness (Chapters 4 and 5):

- ❖ Is it a temporary problem? Is it temporary stimulation? If the answer to both is yes, then steer at quantitative targets. If the first is negative, but the second positive, make sure that time, money, incentives, and network governance forms are optimal for stimulating regional collaboration.
- ❖ In addition to project-specific goals and objectives, can effectiveness of multiple projects be assessed at the level of the region?

By answering these questions satisfactorily, central government can utilize the existence of regional meta-networks optimally, while still addressing each policy-issue individually.

Moving toward the top left quadrant

Addressing the questions in the above is likely to lead to incremental improvements of current practices. But there is a more radical approach. Politicians could consider introducing an interdepartmental, regional budget for education and employment (or other policy areas) issues, so that the most pressing problems of that specific region can be addressed. Regional actors will then have to show, based on regional analyses and a plan of action, what the key issues are, how they want to address those and what effects they can be held accountable for. These regional actors are not determined beforehand: they can form various coalitions which may result in various projects with or without synchronization. This means that the result may be similar to the situation in which the central government launched series of projects, with the exception that the choice of which issues to focus on, are determined by regional actors, which enhances a sense of urgency and commitment.

There is a critical note to be made with this suggestion. Although regional actors will probably

welcome this suggestion (also see the section: 'Focus on perception of network actors'), central government and possibly the general public may have a serious objection to this customization. As we saw in Chapter 6, the political legitimacy of the regional networks is secured by the central government, who took the initiative. However, when regions would have more freedom to decide which pressing issues to focus upon, the central government's political legitimacy for that course of action is not self-evident. As such, issues of a lack of democratic legitimacy for regional networks become more pressing compared to the current situation. In addition, for national politicians, it will become more difficult to be visible, as they would not have a nation-wide program to run.

A more practical challenge is that 'the region' is not a formal institution, and therefore cannot receive funding. The funding should thus be directed at one of multiple actors within the region, such as the largest municipality or an institutionalized collaboration of actors (e.g., the regional platforms for employment issues, or the he Daily Urban Systems, responsible for, amongst others, economic affairs). This means that relevant regional actors will have to find a way to distribute the funding among its actors, which could be a challenging task.

So, although a regional budget for employment and education issues may lead to region-specific and therefore more relevant projects, the political legitimacy, practical challenges, and limited political visibility inhibit the implementation of such a radical choice. However, it would be a serious option. Recently, similar sectoral budgets were initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs so as to, for example, stimulate employment in the health sector, ICT or the metal industry. National, regional or local actors could apply for this funding, with large degrees of freedom about the 'what' and the 'how.' Among the requests, there were also a few regional plans, including two from the studied regions East and South. Another example regards special education, which is a specific part of education. In this policy area, groups of schools receive regional budgets for their pupils, so as to organize education and care for pupils with physical, cognitive or behavioral disadvantages. The regional investment funds for public-private partnerships in the area of vocational education and employment are another example. These funds stimulate collaborative efforts for better connection between vocational education studies and requirements of regional industries. And finally, the Ministry of Economic Affairs is experimenting with network-based subsidies, in which clusters of companies may apply for so-called stimulation funding, without having to comply with pre-determined objectives by the central government. This means that also traditional evaluation methods do not apply, as the objectives may evolve over time and are not determined beforehand.

Moving toward the top right quadrant

Moving from the bottom left to the top right quadrant entails the most radical departure from current strategy. In this strategy, central government stimulates both regional meta-networks and regional policy-implementation strength, by funding the regional meta-network rather than specific projects. Central government identifies and mobilizes regional meta-network actors, by analyzing past involvement in regional networks around education and employment issues. These actors are invited to jointly formulate a regional policy agenda and concrete plans of action, for which they can apply for funding. For this strategy, the same practical challenges can be noted, as for the top left quadrant strategy. In addition, there is a risk of leaning on 'the usual suspects' and excluding new or other actors.

Suggestions for a practical approach

The interdepartmental committee for regional education and employment issues (see Chapter 2) that sought solutions for better aligned or even integrated regional policy and action was abolished mainly because some of the temporary funding regulations were soon to be eliminated. However, since then,

new initiatives have started, and the question how temporary funding for regional networks can be used so that it has the desired impact with few negative side-effects continues to exist. The strategies toward larger implementation strength for regions (top-half of the matrix) involve both practical and ideological challenges. Implementing such strategies may be a bridge too far on the short run. Therefore, we offer some suggestions for experimenting with these strategies on a smaller scale.

The regional investment fund for improving the connection between vocational education and employment could be a viable starting point, because schools for vocational education have a strong regional orientation and are manageable in terms of their numbers. At the moment, public-private partnerships (consisting of vocational schools, local or provincial governments and private-sector firms) can apply for funding, which results in several distinct initiatives per region. Ideally, such regional funding should result in an overall regional agenda with priorities that are pressing in that particular region. In order to achieve that, such a fund could be thematically broadened, i.e., by opening up for other issues in the area of vocational education and employment, for example, youth/adult unemployment, stimulating excellence, school drop-outs, language and arithmetic, or a focus on attracting and schooling students for specific sectors. At the moment, the regional investment fund is organized into five geographical areas, which means that they exceed the more 'natural' regions (approximately 30 in the Netherlands). Experimenting with such inclusive regional funding, however, may be most valuable in regions that are traditionally strongly organized, such as East or South. This way, central government could experiment with regional, inclusive budgets for education and employment issues in a controlled and manageable manner and take a more evolutionary approach to the strategies in which regional meta-networks and policy strength is optimally used as well as being reinforced.

LIMITATIONS

Like any study, this PhD thesis is subject to limitations. The previous chapters already discussed specific limitations of each of the undertaken studies. This section addresses the more general limitations that apply to the thesis' research as a whole. In addition to discussing the limitations, we discuss in the below also the generalizability of the findings.

Number of respondents

According to positivists, in qualitative research, the number of respondents is often seen as a limitation. This exploratory research is no exception. Although in total, we interviewed over 90 respondents in regional networks and within ministries, the number of respondents per case study varied, depending on the scope of the questions. The wider the scope of the research question, the more interviews were held, and, in general, we stopped interviewing when we did not hear any new perspectives. For example, we interviewed up to 59 regional network members, as these interviews captured multiple topics (including network effectiveness, network relations, regional meta-networks, and the role of the central government). In the case studies in Chapter 2, varying numbers of interviews were necessary, ranging from 25 for the rather broad subject of the start and functioning of several thematic directorates, to merely 2 interviews (with a two year time-span between the two) for the narrower subject of an intention to harmonize legislation. In the regions, the number of interviewees varied mostly due to practical reasons. In some networks, almost all network members were interviewed, while in others only two or three interviews were conducted. This was mainly due to the degree of access that was provided by the network leader. In some networks, members were willing to participate in this research and spontaneously suggested fellow network members, whom should be interviewed as well, leading to higher quantities of interviews than planned beforehand. In other networks, the network leader – usually the first entry – was reluctant to provide access to other network members. This may have induced a (positive)

bias: Possibly, the more content network leaders were with their networks, the more likely they were to allow free access for the study.

Response to the questionnaire

The response to the questionnaires used for Chapters 4 and 5 was rather low. We aimed to reach network actors beyond the ones that were interviewed already, by distributing the survey via the network leaders. However, the response rates were fairly disappointing; this was due in part to the many intensive written inquiries coming from several other actors at that time, including the central government itself. By using multiple methods (survey data, archival data, participant observation data, and social network data), we had aimed to counteract for some of the biases that were likely to occur and to find consistency in data patterns throughout these different types of sources. Since the data was highly consistent across the distinct data sources, the limited quantitative data is not considered a threat to the validity of the study as a whole.

Backgrounds of respondents

Regarding the background of the interviewees as well as respondents of the questionnaires, two critical notes regarding should be made. First, in the four case studies of Chapter 2, the political perspective was missing. Several barriers that were found were related to political actors, often having to do with protecting political turf (among ministers or between ministers and top tier civil servants) or shifting political attention. We were not able to include the political perspective on things by interviewing these ministers, due to the fall of a cabinet at that time, followed by period of political ‘vacuum’, and a high workload when the new cabinet was finally installed months later. The absence of a political perspective may have induced a bias toward the role of politics, in the sense that civil servants may be prone to external attribution when it comes to factors for unsuccessful initiatives.

Second, in the studies reported in the Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the number of interviewees and survey respondents at the networks’ tactical levels outnumbered those at the strategic levels. This may have led to an incomplete view of the meta-network, since the strategic level network actors are particularly intertwined with multiple networks. Also, this overrepresentation is likely to present a too positive view on the role of the central government and the perceived added value of temporary stimulation of regional networks, as interviews showed that strategic level network members were more critical compared to tactical level network members. Despite these shortcomings and possible biases, we believe we have captured a diverse and as much complete view as possible on the research subjects of these studies: departmental developments in The Hague and dynamics of regional networks.

Note that these specific networks consisted of strategic steering committees and tactical working groups. This means that operational level employees, for example, teachers, did not participate in these networks. As the core focus of this study was the network dynamics, we chose to focus on the actors who were actually engaged in the networks. As a consequence, these operational level employees were not included in the sample. However, from an effectiveness point of view, including this level is preferable, considering that, usually, policies and interventions ultimately take place at the operational level.

Focus on the perceptions of network actors

The majority of the findings are based on the perception of network actors: On the effectiveness and added value of regional networks. Since the research questions were targeted on their perceptions, this is not so much a limitation per se, but it does color the framework that we developed. There are more stakeholders than merely regional network actors, for example: central government’s politicians and civil

servants, as well as the 'clients' of the networks. This means that when contemplating about the 'perceived added value of central governmental stimulation of regional networks,' only the perceptions of the (strategic and tactical level) regional actors have been included. Future research may need to take more of a 360 degrees type of perspective.

Generalizability to other issues and other policy fields

In our research design, we chose to study in-depth regional networks around four topics in the policy fields of education and employment (Lifelong Learning, School-Drop Outs, Youth Unemployment and Technology in Education and Employment). Regional networks, however, are also the preferred level for many other similar topics (see Chapter 1 for an overview). During the interviews conducted for the Chapters 4, 5, and 6, network actors frequently mentioned other topics in the field of education and employment, for which, according to them, similar network dynamics applied.³⁸ This suggests that our research findings first and foremost apply to a wider area of educational and employment issues.

We do believe that the findings are generalizable to other policy areas in the social domain. The main author participated in an interdepartmental committee for a ten-month period (see Chapter 2) and closely collaborated with civil servants from a wide range of Ministries and policy areas (including OCW, SZW, LNV, WWI). During that period, it became clear that the issues of trying to facilitate cross-boundary work, offering seamless policies to regions, and questions regarding the design of networks (e.g., regional delimitations), managing networks (e.g., the role and tasks of account managers), and evaluating networks (defining and measuring effectiveness) were pressing in all of these policy areas.

Currently, the main author is employed in the Hague as a consultant in the social domain, which involves, amongst others, supporting local governments with the preparations of their decentralized tasks around health, youth care, and employment.³⁹ Especially for smaller municipalities, these decentralized tasks cannot be sufficiently fulfilled at the local level. Hence, they are seeking collaboration with other municipalities and other agencies; at the regional level. Although not directly stimulated by central government, like the regional networks we studied, these municipalities may encounter similar dilemmas, especially with regard to coordination, the tension between public and private actors, and possibly also a tension between a focus on results and a focus on relations (Chapter 4). Most definitely, tensions will arise regarding the need to work across boundaries, and the persistence of silo-based budgets, incentives and leadership (Chapter 2).

These insights suggest that the findings are generalizable to other policy areas in the social domains, such as health and youth care. The findings mainly apply to regional collaboration in an informal, less institutionalized setting, characterized by temporary and changing constellations of actors. On the other hand, the findings may not apply to policy areas that are characterized by formal, institutionalized, and structural regional collaboration, such as the judicial or safety regions. Since such regional networks are characterized by a highly institutionalized and formal network organization, and not with temporary impulses and project-based goals, challenges such as network formation and the tension between results and relations are less likely to play a role.

³⁸ Similar projects in the areas of education and employment, in which regional network members participated, included: 'Passend Onderwijs,' Maatschappelijke Stage', 'Leren in de Wijk,' Plusvoorzieningen Voortijdig Schoolverlaten,' Technocentra,' and 'Pieken in de Delta.'

³⁹ We are referring here to the following laws that entail a decentralization, and that started per January the 1st, 2015: the Participation Act; the transfer of components of the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ) to the Social Support Act (Wmo); and the Youth Care Act.

Generalizability to other regions and countries

We chose to study networks in four regional areas (which we named North, East, South and West) in the Netherlands. These regions were chosen in order to capture a broad area of the Netherlands, which fosters generalizability. It included industrial, rural and metropolitan areas. At the same time, we made sure to include regions that are still fairly comparable, in the sense that they all fall within the G30; the 30 largest cities of the Netherlands. In order to explore whether our findings are not exclusive to our four target regions, we included two more regions in a pilot study that was part of Chapter 5. These two regions were highly similar with regard to the existence and functioning of meta-networks and their perception of the central government regarding temporary stimulating projects that are executed by regional networks. Still, this is no guarantee for generalizability to every region in the Netherlands, but it does illustrate that the findings are not merely limited to the four regions studied in-depth.

Whether the findings would hold in other national contexts, depends on 1) the existence and definition of 'regions' in that country; 2) regions' tasks, responsibilities and institutional characteristics (e.g. formal or informal layers); and 3) the way higher tier governments stimulate and support these regions. Although the 'region' may differ for every country, in most countries it is referred to as a collaboration between municipalities and/or companies, at a level situated somewhere between the local and the national level.⁴⁰ In brief, regional collaboration is not exclusive to the Dutch situation, but whether the findings can be generalizable should be subject to future investigation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section, several strands for possible future research are presented. They can be grouped as follows: suggestions for future research on networks, suggestions regarding methods, and suggestions about extending the scope of the research of this thesis.

Include different stakeholders' perceptions of effectiveness

With regard to operationalizing and measuring network effectiveness, we suggest that not only measurable targets are included (i.e., goal attainment), but also relevant stakeholder's perceptions of effectiveness. In our research, we merely looked at the perceived effectiveness by network members themselves, but in order to grasp the subject even more thoroughly, future research could also include the perception of clients, central government (or other funding actors), and – if applicable and relevant in the specific context) – the perception of the general public.

Weigh effectiveness criteria in questionnaires

In addition, if we aim to capture fully how stakeholders perceive a network, not only the relative satisfaction, but also the relative importance of that factor may need to be included, as network actors may be dissatisfied about something, but do not believe that issue to be of great relevance. Therefore, when using a questionnaire with items regarding perceived network effectiveness, one should include the option to weight each item as well.

Study the coherence between results and relations longitudinally

We studied the tension between network relations and network effectiveness at a single point in time: by comparing 'older' to 'newer' networks. This entails two limitations (as discussed previously in Chapter

⁴⁰ Note that in some contexts, the term 'region' is used in a different and broader sense, usually referring to transnational areas without clear borders, such as the 'Euregio' (region consisting of a part of the Netherlands and a part of Germany), or the 'Middle East.'

4): the older networks were still fairly young, and it would provide much more evidential power to compare a network at multiple times during its lifecycle, by studying networks longitudinally, taking both network relations and network effectiveness into account.

Study the composition of a network as a determinant of relations and results

In this thesis, we encountered a new perspective for studying inter-organizational networks: by systematically taking into account the positions of network actors within their home organizations. Within the networks studied, network members varied greatly in terms of hierarchical level and decision-making power. Although it was outside of the scope of our research, we found indications that the positions of network members within their home organizations affected the network dynamics. To illustrate, network members who had close access to the CEO-level actors in their home organization, appeared to have greater decision-making abilities and were therefore perceived as more trustworthy by other network members, in terms of sticking to agreements. Also, the higher the network actors were in their own organization, the more this organization was perceived to take the network seriously. Network members that were close to the work floor in their home organization had less decision-making power and were therefore less reliable as a negotiation partner. Nevertheless, their ideas were perceived as having a greater chance of being successfully implemented. In addition, we learned that some network members were put forward for their knowledge on the topic at hand, but were criticized by others for lacking networking skills. The precise consequences of choosing who to represent one's organization in a collaborative network are of interest: they appear of great relevance to managers who have to decide which (type of) employees should engage at what level in their future network settings. Future research on this matter could pose the question: How do personal (knowledge, skills, collaborative capabilities) and structural (e.g., the hierarchical or information position in the home organization) factors affect collaborative network processes (e.g., trust, decision-making processes) and network effectiveness?

Expand the current research to other policy areas and geographic levels

This research focused on regional networks in the employment and education policy fields within the Netherlands. This topic can be expanded to other policy fields, including social policy fields such as health and community care, youth, and special education in the Netherlands: issues that are currently under the influence of decentralization and/or regionalization. In addition, in some policy areas similar networks emerge at the level of the neighborhood. These are the results of the new laws around participation and employment, health and social support, and youth care. As a result of these decentralizations, municipalities stimulated collaboration between executive agencies in the areas of health, community welfare and youth care and so forth, in order to cross organizational and policy boundaries so as to deliver more effective and efficient services. A concrete result are the newly started neighborhood community teams,⁴¹ which are somewhat regarded as a panacea for persistent health problems such as too much professional-care costs. It would be interesting to study these developments as a 'network of local actors,' struggling with their loyalty towards the network versus their home organization, while trying to cross organizational and policy (including funding and incentive) boundaries, as well as trying to realize both concrete results and establish fruitful network relations.

⁴¹ In Dutch: *Wijkteams*

Nederlandse samenvatting

Inleiding

Regionale netwerken worden steeds vaker door de Rijksoverheid benut als vehikel om nationale beleidsdoelstellingen te vertalen naar lokale en regionale actie. Dit fenomeen doet zich op uiteenlopende beleidsterreinen voor. Deze dissertatie richt zich op regionale netwerken op onderwijs- en arbeidsmarkt. Regionale netwerken op onderwijs- en arbeidsmarkt komen voort uit een behoefte om beleid dicht bij de eindgebruiker te formuleren en de overtuiging dat het niveau van de regio het meest geschikt is voor arbeidsmarktvraagstukken, alsmede onderwijsvraagstukken die te maken met het MBO-onderwijs.

Deze dissertatie beschrijft een serie studies naar enerzijds de mate waarin de rijksoverheid erin slaagt om te komen tot afstemming tussen afzonderlijke projecten en anderzijds hoe deze projecten binnen regionale netwerken vorm krijgen. Deze regionale netwerken worden gefinancierd door het rijk, vaak op basis van concrete doelstellingen/targets en voor een specifieke periode en doorgaans met de intentie om de in gang gezette interventies te continueren na afloop van de subsidieperiode. De netwerken bestaan uit onder meer ROC-scholen, middelbare scholen, gemeenten, UWV-werkpleinen, regionale arbeidsmarktplatforms en bedrijven.

De centrale vraag waarop antwoord wordt gegeven luidt: “Wanneer en hoe is het (tijdelijk) stimuleren van regionale samenwerking door de centrale overheid van toegevoegde waarde voor het aanpakken van complexe issues in het beleidsdomein onderwijs en arbeidsmarkt en op welke wijze zijn dergelijke netwerken effectiever in te zetten?”

Hoewel in deze dissertatie regionale netwerken centraal staan die zijn ontstaan vanuit *top-down* stimulering van de rijksoverheid, raakt het aan een recente en actuele ontwikkeling. De decentralisaties van de participatiewet, de jeugdzorgwet en (delen van) de AWBZ naar gemeenten leiden er in de praktijk vaak toe dat gemeenten, wanneer zij deze taken niet autonoom kunnen uitvoeren, samenwerking zoeken op regionaal niveau. De thema's die in dergelijke *bottom-up* gestimuleerde netwerken spelen, hebben belangrijke parallellen met de thema's in de *top-down* gestimuleerde regionale netwerken uit deze dissertatie. Een voorbeeld is het spanningsveld tussen het opbouwen en onderhouden van prettige samenwerkingsrelaties enerzijds en de druk om te presteren anderzijds. Een ander voorbeeld is het effect van keuzes rondom de governance-structuren van samenwerkingsverbanden. De inzichten uit deze dissertatie kunnen hiermee bijdragen aan effectievere regionale netwerken, zowel direct gestimuleerd vanuit de rijksoverheid als indirect via de decentralisaties.

In hoeverre slaagt het Rijk erin te komen tot integraal of afgestemd beleid?

De rijksoverheid stimuleert en faciliteert regionale netwerken middels subsidieregelingen, met informatie en met het inzetten van accountmanagers. Om binnen de rijksoverheid de noodzakelijke randvoorwaarden voor regionale samenwerking te scheppen, is samenwerking tussen verschillende directies en departementen nodig. De traditionele inrichting van ministeries blijkt niet ideaal voor dit doel. Binnen de rijksoverheid zijn dan ook veel initiatieven die trachten directie- en departement-overstijgend werken te stimuleren. De behoefte en tendens om inter- en intradepartementale barrières te slechten, doet zich niet alleen voor rondom het onderwerp regionale samenwerking, maar veel breder; en niet alleen in Nederland, maar in praktisch de gehele Westerse wereld. Deze tendens komt voort uit het gegeven dat sociale problemen complexer en eisen hoger zijn geworden; samenwerking en coördinatie nodig is om tegenwicht te bieden aan gefragmenteerde beleidsprocessen; de gedachte dat samenwerking leidt tot

betere diensten; en de subjectieve overtuiging dat 'samenwerking de toekomst is'.

Op basis van vier case studies binnen de rijksoverheid, uitgevoerd tussen 2008 en 2012, zijn leringen getrokken over effecten van dergelijke initiatieven en randvoorwaarden voor succes. De vier case studies hadden alle betrekking op onderwijs en/of arbeidsmarktbeleid, met elk hun eigen focus en aanpak: 1) het veranderen van de organisatiestructuur (directie-overstijgende themadirecties); 2) beleidsprocessen en –instrumenten (het synchroniseren of integreren van bijv. accountmanagers, regio-indelingen, subsidies en verantwoording); 3) cultuur/mind-set (het formuleren van 'rode draden' over beleidsonderwerpen heen); en 4) wet- en regelgeving (het formuleren van een integrale onderwijswet).

Analyse van deze case studies toonde aan dat geen van de initiatieven het absolute gewenste effect bleek te sorteren. Wel leidden al deze initiatieven tot incrementele verbeteringen; soms structureel, soms tijdelijk van aard. Structurele oplossingen (aanpassen van organisatiestructuur) bleken weer nieuwe grenzen op te werpen, doordat de veranderingen gericht waren op het herstructureren van grenzen en niet gepaard gingen met incentives om over grenzen heen te werken. Aan de andere kant bleek het stimuleren van denken in directie-overstijgende beleidsthema's (cultuur), zonder dat dit door de organisatiestructuur werd ondersteund, ook tekort te schieten. Een aantal stimuli en barrières voor het werken over grenzen heen bleek in elk van de case studies relevant: een overtuiging bij management en politici dat goed afgestemd beleid belangrijker is dan zichtbaarheid voor individuele politici; bijpassende incentives voor directies om te investeren in directie- en departement-overstijgende samenwerking; en hierdoor een bewustwording bij beleidsmedewerkers dat werken over de grenzen van de eigen directie heen gewaardeerd en beloond wordt.

Hoe effectief zijn top-down gestimuleerde regionale netwerken?

Indien het gelukt is om door de traditionele directie- of departementale grenzen heen beleid te formuleren ten behoeve van een complex sociaal probleem, begint de volgende uitdaging: lokale en regionale actoren stimuleren de handen ineen te slaan teneinde deze beleidsdoelstellingen te vertalen in regionale resultaten. Vanuit de netwerkliteratuur beschouwd hebben de onderzochte regionale netwerken een paar opvallende kenmerken: ze zijn *top-down* geïnitieerd en ze worden *tijdelijk* gesubsidieerd. Het gegeven dat de netwerken vanuit het Rijk worden gestimuleerd – hoewel de meeste geen verplicht karakter hebben – is van invloed op de aard van de samenwerking. De overheidssubsidie is bedoeld als tijdelijke impuls; de initiatieven die door de netwerken ontwikkeld worden, dienen echter verankerd en gecontinueerd te worden nadat de tijdelijke subsidie voor het netwerk stopt. Immers, het probleem waar de stimulans zich op richt houdt niet op te bestaan na de subsidieperiode. Er vanuit gaande dat een goede samenwerking en commitment een van de randvoorwaarden is voor continuering en verankering, impliceert dit dat voor deze typen netwerken zowel het realiseren van concrete output, als het ontwikkelen van (potentieel duurzame) samenwerkingsrelaties relevant is.

Door middel van twee veldstudies is onderzocht hoe het stimuleren van (duurzame) samenwerkingsrelaties enerzijds en het stimuleren van concrete (kortetermijn-) resultaten anderzijds zich tot elkaar verhouden. De eerste, verkennende studie vergeleek twee netwerken in twee verschillende regio's rondom hetzelfde beleidsthema. Leren & Werken. Hoewel de netwerk- en organisatieliteratuur er doorgaans vanuit gaat dat goede samenwerkingsrelaties leiden tot goede resultaten, toonde deze eerste studie een spanningsveld aan tussen het behalen van resultaten enerzijds en het opbouwen van samenwerkingsrelaties anderzijds. Het best presterende netwerk bleek de meeste problemen te ondervinden in de samenwerking en de verwachte continuïteit. Het minst presterende netwerk was een collectief, waarbij

de inzet en inspraak van partijen gelijk verdeeld was. Processen duurden hierdoor echter langer, waardoor resultaten achterbleven op de doelstellingen.

In een tweede, grotere studie onder elf netwerken in vier verschillende regio's werd dit opnieuw getest en werd gezocht naar verklarende factoren. Deze regionale netwerken waren georganiseerd rondom vier beleidsonderwerpen: leren en werken (L&W), jeugdwerkloosheid (JWL), voortijdig schoolverlaten (VSV) en technologie in onderwijs en arbeidsmarkt (TOA). Deze studie bevestigde het bestaan van een spanningsveld tussen resultaten en relaties; en toonde tevens aan dat dit spanningsveld zich vooral bij jonge netwerken voordoet. Naarmate een netwerk langer bestaat, gaan het werken aan relaties en resultaten beter samen. Bovendien bleek dat de organisatievorm van het regionale netwerk een grote rol speelde. Er zijn drie basisorganisatievormen van netwerken; *lead-organization* (waarbij een van de deelnemende partijen een leidende en trekkende rol heeft), *shared-participant* (waarbij alle partijen in gelijke mate zijn betrokken), en *NAO-governed networks* (wat staat voor *Network Administrative Organization*; en waarbij een externe/onafhankelijke partij zorgdraagt voor de projectcoördinatie). De specifieke rol die een NAO aannam bleek een bepalende factor voor zowel het realiseren van output als het opbouwen van goede samenwerkingsrelaties. Netwerken met een NAO die zich beperkte tot de ondersteunende, coördinerende rol scoorden op beide aspecten hoger dan *shared-participant* en *lead-organization governed networks*. Echter, netwerken waar de NAO een sterk sturende of uitvoerende rol op zich nam scoorden op beide aspecten lager dan de andere netwerkvormen.

Deze bevindingen impliceren dat zowel het Rijk als de regionale netwerkpartners waakzaam moeten zijn indien een project extreem hoog scoort in termen van targets, vooral in de beginfase van het netwerk. Mogelijk worden deze resultaten behaald ten koste van het opbouwen van de samenwerkingsrelaties, wat een nadelig effect kan hebben op het verduurzamen en verankeren van gezamenlijke maatregelen. Vanuit het Rijk dient er bij het sturen op resultaten dan ook oog te zijn voor de ontwikkelingsfasen van netwerken en samenwerkingsprocessen. Wanneer er een NAO-achtige organisatie betrokken is bij het netwerk dient waakzaamheid of de kernpartners afdoende gecommitteerd zijn en in het netwerk investeren. Een NAO die een sterk sturende of uitvoerende rol op zich neemt, doet dit vaak vanuit een initieel gebrek aan commitment en actie van andere netwerkpartners. Doordat het netwerk in dergelijke gevallen afhankelijk is van een externe en tijdelijk bekostigde speler, maakt dat het netwerk kwetsbaar en de kans op continuering nihil.

Welke effecten hebben overlappende netwerken in de regio?

Tijdens het onderzoek naar effectiviteit van netwerken werd duidelijk dat de verschillende netwerken binnen een regio nauw met elkaar samenhangen. Zij bleken elkaar thematisch te overlappen (neem bijvoorbeeld voortijdig schoolverlaten en jeugdwerkloosheid, welke in elkaars verlengde liggen), maar er bleek eveneens een personele overlap te bestaan tussen de netwerken, doordat een beperkt aantal actoren elkaar in verschillende gremia steeds treft. Dit fenomeen, waarbij personen elkaar rondom verschillende netwerken steeds weer treffen, duiden we aan met de term 'regionaal meta-netwerk'. Vanuit de netwerkliteratuur wordt het 'hele netwerk' (*whole network*) gezien als het hoogste abstractieniveau om netwerken te analyseren. In literatuur over de private sector zijn dergelijke overlappende netwerken echter geen noviteit: met name in sectoren die sterk project-georiënteerd zijn, zoals de film- en televisiebranche en de bouwsector, is veel aandacht besteed aan project-overstijgende netwerken. In de publieke sector literatuur is het fenomeen dat op het oog afzonderlijke netwerken met elkaar verbonden kunnen zijn een relatief nieuw en schaars begrip.

Door middel van interviews, vragenlijsten en sociale netwerkdata, van elf netwerken uit vier regio's, is

onderzocht op welke manier regionale meta-netwerken de formatie, effectiviteit en continuïteit van hun onderliggende netwerken beïnvloeden. Ook zijn de vier regionale meta-netwerken, die normaal onzichtbaar zijn, op basis van sociale netwerkdata gevisualiseerd. In alle vier de regio's was sprake van een meta-netwerk, maar deze varieerden ten aanzien van de mate van dichtheid, centraliteit, grootte en congruentie. Deze variaties werden veroorzaakt door specifieke institutionele (bijvoorbeeld het aantal ROC-scholen in een regio), historisch-culturele (bijvoorbeeld een historie van economische tegenspoed) en sociale factoren (bijvoorbeeld ambassadeurs van regionale samenwerking op strategische plekken) binnen een regio. De kwantitatieve data liet zien dat grotere en meer gecentraliseerde meta-netwerken een positief effect hebben op het behalen van concrete resultaten in de onderliggende netwerken. Tegelijkertijd bleek dat kleinere en meer decentrale netwerken een positief effect hadden op samenwerkingsrelaties in de onderliggende netwerken. Bovendien bleek dat regio's met een sterk meta-netwerk beter in staat waren verbindingen tussen afzonderlijke projecten te leggen, door gebruik te maken van elkaars interventies of deze zelfs bundelen (bijvoorbeeld een gezamenlijke loket voor doelgroepen van diverse projecten), wat leidt tot een verhoogde effectiviteit of efficiëntie voor de afzonderlijke projecten.

Voor het Rijk kan het een meerwaarde opleveren om meta-netwerken te herkennen en actief te gebruiken. Nieuwe netwerken kunnen sneller opgestart worden en bestaande projecten kunnen elkaar versterken. De wetenschap dat formeel afzonderlijke netwerken in werkelijkheid met elkaar vervlochten zijn, impliceert dat er een extra niveau aan effectiviteit kan worden toegevoegd, bovenop effectiviteit voor cliënten, organisaties en netwerken: effectiviteit op het niveau van het meta-netwerk. Kerngedachte hierbij is dat afzonderlijke netwerken elkaar versterken en geen wrijving veroorzaken.

Wanneer is het stimuleren van regionale netwerken van meerwaarde?

Naast de vraag waaruit effectiviteit in een netwerkcontext bestaat, is een andere relevante vraag onder welke voorwaarden regionale netwerkpartners überhaupt vinden dat het (tijdelijk) stimuleren van regionale netwerken vanuit het Rijk meerwaarde heeft, en waaruit deze meerwaarde dan precies bestaat. Studies naar projectmanagement en regionale samenwerking laten een scala aan mogelijke voorwaarden voor succesvolle tijdelijke projecten en regionale netwerken (zoals een gevoel van urgentie, afwezigheid van bureaucratie, een klein aantal homogene partners en wederzijdse afhankelijkheidsrelaties), evenals een groot aantal potentiële typen van toegevoegde waarde (zoals gedeeld leren, een hogere kwaliteit van dienstverlening en het overbruggen van lokale verschillen).

Om erachter te komen wat netwerkparticipanten spontaan noemen en wat hiervoor de onderliggende redenen zijn, zijn 39 netwerkparticipanten geïnterviewd volgens een *laddering technique*, waarbij er steeds doorgevraagd wordt naar dieperliggende oorzaken en motieven van initiële reacties. Drie typen voorwaarden bleken - volgens netwerkparticipanten - nodig om te spreken van zinvolle stimulering van regionale netwerken: kenmerken ten aanzien van de rol van de rijksoverheid (o.a. de gepercipieerde legitimiteit van ingrijpen en een beperkte administratieve belasting); kenmerken van het project (o.a. heldere doelstellingen); en kenmerken van de regio (o.a. de perceptie dat het regionale niveau is 'natuurlijk' en 'logisch' voor het onderwerp). Dit impliceert onder meer dat voordat er wordt overgegaan tot het implementeren van projecten waarbij regionale netwerken aan zet zijn, het Rijk er goed aan doet een decentrale verkenning uit te voeren onder relevante actoren, teneinde de beleefde urgentie voor het specifieke onderwerp te toetsen en te verifiëren wat het geëigende niveau is om dit onderwerp aan te pakken.

Ten aanzien van de toegevoegde waarde van regionale netwerken kwamen eveneens drie patronen naar voren: toegevoegde waarde voor organisaties, voor cliënten en voor de regio's als geheel. Opvallend

was dat sommige typen meerwaarde die in de literatuur vaak naar voren kwamen, waaronder klanttevredenheid, niet genoemd werden. Dergelijke relatief kortdurende impulsen lijken vooral informatie-uitwisseling, gedeeld leren en netwerkrelaties te stimuleren, terwijl de meerwaarde voor de eindgebruikers (i.e., leerlingen, jongeren, werkenden) minder overtuigend en minder zichtbaar zijn voor netwerkparticipanten. Enerzijds heeft dit te maken met het feit dat de participanten in deze netwerken niet altijd degenen waren die in direct contact stonden met de eindgebruikers en anderzijds met het gegeven dat deze opbrengsten langer duren om zich te manifesteren.

Hoe kunnen regionale netwerken effectiever worden ingezet bij het vormgeven van regionaal beleid?

De resultaten uit de voorgaande studies vormen tezamen de bouwstenen voor de vraag hoe regionale netwerken op effectievere wijze benut kunnen worden bij het aanpakken van problemen en uitdagingen op onderwijs- en arbeidsmarktgebied. Om antwoord te geven op deze vraag worden in deze dissertatie vier strategieën beschreven, die zijn gebaseerd op twee assen: het stimuleren en benutten van regionale meta-netwerken en het stimuleren van regionale beleidskracht.

De eerste strategie is de huidige aanpak, waarbij op projectbasis via tijdelijke subsidies regionale netwerken worden gestimuleerd en ondersteund. Hierbij wordt niet of nauwelijks gebruik gemaakt van regionale meta-netwerken en wordt een beperkt beroep gedaan op regionale beleidskracht. De tweede strategie doet een groter beroep op beleidskracht van een regio, door een regionaal budget beschikbaar te stellen, waaruit regionale actoren zelf projecten kunnen opstarten. Een alternatieve strategie is het blijven gebruiken van tijdelijke projecten, maar bij de samenstelling hiervan optimaal gebruik te maken van regionale meta-netwerken en deze ook te versterken. De laatste strategie doet een groot beroep op zowel regionale meta-netwerken als regionale beleidskracht: hier wordt het regionale meta-netwerk direct gefinancierd middels een breed inzetbaar, regionaal budget.

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Since the acknowledgements are usually the most well-read pages of a PhD thesis, I might as well write these partially in Dutch, zodat ook deze laatste eventuele barrière tot lezen wordt weggenomen.

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Hoewel een wijs man mij recent zei dat 'organisaties niets zijn, het gaat om de mensen binnen organisaties', wil ik toch een dankwoord richten aan OCW en PwC, die deze promotieplek mogelijk hebben gemaakt en mij alle vrijheid en mogelijkheden hebben geboden om dit onderzoek uit te voeren. En, omdat het uiteindelijk inderdaad om mensen gaat, wil ik een paar mensen binnen OCW specifiek danken. Jacob Zuurmond en Bob Lodder, die de twijfelachtige eer hadden mij te begeleiden in het onderzoek vanuit OCW, veel dank voor jullie aandacht, interesse, het meedenken en de praktische ondersteuning. Jullie zijn allebei enorm fijne mensen. En Marjolein en Harm, mijn kamergenootjes van het eerste uur en tevens welkomstcomité, dank je wel voor jullie vriendschap. Het ministerie is te groot, en deze pagina's te klein, om alle mensen persoonlijk te bedanken die in tussen 2008 en 2012 zich door mij hebben laten interviewen, mij hebben mee laten lopen en kijken, of hebben gezorgd voor ontspanning tijdens

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Voor veel projecten gaat de 80-20 regel op: de laatste 20% kost 80% van de tijd. Voor deze dissertatie is dat niet veel anders. Na de jaren van dataverzameling en schrijven als promovenda, lag er nog behoorlijk wat analyse- en schrijfwerk te wachten toen ik op 1 januari 2012 als adviseur bij B&A begon. Aan alle collega's die dit proces aan de zijlijn hebben moeten aanzien, en in het bijzonder Jesse, Guy, Eline, Timo, Mark, Eva, Yorick en Yermo (mijn paranimf!): dank voor de fijne werksfeer, de steun en inspiratie, de flauwe grappen en de gezelligheid. Ik verheug me op het moment dat de wekelijkse vraag 'Heb je nog plannen voor het weekend?' kan beantwoorden met een andere reactie dan 'dissertatie'. Ook alle dames van de ondersteuning, Marianne, Paulien, Lenie, Teresa en Anne, bedankt voor jullie hulp met allerlei last minute print- en drukwerk, lay-out en het naarstig versturen van manuscripten. En B&A als geheel, dank voor de ondersteuning en de tijd die ik heb gekregen voor de afronding van dit boek.

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About the author

Esther Klaster was born on July 12, 1982 in Almelo (the Netherlands), where – quite a few years later – she also attended middle school. Shortly after her final exams her life changed drastically when her daughter, Amy, was born. One year later, in 2002, she started to study at the University of Twente and obtained master's degrees in Corporate Communication (2006), as well as in Business Administration (2007).

After graduating she received a PhD-position at the IS&CM department of the University of Twente. As the object of her research involved the Dutch Ministry for Education, Culture and Science, she moved to The Hague. Between 2008 and 2012, she conducted a series of studies both within the central government and within regional networks.

In January 2012, she started to work as a consultant for B&A, a research and consulting firm in The Hague. At B&A, she advises ministries, municipalities and other public actors on issues regarding education, employment and social support, including the decentralizations concerning the Participation Act, the Social Support Act and Youth Services Act.

Toward more effective regional networks

Regional networks have become a popular way for the Dutch central government to translate national ambitions into regional policies and actions. This thesis focuses on regional networks in the public-policy fields of education and employment. These consist of various actors, including schools, local governments, and businesses.

This thesis provides better understanding of both the organization and effects of regional networks, and the attempts of the central government to 'work across organizational boundaries,' so as to facilitate these networks. Strategies for making better use of regional networks are offered.

Its findings are relevant to regional networks that are stimulated top-down by central government, as well as to regional networks that arise bottom-up, as a result of the decentralization of tasks to local governments.