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Accountability of educational networks:
What?
Why?
How?

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Coordination of education systems:

- Hierarchical control
- Market governance
- *Network governance*

Network governance involves policies that link different stakeholder organizations (e.g. through incentives such as subsidies) around a public policy purpose and a set of joint goals (Mayne et al, 2003).

What is an (inter-organizational) network?

- Formal arrangements of a multitude of public and private organizations, agencies, and departments that have been constituted to facilitate collective action
- Collective action: implementation of specific education reforms or services, joint professional development, school improvement and exchange of good practices and/or peer reviews.
- (Aspects of) the provision and/or improvement of teaching and learning becomes the joint responsibility of the network, instead of that of single schools.

Types of networks

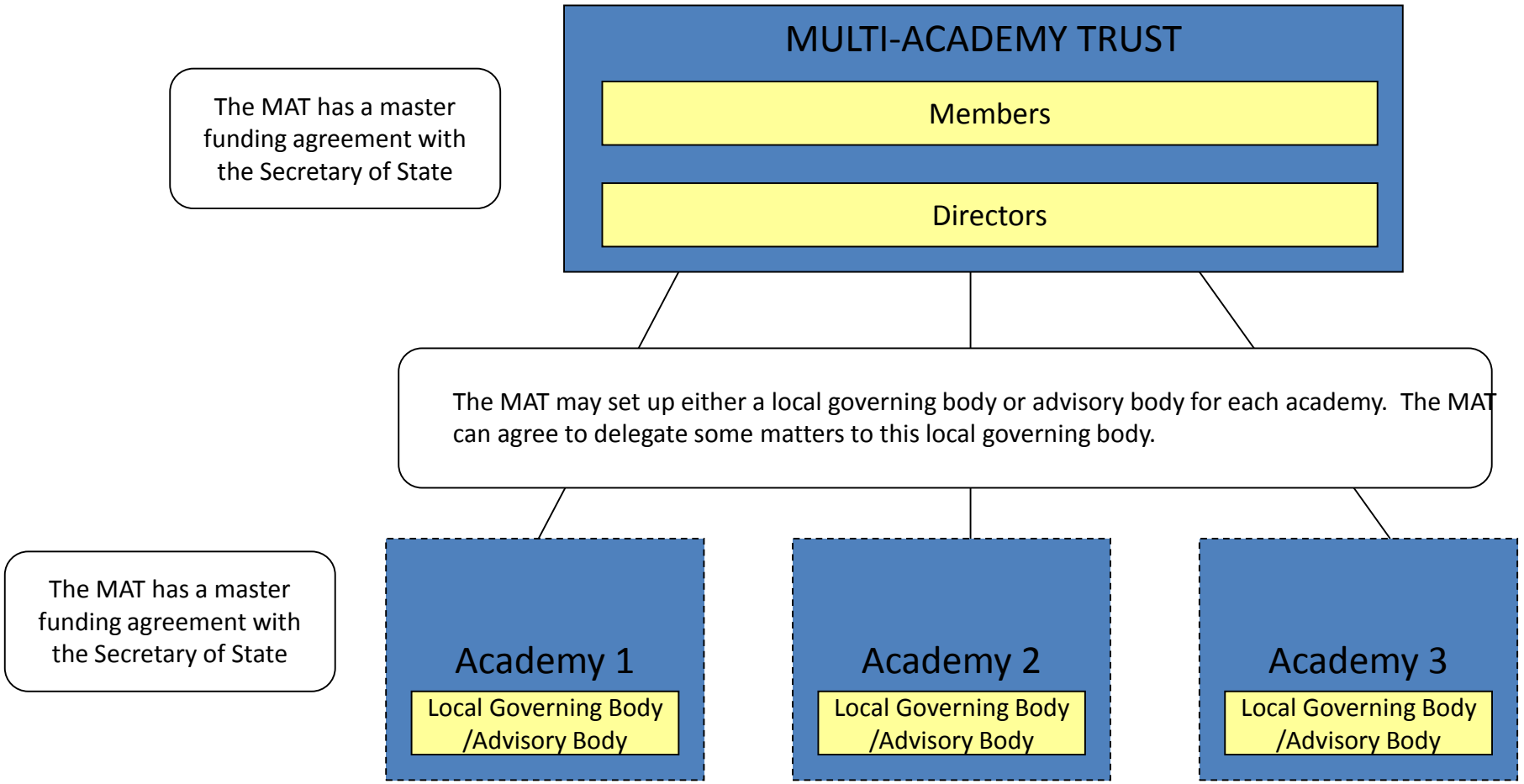
- Formal/mandated versus informal/self-initiated
- Centralized versus decentralized decision-making/ brokered versus non-brokered governance (lead organization, network administrative organization, participant-governed)
- Etc.

(Provan and Kenis, 2008)

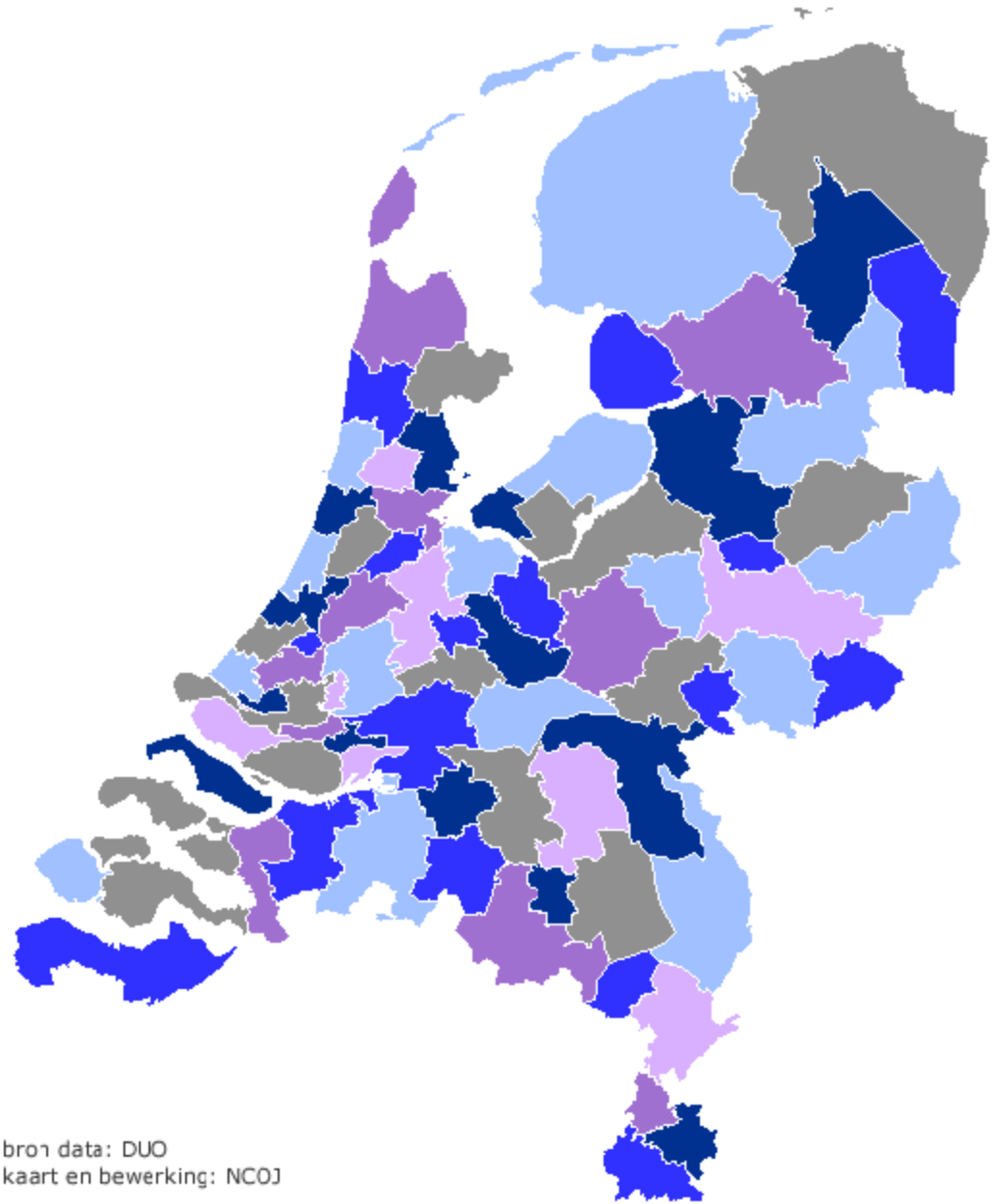
Multi-Academy-Trust Model

(Example)

There is only one legal entity accountable for all schools within the chain, the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The MAT has one set of Articles which governs all the academies in that chain.



AET (Academies Enterprise Trust):
32 primary
29 secondary
5 special



The Netherlands:

August 2014: Inclusive Education Act
76 regional partnerships in primary education
74 regional partnerships in secondary education

West Belfast Partnership

TWEETS 1,394 | FOLLOWING 410 | FOLLOWERS 832 | LIKES 45

3 10

WBPB @WestBelfastPB · Aug 15

Children at the summer transition school are learning about Java coding today. @PaulMaskeyMP @Anorthosis87

3 3

Bulgaria: peer review network to improve parental involvement

Part 2. Accountability of educational networks

Accountability of networks is important because collaboration is not without problems or unintended consequences:

- Fragmentation of delivery structures
- Self-protective behavior
- Inter-organisational politics and struggles
- Network members protect their specific independence and identity
- Loosing sight of the public objectives
- Network members defaulting on obligations to other network partners
- Groupthink
- Inefficiencies (turnover and meeting costs)

(Mayne and Rieper, 2003)

Accountability of school networks needs to improve network-level outcomes and prevent unintended consequences of networking.

What is the added value of the network, and does it contribute to the common good?

Purpose and outcomes of the network:

Performance of networks is not a simple aggregate of performance of its members

Effective networks:

'attain positive network level outcomes that could not normally be achieved by individual organizational participants acting independently' (Provan and Kenis, 2008, p.230)

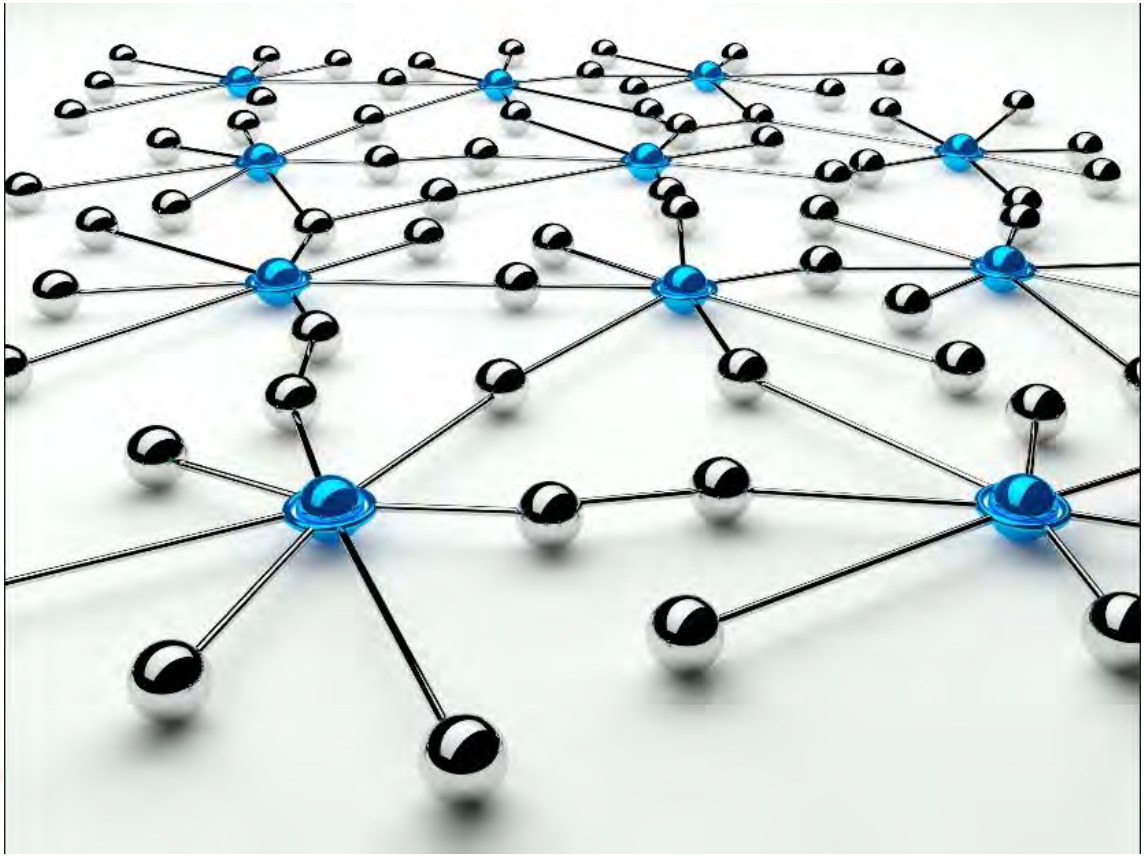
- Network-level outcomes are specific to context and the purpose for which the network was established, purposes and outcomes may change over time

Three types of outcomes

1. Creating synergy: adding value by combining mutually reinforcing interests
2. Leading to transformation: transform different views into an ideological consensus
3. Enhancing financial efficiency: maximizing the use of resources across the partners in the network

Source: Gray et al (2003)

What does accountability of an educational network look like?



Accountability of networks

Approach

Methodology:
Bottom-up, 'subjectivist' approach, aimed at validating, interpreting, understanding quality of context-specific approaches and solutions.

Valuing
Goal-free, flexible and specific to context and information needs of (network of) schools and stakeholders

Use/User involvement:
'Collaborative/participatory evaluation'
Stakeholders and schools involved in all phases
Intelligent intervention strategies targeted at all schools/ stakeholders in a network to improve performance of entire network.

Level of analysis

Individual: (contribution of) network on individual and individual in relation to network

Organisation: (contribution of) network on member and member to network outcomes

Network: assessment of network-level outcomes and network properties (structure, relationships, internal evaluation mechanisms) contributing to outcomes

Community: (contribution of) network to community it was established to serve and community to network

Examples from our EU-study:

www.schoolinspections.eu

1. England: batched (Ofsted) inspections of Multi-Academy Trusts and monitoring of Regional Schools Commissioners
2. The Netherlands: inspections of networks for inclusive education
3. Northern-Ireland: area-based inspections (West Belfast)
4. Bulgaria: thematic inspections of a school peer review network (Sofia)

School Inspections

Share your example

Dimensions

This interactive map presents examples of inspections of educational networks, such as networks of schools (under a school board) or networks for inclusive education. You can search for examples by country, or by the following three dimensions:

- **Methodology**
- **Valuing and judgement**
- **User involvement**

Search by keyword or country...

The key questions:

How effective is it to hold networks to account?

Does accountability of school networks benefit student learning?

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