

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND RELATIONAL GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF BRAINPORT EINDHOVEN, THE NETHERLANDS

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### **Abstract:**

*It has been argued that the new form of relational governance might lead to a substantial deficit of democratic accountability, but in previous studies less attention has been paid to what accountability is and how to systematically analyse it before announcing there are accountability deficits. In order to advance the knowledge of accountability and relational governance, this paper examines the notion of accountability and adopts a conceptual framework of public accountability established by Mark Bovens to conduct a case study of Eindhoven city-regional governance. Eindhoven city-region has been recognised as a successful story of high-tech development and its success is a result of a new form of relational governance—close collaboration between different levels of government and other parties, including high-tech firms and knowledge institutes. Major focus is put on the establishment and operation of the Brainport organizations, which perfectly represents the new form of relational governance in Eindhoven city-region. By mapping its networks of accountability and assessing its accountability arrangement, this paper finds that the degree of the Brainport organizations' accountability toward the municipal councils differs from municipality to municipality. While the councils of municipal stakeholders of Brainport Development NV may use municipal regular planning and control cycle of annual memorandum, reports, and budget to influence the content and financial frameworks of Brainport organizations' year plan to certain degree, the councils of non-stakeholder municipalities in Eindhoven city-region can hardly ever influence the decision making of the Brainport organizations. From either the democratic or the learning perspective, the institutional arrangement of the Brainport organizations insufficiently satisfy the criteria of accountability. This indicates large space for improvement. Further, the case study results remind us that comparing to the traditional governance mode the nature of relational governance is rather dynamic. It is a learning by doing process and is constantly shaped by the alteration of national policy as well as of the changing agreements between the municipalities. Thus, it deserves continuously monitoring and investigating the change of city-regional institutional setting and its influences on the accountability arrangement of the relational governance.*

Keywords: Brainport Eindhoven, Relational Governance, Democratic Accountability

### **1. Introduction**

In the age of network society, a relational approach in spatial governance has emerged for more than a decade (Healey, 2004). The emphasis on competitiveness agenda has positioned city-regions in a European/global economic space (Albrechts et al., 2003). The focus of spatial relations and city-regions has encouraged levels of government to create new institutional arenas to work together and collaborate with private sectors that have access to a wide range of know-how and crucial resources that can help strengthen city-regional competitiveness. Eindhoven city-region in the Netherlands is a good example of such practices. Since 2004, the Dutch government has considered Brainport Eindhoven together with Rotterdam Seaport and Amsterdam Schiphol Airport the top three engines of the Dutch economy (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2004). According to Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2011, in Europe the Eindhoven city-region ranks highest in terms of patents per population (more than 2, 000 patents per million inhabitants). The successful story of high-tech development in Eindhoven city-region is a result of close collaboration between different levels of government and other parties, including high-tech firms and knowledge institutes.

However, the creation of new institutional arenas makes possible new alliances and realignments of

power to influence the decision-making of city-regional development. Issues related to accountability and social justice may emerge in the new governance practices (Huang, 2013). Some scholars have argued that the rescaling and reframing of governance space has increased the complex relationships between politicians, citizens, and other stakeholders, and created a post-political situation that may lead to a substantial democratic deficit (Buser, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2005). It is important to examine whether and how people are excluded or included in the processes and how the relationships between them are organized. In other words, the new forms of relational governance has challenged the capacity of traditional institutions of democracy and raised the concern of accountability.

Nevertheless, in previous studies—despite the growing concern of accountability deficit along with the emergence of relational governance—less attention has been paid to what accountability is and how to systematically analyse it before announcing there are accountability deficits. Bovens (2010) reminds that a lack of a consistent framework for the analysis of accountability is undermining accountability practices and preventing much empirical progress in accountability study. Moreover, previous studies often assumed a simple, linear cause-effect relationship of accountability mechanism and ignored ‘the problem of many eyes’ (Bovens, 2007, p. 455). In fact, there are various types of accountability that exist side by side and form complex networks of accountability (Buser, 2014; Scott, 2000). Some are less formal, less evident and mutually interdependent, such as the informal accountabilities of peer review in a particular community (Scott, 2000). It is inappropriate to jump to conclusions without carefully mapping the webs of accountability and systematically investigating the interrelationships among the webs in the new forms of relational governance.

In the light of these issues, this research first examines the notion of accountability and then adopts a conceptual framework of public accountability established by Mark Bovens to map the networks of accountability and to explore whether and how the new institutional arrangements of Eindhoven city-regional governance challenge the practice of accountability. Major focus is put on the establishment and operation of the *Stichting Brainport* (Brainport Foundation). Brainport Foundation consists of representatives of the regional governance body, local governments, knowledge institutes and high-tech firms. It is a collaborative body determining the development strategies of Brainport Eindhoven NV<sup>1</sup>, the economic development organisation for the Eindhoven city-region. The empirical study is from 2008 to 2013, because since December 2012 the regional governance body in Eindhoven city-region, the *Stadsregio Eindhoven* (Eindhoven City Region, SRE), has undergone a process of institutional transforming (SRE Regioraad, 2013). This will influence the role and capacity of the SRE in the Brainport Foundation and the accountability arrangement of the relational governance in the city-region. In the final part of this paper, I summarise the research results to pave a way for more rigorous analysis of the accountability in the relational governance.

## 2. Analysing and Assessing Accountability

The application of accountability is important for democratic governance. It can not only contribute to the legitimacy of public governance, but also prevent and detect the abuse of public powers, and lead to reflection and improvements on the performance of public governance (Bovens, 2010). However, accountability is a very elusive concept. It ‘is used as a synonym for many loosely defined political desiderata, such as good governance, transparency, equity, democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility, and integrity.’ (Bovens, 2010, p. 946) Each of the political desiderata is an umbrella concept itself. Accountability in this broad sense more emphasises evaluative rather than analytical dimensions. Moreover, it has to be taken into consideration that the standards of accountable behaviour differ according to particular places, times and institutional settings.

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<sup>1</sup> Brainport Eindhoven NV was established in 2008. Its forerunner is NV REDE. Since 1982, NV REDE had been the economic development organization for the Eindhoven region. It aimed to promote business and employment in the region, and its target groups were small and medium-sized enterprises in industry and services.

Specifically, accountability refers to the right to conduct *ex post* oversight and control rather than *ex ante* control and involvement in decision making (Scott, 2000). In order to let the notion of accountability be more operational and analytical, Bovens (2007, p. 450) proposes a more narrow definition of accountability—‘a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face [formal and/or informal] consequences’, such as penalty sanctions, minister’s resignation, and so on. This definition is centred on four essential questions regarding the institutional arrangements of accountability, including ‘who’ is accountable to ‘whom’, ‘how’, and for ‘what’? To clarify the interrelationships between these four elements is a useful starting point for accessing accountability arrangements in particular institutional settings.

### 2.1 Typologies of Accountability

As shown in Table 1, seven types of accountability can be identified according to the nature of the forum and of the obligation. This identification is handy for characterising distinct accountability arrangements.

Table 1. Typologies of Accountability

Based on the nature of the forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political accountability</li> <li>- Legal accountability</li> <li>- Administrative accountability</li> <li>- Professional accountability</li> <li>- Social accountability</li> </ul>
Based on the nature of the obligation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vertical accountability</li> <li>- Horizontal accountability</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Bovens, 2007; 2010.

According to Bovens (2007; 2010), *political accountability* is exercised in the opposite direction to that of the delegation chain. Although the composition of the chain may vary in different countries, voters and the executive public servants are the two ends of the chain. In some countries, the media has become major informal forums for political accountability. *Legal accountability* is often based on detailed legal standards, so it is the least ambiguous type of accountability. Its major forums are courts, including civil courts, administrative courts, and so on. *Administrative accountability* refers to a wide range of quasi-legal forums, which vary from ombudsmen and audit offices at different levels of government to independent supervisory authority, inspector generals, anti-fraud offices, etc. This type of arrangement plays an important role to oversee the performance of quangos and executive public agencies.

*Professional accountability* relates to professional peer review on the basis of codes with standards laid down by professional associations. It is especially relevant to the public managers who are professionals, such as architects, urban planners, or civil engineers. *Social accountability* is an emerging concept responding to the urgent demands of contemporary civil society for more direct and explicit accountability relations with public agencies or individual public managers. Under certain circumstances, public agencies or individual public managers are asked to account for their performance to the public, or at least, to civil interest groups, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders.

Considering the nature of the obligation, two types of accountability can be categorised, including vertical accountability and horizontal accountability. *Vertical accountability* refers to a situation where the accountability is rendered to a higher authority, who formally hold power over the actor on the basis of a hierarchical relationship, or of laws and regulations (Bovens, 2007). *Horizontal accountability* may be rendered to parallel institutions (such as ombudsmen, audit offices, inspectors, and accountants), or to groups (such as civil interest groups, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders). A hierarchical relationship is lacking in this situation.

## 2.2 Assessing Accountability from Three Perspectives

If we see accountability as mechanisms to conduct *ex post* oversight of public governance performance, it must imply a sense of virtue, more specifically, substantive norms for the behaviour of public agencies or individual executives. Although the norms may vary according to different places and institutional settings, they do embed in the judgments, albeit implicitly. In order to allow others to review and to generate meaningful assessments and discussions, it is necessary to establish an analytical framework with explicitly explained criteria.

On the basis of scholarly literature and policy documents, Bovens et al. (2008) recognise that people often assess accountability from three perspectives, including democratic perspective, constitutional perspective and learning perspective. From a democratic perspective, accountability is important to provide a means for citizens and their representatives to monitor, influence and control government conduct. The means involves a responsiveness relationship between the actors in the democratic chain of delegation (Bovens et al., 2008; Bovens, 2007). The central criterion here is to what extent a particular accountability arrangement or regime enables democratically legitimised bodies to monitor and assess the conduct of executive bodies or actors and to induce modification of their behaviours in accordance with the preferences and priorities of the democratically legitimised bodies.

From a constitutional perspective, the main concern of accountability is how to prevent the executive actors from abusing public powers and resources. Its central criterion is to what extent a particular accountability arrangement or regime curtails the abuse. From a learning perspective, the purpose of accountability mechanisms is to encourage openness and reflexivity in administrative systems to enhance government effectiveness and avoid inward-looking conduct. In other words, the executive actors should truly communicate with outside actors, and act in accordance with the external feedback on their executive performance (Bovens et al., 2008; O’Loughlin, 1990). The central criterion is to what extent a particular accountability arrangement or regime can induce the executive actors to constantly take into consideration the wishes and priorities of contemporary civil society. The learning perspective is closely related to the notion of social accountability.

As show in Figure 1, an accountability arrangement consists of three major activities, including informing the conduct, debating and judging, which leads to formal or informal consequences the executive actor has to face. The institutional designs of the three major activities influence the effectiveness of a particular accountability mechanism. In view of this, Bovens et al. (2008) propose an analytical framework consisting of three concrete evaluation questions respectively from the three perspectives (see Table 2). Since this research more focuses on whether the issue of democratic deficit emerging in the relational governance as Swyngedouw (2005) argues, the emphasis of the empirical study is put on the democratic and learning perspectives of accountability assessment.

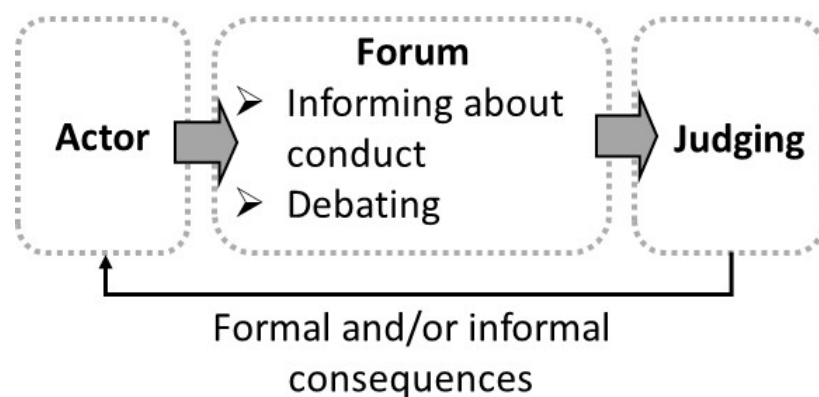


Figure 1. A Notion of Accountability  
Source: On the basis of Bovens 2007.

Table 2. An Analytical Framework for Accessing Accountability Arrangements

<p><b>Democratic perspective</b></p> <p><i>Information provision:</i> Is democratic chain of delegation informed about the conduct and consequences of executive actors?</p> <p><i>Debate:</i> Do the debates between accountability forum and executive actors focus on whether the actor's conduct conforms to the democratically legitimized principal's standards and preferences?</p> <p><i>Consequence:</i> Does the accountability arrangement provide democratic chain of delegation sufficient tools to influence the executive actor's policies?</p>
<p><b>Constitutional perspective</b></p> <p><i>Information provision:</i> Does the accountability forum have enough investigation powers and information-processing capacity to evaluate executive behaviour, particularly regarding the conformity of laws, regulations and norms?</p> <p><i>Debate:</i> Do the debate and questions concentrate on conformity of actions with laws and norms?</p> <p><i>Consequence:</i> Does the accountability forum possess credible sanctions to punish and deter executive misbehaviour?</p>
<p><b>Learning perspective</b></p> <p><i>Information provision:</i> Does the accountability arrangement yield executive actors and external stakeholders an accurate, timely and clear diagnosis of important performance dimensions?</p> <p><i>Debate:</i> Does the accountability arrangement provide a setting and a set of interaction routines which induces ongoing, consequential dialogue among executive actors and external stakeholders about performance feedback?</p> <p><i>Consequence:</i> Is the external stakeholders sufficiently strong to make accountors anticipate the desirable societal outcomes, yet sufficiently 'safe' culture to minimize defensive routines so that accountors adopt the lessons learned from performance feedback and stakeholder dialogue?</p>

Source: Based on Bovens et al., 2008, p.231-232, 238.

### 3. Accountability in Eindhoven City-regional Governance

Since 2004 the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs has recognised the Eindhoven city-region as the national important Brainport, a centre of innovation and knowledge in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2004). However, the emergence of Brainport Eindhoven is not a spontaneous process but rather a result of close collaboration between the local governments, high-tech industries and knowledge institutes in the past two decades. This close collaboration was triggered by the crisis in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. At that time, the *Stadsregio Eindhoven* (Eindhoven City Region, SRE), local governments, business, and knowledge institutions joined forces to recover from the economic downturn. The SRE is a regional organisation made up of the city of Eindhoven, the city of Helmond, and another 19 surrounding municipalities (see Figure 2), which created a joint fund to strengthen the economic structure of the region and set up the Stimulus programme in 1995 (Brainport Eindhoven, 2011; Brainport Foundation NV, 2009). This collaboration laid the foundation for the Brainport of today.

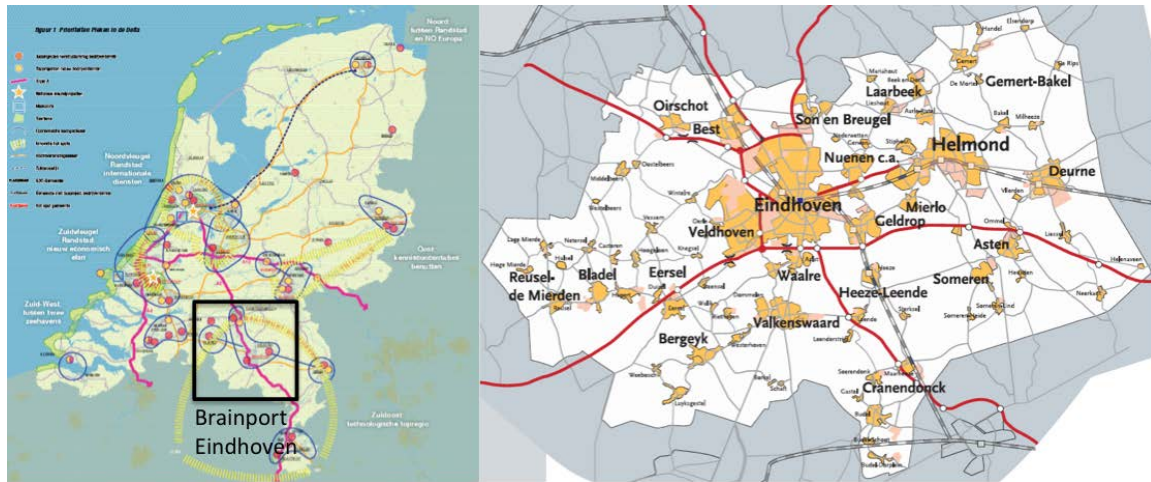


Figure 2. Dutch national strategic planning and Eindhoven city-region

Source: based on Ministry of Economic Affairs 2004, p.10; Brainport Foundation NV 2009, p. 32.

Due to the success of the Stimulus Programme in the late 1990s, people in the city-region have broadly accepted the idea that tight relationships between government, academia, and industry will encourage the creation of an innovative milieu. Since the beginning of the 2000s the SRE and the local governments have decided to adopt a triple helix model focusing on the development of hybrid organisations and tri-lateral networks that overlap and connect these three institutional spheres. The government first invited knowledge institutes and the business community to formulate and commit to a joint action-focused agenda and priorities—the Horizon Programme (van der Meer et al., 2008; Sistermans Commission, 2006; Programme Agency Horizon, 2004). On the basis of its success, in 2005 the government established the *Stichting Brainport* (Brainport Foundation) consisting of representatives of the three sectors, forming a platform as well as a collaborative body to determine the development strategies of Brainport Eindhoven NV and appoint *Raad van Commissarissen* (the advisory committee board) of Brainport Eindhoven NV (Brainport Development, 2012). The advisory committee board consists of representatives of the government, business sector and knowledge institute involved in the development of Brainport Eindhoven. They meet twice a year and act as a think-tank for the Brainport Foundation and Brainport Development NV. The representatives of business sector and knowledge institute are requested to represent the position and expertise they hold rather than a representative of that company or of the institute (Stichting Brainport, 2007).

### 3.1 Mapping the accountability of Brainport organizations

The accountability arrangement is mapped in Figure 3. There are two types of shareholders in Brainport Development NV. One is the triple-helix shareholder, the Brainport Foundation, which determines the development strategies of Brainport Development NV and appoint supervisory committee board. Brainport Foundation consists of twelve representatives from three sectors forming the triple-helix platform. The three sectors include executive committee of SRE, *burgermeesteren* (mayors) of municipal shareholders, presidents of research institutes, and CEOs of high-tech firms and/or chairperson of local business associations, such as East Brabant Chamber of Commerce or employers association. Their major responsibility is to set up strategic development agenda to improve the economic structure and the international competitiveness of the Eindhoven city-region as a whole. Supported by the SRE and the municipalities, the business sector together with knowledge institutes play a leading role in formulating and managing the development agenda (van Leest, 2012a). At the same time, the representatives of the two sectors may need to render accountability to their own boards of organization or councils.



monitor from the website of Brainport Development NV, but the information may not be sufficient. In 2009 Eindhoven municipality hired BMC Advies to evaluate the performance of Brainport Eindhoven program from 2007 to 2010 as a reference for municipal council to decide if the municipality should support the following program, Brainport 2020 (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2010a, 2010b). The report concluded that the council of the Eindhoven municipality did not have sufficient opportunity to play a role in the new city-regional governance model according to the BMC report in 2010. Its conclusion was mainly based on three findings. First, it was difficult for the councillors of Eindhoven city to evaluate whether Eindhoven city benefited from each Brainport project, because those projects were implemented for the city-region as a whole. Second, the substantive preferences of the Eindhoven city were not sufficiently visible in the outcome of those Brainport projects. Third, the report also found that coordination between the Economic and Culture sector of Eindhoven city and the Brainport Development NV was poor. It suggested that the Economic and Culture sector should play a leading role to coordinate the collaboration between the municipality and the Brainport organizations (BMC, 2010). The Economic and Culture sector is legitimized by the council and its priorities represent the preferences of the council. The poor coordination indicates a gap between the preferences of the council and the conduct of the Brainport organizations. This implies a danger of democratic deficit in the new governance model.

Table 3. Assessing the accountability of Brainport organizations

	<b>Democratic</b>	<b>Learning</b>
<b>Information provision</b>	Is democratic chain of delegation informed about the conduct and consequences of executive actors?	Does the accountability arrangement yield executive actors and external stakeholders an accurate, timely and clear diagnosis of important performance dimensions?
<i>Assessing</i>	Yes, but slight. Twice per year an informative meeting is held for the municipal shareholders, but it is difficult for the councillors to evaluate the information.	Yes, but hardly at all. Every year, year plan, annual report and Brainport monitor are published on the website, but if it is difficult for the councillors to evaluate, then it is difficult for citizens as well.
<b>Debate</b>	Do the debates between accountability forum and executive actors focus on whether the actor's conduct conforms to the democratically legitimized principal's standards and preferences?	Does the accountability arrangement provide a setting and a set of interaction routines which induces ongoing, consequential dialogue among executive actors and external stakeholders about performance feedback?
<i>Assessing</i>	Yes, but slight and the quality is difficult to evaluate.	Yes, but hardly at all. Occasionally, the company may hold conferences.
<b>Consequence</b>	Does the accountability arrangement provide democratic chain of delegation sufficient tools to influence the executive actor's policies?	Is the external stakeholders sufficiently strong to make accountors anticipate the desirable societal outcomes, yet sufficiently 'safe' culture to minimize defensive routines so that accountors adopt the lessons learned from performance feedback and stakeholder dialogue?
<i>Assessing</i>	Yes, but slight. Only when the municipalities are the shareholders, their councils may have some chances to influence Brainport policies and programs mainly through financial mechanisms.	Not yet find any evidence.

Regarding the forum for debate and the mechanism to oversee and control, the only official forum is an informative meeting held twice per year by the director of Brainport Development NV to the councils of the governmental shareholders (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2010a). Although the

representatives of the SRE and the municipal shareholders may convey the councils' opinions to the Brainport organizations during the regular meeting of Brainport Foundation and the general meeting of shareholders, their representatives are the mayors, who are not elected by the citizen and members of the municipal councils. The mayors render account to the Minister of Interior<sup>2</sup> rather than municipal councils. Under this circumstance, the councils of the governmental shareholders have very limited capacity to oversee and control the conduct of the Brainport organizations. The only tool the councils can use is to adjust the financial contribution to the Brainport program via the regular planning and control cycle of annual memorandum, report, and budget of the municipalities. But only the municipalities, which are the shareholders of the Brainport Development NV, can use the mechanism.

As for the non-shareholder municipalities, the SRE—the most important shareholder of the Brainport Development NV<sup>3</sup>—can be seen as their representative in the general meeting of shareholders, because the SRE is a joint administration and representative of the 21 municipalities in Eindhoven city-region rather than a fourth layer of government. However, the regional agenda and programs for regional collaboration of the SRE are determined by the *Regioraad* (Regional Council), which comprises mayors or *wethouders* (aldermen) of each participating municipality. As a result, although after the national government the 21 municipalities together are the second biggest financial contributor to the regular budget of SRE<sup>4</sup>, the municipal councils have very limited influence on the decision making of the regional council. In fact, some municipal councillors in the Eindhoven city-region had doubted the democratic accountability of the SRE and criticised its lack of transparency in decision-making, although they identified the achievements of the SRE in promoting regional collaboration, lobbying, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, comparing to the municipal shareholders of Brainport Development NV, the non-shareholder municipal councils have even less capacity to oversee and control the conduct of the Brainport organizations. That is the reason why Best municipality in 2014 decided to pay extra budget to be one of the governmental shareholders.

From the learning perspective, it is hardly to infer that the accountability arrangement can induce the Brainport organizations to constantly take into consideration the wishes and priorities of the citizens in Eindhoven city-region. Every year the Brainport Development NV publishes year plan, annual report and Brainport monitor on the website, but if it is difficult for the councillors to evaluate, then it is difficult for the citizens as well. Occasionally, the company may hold a regional conference to collect opinions about the development of Brainport as a reference for its year plan, but in which situation the company considers it is necessary to hold the conference, and how they deal with the opinions and feedbacks from external stakeholders are not clear. Except for the two ways, the public may receive information via the public meeting held by the municipalities. But it is an occasion for the executive board of municipality rather than the Brainport organizations to render accountability to the public. It can only be seen as an indirect accountability arrangement.

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<sup>2</sup> According to *Gemeenteweg* (Municipality Law) Article 61b, the mayor may at any time be dismissed by national government according to the recommendation of the Minister. If there is a difficult relationship between the mayor and the council, the council may, through the Commissioner of the King, recommend the minister to resign the mayor. But, before the council declares that a difficult relationship between the mayor and the council exists, they need to explain the difficult relationship and consult with the auditor.

<sup>3</sup> In 2011 its shareholders included the Brainport Foundation (50%), the SRE (25.9%), Eindhoven municipality (15.2%), Helmond municipality (5.5%) and Veldhoven municipality (3.4%) (Brainport Eindhoven, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> In 2010, 51 percent of the SRE revenue was from the national government, while 19 percent of the revenue was from the 21 municipalities (SRE, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> In 2010 Daniëlle van Lith, a municipal councilor in the Eindhoven city-region, criticized the direct accountability and a lack of transparency of the SRE in decision-making in the VNG Magazine. VNG is an association of the Dutch municipalities. It works as a platform for the Dutch municipalities. (<http://www.vngmagazine.nl/weblog/706/hoera-afschaffing-van-de-wgr> ; accessed in November 2012)

#### 4. Conclusion

Obvious to all, the new form of relational governance in Eindhoven city-region has built consensus among and drawn resources from the three sectors, and offered the Brainport organizations greater flexibility and efficiency in decision making and action taking. However, after systematically assessing its accountability arrangement, this paper finds that from either the democratic or the learning perspective the institutional arrangement of the Brainport insufficiently satisfy the criteria of accountability. This may be due to three institutional weaknesses.

The first is the malfunction of the mayors and the *college van burgemeester en wethouders* (municipal executives) leading to a weak link between the conduct of Brainport organizations and the preferences of the municipal councils. According to the institutional settings, the mayors—the representatives of the municipality in the regional council and the Brainport organizations—should play a role of intermediary between the councils and the Brainport organisations. The malfunction occurs may be because the mayors are not elected by the citizen and they are supposed to render account to the Minister of Interior rather than municipal councils. Under this institutional setting, even for the Eindhoven municipality, the biggest player in the city-region, its municipal council did not have sufficient opportunity to play a role in the new form of relational governance.

Second, only the municipalities that pay the extra money can be the shareholders of the Brainport Development NV, so the degree of the Brainport organizations' accountability toward the municipal councils differs from municipality to municipality. While the councils of municipal stakeholders of Brainport Development NV may use municipal regular planning and control cycle of annual memorandum, reports, and budget to influence the content and financial frameworks of Brainport organizations' year plan to certain degree, the councils of non-stakeholder municipalities in the city-region can hardly ever oversee and control the conduct of the Brainport organizations. The degree of accountability that differs from municipality to municipality may affect the fairness of decision-making and result in an uneven distribution of resources in the city-region.

Last but not least, for the citizens in Eindhoven city-region there is no regular forum for debate. Only when the Brainport Development NV considers it is necessary, may they hold a regional conference to collect opinions. Besides, the Brainport organizations do not provide sufficient information of their conduct to the citizens. Although the citizens can easily find the three annual documents on the website of Brainport Development NV, it is difficult for the citizens to evaluate the information and find an occasion to express their opinions. This leaves a large space for improvement regarding the openness and reflexivity in the executive system of the regional governance bodies and the Brainport organizations.

Three lessons we can learn from this case study regarding the feasibility and applicability of the analytical framework, and the knowledge of accountability and relational governance. First of all, accountability arrangements can be considered a useful tool to link the conduct of public officials and institutions to the preferences and priorities of the democratically legitimised bodies, to prevent or reveal abuses of public authority, to enhance government effectiveness and to avoid inward-looking conduct. However, this does not mean the more is the better. The design of accountability arrangement has a manner of accumulation. Various types of accountability exist side by side and form complex networks of accountability. The accumulation of accountability arrangement may overload public officials and institutions with bureaucratic and complex procedures. Based on the understanding, the major question is whether the design of accountability arrangements actually work in the intended manner rather than trap public officials and institutions in overly bureaucratic procedures. The analytical framework proposed by Bovens does provide a useful framework to assess systematically whether a particular accountability arrangement is insufficient or not. But it is difficult to measure if the arrangement is sufficient enough, especially when taking into consideration the different perception of accountable behaviour within distinct places and institutional settings. A possible way to improve the analytical framework is to conduct a comparative analysis of similar regional governance settings within the Dutch context.

This links to the second lesson. That is, before making any conclusion, it is necessary to examine carefully the political and administrative systems the new governance mode embedded in and evolves from. This helps understand their influence on the new governance mode and make effective recommendations. Third, the case shows a dynamic nature of the relational governance mode. It is constantly shaped by the alteration of national policy as well as of the changing agreements between the municipalities, so does its accountability arrangement. For example, since December 2012 the SRE has undergone a process of transforming from a governance body to an administrative platform, Metropolitan Eindhoven, due to the abolishment of *Wgr-Plus* (Joint Agreement Act Plus) in 2013. The Joint Agreement Act Plus had formed the legal base for the SRE to undertake the public tasks since 2006. Up to now, the role of the new regional governance body in the operation of Brainport organizations is unclear. The transformation result will eventually shape the accountability arrangement and affect the degree of accountability. Especially for the non-shareholder municipalities, it is influential, because the SRE could be seen as their representative in the Brainport Foundation and the general meeting of shareholder, but the SRE representative's position in the Brainport Foundation is vacant now<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, it deserves constantly monitoring and investigating the change of city-regional institutional setting and its influence on the accountability arrangement of the relational governance in Eindhoven city-region.

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