

CO-CREATING INNOVATION

A study of the collaboration process between museums and partners
for the creation of innovative educational products

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ABSTRACT

The rise of a consistent number of new cultural institutions in the last two decades, coupled by the arrival of new forms of entertainment and other leisure spaces, have put museums in a very competitive environment. In addition, museums have to face other important issues such as the reduction of governmental funds, the continuous change in people's tastes and the development of new technologies. In consequence of this, museums have understood the need to take on a more innovative approach. However, due to their non-profit nature being innovative could be very risky. That is why, it is necessary for them to establish strategic partnerships with external partners. Together with their partners, museums can co-create innovative educational products that reach and educate the desired target audience. Although existing literature has already studied the formation of cross-sector partnerships, this does not apply to alliances regarding museums and businesses. In addition, there is an evident gap in literature with regard to innovation processes when these are brought about by organizations together. Hence, by carrying out a qualitative research based on fourteen semi-structured expert interviews, this paper tries to answer the question on how museums can co-create innovative educational products with external partners. The results derived from the interviews show that the bases to build a strategic alliance between museum and businesses are shared goals and values and that a fundamental element to maintain it is communication. Other factors such as mutual benefits and a balanced collaboration were also considered very important. Noteworthy, the management of informal relations was considered as the most important element when establishing and, particularly, maintaining a successful partnership. In addition, what characterized the innovation process carried out by the partners was an open innovation attitude and a design thinking approach.

Keywords: museums, strategic partnerships, innovation, co-creation, education

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“Genius is 1% inspiration and
99% perspiration.”
Thomas Alva Edison

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a boom in the arts and culture industry, with a significant number of new museums, galleries and cultural centres being open worldwide (Burton & Scott, 2003). Although this may be seen positively, given that museums can be the carrier of a nation's identity as well as providers of culture, this trend has de facto placed them in a very competitive environment (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Burton & Scott, 2003; Garrido & Camarero, 2010; Kotler & Kotler, 2000). The competition museums have to face is greater if we also consider, among their competitors, other leisure activities and attractions which have expanded in recent times, such as theme parks, gardens and so on, which are able to attract high numbers of visitors and tourists (Burton & Scott, 2003). Together with this, other factors such as a diminishment of public funds, a change in consumers' behaviour and the development of new media and new technologies have put museums in a very delicate position, forcing them to reassess their strategies and listen to the new needs of society (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero, Garrido & Vicente, 2011; Falk & Sheppard, 2006; Rentschler & Hede, 2007).

What is required of museums nowadays not only to survive, but also to keep fulfilling their core mission of spreading culture and educating society, is to have a more *business-like approach*, in other words a more entrepreneurial way of thinking (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; Falk & Sheppard, 2006). Tim Brown would define this type of approach as "design thinking", namely a model based on finding new ways to innovate as well as new solutions to social challenges: "design thinking...addresses the needs of the people who will consume a product or service and the infrastructure that enables it" (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, p. 32). For arts institutions, and museums in the specific, this new *way of thinking* can be applied through the adoption of innovation which is in fact the core element of Brown and Wyatt's theory (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).

Existing literature recognizes innovation as a key for businesses to gain competitive advantage as well as to improve performance and this applies to museums and non-profits as well (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; McDonald, 2007; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Defining what innovation means, however, is not easy, as innovation is a very broad term and its definition has changed over time, making it difficult for scholars to unanimously agree upon (Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2009; Popadiuk & Choo, 2006; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Nonetheless, a common element in the various definitions is that

innovation is recognized as an *ongoing process* rather than a single event (Baregheh et al. 2009; Brown, 2008; Dogruel, 2013). Scholars recognize different categories of innovation within the arts industry (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; Garrido & Camarero, 2010) which will be analysed later on in the theoretical section. In addition, it will also be discussed how the type of innovations carried about by museums can be defined as *social innovations* (Windrum, Schartinger, Rubalcaba, Gallouj & Toivonen, 2016) as they are producers of social value as well as instrument of social change (Weil, 1999).

The adoption of innovation implies many challenges for museums and among the most relevant stands the safeguarding of their core mission, since this may be threatened. In fact, although museums can use innovation to obtain a better organizational performance, when doing so, they need not forget what their main goals are as well as their primary mission. If this does not happen, they may eventually run the risk of converting into entertainment centres rather than sharers and distributors of culture (Kotler & Kotler, 2000). Another challenge museums have to face, when deciding to engage in innovation processes is their heterogeneous nature. Museums are considered to behave as both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, although their status is generally and mostly considered as that of non-profits (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; Johnson & Thomas, 1998). The confusion is legitimate and it is due to the fact that, although their primary goal is to produce a social value, which is typical of non-profit organizations, financial issues are also a big issue for non-profits. Making profits is not something that non-profits strive for, but revenue streams are crucial for them to survive and keep fulfilling their social mission (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; McDonald, 2007). Besides this, the museum's nature gives us the right to define it using the term *social enterprise* (SE), a definition which has been elaborated by scholars during the last years and which is also often used to denote non-profits (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005). The concept of social enterprise will be explained more in detail in the following sections.

According to McDonald (2007), innovation is the solution to cope with the *double nature* of museums: "(innovation) may enable the non-profit organization to fulfil its mission while maintaining a fiscal health" (McDonald, 2007, p. 257). Despite the potential innovation offers to museums, it seems that non-profits are generally less inclined to adopt innovation as they see it as too risky as well as financially prohibitive (Hull & Lio, 2006).

All in all, the benefits that innovation can bring to museums outweigh the downsides. Therefore, innovation can be considered as one of the ways to cope with the competitive

environment. Nevertheless, one may wonder how museums can effectively engage in innovation projects given the previously mentioned impediments. According to Hull and Lio (2006), who discuss the case of non-profits, a solution for this would be the creation of collaborative partnerships with external parties. They argue that by forming a “cooperative venture” (Hull & Lio, 2006, p. 63), non-profits can *take the risk* of adopting innovation by sharing such risk with another partner. Interestingly, this finds validation in the study carried out by Bradburne (2001) who analysis the specific case of museums. His study calls into question the sponsorship-type of relation that museum usually establish with businesses and it concludes that: “the Museum doesn’t want any more sponsors, it wants partners instead” (Bradburne, 2001, p. 81). A partnership with businesses can strengthen the museum in a way that sponsorships alone cannot and it gives it the possibility to innovate, also on a long-term basis. In fact, if sponsorships can be seen as a sort of *take the money and run*, partnerships require an on-going and mutual engagement as well as a set of common and shared values (Bradburne, 2001). This last aspect, in particular, is seen as one of the bases for the creation of partnerships and it can be a determinant of the relationship’s success: “the partner and the museums must share certain core values if they are to work together to develop programs and products without compromising the museum’s privileged position in society on the one hand, or the partner’s interests on the other” (Bradburne, 2001, p. 81).

It seems clear that through innovation and the creation of partnerships, museums can not only improve their performance and be more competitive in the current world, but also find a balance between achieving their core mission and maintaining a financial health. Moreover, existing literature concerning social enterprises, which represents another way to define museums, states that the production of innovations worth for society requires a *multiagents* (Windrum et al., 2016) or *multi-stakeholder* approach (Arora, 2016). As argued by Windrum et al. (2016), *social innovation*: “involves the co-creation of new services/products, and is shaped by the interactions between key stakeholders” (Windrum et al., 2016, p. 162).

Quite an abundant amount of literature is available on cross-sector partnerships and, in particular, as relevant to our case, the collaboration between profits and non-profits (Bradburne, 2001; Dahan, Doh, Oetzel & Yaziji, 2010; Sanzo, Alvarez & Garcia, 2015). However, hardly any research focuses on the specific case of museums and even when doing so, it mostly deals with their relationship with sponsors, rather than partners (Burton & Scott, 2003; Johnson & Thomas, 1998; Kotler & Kotler, 2000). Besides this, given that innovation is

still quite a new topic in the art sector and, in the specific, in the museum world, not a lot of research has been carried out regarding its innovation processes and the following outcomes. According to Bakhshi and Throsby (2009): “little is known about the various ways in which these institutions engage with, adopt, utilize and contribute to processes of innovation” (p. 1). In addition, there is an evident gap in literature regarding the phases and processes of innovation’s co-creation between museums and their partners.

With this said and considering the “primary educational purpose” (Kotler & Kotler, 2000, p. 284) of museums and the use of innovations to accomplish that mission, this study aims at answering the following research question:

RQ: How can museums co-create innovative educational products with external partners?

Besides the importance of same values sharing previously mentioned, also having a mutual missions and shared goals plays an important role (Austin, 2000). In any venture, the definition of a core mission and goals is the starting point, the base from where the whole strategy is shaped (McDonald, 2007). More specific to our case, as stated in McDonald (2007), “a clear and compelling mission statement may be associated with an innovative culture” (p. 257). With regard to the concept of strategy, we can refer to Porter’s definition stating that it can be defined as the “creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities” (Porter, 1996, p. 8). When a multi-stakeholder approach is adopted and various partners are involved into the same cause, strategies need to be aligned and hence the collaboration itself can be defined as *strategic*, based on negotiation processes (Bryson, Crosby & Middleton Stone, 2006). In addition, during the process of collaboration, museums need to be able to maintain a certain equilibrium between the various stakeholders involved. This implies a *judgmental capacity* required by the non-profit to maintain its social mission and at the same time to satisfy the needs and expectations originated from the venture (Austin et al., 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005; Sullivan Mort et al., 2003). Therefore, given the interest and the need for a deeper understanding on how such strategic alliances work, the first sub-question is:

SQ1: How can museums develop strategic partnerships with external parties to create innovative educational products?

The step following the establishment of a partnership and the definition of a certain strategy is that characterized by the execution or process of innovation, in other words the *how* the collaboration can create and deliver a certain set of values which Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) define as *value proposition*. A good example of innovation process is that elaborated by Tim Brown and named “design thinking” (2008). As previously mentioned, the concept of “design thinking” implies the understanding of current unmet social needs which can be satisfied by adopting the approach typical of designers who first get insights from the society and then develop a product (Brown, 2008). According to this model, three are the main *phases* or *spaces*, as Brown calls them, which should constitute any process of innovation: *inspiration*, *ideation* and *implementation* (Brown, 2008). These spaces are not necessarily consequential as they may be repeated along the process.

With this said, although this model represents a good example of innovation process, it is still quite unknown how it may look like when two partners, and in this specific case museums and external businesses, co-create the innovative product or service together. Hence, considering the lack of knowledge and a gap in literature with regard to processes of innovation between museums and partners, as also argued by Bakhshi and Throsby (2009) the second sub-question is:

SQ2: How can museums execute innovation processes with external parties to create innovative educational products?

This study is scientifically relevant as it contributes to enlarge the existing literature regarding the collaboration of profits and non-profits by focusing on the particular case of relations between museums and profits for which only little research has been carried out. Moreover, as never done before, it focuses on the phases, the planning and the challenges which the partners involved need to tackle during the collaborative process. In addition, it enriches the literature regarding the field of innovation by focusing on the specific case of the production of innovative educational products.

From a social perspective, this study is useful for museums, as well as companies and organizations, to better understand how to engage in collaborative processes and possibly, it provides them with suggestions for developing future strategies.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the various topics briefly mentioned in the introduction are explained more in depth. Firstly, the purpose of museums and the challenges they face nowadays are discussed. In addition, a more in-depth analysis of their non-profit nature is proposed. Secondly, an analysis of the need of museums to acquire a more business-like approach is given. Following, the various definitions of innovation are discussed and a particular focus is put on the type of innovations that can be recognized in the museum sector and a definition of what is called *social innovation* is presented. After this, the need for museums to create partnerships in order to adopt innovation and therefore, to achieve their primary social goals, is discussed. Linked to this, an explanation of the creation, maintenance and success of strategic partnerships is proposed. Finally, an example of process of innovation is presented and the phases characterizing such process are explained.

2.1. THE PURPOSE OF MUSEUMS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

According to Johnson and Thomas (1998) museums can be considered as “major repositories of a country’s stock of objects and specimens of educational and cultural value” (p. 75). Although this definition can still be considered valid, museums have greatly changed in the latest years due to different reasons.

What has changed since 1998 is not only the way in which museums have made their *stock* available to their public, but also part of their objectives and focus. Johnson and Thomas (1998) identified among the main objectives for museums *extension, conservation, research* and *education* which also align with those proposed by Porter (2006), although he adds one more, namely “visitor experience/engagement” (Porter, 2006, p. 10). With this, he puts a focus on both the public and the *entertaining* aspect of art that has emerged in the last years. Concerning this, Rentschler and Hede (2007) affirm that nowadays, museums have shifted from educating to entertaining and from preserving cultural goods to facilitating the exchange of those. This should not lead us to think that museums have converted into entertainment centres similar to the ordinary media. In fact, museums’ core mission still remains spreading and fostering culture as well as maintaining a key role in “developing the learning society” (Flemming, 2014, p. 7). According to Weil, museums can even be considered not only sites of education via informal learning, but also *instruments of empowerment and social change* (Weil, 1999). Nevertheless, particularly in the last two decades, museums’ ability to achieve their educational and social purpose has been threatened. Firstly, cultural institutions have

been damaged by a diminishment of public funding due to the recent economic crises (Flemming, 2014). Secondly, the *museum boom*, flanked by the rise of other entertainment and leisure products and activities (e.g. theme parks) and the development of the Internet and new technologies (e.g. video games, virtual realities etc.), has located museums within a very competitive environment, making it difficult for them to stand out and sometimes also to survive (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Burton & Scott, 2003; Johnson & Thomas, 1998; Kotler & Kotler, 2000). Together with all this, it is also necessary to consider a change in people's tastes and interests (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Burton & Scott, 2003) which has represented another major reason for the diminishment of museums' visitors and subsequently for the loss in museums' revenues.

Given all these impediments and difficulties, one might wonder how museums can expect to survive and in what ways they can keep delivering a social value. Before analysing possible answers to this question, let us first analyse the nature of museums, namely whether they fit in the non-profit or for-profit category and what this implies.

2.2. A HETEROGENEOUS NATURE

Camarero et al. (2011) affirm that museums are characterized by a "heterogeneous nature" (p. 248). In fact, they can be considered to behave as both non-profits and for-profits. Their non-profit character is given by their social goals (i.e. education, custody etc.), but also by the monetary support coming from public institutions and organizations. The for-profit, instead, is given by their being part of the free-market economy where they compete with other educational and cultural businesses and also, by their pursuing financial goals (Camarero et al., 2011; Johnson & Thomas, 1998; Rentschler & Hede, 2007). Johnson and Thomas (1998) even recognize them as "productive organisations" (p.76) "which, in order to achieve certain objectives, engage in the transformation, via a production technology, of inputs into a mix of outputs that are valued by others" (Johnson & Thomas, 1998, p.75).

However, the majority of the literature agrees in identifying them as non-profits (Camarero et al., 2011; Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Garrido & Camarero, 2010; Kotler & Kotler, 2000). Firstly, their primary goal is still that of fulfilling a social mission rather than an economic one: "the main mission of museums and cultural exhibitions is undoubtedly to spread and foster a positive attitude towards culture and favour research and conservation of the heritage in their custody" (Camarero et al., 2011, p. 254). Secondly, despite the fact that there is a growing number of arts and cultural institutions which have decided to adopt

governance structures, the *charity model* is still prevalent in museums, therefore it is fair to consider them as non-for-profits (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009). In addition, for museums it is also fundamental to keep this status of non-profits since, despite what the price for a ticket may be, their costs and expenses will never be covered (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009). In fact, they mostly live on the financial support of either public or private donors, who will be willing to monetarily support the organization only if this does not make profits for itself out of the money received (Throsby, 1994). Together with the definition just given, it is fair to state that museums could and should also be labelled as *social enterprises*, a term which can also quite well represent the mentioned *double nature* of museums. In fact, the term social enterprise is generally used to define those types of businesses or organizations that have a primary social objective and which therefore aim at creating a social value as well as at fostering a change in society (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005). In addition, the concept of social entrepreneurship, also implies *innovative activities* (Austin et al., 2006) which, as it will be explained later on, are fundamental for the survival of museums. Moreover, Austin et al. (2006) recognize that “social entrepreneurship typically refers to the phenomenon of applying business expertise and market-based skills” (p. 2) to social causes, which is also what is considered necessary to museums nowadays to cope with the current economic and social situation (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009). Together with this, in the same way as museums, also social enterprises are driven by a social mission which shapes all their strategic and operational decisions and which determines the scope and the reason of their activity (Austin et al., 2006; Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003).

With this said, for the purpose of this paper and with regard to the theoretical framework, from now on museums will be referred to as both non-profits and/or social enterprises.

2.2.1. Need for a business-like approach and innovation

After having clarified the *nature* of museums, it is necessary to go back to the challenges that museums face in order to answer the question previously posed.

According to Kotler and Kotler (2000) “the challenge for museums managers is to safeguard the museum mission while reaching out to a larger public and offering a richer museum-going experience for visitors” (p. 286). Existing literature affirms that a way for museums to achieve this would be developing a more business-like approach (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; Falk & Sheppard, 2006). This does not mean that museums are expected to make economic goals their priority, but rather to look at their

current situation with a more *business eye*. Nevertheless, a shift in museums *business model* was recognized by Weil already a few years ago. In fact, regarding this he affirmed that museums have:

shifted from a “selling” mode to a “marketing” one. In the selling mode, their efforts had been concentrated on convincing the public to “buy” their traditional offerings. In the marketing mode, their starting point instead is the public’s own needs and interests (Weil, 1999, p. 233).

This is why, as mentioned before, it is fair to call them social enterprises. To explain more in detail, the concept of social entrepreneurship developed at the end of the twentieth century is based on the idea that by using innovative approaches, a business or an individual or an organization can solve social problems as well as simultaneously create economic value (Rexhepi, Kurtishi & Bexheti, 2013). Such concept can also be easily applied to non-profits, in fact, according to Rexhepi et al. (2013), social entrepreneurship “embraces a wide mixture of activities such as...nonprofits organization that are reinventing themselves by drawing on lessons learned from the business world” (p. 536). Given that museums are considered as non-profits, this is also applicable to them. In addition, the principles of social entrepreneurship match the “marketing mode” concept expressed by Weil as well as the concept of “design thinking” developed by Brown (2008). The latter states that businesses should look at problems from a different perspective and rather than convincing the public to consume or buy a product, they should listen to them and, based on their needs, create the new products: “design thinking crosses the traditional boundaries between public, for-profit, and non-profit sectors. By working closely with the clients and consumers, design thinking allows high-impact solutions to bubble up from below rather than being imposed from the top” (p. 32).

All in all, as it has already made explicit, at the base of these concepts lays the idea of innovation. Existing literature recognizes innovation as a fundamental element for businesses to respond to the new customers’ needs as well as to the change in society and the economy and it is therefore seen as the means to boost an organization’s performance and to allow it to grow and gain competitive advantage (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Baregheh et al., 2009; Camarero et al., 2008; MacGregor & Fontrodona, 2008; Rexhepi et al., 2013). Innovation seems to be the key for the art world and, in this specific case, for museums to re-attract their audience, to engage it and at the same time to keep existing and achieving their social

mission. Before understanding how innovation can be applied to the world of museums and what type of innovations existing literature recognizes, it is necessary to first analyse what innovation really means in a broader and more general sense.

2.3. DEFINING INNOVATION

When talking about innovation, the first problem we encounter has to deal with its definition. Up to the beginning of the twenty-first century, innovation was mostly associated with the production or development of *new ideas* or *new products*, in other words with the concept of *newness*, besides been considered as something related to technology and technological development (Baregheh et al., 2009). In addition, innovation had long been considered as something happening at one specific moment in time, as *popping up* from someone's head. Only recently, scholars have started analysing the concept more in-depth and have started considering innovation in a broader sense, namely as a more "continuous, systematic activity that takes place throughout the enterprise" (MacGregor & Fontrodona, 2008, p. 1) and, definitely, not as a single event like the "light bulb going off above a cartoon character's head" (Dogruel, 2013, p. 39). Thus, one of the first characteristics that has been recognized in order to understand and recognize innovation is its *process aspect* (Brown, 2008; Dogruel, 2013). Innovation is indeed a process of thinking and re-thinking and of testing ideas and prototypes (Brown, 2008).

Moreover, recent literature has started referring to innovation as an economic and social process, meaning a process of *exploitation of ideas* for economic purposes as well as for a social impact (Brown, 2008; Dogruel, 2013; Murray, Mulgan & Caulier-Grice, 2008). According to Brown and Ulijin (2004), an innovation in the economic sense happens when a new product produces its first commercial transaction. On the other hand, according to Murray et al. (2008), social innovation happens with "new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act" (p. 3). For these reasons, innovation is considered a fundamental element not only for companies but also for institutions to be able to compete in the vast market through the creation of value as well as uniqueness (Baregheh et al., 2009; MacGregor & Fontrodona, 2008; Porter, 2006). The importance of innovation has been recognized in many sectors and it has even been made one of the European Commission core strategies as defined by the Innovation Union which states: "our future standard of living depends on our ability to drive

innovation in products, services business and social processes and models. This is why innovation has been placed at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy” (European Commission, 2010, p. 2). An important aspect about innovation which is necessary to mention, also for the scope of this paper, is what Rossetti di Valdalbero (Principal Administrator at the European Commission, Directorate-General for Research) defines as “innovation ecosystem” (Rossetti di Valdalbero in Gallouj, Rubalcaba & Windrum, 2013, p. X). By this, he means that innovation is not operated by or within one only sector. Innovation, especially if the aim is that of facing societal challenges, is a *multi-agents* activity, or in other words “a combination of public, private and third sector efforts” (Rossetti di Valdalbero in Gallouj et al., 2013, p. XI).

With regard to innovation specifically related to the art sector, according to Bakhshi & Throsby (2009), the concept and definition of innovation are unclear. Nevertheless, some existing literature can help understand and define the various types of innovation related to cultural institutions which can also be associated to the definition of *social innovation* as it is discussed in the following section.

2.3.1. Museums and innovation

As mentioned before, when talking about innovation in the arts and creative industries there is always some confusion with regard to the term. Abreu, Grivenich, Kitson and Savona (2010), for instance, define innovation in the creative sector as “hidden innovation”, as they have not been recognized yet due to the lack of appropriate measurements. Stoneman, instead, defines them as “soft innovations” as they fulfil an aesthetic or intellectual purpose (Stoneman in Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009). In their study, Bakhshi and Throsby (2009) try to explain the types of innovation related to cultural institutions based on the model of creative businesses’ innovation by Miles and Green (2008) which they apply to arts and cultural institutions. From this model, they elaborate four areas of innovation that can be recognized in cultural institutions: 1) “**innovation in audience reach**”, which implies the reaching of new audiences by using, for instance, digital technologies which can foster digital and online experiences (e.g. online collections; online learning; digital artistic production); 2) “**innovation in artform development**”, which is characterized by experimenting new ways of creating or providing art; 3) “**innovation in value creation**”, which implies new ways for cultural organizations to measure and exploit the cultural as well as the economic value they create and to translate it in a way that both private investors or funders can find a relation with; 4) “**innovation in business management and governance**”, which, for cultural

institutions, is related with finding new ways to strategically manage the challenges typical of this kind of industry. (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009, p. 4, 5).

Camarero et al. (2011) also analyse the types of innovation in the art sector, specifically in museums, but they gather them into three main categories which are “**technological innovation**”, “**innovation in value creation**”, “**organizational innovation**” (Camarero et al., 2011, p. 249). Their categorization is very similar to the one elaborated by Bakhshi and Throsby, but in this case the audience reach is not explicitly mentioned. although the two authors consider it as a central goal for both technological and value creation innovation (Camarero et al., 2011).

What all these different definitions and types of innovation have in common is the underlying social mission/goal which is still the primary focus of museums. This is what allows to define them by using a sort of *umbrella* term, namely *social innovations*. According to Mulgan (2006): “social innovation refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purpose is social” (p. 146). This definition, quite accurately outline the museum’s purpose and also its status as non-profit/social enterprise.

All in all, it seems evident that museums are trying to proactively respond to the social and economic challenges by adopting innovations in different ways but with a same goal. Although this is true, existing literature also discusses that the decision and the process of adopting innovations is not always easy for museums (Bradburne, 2001; Hull & Lio, 2006). In addition, due to their non-profit/social enterprise nature, it seems that the most successful and possible way for them to produce innovations is through the creation of partnerships with external parties with which they can co-create and co-define innovative processes and products (Bradburne, 2001; Hull & Lio, 2006; Windrum et al., 2016).

2.4. NEED FOR INNOVATION PARTNERS

In their paper, Hull and Lio (2006) discuss the differences between not and for profits especially with regard to their approach towards innovation. They affirm that, in general, non-profits tend to be less inclined to adopt innovation as it would be too risky as well as too expensive for them, but also that: “an organization’s risk taking is based on how much failure it can tolerate, which in turn is directly related to the number of groups to which it is responsible and its reliance upon each group” (Hull & Lio, 2006, p. 59). Keeping this definition in mind and looking more closely at museums, it is indeed the case that they are

responsible towards many different groups, namely their public and visitors, their sponsors (both public and private) and their volunteers and employees. Museums, like other cultural institutions, generally depend too much on other social actors and for this reason adopting solutions that do not ensure success and which may lead to failure may sound too dangerous. In particular, and always according to Hull and Lio (2006): “if a non-profit organization fails to provide an expected service or product, it has failed to uphold its social responsibility” (p. 60). The expected service and social responsibility from museums, as previously mentioned, is the provision of education, of learning opportunities and, possibly, the fostering of social change and social impact. For this reason, and putting it at the extreme, if they fail to provide the *social expected value*, the whole society will suffer.

With this said, one may wonder how museums can actually adopt innovation without running too many risks, and at the same time, how they can re-gain their space in the cultural market and fulfil their necessity to produce a social value. The answer is given by both Bradburne (2001) and Hull and Lio (2006) who suggest that museums, and non-profits in general, should take advantage of external parties to create what they define a “cooperative innovation” (Hull & Lio, 2006, p. 62). This not only would allow museums to share the risk with other organizations, thus risking less damage for themselves, but it would also produce long-term successful outcomes and it would allow them to accomplish their social mission (Bradburne, 2001; Hull & Lio, 2006). For these reasons, “without any exaggeration, partnership is at the heart of the Museum’s ability to deliver on its claim to be a ‘motor of learning society’” (Bradburne, 2001, p. 83). In addition, this finds validation in the theory of social innovation according to which social innovation per se “involves the co-creation of new services/products, and is shaped by the interactions between key stakeholders” (Windrum et al., 2016, p. 162). This means that social innovation is not something produced individually, but rather as the result of a collaborative creation, that is the product of that *innovation ecosystem* previously mentioned.

2.4.1. Strategic partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships, also called “social alliances” or “strategic partnerships” (Dahan, Doh, Oetzel, & Yaziji, 2010) are “increasingly assumed to be both necessary and desirable as a strategy for addressing many of society’s most difficult public challenges” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 44). Part of this “multi-agent co-creation” (Windrum et al., 2016, p. 151) strategy deals with being able to combine each partner’s strengths while minimizing the weaknesses (Dahan et. al., 2010; Sanzo et al., 2015). As stated by Le Ber and Branzei (2010), who draw

their definition on existing literature, in intersectoral partnerships, non-profits and profits “strategically leverage the core competencies of both partners to address market failure or social opportunity and thus engender social innovation” (p. 141). To briefly re-iterate the concept, social innovations represent solutions to solve social problems or fulfil unmet social needs (Mulgan, 2006; Phills, Deiglmeir, & Miller; 2008). Hence, such solutions are aimed at creating a social value (Phills et al., 2008). According to Le Ber and Branzei (2010), “many regard social value creation as the *raison d’être* of cross-sector partnerships” (p. 141).

Therefore, partnerships seem the solution for innovation and production of social value. Nevertheless, establishing a partnership is not an easy process and requires a well-founded strategy as well as a “staged progression” (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010) and a continuous re-alignment between the partners and it is often characterized by a mix of failures and successes (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010). As stated by Rondinelli and London (2003), inter-sector partnerships “must rely on strategic criteria that can both effectively utilize the firm’s existing competencies in intrasector...alliances and develop the new skills needed to make cross-sector...alliances succeed” (p. 63). At the same time, this is easier said than done as profits and non-profits respective visions and goals can often be so different that it may become complicated to align them (Hull & Lio, 2006). Besides this, according to Le Ber and Branzei (2010), also “organizational identities, missions, structure and patterns of activity [may] constrain partners’ willingness to engage in increasingly intense partnerships, their ability to adapt to evolving contingencies and opportunities and to overcome role conflict” (p. 144). The level of engagement and commitment between the two partners is certainly a fundamental aspect and factors jeopardizing it should be eliminated. Existing literature recognizes different elements and factors which are recognized as fundamental and possibly predictors of a successful partnership. Among these, stand the development of a strategy based on negotiation, mutual understanding and learning and the definition of a common mission and shared value (Austin, 2000, Bryson et al., 2006). To clarify the first aspects, namely learning and mutual understanding, Bouwen and Taillieu (2014) recognize that in the management of partner interdependencies, the various stakeholders need to be open to the others’ knowledge and competencies as these are the enriching values of the social alliances as well as co-creator of a “social learning process” (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004, p. 137). With regard to defining shared missions and values, it is undeniable that these represent an even more fundamental part in the formation of partnerships and in the development of strategies (Bradburne, 2001). Speaking of companies more in general, without specifically addressing

cross-sector partnership, McDonald (2007) states that “a mission statement is expressed at a macro level to guide the strategic plan of the entire organization...a sufficient clear and compelling mission can play an active role in the short term, more micro-level processes of innovation development and adoption” (p. 257). It can be assumed, however, that this is also valid and can be applied in cross-sector partnerships. With this said, it seems clear that defining a mission, shared by both parties, is one of the first and most important steps to take for the definition of a clear strategy and the establishment of a successful and productive collaboration. In addition to what has just been said, it is necessary to mention the fact that a strategic collaboration is a *continuum* made of different stages, an ongoing process that needs to be re-assessed and re-calibrated continuously (Austin, 2000; Le Ber & Brenzei, 2015). A successful strategic collaboration is such when the product or project developed together is *co-designed* by the partners (Le Ber & Brenzei, 2015).

Regarding this *staged process* of strategic alliances, Austin (2000) recognizes three different stages, which he also defines as *types of interaction* between the partners, namely **philanthropic**, **transactional** and **integrative** collaborations. The first stage or type, is characterized by a relationship between the partners which “is largely that of charitable donor and recipient” (Austin, 2000, p. 71). The second one, the transactional, is characterized by “explicit resource exchanges focused on specific activities; for-example, cause-related marketing, event sponsorships, and contractual service arrangements” (Austin, 2000, p. 71). Finally, in the third type of collaboration “partners’ missions, people, and activities begin to merge into more collective action and organizational integration. This alliance stage approximates a joint venture and represents the highest strategic level of collaboration” (Austin, 2000, p. 71). These different types of collaboration, however, are not fixed and may change or evolve along the way (Austin, 2000). Obviously, the integrative collaboration seems to be the most desirable one and it is even defined, by AL-Tabbaa et al. (2013) as “the utmost frontier of an NBC (Nonprofit-Business Collaboration) (p.665). In fact, through this type of alliance, the collaborating partners create what Crosby and Bryson (2005a) define as “regime of mutual gain” (p. 23), but also called “mutual mission relationship” by Swartz (Swartz in Austin, 2000, p. 75). According to Bryson et al. (2006), the first outcomes of such a *high-performance* partnership are: “the creation of social, intellectual, and political capital; high-quality agreements; and innovative strategies” (p. 51). In other words, this type of cross-sector partnership is what allows the creation of both social and economic value, which both non-profits and profits pursue, although for different reason, and it also allows the

development of innovations (Sanzo et al., 2013). Concerning the stage of *value creation*, Austin (2000) states that this needs to be preceded by a *value definition* since “the more specifically that one can set forth the expected benefits to each partner and to society, the greater guidance the collaboration will have” (Austin, 2000, p. 76) and hence the more successful the strategic collaboration will be. In addition, the definition of value needs also to be accompanied by the establishment of risks and costs resulting from the alliance, in fact according to Le Ber and Branzei (2015), “coupling risk and social value creation potential enables the partnership to maintain momentum for success as they progress along the collaboration continuum” (p. 162).

What is also important during the process and along the partnership, according to Austin (2000), is that the exchange of value within the collaboration is constant and balanced. In addition, the value needs to be reiterated along the process or as both Austin (2000) and Le Ber and Branzei (2015) put it, it has to be *renewed*. In fact, “the failure to innovate and create new value will likely lead to the displacement of laggard by innovators” (p.80). When this does not happen, a “partner complacency”, as defined by Le Ber and Branzei (2015, p. 165), takes place. Besides this, the process must be also characterized by partners’ expectations realignment (Rondinelly & London, 2003), role re-calibration (Le Ber & Branzei, 2015) and continual learning (Austin, 2000). With regard to role recalibrations, according to Le Ber & Branzei (2015), these “are seen as drivers of success- specifically, partners regard the gradual engagement in relational processes as forward-looking investments in crafting social innovations” (p. 158). As for the last one, according to Austin (2000), the strongest collaborations are the result of continual learning “about the partnering process and how it can generate more value. There is openness and hunger to find new ways to engage more effectively” (p. 85).

Going back to the focus of this paper, namely museums, the creation of strategic partnerships seems to be the key for their survival and for the production of innovative processes and products. However, for their very nature, it is fundamental that they keep a balance between the production of social value and the maintenance of fiscal health (McDonald, 2007). For this to happen, it is of extreme importance that the scope of the museum’s activity and the related social mission are not lost along the way as a consequence of prioritizing partners’ needs, as often happens in social enterprises (Austin et al., 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005; Sullivan Mort et al., 2003). This is why, the social mission needs to be reiterated along the process of innovation and the social enterprise needs to apply *judgment*

capacity in order to make the process of innovation possible, without jeopardizing its nature and producing an undesired outcome (Sullivan Mort et al., 2003).

2.4.2. Innovation processes between profits and non-profits

According to Austin (2000), “the partnerships are strengthened when the parties think continually about value creation. This involves scrutinising each organization’s resources and capabilities to see *how* they can create value” (p. 78). Therefore, when explaining the process of innovation, it is fair to think of it as the *how* a certain value can be created. This represents a following step to the *what* (the social mission) established during the formation of the strategic alliance. A good example of innovation process is Brown’s (2008) “design thinking” model, previously introduced. This model can be considered as an advancement of the “social design thinking” elaborated in the 1980s by Papanek, but also an extension of the principles of sustainable design (MacGregor & Fontrodona, 2008). What all these theories try to communicate is that in order to achieve innovation and to develop new products, which may produce both an economic and a social value, companies need to look at society’s needs with the eye of a designer. Designers are generally particularly sensitive and good at developing new products which satisfy those needs and, at the same time, which are feasible and desirable for the public.

In the specific, the model of “design thinking” is constituted by three different “spaces” as Brown calls them, namely “**inspiration, ideation and implementation**” (Brown, 2008). Working on these three spaces allows to develop “real world solutions that create better outcomes for organizations and the people they serve” (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, p. 35), in other words, it allows companies to develop innovative products which generate a social value. According to Brown (2008), the reason for not calling them stages or steps is that they do not constitute a linear process, but rather they represent different areas of a bigger space from which the project team can *jump* back and forth during the creation process, thus creating what is called process of innovation (Brown, 2008, p. 6).

The *inspiration* space can be considered as the starting point of the whole process and it is characterized by “the problem or opportunity that motivates people to search for solutions” (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, p. 33). To start tackling the problem, the project team first needs to *observe* the surrounding world, in fact, according to Brown “innovation is powered by a thorough understanding, through direct observation, of what people want and need in their lives. And what they like or dislike about the way particular products are made, packaged, marketed, sold and supported” (Brown, 2008, p. 86). In order to better understand

how a social opportunity or problem can be found and how to create the bases for starting the process of innovation, it is useful to refer to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) *value proposition*. According to them, a value proposition “describes the bundle of products and services that create value for a specific Customer Segment” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010, p. 22). In other words, a value proposition explains both *who* will benefit from the product that a company wants to build and *how* to actually develop such product in order to produce a benefit for the targeted audience (Skok, 2013). According to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) a customer segment can be constituted by different segments or types of customers (i.e. “mass market”, “segmented”, “diversified”, “multi-sided market” (p. 21)). When developing a value proposition, each customer or customer segment, is characterized by a *customer profile* which is not only useful for a better understanding of the segment, but also for taking decisions with regard to the innovation process and the process of product development (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda & Smith, 2014). The customer profile is furtherly described by three sections, namely *customer jobs*, *customer pains* and *customer gains* (Osterwalder et al., 2014). With *customer jobs* Osterwalder et al. (2014) refer to any type of tasks, needs, problems or jobs that the target customer carries out and faces daily. *Customer pains*, instead, refers to any kind of impediment, bother or annoyance that prevents the customer from getting the job done (Osterwalder et al., 2014). Finally, *customer gains* refers to all those things that the customer would like to have and which may help him overcome problems and pains (Osterwalder et al., 2014). Thence, the identification of such pains and the definition of possible gains is what allows to identify those social opportunities previously mentioned and also recognized as “social problems” (Austin et al., 2006, p. 2). Social problems are usually unmet social needs which indeed represent an adversity for the customer segment and which are usually the result of an inhospitable context or a market failure (Austin et al., 2006). The identification of social problems or opportunities is particularly relevant to social enterprises and non-profits, such are museums, as they represent the “central driver for social entrepreneurship” (Austin et al., 2006, p. 2).

Once established the customer segment and identified the social opportunity, it is possible and easier to create that *value proposition* previously explained. It is necessary to specify that Osterwalder and Pigneur’s (2010) value proposition is thought and explained for businesses working individually, rather than in partnerships or joint ventures. Nevertheless, for the scope of this paper, their model will be used to explain the value creation also when this is executed by a cross-sector partnership.

The definition of a value proposition and therefore of the products and services to produce is what characterizes the second *space* or *phase*, as defined by Tim Brown, namely *ideation* (2010). During this phase, brain storming and “divergent thinking” happen since “truly innovative ideas challenge the status quo and stand out from the crowd- they’re creatively disruptive” (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, p. 33). In order to reach this type of thinking, according to Brown and Wyatt (2010), people from different disciplines and sectors are required. In other words, an open innovation approach, as defined by Chesbrough (2006), is necessary. The concept of open innovation developed by Chesbrough (2006) consists on the idea that companies and organizations need to outsource knowledge and resources in order to produce truly innovative and successful products. According to him, innovation needs to be a co-created process (Chesbrough, 2006) and as stated in Enkel, Gassman and Chesbrough (2009), “open innovation strongly focuses on peer-production through communities” (p. 313).

Hence, this phase is also characterized by the definition of the *competencies* and *resources* needed to carry out the innovation process. For this reason, this also represents the stage where the outreach of resources happens (Brown, 2008). According to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), resources can be categorized as follows: “physical”, “intellectual”, “human” and “financial” (p.35). As the term suggests, physical resources can be tools, machine, facilities of all kind. Intellectual resources refer to “brands, proprietary knowledge, patents and copyrights and partnerships” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010, p. 35). Human facilities are the human resources, that is the experts and all those people with a certain kind of knowledge. Finally, financially resources evidently are the monetary ones. Regarding resources, Austin (2000) affirms that, in the case of a non-profit-profit partnership: “the magnitude of the value [that will be produced through the collaboration] is related to the nature of the resources involved” (p. 78). He identifies three type of resources and knowledge exchange: 1) “Generic source of transfer”, namely a certain business gives money to the non-profit and the latter provides the company with good deeds or enhanced reputation) (Austin, 2000, p. 78); 2) “core competencies exchange”, where partners exchange their capabilities and skills to generate benefits for the partnership, but also for the ally itself (this is more typical in *transactional partnerships*) (Austin, 2000, p. 78); 3) “joint value creation” which “represents benefits that are not bilateral resource exchanges but rather joint products or services derived from the combination of the organization’s competencies and resources” (Austin, 2000, p. 79) and this is typical of *integrative partnerships*. Hence, each type of competencies or resources exchange can generate a greater or lower value.

Besides this, what also characterizes the *ideation* space is the definition of the product in more practical terms. What this means is that, the organizations involved in the co-creation of innovative products will have to consider three factors: *feasibility*, *viability*, *desirability* (Brown, 2008). In fact, according to Brown (2008) any innovative product needs to be doable, namely physically producible and “technologically feasible” (p. 86). In addition, the product needs to “match people’s need with what...a *viable* business strategy can convert into a customer value and market opportunity” (Brown, 2008, p. 86), hence it also needs to be appealing, namely something that the customer segment or the public would buy.

After this, prototyping is considered as the best action to take, although this step can be considered as belonging to both the *ideation* and *implementation* spaces (Brown, 2010). In fact, prototyping has to be seen as an ongoing phase which is re-iterated along the continuum of the innovation process (Brown, 2010). Moreover, according to Brown, “prototyping doesn’t have to be complex and expensive...prototypes should command only as much time, effort, and investment as are needed to generate useful feedback and evolve the idea” (p. 87).

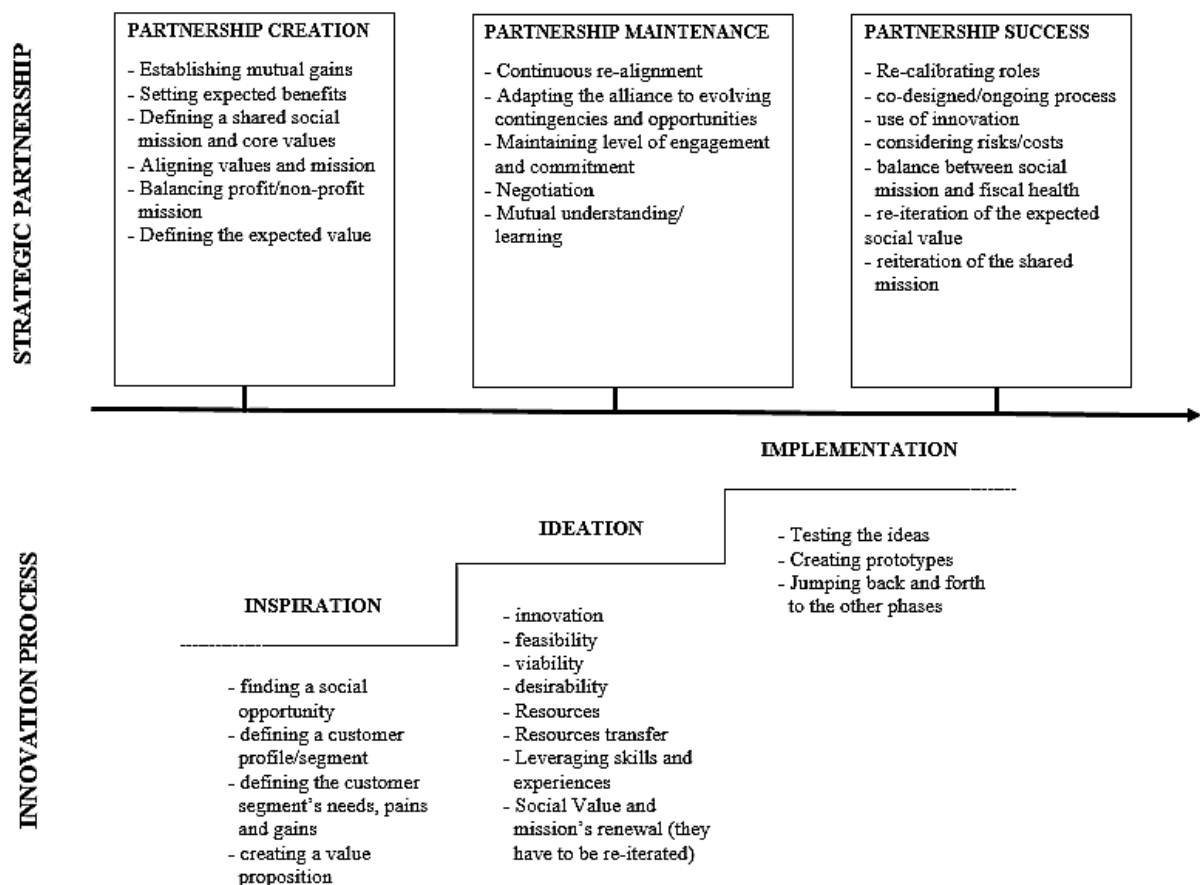
Finally, the *implementation* phase or space, besides being characterized by a continuous testing and prototyping, and by a *jumping* back and forth to the other spaces if necessary, it also represents the moment when the product or service starts to be developed and *dressed up* for the market (Brown, 2010).

All in all, the process described above is what is required nowadays to produce successful and innovative new products and/or services, as it focuses on real social needs and starts by defining and understanding the people for which it is thought. In addition, this type of innovation process is what will allow the partnership to produce what Porter and Kramer define as “shared value” (2011). According to them, “shared value...involves creating economic value in a way that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges” (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 4). In other words, both parties will gain from adopting a similar innovation process since first, they will be able to achieve their respective main goals and second, they will be able to tackle social issues and produce benefits for the society in general.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the theoretical framework, strategic partnerships and innovation process have been identified as the two main faces of the co-creation of innovative educational products between partners and, more specifically, between non-profits (museums) and profits (businesses). Therefore, they also represent the two main themes which will drive the present research. Nevertheless, although in the theoretical framework the above-mentioned themes have been explained separately, it can be assumed that these two happen at about the same time, namely along a continuum where the strategic alliance is carried on together with the innovation process. For these reasons, the author of this paper has developed the conceptual framework reported below (Figure 1) in which the phases of the partnership and the *spaces* of the product development are represented as part of a continuum or sort of time line.

Fig.1 Conceptual Framework



4 METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

First of all, considering that this study does not focus on answering any hypothesis nor aims at generalizing findings which may be considered valid for an entire population, a qualitative approach is what better fits this research (Dworkin, 2012). In addition to this, being the subject of the research the analysis of a specific phenomenon that relates to a specific cultural institution, namely museums, the best way to find an answer for it is by means of a qualitative analysis made through expert interviews. According to Dworkin (2012): “qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meaning (and heterogeneities in meaning)—which are often centred on the how and why of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture, scene or set of social interactions” (p. 1319). In fact, a typical characteristic of qualitative research is that it allows to understand and analyse the real perspectives and point of views of people with regard to a certain phenomenon, therefore “the events and ideas emerging from qualitative research can represent the meanings given to real-life events by the people who live them, not the values, preconceptions, or meanings held by researchers” (Yin, 2011, p. 8). For this reason, “qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15). With regard to the specific case of qualitative interviews, Rubin and Rubin state that through this research method the interviewer can understand and reconstruct certain experiences and processes in which he or she did not participate (2012).

4.2. EXPERT INTERVIEWS

The decision of using expert interviews to research the topic comes from the fact that experts provide the interviewer “a unique source of “inside” information” (Dorussen, Lenz & Blavoukos, 2005, p. 317). This is exactly what this study aims at, namely researching and analysing the strategies and processes of co-creation between museums and their partners, therefore only people who actively participated in and who are part of this process can provide that *inner* information. In addition, according to Van Audenhove (2007), experts are generally willing to share their perspectives and to cooperate and they usually have remarkable communication skills (Mikecz, 2012). In addition, as it is discussed more in detail

in the following paragraph, experts can provide a “specific knowledge” (Van Audenhove, 2007, p. 5).

One last aspect important to mention regards their *responsive* and *dynamic* character and that is why they are also called “responsive interviews” by Rubin and Rubin (2012). What they mean with this is that, in this type of interviews, the interviewer and the person interviewed create a sort of relationship, made possible by the two-way type of conversation. As such, the “responsive interviewing model” aims at generating “depth of understanding, rather than breadth” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30) and depth is reached “by going after context; dealing with the complexity of multiple, overlapping and sometimes conflicting themes; and paying attention to the specifics of meanings, situations, and history” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35). For this reason, and to facilitate the interviewer job of eliciting and managing the above-mentioned type of information, the interview design needs to be flexible and the interviewer needs to be ready to adapt his or her questionnaire (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

4.2.1. Sample and sampling method

In order to answer the research question, it is necessary to collect data. According to Yin (2011): “in qualitative research, the relevant data derive from four field-based activities: interviewing, observing, collecting and examining (materials), and feeling” (p. 129). In this section, the first three activities are explained more in detail.

The first thing to do in order to obtain the data is deciding whom to interview, namely the sample as well as its size. For the aim of this study a “purposive” (Yin, 2011, p. 88) or “purposeful sampling” (Bailey, 2007, p. 64) has been used. Besides being the best option when carrying out expert interviews, this sampling method is also particularly apt for small samples’ groups and it allows to get the “most relevant and plentiful data” (Yin, 2011, p. 88). Within this method, there are different strategies which can be used based on the type of information needed. Concerning this, Yin (2011) suggests that the best strategy consists in selecting a variety of sample that may provide different opinions and therefore, some variegated pieces of information.

Regarding the sample size, the majority of scholars suggests that the right size is considered to be the so-called point of saturation (Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010). However, being this a Master thesis and in accordance with the Master thesis’ methodological guidelines, the sample for this research consists of a total of fourteen people. As previously explained, the people interviewed are experts as they are considered “knowledgeable about

the issues been researched and able and willing to communicate them” (Kumar, Stern & Anderson, 1993, p. 1634). In addition to this, in the literature concerning cross-partnerships, experts are considered the best sample to interview, if a qualitative approach is used, given that those types of interorganizational co-operations result from the interactions between professionals working for the various organizations in cause (Heide & Miner, 1992).

More specifically, experts, also defined as *elites* by Mikecz (2012), are recognized as carrier of a factual and technical knowledge which is not accessible to everybody (Bogner, Litting & Menz, 2009). According to Bogner et al. (2009), “it is this advantage of knowledge which the expert interview is designed to discover, and it is an exclusive realm of knowledge which is highly potential because and in as far as it is linked with the power of defining the situation” (p. 18). What needs to be made clear is that not all those individuals who may be recognized as experts necessarily represents good samples (Bogner et al., 2009). Firstly, a good experts or elites sample is characterized by those individuals who usually act as key decisions’ makers or who, to a certain extent, influence decisions in their work setting (Mikecz, 2012). Secondly, according to Sprondel, as reported in Bogner et al. (2009), although experts are recognized as carrier of a *special* knowledge, it is fair to state that “not every special knowledge...already is expert knowledge...but only that one which can be grasped as a “socially institutionalized expertise” (p. 19). For this reason, Hitzler, Honer and Maeder (1994) define experts as those individuals who possess an “institutionalized authorities to construct reality” (in Bogner et al., 2009, p. 19)

With all this said, and to the purpose of this research, the experts chosen for conducting the interviews were those professionals recognized as decision makers, but also those who were or are directly involved in the strategic processes of cross-sector partnerships and in the execution of innovative educational processes and products. In order to obtain a deeper and more complete picture, the fourteen-people sample was divided into two main groups made of seven people each. One group was characterized by experts currently working, or who used to work, in different museums of The Netherlands. The other group was constituted by experts working for business and/or organizations which are, or used to be, in a partnership relation with museums and who also hold, or used to hold, a role of decision-makers and/or take or took part in the strategic partnership process as well as in the innovation one. Hence, the criteria for selecting those subjects were based on their working role, rather than position. What is more, given that partnerships between museums and businesses are often established on a national base, it seemed fair to select experts working in

museums and businesses both located in The Netherlands. Besides, the choice of selecting organizations from the same country drew on practical reasons, namely given that the researcher was also located in The Netherlands while carrying out the research.

One last thing to mention is that this research was conducted with the collaboration of the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam. For this reason, the cultural institution provided help in finding part of the respondents according to the afore-mentioned criteria. The list of the experts, accompanied by the institution or organization they are currently working or used to work at, their role there and experience, is reported in the following subsection.

4.2.1.1. Experts' list

Name organization	Description
Wim Pijbes (Rijksmuseum)	Emeritus General Director of the Rijksmuseum, which he directed from 2008 until 2016. He holds a wide experience in the museum world. He was responsible of the restauration and reopening of the Rijksmuseum in 2013. The reopening, really represented a new era for the museum of The Netherlands due to the changes made by the direction which transformed the attitude of the museum and its approach towards the public. Currently, he is the managing director of Stichting Droom en Daad, a philanthropic foundation, based in Rotterdam.
Wouter van der Horst (Rijksmuseum)	Currently Staff Member Schools – online education – at the Rijksmuseum. He is responsible for the educational partnership with ThiemeMeulenhoff, educational publisher and he was involved in the development of the last innovative educational product, Snapguide, produced by the Rijksmuseum in collaboration with external partners and launched this past April.
Minke Van Hooff (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen)	Currently Head of Relations and Philantropy at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen of Rotterdam. Among the projects in which she is involved there is the current development of the Public Art Depot, a new

	<p>innovative construction which will allow people to engage with the entire collection of the museum, thence also fostering the spreading and education of art. The Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen is going to be the first place in the world to make its whole collection available. Previously, she was responsible for the marketing at the Rembrandt Association in The Hague, but she also accounts 11 years of experience in advertising.</p>
<p>Justin Waerts (Amsterdam Museum)</p>	<p>Currently Senior Educator at the Amsterdam Museum. He is an art educator and philosopher, actively involved in finding new ways to re-shape and revise the barriers of understanding and to empower the audience in relation to the art and museum world. He is responsible of the development of different innovative educational projects.</p>
<p>René van Blerk (Van Gogh Museum)</p>	<p>Currently Senior Curator of Educator & Interpretation at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. He is responsible for the development of educational projects and products aimed at spreading the word of art among the young audience (ages 4- 18), and for engaging the public in new and innovative ways.</p>
<p>Sophie Heyligers (Rijksmuseum)</p>	<p>Currently Desk researcher in the Development Department at the Rijksmuseum. She is responsible for identifying new prospects for the Rijksmuseum: private, institutions and businesses.</p>
<p>Renate Meijer (Rijksmuseum)</p>	<p>Currently Senior Staff Member Adults at the Rijksmuseum. She is responsible for the development and content of the multimedia-tour, a collaboration with many shareholders and, in the past, was involved in creating content for partnership relations.</p>

<p>Rob Sudmeijer (ThiemeMeulenhoff)</p>	<p>Currently Senior Business Developer at ThiemeMeulenhoff, the biggest educational publisher of The Netherlands. He is responsible for the educational partnership with the Rijksmuseum and has been directly involved in the development of various innovative educational projects in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum.</p>
<p>Daan de Raaf (J. Walter Thompson Amsterdam)</p>	<p>Currently Executive Strategy Director at J. Walter Thompson in Amsterdam. He is a creative thinker and communication strategist and has been directly involved in the “Next Rembrandt” project, a highly innovative educational product which has allowed to spread the word of art among the audience in a way never done before.</p>
<p>Paul Stork (Fabrique)</p>	<p>Currently designer and partner at Fabrique, a multidisciplinary communication and design agency based in The Netherlands. He has been involved in the development of innovative educational projects and products for various museums of The Netherlands, among which stand Rijksmuseum Studio, for the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam, and the multi-media tour for the Van Gogh Museum.</p>
<p>Bas Korsten (J. Walter Thompson Amsterdam)</p>	<p>Currently creative partner at the advertising company J. Walter Thompson in Amsterdam and Chairman of the European Creative Council. He is a creative thinker, always involved in finding new and innovative ways to engage the public. He was the driving force of “Next Rembrandt” project for ING, developed in collaboration with Microsoft, the Rembrandt Association and the Mauritshuis in The Hague.</p>
<p>Omar Kbiri (Maak)</p>	<p>Story manager, creative director and co-Founder at Maak a design agency located in Amsterdam. He has been directly involved in the co-design and co-</p>

	development of the recently-launched Rijksmuseum's innovative educational product, Snapguide.
Hayo Wagenaar (Ijsfontein)	Creative director and co-owner of Ijsfontein, a design company located in Amsterdam specialized in playful learning. They create series games for corporates, educational materials for schools, exhibitions for museums, interactive exhibitions for museums and for people to play and learn.
Jeanny Duijf (NTR)	Currently lecturer at Radboud University and advisor on educational content for educational innovation. Used to work for the national TV broadcaster NTR and was directly involved in the development of an innovative educational product created in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum and another business partner.

4.2.2. Data collection

The fourteen interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks, they were semi-structured and the average duration was around fifty minutes. The characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that they give more freedom to the interviewer to ask further unplanned questions and to use probes based on the answers given by the interviewee. This allows the researcher to extrapolate more information from the expert being interviewed and to obtain confirmation of what is just being said (Gilbert, 2008). Existing literature discussing expert and responsive interviews indicates that, for this qualitative method to be successful in eliciting information and obtaining an in-depth understanding, a more flexible and open questionnaire is necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviewer also plays an important role here, especially with regard to using the right probes and fostering an open dialogue in order to get more information from the interviewee and, consequently, develop a deeper understanding of the topic which is the subject of the research (Gilbert, 2008).

However, a list of main and pre-determined questions, based on the theoretical framework previously presented, was also elaborated. For a better understanding of the main themes and sub-themes used to elaborate the interview questions, see the following paragraph on operationalisation.

The interviews were all conducted face to face and tape recorded upon previous agreement. The advantage of conducting such interviews face to face is the *synchronous* aspect which facilitates the interviewee in giving more genuine and spontaneous answers (Opdenakker, 2006). In addition, this more *personal contact* allows the interviewer to create a better atmosphere for the interviewee, thus fostering a more fruitful conversation (Opdenakker, 2006). It is also true that the face to face interview requires more attention and concentration from the interviewer especially in the case of semi-structured interviews where the researcher is supposed to elaborate questions based on the respondent's answers:

“you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 194).

A total amount of 13 hours was recorded. All the interviews were personally transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

4.3. OPERATIONALISATION

The questions used for the interviews were elaborated based on the conceptual framework drawing on existing theory. Hence, the questions were divided into three principal categories for each main theme. For *strategic partnerships* these were: partnership creation, partnership maintenance and partnership success. For *innovation process* these were: inspiration, ideation and implementation. Every category was furtherly enriched with sub-themes based on which additional questions and probes were elaborated during the interview, in accordance with the semi-structured interview type. As follows, a table of the operationalisation, characterized by main themes, main questions and subthemes, is reported.

Table 1. Operationalisation

Strategic partnerships	
<i>Partnership creation</i>	<p>Measured by asking the following questions: “What, are the reasons for creating a partnership with museums/businesses?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive environment • Solution for innovation • Production of innovative educational products • Production of social value • Mutual gain

	<p>“How do you establish a partnership?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting expected benefits • Defining a shared social mission and core values • Aligning values and mission • Balancing profit/non-profit mission • Defining the expected value
<i>Partnerships maintenance</i>	<p>Measured by asking the following question: “How do you maintain a partnership”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous re-alignment • Adapting the alliance to evolving contingencies and opportunities • Maintaining level of engagement and commitment • Negotiation • Mutual understanding • learning
<i>Partnership success</i>	<p>Measured by asking the following question: “How do you define/guarantee success?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-calibrating roles • co-designed/ongoing process • use of innovation • considering risks/costs • balance between social mission and fiscal health • re-iteration of the expected social value
Innovation process	
<i>Inspiration</i>	<p>Measured by asking the following question: “How do you come up with an innovative idea/project with a partner?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding a social opportunity • defining a customer profile/segment • defining the Customer Segment’s needs • defining Customer Segment’s pains and gains • creating a value proposition

<i>Ideation</i>	<p>Measured by asking the following questions: “What are the fundamental requirements for your innovative educational product to have?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovation • feasibility • viability • desirability <p>“What resources do you need when creating an innovative educational product?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources • Resources transfer • Competencies- Leveraging skills and experiences
<i>Implementation</i>	<p>Measured by asking the following question: “How do you implement your idea with your partner?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing the idea • Creating prototypes • Jumping back and forth to the other phases

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In order to answer the research question and to analyse the data collected through the interviews, a thematic analysis of the interviews transcripts was carried out. The choice to use this method draws on different reasons. Firstly, by carrying out a thematic analysis, data can be broken down, thus facilitating its understanding and interpretation by the researcher (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010). It is at this point that the *feeling your data* previously-mentioned (Yin, 2011) needs to be applied, meaning that data collected needs to be translated and interpreted to produce the final report (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010; Gilbert, 2008). Secondly, according to Braun and Clarke (2008), this method is suitable “within different theoretical frameworks” (p. 81).

Understanding and interpreting the data is a long process made of various different steps, each of which allows to reduce the amount of collected data into main topics or *themes*. As follows, the thematic analysis carried out by the author of this paper is explained more in detail.

The first step which allowed the researcher to *work* on the collected data was transcribing all the interviews verbatim. This type of transcription is considered the best solution when the sample is made of less than 20 people (Gilbert, 2008). In addition,

according to Gilbert (2008): “verbatim interviews will help guide your analysis and probably reveal themes you had not thought of” (p. 257). After this, the actual process of data segmentation, reassembling and interpretation was carried out. As first, data were reorganized into smaller segments also known as *codes*. As explained by Boeije (2010), “a code is a summarizing phase for a piece of text which expresses the meaning of the fragment” (p. 96). This first *labelling* phase serves to get a general feeling of the data and of the various themes present in it and also to facilitate the retrieval of those during the following steps (Boeije, 2010). Besides, it allows to develop “new concepts, while existing theoretical concepts will not a priori over-define the analysis” (Boeije, 2010, p. 100). In this phase, the fragments of text, as divided by the researcher, were labelled both *in vivo* and by following pre-elaborated *theoretical concepts*. The first one means that the researcher used more *general* terms, or expressions made up by herself to code the segments; the second one, instead, means that the labels given to the chunks of text were based on the theoretical themes and topics elaborated in the theoretical framework and schematically presented in the conceptual framework. During this phase, the researcher could recognize various codes which sometimes overlapped. After this step, the fragments of text and codes were compared and, after a more attentive analysis, reassembled into more relevant and meaningful categories. This second step allowed to recognize, by comparing, similarities and differences between the codes, thus enabling a further reduction and reorganization of the data set (Boeije, 2010). At this stage, new connections between categories were established and a first division between main and sub categories was made. Finally, the most recurring themes and the main codes obtained by the further comparisons were reorganized based on the main themes and subthemes derived from the literature and previously explained.

The findings of the coding represent the main concepts and the recurring patterns characteristic of the majority of the interviews. The analysis and interpretation of those, which is the subject of the following chapter, is what allowed the researcher to answer the two sub-questions presented at the beginning of this paper and to subsequently also answer the main research question.

One last remark regarding the method of coding is that this was carried out by the researcher manually, without the use of any particular software. In order to do so, the text was actually cut into pieces, highlighted and subsequently *physically* reassembled based on the different formed categories.

4.5. VALIDITY, RELIABILITY

When carrying out a qualitative study of this kind, the researcher be careful of respecting the criteria of *validity* and *reliability* (Bailey 2007; Gilbert, 2008). However, although the first one is required in all type of research, the lack of the second one “is not always a problem for the qualitative researcher as it is for those who practice other methodologies, some researchers use the criterion of dependability as an alternative construct” (Bailey, 2007, p. 184). Despite this and according to the explanation made by Silverman (2011) who states that reliability has to deal with the *soundness of methods* used, it is fair to state that this research paper presents reliability. In fact, firstly it transparently shows and explains the conceptual framework on which the research was based. Secondly, it widely and clearly explains the research method as well as the method of data analysis. With regard to validity, Gilbert (2008) states that data can be considered valid “when they provide accurate measurements of a concept” (p. 515). According to Bailey (2007), in qualitative research, validity can be and is often associated with trustworthiness. In the case of this study, and considering the selected method previously explained, “the validity of the information collected by means of expert interviews crucially depends on the quality of the experts” (Dorussen et al., 2005, p. 333). Concerning this, the experts’ sample was carefully selected and the researcher made sure that each interviewee matched the established selection criteria, so as to guarantee trustworthiness and validity. In addition, according to Silverman (2011), validity can be identified as representing the *solidity of results*. In this paper, this is given by a clear and accurate process of coding where concepts were compared and analysed multiple times before obtaining the final results.

5 RESULTS

5.1. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

As previously explained, existing literature recognizes the need for museums to engage in strategic partnerships, also called strategic alliances, (Hull & Lio, 2006; Bradburne, 2001) in order to be able to produce innovative products and to carry out that innovation process necessary today for their survival and continuing existence as producers of social value and carrier of educational missions (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; McDonald, 2007). With regard to strategic alliances, the literature already recognizes some of the main elements and characteristics necessary to first establish these partnerships, and subsequently maintaining them in order to produce successful outcomes. However, the aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of such partnership creation processes and, particularly it aimed at answering the following sub-question: *How can museums develop strategic partnerships with external parties to create innovative educational products?*

The current section aims at answering this question by presenting, analysing and discussing the main themes concerning strategic partnerships resulting from the thematic analysis.

5.1.1. Partnership creation

5.1.1.1. *Sharing core values and stories*

The majority of interviewees affirmed that, when establishing a new partnership, the organizations involved need to share core values and stories in order to make the partnership work. This represents a fundamental criterion which can determine whether a partnership can be formed or not. As stated by Wouter van der Horst, current Staff Member Schools at the Rijksmuseum:

It's not that everyone can become a partner of the Rijksmuseum and I think it's always good to have shared values, it's always good to find out 'why should we partner up?'. You have to have shared values, you have to have a shared story that is not only believable, but it's also true.

What other respondents pointed out as well, when referring to shared values, was indeed the *common story* aspect. What the experts meant by this is that, when establishing a partnership,

the organizations need to be on the same line, thus showing a common picture to the public. Concerning this, when talking about the partnership between the Rijksmuseum and the beer company Heineken, Wim Pijbes, former director of the Rijksmuseum, stated that these two organizations represent a perfect match since they both share core values and hence, tell the same story: “breweries, seventeenth century, Dutch, beer, tradition, Amsterdam, fun...all these values that you combine with Heineken, you can find in a collection of the Rijksmuseum”.

Justin Waerts, from the Amsterdam Museum, also pointed out the common story aspect of a partnership. In addition, he defined this alignment of missions and values as *ideological*:

You search for partners who interest you, also on the ideological side. Where do we feel comfortable as a museum to work with? Who is really making a change at the moment as a big institution or a big bank or another corporate business that we can work with? I think it's finding the right partner for the right story that you, and the right time, that you would like to tell.

Interesting to highlight regarding the sharing value aspect is that, contrary to what one may think, this is something that not only museums care about and look for in a partner. In fact, although businesses may be seen as mainly interested in creating a profitable partnership in a more economic sense, they *do* also consider values as an important criterion when establishing a partnership. Concerning this, some of the experts from the business side acknowledged that a good partnership needs to be a good match in terms of shared values. When talking about the creation of new partnerships, Omar Kbiri, co-founder at Maak, stated: “we, sometimes, also have to say no because it doesn't feel like our values are matching”. This last statement goes along with what explained by Jenny Duijf, former project manager at NTR. In fact, she also acknowledged that when values are too different, the organizations involved should not even try to establish a partnership. Such a difference may eventually become very problematic and “give fights along the process”, as she stated.

In addition to what has just been said and according to some interviewees, the absence of shared values or values misalignment, may cause problems not only internally, but also externally, in other words between partners and public. In fact, particularly from the museum side, experts affirmed that when the values of the two organizations are too different and, consequently, their respective stories do not align, the reputation of the cultural institution

may be damaged. Concerning this, Justin Waerts affirmed: “sometimes you have to be careful with whom you collaborate. I don't know, oil and gas companies are not very popular at the moment”. This also agrees with what stated by Minke Van Hooff, from the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen of Rotterdam. In fact, in her interview, she explained that if a company turns out to be involved with child labour, then the museum should rethink whether to create the partnership or not: “you must be aware of that before you talk about partnerships, when you don't want to be associated with that”.

Lastly, when talking about the importance of having same shared values, Jeanny Duijf stated that finding common values between non-profits and for-profits may be more complicated than when only non-profits are involved: “the values in non-profit organizations are always content-driven and exposure-driven, so I don't think I ever experienced that values is a big issue. [But], when you work with a profit organization then yes, then it's more complicated”.

All in all, what stated by the interviewees seems to agree with the existing literature. In fact, especially in partnerships between profits and non-profits, where the chances of conflicts are higher due to the different natures, having shared values and a shared story are considered fundamental for the success of the partnership (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Sanzo et al., 2015; Selsky & Parker, 2005). Besides this, as reported by the interviewees and also explained in existing literature, having a credible and shared story with the partner is important to avoid both internal and external issues (Sanzo et al., 2015). Both Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) and Sanzo et al. (2015) argue that a value misalignment may cause public mistrust and even reputation damage and this was confirmed by the experts. According to existing literature, this is because “the NPOs’ public-benefit mission renders them even more susceptible to public scrutiny than for-profit organizations” (Sanzo et al., 2015, p. 386). Hence, non-profits cannot afford this to happen, since “losing reputation means damage to the nonprofit’s capacity to attract donors, volunteers, and employees, so its survival may be threatened” (Sanzo et al., 2015, p. 386).

5.1.1.2. Setting clear goals and expectations

Another main theme emerging from the interviews was setting goals and defining clear expectations. This was considered by many interviewees as one of the core aspects and one of the very first steps when establishing a partnership. Setting the goals of the partnership was seen as ensuring a successful collaboration as well as strong results. As Jeanny Duijf stated: “First of all, otherwise it won’t work, you have to find out which goals you share and be open

about your own goals for that matter. When you agree about them, then it can become a success”.

Setting goals also implies setting and defining expectations. This could mean, for instance, establishing the boundaries of the partnership. According to Justin Waerts, the partners should explicitly state: “this is what we can do and this is where our collaboration starts and stops. So, these are the borders of our collaboration”. Besides, defining expectations could also mean establishing the mutual gains and benefits that the partners can obtain out of the collaboration. According to René van Blerk, Senior Curator of Education and Interpretation at the Van Gogh Museum, mutual gains and benefits need to be made clear since the very beginning, in order for the organizations to be aware of the consequences and also to decide whether to partner up or not: “I think you need to talk about what you want to get out of it before you sign a contract of whatever. If you don't feel good about what a company wants from you, then you shouldn't team up”. Nevertheless, he also affirmed, as other experts did, that predicting and, therefore, setting all the benefits for the various partners is not always possible. This constitutes a further reason for being very clear and transparent when establishing the goals and the aims of a certain partnership, namely when setting the strategy. In fact, setting goals means defining the whys of the partnership. This will constitute not only the bases of the collaboration, but also the starting point for the development of projects and products originating from the partnership. This clarity is what, according to René Van Blerk, will prevent misunderstandings and problematics from happening:

Predict all the benefits, I don't think you can. I mean, you can talk about what you want from this partnership, what you're aiming for and sometimes benefits just pop up. You should talk about what you want to achieve of course, the why start it all. You are working on this specific project, a specific goal and I think you should really talk about that, put them in a contract, perhaps, depending on the company you are working with. Because, [when] you have an objective, you need to work towards that and that should be clear from the start. Otherwise you get all kind of misunderstandings [and] that will be a risk.

According to many of the experts interviewed, risks, problems and contingencies may raise during the partnership due to many different reasons. However, if the partnership has been

established by setting clear expectations and goals, those can be overcome more easily. As Daan de Raaf, Executive Strategy Director at J. Walter Thompson, said:

[You should] be very clear upfront of what you expect, be very clear upfront in what everyone brings to the project and what their investments are. Be very clear what you want to get out of it and if this is all very clear, I think the contingencies, things that happen, find easier solution than if you have to find out that yourself.

Moreover, besides external factors, problems and contingencies may also arise internally, namely when the personal goals of each one of the partners are not shared or made explicit. This is particularly relevant in a partnership between a profit and a non-profit institution. According to Rob Sudmeijer from ThiemeMeulenhoff, if in a commercial partnership it is clear what the goals are, this is less the case in a partnership such as that formed between businesses and museums. Regarding this, he stated:

For a business cooperation [defining goals] is rather simple, I must say *rather*. Because it depends on your commercial goals. You define the goals of your partnership in terms of money. How can I create money for myself within this partnership?...For the Rijksmuseum, it was slightly more difficult, because they do not have a commercial goal, they have a social goal.

Therefore, due to the different nature of the organizations, Sudmeijer affirmed the necessity to clearly state each other's goal since the beginning and he learned this particularly in one of the latest partnerships he was part of:

I think the most important thing that we realized is respect each other's goals. What we learned during our partnership [is] that we should define the goals of the partnership, the different goals of the partnership right at the beginning. The more you are clear about your own goals, the better it is. Because then it becomes clear to both partners why you are doing things, why you are thinking along the lines as you do and why some of the projects that you would like to start do not come off the ground, simply because the different goals of the different partners do not match.

In conclusion, as also explained by existing literature, defining goals, shared missions and expectations constitute an important preliminary step in order to guarantee a successful partnership (Austin, 2000; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a; Bryson et al., 2006). In particular, thus confirming what reported in Austin (2000), experts recognized the importance of setting forth the expected benefits so as to give the collaboration a greater guidance, although they also acknowledged the impossibility to know in advance all the possible benefits deriving from it. Moreover, the definition of expectations and mutual benefits clearly represent that negotiation phase mentioned by Austin (2000) and Bryson et al. (2006), which constitute an essential moment in partnership creation. In addition to this, what explained by the experts with regard to defining shared goals confirms what stated in Austin and Seitanidi (2012b). In fact, by establishing what the partners want to reach together, they also make clear what their common interests are. Making goals and interests clear represents what can be defined as *partnership compatibility check*, namely an “early indication of high potential for co-creation of value for the social good” (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, p. 932).

5.1.1.3. *Having a good network*

When talking about partnership creation, the majority of experts acknowledged that, more often than not, new partnerships are created on the base of personal connections or previous working relationships. Regarding the first one, Minke Van Hooff, from the Boijmans museum of Rotterdam, affirmed that, the search for a partner usually starts with a “brainstorm with colleagues [on] what would be good companies to work with. Then we investigate the companies, talk to people we know who might have connections with that company or other companies”.

Hence, having a good network of personal connections was recognized as a very important factor in the establishment of new collaborations. According to Paul Stork from Fabrique, when you have good personal relations, it can happen that these turn into working relations: “we go to events about museums a lot, so I know a lot of people, so I have personal relationships with the people within the museums, but not a professional relationship with the museum *yet* [emphasis added]”. This possibility of developing future collaborations is what, according to Wim Pijbes, should stimulate organizations, and the people working there, to establish personal connections before-hand, namely even before a project or an idea for a possible collaboration have been set up. “You have to make friends before you need them. That’s the whole idea”, he said.

Good connections may also result from previous collaborations or from being involved in the same field of interest. Regarding the first one, Omar Kbiri from Maak acknowledged that the last project they carried out together with the Rijksmuseum, namely Snapguide, came forward in another project they had developed together. As for the second one, respondents explained that they sometimes get in contact with organizations they already know, because involved in the same sector, but with whom they have never established an actual partnership before. As stated by Justin Waerts:

You search for partners whom interest you, but also whom you already know sometimes...I know a lot of people from the cultural sector who work for different institutions, so sometimes it's also about the collaborations that you know that [can] work well.

Finally, the way new partnerships may be established based on previous relations, can be summed up with what stated by Rob Sudmeijer from ThiemeMeulenhoff. According to him, the creation of a new partnership is the combination of:

luck, coincidence and a good network. I think it's fair to say it like that. We already were in contact with individuals of the educational team of the Rijksmuseum and sometimes it comes to that one particular point where you find each other, where you say: 'Ah, now we have a hook up'. Where we can say: 'Let's start it with this. Let's pilot it with this'. 'Let's do it for one year. Let's see if it works'.

All in all, this theme represents a very interesting finding given that there is little evidence of this in existing literature. In fact, although scholars have widely analysed the importance of shared goals, missions and so on, as fundamental criteria for the formation of new partnerships, hardly anyone explains the formal and informal networks of relationship as a factor characterizing partnerships creation. When talking about the formation stage, Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) mention that previous relationships, or as they call it "the history of interactions" can indicate "potential for moving towards integrative or transformative relations" (p. 933). What they mean by this is that previous collaborations may foster the production of a higher value which is the result of a deeper level of partnership. However,

they do not analyse the existence of previous or informal relations as a factor determining the creation of new partnerships.

5.1.2. Partnership maintenance

5.1.2.1. Communication

Continuously and openly communicating with the respective partners was considered by almost every expert as a fundamental element to maintain a partnership. As Rob Sudmeijer affirmed:

The most important thing of how can you maintain a partnership is to talk about it. Openly speak about it, ‘well, I see this, I hear this, I read this’. Don't wait for a year to put up and put forward issues like that during your evaluation. Do it as soon as possible.

An open and mutual communication was also considered fundamental to guarantee the success of a partnership as recognized by Paul Stork, designer and partner at Fabrique, who stated:

A successful relationship is defined by, if you can be open and honest to each other, and also, if I can say to my partners: ‘I don't think you are doing the right thing’. And they can say to me: ‘you are not doing what we need’ and something like that. In bad relationships that is always hidden and you hear it afterwards: ‘yeah, but we thought you would do this and this’. Well tell me. So, I can respond.

Moreover, communication was seen as a solution for the contingencies and issues that may come up during the partnership. For instance, things can change not only between the partners but also within the organizations themselves. Concerning this, Wouter van der Horst from the Rijksmuseum explained:

The company could reinvent itself and become very different and that, of course, has an effect on every partnership. So, I think the main thing is communication, make sure that you communicate well, always very clear, and always reflect, always reflect on what you do.

A clear and continuous communication can also enable to anticipate and prevent problems from happening. Concerning this, Omar Kbiri from Maak affirmed: “The Rijksmuseum kept us up-to-date with everything that was happening, so, we were very good aligned with each other, we were able to visualize possible hiccups or other things that changed in the right way”.

In conclusion, without any surprise, communication resulted as a fundamental element in the maintenance and development of partnerships. This is also widely acknowledged by existing literature which recognizes communication as an indicator of better performance (Sanzo et al., 2015). In addition, what explained by the experts confirms the research carried out by Austin (2000) in which he states that “to realize the full benefits of an alliance, the partners need to have means of communicating effectively, efficiently, and frequently” (p. 86).

5.1.2.2. Mutual learning and mutual understanding

Although these two themes may be usually seen as separated, they actually resulted intertwined in the various interviews. Mutual learning was often not only seen as acquiring practical knowledge from the other partner. In fact, it was also considered as getting to know, and therefore understanding, the different ways of working of the partner organization, the different ways of expressing its values, the different problematics and limitations that each partner may encounter due to its profit or non-profit nature and the different ways people work and operate in the respective businesses. This kind of mutual learning was considered as leading to mutual understanding and ultimately to the creation of trust between the partners.

With regard to mutual learning in the sense of gaining a more practical knowledge on something the other partner knows better, Rob Sudmeijer stated, particularly referring to his experience of collaboration with the Rijksmuseum:

I think the most important thing that we learn from the Rijksmuseum is their way of creating added value to their brand. The way they have a magnificent marketing machine. We learn from that every day. I think the museum learns from us the speed with which you can create innovation. The speed with which you can create productions, when you work along-side certain alliances.

Mutual learning was also discussed in the sense of getting to know and hence, understanding each other better. In this case, experts explained that by learning how the other partner

expresses its values and how it operates based on those, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding on how to manage and maintain the partnership. Besides, such understanding may lead to re-evaluate and reframe the shared values found at the beginning, in a way that could both strengthen or weaken the partnership. Concerning this, as acknowledged by Minke Van Hooff from the Boijmans museum of Rotterdam:

Along the way you might discover that certain values [of the company] are also... important for the museum, [but] that we pronounce it in a different way. So, [in that case] the partnership can become stronger and also can become weaker [because] maybe the values are not that connected as you thought in the beginning.

As explained by the experts, mutual learning can also mean learning about the other partner's world and hence understanding the implications of it. With regard to this, and particularly in the case of a partnership between museums and profits, Daan de Raaf affirmed that it is fundamental to understand the partner organization's limitations and problematics in order to maintain the partnership and to make it work:

Mutual understanding...is something you need to grow in this kind of partnerships... It's especially important that you understand very well what the other kind of wants to get out of it and what their challenges are, what their problems are, what their world is, what their limitations are. So, ...it's very important to have a mutual understanding. They [museums] have all sorts of different target stakeholders to take into account, they have to negotiate with those stakeholders and that is something that we [emphasized by the interviewee] have to understand how difficult is for them to do this kind of things. We have to understand that there is a limit to how challenging we can be within our creativity, because it's a societal function they have.

Another aspect of mutual learning which was seen as leading to mutual understanding and, ultimately, to trust, is related to the *human side* of the collaboration. What this means is that, along the collaboration, the employees of the organizations involved in the partnership need to learn how to work and to collaborate together. According to different experts, learning to work together as teams of people and understanding each other's world allow to create trust. Trust was considered a fundamental element for the maintenance of a partnership: "You have

to trust. You have to become friends, not friends, but you have to, to get involved, you have to know each other a little bit. Know each other business and there should be a kind of trust”, said Wim Pijbes.

However, building trust based on mutual learning and mutual understanding takes time and time is something that not all the collaborations benefit from. In fact, more often than not, partnerships are based on one-time projects and this makes relations more difficult to manage. This is why, building long-term partnerships was seen as more desirable by the majority of experts. Regarding this Hayo Wagenaar explained:

It is always hard to have a one-time project, you have to get to learn people, you have to get to learn people in a way and how they work, how they work together. You have to accept the mistakes and if you can build a relationship that lasts a little longer, you get to know each other and there becomes a way of trust, and that's also a very good ground to develop further innovation and try out things.

The concept of trust as related to mutual learning and understanding has also been widely analysed and discussed by existing literature (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b). As explained by scholars, which also agrees with what stated by the experts, both mutual learning and understanding can be considered as fundamental and necessary “trust-building activities” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 48) in any collaborative relation. In addition, as also resulting in the interviews, trust can be considered as one of the fundamental “intangible assets” (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, p. 731) in the development of a partnership and in the creation of value. Moreover, besides the advantage of creating trust through mutual learning and understanding, experts seemed to deeply understand the importance of these two activities for the co-creation of future value, as also explained in Austin and Seitanidi (2012a): “each sector understanding the other’s unfolding conceptions and approaches to value creation and collaboration is essential to co-creating value in the future” (p. 731).

5.1.2.3. Human relations management

In the previous paragraph, the human relation aspect was briefly mentioned as part of the mutual understanding process. However, given that human relations management was one of the most discussed themes as resulted from the data analysis, this deserved to be developed furtherly and separately. The, let’s call it, *informal* side of the partnership and the management of such informal relations was considered as one of the most fundamental

elements for the maintenance and success of a partnership. By some experts, human relations management was evaluated as even more important than sharing same values with the partner organization. Regarding this, Wouter van der Horst stated:

I don't think you should underestimate the role that individuals for companies or for museums play in this. Because, if you don't have the right account manager or if you don't have the right person responsible, or the two account managers of the department don't have the right chemistry or connection, that is even more important than all the shared values and goals. You should never underestimate the load that people and person, and personality play for a company.

The human aspect was seen by many interviewees as playing an important role in the maintenance of a partnership and the majority affirmed that a partnership is for the most part personal relations management. With this regard and to the question on how to maintain the partnership along the process, Wim Pijbes affirmed: “become friends and stay friends...it’s all about relationship management. That’s ninety per cent of the whole thing”. Paul Stork also agreed that a partnership is “people working together” and that the chemistry between those people plays a very important role. Besides this, he affirmed that, while this is a positive and desirable factor to maintain long-term relationships, it could also turn to be a problem in case roles and positions are changed within the companies:

We have long term partnerships that go a little bit up and down because then there is new people or person from other side and the other side has to get accustomed to that and sometimes the other side changes and there is some turbulence and well, relationships, between organizations, can go up and down depending on the people.

Organizations and museums seem to know well the informal relations management factor and indeed they annually or monthly organize events or parties where people from the various partners can meet up and spend time discussing together. With this regard, Paul Stork acknowledged that this is “like going out and see your friend. I go out to see my museum friends”.

In addition, the maintenance of informal relationships not only can strengthen the already ongoing collaborations, but it can also foster the formation of future partnerships and

collaborations. With this regard, Sophie Heyligers, Desk researcher in the Development Department at the Rijksmuseum, affirmed that the Development Department, for example, organizes an annual Sponsoring Day, on which relations of the Rijksmuseum's sponsoring and partnering companies come together and think about ways to find cross-overs and to cross-promote each other. It's an inspirational day, and by getting everyone together sometimes, it allows companies to find ways to deepen collaborations with each other.

All this considered, the results confirm Austin's findings which also revealed the importance of "personal dynamics" in the management and development of a partnership (Austin, 2000, p. 83). Regarding this, Sanzo et al. (2015) affirm that managers from businesses and non-profits should focus on and "encourage the physical proximity of team members" (p. 393) in order to create a more favourable climate characterized by trust and commitment. Nevertheless, except for a very small number of studies, there is an evident gap in literature with regard to this topic. In fact, existing literature dealing with intra-sector partnerships, mostly analyses relationships management in a more broader term and particularly focuses on the ways non-profits and profits interact as institutions rather than as single individuals (Austin & Seitanidi 2012b; Bryson et al., 2006; Dahan et al., 2010).

5.1.2.4. Balanced collaboration

In order for a partnership to work smoothly and subsequently be successful, what the majority of the experts recognized as important is the maintenance of a certain equilibrium between the partners. What this means is that the various partners involved should be equally committed in the partnership and to the project and therefore, should put the same efforts and be equally engaged. According to Minke Van Hooff: "a successful partnership is a partnership that is, well, when you are really working together on the same goal". René van Blerk from the Van Gogh Museum also stated that a successful partnership is a partnership with an equal commitment along the process: "I think you should be committed on both sides to achieve the greatest success you can....You have to be on the same level on that. Otherwise, it is going to be unbalanced, and you don't want that".

The experts interviewed seemed to agree that this level of equal commitment and participation is also what differentiates a partnership from a simple customer-supplier relationship or a relationship based on sponsorship. Concerning this, some acknowledged that a true partnership happens when no partner really depends on the other, namely when there is no hierarchy. According to Daan de Raaf:

You shouldn't have some sort of hierarchical relationships, like a client and an agency. I think it's important to be there, in that together and be equal partners...everyone should put in a comparable amount of energy in the project.

This was also confirmed by Minke Vaan Hooff who stated that: “when we are more depending on the business then it’s not a partnership.”

Nevertheless, what some of the interviewees also recognized was that a collaborative and balanced partnership does not necessarily imply that all partners work together in every single moment of the collaboration. What is important is that everyone stays on the same line and is aware of what is happening in the process and in the other partner. Regarding this, when explaining one of the projects in which she took part and which saw the collaboration of NTR, the Rijksmuseum and another business partner, Jeanny Duijf affirmed that only one of the partners was in charge of building the product, nonetheless everyone was continuously informed, in fact:

What is important, is that the other partner, who is not involved in the creating process, can follow the process and can see what’s happening and tell his opinion. So, when I worked together with an educational publisher, I always got all the content they created and I could tell where I disagreed or where I was not happy about it.

When talking about equal collaboration, Daan de Raaf used the expression “diverging and converging”. What he meant by this, thus confirming what stated by Duijf, is that what really allows to maintain the partnership and to maintain a consistent commitment is meeting every now and then to check how things are going and if everything is going the way it should. According to de Raaf, once the partners have converged to make sure that everything is fine and have, if necessary, recalibrated roles and tasks, they can diverge again and the various teams can keep working on the project separately, but still working on the same line.

All in all, these findings demonstrate what also explained in the existing literature, namely the importance of power balance along the process as well as of lack of hierarchy between the partners involved. Power balance does not necessarily mean being equally committed and engaged in every step of the project, but rather it refers to an equal participation in the production of the final result. As also stated by Austin and Seitani (2012b) “shared...decision making and coregulation” allow to “balance the power dynamics

across the partners” (p.941). In addition, the findings resulting from the interviews, confirm what reported in Selsky and Parker (2005), namely that a power imbalance may eventually harm the entire partnership performance.

5.1.3. Partnership success

5.1.3.1. Producing a higher value

When asked to define what characterizes a successful partnership between museums and businesses, the majority of respondents answered that success has to deal with the ability to create something which can produce a deeper impact on both the society and the respective partners and also which manages to reach the wanted, or even a wider, audience. What this means is that a partnership can be considered successful when it allows the organizations to produce a higher value, not necessarily in the economic sense, which they would not be able to produce individually. As affirmed by Renate Meijer, a partnership is successful “if it brings both parties forward in a way that wouldn’t otherwise be possible”. This goes along with what stated by Daan de Raaf who, when talking about the “Next Rembrandt” project which required the collaboration of multiple partners both profits and non-profits, recognized that “within this kind of network of parties...something happened, which in a normal commercial relationship would not be possible”.

According to the experts, the metrics for evaluating when a partnership is successful and hence to *measure* the higher value produced are mainly two: audience reach and change. The first one indicates that a collaboration can be considered successful when it allows the organizations to reach the desired, or a broader, audience. The second one, instead refers to something deeper, namely to the ability of the organizations to foster a change both in the society and in the respective partner. With regard to audience reach, Sophie Hejligers from the Rijksmuseum, expressively stated: “if you have reached the people that you wanted to reach, then...you are successful”. Wouter van der Horst also affirmed that the success of a partnership can be defined by the people reached. In particular and specifically referring to the production of innovative educational products aimed at kids and developed in collaboration with other partners, he explained: “if you would create a new educational product in the museum...and you get a lot of children doing it, enjoying it and then rating it, then that is something that you can really define as success”. Besides the wanted target, also the possibility to reach a broader group of people was considered as part of the success: “what is

successful for me reaches...different audiences from different sectors or level of society”, affirmed Justin Waerts.

Concerning change, this was seen by many experts as another fundamental metric when evaluating the outcomes of a partnership and it was indeed mentioned very often. First of all, change was considered with regard to partners forming the alliance. What this means is that a partnership was evaluated as successful when it was able to bring an internal change in each of the organizations involved. Regarding this, Waerts affirmed: “a collaboration where you find, probably along the way, that you made a change in each and your own sector, that's how I'd like to define success or a successful collaboration”. This also agrees with what stated by Wouter van der Horst who acknowledged that success does not have necessarily to deal with numbers, but it is something deeper and related to the DNA of each partner:

We have a couple of things that [we] offered in the last couple of years that I feel can be viewed as success, not because [they] can be measured in numbers, but because [they] really transformed the DNA of the Rijksmuseum.

Secondly, change was seen in relation to the audience. In this sense, a partnership considered successful was the one that was able, through the product or the project developed, to bring about a change in the target audience. In fact, producing a change was mentioned as one of the main drivers in the development of innovative educational products, hence the achievement of that was considered as a success. The answer given by René Blerk from the Van Gogh Museum, in relation to partnership success, encloses all the concepts just explained. In fact, according to him, a partnership is successful when the product created together with the partner “attracts the amount of visitors you wanted to attract and you can see that makes some change, [which] is always a difficult thing”.

With this said and to evaluate the above-mentioned results, it is necessary to first reiterate what explained in the previous paragraphs. In fact, according to existing literature on cross-sector partnerships and social alliances, the ultimate goal of such partnerships is that of producing a greater value together, which can be translated into social capital, besides economic one (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Bryson et al., 2006). In addition, what such partnership aim at is addressing and solving public challenges. What explained by the experts confirms this. In fact, experts identified as success the possibility of creating a higher value together, which could have not been reached individually. In addition, the change mentioned

by the organizations and considered by the interviewees as a successful outcome of the partnership can be identified with the social challenge usually hard to solve.

5.1.3.2. Win-win situation: mutual benefits

Besides the production of a higher value, the majority of experts also recognized that a successful partnership is the one that allows the various partners to mutually benefit, hence when the strategic alliance creates a win-win situation. As reported earlier, expectations and possible mutual benefits are established at the very beginning of the partnership creation, but this does not guarantee that all partners will eventually benefit, nor that they will benefit in the same way. This is why, according to the experts' responses, a successful partnership is also measured based on the obtained expected and mutual benefits, which Daan de Raaf summarized using the following words: "when everybody is happy".

As affirmed by Minke Van Hooff, from the Boijmans Museum of Rotterdam, a win-win situation happens when the museum: "fulfil(s) a gap in the need of the company and they fulfil a gap in our need...., then you have a good partnership".

From this statement, it is clear that the benefits that both partners can gain don't have to be necessarily economic. In fact, as explained by Wim Pijbes, the outcome of a successful partnership "should be a common upside, or common profit. A profit not in the sense of money, but profit in the sense of value".

However, as reported by many interviewees, the economic outcome is undeniably an expected and desired one, especially from the business partners, but this does not seem to constitute a problem for the well-being of this kind of partnerships, namely between profits and non-profits, as long as each partner equally benefits, in its own way. Regarding this, Jeanny Duijf stated:

It's obvious that one partner wants to earn as much money as possible and the other organization, the non-profit organization has the goal to reach as much students, or teachers or whatever. And...those goals can be combined. So, the more money you make, the more people are using your product, so the other partner, the non-profit partner is successful in reaching the public. Working together between non-profit and profit organizations is challenging, but not impossible.

In addition, as resulted from the interviews, museums seem understand and accept the need of companies to make money as long as this need is counterbalanced with the production of

social value. Therefore, and once again, this means that when a partnership produces mutual benefits, no conflicts happen and the partnership can be considered successful. Talking about one of the last projects developed by the Van Gogh Museum, René Blerk affirmed:

We don't make any money out of it, cause that's not what we want that's not our goal. But it allows our partner to make a name for itself and [to] attract people like, for instance, school teams. The schools come and create an account for the whole school, which isn't that expensive anyway...The money is not import for us, [but] of course it's important for them [referring to the business partner]. And in that way, it is important for us again, because they need to be able to, to do their job. So, our online platform can stay online [and] the tool works as it should work, for us.

All this aligns with existing literature, according to which the success of a partnership between museums and businesses depends on their ability, especially for museums, to maintain an equilibrium between fiscal health and production of social value (McDonald, 2007). This equilibrium can only be maintained when and if what Crosby and Bryson (2005a) define as “regime of mutual gain” is established and brought about by the partners. When a win-win situation is created and all the partners involved obtain their respective benefits, without seeing the economic value production to overcome the social one, the partnership results successful and the supposed conflict due to the different natures of the partnership does not happen. In addition, what resulted from the expert interviews was a clear *judgmental capacity*, as explained by existing literature (Austin et al., 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005; Sullivan Mort et al., 2003), in the management of the partnerships by museums. As also stated in existing literature, experts recognized that this is what allowed them to bring about a successful partnership with businesses where the production of social value was flanked, but not overcome, by the financial one.

5.2. PROCESS OF INNOVATION

As previously explained, the process of innovation is the phase that sees *how* certain defined goals can be reached and how ideas and projects are developed and implemented. The aim of this paper was to get a more in-depth look in how such process is carried out by partners together and particularly it aimed at answering the following sub-question: *How can museums execute innovation processes with external parties to create innovative educational products?*

The results from the interviews presented in the following paragraphs, and grouped according to the main themes derived from the conceptual framework, try to answer the proposed question.

5.2.1. Inspiration

5.2.1.1. Problem definition

As many of the interviewees stated, the inspiration phase, meaning the phase that will lead to the ideation and production of a certain product, starts always from a *problem definition* or with a challenge.

According to Wouter van der Horst: “good ideas always start with a problem definition... You want something, or you have a problem, and then you start thinking about what are the solutions”. Daan de Raaf also stated that ideas usually raise from a problem which he specifically defined as *cultural tension*: “We love to think in the ideas of cultural tensions. So, something happening in society where you can help and do something which is relevant. Not only relevant for the museums, but also relevant for the target audience”.

Problems usually represent a good engine for producing new ideas, in fact as stated by Paul Stork: “problems are good for inspiration, because then you have a motivation to do something about it”. In the case of a partnership between museums and businesses, as acknowledged by many interviewees, the challenge usually comes from one of the two organizations. Sometimes it is the museum that presents a content or a problem to solve. In the case of Snapguide, for instance, this was reaching young students. In others, it can be the company that comes with an issue or a challenge to take on, as in the case of the “Next Rembrandt” project, where ING proposed the question and then the partnerships were formed.

In addition, another element needs to be considered in this phase. In fact, as affirmed by Daan de Raaf: “with a real challenge there is a target audience that comes along”. This means that the definition of a challenge also implies the definition of a customer segment which represents the target to be reached. Defining the target was acknowledged as a fundamental step. In fact, the customer segment represents one of the main drivers of the whole process and as Wouter van der Horst explained: “segmentations [of customers] are very important for us... you really have to understand who it is that you are creating this for, it's very important”. A similar answer was given by Hayo Wagenaar, co-owner of Ijsfontein, who, talking about projects developed together with museums, said: “we need to know the problem and we need to know for who it is, of course. Because we are in a psychology of

somebody using something, we need to make people curious, to get active themselves, to learn”. In order to do so, namely understanding the problem and defining the customer segment, it is necessary to get insights from the people and from the real world, which represents the other main theme related to inspiration and the subject of the following section.

In conclusion, what reported by the interviewees agrees with existing literature and, in particular, with the concept of value definition as proposed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) and with the concept of problem definition explained by Brown and Wyatt (2010) both of which represent the starting point of any process aimed at producing innovative products (Brown, 2008). Interesting to point out is the concept elaborated by de Raaf of *cultural tensions* which could possibly be translated with the concept of social opportunity as defined by Austin et al. (2006). In addition, what explained by the experts confirms what stated in the existing literature on cross-sectoral partnerships, namely that the decision of partnering up can result from the definition of a social opportunity (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010). In fact, as acknowledged by the interviewees, it can happen that the definition of a problem comes from one of the partners prior the partnership creation.

5.2.1.2. *Getting insights from the real world*

In order to be inspired when creating a new product, the experts affirmed that it is necessary to know well the audience for whom the product is thought, which constitutes a step further the definition of a customer segment previously mentioned. Concerning this, René Blerk stated that it is very important to get: “knowledge of people who are going to use the end product”. Minke Van Hooff also seemed to agree with this as she affirmed that: “getting insights from your customer is very important to think of innovative ways to tell your story ...you have to know what's up and what's not within your audience”.

In order to do that, according to the interviewees, it is necessary to first understand the target’s context, or in other words to *live their world*. This is what Rob Sudmeijer acknowledged when talking about a specific project developed for schools. He explained that in order to understand certain target audiences, students in that case, “[you need to] live their world. Don’t pretend to be their world”. By this he literally meant being part of their daily context, in fact he added: “talk to students, talk to teachers, go and seat in the back of the classroom and just watch.”

According to the interviewees, getting to know and to understand a certain audience is really the key to create innovative educational products. Specifically, with regard to younger audiences, Daan de Raaf affirmed:

Sometimes you say ok, the user is not as interested anymore in culture, but that is not true. They have different culture, it's video, it's pop music, it's- everything that is very modern, very now, very instant, kind of instant, instant gratification and...a lot of other different stuff. If you want to be part of that as a museum, you have to come to their life and be part of their life.

In addition, the process of getting to know the audience was considered to be always developing and changing, because times and trends clearly change continuously. Indeed, although René Blerk used to be a teacher, he acknowledged that since the time he used to teach, things may have changed significantly and for this reason he acknowledged the need to get in contact with people updated with the current situation and trends: “I need to be in contact with people who are working with children on a daily base because they know what's going on and how children of today are responding to specific subjects”.

Omar, co-owner of Maak, also stated that this is a phase when the company has to *learn* from the audience, or putting it in his words has to be educated by them: “well, we try to put the customers here and we try to listen to them, let them educate us”.

This aspect of observing and continuous learning from the audience resulting from the interviewees fully confirms what stated by Brown (2008) with regard to the design thinking approach. This represents an interesting point of analysis since it shows that not only business, but also museums are adopting a new approach to problem solving and social challenges, thus confirming a new attitude in the museum world. As stated in existing literature, museums seem to have started understanding the necessity of new innovative approaches and methods in order to respond to social needs (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009). This is representative of a more open attitude and open-mindedness from the cultural institutions side and openness is a fundamental element in the production of innovative educational products, as it is explained in the following section.

5.2.2. Ideation

5.2.2.1. Openness

One of the main themes resulting from the interviews, which can be considered as characteristic of the ideation phase, was the open character that, according to the majority of experts, needs to be present in any innovation process. Openness was seen both in the sense of

open-minded approach and way of tackling problems, but also in the sense of an open attitude towards the surrounding world, towards the respective partners and towards the various types of innovation.

Based on the answers given by the interviewees, it resulted that open mindedness is what allows innovation to happen, whereas a close-minded attitude represents a block and a limitation for the entire process. According to Paul Stork, who has been a designer for many years, an open-minded attitude allows to be receptive to new ideas and “you have to be receptive to new ideas to be innovative”, he said.

Besides, an open-minded attitude allows to have an open discussion with a partner, to ask each other questions and hence to find solutions for innovation together. According to Rob Sudmeijer: “when you have an idea, you have to try and make mood boards to find out, ‘do you have exactly the same idea about it as we do? Are we on the same line? What's in it for you?’”. In order for this process to be completely open, the various partners should avoid creating restrictions and limitations to one another. In fact, according to Daan de Raaf, when producing something innovative: “you need to give one another the room to do this and don't be too restrictive in this kind of project [referring specifically to the “Next Rembrandt” project]”.

According to many experts, the advantages of an open attitude, in the creation of innovation, also deal with the ability to see beyond what is common and usual. Concerning this, both Rob Sudmeijer and Wouter van der Horst acknowledged that being open-minded allowed both partners to find each other and thus to create something unique together. Indeed, Sudmeijer stated:

A museum is not a natural partner for an educational publisher, from basics. I can think of thousands of other partners in education who are more on top of our mind. But, we observed that learning by doing, learning by observing, learning by listening, is done in several ways and we should not look to the obvious partners that we always use. We should look at the non-obvious partners that we hardly ever use. So, that means that you get another kind of innovation than you used to.

Innovation in this sense can therefore be different things: “the partnership itself can be innovation, but also what comes out of it can also be innovation”, affirmed Wouter van der Horst.

With regard to adopting an open attitude, Wim Pijbes even recognized that this was the real innovation in the re-opening of the Rijksmuseum in 2013, not a product per se nor a new technological device:

The product is just...what it is. You just use it. But the most innovative idea was to decide that you want to have the whole collection online for free. That was the innovation....So, open, open, open, that's the whole innovative approach.

What needs to be added is that, although openness may be seen as the solution for innovation and could somewhat seem easy to adopt, it is definitely not so, especially in the museum world. In fact, some experts acknowledged that museums have had, since always, a general close attitude both internally and externally. Nevertheless, some also affirmed, not without surprise, that this is changing and that museums have been adopting a more open approach in these last years, thus allowing innovation to happen. Regarding this, Justin Waerts from the Amsterdam Museum affirmed: "I think a good development of museums for the last, I don't know, how many x years, is they- things start to open up a little bit, because museums are really these closed walls where people come in". Omar Kbiri, when referring to their last collaboration with the Rijksmuseum for the creation of Snapguide, also acknowledged an unexpected open attitude from the museum. When talking about being educated by the audience, as mentioned in the previous section, he said that he questioned whether the Rijksmuseum would be actually open to such an approach. He added that, out of his expectations, the museum was very open "to the voices of 17 or 16 years...and that was one of the basic things that was very important, [that] we checked that box".

This open attitude acknowledged by the interviewees with regard to partnerships approach and creation of innovative products is a very important theme which deserves particular attention. This agrees with the current literature which identifies the need for museums to be open to partnership creations and to innovation adoption in order to deal with the modern world challenges (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009). As reported by the experts, this change in museums attitude is real and is happening. Besides, the whole open concept confirms what stated by Tim Brown (2008) about the ideation phase which requires, in order to produce real innovation, a very open mind-set. According to the experts, to create innovative products that address social needs, this attitude is fundamental as it allows and fosters a continuous discussion, brainstorming and exchange of ideas between the partners.

Not less important, these findings demonstrate what Chesbrough defines as “open innovation” approach (2006), which is considered necessary for the production of innovative products. Particularly nowadays, as explained by Chesbrough (2006) companies and organizations are highly invited to develop R&D not only by using in-house resources. This will be discussed more in detail later on, in another of the main recurring themes present in the interviews, namely *resources*.

5.2.2.2. *Feasibility and viability*

When asked about what happens after the idea is created and people have brainstormed, the majority of interviewees responded that the product needs to be thought in more practical terms. In other words, at this point of the process it comes necessary to find real solutions on how to build it, how to make it available to people and so on. According to Sophie Heyligers, once you have a project plan or proposal:

then you start thinking, ‘how are we going to do that, and what products can we make?’. Because you cannot make everything if you have an exhibition of course we always want to make and an audio tour and a magazine and a book and documentary and that's not always possible. So, you think of ‘ok, with which product we will reach our target group the most’”.

At this stage, according to Justin Waerts, what is important is to consider the market, namely “to think about what the market needs or the market is used to. We have to find a balance between those two”.

Besides this, the product has to be a combination of people’s needs and desires and of what can be made viable through technology. In regard to this, Hayo Wagenaar affirmed that, when developing a product, a company has to consider “what might work psychologically, or what might work technologically. That's combine psychology with media experience and technological possibilities and match it with what we have in-house”.

Another common thing, as acknowledged by many experts, with regard to feasibility, was the fact that the product, or the idea, has to be very simple and easy. Wim Pijbes stated that easier ideas and easier products are always the most successful. In addition, as also explained by Pijbes, the product that will be developed needs to have and represent the strategy and *imago* of the brand and this was also confirmed by other experts. For instance, Renate Meijer stated that, when developing a new product, this has to “have the look and feel

of other Rijksmuseum products”. Moreover, Sophie Heyligers affirmed, also with regard to the Rijksmuseum, that the directors of the Rijksmuseum have formulated a number of core values, which are at the basis of everything the museum creates. Every new employee learns about them when they start working at the Rijksmuseum, and, basically, each plan, every proposal or project is tested to those values.

All this considered, it is clear that in order to develop a product which can successfully deliver a certain value, factors such as *feasibility* and *viability* need to be considered, as also stated in Brown (2008). What is particularly interesting, as resulted from the experts’ interviews, is how the whole strategy and the nature of the organizations drive and influence the creation of the product. This furtherly confirms that the definition of shared values between the partners and the establishment of a strategic plan are both extremely important, not only for the partnership itself, but also for the creation of a certain product which, in itself, needs to embed those values and the company or organization’s “look and feel”.

5.2.2.3. Finding the right resources and resource outsource

The third main theme regarding ideation that resulted from the analysis of the interviews deals with the resources needed to realize and develop the idea previously elaborated into an actual product. This may be seen as a natural consequence of the process of evaluation of feasibility and viability just analysed. Namely, when evaluating how and by which means the idea can be implemented, resources result as a first necessity especially if they are not present in-house.

According to the results from the interviews, resources can be grouped into two main groups, namely financial and intellectual/human resources, as they are called in Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010). Without any surprise, the monetary aspect was often mentioned and it was considered as an important and necessary resource particularly for museums. In fact, as already explained in the theoretical framework, although museums receive funds from local governments, these are not enough for them to survive, let alone to produce content and develop products. As stated by Wim Pijbes: “You need money, of course..., you need funds, you need sponsors”. What is interesting to notice here is that Pijbes does not simply name funds, but he also mentions sponsors. This is important to consider, as it allows us to understand that funding is not necessarily supplied by the business partner with whom a certain product is co-created. This issue was also expressively mentioned by René Blerk who, when talking about financial resources stated:

You need...money, that's not a very chic thing, but I mean, that's the basic. You need to get funding, and funding can come from all kinds of sources. I mean, when we are co-creating something with a business, it doesn't mean that the business is also offering the money...so budget is an important part.

Hence, museums need to find partners and/or sponsors who can provide them with this type of resource. However, although important, money was not considered the only and, above all, not the most important resource. Regarding this, it is interesting to point out what stated by Rob Sudmeijer, namely that “big budgets are killing for innovation”. By this he meant that usually the best and greatest ideas come up when the monetary resources are limited. Besides, what he also implied, and this was stated by other interviewees as well, was that human capital and knowledge, also defined by some as *expertise*, represent the most important and fundamental resources for the production of successful innovative educational products. When talking about reaching out to partners to obtain the necessary resources, Minke Van Hooff did not deny the importance of receiving financial aids, but she also acknowledged that human capital is a more important resource: “[we reach out to partners] because of their knowledge and because of their money, but first of all because of their knowledge”.

As already mentioned, when talking about knowledge, interviewees also referred to expertise and to the need of outreaching that in order to develop a certain product. Concerning this, Blerk stated: “we need the expertise from other companies, other kind of companies that are businesses, to develop our, in my case, educational programmes. Because, I know about education, but I am not an expert on, for instance, technology, websites”. The same goes for businesses which may need to outreach this kind of resources from museums. This is why, as explained by Daan de Raaf, this stage of the process, namely when the resources needed are defined, also represents the moment when a company get partners on board: “you cannot get all the partners in the beginning...Once you get the idea, you know which partners you need to make the idea come to life”. Then of course, as previously explained, the choice of which partners to get on board depends on the strategy, the missions and the goals of the companies involved.

Besides de Raaf, also Renate Meijer, from the Rijksmuseum, and Justin Waerts, from the Amsterdam Museum affirmed that the search for partners is often subsequent the definition of a certain idea and of the resources needed to develop that. “If you already have an idea about what you want to do, or the audience that you want to reach and you know that

you don't have the expertise, then you start looking for partners or companies”, said Renate. This was also confirmed by Waerts added who stated:

The main core of reaching out to a partner [is the lack of] expertise, that is not always here. So, that is the start for us, the search for other companies, or other corporations to see if we can work together...It's a two-way system.

This “two-way system”, as Waerts called it, could also be defined as resource exchange or resource transfer that happens between the partners and which was also mentioned by other experts. Regarding this, and specifically referring to the Snapguide project developed with the Rijksmuseum, Omar Kbiri stated that the Rijksmuseum contributed by giving the content and part of the resources to Maak, the company he runs. Whereas, Maak supplied the technological part. This resource transfer, which could also be regarded as resource complementation, was confirmed by Wouter van der Horst as well. When talking about the necessary knowledge and expertise to develop an educational product such as Snapguide, he stated:

I think that knowledge is very important because that has to do with segmentation and knowing your audience and I think expertise..., with partnerships, you have different expertise. We have the expertise of connecting the audience with the collection. We also have the expertise of how this young audience reacts in a museum environment. But, Maak, for example, has the expertise of the social influencers, and how young people react on social influencers.

These findings clearly show that companies, but maybe most surprisingly museums, are adopting an open innovation approach. Reaching out to partners to get resources and acknowledging a lack of in-house expertise are undoubtedly a perfect example of Chesbrough's open innovation concept (2006). In particular, the results exemplify what Enkel, Gassman and Chesbrough (2009) define as “coupled process” according to which the co-creation of products is made possible by the combination of in-house and out-of-house resources as well as by a continuous give and take, namely the resource transfer explained by the experts. Such resources exchange seems also to represent the “joint value creation” concept elaborated by Austin (2000).

5.2.3. Implementation

5.2.3.1. Prototyping and testing

Most of the interviewees recognized that prototyping and testing represent other fundamental phases in the evolution of the product. The experts explained the importance to carry out these trials as soon as possible by also involving the target audience that the product aims at reaching. According to Wouter van der Horst: “you have to test because...you want to know almost as soon as you get the idea, if it's going to work”. As Rob Sudmeijer put it, one should start “prototyping, testing and involving...customers as soon as possible”. This phase is certainly fundamental to further developing the idea and to make it the most customized possible. For this reason, the participation of the audience is fundamental and the developers have to observe and listen to their customer segments while testing it, because sometimes they may be surprised by the inefficacy of some characteristics they thought to be good. With regard to this, Paul Stork acknowledged: “I made this beautiful cross on the right, upper side and nobody understands it”. Kbir as well stated that sometimes, “you think you have found the solution in first matter, but then you test it and then he says this, she says that, researchers told that and then you change it a little bit”.

Nevertheless, according to René Blerk’s experience, testing is not always guarantee of success, because other factors may be involved:

I did have a project which worked very well in our testing phase, people where very enthusiastic about it, but in the end the programme wasn't booked as much as we would have liked it to be booked. So, if you have a great programme but it runs only two times a year, it will never become as good as you want it to become.

What explained by the experts agrees with the existing literature concerning implementation. As also stated by Brown, a fundamental part of this space is the testing of ideas and the creation of prototypes (2008). Besides, what is interesting to point out is the importance of feedback recognized by the interviewees and also affirmed in Brown (2008). The importance of prototyping and testing, mainly lays on the feedback aspect which results fundamental for the further implementation and evolution of the idea. A particularly interesting finding regarding prototyping is that this does not represent a guarantee for success. Hence, prototyping is a necessary and useful step along the process, but it does not guarantee a long-term successful product.

5.2.3.2. *Re-adaptation and re-iteration*

According to the majority of the interviewees, implementing an idea is an ongoing process of re-adaption, but also of re-iteration of the expected value that the product should be able to deliver. Re-adaptation was considered an essential part of the implementation phase, as this allows to get to the final product and to deliver the best results possible. Re-adaptation implies the possibility of making mistakes, and thence of improving the final outcome. In addition, according to Hayo Wagenaar, making mistakes is what allows innovation to really happen. Nevertheless, always according to Wagner, most of the times, and especially if the collaboration between museums and businesses is based on a one-time project, this *privilege* of making errors is not possible. This is why, once again, a long-term relationship is more desirable:

Innovation is a lot about the possibility of making mistakes, to try something new. For this a one-off project is of course a very risky business [because] then...it needs to be right the first time. Or, it needs to be right within the very small-time frame you have. If you have a relationship, you would keep try[ing] out things and try and make mistakes and do it again and do it better and improve on the mistakes itself. So, in a way a partnership is, I think, the best way to create some kind of innovation in such trying to find out together.

What this statement clearly shows is the evolution aspect of the innovation process which was recognized by other respondents as well. In fact, Omar Kbiri, from Maak, stated: “from the first moment until the delivery of the deliverable, it's an evolution”. When saying this, he also pointed out that the process could be never ending and for this reason, there must be a point where “it stops because you deliver the deliverable”. Therefore, although adaptation and evolution are important, the partners developing the product must recognize when to stop, even though this means delivering a sort of *prototype* as Bas Korsten defined it. In fact, when talking about the “Next Rembrandt” project, he affirmed: “in a way what you see is the prototype...If we would have kept working on it for three months longer we would have had a better painting and a year, it would have been even better painting”.

Going back to the concept of re-adaptation, it is necessary to explain that this was also considered as readapting the product to the circumstances and the changes that may happen during time. In fact, it might be the case that certain innovative projects take quite a long time

before finally seeing the light and during this time things may change significantly. Regarding this, and specifically talking about the last big project developed by the Boijmans Museum, named Depot, Minke Van Hooff stated:

When we talk about the Depot, this will open in 2020 so what's hot now, will not be hot in 2020, so you have to extrapolate what you know right now and what you know from the past. How the needs from today might develop in the future.

Concerning the re-iteration aspect, some of the respondents affirmed that, during the implementation phase new elements may be proposed or new angles may be introduced. It is in those moments that it may be necessary to go back to the main goal and to repeat the value which constitutes the driver of the whole process. According to Paul Stork, sometimes it is necessary to say: "wait, let's go back to the original idea or the original concept". As also Omar affirmed, there are moments when it is necessary to acknowledge that the project is going to the wrong direction and therefore it is necessary to drive it back towards the expected direction by admitting that the new implementations or ideas do not benefit the main goal. In addition, according to Justin Waerts, fundamental is to keep focus on the goal by:

mentioning it, and telling that story [that you said at the beginning] over and over again...Sometimes, you have to repeat it in the process, for different times and go back to the drawing table and telling each time this was our social goal, that we have to achieve, is this the right way of achieving it? So, you have to talk about it a lot.

All in all, the findings confirm what stated in Brown (2008), namely that the process of creation of innovative products develops along a continuum characterized by re-adaptation and jumping back and forth to the main ideas and to the further developments. Besides this, thus confirming what stated by Austin (2000) and Le Ber and Branzei (2015), the re-iteration of the original mission and values that the partners aim at producing through the product was seen as another fundamental moment of this phase. In addition, what the experts explained, thus again validating Brown's "design thinking" (2008), was that implementation is not a *last stage*, but rather a space constituting the process continuum. Implementation requires and demands to look back at the main goal, at the main idea, at the definition of the customer

segment elaborated at the beginning. Only this way, successful innovative educational products can be produced.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this research paper was to gain a deeper knowledge on the formation of strategic alliances between museums and external partners and on the process of innovation carried out by these in order to produce innovative educational products. In particular, by using a qualitative approach characterised by expert interviews, this Master's thesis has tried to answer the following research question: *How can museums co-create innovative educational products with external partners?*

As explained in the previous chapters, the need for a better understanding of the co-creation processes of innovative products between museums and companies comes from the rise, in the latest years, of such collaborations which have not been widely studied yet. Indeed, although the literature is rich in research regarding partnerships between profits and non-profits, the same cannot be said for profits and museums. As previously elaborated, in the past two decades, mainly due to a more competitive environment, a diminishment of governmental funds, the development of new technologies and a change in society's needs, museums have started understanding that a change in their sector is needed and therefore that the adoption of innovation is required (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2009; Camarero et al., 2011; Falk & Sheppard, 2006; McDonald, 2007; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013.). However, due to both their non-profit oriented nature and a less business-like approach, it has become necessary for them to establish strategic partnerships with businesses (Bradburne, 2001; Hull & Lio, 2006). According to existing literature, the creation of strategic alliances, allows them to take the risk in adopting innovative approaches and hence producing innovative products and projects (Hull & Lio, 2006). The adoption of innovation, together with the establishment of such collaborations is seen by scholars as the solution for museums to survive in the current competitive market and, at the same time, to fulfil their social mission (Bradburne, 2001; Hull & Lio, 2006; Kotler & Kotler, 2000).

The most relevant outcomes resulting from the findings previously analysed are discussed in the following section together with the theoretical implications. Subsequently, the limitations of this study are presented. Lastly, suggestions future research is proposed.

6.1. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

With regard to strategic alliances, what the results told is that, first of all, the creation and establishment of new partnerships is something that can happen either prior or after the *ideation* phase. In the last case, the formation of partnerships follows the definition of

resources needed. Interesting to point out is the fact that, although the outreach of expertise may be seen more as the search for suppliers rather than actual partners, this was not what resulted from the interviews. In fact, what many interviewees acknowledged is that the way such collaborations were carried out was representative of an actual partnership rather than a client-supplier relation, even in the case where the partner was a design agency. This was explained by the fact that these relationships were characterized by a continuous and balanced collaboration, not only along the process of actual production, but in the continuum of the partnership.

A balanced collaboration was seen as characterised by an equal commitment, a power balance, a lack of hierarchy and also as a continuous resource transfer. Referring to existing literature, the kind of partnerships which both experts from museums and businesses explained to have established in the past years can be located in between of what Austin (2000) defines “transactional” and “integrative” collaborations, the latter being similar to joint ventures. In fact, although it would not be correct stating that museums co-create innovative educational products by creating joint ventures, what resulted from the interviews is that many aspects characterizing those kinds of partnerships were also identified as fundamental by the interviewees. With this, I refer, for instance, to the importance of having shared values, goals and missions which resulted among the main discussed themes regarding partnership creation.

Although these results did not come as a surprise, given that there is an abundance of existing literature discussing their importance in partnership creation (Austin, 2000; Bradburne, 2001; Bryson et al., 2006), it is interesting and valuable to assess that they are indeed very important factors when creating new alliances. In addition, the sharing values and common story aspect also demonstrates that a good fit between the partners is necessary and required not only internally, namely for the alignment of the organizations, but also externally, namely for the public, who could be particularly sceptical towards certain collaborations.

Another interesting pattern resulting from the interviews was the need, not only to have shared goals, but also to be aware and accept each partner’s own goal. In fact, although the ultimate purpose of a partnership is that of producing a social shared value, experts acknowledged that each party inevitably has its own aims and expectations. Regarding this and resulting from the interviews, museums revealed to own and to be able to apply *judgmental capacity* which allowed them to balance their social mission with their fiscal

health and with that of their partner, thus also creating the ground for the production of mutual benefits. This last aspect was also seen as one of the principal metrics to measure whether a partnership was successful or not. To guarantee the success of a partnership, instead, one aspect in particular was considered fundamental and necessary to apply throughout both the process of partnership and of product development, namely communication.

Communication, also widely discussed in existing literature regarding cross-sector partnerships (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Selsky & Parker, 2005), was indeed seen as the basis to build and maintain a successful partnership, but also as a core aspect in the ideation and implementation of a product. Experts agreed that when communication is applied, problems and contingencies that may come up along the way can be solved more easily and rapidly. Besides this, and very important to point out, communication together with mutual learning and mutual understanding was considered as builder of trust. Trust was also mentioned as one of the most important factors in a partnership, thus agreeing with the existing literature (Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Selsky & Parker, 2005). In addition, trust was seen as a possible and desirable result of good informal relations management which represents probably the most interesting theme resulting from the interviews.

The reason why this aspect of a partnership is particularly worth of attention is that it is hardly ever discussed in existing literature and, at the same time, it was mentioned as seemingly the most important element of a partnership, even more important than shared values and goals. In fact, as recognized by the experts, organisations per se are only building and blocks and, in reality, it is not organizations that form a partnership, but their people. Hence, what determines the success of a collaboration and the production of a successful product is how these people collaborate and how they manage to create strong relationships together. Moreover, the human aspect was also mentioned with regard to partnerships' building and with finding the right partners. Indeed, as many experts acknowledged, most of the times partnerships are built based on previous relations or by having personal contacts or "friends".

Focusing more on the process of innovation, what resulted particularly relevant and characteristic in the co-production process of innovative educational products was an *open innovation* approach, as it would be defined by Chesbrough (2006). What this means is that, according to what reported by the experts, there was a general open attitude both from the

museums and the business partners. Such openness was exemplified, for instance, by the reach for new and somewhat unexpected partnerships, but also by the way in which ideas and projects were developed by the organisations. Experts acknowledged that being open-minded and open to new collaborations was the key to be innovative and disruptive. As mentioned by both Rob Sudmeijer and Wouter van der Horst, the collaboration between ThiemeMeulenhoff, Dutch publisher, and the Rijksmuseum was all but *natural*. However, their being open to create such kind of partnerships allowed them to boost their common values and maximise their strengths, thus creating successful products. The same could be said for other partnerships mentioned by the interviewees. Hence, clearly, being open and welcoming to reaching out new people and new kind of resources resulted in being able to bring about innovation. According to what reported by the experts, such open attitude was also embedded in the process of production. In fact, as many affirmed, thanks to the open-minded attitude of the organizations, these were able to create outstanding innovative products. In this case, open-mindedness was seen more as the ability to think and work together without restricting the respective partner, but also as the ability to listen to the real world and to elaborate projects based on people real needs and desires.

Besides being representative of an open innovation attitude, this approach also aligns with the concept of “design thinking” elaborated by Tim Brown (2008). According to the findings, such way of thinking was clearly applied from the starting point of the project development until the end. As explained by the experts, both businesses and museums showed openness and willingness to really listen to their target audience and to *live their world*, as someone said, in order to get inspired and be able to produce a valuable product. In addition, as resulted from the interviews, the innovation process is not something that is carried out along a consequential continuum, but rather, it is constituted by moments, by jumping back and forth to the main idea or the main goal. The process of innovation is characterized by the re-adaptation and by a continuous learning from the audience.

All this considered, such findings clearly confirm an actual change in the museum world which has demonstrated not only to be aware of the need for innovation, but also to be ready to innovate and produce innovative products with the help of strategic allies. The success of such partnerships, and consequently the production of valuable products, depends on the ability of the organizations involved to establish an equal and balanced partnership, from which both partners can mutually benefit. Besides this, the alliance needs to be characterized by communication and open-mindedness. The last one, in particular, is what

allows the formation of new kind of partnerships and subsequently the creation of truly innovative and successful educational products. Moreover, the human and informal relations aspect resulted as the most important factor for a partnership success. Hence, this is something on which museums and companies should focus and work on. Building strong internal relations between the people involved in the partnership means building stronger alliances and also successful co-creations of products.

6.2. LIMITATIONS

Although the method used for this paper has been clearly explained thus guaranteeing reliability and the experts chosen are valid source of information, this research also presents some limitations.

Firstly, the experts from the museum side belong to very well-known and big cultural institutions and this implies many things. It certainly gets easier for these museums to reach out partners, resources and, therefore, to be innovative. Such institutions represent a very desirable partner for many different businesses. In addition, due to their fame and hence to a wider reach of people, it is easier for them to support themselves economically and to be selective when it comes to whom to partner up with. Besides the museums, also the experts from the company side, belong to very successful and quite big businesses. It is assumable, also in this case, that the economic resources available and the market power they have make it easier for them to establish partnerships with other big and re-known institutions and to be more open to adopt innovative approaches.

Secondly, this research is an exploratory study that focuses on museums and businesses located in The Netherlands. The decision to carry out the interviews only in this country was due both to practical reasons, being the researcher located in this country, but also to the fact that alliances between museums and businesses are often established on a national base. This certainly constitutes a second limitation as the research presents a narrower view of the issue. In addition, by considering only one country, it is fair to assume that the culture aspect may have somewhat influenced the results. Finding partners with shared values and stories may be easier when those belong to the same country and have same traditions.

6. 3. FUTURE RESEARCH

Drawing on the findings resulting from the interviews as well as on the limitations just explained, various suggestions for future research can be proposed.

As previously stated, there is an evident gap in literature with regard to *informal relations management* of partnerships, especially in the case of cross-partnerships between non-profits and profits. For this reason, it would be interesting to investigate more in-depth how the interactions and actual collaboration between people and work teams is carried out and how this can influence the overall process as well as how it can determine the success of the partnership. Moreover, what it would be worth studying in relation to *informal relations* is how managers and/or directors and CEOs can foster such relations in a way that it does not only allow to create more successful partnerships, but also that it allows to establish stronger and more long-term relationships.

Elaborating on the limitations, it would be interesting to study how the process of co-creation is carried out when less known museums and partners of smaller sizes are involved. In fact, although big budgets may be killers for innovation as one of the experts said, they certainly help in adopting open and innovative approaches. Moreover, it is assumable that a smaller institution and/or less *famous* museum requires different strategies and probably, different kind of strategic alliances. It could be that in such cases it is more difficult to produce innovative educational products or even that the process of innovation is not possible.

Finally, considering the second limitation, it would be interesting for future research to study how partnerships and co-creation processes are carried out when the institutions and businesses involved are located in different countries and hence have different cultural backgrounds and traditions.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is Ilaria, and I'm studying Media & Business.

For my master thesis research, I would like to gain a greater understanding of how museums co-create innovative educational products with external partners (we talk about educational products considering that one of museum's main missions is sharing a providing education). In particular, I'd like to investigate the formation, maintenance and success of such public-private partnerships and the process of innovation carried out as partners to produce a final output, namely an educational product.

First of all, I want to thank you for participating in my research today and being willing to participate in this interview. I will now go over some of the rights you have as interviewee. The interview will take about 45 minutes. During this time, you may take a break or stop the interview, if you wish to do so. Just tell that you would like a break. If you wish to discontinue the interview, then you also have that right. Additionally, you are not obliged to answer all of the questions.

For my research, I won't need any personal information, however, I would like to mention your name and professional title in my research paper. Would it be alright to use your name in my research paper or should I use an alias?

Also, you should understand that there is no wrong answer. I want to understand your perceptions, so this is not a test of facts. But before we start: do you have any questions? Finally, I would like to ask if you are ok with me recording this interview?

We'll start now the interview.

First of all, I'll ask you some questions regarding, in the specific, strategic partnerships.

Strategic partnerships

Partnership creation:

“What, are the reasons for creating a partnership with museums/businesses?”

- Competitive environment
- Solution for innovation
- Production of innovative educational products
- Production of social value
- Mutual gain

“How do you establish a partnership?”

- Setting expected benefits
- Defining a shared social mission and core values
- Aligning values and mission
- Balancing profit/non-profit mission
- Defining the expected value

Partnerships maintenance:

“How do you maintain a partnership”

- Continuous re-alignment
- Adapting the alliance to evolving contingencies and opportunities
- Maintaining level of engagement and commitment
- Negotiation
- Mutual understanding
- Learning

Partnership success/failure:

“How do you define/guarantee success?”

- Re-calibrating roles
- co-designed/ongoing process
- use of innovation
- considering risks/costs
- balance between social mission and fiscal health
- re-iteration of the expected social value

Now, we go more into the innovation and execution process.

Inspiration:

“How do you come up with an innovative idea/project with a partner?”

- finding a social opportunity
- defining a customer profile/segment
- defining the CS’ needs
- defining CS’ pains and gains
- creating a value proposition

Ideation:

“What are the fundamental requirements for your innovative educational product to have?”

- innovation
- feasibility
- viability
- desirability

“What resources do you need when creating an innovative educational product?”

- Resources
- Resources transfer
- Competencies- Leveraging skills and experiences

Implementation:

“How do you implement your idea with your partner?”

- Testing the ideas
- Creating prototypes
- Jumping back and forth to the other phases

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Ilaria Severi
Buizenwerf 55, 3063AA Rotterdam, The Netherlands
ilaria.severi90@gmail.com
+31 630861806

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a master thesis research study about how museums co-create innovative educational products with external parties (i.e. businesses, for-profits). This study aims at two main purposes. Firstly, it wants to gain a deeper understanding of the strategic alliances formed between museums and external parties to reach the goal of producing innovative educational products. Secondly, it aims at understanding and analyzing how the innovation process is carried out when a private-public partnership is formed.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to the co-creation of innovative educational products, the creation of public-private partnerships and the execution of the innovation process.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a voice recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information (such as your position in the organisation) not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym or more general identification, only mentioning age and gender, etc.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular

questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish— the thesis supervisor Matthijs Leendertse, leendertse@eshcc.eur.nl.

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you **DO NOT NEED** to sign this form; you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Date
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I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature	Date
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This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.