

How Museums Co-produce: the Case of Italian Autonomous State Museums

Erasmus University Rotterdam

ESHCC: Master Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

Student Name: Gabriele Giovannoli

Student Number: 594328

Supervisor Name: Carlotta Scioldo

13th June 2025

ABSTRACT

This thesis uses semi-structured qualitative expert interviews aiming to tackle the central research question: *how do the autonomous museums implement co-production in Italy?* Through the further three sub-questions which better structured the analysis. The thesis explores the extent and manifestation of the autonomy given to the institutions after the Franceschini reform of 2014. It looks at whether this autonomy has facilitated co-production initiatives and what this translates to in terms of efficiency. The research also pays an underlying attention to its relevance in comparison to the broader European policy objectives, used as a benchmark. Through the expert interviews of 6 autonomous museums' directors and 1 administrative officer, three emerging themes were identified: *Partial Autonomy*, *Co-production as a Core Strategic Practice* and *Relative Efficiency*. These themes provided clear insights into the complex interplay between the three central macro-dimensions of autonomy, co-production and efficiency within Italian autonomous state museums. The findings highlight how reforms were quite beneficial to their institutions, specifically through the greater autonomy given to their decision-making processes and in terms of financial budgeting. There was an increase in co-production initiatives which brought about positive externalities for the institutions themselves and the other local stakeholders. On the other hand, other limiting factors such as the heavy bureaucratic barriers and lack of autonomy on the choosing of personnel was found to be detrimental to the efficiency of these institutions. This thesis aims to contribute to the recent growth in cultural heritage and museum literature focused on finding new ways to both sustainably conserve and valorize cultural heritage, through the notion of co-production and its potential implication for a more sustainable and democratic governance system. The results thus highlight a number of systemic flaws which limit the potential of autonomous cultural institutions in the Italian case. Uniquely, this thesis also suggests to partially solve these inefficiencies through the role of people and their participative collaboration.

Key Words: Co-production, Franceschini reform, Cultural policy, Autonomous museums, Participatory governance

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.2 Participation through Co-production.....	9
2.3 Museum Autonomy.....	11
2.4 Museum Efficiency.....	13
2.5 European Policy context.....	14
2.6 Italian Policy context.....	18
3. Methodology.....	21
3.1 Research Design.....	22
3.2 Data Sampling.....	24
3.3 Data analysis.....	26
4. Results.....	28
4.1 Introduction.....	28
4.2 Partial Autonomy.....	33
4.3 Co-production as a Core Strategic Practice.....	36
4.4 Relative Efficiency.....	39
5. Conclusion.....	43
References.....	45
Appendix.....	49

1. Introduction

Museums can be understood as a form of Cultural Heritage in the way these cultural institutions research, conserve and valorize the cultural heritage of a country, promoting education, participation and the well-being of the community. As a result, the role of museums has shifted from solely a mission of conservation to a wider mission of valorization and utilization, involving local communities' participation. This is a result of a gradual shift and evolution, over the last twenty years, in the global understanding of the values of cultural heritage. Its use has grown out of the field as its interdependence with other sectors becomes an almost necessary step, especially in regards to recent European policy shifts towards more sustainable and democratic practices (in line with the Sustainable Development Goals agenda). In fact the definition of cultural heritage has now shifted towards being understood as a legitimate driver of socio-economic development and a key solution to urban sustainability issues (Del Baldo, M., & Demartini, P., 2021). This clear shift in cultural policy can be traced back to the Council of Europe's *Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (2005), also known as the Faro Convention. This convention is recognized by many authors as the key turning point in the modern and innovative understanding of cultural heritage as a true resource for development (Colomer, 2023). Similarly, another important aspect that has been presented by the Faro convention is the centrality of the various stakeholders involved with cultural heritage sites, especially when interpreting the notion of civic responsibility. Thus, as Iaione et al. (2022) suggest, by applying the commons-based argument to cultural heritage, active participation in the field can be better justified as a shared effort towards the preservation and valorization of our common resources. This social mission is especially true when understanding the educational and social function of museums being increasingly crucial as they play a key role in the creation of a better educated and informed population (Sandell, R., 2003). This is further underlined by the various non-monetary values of cultural heritage and its vast positive externalities for society as a whole.

Since the 2005 Faro Convention, many European countries have accepted and recognized its importance, including Italy which only ratified it in 2021. On a bigger scale, in recent years Italian cultural policy has shifted its efforts in relation

towards seeing a transformation from the traditional centralised model of cultural governance that had been standing for many years; towards a more decentralised model with more effective management through local governance and public-private partnerships (Mignosa, 2016), with an even more recent revisitation towards public-private-people partnerships (also known as P4) (Boniotti, 2023). These new participatory approaches in Italian cultural policy showcase the influence of the European soft diplomacy efforts since its turning point in 2005. However, as the literature suggests, the real life applications of these multi-stakeholder policy frameworks are not consistently successful but instead have resulted in very mixed empirical findings, especially due to the country's legal frameworks and political objectives (Colomer, 2023; Iaione et al, 2022), as a result this thesis will aim to contribute to the growing literature on the field by providing a further empirical analysis of Italian state museums following a series of key legislative and administrative reforms by the Italian Ministry of Culture which began in 2014 in order to give special autonomy to a number of state museums.

These reforms are a result of over half a century of debates and research around resolving the longstanding problems of fragility and inefficiency of the government's museal institutions, with recurring questions regarding the degree of autonomy needed to better manage and valorize these state museums (Casini, 2018). The Italian Minister of Culture responsible at the time of these reforms, Dario Franceschini, commented in 2022 how the Italian museums have profoundly evolved over the years and are now recognized as an excellence world wide. He further highlighted how the combination of increased autonomy and strategic appointment of directors have significantly contributed to the modernization of the museal system in Italy (Ministero della Cultura, 2022).

Recent literature supports these claims, notably a study by Alfano et al. (2023) found a positive impact of the autonomy reforms on museum attendance and admission revenues. However, the authors also pointed out the limitations of their study, specifically on its reliance on only two main variables (visitors and admission revenue), indicating that additional research utilizing a broader range of data is essential to comprehensively evaluate the effects of museum autonomy reforms in Italy. Therefore, this thesis applies a qualitative approach in order to focus on a

specific and essential valorization function of museums which is in line with the international practices fostered by the Faro Convention: Co-production. This concept will be theoretically explored by framing it as a specific and highly relevant application of the participation paradigm.

Thus, by focusing on the way in which these autonomous state museums apply this new international policy shift towards a more participatory governance model which is centered around the notion of co-production, this thesis will contribute by bridging the gap in the literature in the field by specifically analysing a further fundamental aspect of this multi-stakeholder approach and its real life implementations in the context of Italian autonomous state museums. This is especially relevant since co-production and other forms of participatory governance have been legitimized by policymakers, underlined by Faro, as a sustainable solution to the museal issue of public funding dependency. The latter being of utmost importance in the Italian cultural policy context. Now, after over a decade of this shared understanding on the great promised potential of this governance approach, with major decentralization efforts by the Italian Ministry of Culture, this thesis aims to analyse how these models are being implemented in the museums that have been given greater autonomy. Therefore, to guide this paper, the following sub-research questions will be explored:

- 1. To what extent have recent reforms increased the autonomy of Italian state museums and how is this autonomy manifested?*
- 2. Has increased autonomy actually facilitated the implementation of co-production within Italian autonomous museums? If so, how are these museums employing it?*
- 3. How are the outcomes of implementing greater autonomy and co-production within these museums consistent with the broader participatory governance objectives outlined by the European Union policy-makers since the Faro Convention?*

These sub-questions, with Q2 being the core question, will structure the paper, aiming to explore whether the practical application of museum autonomy and

co-production governance in Italian state museums aligns with the EU's promised objectives. This paper will undergo this analysis through a careful exploration of 3 relevant macro dimensions: museum autonomy, efficiency and participation (co-production). This will allow for the thesis to more clearly break down the wider overarching research question guiding the research: *how do the autonomous museums implement co-production in Italy?*

Furthermore, the research gains societal relevance through an understanding of the significant function that cultural institutions hold in fostering economic development through a growth in cultural, human and social capital (Alfano, M.R. et al., 2023). More specific to the cultural heritage and museum field, this research is relevant in the way it answers the call for more empirical research on new democratic and multi-actor decision-making models which foster co-creation of value, which in turn stimulates socio-economic development.

Lastly, the structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 outlines the key theoretical concepts underpinning the study and offers an overview of the most relevant literature, highlighting both key findings and existing research gaps in the field. This chapter also explores the major developments and reports in EU cultural policy, as well as examining the Italian context in greater depth, providing an overview of the Franceschini reform. Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodological approach employed to conduct the research. Chapter 4 introduces the selected autonomous institutions, presents the research findings and offers a critical discussion of the results. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main insights and contributions of the research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual foundation necessary to explore how Italian autonomous museums implement co-production. In order to guide this research, the chapter is structured around the three key interrelated

macro-dimensions: participation through co-production, museum autonomy, and museum efficiency. These dimensions were selected not only for their individual relevance within the literature on cultural policy, cultural heritage and museum studies, but also for their combined analytical power in analysing the practical implications of the Italian Ministry of Culture's reforms on autonomous state museums. In other words, the rationale for choosing these three dimensions emerges from the core premise of this thesis. This entails how the 2014 Franceschini reform, by granting greater autonomy to state museums, hence now autonomous state museums, has laid the groundwork for a new governance model in which participatory practices like co-production can and should play a critical role, following the discourse in EU cultural policy. Therefore, in order to better understand the extent and effectiveness of this shift, it is essential to unpack how the premise of greater autonomy manifests individually per cultural institution; how it enables or constrains participatory practices; and whether it results in greater efficiency, both in terms of cultural service delivery and managerial performance.

Moreover, whilst each of these three macro-dimensions has been examined independently in the literature, it has not yet been studied together in an integrated framework. Thus, this thesis seeks to bridge this gap in the literature by analysing how autonomy, participation (co-production) and efficiency interact with one another. By doing so, it allows for this research to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the practical outcomes of the Franceschini reforms by interpreting them through a multi-layered framework.

2.2 Participation through Co-production

Firstly, in order to answer the research question on the use of co-production in Italian state museums, the concept of co-production needs to be clearly defined. Initially, literature on co-production was centered around improving productivity with a number of studies, both conceptual and empirical, on a vast range of industries and fields such as self-service supermarkets (Bendapudi, N., & Leone, R. P., 2003). Other scholars have also pointed out how co-production itself implies the making of something and therefore it suggests how customers are 'co-creators of value',

presenting co-production as a specific component of co-creation (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). They suggest how this process involves the close participation in the creation of the core offering itself and it aims to improve the outcome of consumption via the creation of value for both consumers and suppliers through co-design for example. Therefore the literature underlines the close relation between co-creation, co-production and participation, and how through this process the consumers involved become highly endogenous (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). Therefore for the purpose of this research, this thesis will analyse the notion of co-production when referring to the collaboration between multiple stakeholders, including public authorities, private entities and local communities, to jointly produce and deliver services which benefit both supply and demand.

More central to the field of cultural heritage, Ostrom's foundational work on participatory governance emphasizes the importance of co-production as a sustainable mechanism for preserving, valorizing and efficiently managing common resources (Ostrom, 2010). Similarly to Lusch & Vargo (2006), Ostrom et al. (2010) also identifies the function of co-creation in 'creating value for customers and capturing value for the organisation' (Ostrom et al., 2010, p. 24). She further emphasises the need for more research on the field by outlining five main topics, including topic 2: *'Defining the customer's role and developing methods for motivating customer contributions to enhance service success and loyalty'* (Ostrom et al., 2010, p. 24). This is extremely relevant to the case of the Italian state museums in implementing co-production as a way to foster civic participation for mutual benefits.

In the context of cultural policy, co-production is commonly understood as a tool for fostering civic engagement, democratizing decision-making processes, whilst still taking into account the sustainability aspect of cultural activities (Witte & Geys, 2013). In addition, Sacco et al. (2018) coined a new theoretical framework focused on the relation between cultural products and its socio-economic value creation that has evolved over time. Even if the analysis lacks some empirical efforts and is mainly theoretical in its nature, the authors highlight how we are moving towards a *Culture 3.0* regime, showcasing how novel forms of active cultural participation blur the lines between producers and consumers, resulting in new socio-economic value

creations through cultural participation. The paper then states the implications of this phenomenon on policy as it increasingly becomes a central mission to policymakers, even suggesting that cultural policy will become the main policy design approach of the future. Lastly, recent literature further suggests and analyses the role of co-production in achieving positive socio-economic outcomes, especially central to cultural sectors like tourism and heritage management (Palumbo & Gaetano, 2015; Boniotti, 2023). Palumbo & Gaetano (2015) found that engaging the community and co-producing services with them is beneficial to both parties because it improves the quality of services that the cultural heritage institution can provide, potentially increasing loyalty and visitor satisfaction. Additionally, this participatory process also creates a sense of shared identity rooted in the site's cultural and historical values, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility and involvement among the community and users in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the application of co-production in museums is a growing area of interest within cultural policy and as a result more literature is taking shape. Tamma and Artico (2015) use a qualitative approach, which includes 21,00 hours of interviews and detailed study of direct experience, in order to analyse the development opportunities and impact of museums that adopt a *co-production with culture-based companies* approach. Although the study is limited to five main cases both in Italy and France, the findings identify some successful co-production practices that align with European cultural policy objectives. They suggest that in the cases at hand, co-production does have an impact on increasing museum activities and building a closer relationship with the local ecosystems, however the issues arise in terms of maintaining these collaborations in the long-term. Moreover, further literature on museum co-production focused on two museums in New Zealand through a qualitative study using interviews, observations and surveys (Thyne & Hede, 2016). Their results suggest that co-production is necessary to a successful positive experience by museum visitors and they further point out the role of *indexical authenticity* and *iconic authenticity* as catalysts for implementations of co-production in museums. Overall, these two articles showcase the growing empirical engagement with co-production in the museum setting, offering valuable insights into the relationship between participatory practices and local community engagement. They help frame an understanding of what the empirical research has

already uncovered in a range of national and institutional settings, like those of Italy, France and New Zealand. Thus, this provides a useful foundation for comparison within which this thesis will draw on to assess whether similar patterns, benefits and challenges of co-production emerge within the Italian autonomous museums examined, thus contributing to a broader understanding of how co-production functions across different settings.

2.3 Museum Autonomy

The second macro dimension that will be explored in this research is autonomy. In terms of literature, as already mentioned above, Alfano M.R. et al. (2023) discuss the case of the Italian autonomous museum reforms, also known as the Franceschini reform, introduced in 2014, in line with the cultural policy shift towards decentralization. The paper uses quantitative analysis through a diff-in-diff approach which allows the researchers to look at the impact and efficiency of the policy reform with the mission to 'enhance the valorization of their collections'. The variables measured consist of the number of visitors and revenue from admissions, and even though these outcome variables might limit the findings due to other factors potentially affecting the results, the empirical findings significantly show how the reform increased the share of revenue by more than 4.3 percentage points and more than 3.7 percentage points for the share of visitors.

The authors conclude by suggesting that their results, even though limited to those variables, offer crucial policy recommendations supporting the need for more managerial and financial autonomy to be given to state museums; underlining how this approach allows for the museums to preserve the conservation of the cultural heritage whilst still promoting the utilization function of museums, also in line with the sustainability agenda. Other scholars, however, have criticised the Franceschini reform and its earlier initiatives for being dominated by an abundance of ineffective legislative action which doesn't seem to learn from its shortcomings in the last twenty years (Zan et al., 2018). They focus their argument largely also on the radical lack of a management perspective as the lawmakers seem to be unprepared on the understanding and function of this crucial yet lacking dimension.

Further literature on Italian museums similarly highlights how a greater degree of autonomy has a positive effect on the performance of Italian public museums (Bertacchini et al., 2018). In particular, the study concludes that the 'service performance' (p. 640) is higher in public autonomous museums compared to public museums which have a more centralized managerial structure and completely lack financial autonomy. As a result, the findings point to the positive impact of decentralization in increasing the number and variety of services and activities that Italian state museums can offer in order to realize their core mission as promoters and disseminators of local culture. However, the authors note that the findings interpret the museum's performance and effectiveness only based on the number of services in place. Thus the quality of these activities offered is a dimension that has not been analysed, underlining a gap in the literature which has potential for future research to gain extra insights into the performance of museums.

Moreover, Pratt (2005) critiques traditional models of cultural institutions that focus solely on preservation, advocating for museums to act as cultural hubs that foster education and participation. This is then further emphasised with a strong call to revisit the cultural policy on governance, suggesting that it should also take into account the market and more specifically on what it fails to do. With this logic new approaches, such as a more 'democratic form of decision making' emerge, emphasising the need to shift the perspective from just subsidies to an overall support for culture (Pratt, 2005, p. 41).

2.4 Museum Efficiency

The third dimension concerns itself with museum efficiency. Scholars have focused on analysing the efficiency of Italian municipal museums in balancing their cultural, educational, and economic roles, through a Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) (Basso & Funari, 2004). DEA is a non-parametric quantitative method used to measure relative efficiency of museums (but predominantly used in other industries like the health sector) by comparing inputs and resources they employ, such as financial inputs or personnel; with the cultural and educational outputs they generate,

including visitor numbers and services offered. The results suggest that out of fifteen Italian museums, four museums have a DEA index equal to 1 and therefore can be considered as efficient. The rest of the museums taken into consideration in the study range from very inefficient (with the lowest having a score of 0.19) to almost efficient (0.87 score). In terms of geographical location, it was found that each city had at least one efficient museum. These results, even though they are based prior to the Franceschini reforms, highlight how only a small number of Italian museums are functioning at their best, whilst many still have lots of room for improvement in terms of efficiency. This is a key finding which legitimizes the need for this thesis, as the authors call for more complementary approaches, including a qualitative analysis, in order to further understand the local context of each Italian museum.

Since then, other scholars have similarly analysed the efficiency of museums through the use of non-parametric techniques like DEA. del Barrio & Herrero (2013) focused on the context of Spanish museums, specifically in the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, with the aim of analysing the efficiency of these museums as public services. The DEA was deemed suitable for this study due to the nature of museums as cultural institutions which have a number of inputs, including the staff, buildings, equipment and museum collections; which allow them to achieve a set of outputs, in the forms of exhibitions, training, education, research, conservation and many others.

The study finds that more than half of the sample at hand, which included 23 museums, operated efficiently. More specifically, the mean efficiency ratio was 81.06% with constant performance and 90.85% with variable performances. These results showcase how applying a DEA model can be a great tool to get an understanding on the level of efficiency of public services, similar to its more notably used application in education and health institutions. However, the results also underline how the main causes of inefficiency can be traced back to inadequate management of resources. An additional finding which is valuable to this thesis is that the most optimally run museums were run by regional authorities and found in larger towns or provincial capitals; and more interestingly, the governance system employed some level of independence. These results therefore suggest that external

determinants, including the size of the urban area and their respective levels of independence in governance systems, affect the level of museum efficiency.

Similarly, other scholars have also empirically analysed the impact of autonomy on the technical efficiency and performance of museums in the case of the Czech Republic (Plaček et al, 2020). The study uses a quantitative approach with the use DEA, as legitimized in the literature, in order to test hypotheses on the effects of autonomy based on two models of management of museums in the country (the museums as contributory organizations having more managerial autonomy compared to the museums as organizational units). The results showcased how autonomous museums were more efficient in most of the dimensions observed, including exhibitions and publications; yet interestingly the attendance was higher for the less autonomous museums. Overall, the autonomous museums saw higher levels of performance, also seen through the global efficiency model with constant returns of scale. Therefore their findings align with the overarching literature in showcasing how museum autonomy is positively linked to higher performance and efficiency.

2.5 European Policy context

To better understand the various notions and terms that will be explored in this thesis, it is important to also analyse the wider European Cultural Policy perspective. Thus, this section will contribute to the theoretical framework of this thesis by exploring the perspectives, objectives and promises that are being pursued at the European Policy level, in order to better analyse how these soft laws and objectives are filtered down to the local national context of Italy.

Firstly, as already briefly mentioned, the Council of Europe's *Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (2005), also known as the Faro Convention, delineates a key turning point in European Cultural Policy as it acknowledges the value of cultural heritage and how it can be used as a resource for social, cultural and economic development in society (Colomer, 2023). The

convention also emphasizes the participatory governance dimension by suggesting that cultural heritage needs to be understood as a common good, and thus legitimizing the need for the 'widest possible democratic participation' (2005, p. 5) as underlined in the explanatory report of Faro. This participative notion is further explored through the conception of the 'heritage community', defined as including any person who has an interest in the cultural heritage site and wishes to support its management and safe-keeping through public action, especially for preservation purposes.¹ Faro first employed this nuanced concept in order to highlight the role of civic actors and wider active participation as becoming increasingly significant in the creation of a participatory governance model of cultural heritage. Overall, this underlines the key shift in discourse and understanding on a need for more active and democratic participation at the European Cultural Policy level.

Since 2005, notions of participation have become further prevalent in the European landscape with new related and more specific terms like co-production being increasingly central to the discourse. In 2018, the European Commission published a technical dossier focused on co-production, emphasising its role as an effective and strategic approach to cultural governance, and other domains; where citizens actively participate alongside public entities to develop public services. The text highlights the growing global trend in implementing this approach as an innovative service delivery framework which emphasises the active participation of civil actors. The authors center co-production as a response to the limitations evident in both market-driven and state-controlled models of public service, including museums, offering a more inclusive and effective solution that integrates diverse stakeholders such as civil society and local communities (European Commission, 2018). Whilst they do underline how more empirical evidence is needed in order to affirm the extent to which this model is fully legitimized as a successful and sustainable framework; their analysis, through case studies, led to the authors confidently concluding that the model has 'potential to activate citizen participation' (European Commission, 2018, p. 21). They explain how it has the capability to make services more fitting and accessible to a wider diversity of end users, overall increasing the quality of successful partnerships. This aspect is also written in the

¹ Council of Europe Faro Convention (2005), Art 2.b.

context of needing to improve collaborations, as highlighted in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP). Thus once again suggesting how the transparent and multi-actor collaborative nature of co-production, if applied in a flexible way depending on the industry, can enable and greatly benefit different types of partnerships.

The primary objectives set by the European Commission for implementing co-production include fostering innovative, participatory and integrated service models. This approach aims to enhance social innovation by actively engaging citizens and communities, particularly valuable during times of socioeconomic crises and limited public budgets. The latter being especially relevant as it has been a major challenge for the Italian context. The implementation requires creating stronger connections between public sectors and civil society actors, emphasizing mutual interdependence; equitable sharing of power and involvement; and reciprocal learning processes.

The European Commission (2018) further outlines some clear guidelines for the practical implementation of this participative model, highlighting once again that it should be flexible, adapting to different political and institutional contexts; and should offer differentiated service models which are more fitting to a wider range of community needs. They emphasise the role of intermediaries in connecting the various stakeholders needed for this model, also in terms of decision-making. The participative nature of this approach, in line with the governance standards set by Faro, entails a shared form of leadership rather than top-down, where even end users are being involved in decision-making. In fact, through an analysis of the relevant literature, they showcase a clear 'co-production continuum' (p. 4) with three main levels: *Consumer co-production*, *participative co-production* and *enhanced co-production*. The first level is about empowering users by including them in the operational stage of the production processes. The second level is about citizens as co-designers, engaging them in planning and designing stages of services, in order to fully involve them and their opinions with the goal of bettering already available public services. Lastly, the *enhanced co-production level* fully places citizens as initiators in the creation of innovative co-production models which help improve public services. This facet of co-production is deemed the highest in the hierarchical

structure as it delineates a model where citizens have total control in the development of services. Furthermore, the text also suggests that institutional support is necessary for the facilitation of successful co-production initiatives. Through their analysis of the case of the Netherlands, specifically the 'Amersfoort initiative' (European Commission, 2018, p. 21), they found that an enabling environment with a strong history of collaboration is essential, in order to foster social dialogue and participation from local communities. This enabling environment is the result of strong institutional efforts to facilitate these models through important legal frameworks and targeted, innovative policies. They underline how this approach needs a supportive environment where failure is permitted and risks are being taken, all under the premise that you can learn through experimentation.

The text highlights some potential outcomes and benefits including a greater and better responsiveness to individual and community needs which in turn increases individuals' well-being; increased social capital; enhanced public service efficiency, and strengthened democratic governance through participatory processes. Furthermore, co-production is also understood to foster social innovation, producing solutions that are cost-effective and sustainable, as the participation of other stakeholders, especially local communities, can improve the execution of services. (European Commission, 2018). Thus, from a European policy perspective, co-production is positioned as a crucial mechanism for achieving sustainable and democratic governance aligned with broader EU social, economic and cultural objectives.

Overall, these notions and objectives proposed by the EU commission in regards to the benefits of co-production and greater participatory governance models, have been presented in the sub-chapter in order to gain a further understanding on the EU cultural policy discourse, which will be taken into question when analysing the Italian cases. This will allow for the analysis of the autonomous museums to have a benchmark for comparison with the wider EU standards on the subject.

2.6 Italian Policy context

After having analysed the cultural policy objectives and discourse at the European level, this next sub-chapter will zoom in further into the national cultural policy of Italy. The section will first introduce the contextual information and other structural factors which led to the 2014 Franceschini reform, central to this thesis. After that, the main objectives of the reform will be explained in order to paint a clear picture of the drastic structural and organizational changes that have been going on in the last decade. Overall, this section provides the necessary tools in order to understand the organizational and political context of the Italian Ministry of Culture, especially in its role in enabling state museums to gain greater autonomy, following the international standards.

Firstly, within the European context, the case of Italy is unique for its immense cultural heritage offerings, with over 5000 cultural sites, including a wide variety of museums and other cultural institutions. A third of these institutions are privately owned whilst the remaining two thirds are public, of which 10% are state owned. Interestingly, these state museums makeup over 50% of the total visitors in the country, highlighting the superstar status of these government owned and managed cultural institutions (Alfano et al., 2023). Historically, these prestigious state museums have been the subject of a centralized governance approach, which meant that the museums were completely lacking autonomy in terms of an independent budget, spending and revenue; in line with Italy's long-lasting traditional cultural policy up until the 1990s (Alfano et al., 2023; Mignosa, 2016). In addition, the prominent perspective in the management of cultural heritage was traditionally centered around the dimension of conservation rather than valorization. For these reasons and others, discourse on the pressing issue of solving this chronic weakness of museal institutions belonging to the state, was at the forefront of debates with many studies, commissions and reform proposals taking place (Casini, 2018). Meanwhile, in the 1990s, the economic and social context also saw a significant cutback in public expenditure, making the quest for a more sustainable and efficient governance approach even more relevant. As a result, for decades there have been various attempts to effectively reorganize the museal system within

the ministry, with every project, even if valuable, lacking the final decisive approval from either a political, economic, administrative or even cultural body, leaving them incomplete. It is therefore important to understand the 2014 Franceschini reform as the outcome of a long and extremely slow process comprising a series of unfinished proposals. The final proposal, which ultimately set the foundational basis for this reorganization movement, was a 2013 report by the study commission chaired by Marco D'Alberti (Casini, 2018).

Thus, finally in 2014 the administrative Franceschini reform, named after the newly appointed Minister of Culture at the time, was initiated through the decree n. 171 on the 29th of August (d.p.c. no. 171/2014). The reform marked a clear shift in the administrative organization of Italian cultural heritage and museal policies, which had been arguably untouched since its conception in 1974 (Casini, 2014). Essentially, starting a long process which sees the Ministry of Culture deviating, to some extent, from the traditional centralised governance model towards a more decentralised one that emphasizes efficiency through rationalization of tasks, accountability, and international standards of cultural governance. At its core, this revolution aimed to slim down the administrative and bureaucratic burden whilst modernizing more economically efficient organizational systems, all with the intent to place culture at the forefront of the country's priorities, especially in line with the necessity of an economic revival in the country.

Firstly, one of the first objectives of the reform was to restructure the main offices inside the machine of the Ministry of Culture based on their functions. This meant that they first delineated the various functions needed in terms of cultural heritage, then each function was given an office with specific goals and power, and within that a director. The most stand-out result of this is the distinction between the *soprintendenze* and museums. The Ministry realised that the protection and conservation of the land and cultural heritage was a different function to the role of a museum, especially in line with the modern definition given by ICOM (International Council of Museums) which also entails efforts in education and research. As a result, the reform simply divided the two tasks. Now the *soprintendenze* offices were given the mission of protecting the national cultural heritage, and created museums for the latter function (Casini, 2018).

This creation of museums as institutions is therefore the next crucial outcome of the reform, extremely central to this thesis. Before the reform, as already briefly mentioned, museums were merely just offices which were part of the soprintendenze. They had no real regulations, nor a director or any other scientific and administrative bodies needed to meet the modern functions of museums. As a result, the Ministry, borrowing ideas from the French cultural system, created a central institution solely focused on the management of museums, named *Direzione generale Musei*, allowing for a more structured system. This directorate for museums could support and oversee the network of these state museums whilst still ensuring alignment with national cultural policy objectives. These efforts by the Ministry also resulted in the creation of national museum standards which improve the museal system and its efficiency, trying to catch up to the European standards which had already been present for decades. In line with decentralisation efforts, 17 new sub-offices of the *Direzione generale Musei* were spread across the country, acting as 'poles', hence the name *poli museali regionali*, throughout the vast regions in order to have a more localized structure for better efficiency of the museal system. Finally, the further deep restructuring also led to the creation of museums with a *special autonomy* given to them in order to remodel them into real institutions, again in line with the international standards. Between 2014 and 2017, the first 32 autonomous museums were set up (Casini, 2018).

These new autonomous institutions were now led by on-site directors appointed through international public competitions. These directors were empowered with great managerial autonomy including the control over budgeting and spending, given by the Ministry. Therefore, the directors now also had the help of a personal scientific committee and board of councilors in order to conserve and valorize the museums as cultural heritage (Alfano et al., 2023). This new revisited structure aimed to enhance accountability, operational efficiency and more effectively valorize the national cultural heritage through a rationalization of function and a more localized, decentralised governance. These efforts were closely related to the international discourse on the role of heritage as a source for socioeconomic development, with the understanding of a museum increasingly reflecting international standards set by organizations such as ICOM. This is further

highlighted in the way the council's definition of a museum was accepted and used in the Franceschini reform (Bertolini, 2017).

Overall, the Franceschini Reform of 2014 signified a pivotal shift in Italian cultural policy in the revitalization of the museum system and with that the creation of autonomous museums. Even though the reforms came about after decades of debate and failed reform attempts, the newly established framework for a more up-to-date and efficient cultural governance system was greatly necessary, also in line with broader European policy objectives. Furthermore, authors have showcased how the initial reform also promoted the activation of public-private partnerships (Casini, 2018). Thus the next chapters will introduce the methods used in this thesis and showcase the empirical analysis undergone in order to explore the extent to which structural changes have translated into greater autonomy for museums; and whether this autonomy grants the activation of more efficient participatory practices such as co-production.

3. Methodology

Whilst the previous chapter outlined the key theoretical framework needed for the exploration of this thesis and the cultural policy objectives; this next chapter presents the methodological approach employed to explore how Italian autonomous museums implement co-production. The chapter is divided into three main sections, with the first presenting the overall research design, justifying the use of a qualitative approach centered on semi-structured expert interviews. The second section details the sampling process, explaining how the sampled cases were selected and how access to interviewees was obtained. Finally, the third section is concerned with the analysis applied to the collected data, elaborating on the combination of thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis used to interpret the interviews, in addition to further insights into the coding process.

3.1 Research Design

In order to answer the central research question: *How do the autonomous museums implement co-production in Italy?* And its related sub-questions, a qualitative semi-structured interview approach was applied. A diversified sample of the Italian autonomous museums was outlined and expert interviews were conducted. These experts, consisting of museum directors and an administrative officer, allow this thesis to analyse the proposed co-production applications of each museum by focusing on how each institution decides to present and manage their museum and how these decentralization efforts from the Ministry have impacted their governance and performance. This qualitative approach, particularly through semi-structured interviews, allowed the study to remain open to emergent meanings and institutional particularities that might not have been previously theorized (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This is particularly important when investigating how policy concepts such as co-production, which are embedded in evolving European cultural governance discourses, are interpreted and enacted in localized institutional settings. The semi-structured nature of the interviews (see Interview guide in Appendix A.) allowed for the interviews to still maintain the theoretical structure needed to explore the three dimensions central to this thesis. This also resulted in a more logical and fluid flow of exploration of the dimensions whilst still leaving some space for the interviewees to openly talk about their experiences in their own way. In addition, the questions were formulated based on the theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter 2.

More specifically, the interview structure allowed the experts to ease into the questions by first giving a small introduction to their respective autonomous museum and their academic and professional backgrounds. This was also beneficial to the research as it uncovered a further potential layer of exploration involving the different managerial types of the directors and how their distinctive academic backgrounds resulted in diverse managerial beliefs and approaches. For the sake of this thesis, this aspect was acknowledged but not made central, hence further research on the topic could be of interest to both academics and policy-makers. Nonetheless, after this introduction, the interview began through the exploration of the participative dimension, with questions such as: *What roles do local communities or other*

stakeholders typically have in these co-production processes? This allowed the interview to first uncover the co-production dimension in full, also due to its centrality in answering the core research question. Only then did the questions shift towards the dimension of autonomy, which permitted the clear answering of the first sub-question regarding how this new autonomy was manifested. At this point however, since the co-production discussion was already initiated, the link between the two dimensions became very natural allowing to also tackle the second and core sub-question. Finally, the latter part of the interviews wrapped everything up through the discussion on efficiency, which was placed at the end also due to its intertwined relation to the previous two dimensions. The last sub-question which explored the alignment of these practices with the EU policy objectives, was mainly asked at the conclusion of the interviews, as a final line of discussion, and will be further analysed in the next chapter, based on the findings of the data collected.

The qualitative approach was also appropriate due to a vast majority of literature on the efficiency of Italian museum using a more quantitative approach (Basso & Funari, 2004; Alfano M.R. et al., 2023), which even though it might give more generalizable results, will lack the specificity and subjectivity of each case that is only attainable through this methodology. Furthermore, this thesis is not concerned with ranking levels of technical efficiency of the autonomous museums, which has already been done successfully using Data Envelopment Analysis (Basso & Funari, 2004; del Barrio & Herrero, 2013), but instead a qualitative approach allows this research to apply expert interviews in order to gain first-hand insights from the main actors of these museums. Their opinions and experiences will be much more suitable at exploring the unique and specific co-production initiatives, their sense of autonomy that has been employed since the reforms, and their respective effects in terms of managerial and internal efficiency of their museums. These valuable insights are very much case dependent, especially since different museums vary in location, size and financial contexts which in turn affect their respective benefits and challenges gained from the reforms. As a result, interviewing the directors of these autonomous museums by-passes the more practical problem in the lack of data available about the museums, which has already been underlined by some scholars (Casini, 2014; Bertolini, 2017), and allows to look further into the understanding of the effects of the reforms by exploring the reasons why and how these central actors

(the directors of the museums, which represent one of the most important outcomes of the Franceschini reform) respond to questions about their museums in line with the three main dimensions of participation (co-production), autonomy and efficiency.

3.2 Data Sampling

In terms of sampling, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, the first Franceschini reform, between 2014 and 2017 saw 32 museums given special autonomy. Since then more institutions are gaining autonomous status, with the current tally at a total of 67 autonomous institutions, with over 15 gaining this status in the latest ministerial reform of 2024 (DPCM, 15/03 2024, n. 57) and thus still in the process of re-organization and activation. Nevertheless, the museums are divided by the ministry into two main categories: *General managerial-level offices* and *Non-general managerial-level offices*². The first category, also known as the A-list or *of first rank*³, consists of 14 institutions; whereas the second category comprises the remaining 53. Within these categories, there are a number of distinct nominations which classify the type of museums, ranging from galleries, national museums, archeological parks and palaces. In order to get a wider and full understanding of a more complete sample of the Italian autonomous museums, the scope will include a total of 6 diverse types of institutions in the country both with general and non-general managerial-level status, as highlighted in the table below. More information will also be available in the introductory section of the next chapter.

Autonomous Institution	City	Maneagerial Level	Interviewee (personal code)	Duratio n (min.)
<i>Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica</i>	Rome	Non-general	Director Alessandro D'Alessio (I1)	47

² Originally in Italian as '*Uffici di livello dirigenziale generale*' and '*Uffici di livello dirigenziale non generale*', translated by the author.

³ Originally commonly described as '*di prima fascia*', translated by the author.

			Alberto Tulli, Administrative Officer (I3)	55
<i>Musei Nazionali di Siena</i>	Siena	Non-general	Director Axel Hemery (I2)	60
<i>Parco archeologico di Sepino (Direzione regionale Musei nazionali Molise)</i>	Sepino, Province of Campobasso	Non-general	Director Enrico Rinaldi (I4)	69
<i>Parco archeologico dell'Appia Antica</i>	Rome	Non-general	Director Simone Quilici (I5)	42
<i>Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze</i>	Florence	Non-general	Director Daniele Federico Maras (I6)	54
<i>Reggia di Caserta</i>	Caserta	General	Director Tiziana Maffei (I7)	46

Even though a larger sample of cases would increase the scope of understanding of the research, because of practical issues with reaching directors of these museums, especially the more renowned ones, this study aimed at getting a smaller number of cases but with a diverse sample which incorporated a variety of types of museums from as many different regions as possible. Furthermore, the Reggia di Caserta being the only general managerial-level institution that agreed to the interview was to be expected given their busy agendas, however the sample still

remains fairly reflective of the total population of autonomous museums given the 14 out of 67 distribution, similar to the 1 out of 6 of the sampled cases.

In the interview process, e-mails were sent to a number of different directors of autonomous museums, but a relatively low response rate was obtained. This issue was solved using snowball sampling (Flick, 2009). After the first director of the Archeological Park of Ostia Antica accepted the interview request, he was able to share some names of other fellow directors and colleagues of autonomous museums, allowing for other directors to be reached more efficiently. This process was then continued over to the next interviews. It is important to note, however, that the scarcity of responses to the interview requests (especially from the general managerial-level offices, which include the 'superstars' of the country), resulted in the case of Ostia Antica having an additional interview from an administrative officer. This gave an extra layer of analysis to the archeological park of Ostia Antica, especially since the interviewee was responsible for the valorization function of the autonomous museum, hence he was able to describe in more detail the launch of various public services and co-production initiatives for which he was responsible for.

3.3 Data analysis

Moreover, the chosen methodology was accompanied by a thematic analysis approach, which allowed for the various themes to emerge through an initially inductive analysis of the interviews, mixed with a more deductive approach when the initial codings were merged into broader categories which created common overarching themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the study also employs elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) developed by Wodak (2015). The DHA emphasizes the importance of analyzing discourse within its socio-political and institutional contexts, enabling the research to examine how language and discourse is embedded and interrelated to its historical context, power structures, policies and its institutional context (Wodak, 2015). Given the fully centralized role that the chosen discourse plays in shaping the directors' perceptions of autonomy, efficiency and participation within their museums, this perspective enhances the depth of the analysis. Additionally, Wodak (2015)

suggests how CDA is particularly well suited for uncovering implicit power dynamics within policy implementation processes. This aligns with the objective of this thesis to critically assess the practical impact of the Italian decentralization reforms on the autonomous institutions. Thus, the methodological approach of this research, embedded in thematic analysis with a focus on the discourse-historical approach, enables this thesis to reveal the subjective experiences and institutional logics that shape how Italian autonomous museums implement co-production, autonomy and its effect on their wider museal efficiency.

Moreover, the coding process was undertaken through the use of the software Atlas.ti (Version 25.0.1) following a hybrid approach with a mix of inductive and deductive approaches, merging data-driven and theory-driven results in order for the final 3 themes to emerge. Initially, the transcripts of the 7 interviews were inductively coded in order to extract meaning from the data collected, creating over 200 initial and open codes. These primary codes were then later sorted into 11 broader categorical code groups. At this stage, the analysis could be argued to have also employed a deductive approach in sorting the final categories into 3 wider themes in line with the three central macro-dimensions. This layout allows the final three themes that have emerged from the transcripts to be analysed in relation to the dimensions of co-production, autonomy and efficiency. This consents the thesis to answer the wider research question and its three sub-questions by breaking down these complex interrelated findings into a more clear and structured organization; also underlining the interdependent relation between the macro-dimensions. Overall, a brief codebook can be found in Appendix B, showcasing some examples of these codes and how they fit into the different categorical codes.

In summary, this methodology ensures a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the semi-structured expert interviews of Italian autonomous museums directors. The hybrid coding process ensured that the analysis is grounded in the data whilst also allowing for the synthesis of broader themes that follow the theoretical framework of Chapter 2 and its three macro-dimensions. The following chapter will introduce the data analysis of this thesis, unpacking the main findings of the empirical research, also in relation to the body of literature and European policy objectives.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the main empirical findings of this thesis. As previously mentioned, the analysis will be presented through the three main themes which allow the answering to the wider research question: *How do the autonomous museums implement co-production in Italy?* And its complimentary three sub-questions: 1) *To what extent have recent reforms increased the autonomy of Italian state museums and how is this autonomy manifested?*; 2) *Has increased autonomy actually facilitated the implementation of co-production within Italian autonomous museums? If so, how are these museums employing it?*; and 3) *How are the outcomes of implementing greater autonomy and co-production within these museums consistent with the broader participatory governance objectives outlined by the European Union policy-makers since the Faro Convention?*

These research sub-questions provide further guidance in examining the case of autonomous museums in the Italian context, through the expert opinions of these institutions' directors and administrative officers. The three key emerging themes are broken down and organized per macro-dimension, ensuring a conceptually sound exploration of the research in a systematic and clear manner. The themes that will be explored are the following: *Partial Autonomy*, *Co-production as a Core Strategic Practice* and *Relative Efficiency*. This thematic analysis will present the research findings in regards to their connections or contradictions to the wider literature on cultural participation (including co-production), autonomy and efficiency. A further discussion of the sampled empirical cases of Italian autonomous museums will also be reported in connection to the EU cultural policy objectives and suggested outcomes on the notions of participation and co-production. However, before delving into the analysis, a brief contextual introduction to each cultural institution and their respective directors interviewed will be recounted. This is necessary in order to

better comprehend the meaning and perspective conveyed by each interviewee based on their diverse institutional cases and professional background.

The first sampled cultural institution is the *Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica*. This autonomous museum is the first of three archeological parks sampled in this thesis. The institution is found in the peripheral southern area of Rome, in the 10th Municipality (also known as *Municipio X*) and in the neighbouring town of Fiumicino, where the biggest Italian airport resides, the *Leonardo da Vinci Rome Fiumicino Airport*. The institution consists of a number of museums and archeological sites, including the main attraction that is the ancient Roman port city of Ostia; medieval Castel of Giulio II; the Necropolis of Isola Sacra; the Imperial Harbours of Claudius and Trajan; and the Roman Ships Museum in Fiumicino. This makes it one of the biggest naturalistic archeological museums in Europe. In terms of Ministerial identity, the park was part of the major Roman Soprintendenza originally named *Soprintendenza speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l'area archeologica di Roma*, which included various Roman cultural sites including the biggest of them all, the Colosseum. The Ostia Antica park only became its own autonomous institution in 2017, as a result of the first line of reforms by the Franceschini administration. The current director Alessandro D'Alessio (I1) and the administrative officer Alberto Tulli (I3) were interviewed. The director was appointed in November of 2020, through the international public competition system which each autonomous director was selected from. The mandate is valid for 4 years, after which an additional 4 years may be extended, but only once. Alessandro D'Alessio was therefore extended for a further 4 year period in 2024. His background is in archeology where he was first appointed as an archeological officer in the Archeological Soprintendenza of Calabria in 2010; and later joining the special Roman Soprintendenza, which later became the *Parco Archeologico del Colosseo*, from 2015 to 2020. Alberto Tulli, on the other hand, has a more diverse background with a diploma in literature and an early career in the Roman Cinema scene, still as part of the public force. In 2015 he joined the archeological park of Ostia Antica, before its official special autonomy, as the responsible for the valorization function of the museum.

The second autonomous institution that was analysed is the *Musei Nazionali di Siena*. This new configuration of multiple cultural sites in the city of Siena is made up of 8 very different realities, and has been grouped together under this current title since 2024. The sites include a National Archeological Museum, a number of historic churches, the Villa Brandi, and its main attraction that is the *Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena*. The director of the autonomous museum, Axel Hémery (I2), was appointed in 2022 when the Pinacoteca was granted special autonomy, before its new added compositional status in 2024. His background stems from over 20 years of successful experiences and careers in museum leadership in France, including directing the Musée des Augustins in Toulouse. He positions himself primarily as an art historian rather than a manager, expressing a balanced vision which acknowledges the need to respond to market demands and valorization functions, but still keeping the conservation of cultural heritage the first indisputable priority.

Another institution that has been sampled in this analysis is the *Parco Archeologico di Sepino* alongside the *Direzione Regionale Musei del Molise*. This archeological park is very unique in its case as it allows the sample to also understand the situation of the much smaller realities scattered away from the major cities. The archeological park consists of the ancient Roman ruins of the town, Sepino, which now holds a population of just under 1800 inhabitants (the smallest population density in the sampled cases). This unique reality became instituted as an autonomous museum in 2022, where the director Enrico Rinaldi (I4) was appointed. The uniqueness of this case lies in the way the director was tasked with a real initiation and activation of the autonomous cultural institution, which didn't even have a fence at the time of his arrival. A further peculiarity of the case is that since Sepino is found in Molise, one of the five smallest regions in Italy, when the appointed director Rinaldi was chosen, he was also tasked with the job of directing the other state cultural sites in the region. This meant that in 2022, when the archeological park of Sepino was created and given special autonomy (the first in the region, and the last region to not have one), the director also became responsible for the other 10 cultural sites which made up the regional directorate of state museums in the region of Molise, hence the full title now being *Parco Archeologico di Sepino e Direzione Regionale Musei del Molise*. These other state museums were not autonomous in status up until only recently, 2024, where they were now given

autonomy and became absorbed by the park of Sepino, creating one big cultural institution with special autonomy. His career background lies in archeology but with a special uniqueness as he specialized himself in archeological architecture at the first Italian specialized school in heritage conservation in the faculty of architecture.

The following case entails the *Parco Archeologico dell'Appia Antica*. This archeological park, like the Ostia Antica institution, is situated in Rome. It became an autonomous institution in 2016 after being detached from the major Soprintendenza of Rome, but the park is considered one of the first open-air museums, with its origins dating back to the 1800s. The park extends over 4800 hectares of land and is concerned with the management of cultural heritage in the form of Roman ruins and monuments, but also landscape and environment protection of the prestigious park area, including the Ancient Roman *Appian Way*. Furthermore, this case distinguishes itself from the other archeological parks sample, firstly due to its location being in the more Eastern outskirts of Rome (encompassing also other municipalities like Ciampino); and most notably for its recent authentication as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2024. This makes the case unique, even if only just being added, due to the additional factor of UNESCO's symbolic and strategic stamp of approval which legitimizes and upholds the value attached to the institution. The current director of the autonomous museum that was interviewed for this thesis is Simone Quilici (I5). He became the director of the park in 2019 and has a background in architecture. Interestingly, his academic repertoire is solidified in landscape architecture, specifically having written his doctorate and previous theses on the case of the Appia Antica.

The subsequent case entails the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze*. This archeological museum is situated in Florence, a unique cultural setting packed with numerous other important museums like the superstar *Uffizi* gallery. Its autonomy was attained in the latest Ministerial decree of 2024 and prior to this it was managed under the region's directorate offices, the *Direzione Regionale Musei della Toscana*. This regional body of Tuscany is the largest of its kind in Italy, with over 40 cultural institutions present, making the governance of all these museums a challenging task. As a result, the recent autonomous status given should prove highly beneficial to the museum, however it still remains in quite a transitional phase,

with its real autonomy not yet fully operating due to administrative delays. However, this is valuable to the thesis as it allows the analysis to uncover empirical data on the initiation process of the latest autonomous institutions being activated, especially one that needs to navigate such a concentrated museal ecosystem. The museum's first autonomous director and interviewee, Daniele Federico Maras (I6), is trained as a classical archaeologist who has a career background within the regional body of the Ministry. His managing approach, also thanks to his experience at the regional level, is highly centered around a variety of collaborations with local stakeholders.

Lastly, the final case sampled is that of the *Reggia di Caserta*. This world renowned Royal Palace is found in the city of Caserta, near Naples. It exemplifies one of Italy's most complex cultural institutions as it has the challenging task of safeguarding and managing a UNESCO World Heritage site which entails over 138,000 metres squared of Palace. It also has 123 hectares of historic parks and gardens, and 76 hectares of forest. It spans over two provinces and seven municipalities. The institution has a long history of international relations since its royal origins, with more recent political events like the G7 also being hosted in the past. This museum represents the only general managerial level status of the sampled autonomous museums, being part of the top 10 museums visited in Italy in the last year, and was given the special autonomy after the first initial wave of autonomous museums was appointed in the Franceschini reform of 2014. The current director and interviewee, Tiziana Maffei (I7), has been in charge since 2019 and has also has an academic background in architecture, focused on restoration. In addition, she was the president of ICOM Italy between 2016 and 2019, and is currently the vice-president. This makes her expert opinion highly valuable and relevant to this thesis as her managerial approach follows the international understandings of ICOM on museums and their respective functions.

Overall, these 6 diverse Italian autonomous museums represent a diversified sample of cultural institutions that have gained autonomy, thanks to the Franceschini reforms, at different times, in different geo-political, social and economic contexts. Each director and administrative officer interviewed presents a distinct perspective and experience which, as visible in the next sub-chapters, lead to the creation of a wider understanding on the governance of autonomous cultural institutions and their

activation of co-production processes. As already explained, the next sub-chapters will highlight the empirical findings of the thesis through the three central macro-dimensions of participation (including co-production), autonomy and efficiency.

4.2 Partial Autonomy

The very first theme that will be analysed in order to answer the main research question is that of autonomy, more specifically, Partial Autonomy. The notions of autonomy were obviously central to the autonomous institutions interviewed, hence the name. Although not all museums gained this special status at the same time (with the cases of Ostia Antica, Appia Antica and the Reggia di Caserta being part of the first wave of reforms almost 10 years ago, and subsequently Siena and Sepino in 2022 with the Florence museum only in 2024) each and every director underlined how the Franceschini reform was massively impactful by granting this autonomous framework.

According to the interviewees, the first way in which this concept is manifested is through an emphasis on the transformative effect of being on-site and physically present at the museum. This was a drastic and clearly needed change as it allowed museum employees to make real-time decisions and foster a deeper and true understanding of the local context. An example of this can be understood in the case of Ostia Antica. As already mentioned, historically the Roman archeological park was part of a large special Roman entity, the Soprintendenza. The pressing issue with this is that this office was concerned with the management of a number of other major cultural institutions in such a culturally dense and rich area like Rome, including the Colosseum. As both the director (I1) and administrative officer (I3) of the archeological park explained, the park was lacking personnel on the site, with only two archeologists running the whole institution. As clearly put by Tulli (I3), the Ostia site was seen as a “peripheral burden” or “annoyance”⁴ by the Soprintendenza, as their main focus and resources were devoted to the Colosseum. This account is

⁴ Originally “Ostia era gestito da una Soprintendenza romana... era un fastidio periferico.”, translated by the author.

further valuable also due to Tulli working at the park during the time, before the reform. Similarly, the Appia Antica park was also part of the Roman Soprintendenza prior to the reform, and their director (I5) explained how they would have a conflictual approach with the Appian ecosystem, and as a result it is now their job to subvert that and become facilitators. This highlights the main benefits of this autonomy allowing the museums to change the perspective and reputation that they had on the local setting as a result of a scarce attention due to the Soprintendenza's higher priorities. Furthermore, this interpretation was further highlighted by Rinaldi (I4) who also shared how when he arrived in Sepino and found his newly activated autonomous museum, he describes that it was "abandoned" with "no direction" and most importantly, "no strategy"⁵.

This last point introduces another crucially important outcome of the reform in terms of autonomy: the role of the directors. As highlighted by Casini (2014, 2018), a clear outcome of the Franceschini reform lies in the appointment of an autonomous director to more closely manage the institution. These directors are now able to express their personal visions and strategically guide initiatives for the bettering of the museum. This is also understood in terms of accountability. The Ministry gives the financial budget to the director who is tasked with the freedom of finding the best and most efficient ways to invest this capital, whilst keeping in mind that their end of year performance reports are being assessed as to assure a transparent and economically sustainable governance. This allows the newly autonomous institutions to benefit from the role of a director who can lead the future of the museum in a more hands-on, personal strategic approach. This is evident in the case of the Reggia di Caserta, as Maffei (I7) explains how the Royal Palace develops its mission in line with the 17 sustainability objectives. This suggests that the role of a competent and ambitious director can hold the museum to higher standards, similarly to the shift in realities post reform in Sepino, Ostia Antica and Appia Antica.

In addition, the role of the director upholds the benefits of the reform in terms of autonomy also in the way this new Ministerial framework enabled museums to

⁵ Originally "Sepino... era abbandonato, senza una direzione,...non c'era alcuna strategia." translated by teh author.

make faster and more tailored decisions, particularly in financial and administrative matters. Director Quilici (I5) highlights how with this new autonomy given to the museum and to the role of the director, they are able to intervene more rapidly, without waiting months for a financial approval from the centralized governing bodies. This notion was clearly and passionately expressed by every autonomous institution interviewed. In fact, Rinaldi (I4) explains how they have activated over 30 projects since 2022, “many of which would not have been possible with the old structure”⁶. Furthermore, the benefits of on-site directors at the museum means that they can better react to the necessities of the public in real time, as highlighted by D’Alessio (I1) and Quilici (I5). In very simple words, D’Alessio (I1) expressed the idea that there is a need for someone to be physically on the premises of the museum and knows and understands the context, allowing them to react in real time. This has only been possible through the reorganization of the Ministry which localized governance, decentralising the soprintendenze’s role and giving autonomy to the singular institutions, especially through the autonomous role of the directors.

However, despite autonomy being clearly apparent and crucial for the governance of these cultural institutions, all directors have also underlined the critical limitations and evident frustration with the realities of autonomous museums. Both the directors of the Appia Antica (I5) and Ostia Antica (I1) archeological parks made a humorous remark on the autonomy given saying that “we are autonomous only when it’s convenient to the Ministry”⁷. The main limitations of this autonomy are therefore understood by all interviewees as being the lack of power that directors have on choosing the museum’s personnel, as it is still being chosen by the central Ministry. Furthermore, some directors (I5, I2) have also interestingly pointed out that the fact that the institutions are not fully financially self-sustainable, they still have to rely on the financing of the central structures which in turn can create some hostility between the different institutions in the area, especially those in peripheral zones as underlined by Quilici (I5). Furthermore, a deeper exploration of these limitations of autonomy will be analysed in the later themes, delving more into its consequences in terms of efficiency.

⁶ Originally “Dal 2022 abbiamo attivato più di 30 progetti, molti dei quali non sarebbero stati possibili con la vecchia struttura.” translated by the author.

⁷ Originally “siamo autonomi quando gli fa comodo al ministero” (I5) translated by the author.

4.3 Co-production as a Core Strategic Practice

The second theme that emerged from the qualitative data collected, highlighted the phenomenon of co-production seeing a significant increase in implementation and validity following the museum's acquisition of autonomous status. As Rinaldi (I4) clearly puts it: "we have tripled our events since 2022 thanks to new collaborations"⁸. The main co-production initiatives can be seen in terms of more institutional partnerships as well as more grassroots community collaborations.

Firstly, the greater involvement of institutions in co-production processes can be understood through the public-private-partnerships between the *Rome Fiumicino Airport* and the *Parco archeologico di Ostia Antica*. The Ostia Antica park, as already explained, encompasses not just the 10th Municipality of Rome, but also extends into Fiumicino where the major airport resides. The park understood its great potential and has co-produced with the airport a number of unique initiatives. This includes exhibitions and most notably the lending of antique Roman statues to the airport itself in order for them to be displayed throughout the terminals. D'Alessio (I1) describes this partnership as a "virtuous example"⁹, underlining how it is beneficial to both parties and leads to positive externalities for all other stakeholders, including civil society. This is reflective of the close relationship between co-production and sustainable governance which the EU promotes. This is because by having Roman statues on display at the arrivals and throughout the capital's airport, prestige and aesthetic value is added to the airport itself, which in turn is also beneficial for the national tourism. This co-produced initiative also attracts visitors and potential tourists to other cultural destinations in Rome which are less visited especially due to its peripheral geographical location. This last point has been a topic of conversation which has been brought up by the two Roman archeological parks (I1, I3, I5) highlighting the need to attract tourists which, due to their short stays of 3 days on average, and the density and richness of cultural heritage sites in the central zone; are less likely to visit these institutions that reside in the outskirts of the city.

⁸ Originally "Dal 2022 abbiamo triplicato gli eventi grazie a nuove collaborazioni." translated by the author.

⁹ Originally "è un esempio virtuoso." translated by the author.

The case of Ostia Antica also clearly suggested that this new autonomy has allowed them to create and foster other public-private-partnerships with the Roman theatre present in the park. They can now utilize and valorize that specific and unique monument, in order to create a real season full of activities with a number of diverse and external cultural actors. Tulli (I3), who is in charge of this operation, has also expressed how these innovative collaborations would have been unthinkable prior to the autonomous reforms. Other mentioned forms of institutional co-production services include working with regional entities in order to develop educational and more digital initiatives (I1, I3, I4, I5). The Reggia (I7), in addition, also makes the most of its interconnected and complex reality with other institutional bodies. Some main examples of this include the collaborations with the State Archives and with the *scuola nazionale di alta formazione*, a national school in order to better educate and shape cultural workers, with the end goal of sustainably bettering the system. This is linked to the potential of Public-Private-Partnerships (and People) as entailed by the literature (Mignosa, 2016; Boniotti, 2023).

Furthermore, these increased co-production initiatives can also be understood through the engagement with the local communities. Every sampled museum director has highlighted how local communities have become more involved in the museum ecosystem. For example, the case of Ostia Antica showcases how they engage and co-produce activities with a local association, the *Pro Loco*, in which they organize guided tours of the park and other thematic days, fostering the connection to the local context. Similarly, Quilici (I5) explains how they constantly collaborate with local committees which give a helping hand in the organization and governance of the large landscape of the setting. This exemplifies the notions delineated by Ostrom et al. (2010) on the need to develop new ways to motivate civil society to contribute in order to enhance the success of the services. The need for this participatory approach is further conveyed by Quilici as he entails that the involvement of the local committee for the Caffarella and the aqueducts is essential, as “without them the park would not exist”¹⁰. This aligns with the discourse at the EU level as the European Commission (2018) reported that co-production would enhance social innovation and create a stronger connection between the public and civil society actors. This was also clearly seen in the case of Siena, for example, with

¹⁰ Originally “senza di loro il parco non esisterebbe” translated by the author.

the creation of the *Associazione Amici della Pinacoteca* which saw a rapid increase in numbers, even for a small locality with a smaller population. This use of a friends association programme has been largely used in many other autonomous museums (15, 17) as well as more basic annual memberships (11, 13, 14) which foster the creation of a close and loyal *heritage community* as entailed by the Faro Convention (2005). In summary, Maffei (17) best describes the link between the greater autonomy given to these institutions and the effects on the activation of co-production models by explaining how “autonomy allows the building of strategies and relations with the community with freedom, which was not possible before (the reform)”¹¹.

This autonomy also facilitated the implementation of co-production initiatives by providing the opportunity for more innovative, diverse and experimental projects to be taken. Maffei (17) describes the Reggio's activities encompassing from temporary exhibitions to concerts or workshops, all with a range of diverse actors. A further interesting example of this concept is the case of Sepino, where Rinaldi (13) described how, thanks to his passion for classical music, he personally reached out to different people and entities, giving priority to the local town's community (emphasizing the engagement with the local territory), in order to set up a music festival at the archeological park. This classical music festival was a huge success as it brought a diverse range of visitors from all over the region, not just Sepino. This notion on the variety of activities promoted by the museum and its benefit was also very evidently voiced by Maras (16), who suggests that the museum was seen by the locals as the museum they went to for school trips, essentially devaluing it. Thus, by promoting new collaborative and diverse projects, he is trying to change this perspective and attract new audiences (especially the young adults). This supports the notion that co-production should involve a diverse range of stakeholders, as explained by Faro (2005) and the co-production dossier (2008). The report clearly emphasizes how co-production implementations should offer differentiated service models which are more fitting to a wider range of community needs.

On the other hand, Maffei (17) also acknowledged the difficulties that she encountered at times with the local communities, explaining that they felt very

¹¹ Originally “L'autonomia consente di costruire strategie e relazioni con le comunità, con libertà che prima non esisteva.” translated by the author.

attached to the Reggia and its locality, but more in a possessive way. This meant that lots of attention and communication with the local communities was needed in order to create a collaborative atmosphere which makes all stakeholders feel part of the same mission. This was also seen in the case of Sepino (I3), as locals were shocked by the introduction of a ticket in order to enter the archeological park. Lastly, Maras (I6) has underlined the need for co-production and collaborations with a range of local actors in order to create a real network and ecosystem which can benefit everyone. This is especially relevant as he explains how these co-production processes are essential as he awaits the full activation of his newly autonomized institution. However, he strikingly pointed out a disillusionment with the concept of participatory governance, specifically the involvement of civil actors in decision-making processes. He suggested that whilst participating in activities is essential, decision-making processes should be left to the more authoritative experts as they have the best knowledge on how to manage their cultural heritage and institution. This finding contradicts the theoretical notions attached to co-production displayed in the Commission's report (2018) dismissing the effectiveness of *participative co-production* or *enhanced co-production*. The findings also go against the literature on cultural heritage as a common good, emphasizing co-creative solutions to heritage governance (Ostrom et al., 2010; Iaione et al., 2022), as reflected in the core participative Faro (2005) values.

4.4 Relative Efficiency

Lastly, the final theme that will be explored in this analysis is that of Relative Efficiency. This final theme is very much embedded into the previous two macro-dimensions of autonomy and co-production, thus tying all the findings back together through the concept of efficiency. As already explained, the increased autonomy that has been manifested in these Italian cultural institutions has led to an increase in efficiency, especially in terms of management. In other words, autonomy has allowed for swifter internal decision-making processes and with that, better operational outcomes. The director of the Appia Antica archeological park (I5) has suggested that now, thanks to this autonomy, they can resolve problems much more

rapidly, without having to always get approval from Rome's central governing body. This improves the time and operational efficiency of everyday tasks as well as the efficiency in implementing activities which would have taken a lot longer without a director with some authority. This aspect was evident and largely mentioned by other museums (I1, I2, I3, I7). These findings echo the works of Alfano et al. (2023), who highlight the significant improvements in efficiency that come about through more decentralised governance and authority of directors. Moreover, co-production initiatives, supported by the strategic role of an autonomous director, have led to the general increase of visitors. This highlights a greater efficiency function in valorizing the museum and gaining more audience participation. The director of the Musei Nazionali di Siena (I2) underlined how since his arrival and with that the gaining of special autonomy status, the museum's collective efforts have resulted in the yearly visitor count increasing from 16,000 to 32,000 in just two years. Similar results were seen in the case of Sepino (I4) and Ostia Antica (I1, I3).

However, a number of structural barriers to efficiency have emerged through the interview process, also understood through a limited autonomy. Despite these advancements in autonomy and cultural participation, a further significant finding from the interviews highlighted the concerning bureaucratic barriers which remain in the Ministerial ecosystem. These contextual constraints severely impact the museums' operational efficiency and reduce the benefits of increased autonomy. The Florence museum (I6) showcases a prime example of this burden, as it's been recognized as autonomous for a total of 13 months now, however he still doesn't have an actual staff and he is still left by himself. The museum is still waiting for the Ministerial funds, an administrative councillor and an actual team. Ironically, he described this situation as him being the director of himself. These bureaucratic burdens have been spoken about by all interviewees, even in the case of Siena (I2) where the director is having to wait to pay for past wrongdoings from previous situations which resulted in the blocking of the nomination of committees. This is highly detrimental to the efficiency of the museum as they are not able to take strategic decisions without them, as Hemery explains. Therefore the complexity of administrative procedures slows down processes and hinders the potential for more quick decision-making as promised with the autonomy. This in turn limits the opportunities for more innovative and experimental initiatives. These limitations also

restrict the responsiveness of both internal and external museum management, once again hindering its efficiency.

Moreover, staffing issues, particularly the inability of directors to have a say on hiring decisions, present profound operational challenges for autonomous institutions. This has been underlined by every director as one, if not the most important limitation of the reform. This limitation not only affects everyday efficiency as the creation of a synergetic team is crucial, but also impacts long-term strategic planning and institutional growth. Museums are understaffed, as seen in the case of the Reggia di Caserta. Maffei (I7) explains how the Reggia is huge in size and thus needs enormous resources, also in terms of personnel, in order to manage it efficiently. The reality of it is that whilst its French counterpart, Versailles, has over a 1,000 employees; the Reggia has only been given 233 by law, which in reality only amount to 143. This creates inevitable inefficiencies. This last finding supports the literature on Italian museums which largely critiqued the lack of a managerial perspective by the lawmakers involved in the reforms, which limits the effectiveness of these legal decentralization efforts by the Ministry (Zan et al., 2018).

As a result of these inefficiencies, the findings of the empirical research point out to a single potential solution on which to focus on: the people. All directors expressed a simple but crucial insight which has the potential to bypass these inefficiencies and limitations that have been previously mentioned. They universally emphasized that ultimately the true success of these reforms depends not just on policy, but on the actual people. Therefore, even though the EU (2018) emphasizes the need for institutional support and the creation of better legal frameworks to enable these processes, D'Alessio (I1) and his colleagues suggested that the people are the real motors behind these reforms, and that their efforts are the real factors which decide on the success of these opportunities. The role of individuals is also essential in creating diversified networks and collaborations which facilitate co-production initiatives, which in turn aid the efficiency paradigm. Once again D'Alessio (I1) suggests that the relations with the territory are the museum's true real resource. This is very much in line with Faro (2005) and the vast literature on the topic (Iaione et al., 2022; Witte & Geys, 2013). Similarly, Maras (I6) views the museum as a hub which creates and fosters spontaneous interactions between

diverse actors, which is beneficial for everyone, and essential especially when there is a lack of staff and bureaucratic constraints which limit the activation of his museum. Once again, Tulli (I3) also marks the need to work and collaborate with volunteers and associations as a way to compensate for the inefficiency of the Ministry in providing personnel. A further example is present in the case of Siena, as the director (I2) explains how they were able to bring back and put back on their feet buildings and cultural sites which were semi-closed. He denotes the success of these projects largely due to the help of volunteers and local associations. This reinforces the people-centered models of governance promoted in Faro and written in the literature (Boniotti, 2023)

Thus overall, while the positive effects of increased autonomy and co-production initiatives are evident, addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies and staffing issues emerges as a crucial area for policy improvement. The empirical evidence from the directors of these sampled museums, interestingly highlighted the centrality of the people involved in these services and how co-production and other multi-actor collaborative frameworks are essential in overcoming these inefficiencies. However these notions cannot function as the sole solution to these issues but needs to be understood as a strong starting point from which to build from. These participative notions can help overcome these obstacles, but better legal frameworks are still necessary, as highlighted by the European Commission (2018) underlining the need for institutional support to facilitate successful co-production initiatives, creating an enabling environment. Thus future research should further empirically analyse these participative management models, contributing to the growing literature. In addition, Italian policy actors should further explore more targeted policy recommendations aimed at enhancing managerial autonomy, streamlining administrative processes, and empowering museum directors with human resource management in order to fully realize the potential of the recent reforms.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis used semi-structured qualitative expert interviews aiming to tackle the central research question: *how do the autonomous museums*

implement co-production in Italy? Through the further three sub-questions which better structured the analysis. The thesis was concerned with understanding the extent and manifestation of the autonomy given to the institutions; whether this facilitated co-production initiatives and what this resulted in terms of efficiency; also in comparison to the broader European policy objectives. The three emerging themes identified through the hybrid qualitative coding process were: *Partial Autonomy*, *Co-production as a Core Strategic Practice* and *Relative Efficiency*. These themes provided clear insights into the complex interplay between the three central macro-dimensions of autonomy, co-production and efficiency within Italian autonomous state museums.

The findings highlight how the directors and other administrative workers of these sampled museums believe that the Franceschini reforms were quite beneficial to their institutions, specifically through the greater autonomy given to their decision-making processes and in terms of financial budgeting. Closely related, the cases emphasized an increase in co-production initiatives which brought about positive externalities for the institutions themselves and the other local stakeholders, as evident in the broader literature. These positive outcomes of the reforms demonstrate alignment with European policy directions and objectives on co-production, advocating for greater participatory governance and the benefits of active public engagement in the management of cultural heritage. However other limiting factors such as the heavy bureaucratic barriers and lack of autonomy on the choosing of personell was found to be detrimental to the efficiency of these institutions.

Overall, in terms of academic relevance, this thesis contributes to the recent growth in cultural heritage and museum literature focused on finding new ways to both sustainably conserve and valorize cultural heritage, through the notion of co-production and its potential implication for a more sustainable and democratic governance system. Therefore, the empirical findings emerging from the six sampled autonomous museums showcase the effective advantages of the Franceschini reforms, yet more importantly highlighting a number of flaws which limit the potential of autonomous cultural institutions.

As well as underlining these inefficiencies, this thesis also offers actionable insights into solving these key challenges, through the involvement of numerous diverse stakeholders in the delivery of services, hence implementing co-production initiatives. Even though this discourse has already been promoted at the European policy level, more empirical evidence is needed (European Commission, 2018). Therefore these results contribute to the growing literature (Alfano et al., 2023) and can be of relevance to Italian policy-makers which have the direct power to shape and improve the Italian museal system. The relevance can also be extended to international policy-makers who can learn from the Italian case.

Once again, this thesis needs to be understood in relation to the never-ending issues of conservation and protection, but most importantly, the valorization of public resources (cultural heritage) and services in a more socio-economically efficient manner which benefits all stakeholders. Lastly, the societal relevance of this topic is underlined in the nature of public administration and its welfare implications on the bettering of these public services. Furthermore, the central subject matter of this thesis being embedded in cultural heritage and its management, is a serious issue which concerns not just current cultural workers, but future generations.

References

Alfano, M. R., Baraldi, A. L., & Cantabene, C. (2023). Eppur si muove: an evaluation of museum policy reform in Italy. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 47(1), 97-131.

Basso, A., & Funari, S. (2004). A Quantitative Approach to Evaluate the Relative Efficiency of Museums. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 28(3), 195–216. doi: 10.1023/b:jcec.0000037997.23746.f2

Boniotti, C. (2023). The public–private–people partnership (P4) for cultural heritage management purposes. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13(1), 1-14.

Bendapudi, N., & Leone, R. P. (2003). Psychological implications of customer participation in co-production. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(1), 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.67.1.14.18592>

Bertacchini, E. E., Dalle Nogare, C., & Scuderi, R. (2018). Ownership, organization structure and public service provision: the case of museums. *Journal of cultural Economics*, 42(4), 619-643.

Bertolini, S. (2017). The effects of autonomy on museums. *Master Arts, Culture & Society*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2105/39507>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Casini, L. (2014). Il "nuovo" statuto giuridico dei musei italiani. *Aedon*, (3).

Casini, L. (2018). Una «Revolution in Government»? La riforma amministrativa del patrimonio culturale. *Rivista trimestrale di diritto pubblico*, (2), 693-721.

Colomer, L. (2023). Exploring participatory heritage governance after the EU Faro Convention. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13(4), 856-871.

Council of Europe. (n.d.). Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) - Culture and Cultural Heritage. The Council of Europe.

Retrieved March 29, 2024, from
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>

Council of Europe. (2005). Explanatory report to the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society.
<https://rm.coe.int/16800d3814>

Del Baldo, M., & Demartini, P. (2021). Cultural heritage through the “youth eyes”: Towards participatory governance and management of UNESCO sites. *Cultural Initiatives for Sustainable Development: Management, Participation and Entrepreneurship in the Cultural and Creative Sector*, 293-319.

del Barrio, M. J., & Herrero, L. C. (2013). Evaluating the efficiency of museums using multiple outputs: evidence from a regional system of museums in Spain. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20(2), 221–238.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2013.764290>

European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion & Stott, L. (2018). Co-production : enhancing the role of citizens in governance and service delivery. Technical Dossier no. 4, May 2018, Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/562>

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.

Iaione, C., De Nictolis, E., & Santagati, M. E. (2022). Participatory Governance of Culture and Cultural Heritage: Policy, Legal, Economic Insights From Italy. *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 4, 777708.

Lusch, R. F., & Vargo, S. L. (2006). Service-dominant logic: Reactions, reflections and refinements. *Marketing Theory*, 6(3), 281–288.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593106066781>

Mignosa, A. (2016). Theory and practice of cultural heritage policy. In Rizzo, R. and Towse R. (eds.) *The Artful Economist* (pp. 227-244). Springer, Cham.

Ministero della Cultura. (2022). Progetto culturale: Comunicato stampa. Musei: Franceschini, nominati 6 nuovi direttori autonomi. Retrieved December 11, 2024, from <https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/22112>

Ostrom, A. L., Bitner, M. J., Brown, S. W., Burkhard, K. A., Goul, M., Smith-Daniels, V., Demirkan, H., & Rabinovich, E. (2010). Moving forward and making a difference: Research priorities for the science of service. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(1), 4–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670509357611>

Ostrom, E. (2010). Beyond markets and states: polycentric governance of complex economic systems. *American economic review*, 100(3), 641-672.

Palumbo, R., & Gaetano, T. (2015). Co-producing services to enhance cultural heritage. The role of co-production in improving the quality of tourism services. In *Heritage, Management e Impresa: Quali Sinergie* (pp. 77-90). CUEIM.

Plaček, M., Ochrana, F., Půček, M., Nemec, J., Křápek, M., & del Campo, C. (2020). Autonomy and performance of local museums: the case of Czech Republic. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 36(5), 504–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2020.1803112>

Pratt, A. C. (2005). Cultural industries and public policy: An oxymoron? *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630500067739>

Sacco, P. L., Ferilli, G., & Tavano Blessi, G. (2018). From culture 1.0 to culture 3.0: Three socio-technical regimes of social and economic value creation through culture, and their impact on European Cohesion Policies. *Sustainability*, 10(11), 3923.

Sandell, R.. (2003). Social inclusion, the museum, and the dynamics of sectoral change. ResearchGate. Retrieved December 11, 2024, from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/27244654_Social_Inclusion_the_Museum_and_the_Dynamics_of_Sectoral_Change

Tamma, M., & Artico, C. I. (2015). Co-production practices between museums and culture-based companies. Department of Management, Università Ca'Foscari Venezia Working Paper, (2015/10).

Thyne, M., & Hede, A. M. (2016). Approaches to managing co-production for the co-creation of value in a museum setting: when authenticity matters. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(15–16), 1478–1493.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2016.1198824>

Witte, K. D., & Geys, B. (2013). Citizen coproduction and efficient public good provision: Theory and evidence from local public libraries. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 224(3), 592–602. doi: 10.1016/j.ejor.2012.09.002

Wodak, R. (2015). Critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach. *The international encyclopedia of language and social interaction*, 3.

Zan, L., Baraldi, S. B., & Gordon, C. (2007). CULTURAL HERITAGE BETWEEN CENTRALISATION AND DECENTRALISATION: Insights from the Italian context. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 13(1), 49–70.
<https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10286630701201723>

Zan, L., Baraldi, S. B., & Santagati, M. E. (2018). Missing HRM: the original sin of museum reforms in Italy. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 33(6), 530–545.
<https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/09647775.2018.1537608>

Appendix

Appendix A): Semi-Structured Interview Guide:

Introduction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ice-breaker eg. Ask about the museum- What is your role?	5 mins.
----------------------	---	---------

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How long have you been working at the museum? - What is your career background? 	
Dimension 1: Participation (Co-production)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe your museum's current engagement with local communities and other stakeholders? 2. Does your museum implement forms of co-production? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, could you provide specific examples of co-production projects or initiatives your museum has undertaken? 3. What roles do local communities or other stakeholders typically have in these co-production processes? 4. What challenges or barriers has the museum faced in implementing co-production? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, how did you overcome them? 5. How do you assess the impact or success of co-production initiatives within your museum? 6. In your opinion, to what extent do these co-production activities reflect broader European policies on participatory governance, particularly since the Faro Convention? 	+/- 20 mins
Dimension 2: Autonomy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe the autonomy your museum has gained through the recent reforms?/ How/In what way is your museum autonomous? 2. Can you describe specific changes in management or operational processes which resulted from the increased autonomy? 	+/- 20 mins

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Has greater autonomy facilitated more innovation or experimentation in your museum's operations? 4. Are there aspects of autonomy you feel are still lacking or need improvement? 5. In your experience, has increased autonomy directly supported the adoption of more participatory governance approaches? 	
Dimension 3: Efficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you perceive the relationship between the museum's increased autonomy and its operational efficiency? 2. Have autonomy reforms resulted in visible improvements in museum services, visitor satisfaction or financial performance? 3. How does your museum measure its efficiency? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the criteria? 4. Could you discuss specific examples where greater autonomy led to improved resource allocation or decision-making processes? 5. Have efficiency improvements influenced your museum's ability or willingness to engage in more participatory and co-production initiatives? 	+/- 20 mins
Conclusion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask if they want to add any additional insights or clarifications 	

Appendix B): Codebook showcasing the coding process (in reverse order) of the interviews, from the broader theme on the left, back down to the main catgeorical codes that emerged from the initial codes on the right.

Themes	Code Groups	Codes
4.2 Partial Autonomy	Localized Governance and On-site Presence Role of Directors Autonomy Limited by Structural Constraints	Away from Soprintendenza Financial autonomy Reliance on Ministry funds
4.3 Co-production as a Core Strategic Practice	Increased Institutional Co-production Community Engagement Diversified and Innovative Initiatives Co-production as Resilient Strategy	Public-Private-Partnerships Involvement with local communities Music festival in Sepino Local community as resource
4.4 Relative Efficiency	Managerial Efficiency through Local Control Structural Barriers to Efficiency People and Collaborations as Solution to Inefficiencies	Increase in visitors after autonomy Understaffed Reggia Museums as Networks

