

Everyone's collections at Art Museums: groundbreaking digital business strategy as cornerstone for synergies¹

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper: *This paper aims to investigate how an innovative digital strategy of a museum could develop new avenues for business and social value, looking into its role as a booster of competitive advantage for cultural institutions and as a possible source of socio-cultural development.*

Methodology: *The research project focuses on the analysis of the Rijksmuseum's re-opening strategy, using a case-based qualitative and recursive approach, where the outcome of each phase has been the starting point of the following phase.*

Findings: *"Open digital-cultural contents" make art and culture more accessible, stimulating people to value Cultural Heritage, heightening the level of cultural participation by lowering the threshold to experience culture and art. This e-strategy has been the precondition to develop synergies and alliances, moving towards a creative economy by catalysing spillovers in a wide range of economic and social contexts.*

Research limits: *This is a case-based research paper with contextual factors, but we consider the data to be particularly suitable for illustrating and extending relationships and logic among constructs.*

Practical implications: *The research contributes to better unlock the potential of the digital-cultural-contents leading to understanding of how to boost the durability of cultural organizations and unlock the potential of cultural and creative industries (CCIs).*

Originality of the paper: *Identifying synergies emerging from museums' groundbreaking digital-strategies adds significantly to the body of knowledge on the topic of innovation management in the cross-fertilization territories of the CCIs.*

Key words: digital strategy; digital-open-content; cultural heritage; museum; synergies; alliances

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1. Introduction

Nowadays Cultural Heritage, which is included in the broader concept of Cultural Capital (Throsby, 1994, 2001), is well founded and assumed to be an asset which offers an innovative and open ambiance that stimulates creative thinking (Florida, 2002, 2009; Kourtiti *et al.*, 2011; McKinley, 1998). As sources of creativeness, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) needs to be managed, developed and communicated effectively (Throsby, 2001). Re-imagining the management of cultural content, in order to find paths able to boost as a long-term value, the cultural participation of the public and the development of Cultural Heritage means finding new ways to communicate that Cultural Heritage effectively, proactively and coherently within the new postmodern era.

The “*visual culture*”, qualified by this modern tendency to picture or visualize existence (Mirzoeff, 1999)², characterises Postmodern culture, placing an increasing premium on rendering experience in visual form. In the current epoch of overabundance of content and products it is extremely difficult to catch consumers’ attention. This is not different in the cultural domain where the variety of cultural activities and cultural products is wide and deep. Moreover, this age is characterised not only by a (*digital*) *image culture* but also by widespread *open design*. A plethora of images and open contents - co-created, manipulated and downloadable - are available on the Internet for everyone and everywhere; organising cultural-content projects requires taking into consideration both the new technologies and the new approach regarding content, text and images³. Digital technologies⁴ are flexible tools which can be used to boost business and social synergies, such as social cohesion and culture dissemination, capitalising the mechanisms of the *visual culture* paradigm (Mirzoeff, 1999). The work presented here can contribute to better unlocking the potential of (open) digital-cultural contents, on both business and socio-cultural dimensions, within today’s image culture.

Throsby (1994, 2005) has well expressed a reading of the Cultural Capital as economic capital. In any case, in order to sustainably manage the value of Cultural Capital, it is also necessary to understand the peculiarity of this asset (as compared to the economic capital tout court), which is its generation of a flow of income that needs to be measured in both terms of monetary-value and cultural-value (Throsby, 1997). Moreover such value, in its various dimensions⁵, needs to be democratically accessible to the community; in other words, it must be enjoyed by everyone (Benhamou, 2001).

² “Visual culture does not depend on pictures but on this modern tendency to picture or visualise existence” (Mirzoeff, 2012, p.6)

³ From the interview of the digital communication manager of the Rijksmuseum, P. Gorgels.

⁴ We refer to digital technology in general, as well as to the communication and marketing tools (like social media) where digital technology has a high impact on a new target audience.

⁵ Economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu), but also different value dimensions; monetary-value and cultural-value (Throsby).

Trying to discover strategies to manage Cultural Heritage sustainably (coherent with the postmodern *digital-image culture*, with the multiple dimensions of value presented by this Asset and with the necessity to make its Value democratically accessible to the community) this research focuses its attention on the institutions of a specific cultural industry: art and historical museums.

The endeavour is to understand how these cultural institutions can maintain, enhance and develop Cultural Heritage, boosting the participation of the public through re-imagined *digital cultural-content*. On top of this, the present study addresses the impact of this re-imagined *digital cultural content*, highlighting the possible avenues that open new perspectives on the relationship between cultural institutions and creative industries (CCIs), highlighting, moreover, the acceleration of the spillover effect of CCIs on other industries and on society at large⁶.

CCIs are advanced frontiers of contemporary economic development, a productive dimension that generates both cultural innovation and innovation tout-court (Sacco, 2011), which derive nourishment from the creativity with which it is at once permeated (Calcagno, 2013). Furthermore, increased exposure to the world of arts and culture translates into higher creative capabilities (Kloosterman, 2005; Fusco Girard *et al.*, 2012; Kourtitt *et al.*, 2011; Camagni, 2012), necessary requirements in a learning society where the ability to manage new skills is strategic (Bradburne, 2004).

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, investigated in this case study research, has “re-invented itself during its renovation”⁷, opting to extend its virtual museum instead of enlarging the *brick-and-mortar* one, coherent with the opportunity of the available technology, with the *digital-visual cultural* paradigm (Mirzoeff, 2012) and with the management board’s important guideline “less is more”⁸. Creating its *Virtual Identity* through the Rijks Studio project, the Rijksmuseum has re-imagined the meaning (Verganti, 2008) of *digital cultural-content*, re-functionalizing its collection to generate strategic synergies as well as a flow of “*cultural outcomes*”⁹, “some of which accrue to society at large as public-good benefits, arising from the existence of these items of the cultural capital stock” (Throsby, 2005, p. 8). On one hand, Rijksmuseum’s new strategy is stimulating the Cultural Heritage Cycle (Thurley, 2005)¹⁰, promoting the participation of citizens in the cultural life of society (European Commission, 2010), while on the other hand, it is boosting creativity tout-court, both in (creative) industries and in the broader socio-cultural environment. These are some spillovers¹¹ of this approach; in addition, some important synergies have been achieved

⁶ As suggested by the European Commission in the “Green paper. Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries” (European Commission, 2010 p 19).

⁷ From an interview with the general director, W. Pijbes.

⁸ From an interview with the director of the collection and member of the board, T. Dibbits.

⁹ We refer to John Smyrk’s definition of “outcome” proposed in the ITO model (Smyrk, 1995), which is discussed in paragraph 5.1.

¹⁰ See footnote 75.

¹¹ Positive spill over effects refers to some external processes and some “positive side-effects” which arose from the implementation of the Rijksmuseum’s strategy innovation.

through the “*advanced management*” (Calcagno and Cavriani, 2014b)¹² of the strategy of Amsterdam’s museum. In particular, the research has analysed *mutual reinforcing* (Porter, 1996) in the implementation of the corporate strategy and effective management of alliances, which had boosted strategic-alignment synergies as well as cooperation synergies, business developments and financial matching¹³.

The study aims to add to the body of knowledge regarding the entrepreneurial re-use of cultural-content in order to develop innovative applications, innovative culturally sensitive products and concepts, that are able to communicate art and history in a ground-breaking way, reducing the distance between museums, their collections and the public¹⁴, and disseminating culture (Calcagno and Cavriani, 2014a). The observation has lit up avenues which can boost, through art museums’ strategy innovation, a fertile environment for creativity, propelling economic and social wealth and answering the question, “How to accelerate the spillover effects of CCI on other industries and society at large?” that was posed by the European Commission in 2010 (p. 19).

The present study endeavours to gain deeper understanding of how to boost synergies in the strategy innovation management of art museums, enhancing groundbreaking digital business strategy as a source of competitive advantage, financial sustainability and socio-cultural development.

2. Looking for synergies

2.1 The concept of synergy

Synergy means ‘combined action’: it is a universal law of nature which provides a particular effect in a system of interacting elements: a dynamic effect connected with cooperation, it is a phenomenon that occurs at the junction of different elements (Kowalska, 2012). As synergy results from an economic activity in total, it can be analysed in the economic field through a holistic approach (Zhao, 2005). Thus, in economics, synergy is connected with the endless process of (re-) combining resources (Kowalska, 2012), where it is possible to achieve a mutual strengthening (Porter, 1996, 1998), amplifying the effects of two or more related elements (Miller, 1996), which boost combined effects as a result of the cooperation.

¹² In this research paper the “advanced manufacturing” approach has been proposed, “advanced management” is assumed to have the same characteristics.

¹³ We refer to the “matching-funds model” proposed by Bradburne (2004) that, referring to the “Metzler effect”, takes the Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) approach, namely by leveraging also private support, like that implemented by the Mak.frankfurt.

¹⁴ Interestingly enough this brave approach has been able to reach a new target public (the young generation defined in the Rijks Studio strategy plan as “culture snackers”). With its e-strategy target, the museum is renewing the audience or, in other words, the end-user of the Cultural Heritage held in the Museum’s collection.

Ansoff (1965; 1988) introduced the concept of synergy into strategic management, describing synergy as the combined effect¹⁵ available to a diversified firm, suggesting that it can produce a combined return on resources greater than the sum of its individual parts¹⁶. However, this approach stresses just its positive effects, implying that synergy merely provides positive effects. Interpreting synergy as a cooperation of elements, however, which could cause different effects (Ensign, 1998), more recent researchers have noted that the effects of synergy can be positive, negative (dis-synergy) or null (a-synergy) (Kowalska, 2012).

The effect of synergy is therefore the difference between the total combined effect (realized as a result of cooperating elements) and the base effect (realized by non-cooperating elements) (Kowalska, 2012)¹⁷. Of course, this research focuses on the positive synergies, that have boosted the *outcomes* (Smyrk, 1995) of the Rijksmuseum's virtual identity project. In particular, it focuses on the interpretation of Davis and Thomas (1993) regarding super-additivity in the evaluation of business combinations¹⁸.

2.2 *Strategies' alignment and cooperation by way of alliances to boost synergies*

The reasons why enterprises succeed or fail is the central question in strategy, which is bound with how they choose, develop, implement and manage strategy. "Any effort to understand success must rest on an underlying theory of the firm¹⁹ and an associated theory of strategy" (Porter, 1991, p. 95).

Strategy is the means of integrating the activities of diverse functional departments within a firm²⁰; in other words, to have the chance to succeed, it is necessary to integrate the different functional strategies with a broader corporate strategy. "An explicit and mutually reinforcing set of goals and

¹⁵ Ensign (1998) reminds that Hofer and Schendel (1978) referred to synergy as "joint effects", moreover, suggesting the development of interrelationships as a way to obtain synergy.

¹⁶ He proposed the intuitive formula $2 + 2 = 5$ to describe that firms' combined performance may be greater than a simple aggregate of their parts.

¹⁷ $efs_{syn} = ef(A+B) - (ef(A) + ef(B))$ where: efs_{syn} = synergy effect, $ef(A+B)$ = total (combined) effect, realized as a result of the cooperation of element A with element B, $(ef(A) + ef(B))$ = base effect, realized by independent (non-cooperating) elements A and B (Kowalska, 2012). In other words, "synergy potential does not fully translate into actual synergies" (Knoll, 2008 p. 14) namely, synergy is a net effect between total synergy potential and realization costs (Knoll, 2008).

¹⁸ "Such revenue super-additivities are associated with the combination and transfer of complementary resources to capture growth opportunities across businesses rather than with sharing similar resources to increase efficiency (cf. Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Tanriverdi and Venkatraman, 2005). We term these valuable revenue super-additivities from combining complementary operative resources across businesses growth synergies (Knoll, 2008).

¹⁹ One of the essential conditions (Andrews, 1971, 1987) to explain success is that of developing and implementing an internally consistent set of goals and functional policies which collectively define an enterprise's positioning.

²⁰ Including marketing, production, research and development, procurement, finance and the like.

functional policies is needed to counter the centrifugal forces that lead functional departments in separate directions” (Porter, 1991, p. 96). This internally consistent set of goals and policies could be boosted by strategies’ internal alignment. Strategy implementation is a process of action, which is a connection of elements and tasks, as well as their cooperation (Goold and Campbell, 2000). There is a strong perception of the concept of synergy in the context of corporate strategy (Andrews, 1971; Ansoff, 1965, 1988; Pun, 2004). To achieve synergy, it is necessary that each task adds new value to the effect of the previous task (Kowalska, 2012). Another condition for success is that the set of goals and policies aligns the firm’s strengths and weaknesses with its external environments. “Strategy is the act of aligning a company and its environment” (Porter, 1991, p. 97). Both kinds of alignments - internal and external - are the place of synergy in relation to strategy.

In this research paper, with specific reference to e-business strategy, we will argue, on one hand, that it needs to be integrated²¹ with corporate and functional area strategies²² in order to boost synergies and develop an effective corporate strategy, while, on the other hand, that a ground-breaking e-strategy could be a cornerstone for further synergies by way of alliances.

Synergy is in many cases perceived in the context of business cooperation, where two or more cooperating subsystems²³ produce more than the total sum of their production would have been, had they been working separately. In order to understand these joint effects Davis *et al.*, (1992) tested relatedness and resource sharing. This effect of synergy is connected with the mutual work of these sub-systems that, because of their connection, are able to produce mutually reinforcing activities (Porter, 1996, 1998; Miller, 1996; Fluck and Lynch, 1999; Siggelkow, 2002).

Cross-business synergies have been conceptualised in the corporate-strategy literature (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1996, 1998; Goold and Campbell, 2000) where the research has focused on studying the impact on performance of the relatedness between businesses of diversified firms (Rumelt, 1982; Berger and Ofek, 1995; Harrison *et al.*, 2001), most of them capturing the benefits of cost-sub-additivities (economies of scope) from sharing similar resources across businesses (Davis and Thomas 1993; Martin, 2002; Tanriverdi and Venkatraman, 2005).

Recently, however, relationships among businesses have been studied not only for how they lead to cost-sub-additivities, but also for how they lead to value-enhancing revenue-super-additivities, namely profitable corporate growth (Davis and Thomas, 1993; Tanriverdi and Venkatraman, 2005). This research paper focuses on these revenues, which are associated with the combination and transfer of complementary resources to capture

²¹ To examine in depth the central role of alliances in e-business strategy connected with the concept of the virtual organisation (Rowley, 2002, Venkatraman, 2000).

²² Tallon (2007) suggested that alignment should be tightest in processes that are considered critical to each firm’s strategic focus.

²³ According to Chakravarthy and Lorange (1991) synergy describes how each cooperating entity strengthens each of their competitive positions by sharing capabilities.

growth opportunities across businesses, rather than with the sharing of similar resources for efficiency (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Tanriverdi and Venkatraman, 2005). In this case, the alliances effectively developed by the cultural institution are stable cross-business collaborations looking for a kind of “advanced outsourcing” in order to develop other businesses or to gain consistency among the core organisational elements and systems (Siggelkow, 2002). They are strategic alliances from a resource-based point of view, developed to access other firms’ resources for the purpose of garnering otherwise unavailable competitive advantages and values for the firm (Das and Teng, 2003; Ray *et al.*, 2004). These alliances are “cooperative relationships driven by a logic of strategic resource needs and social resource opportunities” (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1996, p. 137).

This research focuses on cross-business opportunities in the area in which creative and cultural industries overlap and between juridically independent enterprises. These are open-minded alliances, considering how the art museum’s management board has developed the framework of the partner analysis²⁴ and alliance conditions (Das and Teng, 2003), which is coherent, interestingly, with the guideline “less is more”²⁵ and the pillar value “the collection is of everyone”. Moreover, such combinations have the highest impact force on the chosen elements of the external environment (Kowalska, 2012, p 105).

This research aims to analyse synergies concerning a dynamic management (Porter, 1991; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000)²⁶ to achieve the alignment of the organization with its internal environment (synergies and strategy) and with its external environment (synergy and alliances), arranging resources to achieve competitive advantage, financial sustainability and socio-cultural development.

The change management of the re-opened Rijksmuseum, which re-invented itself by creating a *virtual museum*²⁷, was developed by considering both the internal and external alignment and also by looking for emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 1979, 1987; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Porter, 1991), coherent with the corporate objective and always guided by certain shared values, which are heart-and-soul themes around which the organization has rallied, such as “less is more” and “the collection is of everyone”. The evidence of this path will emerge from the presentation of the case study, which will allow a deeper understanding of the relations between the art museum’s ground-breaking digital business strategy, its management of alliances and its achievement of competitive advantage and financial sustainability.

Therefore, the research question of this study is the following: “How could innovation in strategy by an art museum through a ground-breaking digital business strategy be a source of competitive advantage, financial

²⁴ Market and resource analysis.

²⁵ For example see footnote 62: “Other platforms should be”.

²⁶ A process, which is on-going, involving continuous fine-tuning, adjusting and responding to changes in circumstances.

²⁷ A Museum without borders of time or space, ideally able to boost cultural experience whenever and everywhere, interestingly with the objective to let people get in contact with the collection not on view in the new Rijksmuseum outfitting, because of the “less is more” approach, the Museum has selected 8,000 pieces of artworks for display, out of a total of 1.1 million objects.

sustainability and socio-cultural development?” Or, in other words, “What are the relations between the success of the Rijksmuseum and its digital strategy?” The consistent aim is to comprehend how Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum is achieving the maximum strategy *effectiveness*, “finding ... a combination which has the highest impact force on the chosen elements of external environment” (Kowalska, 2012, p. 105).

3. Framework of the research: antecedent and methodology

The study presented in this paper is case-based (Eisenhardt, 1989; Siggelkow, 2007; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2014) and uses a qualitative approach (Myers, 2013; Ellis and Levy, 2008). The research process is characterized by a recursive approach among different, albeit connected, research questions and cases, all on the same topic: strategy and innovation management in CCIs with a special focus on cross-fertilization territories.

The research started in 2013. To meet its objectives and following the recursive approach, the outcome of each phase has been the starting point of the following step. Therefore, the research path consists of interdependent phases (with a similar research problem²⁸ and coherent research goals²⁹) and this research paper is focused on the third.

The study of the overlap between the domains of arts, creativity and management started at the end of the 1990s and is still on-going, producing various areas of cross-fertilization and stimulating a critical thought on the possible or actual relationship between arts and management (Scherdin and Zander, 2011). The main pillars, on which the overlappings are based, are design, creativity and entrepreneurship. These are, at the same time, the key words and reference points of a highly celebrated territory, a sort of “middle earth” (Calcagno, 2013) where hybridization between arts and management takes place, creating new conditions of economic value, but also urging management research to develop critical thinking regarding the patterns through which this relationship comes true. The first step of the research here has therefore focused on this overlapping, proposing some interpretations of the above-mentioned interactions.

In the second stage, the research focused on the emerging intersection between the domains of arts and management, discussing the design process as one of these merging areas of cross-fertilization. The design process has experienced, before any other field, a fatal attraction towards the cultural world, typically using the cultural dimension to re-invent the concept of products. Furthermore, the word “design” identifies a process of generation, which is at the same time an expression of creative thinking and also essential in any kind of entrepreneurial activity. Design is then the

²⁸ Contributing to better understanding the relationships, the logic and the opportunities of “effects between fields”, especially in the cross-border area of CCIs.

²⁹ Finding ways to develop synergies which could boost social and economical spillovers for both creative and cultural industries and more generally for the maintenance and enhancement of Cultural Heritage.

strategic axis on which the above-mentioned “middle earth” is based, the *file rouge* between art and management and the process shared between artists and entrepreneurs in transforming a creative idea in a project of innovation.

In order to explore this idea, the second research stage analysed the case study of Droog, a design company based in Amsterdam and working at the fuzzy borders between the arts and design³⁰. More specifically, the research has focused on the analysis and interpretation of an open innovation project (Chesbrough, 2003) launched by Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and joined by Droog. Using emerging data the work proposed a model of “sustainable cultural development”, identifying an area of meaningful and promising cross-pollination between the worlds of culture and design, opening a new perspective on the relationship between cultural and creative industries.

After a literature review of design management and an inductive analysis based on the case study “Droog and its collaboration with the Rijks Studio”, the second research stage resolved its research questions³¹ proposing an alternative perspective on design, adopting what had emerged as a new model of design-led-innovation, where cultural regeneration may be realized through the design of artefacts incorporating specific cultural codes. In the suggested path, the world of art and culture can use design as a driver to increase its value by communicating itself through the design of artefacts, thus reaching the external world more effectively, reinforcing Cultural Heritage at the same time towards a new model of innovation. The suggested “*Design-to-Boost Culture*” approach re-functionalized design's ability to create value by boosting culture and art (Calcagno and Cavriani, 2014a). This design approach (developing society's knowledge and sensitivity about different kinds of art in order to attract customers to art and culture and suggesting new ways to live the consumption experience) transforms design language into a tool for the Cultural Heritage Cycle development (Thurley, 2005), giving culture a way to pass through the products using them to shape a new relationship with the customer. At the same time, it interprets the supposed relationship between cultural and creative industries that, becoming more than a simple combination of different industries, can be based on cross-business synergy and co-development, aimed at producing sustainable innovation by generating social and cultural, in addition to economic, impact³².

During the data collection and analysis of the second research phase, we discovered that the sparkling process of design that we named “*Design-to-Boost Culture*” was the result of a collaboration between the Rijksmuseum

³⁰ Since its founding, Droog has pioneered new directions for design discourse, radically experimenting in the design of products, experiences, concepts and events.

³¹ “Could design give value to the cultural and artistic domain?” “Is it possible to imagine a path through which the design world could support the sustainability and development of Cultural Heritage?”

³² The first project coherent with the Design-to-boost Culture approach (Calcagno and Cavriani, 2014a) has been an unexpected tattoo, referring to the “still life with flowers in vase” by Jan de Heem dated to the 17th Century and designed by Studio Droog. This artefact enabled the Museum to meet Street Culture (<https://studio.droog.com/studio/all/rijksmuseum/tattoo/>) and moreover has pioneered and communicated the opportunities offered by the Rijks Studio (boosting the e-strategy of the museum).

and Droog, which was interestingly driven by the art museum. On the occasion of its re-opening (in 2013) after a ten-year restoration, the museum launched the “Rijks Studio” official site, a ground-breaking online presentation of 125,000³³ works of art from its collection. To celebrate this digital milestone, the Museum approached several leading international designers, architects and artists to become pioneers of Rijks Studio by selecting some pieces from the online collection and using them creatively to produce a new artwork or series of products. This project thus strengthened the idea that a process of innovation could be launched thanks to the proactive “use” of Cultural Heritage. However, there was something more here than the re-functionalization of “centuries-old works reinterpreted in contemporary shapes, functions, techniques and materials”³⁴ (Ramakers and Jaworska, 2014, p. 161). The additional effects were the boosting of the connection between people, art and history and of the development of Cultural Heritage through the communication of cultural codes, which were core to this path of design development.

Exactly these findings and suggestions for further research directions, received at the Egos Conference 2014 during the presentation of the second-phase paper, have driven the start of the third research stage treated in this paper, which concerns cultural institutions in order to better understand the potential impact of the relationships, the logic and the opportunities of “effects between fields” in the cross-border areas of CCI³⁵.

The specific research goal of this current phase has been to understand how cultural institutions like art museums could sustainably maintain, enhance and develop Cultural Heritage, boosting the participation of the public as well as the spillover effect in the cross-territories between the cultural and creative industries. The endeavour is intended to gain deeper understanding regarding how to boost synergies in the strategic innovation of art museums, enhancing ground-breaking digital-business strategies as source of competitive advantage, financial sustainability and socio-cultural development.

It was swiftly discovered that the collaborations boosted by the art Museum were multiple and different both for the characteristics of the partnerships and for their strategic objectives. Some were complementary³⁶ - optimising the internet’s contribution to their core business - and some were designed with specific objectives, to reinforce the contribution of the e-strategy to the core business as well as to the strategies of other functional areas (Pun, 2003, 2004; Pun *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, this third phase of the research began firstly with a review literature and secondly with interviews of the art museum’s managers/directors and some of the different partners cooperating with the Rijksmuseum.

³³ At the moment, they are 200,000.

³⁴ Explicative examples are the project “Masterpieces by Droog and the Rijksmuseum” (<http://www.droog.com/news/2013/04/masterpieces-droog-rijksmuseum/>) and the project “Rijksmuseum: Rijksstudio m2” presented by Droog during the Fuori Salone del Mobile in Milan in 2014 (<http://www.droog.com/news/2014/04/droog-milan-2014/>).

³⁵ The research problem at all stages of the research.

³⁶ See footnote 62.

Reviewing literature concerning art museums' management (Bradburne, 1999, 2002, 2004; Grattan and Langeven, 2007; Bakhshi and Throsby 2010; Calcagno and Faccipieri, 2010, 2011; Calcagno and Biscaro, 2012; Bonacini, 2011, 2012; Cecchini, 2013) with particular attention to the impact of digital technology on the new ways of interaction between the museum and its audience, we immediately perceived that this case study would be highly representative thanks to its ground-breaking digital business strategy. Therefore, the research turned to an analysis of the literature concerning the synergies between the e-strategy and the corporate strategy (Rowley, 2002; Pun, 2003, 2004; Pun *et al.*, 2004; Tallon, 2007). The connection between synergies and alliances (Ensign, 1998; Das and Teng, 2000, 2003; Knoll, 2008; Christoffersen *et al.*, 2012) emerged as another academic research field coherent with the features of the case study.

As an effect of the literature review, the research question was clarified and focused: "How could an innovation in strategy by an art museum through a ground-breaking digital-business strategy be a source of competitive advantage, financial sustainability and socio-cultural development?" Or, in other words, "What are the relations between the success of the Rijksmuseum and its digital strategy?"

The gathering of the data for the case began with collecting information available on the web³⁷, in order to gain the knowledge to effectively manage the direct interviews. Further data have been collected from primary sources: interviews, meetings and colloquia with directors and managers of the Rijksmuseum and the analysis of its financial reports³⁸. During these semi-structured in-depth interviews, (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), the subjects of strategic innovation and digital strategy were discussed, as well as the subjects of alliances and collaborations. As collaborations are between two entities - the museum and its different partners - the research has collected information interviewing both the Rijksmuseum's managers and some of its partners in order to compare and match the data more objectively and to better understand the collaborations' characteristics (interviewing again the business director of Droog³⁹ and some other managers of the companies' network developed and boosted by the cultural institution)⁴⁰. Most

³⁷ E.g. video interviews, articles in Dutch and international newspapers, papers proposed for presentations at the re-opening by Rijksmuseum's managers and "rumours" on social media.

³⁸ Taco Dibbits, director of the collection of the museum and member of the board of directors, responsible for the new corporate strategy and for the new approach of the collection's outfitting in the *brick-and-mortar* restored museum. He was already part of the organization at the beginning of the renovation, which means he is the memory and the upholder/supporter of all the renovation-reopening strategy development and implementation. Peter Gorgels, manager of digital communication, responsible for the digital project Rijks Studio, the *virtual identity* of the museum. Marjolijn Meynen, the head of communications and marketing. Hendrikje Crebolder, the head of development and general director Wim Pijbes.

³⁹ Machiel Brautigam. In the first research phase the co-founder and president of Droog Renny Ramakers and the manager of Studio Droog Marielle Janmaat were also interviewed.

⁴⁰ Some users of the platform Etsy, together with the Rijks Studio project, and collaborators/users of Peecho.

observations and interviews (recorded, lasting on average 75 minutes) were subsequently been triangulated in order to discuss and let the critical points emerge.

The findings reveal that for art museums a ground-breaking digital business strategy, like a *digital-open-content* collection, bolstered by tight-fit (Siggelkow, 2002) alliances can be a cornerstone for synergies. The alliances need to be driven by an emergent strategy with internal and external fit. The connected synergies lead the digital strategy to be internally and externally effective, able to boost economic, financial and socio-cultural spillovers.

4. Ground-breaking digital business strategy and alliance management: the case-study of Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum

4.1 "Less is more" and "Rijksmuseum's collection belongs to everyone"

The chain of causality of this case study goes back to the period of the restoring of the Rijksmuseum. It began in 2004 and was expected to take five years. Instead, it has effectively taken ten. From the beginning, one of the most important guidelines, "less is more", boosted the decision-making process; therefore, the museum's refurbishment has not involved (in contrast to many other museums) the expansion of the *brick-and-mortar*⁴¹. Contextually, the new outfitting was conceived to follow the same guideline; the exhibited collection in the "new" Rijksmuseum counts about 8.000 artworks out of a total collection of 1.1 million objects⁴². As the restoration was taking more time than estimated, the management board tried to transform the delay into an advantage, deciding to use this longer period of being unable to exhibit the collection by focusing its attention on the artworks' digitalization at the highest possible quality⁴³. This choice has driven important decisions around the restoration project, transforming it into a moment of re-invention of the art museum. Coherent with the decision not to expand the *brick-and-mortar*, and with the pillar value that the Museum's collection is everyone's heritage⁴⁴, the board decided

⁴¹ W. Pijbes stated: "We didn't need to build an extension. Big is big enough. I'm a foodie, but I don't like too many courses. I want us to focus and only have the best of the best. I believe in the strength of simplicity". The restored Rijksmuseum has a new entrance, an outdoor exhibition space with free entrance, an Asian pavilion, shops, restaurants, educational facilities and a renovated library.

⁴² Dibbits said, "Instead of fighting the building, we have embraced it and accepted its eccentricities". They want the public to get a sense of history, seeing the paintings, furniture and applied arts which were all conceived around the same time, "so rather than separating paintings from silver tapestries or furniture, as they had before, the curators have decided to tell the history of Dutch art from the Middle Ages to the 21st century".

⁴³ The highest-resolution images using the available technologies (2500 x 2500 pixels, 300 dpi). These are not "thumbnails," and there are no watermarks or sharing restrictions, which means they are of real value to the user.

⁴⁴ Dibbits, during the interview, defined the Rijksmuseum collection as "national collective memory" which "belongs to everyone".

to expand the virtual walls of the museum instead of the “concrete” ones, developing the idea to create a *virtual identity* for the Rijksmuseum - the Rijks Studio - consistent with the emergent new technological⁴⁵ and socio-cultural scenario⁴⁶.

This ground-breaking digital business strategy leans on open content on one side and on the high resolution of the image on the other side: the digital project, Rijks Studio, is an *advanced virtual museum* which makes the Museum's collection available to everyone.

The internally consistent new set of goals was translated into a new vision-mission of the Rijksmuseum: linking individuals with art and history, by allowing these to take on a new meaning for a broad-based, contemporary audience. In other words, the art museum was looking for a new key challenge, deciding to reduce the distance between the museum, its collection and the public, while targeting at the same time a new audience - the recalcitrant target of the “*culture snackers*”⁴⁷ - “letting them be attracted by the beauty of the images and trying to get them into the museum in the end, to experience the authenticity of the art” (Dibbits).

Interestingly enough, in defining this growth path, they have deliberately not given attention to benchmarks in their own industry, thinking that to be innovative it is necessary to look towards other fields⁴⁸. Rivetingly, moreover, during the restoration of the *brick-and-mortar*, the team responsible for the Rijks Studio project consulted a military think-tank regarding the forecasted digital and ICT technologies, with special focus on the (Web-) Computer-Mediated Communication (W-CMC). Their objective was to use the most advanced technologies to evaluate these increasingly important marketing-communication media in order to mobilise as much as possible visitors' engagement with the digital-content creation of the Rijks Studio. Receiving a technological framework forecast with only a three-year time horizon (and the restoration was far from finished), they decided to concentrate their energy on the quality of the digitalization and on the development of the visual concept, stressing the content of the e-strategy innovation over the selection of the W-CMC tools.

The values of simplicity, authenticity, quality and innovation have driven the development of the Rijks Studio project and together with the guideline “less is more” (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000) these supported strategic decisions that led to the chosen web concept, “with the minimum possible text and the highest possible quality of the image”⁴⁹. According to Peter Gorgels, the

⁴⁵ “New technological scenario” refers both to the possibility of high-resolution images (thanks to new tools for high-quality digitalisation) and high-quality of the image available on PCs, smartphones and tablet (accessible through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) tools) and to the new CMC technologies themselves.

⁴⁶ The socio-cultural scenario refers to the new (digital) *virtual culture* typical of postmodernism (Mirzoeff, 1999) and also to the widespread open-design approach.

⁴⁷ The teens and more generally young creative people, who love web opportunities like downloadable images available for free.

⁴⁸ From the interview with T. Dibbits.

⁴⁹ About the focus on the image: “Many museum websites present a wealth of information and data. Rijks Studio believes in the strength of the images themselves” (interview with P. Gorgels).

objective of the Web experience is to “earn attention by offering attractive content that is easy to share”. The previous website contained too much information and too many options, whereas the new concept, coherent with “less is more”, opted to focus on essential content⁵⁰. The layout has emphasised the value of the image: as Taco Dibbits said, “this is the ideal way to view an artwork, the picture in its full glory, uncluttered by information or buttons”.

The e-strategy mission - to bring the collection to the public - and its strategic principles were coherently implemented. The website had to be “lean and mean”, it had to be an open platform and it had to identify ways of reaching the public by surprising and seducing, whereby users would learn more and wish to return⁵¹. Interestingly enough, both the new mission and the new values have been the exegesis of the core pillar-values “Rijksmuseum’s collection belongs to everyone” and “less is more”; moreover these core pillar values have been fundamental to the implementation of the emerging strategies of the Rijksmuseum.

4.2 The e-strategy as a core element of the corporate strategy

The vision of the Museum, “The Rijksmuseum links individuals with art and history”⁵², reflects the mission of the Rijks Studio “to connect people, art, and history”. In order to let art and history adopt a new meaning for a broad-based, contemporary, national and international audience (paraphrasing the mission of the Rijksmuseum), the museum has implemented its e-strategy as a core element of its corporate strategy, bringing the collection to the broadest possible contemporary audience.

The mission of the Rijks Studio (connecting people, art and history) was clear from the beginning, but something in the strategy changed because environmental challenges were reconsidered. It was decided at the start to invite members of the public to create their own works of art by downloading images of the artworks and using them in a creative way, but deviating from the first concept, this boosted creative activity has also been made available for commercial applications, whereas previously it was only available for private applications⁵³. The core motivation for this new decision has been the forecast that otherwise the strategic potentiality of the Rijks Studio as a marketing tool of the museum would have been compromised, caused by a reduction in the positive impact of public

⁵⁰ “Anything else should be pushed into the background or omitted altogether” (interview with P. Gorgels).

⁵¹ “Although content-rich, the design of “virtual museum” often fails to rise above the level of a database intended more for administrative purposes than for aesthetic pleasure. The artworks are often shown as small thumbnails. If they can indeed be enlarged, there are various (technical) restrictions which stand in the way of a truly user-friendly experience” (interview with P. Gorgels).

⁵² The Vision of the museum is “The Rijksmuseum links individuals with art and history” and the Mission is “At the Rijksmuseum, art and history take on new meaning for a broad-based, contemporary national and international audience” (<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/organisation/vision-and-mission>)

⁵³ “Rijksstudio is exceptional ... because we actively encourage users to be creative in this way using the collection of the Rijks Museum available not only wherever and whenever, but also for every artistic development” (P. Gorgels).

engagement with the *viralisation* of the brand⁵⁴. The spillover effect in creative industries would not have been possible, so that the public would have been less interested in using the collection in a copyright-free creative way⁵⁵.

This change in the implementation of the digital strategy has been boosted by the emergent strategy, coherent with the corporate objective to use the Rijks Studio project to connect the museum's collection with a contemporary, (inter-)national audience and consistent with the marketing strategy to develop the awareness of the restyled brand of the art museum, fostering the *resonance* of the Rijksmuseum⁵⁶. The cultural open-content collection became a fully open source, usable also for commercial applications, boosting creative spillovers as well as marketing communication, (e. g. by letting the brand of the museum be presented during the Salone del Mobile di Milano 2013, conveying its re-opening thanks to the collaboration with Droog). This approach has led to increased participation by the (Dutch⁵⁷) audience with the Rijksmuseum and to a boost of the positive Cultural Heritage Cycle (Thurley, 2005) in Dutch society at large, mostly thanks to the Rijks Studio project.

Moreover, with its e-strategy (to achieve the corporate objective of connecting a broader target audience of people to art and history, enhancing the new external-environment opportunities) the Rijksmuseum approached a new target: the "culture-snacker", comprising a young audience that enjoys viewing images and sharing them with friends and followers, part of the prevailing image-heavy culture. Its new *virtual identity* created a new target group for the art museum on top of art professionals or art lovers⁵⁸; by mobilizing this new audience, the e-strategy gives the art museum a place within today's image culture. As Gorgels said "We shall invite and seduce the snackers. We shall inspire and engage the art lovers, enabling all to take their passion further. Ideally, we shall convert the snackers into true art lovers, and we shall connect with all site users to create mutual loyalty".

⁵⁴ "... we also wish to encourage people to publish our content on their own sites and blogs. The more who do so, the greater our outreach" (P. Gorgels).

⁵⁵ Results: Rijks Studio at the moment shows 200,000 digital images and has lodged 2.47 million visitors (the amount has doubled), 210,000 objects have been downloaded and 110,000 personal accounts have been created.

⁵⁶ The mission of the marketing strategy is to develop the awareness of the Rijksmuseum brand looking to boost the visitors' success (both in the *brick-and-mortar* museum and to the virtual museum Rijks Studio) and enhancing the support of the followers to the viralisation of the museum's brand using the social media for the word-of-mouth advertising. The number of visitors to the Museum has doubled (actually more than 4 million since reopening) exceeding expectations.

⁵⁷ After the reopening for the first time in years, the number of Dutch visitors exceeds the number of foreign visitors (L. Volkers interview, marketing director of the Rijks Museum).

⁵⁸ They applied the 80/20 rule, designing based on the assumption that 80 percent of visitors would represent the identified target groups. At the same time, the other 20 percent must also be able to find their way around. The result has been characterised by simplicity, and the design approach has drawn inspiration from generalist platforms.

4.3 Alliances: boosting synergies in the e-strategy and spillovers in the corporate objective

The idea of the *open collection* has first of all been a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project of the Rijksmuseum; in other words, the propelling motivation has been ethical: “the collection of the national museum is a (*national*) *collective memory* that belongs to everyone”.

The e-project has enhanced the available new technologies, letting the cultural-value of the Cultural Capital (Throsby, 2005) held in the museum’s collection, become democratically accessible to the community (Benhamou, 2001). In following the guideline “Rijksmuseum’s collection belongs to everyone” the board of the museum has enhanced this path, also boosting strategic synergies and certain spillovers (e.g. a sustainable management of the Cultural Capital).

The Rijks Studio project was conceived to drive the “*viralisation*” of the reopening of the Rijksmuseum and, in addition, to re-brand the “new” museum, to develop, in other words, its *resonance*. To facilitate these objectives and bring the online project to public attention, renowned designers and artists were asked to produce new artworks inspired by the Rijksmuseum’s collection and available through the *open content* Rijks Studio. One of these projects, joined by the design company Droog, was the case study of the second stage of this research⁵⁹. Grippingly, thanks to this collaboration, the Rijksmuseum has been represented for two years (2013 and 2014) at the Design Week in Milano: quite a groundbreaking and successful marketing operation for the art Museum⁶⁰.

Other collaborations of the same nature and with the same objectives (marketing and communication, *viralisation* of the brand) have been boosted by the art museum⁶¹ but, more interestingly from a strategy-synergy point of view, the museum started to develop other stable collaborations in order to support the “virtual organisation”⁶² necessary to optimise the contribution of the internet to its core objectives, extending applications and increasing the community dependency to boost the brand awareness of the museum. This goal has also been very important for the museum’s capacity to attract supporters and partners because, as Dollinger *et al.* (1997) wrote, a firm’s reputation encourages decision-makers to form

⁵⁹ The first product with cultural codes embedded in the design concept has been the remarkable tattoo. See footnote 32. For more information about this collaboration, we refer to the research paper concerning the second stage of the research (Calcagno and Cavriani, 2014a).

⁶⁰ See footnote 34.

⁶¹ Fashion designer Alexander van Slobbe produced a dress and a shawl, which De Bijenkorf sold in a limited edition of 100 pieces; Christian Borstlap produced a stunning video animation in which he brings to life various prints from the collection; the fashion brand Ladresse by Simone van Trojen has developed dresses with embedded cultural code.

⁶² “Collaborations are a useful vehicle for enhancing knowledge in critical areas of functioning where the requisite level of knowledge is lacking and cannot be developed within an acceptable timeframe or cost” (Madhok, 1997, p 43). And, coherently with this, Gorgels said “Other platforms should be used where possible rather than building everything ourselves”.

a strategic alliance with it. Two partnerships that have been necessary to support the e-strategy objectives and the internet presence are Etsy⁶³ and Peecho. These two open platforms (the first a peer-to-peer e-commerce website focused on handmade and vintage, and the second a cloud-print on-demand service) are ways to reach millions of potential followers⁶⁴, boosting the creative use of the Rijks Studio as well as extending the sharing and cropping of the collection, enhancing and exploiting the latest digital technology and digital trends.

From a resource-based point of view (Das and Teng, 2000), these are service partnerships, a kind of distribution agreement; however, looking more deeply, they are strategic alliances⁶⁵ that boost strategic synergies. Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996, p.137) view alliances as “cooperative relationships, driven by a logic of strategic resource needs and social resource opportunities”. Thus, the partnerships with the two platforms are a joint marketing and promotion partnership with which the museum is able to boost - simultaneously and synergically⁶⁶ - the corporate objective (connecting more effectively individuals with art and history, increasing the target audience of people who can be connected with the collection and boosting a positive Cultural Heritage Cycle) and its e-strategy (bringing the collection more effectively to the people), as well as its marketing strategy (developing the museum’s brand awareness, to increase the number of potential visitors⁶⁷ using word-of-mouth advertising) and last but not least its financial strategy (increasing the reputation of the museum and the visibility of its brand to leverage also private financial support) coherent with the model of public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The research analysed the logic of the decisions regarding these alliances based on the Resource-Based Rationals (Das and Teng, 2000)⁶⁸, namely “maximizing firm value through gaining access to other firms’ valuable resources” (Ramanathan *et al.*, 1997)⁶⁹.

The above-described framework of highly interdependent elements (Miller, 1981; Porter, 1996) is an example of the synergies developed by the alignment of the e-strategy with the corporate strategy which, fostering tight-fit alliances, is furthermore able to boost financial synergies to improve

⁶³ “Rijksstudio (Rijksmuseum) introduces its digital images to be used by Etsy” (<https://www.etsy.com/it/pages/rijksstudio>). Etsy is the world’s largest platform for handmade and vintage products.

⁶⁴ Etsy has 40 million clients all over the world.

⁶⁵ “Strategic alliances are voluntary cooperative inter-firm agreements aimed at achieving competitive advantage for the partners ... The critical part played by technology and speed in the new competitive calculus, among other factors, has led to the contention that the key to success in the coming years lies in the creation of collaborative advantage through strategic alliances” (Das and Teng, 2000).

⁶⁶ Thanks to the tightly coupled organisation of resources, which boosts mutually reinforcing activities (Porter, 1996) creating and sustaining tightly reinforcing elements (Siggelkow, 2001, 2002).

⁶⁷ That effectively has increased enormously, exceeding the budgeted target of the restoring business plan for restauration.

⁶⁸ And not on the Transaction Cost Rationale: “Minimizing the sum of production and transaction costs” (p. 35, referring to Kogut)

⁶⁹ See footnote 62.

the sustainability of the cultural institution.

4.4 Examples of synergies and spillovers: sustainability of Cultural Capital

The sustainable “matching-funds model” (Bradburne, 2004) of the Rijksmuseum, coherent with the PPPs approach, is greatly boosted by the synergies that originated from the ground-breaking e-strategy and its alignment with corporate strategy and by the strong commitment with the guideline (shared value) “the collection is of everyone”.

The ground-breaking digital strategy - to let the museum’s collection become totally copyright-free, on-line and open content, to democratise the consumption of art, making it accessible and usable online to the widest possible audience - has been the core element leading the Rijksmuseum to receive a million-euro grant from the National Lottery for Culture, BankGiroLoterij⁷⁰.

The marketing director of the Rijksmuseum, Volkens, said “We are very enthusiastic, the BankGiroLoterij has sponsored Rijks Studio because one of their objectives is to exhibit culture to a broader audience”. The managing director of the BankGiroLoterij, Marieke van Schaik, said “We are proud to be a partner of the Rijksmuseum (because) we are two organizations with the same mission”. And Pijbes, managing director of the Rijks Museum, said “Without the BankGiroLottery, Dutch museums would not be able to take part in the international art market. Nor would we be able to succeed in our mission to ensure that the museum is accessible for everyone and for all ages”. Summarizing the spillovers: because of its open content, Rijksmuseum has received and is still receiving⁷¹ important financial support from the National Lottery, and because of its consistent implementation of e-strategy, it has boosted both the achievement of its marketing objectives (increasing brand awareness and the visibility of the art museum) and the successful democratisation of the collection. Additionally, because of its reputation, the Rijksmuseum is leveraging private support through partnerships (co-branding and marketing as well as business partnerships⁷²) and is moreover increasing the financial support derived from Dutch society through the friends/patron of the museum card⁷³, as well as from companies like ING Bank and KPN (the former national telecommunication company).

Interestingly, the whole strategic approach has fostered mutual fertilization between the identity of the Dutchmen and the Rijksmuseum’s identity, now perceived by the community as a “*collective national memory*”⁷⁴. This is, of course, a success of the strategy innovation of

⁷⁰ The digitalisation project was financed by a million-euro (\$1.29 million) grant from the national BankGiro lottery, which provides funds for the arts and cultural groups.

⁷¹ The national lottery is the sponsor of Rijks Studio’s downloadable project as specified on the web site of the latter.

⁷² The most important are Philips, Heineken, Douwe Egberts and Albert Heijn, but also CCIs like Droog, Ladresse, and Alexander van Slobbe.

⁷³ <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/friends>, Interviewing T. Dibbits it became clear that around half of the operational revenues are connected to the friends’ card/patron of the Rijksmuseum card and other museum cards.

⁷⁴ Interview with T. Dibbits.

Amsterdam's top art museum, which has boosted a positive Cultural Heritage Cycle, "to make the past part of our future" (Thurley, 2005, p. 26) creating a cycle of understanding, valuing, caring and enjoying⁷⁵.

As Volkers said, "Before the restoration, 70% of visitors were foreign tourists; after the reopening, 60% of the visitors are Dutch, and also the number of kids visiting is increasing more and more (400,000 just in the first year)". Especially for the youngest generation, the Rijksmuseum has another important objective for which the museum is also receiving financial support from the BankGiroLoterij⁷⁶: "to send all children to see the "Night Watch" (the most representative painting by Rembrandt, around which the Rijksmuseum building was architecturally conceived by the architect Pierre Cuypers) before their 12th birthday!" as Dibbitts said.

The social spillovers are quite evident in the increase of both social-cultural participation as well as social cohesion. A national identity has been developed around the art museum's Cultural Heritage, considered to be a *collective national memory* of which people are proud and which they want to support and maintain. The Rijksmuseum, with its ground-breaking digital strategy, has catalysed the attention of both the real and virtual community, able to inspire different audiences: Dutchmen as well as foreigners, children as well as adults, culture-snackers as well as art lovers and professionals.

This latter is an example of a flow of synergy that starts from the alignment of strategy (not only e-strategy and corporate strategy, but also marketing strategy), continues with the development of alliances and flows into the financial sustainability of the art museum as well as the sustainability of the Cultural Capital.

4.5 Some quantitative results of the re-opening strategy

To illustrate the *effectiveness* of the innovative strategy of the new Rijksmuseum, some results will now be highlighted. Mr. Pijbes expected the renovated museum to attract 1.75 million to 2 million visitors annually, which would rank the Rijksmuseum twentieth in attendance among all museums worldwide. In its last full year (2002) before restoration it drew 1.3 million visitors. From its reopening in April 2013 until November 2014, the number of visitors has exceeded 4 million (2,47 million in the whole of 2014), therefore doubling its number of visitors. Moreover, the Rijksmuseum's new exhibition wing (1,000 m², restored after the re-opening and able to receive 1 million visitors annually) is at the moment further contributing to its increasing success. For the first time in years, the number of Dutch visitors (now 60% compared to 30% in the past) exceeds the

⁷⁵ "By understanding the historic environment people value it; by valuing it, they will want to care for it; by caring for it they will help people enjoy it; from enjoying the historic environment comes a thirst to understand" (Thurley, 2005, p. 26), which provokes a thirst to support and take care of it.

⁷⁶ In 2014, the Rijksmuseum received an amount of almost 1 million euros in earmarked donations, which will enable the continuation of the Rijksmuseum bus service. This contribution from the BankGiroLoterij will therefore make it possible to continue fulfilling the stated ambition to send all Dutch children to see the *Night Watch* before their 12th birthday. This program has been set up because not all schools have the resources to achieve this on their own.

number of foreign visitors; over a quarter (23%) of visitors used an e-ticket, which, by international museum standards, is also an unprecedented number. Rijks Studio - showing at the moment 200,000 digital images - has lodged 2.17 million visitors (therefore doubled); 500,000 objects have been downloaded and 110,000 personal accounts have been created. The re-opening strategy innovation has led to the following financial results for 2014: a positive operational result of € 5.2 million, entrance fees of € 25.6 million (of the 2,47 million visitors, 21% had a Museum card), and sponsoring revenues of € 5.2 million.

The Rijksmuseum has won (inter-)national “Best of the Web” awards (SpinAwards 2013, Dutch Interactive Awards 2013, Museum and Web Awards and the European Design Award) and recently won (for 2015) the “European Museum of the Year Award” (EMYA)⁷⁷. These awards are based on peer evaluations by museum professionals.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Any discussion of what determines an organization's success, firstly needs to define what success means. For the purpose of this research paper, we need to consider the special kind of organization we have studied: a cultural organization and, in particular, an art museum. Porter (1991, p. 96) argued that “firm success is manifested in attaining a competitive position or series of competitive positions that lead to superior and sustainable financial performance”. The flow of synergies described above has demonstrated the “superior and sustainable financial performance” that the Rijksmuseum has achieved thanks to synergies boosted by its groundbreaking digital strategy. Moreover, consistent with Throsby (2005, p. 7), “Cultural Capital gives rise by definition to two sorts of value: economic and cultural”. Therefore, for discussing the success of the strategy of an art museum (or cultural institutions in general), it is necessary to consider these two types of value. Throsby insists that the cultural valuation of the stock of Cultural Capital is measurable according to some agreed-upon system of units, reflecting the significance or worth to society of a cultural asset. During any time period, Cultural Capital produces a flow of income measured in terms of both monetary and cultural value (Throsby, 2005, p. 8). Grippingly then, considering that the cultural value depends on the significance or worth to society of the cultural asset, if the strategy of a cultural institution reinforces this perception (as the art museum of Amsterdam has done), it, at the same time, synergically increases the value

⁷⁷ <http://www.europeanmuseumforum.info/emya/emya-2015.html>

“The renewed Rijksmuseum offers impressive multilingual guidance to its visitors, witty and thought-provoking interventions in the galleries, and a state-of-the-art website for virtual visitors. The ambition to “reach every child in the Netherlands by the age of twelve” is notable, impressive and achievable. This is a great museum ... providing a rich experience to the public, and a socially aware outreach programme for visitors of all ages”

of Cultural Capital⁷⁸; in other words, it achieves a socio-cultural synergy, disseminating culture and boosting the preservation of Cultural Heritage.

According to the ITO (Input-Transform-Outcome) model of Smyrk (1995)⁷⁹, “outcomes are the result of *outputs* being utilised by stakeholders” (Smyrk, 1995, p. 4). In other words, outcomes represent the *effectiveness* with which the *utilisation* of the output has taken place.

The Rijksmuseum processed its corporate strategy with a ground-breaking e-strategy, and the *output* (the Rijks Studio) is in itself a high-value output, because of its contribution to the democratisation of the museum's collection. However, if the management board had not boosted synergies, neither in the implementation of the strategy nor in the development of alliances⁸⁰, the *effectiveness* of the strategy process would have been less significant, despite its game-changing copyright-free, open digital collection. Although this is a case-based research paper with contextual factors, we consider the findings particularly suitable for illustrating and extending relationships and logic in the broader field of strategy innovation management in CCIs that deal with digital-open (cultural) contents.

5.2 Conclusion

These results reveal that, for art museums, a ground-breaking digital business strategy bolstered by tight-fit (Siggelkow, 2002) alliances - driven by an emergent strategy with internal and external fit - can be a cornerstone for synergies. The connected synergies allow the digital strategy to be internally and externally effective, able to boost economic, financial and socio-cultural spillovers.

The success of the innovation strategy of the Rijksmuseum connected to its restoration/reopening definitely depends on the museum's brave decision to develop a totally copyright-free, open online collection with the aim to democratise the art and to link a broad-based contemporary audience with art and history. However, this is “just” the *output* of the strategic project, saying nothing about its *effectiveness*. In order to determinate the success of the project, the mechanism of converting this available output into the desired *outcomes* (which Smyrk calls *consumption*) is traceable to the synergies that

⁷⁸ $Y_c = \alpha Kc$ is the production function of cultural value (calculating the cultural value of the cultural capital K), where Kc is the cultural value and α is the “cultural appreciation parameter”, “measuring the extent to which members of society, in a given time period, understand and appreciate the significance or importance of K. Thus for a society that cared nothing for its cultural assets, $\alpha = 0$ and no cultural income would accrue” (Throsby, 2005 p. 9).

⁷⁹ This model evaluates the success of a project, expressing the “goal as the extent to which desired outcomes are generated” (Smyrk, 1995, p 3) including effectiveness in the evaluation.

⁸⁰ E.g. the decision to let the content also be used for commercial applications or the partnerships with creative industries such as Droog, to inspire the possible use of the open content of Rijks Studio and communicating the Museum at the Fuori Salone in Milan, or the partnerships developed with Etsy and Peecho, which were specific alliances to boost the “utilization” of the output (the open, digital cultural content) and which have impacted the consumption (as well as the *viralisation* of the museum brand). For Smyrk (1995) this means “the mechanism of converting sets of available outputs into desired outcomes”.

depend on the strategies' alignment and their effective alliances. This research has revealed that the *effectiveness* of a cultural institution's strategy also depends on its capability to enhance emergent strategies consistent with its core elements. The findings of the research⁸¹ therefore lead to the conclusion that, although the process of strategy innovation presented in this case was based on a ground-breaking digital business strategy, it would not have led to ground-breaking success if the e-strategy had not been utilised as a cornerstone for synergies. Rijksmuseum's perception of the need to boost the effectiveness of the open-content digital strategy has been the key condition for its success, letting the digital strategy become a cornerstone for synergies.

The managerial implications⁸² of the above results are that, even though the digitalisation of Cultural Heritage and e-strategy seem to be a panacea for sustainable Cultural Capital management and development, the *effectiveness* of a (digital) e-strategy in cultural organisations - and the *resonance*, competitiveness and sustainability towards which such a strategy aims - highly depends on the capability of the organisation to implement such strategy by creating and maintaining a tight-fit with overall corporate strategy by enhancing emergent strategies and alliances. These implications are even more significant considering that they are even valid with a ground-breaking digital business strategy, as the research has pointed out.

Considering that Cultural institutions such as museums, are possible pivots to develop *cultural innovation* (Coblence and Sebastier, 2015), capable to generate a fertile environment for creativity, future research directions would include verifying whether and understanding how collaborations between (art) museums and creative industries could develop new Business Models, to boost their economical and socio-cultural sustainability as well as the sustainability of Cultural Heritage.

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⁸¹ Related to the research question: "How could an innovation in strategy by an art museum through a ground-breaking digital-business strategy be a source of competitive advantage, financial sustainability and socio-cultural development?"

⁸² This case study can be used (Flyvbjerg, 2006) to better understand the connection between the digital strategy of a cultural organisation and its socio-cultural and economical success.

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Erika Cavriani
 Everyone's collections
 at Art Museums:
 groundbreaking digital
 business strategy as
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