Partnership as Vehicle for Innovation
Collaborative Innovation in Public Libraries
Jæger, Birgit

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Partnerships as Vehicles for Public Sector Innovation
Professor Birgit Jæger, Roskilde University
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ABSTRACT
How does the idea of partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation develop in the public sector? Under which conditions is it possible to carry out the idea in practice? To answer these questions, a case study of a new strategy for the Danish library sector was prepared, in which the idea of using partnership as a means to create collaborative innovation was deployed. In the Danish context a partnership was defined as a more formal type of collaboration than other types like for instance network collaboration. This case was selected due to a strong need for innovation in the library sector caused by the development of digital technologies and a recent reform of the structure of the Danish public sector. The empirical analysis, based on eight semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, shows how a committee added innovative elements to the idea of partnership. In this way, the strategy aimed to create collaborative innovation in the library sector. Next, a partnership between a music library and a new rock museum was selected for analysis of how collaborative innovation is carried out in practice. The partnership was chosen due to its success and the establishment of it was followed in a period of two years including regularly interviews with the staff members and a theater workshop. The empirical analysis identified the conditions under which it succeeded in creating collaborative innovation. By answering the above questions, this paper contributes to academic discussions about how partnerships can serve as a vehicle for collaborative innovation in the public sector in two ways. First, by showing that partnerships have many forms and only some of them are suitable for creating collaborative innovation. Second, by presenting an empirical analysis of a successful innovative partnership that reveals that establishing an innovative partnership is a very complicated task which requires considerable coordination and governance.

Keywords: Public sector, collaborative innovation, innovative partnership, library sector

Introduction
Governments in many Western countries have introduced the idea of partnerships as a means to renew the public sector. The ambition is that collaboration between different agencies, in a binding agreement, will result in the delivery of public services with added value (Dickinson and Glasby, 2010). The idea of partnerships has also been introduced in the Danish library sector, where a new strategy for public libraries was developed in 2010 (Agency for Library and Media 2010). In this strategy, the idea of partnerships, that include external partners from civil society, the private sector, or other public agencies, was introduced as a means to create collaborative innovation.

Using the Danish library sector as a case study, this paper aims to contribute to academic discussions of how partnerships can work as a vehicle for public sector innovation. I seek to answer the following two research questions: 1) how does the idea of partnership as a vehicle for
collaborative innovation develop in the public sector? and 2) under which conditions is it possible to carry out the idea in practice? However, before turning to the case study, a literature review is needed to clarify the concept of partnership as well as the concept of collaborative innovation.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a review of the theoretical literature on the concepts of partnership and collaborative innovation is presented. Second, I introduce the case, the methodology and the methods. Third, an analysis of the case study is presented. The first part of the analysis is an investigation of how the idea of partnership is developed by a committee of stakeholders; and the second part investigates how collaborative innovation is carried out in practice through a partnership in a single library. Finally, the findings of the case study are discussed, followed by an answer on the research questions: 1) how does the idea of partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation develop in the public sector? and 2) under which conditions is it possible to carry out the idea in practice?

Partnerships as Collaborative Innovation: A Literature Review

In this section, I present a theoretical literature review on partnerships as a vehicle for public sector innovation. The review takes its point of departure in the literature on the concept of partnership. However, my emphasis on the innovative outcomes of partnerships in the public sector requires that the review also include literature on the concept of innovation. Originally, innovation was regarded as pertaining to the private sector and, in accordance with this the concept is usually addressed with a focus on the private sector. But as innovation has entered the public sector, a new body of literature has emerged trying to translate the concept into a public sector context (e.g. Bason, 2007; Eggers and Sing, 2009; Gow, 2014; Halvorsen et al, 2005; Mulgan and Albury, 2003; Hartley, 2005; Osborne and Brown, 2013; Van de Ven et al, 2008).

Part of this literature is of particular interest for this paper: namely, the literature that addresses collaborative innovation in the public sector (e.g. Aagaard et al, 2014; Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Bommert, 2010; Corwin et al, 2012; Hartley et al, 2013; Swan and Scarbrough, 2005; Sørensen and Torfing, 2011a; 2011b; 2012). Consequently, the literature review addresses both the literature on the concept of partnerships and literature on the concept of collaborative innovation in the public sector.

Literature on Partnership

According to Dickinson and Glasby (2010), the concept of partnership was introduced in the public sector in the UK by the New Labor government, which included it in public policy as part of the ‘Third Way’ in the late 1990’s. Following this, partnership is defined as involving:

“…negotiation between people from different agencies committed to working together over more than the short term; aims to secure the delivery of benefits of added value which could not have been provided by any single agency acting alone or through the employment of others; and includes a formal articulation of a purpose and a plan to bind partners together” (Dickinson and Glasby, 2010: 815).
Despite this definition, several empirical studies on the implementation of partnerships in the public sector question whether or not they are able to deliver results and actually create collaborative innovation (e.g. Brogaard and Petersen, 2014; Dickinson and Glasby, 2010; Huxham, 2003). In an analysis of different kinds of collaboration, Huxham (2003) concluded “…that unless the potential for real collaborative advantage is clear, it is generally best, if there is any choice, to avoid collaboration” (p. 421).

Furthermore, several empirical studies reveal a wide variety in the types of partnership, network, and collaboration that exist, and also that these have different strengths when it comes to creating innovation. A clear distinction between these different forms of partnerships and networks is, moreover, difficult to find in the literature (Huxham 2003). In a study of public-private partnership, Hodge and Greve (2007) identify five types of arrangement, all referred to as partnerships, including 1) Institutional cooperation, 2) Long-term infrastructure contracts, 3) Public policy networks, 4) Civil society and community development, 5) Urban renewal (Hodge and Greve, 2007: 547). Not all of these arrangements have the ability to foster innovation.

The classic literature on partnerships generally accepts that all partnerships originate from contracts (e.g. Andersen, 2006). A classic contract is a formal promise to do something specific in the future. Typically, one party commits to producing a product or a service while the other party commits to paying a certain amount of money for its delivery. The commitments are specified in detail, making it possible to have the contract sanctioned by law. This type of contract is typically used in connection with competitive tendering, outsourcing and privatization (Hodge and Greve, 2007). Consequently, the classic contract determines the future actions of the partners, based on present needs, and as such limits the options for making changes and acting in other ways in the future than those defined at the outset. In this way, the classic contract is likely to inhibit innovation.

However, the literature points to a paradigm shift in the way contracts are understood (e.g. Andersen, 2006; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994), with a new emphasis on the relationship between the partners and on a relational understanding of contracts (Williamson, 1981). By shifting the focus from the legal and economic perspectives to the relational perspective, the central focus becomes the process between the partners. In the context of this paradigm shift, Ring and Van de Ven (1994) develop a process framework to understand how inter-organizational relationships (including partnerships) emerge, evolve and dissolve. The framework conceptualizes inter-organizational relationships as based on two simultaneous processes: one that has to do with formal legal contracting, and one pertaining to informal sense-making, trust building and agreement among the partners about values, mission and vision. In this way, the result of the negotiation can be described as two contracts: a formal legal contract and a psychological contract between the partners (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994: 97).

In partnerships based on a psychological contract, the conditions for creating innovation are much better than in partnerships based on the classic contract. In relational partnerships, the contract does
not set out distinct outcomes and tasks but instead outlines some guidelines about how the collaboration should proceed in order to achieve certain broadly defined objectives. In this way, a partnership based on a relational contract is a promise to do something undefined in the future, and the partners commit to work towards the common objectives and visions formulated in the contract (Andersen, 2006). Hence, negotiations about common objectives, values, and visions become an important part of the genesis of the partnership. A partnership based on this understanding is equipped to handle constant changes in the conditions for interaction among partners.

A partnership designed to handle changes in the future is always in the making (Andersen, 2006). This renders it potentially fragile but also enables it to produce new visions for the future, new ideas for development, new issues for collaboration, and new possibilities for the partners. Thus, this type of partnership can be characterized as a *machine of possibilities* (Andersen, 2006: 184) and in this way such partnerships can serve as vehicles for collaborative innovation.

**Literature on Collaborative Innovation**

Following this synthesis of the literature on the partnership concept, I now turn to the second body of literature in this review, on the concept of collaborative innovation. From the classic literature on innovation (e.g. Schumpeter, 1934; Heertje, 2006), the concept of collaborative innovation draws on a basic understanding of innovation as a process that starts with a new, creative idea or invention. However, a new idea is not enough for something to be labeled as an innovation, it also has to be implemented and put into practice (Fagerberg, 2005; Hartley, 2005). In line with this definition, the process of innovation is often described as consisting of different phases. Eggers and Singh (2009: 7) have created a circular model for innovation in the public sector consisting of four phases: idea generation, idea selection, idea implementation and idea diffusion (see also Sørensen and Torfing, 2011b: 851).

Moreover, innovation must also lead to some kind of value or qualitative change for the implementing organization. In classic innovation theory, this value is defined in economic terms (Schumpeter, 1934). However, governmental agencies do not operate for profit but for higher productivity, better services for citizens, enhanced results, and stronger democracy. This is what Bason (2007) refers to as the four bottom lines of innovation in the public sector and any given innovation must create value for at least one of these.

A distinction often made in the literature concerns the degree to which an innovation may be considered radical or incremental. Where some authors reserve the term innovation for radical innovations that involve a profound shift in the understanding of the problem in question (Osborne and Brown, 2013), others consider that incremental changes in daily practices also constitute innovation (Hartley et al, 2013). Often, a continuum of innovation is depicted, ranging from incremental innovation at one end to radical innovation at the other (e.g. Teigen, 2007; Bundgaard and Petersen, 2014). Due to its tradition for bureaucracy, the public sector is regarded as mostly capable of generating incremental innovation (Aagaard et al, 2014). However, in the long run a series of incremental innovations can become a radical innovation (Fagerberg, 2005).
Beside innovation theory, the literature on collaborative (or networked) innovation in the public sector draws on public administration theories, notably theories of governance networks (e.g. Emerson et al, 2011; Kickert et al, 1997; Osborne, 2010; Rhodes, 1997; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). In this body of literature, the concept of collaborative innovation is informed by the concept of mutual interdependence. According to this understanding, the partners in a network are dependent on each other and will only be able to produce the desired outcome if they interact (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007).

The governance of networks is different from the governance of a classic bureaucratic organization, and the concept of meta-governance (Sørensen, 2006) is often used to capture this idea. When used as inspiration for the concept of collaborative innovation, this perspective on governance can inform the way in which innovation processes are governed (Sørensen and Torfing, 2012). In line with this, coordination of networks is singled out as important for the innovative potential of a network (Swan and Scarbrough, 2005). Mandell and Keast (2013) distinguish between three types of network relationships: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, where collaboration is the strongest relationship based on high levels of trust among the partners accompanied by thick communication flows and interdependent goals. They conclude that innovation is most likely to take place in networks based on collaboration. This chimes with Swan and Scarbrough’s (2005) findings that effective network coordination “reinforce[s] the kinds of networking and knowledge integration which contribute to successful innovation outcomes.” (p. 939).

Drawing on these elements from innovation theory and network governance theory, collaborative innovation is defined by Sørensen and Torfing (2011b) as an:

“…intentional and proactive process that involves the generation and practical adoption and spread of new and creative ideas, which aim to produce a qualitative change in a specific context.” (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011b: 849).

Another definition of collaborative innovation is delivered by Swan and Scarbrough (2005). Based on an exhaustive literature review, they define networked innovation as:

“…innovation that occurs through relationships that are negotiated in an ongoing communicative process, and which relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control.” (Swan and Scarbrough, 2005: 916).

Although not explicitly, both of these definitions of collaborative innovation feature learning and knowledge sharing as important elements. Especially when an innovation is radical, learning processes are important. As mentioned before, a radical innovation includes a profound shift in the understanding of a situation, and such a shift is often described as a learning process (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991).
It is clear from this theoretical clarification of the concepts of partnership and collaborative innovation that not all partnerships are able to create collaborative innovation. However, if the partnership is rooted in a relational contract that builds on trust and interdependence among the partners, and is well coordinated, it has the potential to create collaborative innovation since it generates opportunities for learning and a promise of future possibilities. Under these conditions, partnerships can function as ‘machines of possibilities’ and have the potential to create new ideas, new knowledge, and new objectives and in this way generate a new understanding of the problem at hand. If the new ideas are implemented and bring some kind of value to the partners, the result is collaborative innovation. To distinguish between those partnerships that are able to serve as vehicles for collaborative innovation, and those that are not, I will term the former Innovative Partnerships.

**Presentation of Case, Methodology and Applied Methods**

The case of partnerships in the Danish library sector was selected in order to investigate how the idea of using partnerships as a vehicle for public sector innovation is developed, and to understand the conditions for the successful implementation of this idea. This case is particularly interesting as there is a huge need for innovation within public libraries due to technological innovations that challenge their existence. Thanks to digital technologies, it is now, in principle, possible for everybody to gain access to all kinds of information, and within the last couple of years the number of loans of books has decreased rapidly. This tendency raises the question of whether libraries have become redundant or whether they are able to reinvent their role in society and create new library services that meet the needs of their 21st century users.

The purpose of libraries in most Western countries can be described in terms of three concepts: enlightenment, education, and democracy (Moor and Assem, 2013; Overgaard and Jæger, 2014). Hence, the purpose of public libraries is to foster an informed, educated and engaged citizenry that can function in a democracy (Jaeger et al, 2013). They therefore still arguably have an important role to play in society, which has not declined with the advent of digital technologies. Quite the contrary, we now live in a globalized knowledge society where it is crucial that citizens are able to handle many kinds of information, assess the validity of that information, and transform it into useable knowledge. This cannot be achieved solely by lending out books, so public libraries need to find new ways to fulfil their purpose. In other words, they need to innovate.

Besides the development of information technologies and new media, a comprehensive reform of the structure of the public sector has also forced the Danish library sector to become innovative. The structural reform of 2007 reduced the number of municipalities from 275 to 98. As a result, many public libraries were closed down, especially in remote and rural areas. The Danish library sector is governed by a national law which stipulates that the local authorities are obliged to provide the population with library services with the purpose of enlightening and educating citizens to live in a democratic society. Hereafter, it is up to the local authorities to decide how to comply with that law, and to define both the specific objectives for their local libraries, and the resources to be allocated to them. The new, larger municipalities did not automatically continue to finance all the
existing public libraries, but instead asked them to present a clear case for why taxpayers’ money should be spent on running more than just one library in each municipality.

In response to this need for innovation, the Danish Agency for Library and Media set up a committee in 2008 with the aim of formulating a national strategy for the library sector. The members of the committee were stakeholders from the Association of Local Authorities, the Danish Union of Librarians, the Association of Library Managers, the Royal School of Library and Information Science, and a couple of other organizations close to the library sector. In 2010, the committee presented a new strategy for the Danish library sector which included the idea of partnerships as a means for collaborative innovation. As mentioned above, the library sector is organized on two levels, with the general authority at the national level and the specific authority at the local level. In practice, the local authorities have considerable influence, and there is no tradition for a national strategy for the library sector. Thus, the strategy launched in 2010 represents, *per se*, a new way to govern the library sector.

Given this context, the following case study of partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation in the Danish library sector is divided into two parts. The first examines the national level and includes the work of the stakeholder committee and the new strategy they presented. This is regarded as the first phase of the innovation process, which involves idea generation and selection, and aims to answer the first research question, namely: how does the idea of partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation develop in the public sector? The methods applied to analyze this part of the case study consist partly of a document analysis of the strategy report and underlying working papers; and partly of seven semi-structured interviews with stakeholders who participated in the committee. These seven stakeholders were selected for interview because they represent the most important organizations influencing the Danish library sector.

The second part of the case study explores the local level. This part of the case study is regarded as the second phase of the innovation process - the implementation of the idea - and aims to answer the second research question: under which conditions is it possible to carry out the idea in practice? To answer this research question, a successful partnership was selected: namely, a partnership between the music department of Roskilde Library and a new Danish Rock Museum, which was under construction in connection with the famous Roskilde Festival. This partnership was acknowledged by the EU project: *Creative City Challenge*, which awarded it the *Best Collaboration Award* in 2010. In explaining the award, the *Creative City Challenge* argued that the library and the museum had turned each other’s challenges into advantages. This award illustrates how the idea of partnership can be successfully implemented as a vehicle for collaborative innovation. The case is thus suitable for studying the conditions for successfully implementing the idea of partnership in practice.

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1 The strategy also introduced the idea of *The Digital Library of the Danes* but due to the scope of this paper this part of the strategy is not described further.

The development of the partnership between Roskilde Library and the Rock Museum became part of a project funded by the Danish Agency of Libraries and Media in 2010, called *Out of the Box! Libraries in Collaborative Innovation*. This project ran in two public libraries with the aim of further developing the idea of innovative partnerships by actually implementing such partnerships in the two libraries.3

The study of the partnership between Roskilde Library and the Rock Museum was conducted using interactive research (Van de Ven, 2007; Ansell, 2007). I was invited to be a member of the *Out of the Box!* steering committee, and through regular meetings in this committee I learned about the overall implementation process of the partnerships in the two libraries. Besides these meetings, I held quarterly meetings with the two project managers and participated on a regular basis in meetings with the whole group. At the end of the project, I conducted a group interview with all the involved group members. As part of the development of the partnership between Roskilde Library and the Rock Museum, a theatre workshop focusing on the collaboration was set up in collaboration with Dacapo.4 Observations during the theatre workshop, and a video recording of it, are also included in the analysis.

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**Theatre Workshop**

A Theatre Workshop is a special method used to bring about organizational change, using theatre improvisation as a means to create dialogue between the participants.

A Theatre Workshop is facilitated by a process consultant who plans the workshop together with a group of artists and the client. The basic idea is that new understandings and ideas to solve a given problem will emerge in the dialogue between different participants if the theatre is able to tell an incomplete story which is both realistic and opens up for new interpretations. For further elaboration, see Have (2011) and Thellesen et al (2014).

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3 The project also included other elements but for the sake of clarity these have been omitted from the description. A full description of the project is published (in Danish) in Overgaard and Jæger, 2014.

Innovative Partnerships in the Library Sector

In this section, I present an analysis of the case study. As explained earlier, the analysis is divided into two parts. The first part analyzes the phase in which the idea was generated and developed by a committee of stakeholders; and the second part analyzes the phase in which the idea was implemented and carried out in practice at a local library in the form of a partnership between a library and a new museum.

Idea Generation and Selection: A New Strategy

The idea of partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation in public libraries was introduced in 2010 when the stakeholder committee finished its work and presented the new strategy in a report called *Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society* (Agency for Library and Media 2010). In the strategy report, partnerships are defined as:

“…specific initiatives based on a collaboration in which both/all partners contribute resources and where common rules of the game are formulated. This is a ‘win-win’ situation with reciprocal benefits for the partners and to the benefit of the users of the library. Collaboration of less binding character is of course still rewarding but will not be mentioned in this connection.” (Agency for Library and Media, 2010: 71).

This definition shows that the committee’s understanding of partnerships is in line with theoretical descriptions of innovative partnerships inasmuch as it regards partnerships as a “win-win” situation with the possibility for “reciprocal benefits”. Furthermore, the last sentence of the quote shows that the committee wants to implement innovative partnerships in the library sector, and not just “less binding collaborations”. In interviews with committee members, the innovative dimension of the partnership was further unfolded. Several of the stakeholders explained that partnerships give rise to innovative dynamics by mixing different professions and tearing down the walls around the libraries, thus breaking down silos in the public administration and creating better coherence.

On the question of why a partnership was chosen as the solution, one of the interviewees explained that at the time the committee came into being, the concept of partnership was, along with the concept of network, floating around in political circles and was used for many purposes. Partnerships were, at that time, regarded as a kind of standard solution for the network society, and they were a concept everybody agreed on. However, the committee did not simply borrow the existing concept of partnership; they also added some innovative elements, thereby shaping it to fit their aim of creating collaborative innovation.

During the interviews, the stakeholders were also asked how they perceived the innovation process and the new role for public libraries which the partnerships were expected to develop. In the short run, the establishment of a single partnership between a library and an external partner does not indicate a huge change, and thus it should be characterized as an incremental innovation. However, in the long run, many partnerships with many different partners have the potential to change the partners’ view of the service, thereby also altering their understanding of the role of libraries in
society. In this way, partnerships are supposed to generate radical innovation in the long run even though a single partnership might only lead to incremental innovation. One of the stakeholders described the vision of a radical innovation as follows:

“The whole point is – and what I am about to say is very central – the collection of books and other materials used to be the very point of departure for everybody. But now you have to take a point of departure in the user groups and not in the collection. And how do you persuade a profession which defines itself by working with collections to adapt to a situation where you take your point of departure in the users’ needs? … This is the great mental challenge facing this profession… and it will take years… The idea of partnerships – provided us with a theoretical handle to say: ‘the partner represents the needs we have to work with…’ One way to take a point of departure in the user is to establish partnerships – and the more binding they are the better, and there are no limits for partnerships.” (Interviewee 3).

This quote shows how, historically, libraries have understood their mission in society in terms of building up collections of books, maps, nodes, CDs, DVDs, and other materials with the purpose of lending them out to users. Their collections were supposed to be of a certain quality and to represent different approaches and values so that the user could find just the knowledge s/he needed. However, instead of focusing on their collections, libraries have had to shift their focus towards the acquisition of knowledge, as well as user learning. This change can be described as a move from solely lending out materials to delivering frameworks and relationships that support the development of the library’s users.

The shift from a collection focus to a prioritization of the users’ needs and the creation of new frameworks for, and interactions between, the library and its users, represents a new role for libraries in society. Hence, this change can be characterized as a radical innovation. The quote shows that the stakeholders who wrote the new strategy do not think such a radical change in the role of libraries in society is possible to obtain from within. They believe that the libraries need to collaborate with different groups in society to learn what their needs are and how to frame the relationship between the users and the library. Hence, innovative partnerships are the solution.

**Innovation: Partnership between a Library and a Museum**

As mentioned above, the analysis of how an innovative partnership is carried out in practice focuses on a partnership between the Roskilde Library music department (henceforth the Music Library – ML) and the new Danish Rock Museum (RM). The idea of a partnership between the ML and the RM emerged during a meeting between one staff member from each of the two institutions, both of which were engaged at the time in the development of a new, creative area in the city of Roskilde. They realized that they shared a common vision of a new type of public institution where citizens could come and be inspired, have a good experience, gather knowledge, and learn something new. Based on this common vision, the two institutions entered into a cooperation agreement and promised to help each other carry it out. The partnership thus began as a relationship between two
people who shared the same vision, and later on it turned into a formal contract for collaboration between the two institutions.

Since the RM building was still under construction, there was no physical place to exhibit the artifacts which the museum staff had started to collect. The RM needed access to exhibition space because they wanted to experiment with different ways of presenting the artifacts. Based on the cooperation agreement, the ML invited the museum to exhibit the artifacts at the library. Simultaneously, the ML was experimenting with the idea of changing the library services from “an experience at the shelves” to “an experience between the shelves”. Their aim was to add knowledge, stories, and references to their collection of sheet music, music books, CDs, and DVDs ‘at the shelves’, and by doing so to move the focus from the collection of materials to the relationship between the librarians, the users, and their experience. The ML did not know exactly how to make this change happen, but when the museum moved into the library, the librarians realized that they could learn from the museum’s presentation expertise. When the museum presented an artifact – e.g. a guitar – the interesting thing was not so much the artifact but the story behind it. Who made this guitar? Who played it? At which concert? In this way, the museum added knowledge and stories to the artifacts.

In the ensuing period, the ML reorganized the shelves and other furniture to make room for the museum artifacts. The classical music section was moved from the central ML to an adjacent small room to accommodate the RM’s focus on rock and popular music. A small stage for instruments, microphone, amplifier and other equipment was established at the end of the large room. Users of the library were invited to use this stage for free and to record the sound they produced if they wanted to.

This seemingly rather simple rearrangement involving integrating the museum artifacts into the library turned out to be a little more complicated than expected. The refurnishing of the ML sparked a process of interaction between staff members from the two institutions in which the partners were dependent on each other’s expertise, and the exchange of knowledge between the two groups of professionals resulted in a learning process where especially the librarians learned how to present their music collection in a new way. In evaluating the process, the librarians expressed some frustration because it had not been easy, but at the same time they were satisfied with the results. Later on, the collaboration resulted in the generation of a new vision. Instead of just physically merging the two institutions’ artifacts, the idea of fully integrating the functions of the two institutions emerged. In this way, the partnership worked as a machine of possibility by producing a new vision for the collaboration.

Up until this point, the partnership had rested heavily on the personal relationship between the original two members of staff who had initiated the collaboration. Both were supported by their respective organizations, which had a strategic interest in developing the partnership, but the process of establishing the partnership was mostly driven by these two people. However, the Out of the Box! project raised a new possibility to coordinate a full implementation of the partnership in
both organizations. To speed up the implementation process, a theatre workshop was set up where all staff members from both organizations were present for the first time.

The workshop was structured around three themes. The first phase aimed to achieve a common understanding of the process so far. Here, the vision of the collaboration was explored and discussed. The second phase aimed to develop a common understanding of the visions for future collaboration; and the third phase dealt with how to implement the visions in the everyday practices of both organizations. After presentations by all the participants, the theatre workshop consisted of three small plays illustrating different ideas for a fully integrated library and museum. Each play was followed either by discussion in the whole group or discussion in small groups. At the end of the workshop three librarians discussed their reflections while the rest of the group listened, followed by a session where three museum employees discussed their reflections.

During the workshop, a manager from Roskilde Library revealed that when the construction of the RM building was finished in 2016, the ML planned to move into the new museum. This came as a shock to some of the librarians, especially two older librarians who are experts in classical music. During the presentation at the beginning of the workshop, they had both introduced themselves as “analog librarians” as opposed to “digital librarians” and explained that they preferred to work with “physical things” such as collections of music books, sheet music, and CDs. Clearly they did not regard themselves as a part of the merger between the ML and the RM. They expected the collection of classic music to remain at Roskilde Library and they did not see any reason to move to a rock and pop music museum.

This dilemma was addressed in various ways. During the workshop, it became clear that digital and analog ways of presenting music are not bound to specific music genres. Before very long, all music will be handled electronically, so there is no real dichotomy between rock and classic music in this regard. It also became clear that even though the RM specialized in rock and pop, it did not exclude other music genres. Consistent with its aim to give users a new experience, the RM also understood the need to relate its music to other genres which indeed were often the inspiration for it. And the new, integrated service was to offer access to all kinds of music genres. Beside this, the new museum was equipped with a public stage where all kinds of music could be presented, and the ML was well positioned to be a driving force in filling this public venue with music of all genres.

Another important discussion in the workshop concerned the competences and skills of the staff. In particular, the librarians were unsure about what kind of competences the new integrated service required of them. Which new situations should they be able to handle? Which new skills were they supposed to pick up? During this discussion, it also surfaced that staff members from both organizations were afraid of losing their professional identities if they were expected to acquire a new skill set. These concerns led to a long discussion about the similarities and differences between the two professions: librarians and museum staff. During this discussion, it became clear that even though the vision was to integrate the services of the two institutions there was still a need for the different staff’s respective skills. Hence, instead of being afraid of losing their professional
identities it became clear that the two professions were able to challenge and supplement each other in developing new library/museum services.

Especially during the last part of the workshop, which focused on how to implement the new services in daily practice, the exchange of ideas between the two professions became very intense and enthusiastic and several ideas for new services and ways to collaborate were developed. For instance, an idea for a school service came up: classes could start off touring the museum and experiencing the music and the culture surrounding it. Then they could move to the library where they could bury themselves in the music and the stories about it. They could also borrow materials from the library and bring them back to the classroom for further study.

Other ideas had to do with how the two institutions could collaborate and supplement each other in their storytelling about the music, the culture, and the artifacts. For example, one of the RM’s roles is to conduct research into the history of rock music and the youth culture from which it emerged in the 1960s and 70s. During the discussion, a museum staff member reported that the museum had received a donation of 15 volumes of a music journal. They did not know exactly what to do with it, but the librarians had the skills to register the journals in a systematic way, making it possible to use the material in future research. In this way, the ML in Roskilde has the potential to develop a role as a partner in a research team, giving it a different profile than other music libraries.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The analysis of the idea generation and idea selection process in the stakeholder committee revealed that the idea of using partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation was adopted because the concept of partnership was “floating around” and generally accepted as a solution in political circles at that time. However, the committee developed the partnership concept by highlighting its innovative potential, describing it as a win-win situation which would bring benefits for both partners and, in the end, create new and better services for the library’s users.

Furthermore, the stakeholders introduced partnership as a means to change the point of departure in the collections of materials to a focus on the users’ needs. If this change is successful, it has the potential to change the role of libraries in society and create radical innovation. Given this analysis of the strategy and the visions behind it, it becomes clear that the stakeholder committee reshaped the idea of partnership by adding innovative elements to it. Hereby, it also became clear that the stakeholders’ intentions in the committee were not only to introduce partnerships, but rather innovative partnerships designed to create collaborative innovation in public libraries.

The analysis of the implementation of the partnership between the Music Library in Roskilde and the new Danish Rock Museum reveals that several conditions have to be in place in order to carry out the idea of innovative partnership in practice. The partnership’s point of departure was the relationship between staff members from the two institutions. However, this relationship was not enough in itself to realize their vision of a new type of public institution. The staff members needed support from their managers to continue the work, and a formal co-operation agreement between
the two institutions was signed. Thus, the analysis shows that, in this case, the conditions for the establishment of the innovative partnership were both a personal relationship between staff members, and a formal agreement between the managers of the two institutions.

Another precondition was interdependence. This became relevant when the museum was unable to display the rock music artifacts because the museum building was still under construction. At the same time, the library did not know how to go about putting into practice their idea of creating an “experience between the shelves”, due to lack of knowledge about how to present their music in novel ways. By moving the museum into the library, the partnership was able to offer a solution to both institutions. The museum found a place to display its artifacts, and the library gained access to knowledge about how to present them. In this way, the partnership created a win-win situation in which both partners fulfilled some of their objectives and created new services for citizens.

The analysis also reveals that the partnership worked as a machine of possibilities. At the outset, the collaboration was based on a common vision to create a new kind of public institution. Thanks to shared experience and knowledge exchange, when the museum moved into the library a new vision of integrating the two institutions’ functions was formulated. However, if this new vision was to be implemented, the partnership had to expand to include the entire staff from both institutions. This was not going to happen all on its own, so it became necessary to deliberately steer the partnership towards a full collaboration. As shown in the analysis, the two initial staff members, and the managers from each institution, were aware of this situation and the theatre workshop was set up to develop a common understanding of the vision for further collaboration among all staff. In this way, the workshop served as a tool for the governance of the partnership. Hence, it is possible to conclude that in this case, governance and coordination were important conditions for the further development of the partnership.

The analysis of the theatre workshop shows that the process of including the entire staff from both institutions was very delicate. It was important to take the fears and worries of the staff seriously, and the process involved deep discussions of both professional and personal dimensions in order to accommodate people’s feelings. In this case, the process went well and fears and worries dissolved into enthusiasm for the upcoming collaboration, and instead of being afraid of losing their professional identities, the staff from both institutions discovered that there was huge potential for complementing one another. The precondition for this positive outcome was a learning process in which staff members shared their professional knowledge and arrived at a new understanding of the potential for further collaboration. The result of this new understanding was that several ideas for such collaboration, and for new services, were developed during the workshop.

The findings of the analysis reveal that the case study presented here indeed constitutes an innovative partnership. The partnership has produced new visions for the collaboration in question and new ideas for public library service more broadly. Some of the new ideas have already been implemented. The Rock Museum is now located at the Music Library and new services are taking shape where, for instance, the music is supplemented by stories about the artifacts, knowledge about
culture, and inspiration from other music genres. These new services at the Music Library are already creating value for users, and if the ideas developed at the theatre workshop are implemented in the new Rock Museum, the value of the service will increase even further. In this way, the partnership between the library and the museum has, up until now, served as a vehicle for collaborative innovation, and has the potential to continue as an innovative partnership in the future when the construction of the Rock Museum is completed and the Music Library has moved into it.

Based on the above analysis, it is now possible to answer the research questions presented in the introduction: 1) How does the idea of partnership as a vehicle for collaborative innovation develop in the public sector? and 2) under which conditions is it possible to carry out the idea in practice? We learned from the literature review that not all partnerships are innovative. Partnerships based on formal contracts which bind the partners to certain actions in the future are more likely to impede innovation than to support it. The first part of the analysis showed how a stakeholder committee added innovative elements to the idea of partnership. The stakeholders reshaped that idea to signal that partnerships in the Danish library sector ought to be much more than just partnerships - they should be innovative partnerships that can serve as vehicles for collaborative innovation.

From the second part of the analysis, it is now possible to conclude that partnerships in the public sector have the potential to serve as vehicles for collaborative innovation when certain conditions are in place: namely, that the partnership must rest on a collaborative relationship between interdependent partners who share a common vision, and that it must be governed by a formal agreement. Further down the road, the partnership must be well coordinated, function as a machine of possibilities, and create knowledge exchange that can support a mutual learning process.

As is evident from the literature review, several other studies have already pointed to the importance of these conditions. However, earlier studies mostly focus on one or two of these conditions, while this study reveals that the success of the studied partnership was attributable to a combination of all of them. In this way, the findings reveal that establishing an innovative partnership is a very complicated task which requires considerable coordination and governance. A binding agreement is not enough in itself. Neither are engaged staffs with personal relationships across the involved agencies. Even a shared vision for the future development of the partnership is insufficient, and merely coordinating the partnership activities will not do the trick on its own. In this case study, however, all these conditions were fulfilled, and it is very likely that if some of them had been missing it would have been difficult to establish a successful partnership. This is further complicated by the fact that an innovative partnership also has to generate value for the involved partners by creating a win-win situation and new services for citizens. Complicated tasks like this are likely to fail, so Huxham’s advice about avoiding collaboration would appear to make good sense. On the contrary, if a partnership is able to govern the complicated mix of these very different preconditions, it has the potential to create radical innovation in the public sector.

Finally, it is important to mention the limitations of a case study like this. The experiment with innovative partnerships in the Danish library sector was selected for a case study due to the strong
need for innovation in the sector; and the partnership between the Music Library in Roskilde and the new Danish Rock Museum was selected for further analysis of how collaborative innovation is carried out in practice due to the success of the partnership. These choices have some consequences. First, the findings from the library sector cannot automatically be used to infer how partnerships might work throughout the entire public sector. There may be other branches of the public sector that have a less pressing need for innovation, and for which the findings of this study would not be valid. Second, the success of this particular partnership does not mean that all partnerships in the library sector are likely to be successful with regard to collaborative innovation. The findings merely document that in this case, under these conditions, the partnership did succeed in carrying out collaborative innovation. In this way, the case study contributes to the academic discussion of how to implement partnerships in the public sector in such a way that they can work as vehicles for collaborative innovation in practice.

References


