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"Save our spectrum" – Will spectrum policy be based exclusively on market relevance?

Part III – What Return Rate has Culture to Achieve?

Culture has its own value!

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Ladies and gentlemen

The driving team behind today's workshop asked me to share with you some reflections, affirming that 'Culture has its own Value'.

You'll note the absence of a question mark here; it is presented as an affirmative statement.

However, in the next few minutes, I invite you to come along, to raise questions and to challenge the definition of value. Because value is indeed a slippery concept.

When checking the definition of value, we find at least six different meanings to the noun. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that debates about the value of something become quickly confusing.

I'd like to take a moment to go through the definitions that exist:

1. Value is the importance, worth, or usefulness of something. This is the broadest notion of the word and can be used in expressing the value that one attaches to something (*for example : your support is of great value to me*). It can also be used as meaning the material or monetary worth of something or the worth of something compared to the price paid or asked for.
2. The second meaning is that of 'principles or standards of behavior' – it's about one's judgment of what is important in life

3. The third meaning is the numerical amount denoted by an algebraic term, thus a magnitude, quantity or number.
4. The next three definitions are actually used in artistic expressions. The first is in the music: value is the relative duration of the sound signified by a note.
5. The second artistic or cultural-related definition of value is found in linguistics: value is the meaning of a word or other linguistic unit. It is the quality or tone of a spoken sound, whereby the sound is represented by a letter.
6. The last artistically-related definition and also the last of the six meanings comes from the visual arts: value is the relative degree of lightness or darkness of a particular color.

So if we state that "culture has its own value", we actually have to understand which meaning of the word value we are using.

You will probably agree with me that in the current times there is a tension between value as an economic term and value as a reference to what people find important in life.

It is a strange paradigm to compare culture with the radio spectrum. They are both available wherever we are, everyone also uses it or wants to make use of it, they are both – to an extent – scarce resources, yet they serve very different goals.

In order to justify the use of the rare resource of radio spectrum, we are asked by decision-makers: Can you please quantify the value of culture? Indeed, lately, we are first and foremost asked to provide the quantitative value of culture, the third definition we listed at the beginning. Can you demonstrate in millions and billions of Euros how much turnover your sector generates or how many people you reach or how many people you employ?

Statistics throughout Europe can provide these figures. For example in France, a report published in 2004 still is used as a reference because it stated that the performing arts/cinema/audiovisual sector represented as much to employment as the automobile industry. The added value to the French economy was equivalent to the aeronautical/naval and train industries combined. And when strikes shut down several large summer festivals the year before, the economic losses to the host cities figured in millions of Euros.

But what do these figures really mean? How do we interpret them? If 1000 people attend a concert, is that a lot or a little? Compared to what: 1000 people who take the subway to work? 1000 people who attend a different concert, and if so, how do we measure the value of one artistic expression as compared to another?

While these general figures are necessary and are an important part of understanding the impact of culture in society, they only reveal part of the picture. Are they really able to tell us the value of culture?

To get to the heart of the value of culture, I'm sure you'll agree we must look to the second definition we listed, the one about judging what is important in life.

I want to test your imagination of a world without culture: it's a nice autumn day, you sit on a terrace having a coffee, a beer or a glass of wine. There is nice jazz music on the background. Right, it has to disappear; we said we would build up a world without culture.

You take a look around and enjoy the architecture of the surrounding buildings, and admire a sculpture in the square. Indeed, culture again. So tear down those buildings and that sculpture. You talk to your friends about your plans for tonight: one plans to go to the theatre, the other to a football game, and one talks about the success of his team while the other recounts the plot of the play... Gone, all of it. Can we quantify it? No, but we know something is missing.

The value of what culture brings to us, of how it enriches our lives, stimulates our thinking and connects us to other people is precisely that: unmeasurable. That's the beauty of it.

I'd like to present you with a real life example.

(film – Vara concert house in Sweden:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyLLrsitm8g&feature=youtu.be>)

Ladies and gentlemen, a year ago, I had an article published in the European public service review with the title 'the work of art'. The editors quoted: "it's time to nurture Europe's culture values and encourage the performing arts sector". (You find the full text in your conference pack.)

Indeed, it's about time for Europe to deliver and to support those sectors in which it has a natural global leadership.

Cultural organizations, the vast majority of which are small and medium-sized operations, will never be able to compete – in the quantitative sense – with big industries for the use of rare resources, whatever they be.

And yet what cultural organizations bring to communities, to individuals, to history is incredibly valuable. Culture and more specifically 'art' is a highly important export product and it's the reason for millions of visitors to come to Europe each year. On this continent alone, it has proven its capacity to unite peoples, facilitate change and maintain peace. The latter, I believe, is the most significant part of its value.

Does this still need to be demonstrated to policy makers? It is not by chance that European leaders have been among the first to slowly begin to rethink the very notion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Even the ultimate standardized measure of value may well be evolving!

There appears to be a consensus on promoting certain shared ideals within Europe – creativity and innovation, social cohesion, mobility and cultural exchange, well-being – but the correct policy tools and public support must follow to actively allow these aspirations to flourish. The radio spectrum issue we are debating today is a perfect example on which we await European leadership.

On these last words, let me finish with a quote of a British actor whose name is Sam West (son of an important British actors family – his mother used to play the wife of John Cleese in Fawlty towers). He spoke at a Pearle members gathering in London some years ago, and talking about his profession as an actor and director, taking us through his main question 'why art', he reminded us of the following:

"...we should all act more; it would make us better bus drivers, librarians, lawyers, chief executives. The only thing it wouldn't make us is better soldiers. Having empathy with someone makes it much harder to kill them. To kill them, you must have empathy bred out of you. War between two groups of actors would be impossible, both lined up either side of a boundary going 'no, I see your point; I played someone like you once. Fancy a drink?'

The organizers of this workshop were right, culture has its very own and unique value!

Thank you