

Speech to the Conference on the Performing Arts in the Digital Age

Lyon, 28 November 2014

Pierre-Alain Muet

Member of the French National Assembly for Rhône (PS), Vice-President of the Finance Committee

Mr. Chairman, Mr. General Director of the Opera, dear Serge Dorny, Mr. Deputy Mayor for Culture, Mr. Minister Advisor, ladies and gentlemen.

I am very pleased that Pearle (Performing Arts Employers Associations League Europe) has chosen Lyon and its beautiful Opera to hold this conference on the performing arts in the digital age.

Cultural activities in Lyon are a perfect example of the importance of culture in the development of cities. Culture is a key factor in the attractiveness of large cities and some major cultural projects have even been or are a decisive factor of urban renewal, such as the Bilbao Guggenheim or the Louvre Lens. This is well understood by all major European cities that spend - all of them - a significant part of their budget on culture. Like here in Lyon, where culture represents 20% of the city's budget.

In this difficult period for Europe, the role of public stakeholders - states and local authorities - is to support and initiate major cultural projects and not just settle for a mere budgetary and accounting vision. To abandon, in the name of fiscal austerity, major cultural investments is no more justified in a recession than abandoning major technology investments.

Because cultural funding is a fundamental investment for any society, just as education and research. This is why in these difficult years when we need to reduce public deficits, I have tirelessly advocated for the cultural budget to be safeguarded and that we do not delay, for instance, this beautiful project of the Philharmonie de Paris.

I will not discuss here at length the digital economy, even if it is a subject that has always fascinated the economist that I am. Certainly, the performing arts, like all areas of life, are affected by the digital revolution. I had the opportunity here in Lyon to see for example how the integration of digital technology in a dance show could reverse an order that seemed immutable and make a complete musical piece created or modified by a dancer's movements.

Similarly, the capture and digital distribution of great theatrical or operatic works allows smaller cities that do not have an opera like this beautiful one to access live shows. Finally, the digital revolution has led to a fundamental change in the distribution of music, which generates a new division between performers and record companies. Listening to music in dematerialized form now concerns 70% of French people, whether it is downloading files or streaming.

If people read less and less on traditional media (book or press), they go out more and more, and the live performance sector in the last 20 years went from 12 to 16% of the cultural value added, and museum attendance has enjoyed a similar evolution.

Indeed, live performance has an immutable characteristic that the digital revolution will not change: it is above all live, and nothing can replace direct participation in the show. And this particularity imposes upon us, politicians, a special responsibility, and this will be the main point of my speech.

It is through public action that we have kept an active network of booksellers, and that the vitality of French cinema has been maintained whereas European cinema has sometimes collapsed. Similarly, if creativity in live performing arts remains strong, it is thanks to public support for creative works and what I consider one of the fundamental achievements of the French cultural exception: the regime of “*intermittents du spectacle*” – or intermittent employment in the entertainment industry.

Because expenses related to the performing arts are subject to what economists call "Baumol's law". Labour productivity gains are almost nonexistent. The performance of the "Magic Flute" requires the same amount of work today than it did at the time of Mozart, even though we produce 20 times more goods in an hour of work than at the beginning of the industrial revolution, and wages increased in the same proportion. In other words, this sector, by its very nature, faces rising costs, and we can only preserve it by accepting not only significant public funding but also increasing funding.

This support for the performing arts also depends on what is one of the fundamental achievements of the French cultural exception: the intermittent employment system.

This system should not be considered as simple unemployment insurance, but as an indirect contribution to cultural creation in an area characterized by a vulnerability inherent to any creative work.

In addition, artists, as scientists, not only have a creative mission but also an educational mission, and this should be better recognized within the intermittent regime. At a time when we relaunch arts education in schools, it seems important to me to increase the number of teaching hours that can be treated as hours worked under such regime.

Learning the arts weaves the social bond and trust. You just need to see kids play and dance hip hop in front of this opera to understand what art can bring to the social bond. Because art is a major contributor to the social capital of a nation and is one of its most important cement, it is an investment which becomes even more essential in times of crisis.

Former culture minister Jack Lang said in a famous speech in 1982: "*There will only be an economic revival if each of our countries believes in the future, is ready to invest in intelligence and imagination, first believing in itself before submitting to the inevitability of alleged international laws*". Thirty years later, this statement remains current.

I wish you a fruitful work and a pleasant stay in Lyon.