

As a strong and committed supporter of creative industries I am pleased to open this conference with a few words of greeting. To be more precise, those of you with whom I have discussed these issues know how important I consider it to be to develop a new understanding that the arts be treated as an integral part of a nation's economy, not as something separate that we simply subsume under the label "culture".

This is a false dichotomy. A doubly false dichotomy: Yes, it is crucial that people in business come to understand that our GDP is very much influenced by the arts, that tourism to my country is not simply the result of our alcohol excise tax levels. The creative "industries" are not reflected in the country's economic statistics, there is no line comparable to say "manufacturing" or "construction" in the calculation of the contribution of economic sectors to national income.

Yet we know that what comes under that amorphous protean term „culture“ constitutes a palpable and significant part of what people spend their income and their time on. And thus must be contributing to the general commonweal but in ways we cannot or do not bother to measure in euros.

This is not a one-sided myopia of measurement, however, that we can decry when it is convenient and yet defend when necessary. For it is also true that broader acceptance of the importance of creative entrepreneurship also means that in some areas the ivory-storied isolation of what we traditionally have simply called "culture", a human activity separate from "base and crass" business will come under scrutiny and perhaps even criticism.

It is a double-edged sword, it cuts both ways. I just wanted to point that out and this is especially true in a small society. We already observe this now-you-see-it-now-you-don't-approach when social scientists or pollsters use their absolute right to engage in political criticism. When purely political criticism receives a political response to that criticism we hear howls of indignation that "scholarship" and "research" is coming under attack. I personally cannot and do not take seriously pollsters or social scientists who confuse their roles and try to be both at the same time. At least I don't trust their polling or their statistics. So too with the arts: acceptance of the importance of the arts in the national economy means also that more than hitherto, people will ask, if support for economically non-productive, or to be blunter, unpopular arts is warranted. If you are an "entrepreneur" you can't expect different treatment. If you are a business and you fail, the government won't come and bail you out (unless you are a bank deemed "too big to fail"). This is a dilemma for which I have no solution.

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Creative entrepreneurship is also not new. Indeed, the understanding that art is profitable, is at the basis of the transformation of Western society that began with Gutenberg's invention of movable type and the printing press in 1440. Till that time literature was enjoyed by very few. Those who wrote literature, be it in the time of Lucretius, Catullus and Horace or even Petrarch and Dante, knew that they did it for a small circle of people who managed to purchase copies of their works copied by hand. Nor was there a literate audience to read their works anyway, or at least until 19th Century, there was no market for their work. So writers needed a patron, or a day job. Gutenberg, or to be more general, new technology dramatically changed this. Books could be mass produced, writers could support themselves by their work, literacy became something desired by broad masses of people – who – Nota Bene – never earlier knew that reading was something they wanted to do – and to ensure that creators got paid for their work the idea of intellectual property, or copyright, became a part of our legal systems. We see this paradigm repeated down to the present day with Angry Birds.

Technology liberated an art form and that art form gave birth to an industry: literary publishing.

Much the same happened a little more than a century ago with the invention of the phonograph, allowing recorded music to become widespread and liberating that art form from its earlier constraints of (published) sheet music, which also, incidentally, required a performer.

We see then that as creative industries, the arts have long been a part of our economies, no small part if we look especially at the music industry and no one really talks about these branches of the economy as being anything different in kind from other industries reliant on broad masses of consumers.

So I would suggest that when we talk about creative entrepreneurship as something new, then what we are talking about is a change in attitude toward those aspects of creativity that are not immediately about bestsellers and gold records, but rather with the understanding that all forms of art, even the most esoteric or rarified have a place in the economy and that the distinction between popular and so-called elite art is artificial and crude.

When does a musician's or a writer's work become "part of the economy"? How many books or records does he or she need to sell? Or looking at it differently and perhaps more disturbingly, do we define art as elite because it doesn't sell?

Take the example of a composer deemed esoteric and elite, Arvo Pärt, a composer very little known for many years, yet who today is known and whose works are performed all over the world, again to use the crude language of marketing, is part of Estonia's brand?

Examples of creative artists such as Arvo Pärt lead me to think that once we recognise that art is as much a part of our economy as government financed investment promotion efforts and in this case undoubtedly no less important in creating a picture of our country, that perhaps we have not fully understood how important it is for a country to support the creative arts.

Equally important is the effective management of the arts. Not necessarily by government employed "arts managers", but rather the education and training of people who know how to do the work needed for an artist to become known. We recognise that in the case of true artistic genius that he or she should be allowed to devote his time to creating, not to the work of promotion. But what of those whose talents are not yet recognised? Who does the work that ensures....

What I am trying to get at here is that we recognise the whole of the creative enterprise as important. That while it is, I would hope, a no brainer to understand that an Alvar Aalto or Tõnu Kaljuste brings recognition, tourists, audiences, commissions to a country like Finland and Estonia, that otherwise would be known for their saunas and long winters, it is often more difficult to convince people that for an Aalto or a Kaljuste to become known takes time and effort and that if we leave it up only to the artist, that means time and effort spent on activities he may not be so good at and less time on those activities in which he is a genius.

A small nation cannot afford the popular but overblown romantic 19th century image of the starving artist in the garret that receives posthumous discovery, recognition and acclaim like van Gogh or Emily Dickenson. We need to nurture our arts and artists when they are alive and busy at creating.

Again this means attention to our creators.

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As the late Steve Jobs repeatedly demonstrated, creativity and artistic vision is not the monopoly of the painter, the novelist and the composer. What the latter three share with the former is a willingness to innovate, try absolutely new and initially crazy-seeming notions, that moreover, like Beethoven's dissonant opening chord in "Eroica", may not find immediate acceptance and indeed may meet with open hostility. Impressionism and cubism, Joyce's Ulysses and Eliot's Wasteland found little initial understanding. Indeed Ulysses, like Lawrence's Lady Chatterly's Lover were banned in the United States.

Creativity, innovation is not necessarily met with immediate success and acclaim. In this regard Jobs was an exception, although he too had his difficulties. Immediate success and acclaim cannot be a yardstick; the more innovative, the more creative a work is, the longer the time it often takes for acceptance.

Here, I believe we need to ensure that public sector support for the arts remain in place. And as with start-ups recognise that not all projects will pan out. In a sense, if I may be so crass, the role of the government is akin to the venture capitalist, who invests in a range of projects, hoping that one of them will pan out. It may be a crass analogy but I believe it is a forceful rationale for public support of the arts, especially for those starting out.