

Chapter 8

Arguing Art: Evaluation of the Viability Argument in the Political Debate on Cutting the Subsidies for the Production of Art in Dutch Society

By Emilie Blauwhoff

Abstract

One of the arguments used by the Dutch government to support the cuts in the subsidies for the production of art is that of economic viability. In the political discourse faulty arguments are masked by the use of arbitrary language and incomplete statements, but through the restructuring of the Viability Argument with the method of Political Discourse Evaluation, several flaws have become apparent, of which the most severe one is that the value of art is equated with its economic viability. Art has many external, immaterial benefits that help shape the social and political aspects of a society; economic viability, on the other hand, only measures the intrinsic costs and benefits of art. The real value of art, which goes far beyond an economic cost-benefit analysis, is neglected by the Dutch government in its decision to cut the subsidies.

1 Introduction

“The Netherlands screams for culture”¹ was the slogan that inspired thousands of people on November 20th, 2010, to assemble at central places in dozens of cities to scream: scream for culture. This phrase is very to-the-point, since ‘screaming for something’ is a Dutch saying for when there are clear signs that something is missing, while it is needed crucially. But is culture missing in the Netherlands? And is it that important and so much needed? The former question is debatable. The budget cuts that the Dutch government

1 Translation: Nederland schreeuwt om cultuur.

has planned affect culture badly: 200 million – out of a total budget of 900 million – will be cut in the upcoming years. Many artists, art-lovers and organizations have assembled to scream for culture, have organized themselves to show other forms of protest, and have given attention to the problem in their work and daily lives. Clearly, they see the budget cuts as a threat to the survival of their work, or to the survival of the object of their affection. Many people are afraid that this will damage the cultural sector heavily. On the other side, there are the government and several cultural economists who believe that these budget cuts will not affect the cultural sector severely, at least not in a damaging manner. In fact, some claim that the cultural sector might even benefit from the cut-backs in subsidies, since it will give the sector a new impulse.

As for the second question – is culture so important to the Netherlands – it is quite clear that almost everyone agrees that it is important. Then why is there so much discussion? Because there is no absolute agreement about what exactly makes culture so crucial. True, the van Gogh museum attracts millions of tourists every year, which stimulates the economy very beneficially. And this does not apply to the experimental, Dutch spoken play performed in a small theatre in the outskirts of Amsterdam. Some people believe that the former example shows the value of culture, whereas others believe that the latter encompasses that which makes culture so important. Both questions will play a central role in this research paper. Mostly, this paper aims at investigating why the government is so fond of cutting back on cultural subsidies, when so many people believe it is extremely damaging. Why does the government think that it is not damaging, that it might even be very beneficial to the sector? And are the arguments they provide satisfying? On top of these points, this paper will identify the question of the true value of art as a central issue in the political discourse. The extreme variety of viewpoints regarding these questions makes this research highly relevant in light of the current political debate.

Let us start by elaborating on what has been identified as the main Claim that is researched in this paper: the idea that the production of art should not be subsidized. Firstly, this paper focuses on the production of art, not on culture in general, since especially the productive side of arts is hit severely by the budget cuts. On average, the various Dutch ministries have to cut back on 6-8% of their budget.² However, the cultural sector has to cut more than 20% of its budget – 200 million on a budget of 900 million.³ Of this 900 million, about 550 million is divided amongst museums, orchestras, important

2 Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing naar Aanleiding van de Miljoenennota voor het Jaar 2011*, 2011.

3 Claudia Kammer, “We Moeten Goed Kijken of het niet Efficiënter Kan,” *NRC Handelsblad*, August 27, 2010.

art institutions, and the seven existing cultural funds. It is mostly the latter that give out subsidies, however, those will also be cut out of proportion to the other bodies – in total about 40% – since the government wants to save museums and orchestras. On top of this, comes the tax raise of 13% on the podium and expressive arts – from the low tax of 6% to the ‘normal’ tax of 19%. Thus, this specific cultural field is hit thrice: budget cuts in the entire Ministry, cuts that hit this sub-field extra hard and a raise in taxes.⁴ A reduction of 31% is awaiting the podium arts, of which festivals will be cut with 40% and ‘productiehuizen’⁵ will lose all their funding; film institutions will be cut back on funding with 18%; and expressive arts will lose a total of 44% of its subsidies, going up to 72% of cuts for development institutions for proven talent.⁶

Secondly, the Claim reads that the producing arts should not receive any subsidies at all, instead of focusing on the level of subsidies that remains and the elaborate criteria for receiving subsidies that have been put forward. This is done because the question that the different debates have evolved around is whether subsidies for producing art are in essence good or bad for the sector. Many different sources have been used to collect discourse on this Claim: transcripts of (parliamentary) debates, research reports of different institutions, newspaper articles, government publications, and much more. However, the parliamentary debate on December 13th, 2010, is taken as main source for the arguments, since it provides the most important political discourse. Especially this debate focused on the question why it would be better for the cultural sector not to receive any subsidies at all. The tolerating support party of the government even clearly states that they are strongly against any form of cultural subsidies.⁷ Also, the government party claims that the cuts on the subsidies are not merely because of forced government cuts due to the financial crisis. The wish to transform the subsidy dependent cultural sector had been on their list for several years already.⁸ Thus, this paper will focus on the arguments why the government should not give subsidies, not on why the subsidies will be cut in this specific manner.

The aim of this paper is to reconstruct and evaluate one of the arguments for the Claim “the government should not subsidize the production of art” through the method of Political Discourse Evaluation. After having collected enough information through

4 Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*.

5 A ‘productiehuis’ is a company that produces shows and sells them to TV and radio channels, without performing them themselves.

6 Van Bochove and Arends, *Nieuwe Visie Cultuurbeleid: Lijst van Vragen en Antwoorden*, Doc. 32820, no. 31 (2011).

7 Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*, 30.

8 Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*.

reading extensive debates, opinion articles, academic papers, research reports and political statements, this information has been filtered and structured in order to create the Viability Argument. This argument focuses on how art functions on the free market and the evaluation focuses on the difference between art being commercially unviable and being non-valuable. One will find that the different intended meanings of arbitrary language in the political discourse masks the great flaws in the arguments made. Once correctly analyzed the argument does not hold since the real value of art to society goes far beyond that which can be measured in economic terms.

2 Reconstructing the Viability Argument

“There is a very large oversupply of culture at the moment”⁹ says Member of Parliament Mr. de Liefde. With this he refers to the fact that theater productions are not sold out – or sometimes theater associations do not even perform – exhibitions are not widely visited, and dance performances do not attract large audiences. In fact, calculations have been made that if there would be just as much demand for performing arts as there is supply, then every Dutch citizen above 6 years of age should attend three performances each year. Currently, the average amount of theater visits a year per Dutch citizen is one.¹⁰ Mr. de Liefde’s Claim thus holds some truth, namely that there is a misbalance between the demand for and supply of art, with regards to performing arts.

The government holds a very economical perspective on this issue, and the solution that is sought is therefore very straightforward: there is more supply of art than there is demand, thus, the supply should be cut back.¹¹ The solution of the government to the disequilibrium between supply and demand is to get rid of the oversupply of art, not to increase the demand for it. The Data for the Claim would then be that the government wants to get rid of the oversupply of art and the only Warrant that can connect the two would have to hold that not giving subsidies is the only solution to the oversupply. The argument would look as follows:

9 Mr. de Liefde (VVD) in Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing naar Aanleiding van de Miljoenennota voor het Jaar 2011*, 2011 (“Er is nu een ontzettend groot overaanbod aan cultuur.”).

10 Van Bochove and Arends, *Nieuwe Visie Cultuurbeleid*.

11 Increasing the demand for art does not seem to be an option for the government. In fact, certain measures have even been taken to decrease the demand even more, but this is an entirely different subject outside the scope of this paper.

- [Data] We want to get rid of the oversupply of art.
- [Warrant] If we want to get rid of the oversupply of art, the government should not subsidize the production of art.
- [Claim] The government should not subsidize the production of art.

At first sight this does indeed seem to be what the government is claiming. However, just getting rid of the oversupply does not give clear guidelines as to what art will eventually disappear. One cannot say which part of the supply is ‘oversupply’ and which art is still within the boundaries of the demanded supply without certain methods of determining this distinction. Simply stating that the oversupply should disappear makes it seem that the government does not have any criteria as to which art will go. Nevertheless, the discourse clearly shows that there are certain art institutions that the government wants to spare and certain types of art that it wants to get rid of. Namely, the Raad van Cultuur – the advisory board of culture – has put forward certain criteria that it will apply when selecting institutions and artists who will still get a subsidy. These are quality, the ability to attract enough public, entrepreneurship that ensures independent income, participation and education of young people, internationality, and central geographical location.¹² To start with, a central geographical location is not emphasized greatly by the government, neither is it something that will be achieved by cutting in subsidies. Rather, it is a criterion to continue giving subsidies to artists that are located beneficially, and not a criterion by which artists that are not located centrally will disappear. Also education and internationality do not form the hard criteria applied by the government.

With regards to what the Data for this Claim could be, this leaves us with quality on the one hand and public and independent income on the other hand. Both are used as Claims by politicians rather often. For example, Mr. de Liefde uses an analogy with a tree: sometimes you need to trim a tree drastically, before it can grow back strong and beautiful.¹³ He hereby refers to ‘bad’ art that takes too much space in the cultural sector and hinders ‘good’ art to develop further, since they have to share subsidies. It would thus be beneficial to get rid of this oversupply consisting of low quality art to give more room for the high quality art to expand. At the same time, much of the discourse refers to the artists’ ability to attract public and achieve an independent income. This thus refers to the commercial viability of the art at hand.

12 Halbe Zijlstra, *Adviesaanvraag Cultuurbeleid: Raad van Cultuur*, Doc. No. 261571 (2010).

13 Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*.

Both the quality and viability argument fit into the political discourse and it is therefore necessary to apply the quality constraint, which is an important criterion in the method of Analytical Discourse Evaluation. This can be done by looking at the Warrant: if we want to get rid of low quality art (or commercially unviable art respectively), the government should not subsidize the production of art. What is likely to happen when artists and art institutions lose their subsidies? In that case, artists will either have to cut back on expenses or they will have to receive money via other means. The former approach will definitely not increase the overall quality of supplied art. Furthermore the latter approach also does not seem to be a means by which low quality art will be filtered out: it has proven evident that art considered to be of low quality has been able to receive funds and money from visitors, whereas art of high quality was not – for example, Blond Amsterdam¹⁴ is a very trendy and sellable art brand but it is not considered ‘high’ culture, whereas the Dutch opera has to receive subsidies to survive but is regarded as being of high quality. Rather, for an artist to be able to produce art and be able to continue to do so without subsidies, it is important for this artist to produce commercially viable art. This is deemed to be the ‘hard’ criterion that the government uses to decide for or against subsidies.¹⁵ Thus the best possible argument, in line with the political discourse, will look as follows:

[Data]	We want to get rid of commercially unviable art.
[Warrant]	If we want to get rid of commercially unviable art, the government should not subsidize the production of art.
[Claim]	The government should not subsidize the production of art.

Even though this Warrant is not literally stated in any debate, it is clear that this is what the government believes the effect of not subsidizing art is. Furthermore, it is the only form the Warrant can take in order to make this a valid argument.

Data and Verifiers

Let us first look at the Data: We want to get rid of commercially unviable art. What could this Claim be based on? One possible reason could be that the government wants the

14 A brand selling painted teapots, cups etc., started by two women after graduating from the art academy. This brand has grown explosively in the past couple of years, but started as a small scale art product produced in a small atelier in Amsterdam.

15 Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*.

market system to run fully without any interventions, because they wholly believe in the rightness of this system. The argument would then be:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| [Data\Data] | The market system should work without any government interventions. |
| [Data\Warrant] | If the market system should work without any government interventions, then we want to get rid of commercially unviable art. |
| [Data\Claim] | We want to get rid of commercially unviable art. |

This argument is valid and content wise a very acceptable argument if the Data is true. However, although the current government is rather liberalist, it does not believe in running a country without any government interventions. It would contradict many other parts of the Dutch policy: the education system, social welfare, and the mortgage that can be deducted from the taxes, to name a few examples. Furthermore, the Claim that it is not the task of the government to intervene in the economic system is barely made in the political discourse. Therefore, this option has to be abandoned due to the fidelity constraint.

Rather, it might be useful to look at the definition of commercial (un-) viability. If something is commercially unviable, this means that the costs of the product exceed the willingness to pay for it. As Mr. de Liefde states, artists should make art that the public wants to pay for.¹⁶ However, simply Backing up this statement by providing Data that we should get rid of art that people do not want to pay for, will make us go in circles, since 'do not want to pay for' is exactly the definition of 'commercially unviable'. One has to delve deeper into the issue and find a more generally applicable reason why certain art pieces are not commercially viable. The reason that people currently do not want to pay a certain amount for art is not merely that they do not like the product, but also that they believe it is not worth their money and therefore that the value of the art piece is not high enough for them. When taking this into account, the Data for 'we should get rid of commercially unviable art' has to be that this is so because the invaluable art should disappear. The government thus claims that commercially unviable art is the same as invaluable art. This leads to the construction of:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| [Data\Data] | We want to get rid of non-valuable art. |
| [Data\Warrant] | All non-valuable art is commercially unviable art. |
| [Data\Claim] | We want to get rid of commercially unviable art. |

16 Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*.

The Data provided does not need further Backing, since any Reasonable Citizen would agree that it makes no sense to hold on to invaluable products. However, the Warrant seems more troubling. Why is it that if all individuals do not find a certain piece of art worthy of their money, that the particular product can be labeled as invaluable in its totality? This would imply that the value of an art-piece is bound to the price people would want to pay for it. However, what is usually seen as the value of art – on top of the internal monetary value – is the external benefits that art produces. These range from external financial benefits – e.g. for the tourist branch – to external benefits such as providing a cultural identity and democratic values. Thus, invaluable art would then be art of which the costs exceed the internal and external benefits. If this definition should again be connected to the Claim that invaluable art is commercially unviable art, the Warrant should hold that art of which the costs exceed the benefits is commercially unviable art:

[Data\Warrant\Data]	All non-valuable art is art where the costs exceed the benefits.
[Data\Warrant\Warrant]	All art where the costs exceed the benefits is commercially unviable art.
[Data\Warrant\Claim]	All non-valuable art is commercially unviable art.

Warrant and Backing

The Data-side of the argument can now not be further elaborated upon. However, the Warrant ‘if we want to get rid of commercially unviable art, the government should not subsidize the production of art’ needs some verification. Why is it that the only way to decrease the amount of commercially unviable art is to cut back on the subsidies? The opposite does seem to be true, that giving subsidies does not necessarily always lead to valuable art. Mr. Bosma states this in the parliamentary debate, by citing Thorbecke – considered to be one of the most important politicians in Dutch history – “The experience teaches us that giving material support does not always lead to genius works.”¹⁷ This is certainly true: not all subsidized artists produce works of great quality, whereas some unsubsidized artists produce genius and commercially viable artworks, for example Damien Hirst.¹⁸

However, the Dutch government seems to believe that it is the case that the gross of artists will not choose to produce commercially viable art if it does not give them

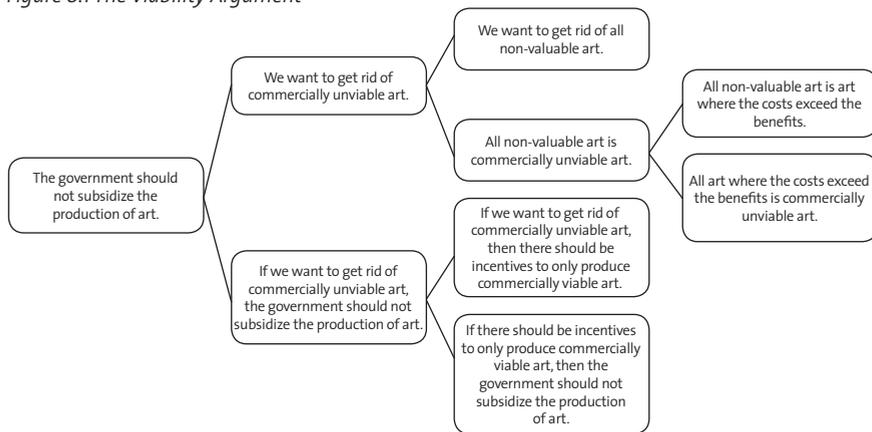
17 Thorbecke, cited by Martin Bosma, in Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*, 28 (“De ervaring leert dat het geven van materiële hulp niet per se tot geniale werken leidt”).

18 A contemporary British artist who is considered to be the richest still living artist in the world.

the incentives to do so. Namely, if the government provides the artists with an income, there is no need for them anymore to receive money from their public, thus they will not need to be able to sell their product. The government, in turn, believes that artists should become responsible for their own income, promoting an ‘Americanization’ of the cultural policy: artists will pay more attention to the market where they need to sell their products. The government believes that only by not giving subsidies to artists any more, will they take this step into producing sellable art. So we now have the following argumentative structure to verify the original Warrant:

- [Warrant\Data] If we want to get rid of commercially unviable art, then there should be incentives to only produce commercially viable art.
- [Warrant\Warrant] If there should be incentives to only produce commercially viable art, then the government should not subsidize the production of art.
- [Warrant\Claim] If we want to get rid of commercially unviable art, the government should not subsidize the production of art.

Figure 8.1 The Viability Argument



3 Evaluating the Viability Argument

Warrant-Branch

There are several things that can be remarked about this argument. Let us first look at the less damaging shortfalls of the argument, before turning to the large problem of defining value and viability. To start, is it necessarily true that if one wants to get rid of commercially unviable art, that there have to be incentives to produce only commercially viable art? And if so, is cutting in the subsidies the only solution? As to the former question, one can ask oneself if artists do not have a certain intrinsic motivation to be able to sell their art or to attract public to their performances, as is claimed even by the government parties.¹⁹ To explain this, Frey's crowding theory looks at this intrinsic motivation of artists and shows its positive consequences.²⁰ Crowding in – an increase of internal motivation – occurs when artists receive money for their work regardless of external pressures. The opposite, crowding out, occurs when external pressures – such as incentives to make commercially viable art – dominate in the motivation of artists to produce art. Social psychology research has shown that work produced because of intrinsic motivation is of higher quality and more open to positive development, whereas work produced because of external motivation is likely to remain on the same level of quality.²¹ Furthermore, spillover effects can take place when artists have been exposed to external pressures for a long time and thus their intrinsic motivation to sell their art diminishes permanently.²² Thus, it seems more beneficial to the cultural sector when the main motivation for artists to produce work remains their internal motivation. Secondly, experience has shown that artists that previously received subsidies have successfully become financially independent by producing commercially viable art. This is shown in the great achievements of the *Wet Werk en Inkomen Kunstenaar*²³ (WWIK). This law provided beginning artists with a basic income, in order for them to be able to start off their careers as artists without having to work double shifts in another job to enable them to finance their artistic work. It has been very successful since it was set up in 2005: 94% of the artists that received a grant via the

19 Tweede Kamer, *Algemene Politieke Beschouwing*.

20 Frey, in: Arjo Klamer and Lyudmila Petrova, "Financing the Arts: The Consequences of Interaction among Artists, Financial Support, and Creativity Motivation," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 37 (2007): 245-256.

21 David G. Meyers, *Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

22 Klamer and Petrova, "Financing the Arts".

23 Translation: Law for Work and Income of the Artist

WWIK were independent from the government within two years.²⁴ Thus, it is definitely not certain that every artist needs external incentives to produce commercially viable art. However, it cannot be excluded that there are artists that currently produce commercially unviable that do need these incentives, so this premise will be treated as an acceptable one for the sake of the argument.

Secondly, it is also questionable whether the only means to give incentives to produce only commercially viable art is for the government not to subsidize the production of art anymore. Are there no other options of what these incentives could look like? It now seems as if the government has chosen for the simplest and cheapest option, even though it might not have the best outcome. Several scholars and politicians might agree that certain incentives are needed to make artists focus more on what the public wants to see and to make his/her art more sellable. However, they also agree that cutting back on subsidies as drastically as the Dutch government will do, is not the right solution to the problem. An example of another solution is the matchingsregeling²⁵ that has been used for several years in order to stimulate artists to become more commercially viable. This regulation entails that if artists are able to produce a certain amount of their income independently from the government, that the government will then 'match' this amount of money with subsidies, thus doubling the income of the artist if he/she successfully produces commercially viable artwork. This successful method, however, has been discontinued by the government, thus suggesting that they are not willing to look into alternative methods of giving incentives to produce commercially viable art. However, the government might use as an argument that this matchingsregeling did not provide a drastic enough change in the cultural sector – which they want to achieve now – and that they therefore see the cutting in subsidies as the sole solution to the problem. Therefore, also this premise will be treated as acceptable, so that we can now critically look at the most problematic part of this argument: defining non-valuable and commercially unviable.

Data Branch

The most debatable section of this argument is the discussion of the meaning of non-valuable and unviable art. Since the argument has to be syllogistically correct, all non-valuable art has to be commercially unviable art, not just a section of that art (the latter would still be acceptable, but the former needs further elaboration). Thus, the argument

24 P. de Krom, *Intrekking van de Wet Werk en Inkomen Kunstenaar: Nota naar Aanleiding van het Nader Verslag*, Doc. 32701 No. 8, June 27, 2011.

25 Translation: the matching regulation

requires that non-valuable and commercially unviable art are defined in the same manner. Commercially unviable art is art which the public does not want to buy, because they consider the costs too high or the benefits too low. Thus, commercially unviable art can be defined as art where the costs exceed the benefits. Non-valuable art has the same meaning, since the things that make certain art valuable can be seen as benefits, and when such benefits do not exist – or when they are diminutive – the costs of producing the artwork are higher than its benefits. Problem solved?

No, not really. Costs and benefits in the case of viability seem to be different than the costs and benefits when talking about value. For, when determining commercial viability, one only looks at economic benefits and benefits for the individual or the group of individuals that purchase the piece of art. However, when determining the value of art, benefits have a very different meaning. We can divide this into internal and external benefits. The internal benefits of art are determined by, for example, the income generated by ticket sale. However, this is only a small fraction of the benefits of art. There are also the external benefits. Snowball²⁶ makes a distinction between the instrumental and the intrinsic values of art – also referred to as material and immaterial values respectively.²⁷ Both produce benefits external to the parties involved with the transaction. However, whereas instrumental values – such as an increase in tourism and other economic benefits – are easy to measure, intrinsic values are difficult to grasp. The material external benefits are often put forward as a very important value of art. For example, many economists refer to the growth of the creative industry in relation to the expenditures on culture.²⁸ However, art should not only be referred to as profitable in a material and economic perception, for it mainly brings gains in a non-material, or intrinsic, sense. This is exactly what the famous quote by Winston Churchill depicts. When it was discussed to cut back on the cultural budget, because of the high expenditures for the war, Churchill refused and asked the rhetorical question:

If we cut back on culture, then what are we still fighting for?²⁹

26 Jen D. Snowball, "Cultural Value", in *A Handbook for Cultural Economics*, ed. Ruth Towse (Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011), 172-176.

27 Johan Fretz, *Hart voor Kunst: Een Pleidooi Tegen de Culturele Kaalslag* (Amsterdam: Lebowski Publishers, 2010).

28 Pieter Hilhorst, "Linkse Liefhebberij," *de Volkskrant*, April 27, 2010.

29 Marianne M. van Dijk, "Kunst Plakt, Kunst Hakt, Kunst Lakt" (paper presented at the Schaven of Schrappen: Kunst en Cultuur in een Rechts Kabinet, Nijmegen, LUX), November 8, 2010.

Immaterial External Benefits of Art

Many politicians and journalists have debated about what these external, non-material values of art are, and a short selection will be given. What they all agree on is that it is very difficult to exactly pin-point these. However, several fruitful attempts have been made. In an article written by Peter Hilhorst the central question is why we do not remember his dentist, while we do remember Ruysdael. Why do we remember Sjostakovitsj and not his baker? His answer: because we recognize ourselves in the art they have produced, but not in that loaf of bread. We are art and art is the basis of what makes the human race so special: because it gives us the ability to create new things and to determine our self-image.³⁰ Even the State Secretary responsible for the budget cuts agrees with this. He states that, apart from the economic values, culture has a very important value of shaping individuals and society as a whole.³¹ Furthermore, the artist-gone-journalist Johan Fretz describes one particular aspect of art: its funnel function. If a certain part of society is inspired by art, this flows to the rest of society as a reversed funnel. Even though some art forms might be a bit elitist, and only a certain group of citizens experience this art, the benefits of it will affect the entire society.³²

Numerous scholars have also attempted to expose the value of art, and in this paper two of them will be discussed: Hannah Arendt and Marianne van Dijk. Let us start with the former.³³ Arendt found the duty that a citizen has in the public and political sphere far more important than that in the private sphere. She believed that the only way to hold a free state together is consent of all citizens – a social contract is necessary. There is also a clear distinction between man and citizen. The laws of nature that guide the former are not applicable to the latter. It is even questionable whether such laws of nature even exist. However, she does not see the existence of a general public opinion – as for example Rousseau claims there is a General Will – but rather claims that individual wills cannot be added together – there is a human plurality.³⁴ This is reflected by her words:

Men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.³⁵

30 Dick Tuinder in: Hilhorst, "Linkse Liefhebberij".

31 Halbe Zijlstra, *Nieuwe Visie Cultuurbeleid: Brief van de Staatssecretarissen van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*, 32820 Nr. 1, 2011.

32 Johan Fretz, *Hart voor Kunst*.

33 This paper is far too short to provide an elaborate exploration of all relevant ideas of Hannah Arendt. However, the dense explanations should be enough to provide a basic idea of the necessary issues.

34 For an extensive exploration into the commonalities and differences, see Margaret Canovan., "Arendt, Rousseau, and Human Plurality in Politics," *The Journal of Politics* 45 (1983): 286-302.

35 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006, s.v. "Hannah Arendt."

If Man would inhabit the world, then policy making would be an easy job, since everyone's interest and opinions are the same. However, this is not the case if men – with different ideas and opinions – live on the earth. On top of that, men are free, in the sense that they are free to introduce novelty and their own ideas. Only compromise can result into clear guidelines for a nation. This compromise can only be achieved if citizens are active in the public sphere and take part in politics. "Man is a political animal" as Aristotle once claimed, hence the emphasis that Arendt puts on the public realm. She stresses the spacial quality, the need of a public space where people share a common world – the relatively permanent context of institutions, settings etc. that provides a field of reference – and a common space of appearance – where political freedom and equality hold when citizens communicate with each other.³⁶

Culture is one of those settings of the common world, which gives citizens a framework and a context of reference. Because people are free to form their own opinions, there needs to be some basis where they can discover what their preferences are: the common world. In the common world, art has the function of letting citizens form ideas of their own. They need to be able to explore what is out there and what, of all these options, it is that they connect to. It forms the identity of people. In the space of appearances citizens will exchange ideas and opinions. If people have formed their own identities by reference to the common world, then the discussion in the common space of appearances will be interesting and varied. This is the political process in the public sphere that is so important to our society and distinguishes us from other animals. Fretz recognizes this point, and states that especially this government should see it as its task to stimulate the production of art if they want their citizens to become independent of the government.³⁷

Also the second scholar, Marianne van Dijk, recognizes the vague debate around the value of art both in media and in politics itself. This Dutch art philosopher stresses that political parties do not use clear wording when they talk of the value of art in their party programs, making the discourse even harder to grasp. Even though everyone seems to find culture and art extremely important, nobody can exactly pinpoint what it is that makes it crucial to a society.³⁸ Van Dijk has combined ideas of many renowned philosophers – including Nietzsche, Foucault and Schopenhauer – and translated it into her theory that the unique values of art are that it:

Pastes, chops and varnishes.³⁹

36 Ibid.

37 Fretz, *Hart voor Kunst*.

38 Marianne M. van Dijk, "De Kunstvrienden Praten te Wollig," *De Volkskrant*, September 30, 2010.

39 Van Dijk, "Kunst" ("plakt, hakt en lakt.").

In terms of 'pasting', van Dijk refers to a group of people having the sense of belonging together. In art, you can recognize yourself, and this recognition in another person's work, shows that you have a bond with those other people, that you are part of a larger community. Research by the Cultureel Planbureau⁴⁰ has shown that people that visit more museums, theatre performances etc. score higher on social cohesion. They feel more connected to the nation, to other people and have more faith in other people: art binds people together. This is something that is crucial in our multicultural country. 'Chopping' in van Dijk's theory entails the breaking of prejudices. Not only those prejudices towards people that are different from you, but also those prejudices of what is seen as 'normal' and 'possible'. Art challenges us to seek the boundaries of the possible and to explore new fields. Lastly, 'varnishing' refers to the beauty of art. We enjoy watching\listening to it. But sometimes, we also find comfort in it. It can make us escape our pain and find joy. But art can also keep us healthy: several researches have shown that art is beneficial for our physical health.⁴¹

Data\Warrant

Thus, the value of art can be grasped through its many immaterial, external benefits that set us apart as human beings – forming identities, providing democratic values, enhancing social cohesion, breaking prejudices and boundaries, providing comforting experiences and much more – next to the internal and the material external benefits that are all too often referred to by politicians and economists. Non-valuable art, on the other hand, is art where these benefits – internal and external, material and immaterial – are lacking, or at least are not present in proportion to the costs of the piece of art. Is commercially unviable art the same? Indeed, something is commercially unviable if the costs exceed the benefits. But are the benefits taken into account in the latter case, the same as the benefits described in the section above? Will a potential purchaser of a piece of art – be it an individual, a company or any other private purchaser – take the external, non-material benefits into account? Will it even take any external benefits into account, next to the internal benefits for the involved parties?

The market system does not seem to run on this principle. Adam Smith, the intellectual founding father of the free market system, claimed that if every citizen acts according to its own interest, then the market would be guided by a so called Invisible Hand, which

40 Cultural research institute of the Netherlands

41 Van Dijk, "Kunst".

would make sure the economy will flourish.⁴² A product is commercially viable if it can survive on such a market. However, acting in one's own interest when purchasing a product, by definition, means to only take the internal benefits of the transaction into account. In exceptional circumstances, big companies or institutions will also take the external material benefits, such as the tourist industry, into account. However, this results into the benefits taken into account, when determining if something is commercially viable, being limited to the internal and the external material benefits, excluding the external immaterial benefits described in the previous section. Even the State Secretary recognizes this problem, when he states that art is worth more money than it can realize on the market.⁴³ Pim van Klink, an important Dutch cultural economist, also agrees that reducing everything to monetary value and economic perspectives does not do justice to the real value of art.⁴⁴

Thus, the problem detected here is that the word 'benefit' cannot mean the same in both premises: on the value-side, external immaterial benefits are added to the calculation, whereas these are left out on the commercial viability-side of the argument.⁴⁵ If anybody would claim that they do mean the same, then either the definition of commercial viability is flawed, or the definition of non-valuable art will find a lot of resistance. In the first case, the central argument would fall into pieces, since that definition of commercial viability does not reflect the argument at hand. If the latter is the case – the value of art is defined through the same costs and benefits as the commercial viability of art – then the government will contradict itself, since several members of the coalition, the State Secretary and other government institutions have stated that they believe there are definitely external immaterial benefits to art. Furthermore, if that is the case, any art-lover or Reasonable Citizen would disagree with the premise that we want to get rid of non-valuable art. Also, this raises the controversial question whether the government believes that the art institution that are currently spared from the budget cuts – museums, monuments etc. – do have external immaterial benefits, whereas other art forms do not have those. This would, first of all, be very degrading to the producing arts. Furthermore, it

42 Steven M. Cahn, *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

43 Zijlstra, *Beleidsdoorlichting*.

44 S. Berendsen, "Bezuinigingen gaan Kunst en Cultuur Hard Treffen: Tijd om Iets te Ondernemen" (paper presented at the Schaven of Schrappen: Kunst en Cultuur in een Rechts Kabinet, Nijmegen, LUX), November 8, 2010.

45 The term used for this particular syllogistical fallacy is 'weasle word' – the same word has several different meanings.

contradicts the analysis above that shows that art has a great value in breaking boundaries and coming up with new ideas – a notion that is strongest in newly produced art. Thus, the viability argument can be disregarded as forming a good ground for cutting the subsidies for the production of art.

4 Conclusion

As is often the case when using the method of Analytical Discourse Evaluation, this research paper has shown that political decisions are – sadly – not always based on sound arguments. After the restructuring of the Viability Argument, one can detect several flaws that may go unnoticed if the political discourse had been left in the form in which it usually comes to the public: disconnected phrases that focus on the same issue, but are left unrelated if they are not subject to critical evaluation. The criticism of the argument includes the questions whether there necessarily need to be incentives for artists to produce only commercially viable art and, if so, whether cutting the subsidies for the producing arts is the only satisfactory solution. Although the evaluation of these questions already shows that some doubt could be cast on the strength of the argument, the main problem lies with the suggestion that the economic viability of art is the same as the value of art. This assumption totally bypasses the external, immaterial benefits that art has for society, and reduces its worth to a simple economic cost-benefit analysis.

A selection of external, immaterial benefits of art has been presented and analyzed in this paper, and it can be concluded that these externalities are of great importance to shaping the Dutch society and identity. If our society would only be left with that art of which the value is reduced to its economic value, the persistence of culture will be laid in the hands of mass society and art will be reduced to one of the many commodities of which the consumption is regulated by the market system. As Johan Fretz states, if one leaves art to work through the market system, then the only thing that will be left is predictable and superficial entertainment.⁴⁶ Or, as Hannah Arendt rightfully concludes, “If we understand by culture what it originally meant (the Roman *cultura* – derived from *colere*, to take care of and preserve and cultivate) then we can say without any exaggeration that a society obsessed with consumption cannot at the same time be cultured or produce a culture.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Fretz, *Hart voor Kunst*.

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Society and Culture,” *Deadalus* 89 (1960): 278-287.

Even if certain art will not be appreciated or enjoyed by many individuals, in the end it still has benefits for society as a whole. The biggest flaw in the proposal of the government, and the accompanying argumentation for it, is that they measure the value of art in economic terms, taking the benefits it has for individual entities as the representation of its worth. Its true value, however, lies far beyond that, namely in its abstract contribution to society as a whole. It is not the Dutch people as individuals, but rather the Dutch national identity, that is referred to in the slogan “the Netherlands screams for culture”.