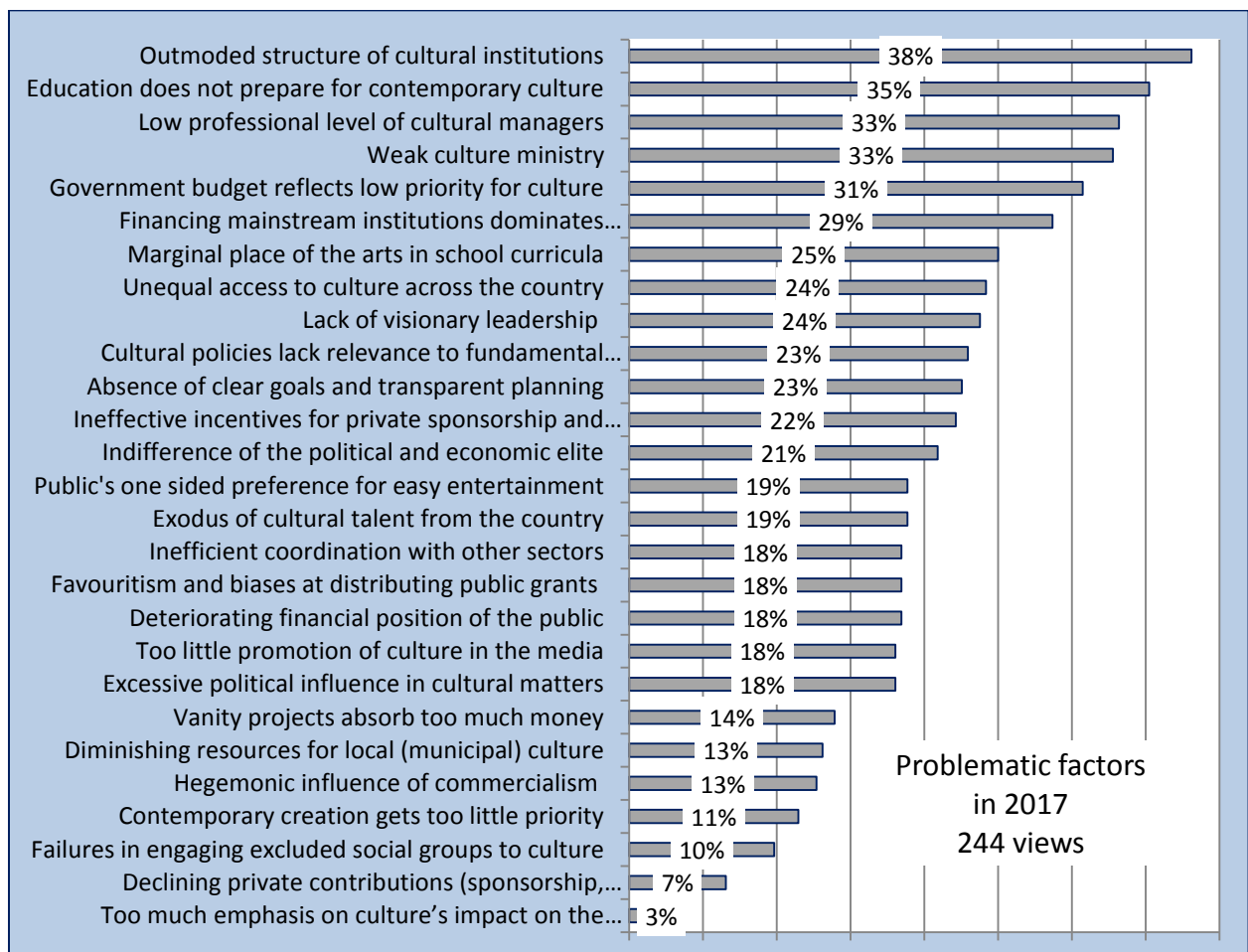


Cultural Climate Barometer 2017

The Budapest Observatory made again set to assessing the overall conditions of culture with the help of the Cultural Climate Barometer. One can find more about this instrument [in the report](#) of the survey done in 2015. This time the focus was on the six Eastern Partnership countries. During the winter months 184 stakeholder views were collected from Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Moldova – the order reflects the amounts of responses. A special report on the six countries is available [on the website](#) of the Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory. From the rest of Europe 57 contributions arrived. With 3 views from other continents the poll totalled 244 perception votes.

Problematic factors for culture

The participating cultural operators were asked to select five from a list of 27 problematic factors for culture in their environment. Two leading complaints about the state of the cultural system flanked the critique of the educational system. The next three problematic factors address the cultural policy: its position within the government and its neglecting smaller and independent operations.



Many participants in the survey feel paralysed when confronted by such a broad scale of factors that may negatively impact the cultural climate. Ironically, at the same time when astonished by the large number, the majority feels constrained by the rule of limiting their choices to five items only. "In our

country all 27 problems prevail” – is more than an often voiced gag. Nevertheless quite a few respondents feel compelled to go further and complement their responses with bitter comments, illustrated with a few from the Belarusian and Ukrainian answers:

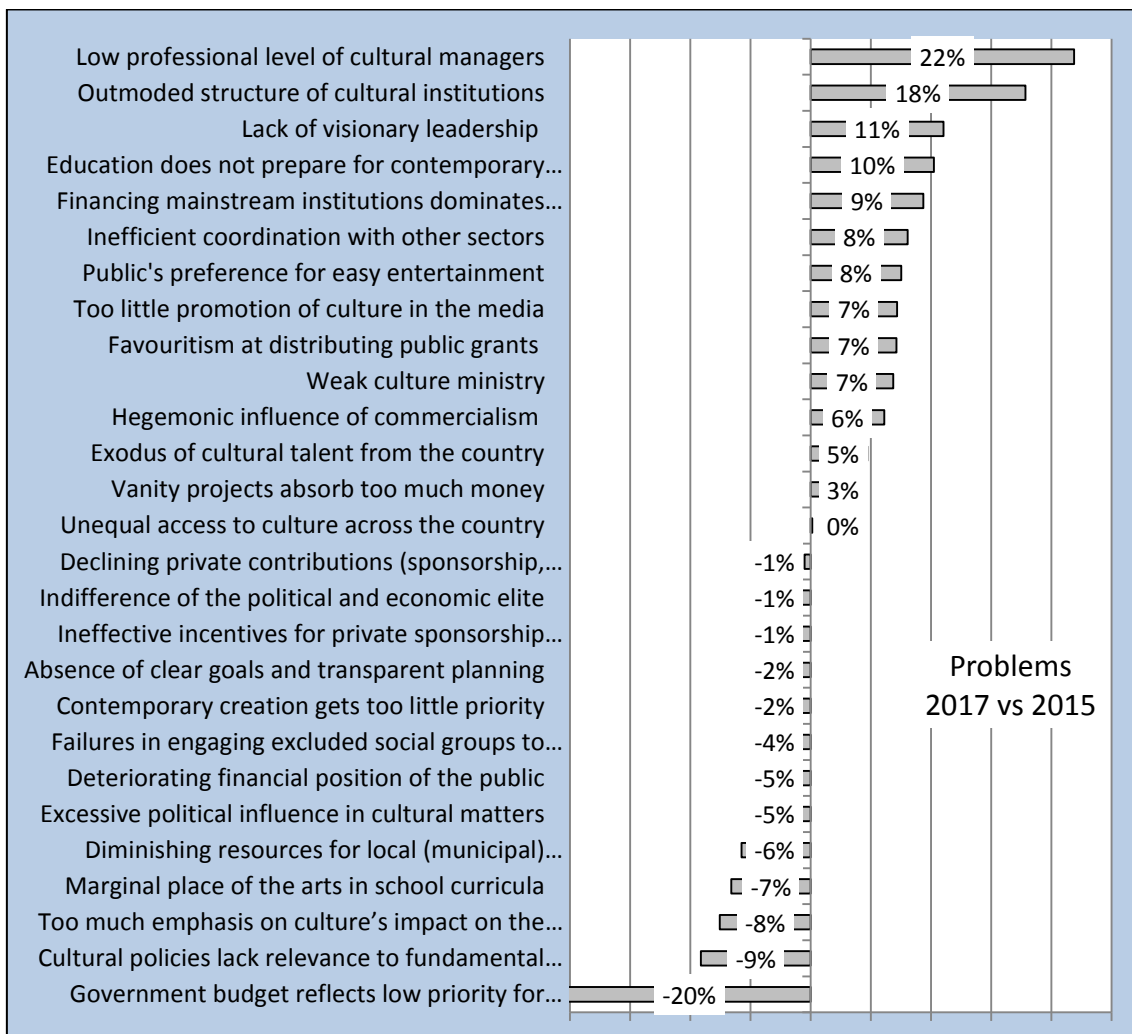
“Tight control of the public and cultural spheres, suspicion of any initiatives not sanctioned by the state whose main principles are any changes are destructive.”

“The regime caused a deep split both in the society, and between the state-sponsored culture and vibrant independent culture. These are two parallel realities.”

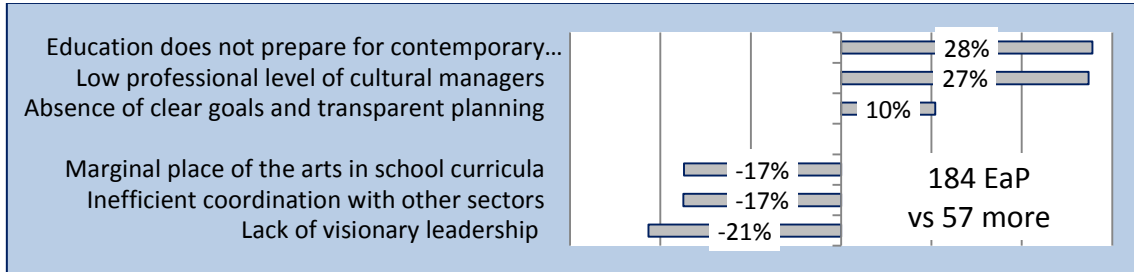
“The state punishes the independent cultural producers, but forcing them either to pay a ‘parasite tax’ or to be examined in a humiliating procedure of ‘applying for a cultural worker status’.”

The testimony of the participants about the cultural climate will be analysed by contrasting the perceptions in various couplings. First, the 244 views collected in the winter of 2017 are compared to the survey made [in 2015](#), with 212 respondents in Europe.

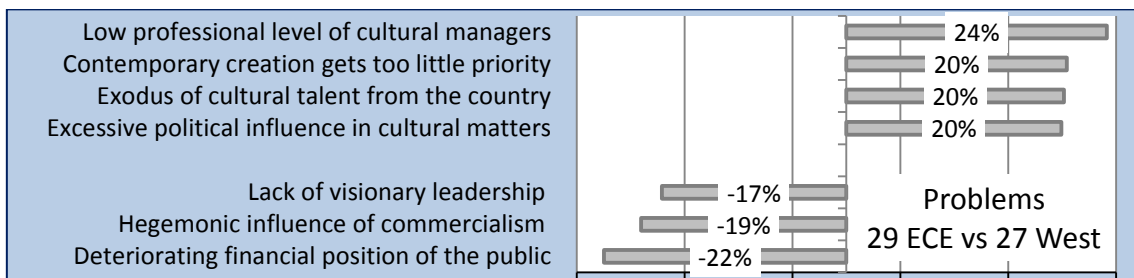
The figures in the next graph indicate absolute distances. This is explained on the item with the greatest gap, *Low professional level of cultural managers*. The 22% means that the 33% we see as the score in 2017 is 22 percentage points more than 11% what had been in 2015. The difference is due more to the sample (dominated this time by the east) than to the time lapse of two years. This, however, does not fully explain the discrepancy shown on the bottom of the graph: two years ago *low priority of culture in public budgets* (i.e. the scarcity of public subsidies) was blamed for problems more than any other of the 27 factors, by 51% of respondents. Now, as seen above, only 31% thoughts so which is 20% less.



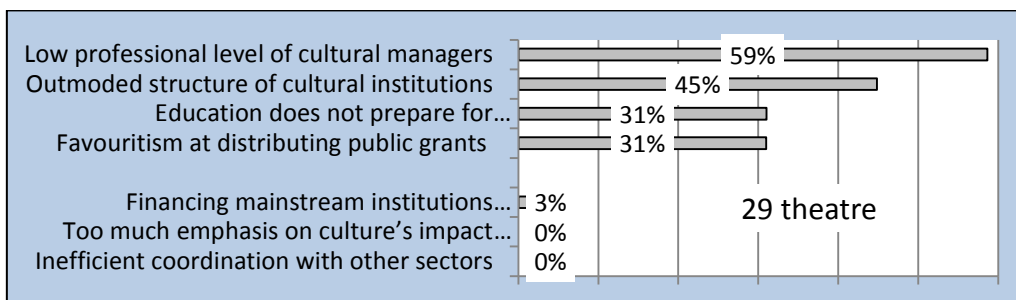
Coming back to the 2017 survey, the next graph shows the items where the largest group, the 184 operators from the six Eastern Partnership countries, differed most from the 57 responses from other parts of Europe (east, middle and west). *Conservatism of education and of cultural managers* appears to concern post-soviet respondents to much greater degree than their colleagues further to the west, while interestingly, they (in the Eastern Partnership area) miss *visionary leadership* much less than others in Europe.



By dissecting the 57 between the middle (east-central Europe) and the west, we discover that *visionary leadership* is indeed a western ideal. Also, (surprisingly?) concern about *commercialism* as well as about *the financial position of the public* appeared as western features: colleagues in the Balkans and the Visegrad countries selected these items much less frequently.

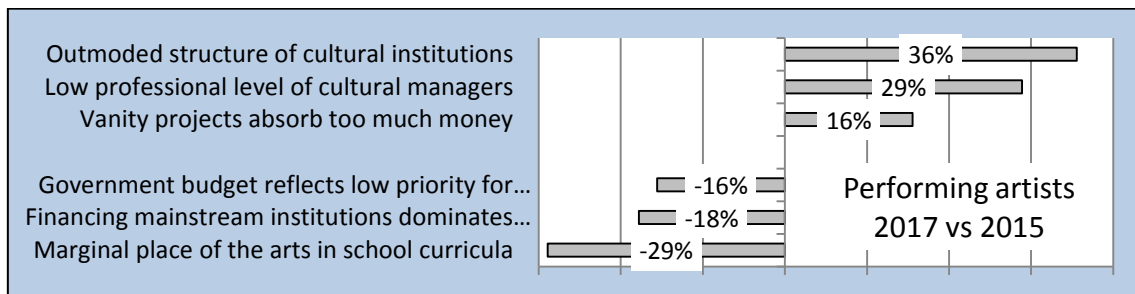


Small samples do not allow for comparison between countries, except within the Eastern Partnership area (e.g. between Ukraine and Georgia) which can be studied in the [separate report](#). Upon the primary background given by the respondents some professional groups could however be formed. 29 people indicated theatre as their basis, many more (59%) of whom complained about *managers' professionalism* than the 33% in the total; also the 45% blame on the *outmoded institutional structure* is more than the 38% average of all responses.

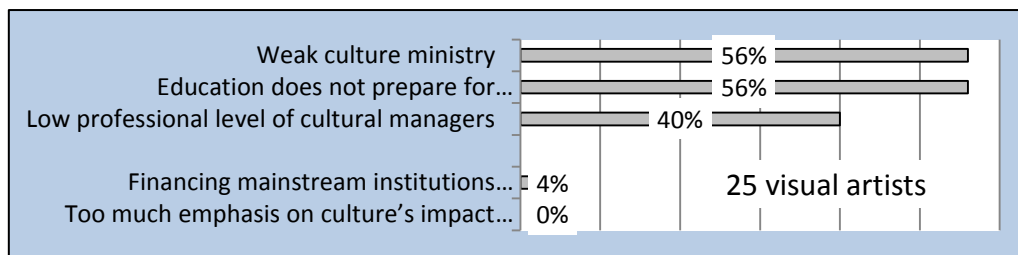


When 16 respondents with musical background are added to the 29 theatre people we get the combined views of 45 performing artists. Two years earlier the same group happened to produce the same number – we had 45 performing artist responses in 2015, too. The comparison reveals that in 2017 money wasted on *vanity projects* was perceived by performing artists more than before. On the

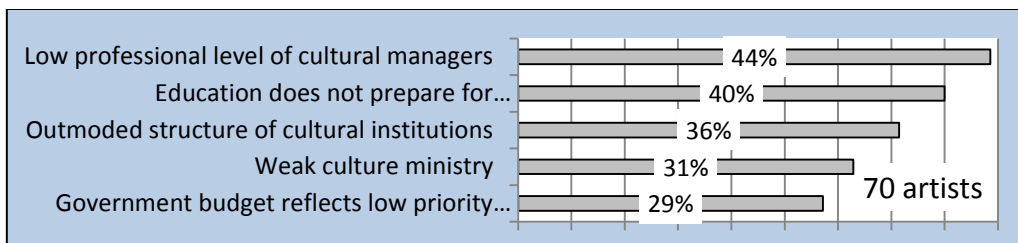
other hand, those who responded in 2017 were much less sensitive about the *place of the arts in the school* and about the *imbalance in financing cultural institutions*.



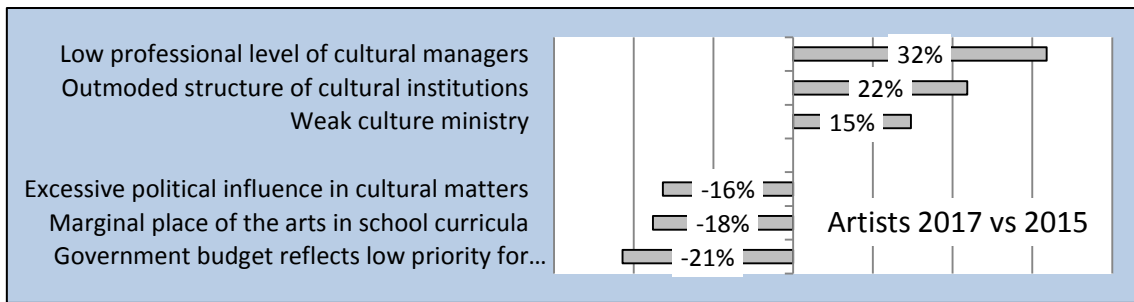
A group of 25 people with visual arts background could be identified, too, who – next to the generally shared complaints – found the *weak position of the culture ministry* a particularly problematic factor. Similar to performing artists, visual artists appear indifferent about the lopsided character of *financing cultural institutions*.



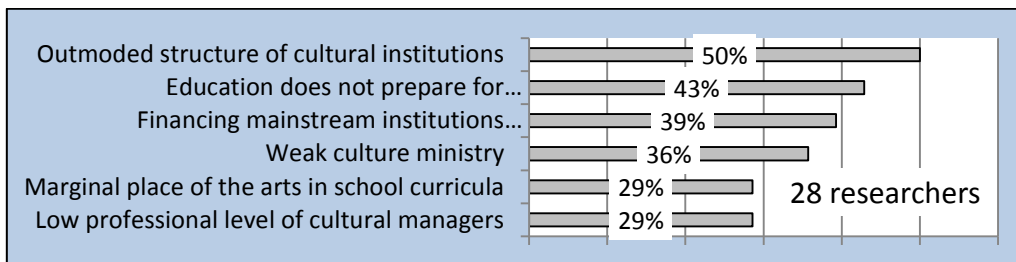
Complemented with respondents with literary and film background, altogether 70 artists expressed their views on the problematic factors to the climate of culture. Their shared priorities reflect the findings discussed so far.



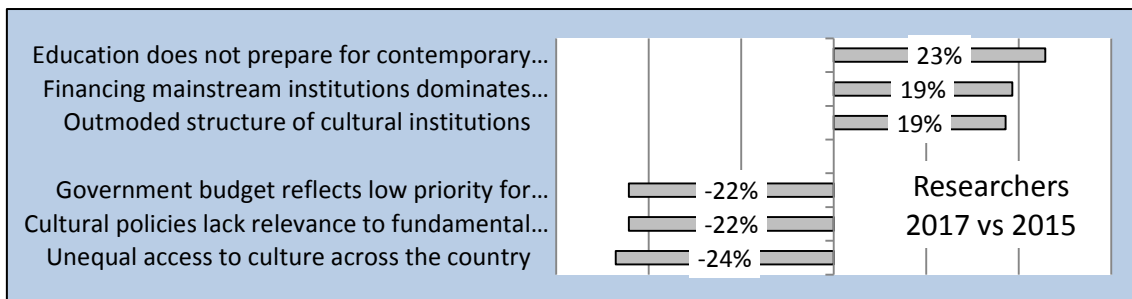
Matching the 70 perceptions to the views of 72 artists' opinions in 2015, the one new item to what we saw above is the case of *political interference*. This choice, too, is characteristic of the sample with a heavy east European weight rather than of the time. It calls, of course, for explanation. Both in 2015 and 2017, complaining about *excessive political influence* was a feature of post-communist east-central Europe, but it was emphasised much less in the post-soviet realm. Either because in the Eastern Partnership countries there is indeed less ideological pressure or because it is taken for granted like for example the weather.



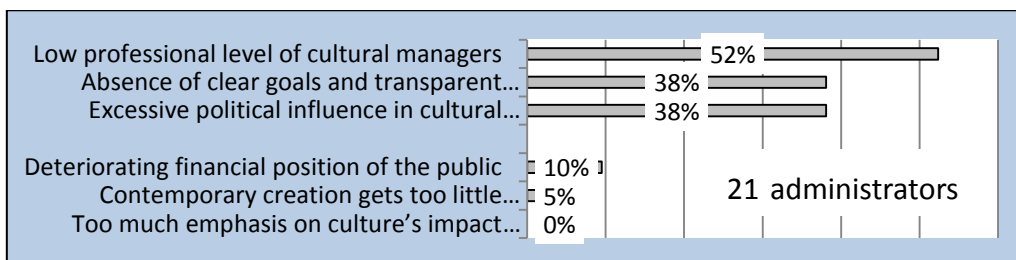
28 respondents are connected to research. In their circle *financing mainstream institutions* at the expense of small and independent ones is among the greatest problems.



If we compare the 28 researchers' views to those of 35 researchers in 2015 we find that the *imbalance in financing institutions* was less of a concern two years ago when the social functions of culture (*relevance to society* and *equality of access*) were closer to the hearts of researchers. Again, composition of the 2015 sample (social sensitivity is a typical western feature) explains the difference more than the distance in time.

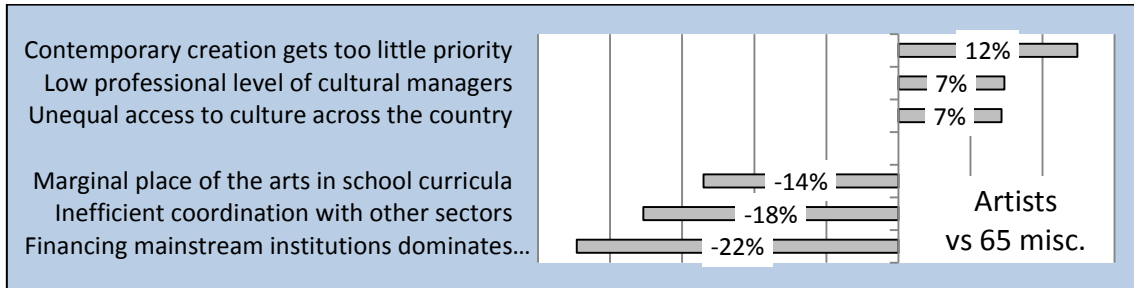


One more professional group counted more than 20 people, that of administrators. They found the *professional level of cultural managers* a particularly serious problem. Participants to the survey sitting probably in state and municipal administration, surprisingly, called for *clear goals and transparency* and expressed concern about *political influence* more than the rest of respondents. At the same time, they did not feel *contemporary creation* being in handicap.



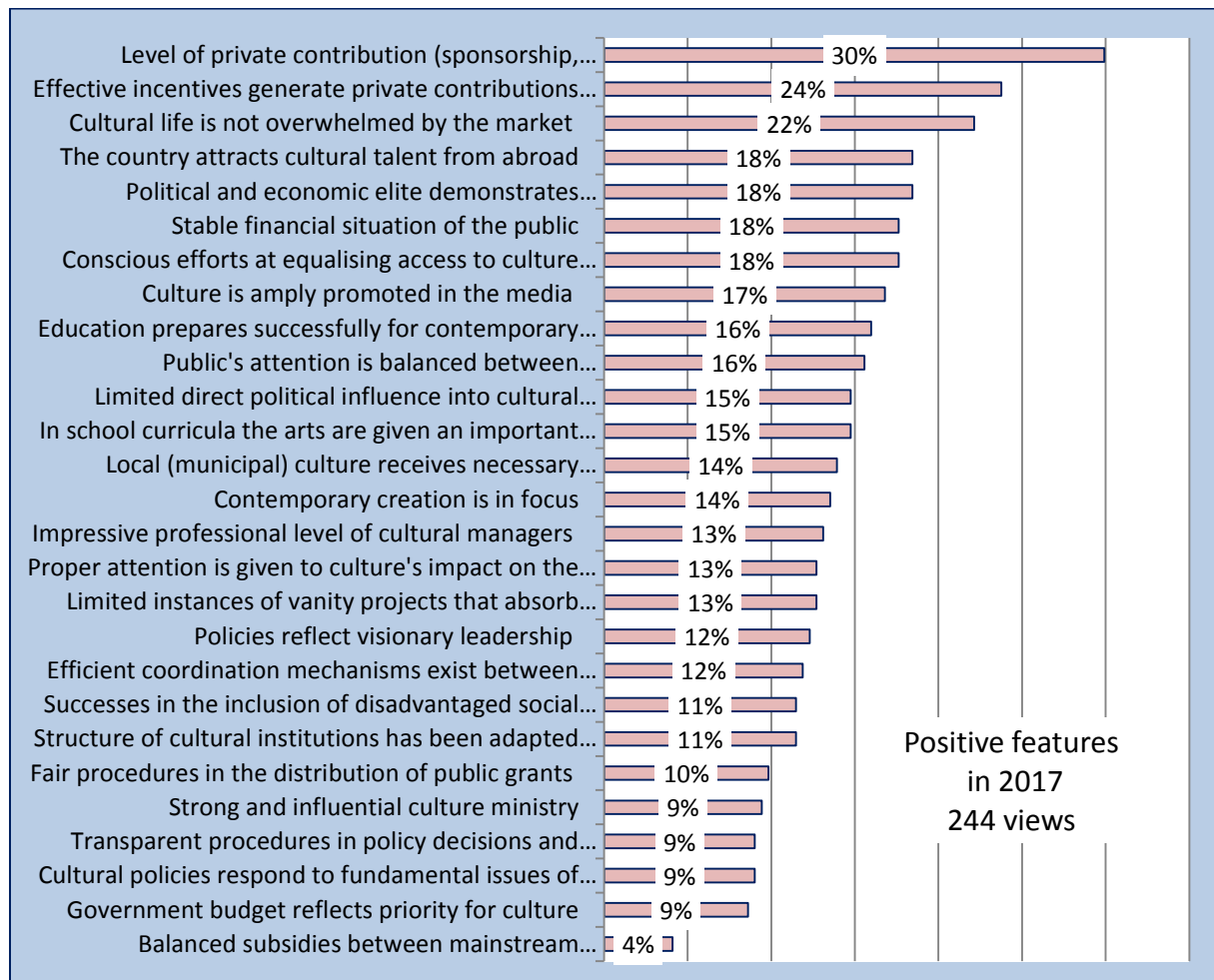
The Budapest Observatory

Respondents with background in research, administration as well as education added up to a group of 65 people. In fact, both they and the 70 artists are a minority in the total of 244: the majority belong to various mixed or “other” professional groups. In the next graph the 70 artists’ perceptions are compared to those of the 65 people in research, administration and education. In this connection artists show greater affinity towards *contemporary creation* and the *equality of access*. Greater is the gap about the assessment of problems like *coordination with other sectors* (e.g. education, economy, tourism...) and the *balanced financing of cultural institutions* which are considered more important by these rational-minded professional groups.



Positive factors of culture

As a complement or double check to the perceptions about the problematic factors, a list of positive features was also designed and applied in the Cultural Climate Barometer. Participating cultural experts find themselves in an even more difficult and unusual situation to rate their ecosystems by their positive aspects. In acknowledgement, selecting five (or fewer) items was not compulsory, which results a smaller and more subjective data base. Here is how the 244 responses ranked the positive components of the cultural climate:



It is an unexpected outcome that satisfaction with both the *amount of sponsorship* and the *mechanisms by which sponsorship is generated* is leading the list. Sponsorship is originally a western concept. In those countries, however, the Barometer sensed limited interest towards sponsorship, both as a problem or an asset. Eastern respondent respond indeed for the eminent position of these items. In the absence of reliable full data on financing, we don't know if indeed, in the Eastern Partnership region amounts of sponsorship and donations have significantly increased lately benefitting cultural action. An intelligent guess is that in an era of not too lavish public finances even a small increase of support from entrepreneurs and private sources is much appreciated. Furthermore, wishful thinking might also play a role in these choices. We looked for clues to the riddle also among the comments (from Belarus and Ukraine):

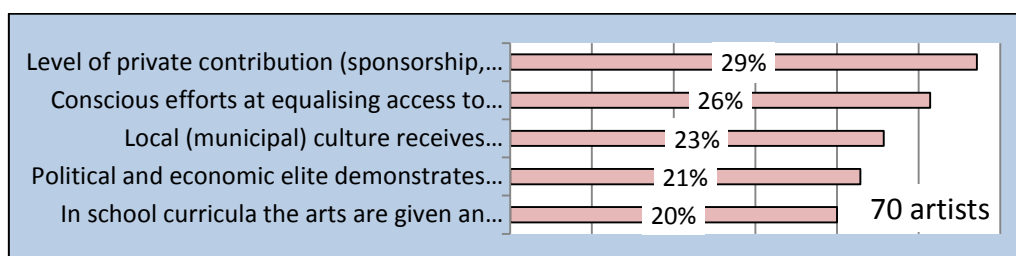
"The number of grass-roots initiatives increased substantially, funding has increased with the EU."
 "Foreign donors finance cultural and educational projects."
 "The state already creates fake-NGOs (GONGOs) that apply to EU grants instead of the independent NGOs and initiatives."

The list contains a few more surprises. Supposedly, by *attracting talent from abroad* some respondents meant and appreciated the high number of guest performances and not the opposite of exodus. More difficult is to interpret the frequent reference to the *stable financial situation of the public*, which can express relative consolidation, also acknowledgement of the people's efforts to maintain their level of cultural behaviour.

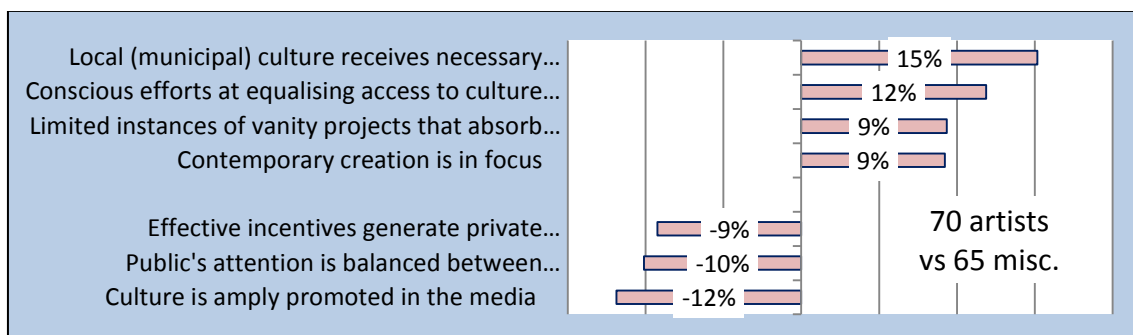
"Even with the wages so low as to cover bare essentials, people still manage to crowdfund more and more cultural initiatives."

Finally, wishful thinking: many respondents apparently combine their perceptions about existing assets with aspects that they consider desirable for a positive climate.

In the following internal divisions within the sample are portrayed. The 70 respondents with artistic background are distinguished by welcoming democratisation more than the rest of the 244 participants: care about *equality of access* and the *conditions of local culture* are emphasised in great proportion in this circle.

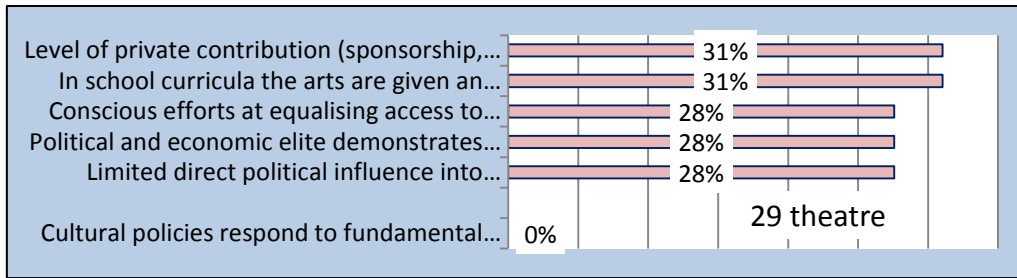


The social sensitiveness of the "artist" group is discernible also when contrasted to the 65 answers with miscellaneous professional background: researchers, administrators and educators. Artists welcomed improving positions of *local culture* and *equality of access* considerably more often than the "rational" professions, who on their part rejoiced over the *stable presence of culture in the media* and *the attention that public pays to deeper cultural challenges*. (The table is drawn from the perspective of the artists: -12% indicates that they care 12 percentage points less about *the media*, i.e. the miscellaneous group values it 12 percentage points more.)

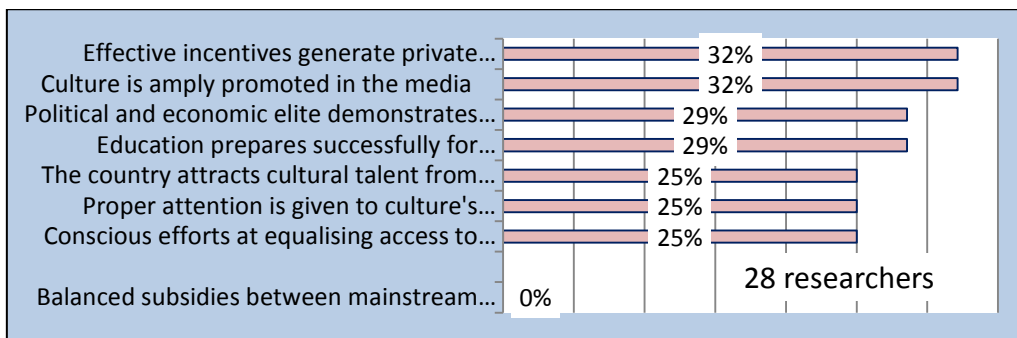


The largest group among the artists are the 29 participants connected to theatre. Beyond the issues mentioned earlier, they appreciate more than the average that *politicians demonstrate appreciation for culture* and they *do not interfere into cultural matters*.

"Due to the lack of money in the sector, lack of transparency and low state intervention, we have a lot of freedom."



The density of the next graph reflects that the group of researchers has selected positive aspects in the greatest number, an average of four out of the five options. New to the previously mentioned issues is their appreciation of *the role of education*. They are the ones who sense and welcome the attraction of *foreign talent* and researchers are the only ones to underline the attention that *the economic impact of culture* receives.



Conclusion

Perception polls raise a number of methodological dilemmas. These can be countered by increasing the number of respondents or by their systematic selection and briefing. Lack of necessary resources has prevented us from measures that would bring the exercise closer to the ideal of standardised expert surveys. Notwithstanding, the latest round of the Cultural Climate Barometer survey has demonstrated that the instrument can reveal eye-opening details about the hierarchy of factors that determine the climate of culture in the various environments. Findings rarely construct model-like schemes about the characteristics of a cultural ecosystem, the messages are best disclosed when ranks of factors produced by various groups of respondents are matched and interpreted. Through this, the Cultural Climate Barometer 2017 appears to have led to a number of worthy signals on the state of affairs of the cultural life in (especially eastern) Europe.