

## Revisiting Cracow, 2009-2019

**This is the reconstruction – with minor additions – of the PowerPoint supported talk held by Péter Inkei at the session on *Lessons for the future from the past* in the frame of the *Assembly of the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends' Association* in Paris on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2019<sup>1</sup>**

The media carry the news of the 94 and 95-year-old veterans who reacted their parachute jumps on D-day seventy-five years earlier. I feel somewhat similar at recalling the exercise we did ten years ago in Cracow<sup>2</sup>, at the conference organised by the Council of Europe and the International Cultural Center.

The conference *Culture & Development 20 Years after the Fall of Communism in Europe*, held between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of June in 2009, can be considered as a keystone of the actions of the Council of Europe addressing the cultural dimension of the regime change in the post-communist countries in east Europe. This noble operation spanned over two decades and exerted considerable impact upon the readjustment of the cultural sectors to the conditions brought about by the transition. In the meanwhile centre stage had been taken over by the European Union: a body with much bigger resources but lacking the explicit ideological and civilising mission of the Council of Europe, also dividing the region into members, candidates and third countries. Still in 2013, the ministerial conference organised in Moscow<sup>3</sup> demonstrated the interest in cultural policies which has considerably faded since.

The Budapest Observatory [took an active part](#) in the Cracow conference. The main contribution was the coordination of the detailed analysis of culture in the post-communist bloc, twenty years after the changes. The findings were contained in a 33-page [background paper](#), edited by Péter Inkei, assisted by Milena Dragičević-Šešić, Mikhail Gnedovsky and Baiba Tjarve, helped also by Vesna Čopič, Cornelia Dümcke and Zsuzsa Hunyadi. The essence of the paper was the list of [161 statements](#) on the position of culture from 22 angles or dimensions, separating into positive and negative features in each of the 22 dimensions – a simplified version of the SWOT analysis. The paper was also complemented with an annex of [26 statistical graphs](#).

### Methodological considerations

The Cracow analysis did not draw on any existing instrument. The authors were familiar with the relevant literature (or even had contributed to it themselves), yet no template was available off the shelf for the undertaking. The challenge was to grasp such a broad scope (covering over two dozen countries from Armenia to Czechia), operating with opaque concepts like culture and development, and arrive at a product with the practical aim of fuelling the discussion at the conference.

The resulting product was borne out of a heuristic novel eclectic approach. Instead of a single focus it partly addressed all of the following:

- Primary output: the success (vitality, health etc.) of culture, judged by production and consumption quantities, top achievements

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<sup>1</sup> There was a considerable overlap between this talk and [the one](#) held on the following day at Sciences Po at the Forum celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Ministry of Culture in France.

<sup>2</sup> By applying the traditional orthography, the author pays tribute to the historical legacy of the city.

<sup>3</sup> See the [final document](#) of the Moscow conference, as well as the [working paper](#) contributed by the Budapest Observatory to the event.

- Secondary output: societal impact, economic spillover, the value of culture
- Direct input: policy priorities, measures, resources (subsidies, revenues, sponsorship etc.)
- Throughput: quality of governance and management
- Framework conditions: historical legacies, economic, sociological and political conditions

The procedure that led to the formulation of the 161 judgments combined features of expert evaluation and scholarly analysis, without citing statistical or other evidence (the graphs in the Annex did not relate to the 22 dimensions). The dimensions reflected functions or areas of culture and not genres or subsectors like theatre, museum etc.

With regard to the platform of the evaluation, tones of impartial analysis alternate with partisan advocacy spirit in the statements. The prevailing value base reflects Council of Europe commitments: social responsibility, equal rights, diversity, etc.

### An early forerunner

While preparing for this talk, browsing the Budapest Observatory folders, I came across an antecedent to the 2009 Cracow analysis. In 2002, our organisation was host and co-organiser of the conference [\*Bigger, Better, Beautiful?\*](#) on the effects of the impending eastern enlargement of the European Union on culture. The [report of the event](#) kept the succinct comparative analysis of culture in the east and west done by Mik Flood, one of the speakers:

**EU countries** can be categorised as having:

1. Generally a high level of cultural output
2. Relatively high but reducing levels of state funding
3. “Mainstream art” as the priority
4. High production, labour and transport costs
5. Few available resources for research and development
6. Some potential for alternative sources of finance (i.e. sponsorship, televising, lotteries etc.)

In contrast, **accession countries** can be categorised as having:

1. Generally low levels of cultural output (meaning the quantity, not the quality of the output)
2. Low and reducing levels of state funding
3. Elements of former state cultural apparatus still in place, draining funds
4. Resistance to change
5. Economic conditions not yet ready to permit more entrepreneurial approaches
6. Few alternative sources of funding
7. Restrictions on mobility in some countries

I could not resist revisiting and commenting Mik’s seven statements about the “accession” countries:

1. Generally low levels of cultural **output** (meaning the quantity, not the quality of the output) – not really true any longer
2. Low and reducing levels of state **funding** – the opposite is true, in contrast to the west, see the analysis of [COFOG statistics](#)
3. Elements of former state cultural **apparatus** still in place, draining funds – some of us are still around, draining insignificant funds
4. **Resistance** to change — this may largely have converged to the west
5. Economic conditions not yet ready to permit more **entrepreneurial** approaches – obstacles are elsewhere today
6. Few **alternative sources** of funding – this has largely converged to the west

7. Restrictions on **mobility** in some countries – barriers are fewer and rarely of administrative character

### 2009-2019, changes in the general environment

Turning to the main theme of this talk, comparing the state of culture in the post-communist bloc between 2009 and 2019, I would first single out three major issues that are dominant today but were less prominent or foreseeable ten years ago, and which all have important bearing on culture.

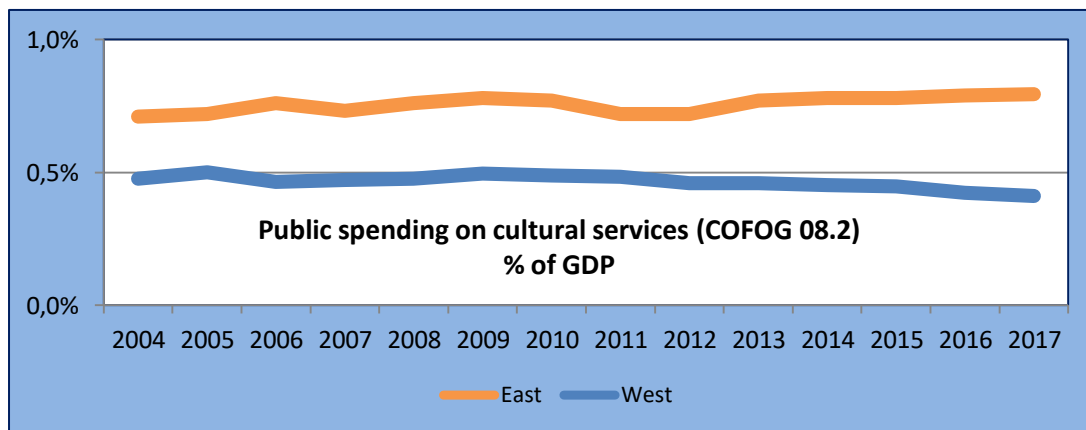
- The **digital shift** has exerted overwhelming impact on the production, dissemination, but above all on the consumption and reception of cultural products
- The increased level of global **migration** dominates policy attitudes, distorts the notion of inclusion
- The past decade has seen the advances and breakthroughs of **populism**, which overwrites value hierarchies and leads to schisms in societies

### The east-west gap has remained

At re-reading the 161 statements (which in fact constitute over 200 distinct statements since a number of “statements” consisted of several sentences) they were “tested” along the following two criteria: whether the assertion holds today the same way as in 2009, and whether in the given case the east-west distinction still prevails. The findings of the re-reading are presented according to the latter criterion; thus we shall first see the seven dimensions of the analysis where I believe that **the east-west gap has remained or even increased** since 2009. (The figures in brackets relate to the [original numbering](#) of the respective dimension.)

The first criterion, i.e. the soundness of the assessment disclosed in Cracow, is marked with emojis: green, when the statements in the particular statement are valid, red, when I find them outdated. Quite a few sections comprise assessments of both sorts. Characteristic statements from 2009 have been selected for illustration.

- National values, memory politics increasingly prevail in the east. (1, 2 😊)  
„Cultural values are predominantly conservative. Policy priorities reflect this state by the strong emphasis on national heritage (including myths of limited authenticity).”
- The demographic crisis of rural areas has reached catastrophic measures. (6 😊😞)  
„Smaller settlements have lost many (often all) of their public institutions – especially cultural – and many of the young inhabitants.”  
„The spectacular advances of telecommunication offer unprecedented access to information and culture... much of the traditional handicap in rural living conditions, also manifested in cultural demands, offer and habits, has decreased.”
- Today eastern cultural policies emphasise social inclusion even less than before, migration having become the main concern (7 😊😞)  
„Public authorities tend to put the main emphasis on the dominant culture... The idea of intercultural dialogue has little influence on the political agenda.”  
„After (or to prevent) cataclysms of co-habiting cultures, tolerance and respect have become the official policies.”
- An inverse development has taken place with regard to public financing as shown in the graph below ([taken from this paper](#)) (1, 8 😞)  
„The traditional prestige enjoyed by culture is mostly manifested in symbolic (rhetoric) ways only and is not reflected in the political and budgetary priorities.”



- The picture is mixed concerning the role of the civil society, both in the Cracow assessment as in the developments on the ground; on the whole an influential civil society in cultural matters has rather remained a western feature. (11 😊 😞 😊 😞)  
 „The third sector sprung up as if from zero and has become a decisive component of the cultural life...  
 The emerging alternative art spaces and groups have been important sources of creativity and channels of innovative ideas...  
 Third sector cultural organisations are too often considered as rivals and troublemakers...  
 Lack of sustainability is a crucial problem.”  
 „True volunteering has begun to catch up in numbers...  
 New professional networks and organisations act as vehicles of professional communication, promotion of best practice and facilitation of innovation and change....  
 With the gradual increase of involvement of third sector agencies by the state, they have begun to lose the critical stance towards state and market.”

### East-west convergence perceived

There are a few areas where certain convergence has to my mind taken place between the two halves of the continent.

- The professional management skills and practices of cultural operators have considerably improved in the east, including the public sector (20 😊)  
 „New standards prevail at most of the cultural spaces.”  
 (Although...) „Systematic evaluation of the efficiency of public cultural organisations and the assessment of tasks of the employees very seldom takes place.”
- Folklore is no longer a substantive basis of culture to the extent as before (5 😊)  
 (Although...) „Folklore is all too often superficially identified with the purest essence of the nation. Many of its artistic adaptations and commercialisation are deceptive and fake.”
- East and west differ little at using culture for branding cities and countries (17 😊)  
 „Accelerated efforts for the expression of local pride, through urban development, creating landmarks, capitalising on built and spiritual heritage, launching new festivals etc.  
 Flagship culture projects considered as emblematic for branding, are politicians’ favourites, and often divert excessive resources.”

### East-west distance unchanged

In a number of cases the division has remained at the same level (as perceived by me and apparent at mapping [expert perceptions](#)).

- The position of culture in school, the place of art education in cultural policies (3 😊)

- Systems of professional training of cultural managers and the position of artists (21 😊)
- Commercialisation has reached its limits, the east is on a par with the west (9 😞)
- Culture as a factor in employment policies (18 😞)
- The role of sponsorship and charities in the financing of culture (10 😞 😞)

As the emojis show, I am now particularly critical of the wording of the assessments contained in [Dimension #10](#), “What businesses and charities spend on culture.”

### Expert consensus invited

Indeed, there are a few issues where I did not dare to risk even a tentative judgment about the course of the east-west gap. Some of them are too complex to arrive at a “one digit” opinion. In other cases even colleagues’ involvement did not help about deciding whether we are now closer to one another or the opposite is the case.

- Mobility (22 😊)
- Democratisation and cultural democracy (14 😊 😞)
- Economic role, the impact or spillover effects of culture (15 😞)
- The role of culture in urban development and regeneration (16 😊 😞 😊 😞)

### A time-proven analysis (😊 😊)

The brief summary of the region was written by Milena Dragičević-Šešić and there is little to add:

- „The **Baltic** and **Visegrad** countries plus **Slovenia** have completed the processes of transition, complemented with **Croatia** whose cultural system and policy is the closest to the accomplishments of the Central European countries.
- Policy goals and measures are less clear and coherent in **Ukraine, Russia, Belarus** and **Moldova**, representing a conglomerate of socialist and capitalist tendencies taking both good and bad sides of both systems, including corruption, with strong tendencies of introvert self-sufficiency.
- **Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia** and **Montenegro** demonstrate declarative approaches towards European standards in policy making, still with many inherited elements from the previous system (like state publishing companies, for example, or largely dysfunctional network of cultural institutions).
- In **Georgia** and **Armenia** cultural policy making is mainly inward looking and dominated by nationalism; and similar tendencies prevent **Macedonia** to be treated along the previous group.
- **Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania** do not have sufficiently coherent cultural policies and are little integrated into European schemes.
- Finally **Azerbaijan** claims to follow European principles but the actual performance, with patronising dictatorial features, is more similar to that of Russia or Belarus.”

### Lessons of the 2009 evaluation

At the time of the analysis many voices claimed that the various forms of east-west distinction were out of place, due to the advances of the European integration as well as to the homogenising effects of globalisation. Some people were apprehended by dumping the post-communist countries in the same box. No doubt, Armenia and Czechia (to come back to these geographic endpoints) represent different classes from most points of view, just as Ireland and Greece do. The past decade, however,



has sadly proven that the distinction is still a reality. To a certain extent the forty (in other cases seventy) years of communist rule are to blame but deeper historical (economic, social, cultural etc.) determinations are the main explanation.

The following are some of the lessons from the evaluation methods applied in 2009:

- A more detailed a-priori adjustment of values makes such exercises much more successful.
- The description, and especially the critical assessment of the – one is still at a loss to find the right term – position, accomplishment, vitality, strength (indeed, listing the four components of SWOT would be the way out of the naming impasse) of “culture” (or “art and culture”, conforming to British usage) should definitely go beyond one dimensional or narrow scope approaches, regardless of the complexity of the challenge.
- Beyond the output, the scope of the examination should cover policies and measures as well.
- In the absence of explicit criteria and indicators of exemplary policies and measures, carefully identified “best practices” can serve as benchmarks.

Culture may not be the only sector of society without established, proven concepts and instruments for drawing overall judgments. I wonder if analysts of the health sector, education, media etc. up to foreign policy or defence have more advanced toolkits at hand for assessing the respective sector’s accomplishment measured against time or between countries. The Cracow exercise was meant for one step into devising such a toolkit for culture.



Participants of the Assembly (the author of the paper is marked with a pale blue arrow)