

The Last Phase in Monotony

Comparative Eurostat data on public financing of culture, 2004-2019

Each March Eurostat updates its Cofog (Classification of the Functions of Government) data, and the Budapest Observatory extracts cultural statistics with a focus on post-communist countries in the EU. [Clicking here](#), you can read about methodology and will find more detailed commentaries to the previous versions of these diagrams up to 2017.

Now, two years later, we can find some changes in absolute figures but almost nothing new in the trends. The same monotony has continued, as you can judge upon the following 29 diagrams. Next spring, however, based on the 2020 data, everything will be different. First of all, although British data could be carried on – as several diagrams here comprise e.g. Norwegian data – instead, all EU28 figures will be replaced with numbers on EU27. However, the truly substantial changes will be due to the coronavirus pandemic.

We are saving our commentaries to the future constellations in the macrostatistical data on the public financing of culture in Europe. Future in the sense of our statistical intelligence about phenomena that will have taken place in the critical year of 2020.

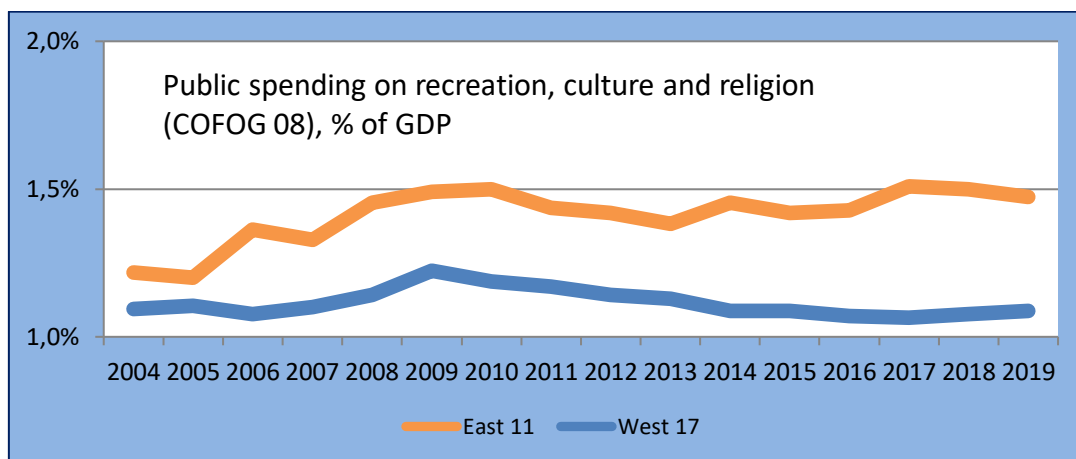


Diagram 1

In the post-communist countries „recreation, culture and religion” keeps absorbing a significantly larger share of public resources than in the west.

As said above, more profound interpretation is found by [clicking here](#); there is also a [more concise](#) variant. Including, among others, the explanation of the uses of “east” and “west”.

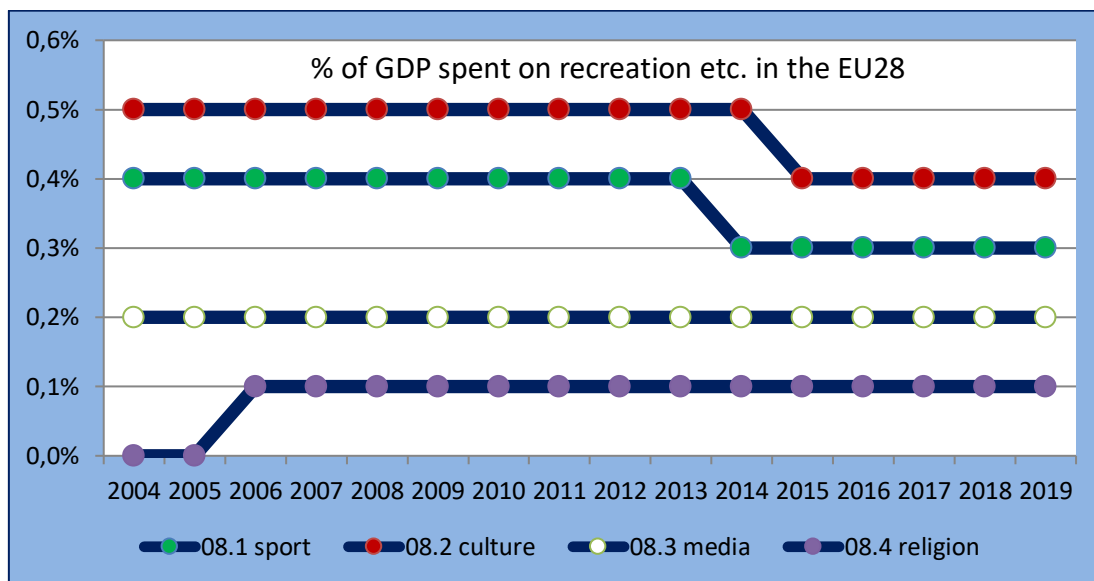


Diagram 2

This clumsy grand aggregate might partly even resist the upheaval and remain the same in 2020.

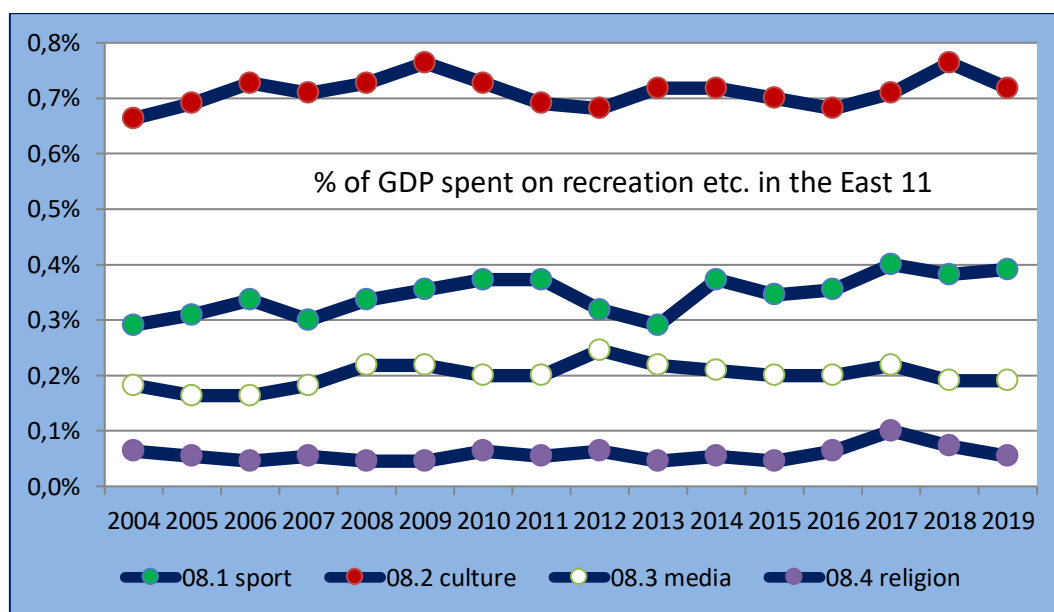


Diagram 3

Culture is the decisive factor in Cofog 08, which is therefore often superficially identified as “culture” instead of “recreation, culture and religion”.

With sport the recreational component has been growing slightly at the expense of religion.

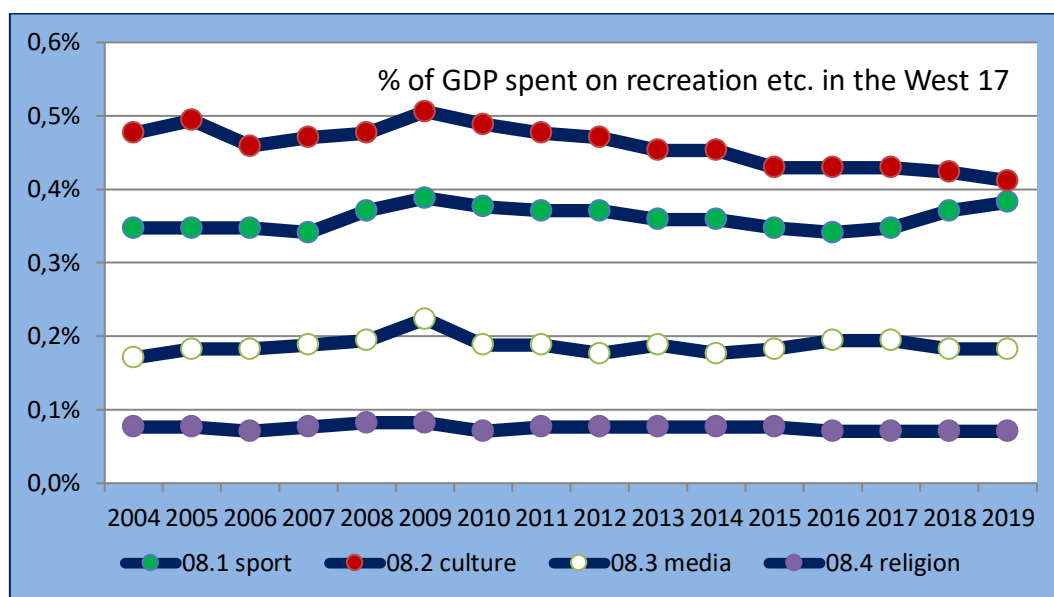


Diagram 4

A little bit of excitement: would western countries spend more on sport than on culture in 2020 if the monotony continued?

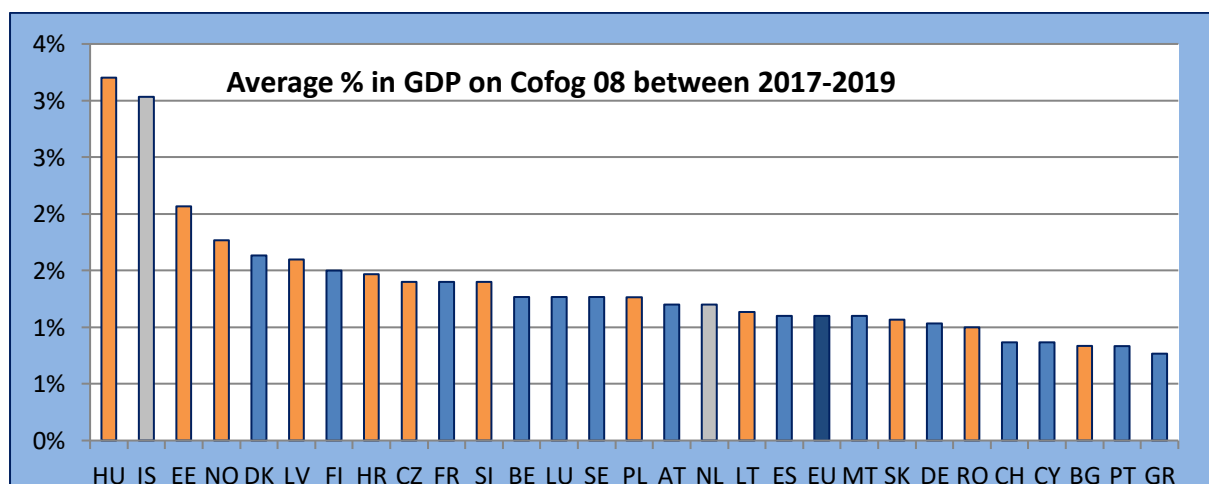


Diagram 5

Hungary and Iceland: so similar yet so very different! Had we not promised to keep commentaries to spring 2022, there would be a lot to explain, interpret and indeed suppose about the tallest two columns.

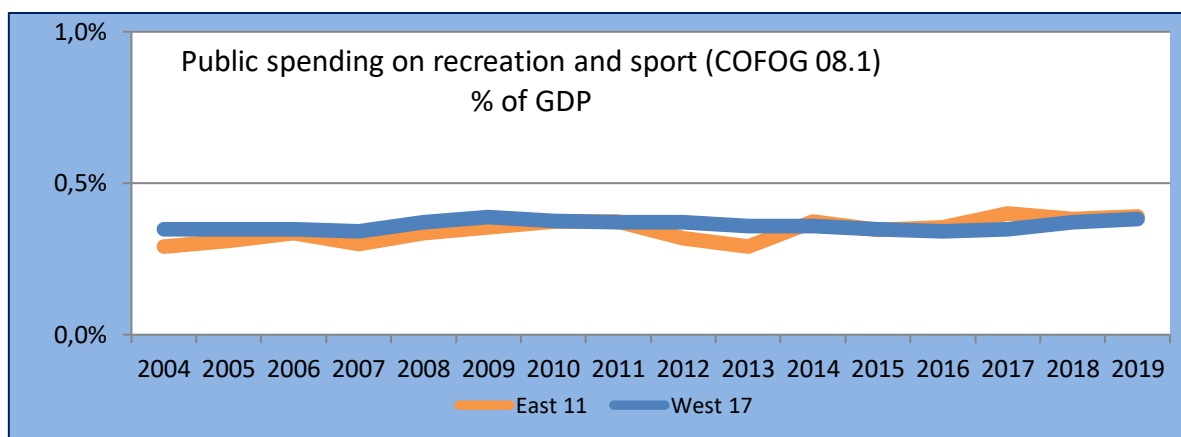


Diagram 6

No surprise, no excitement about public financing of sport and related recreation activities.

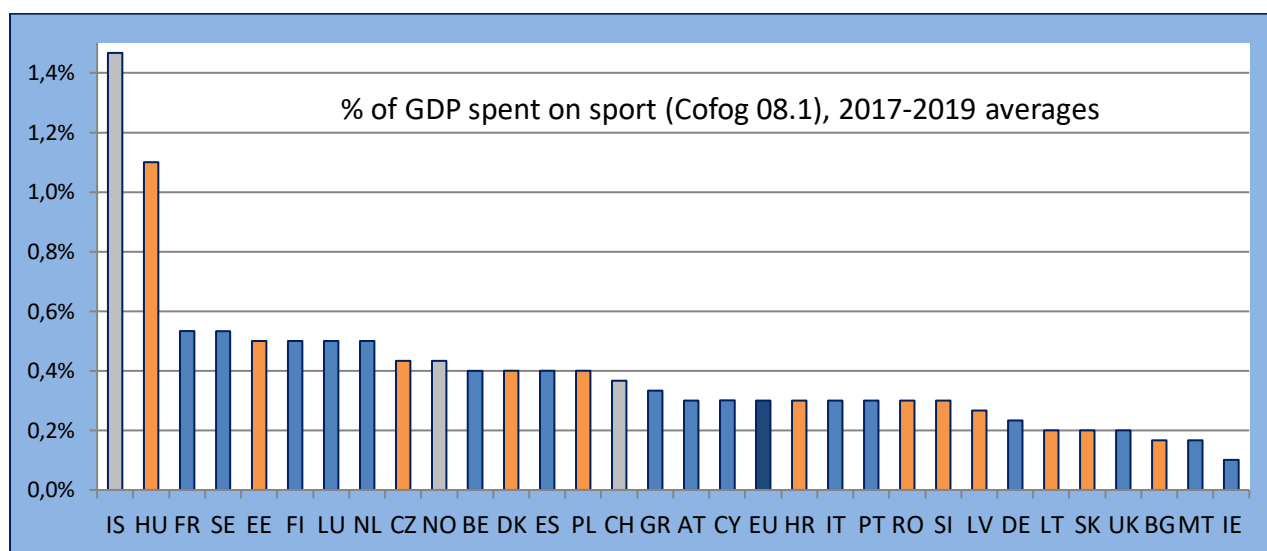


Diagram 7

This explains much of Iceland's position on Diagram 5: they spend a lot on sports. Hungarians, too.

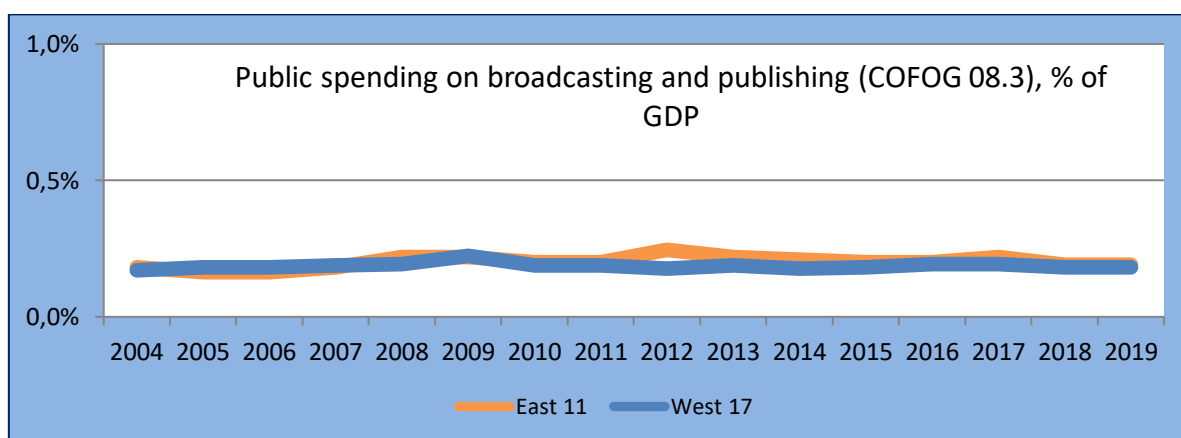


Diagram 8

East and west behave similarly about financing public media.

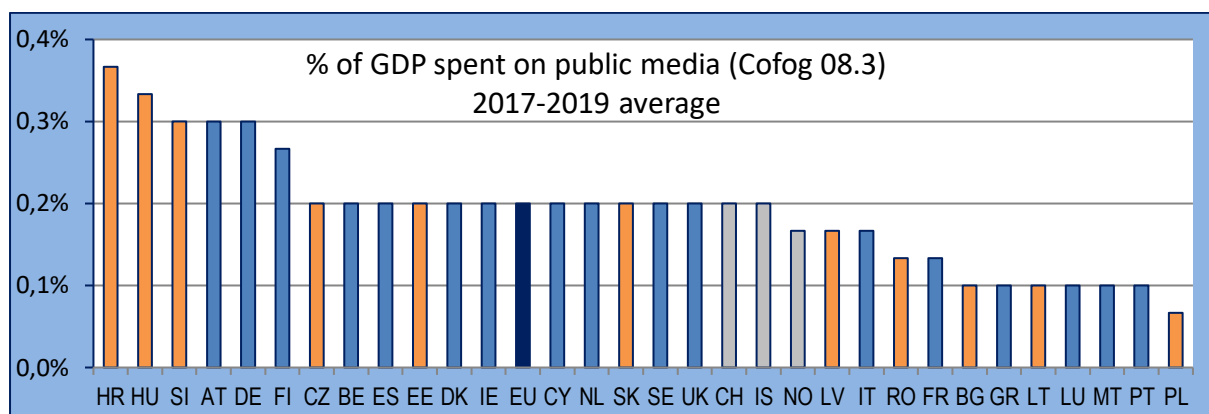


Diagram 9

The comparative spread in financing public media is rather balanced. Familiarity with Croatian and Polish media realities would be required to explain their positions at the two ends of the scale.

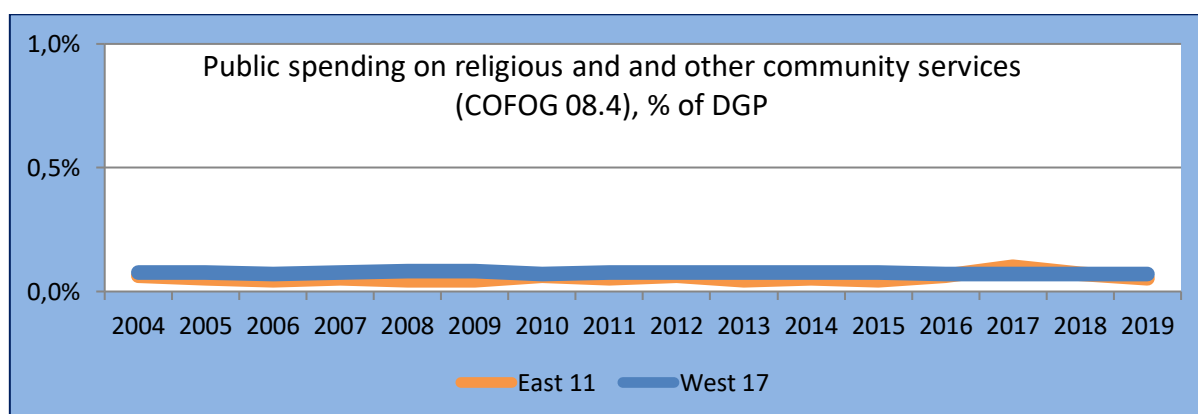


Diagram 10

They very low percentages at financing religion do not allow for great variation on aggregate level.

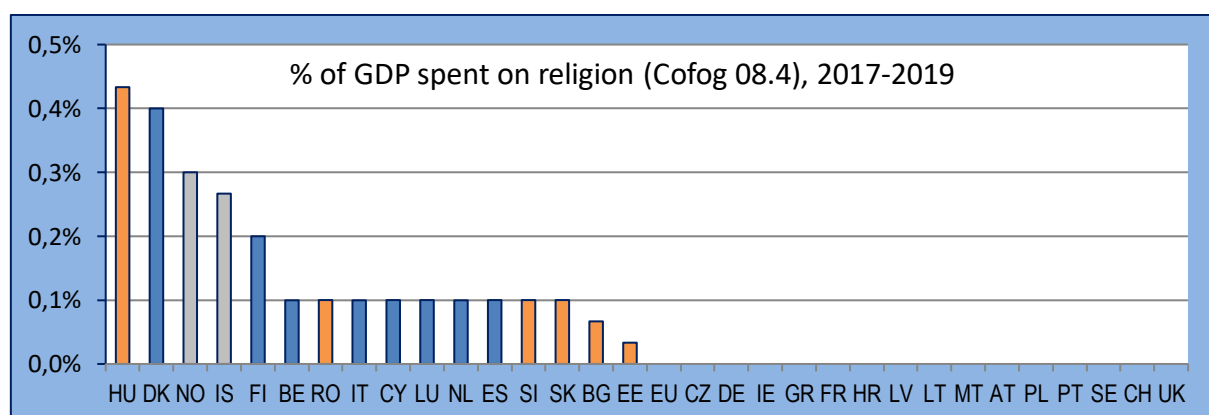


Diagram 11

The graph reveals that the aggregate figure consists of less than half of the countries. The other half do not invest statistically perceptible amounts into faith and related issues.

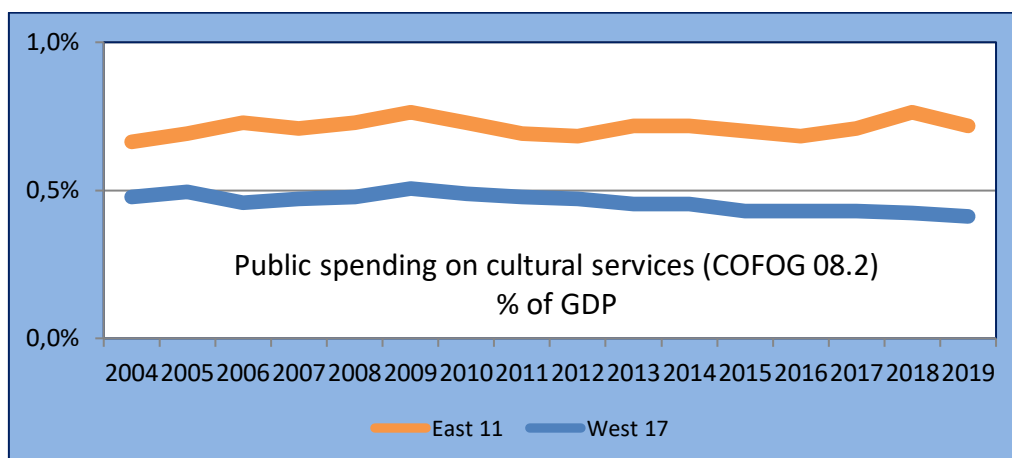


Diagram 12

Culture is that really distinguishes between eastern and western public spending patterns. This was the case already in 2004 and the gap has grown. Partly due to higher shares in the eastern budgets, but mainly because western governments (including local governments) have consistently lowered the percentage of financing “cultural services”.

This divergence between post-communist states and the rest explains the similar shape of the two lines on Diagram 1.

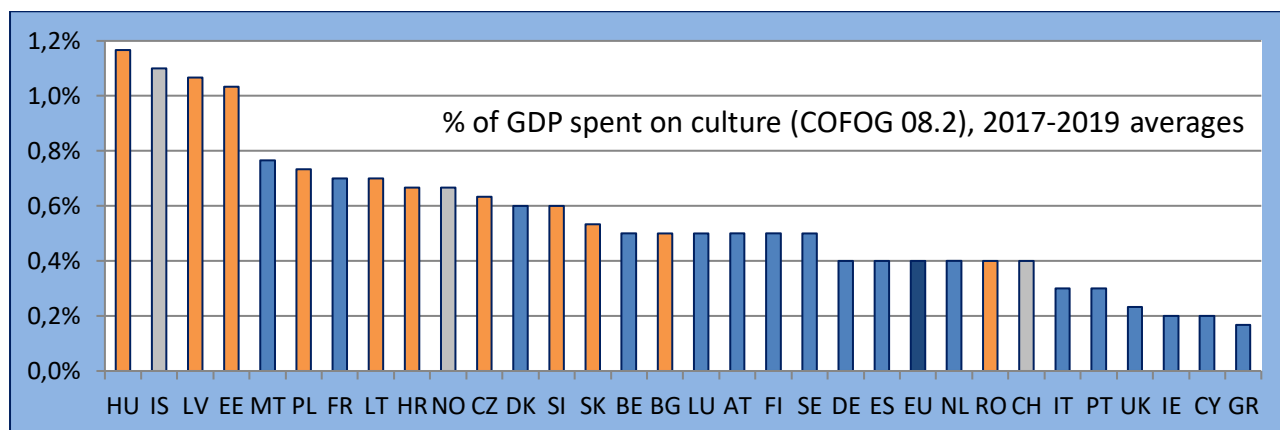


Diagram 13

Four countries keep above the mystified 1% level in terms of public financing of culture. Warning: this not about percentage in the budget, and it comprises both national and lower level governments. And a different kind of warning: the more is not necessarily the better.

A note on the EU average of 0,4%. It is the average of the 28 countries weighted with populations. The low percentage figures of large countries like Germany, Spain and UK pull the European average closer to the low end.

What makes Romania act as the western countries in its cultural financing habits,

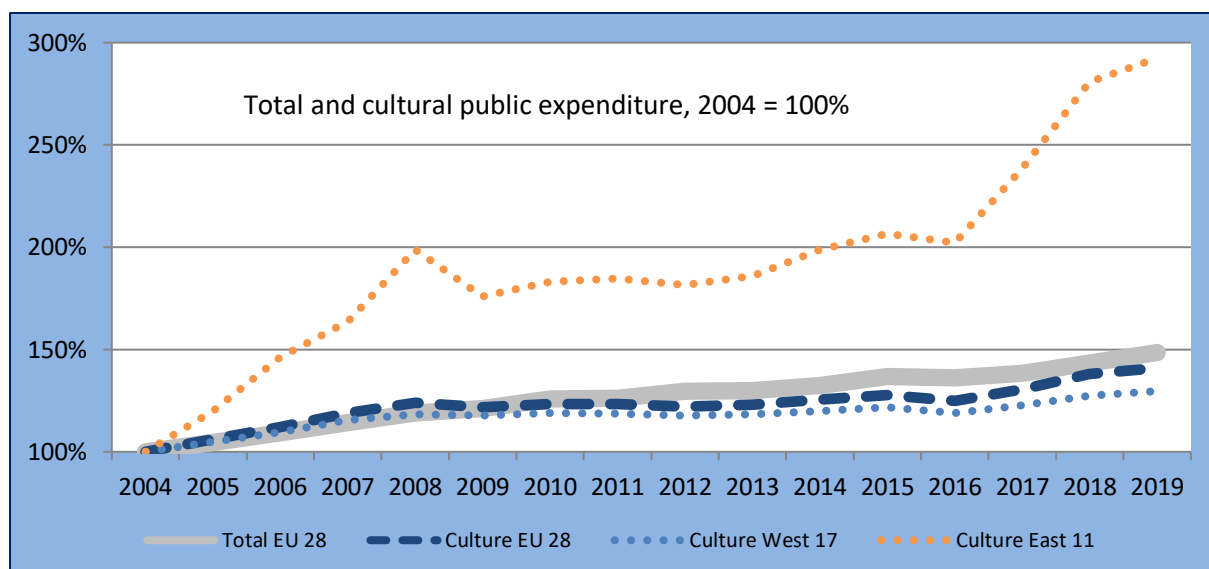


Diagram 15

The two lines on Diagram 12 are related here to a common starting point in 2004, as well as to the dynamic of the grand total public spending in the 28 countries (gray line) and the total cultural expenditure (east and west together). Absolute amounts are compared: e.g. in 2008 the eleven eastern countries spent exactly twice as many euros on culture as in 2004.

After 2008, decreasing relative spending in culture in the west has pulled the overall trend line below the dynamic of total public spending, which the eastern upsurge has not been able to counterbalance. The next graph helps understand why.

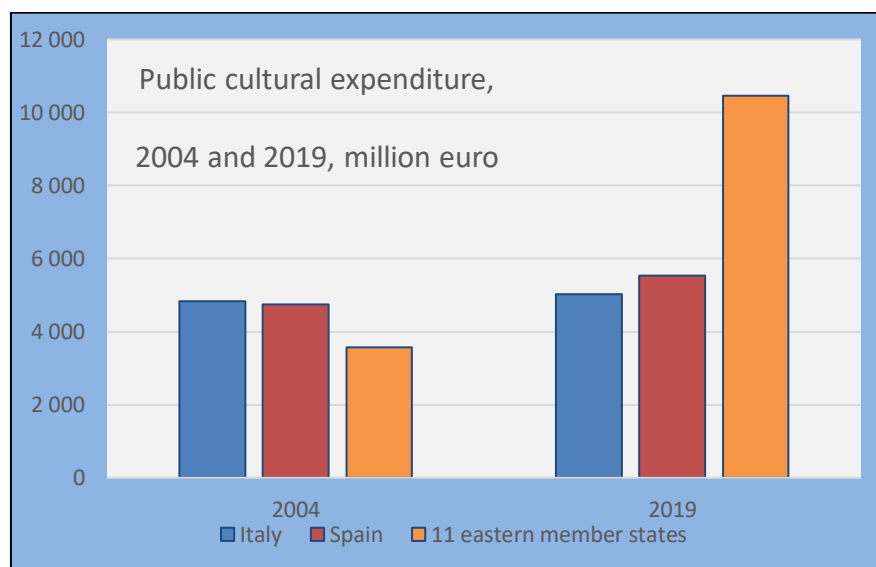


Diagram 16

For a variety of reasons (one of them being west-east EU transfers) post-communist countries have kept growing robustly, including their cultural expenditure. And yet, their combined size is still not enough to fundamentally determine the European totals. In 2004, all eleven states spent less on culture than Italy or Spain. In 2019 they two together are on a par with the eleven in the east.

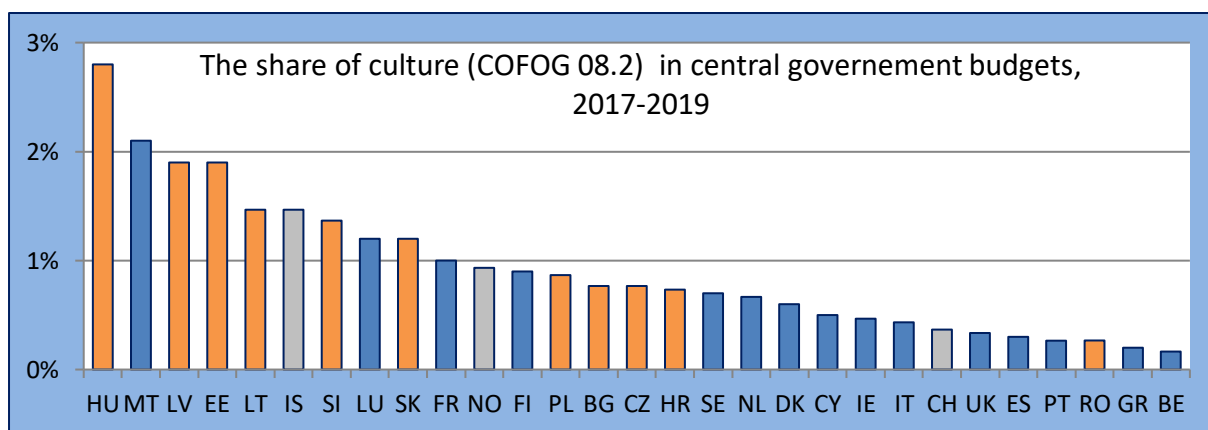


Diagram 17

Hungary, its central government, is the undisputed champion of public cultural funding. Diagram 13 predicted Romania's position on this scale, too.

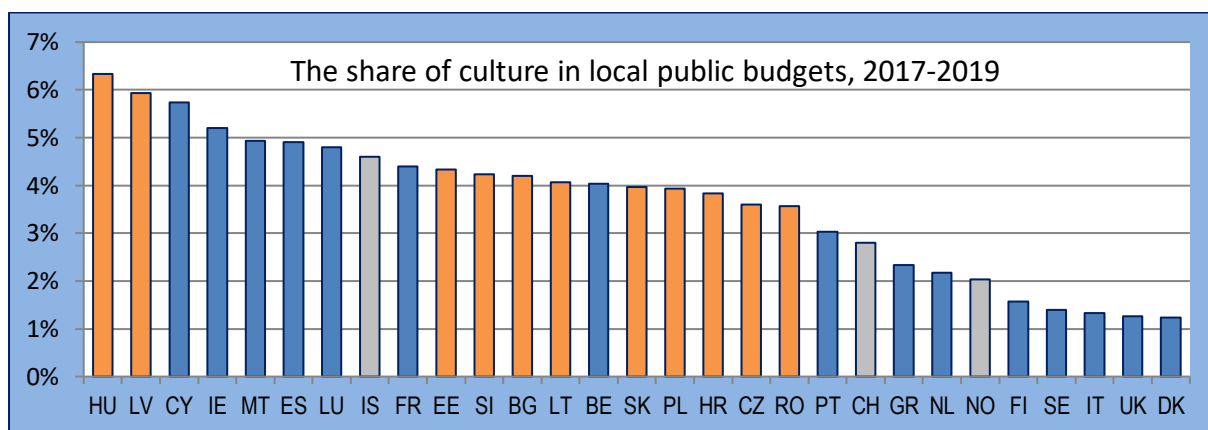


Diagram 18

Percentages of culture in regional and municipal budgets are twice as high as what we see in central budgets.

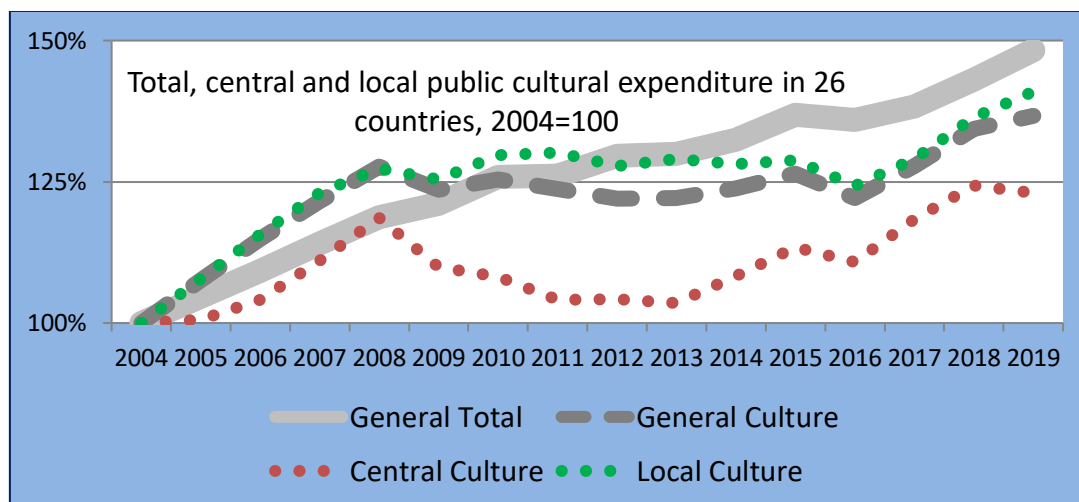


Diagram 19

Remember Diagram 15? Culture has been losing momentum in public finances in Europe.

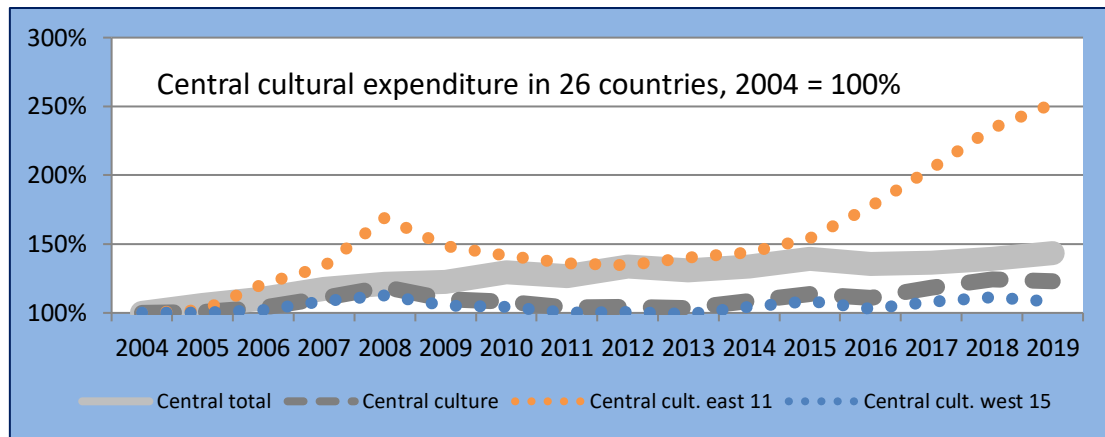


Diagram 20

This and the next graph are in the same scale. For a while eastern local financing was the main engine, now centralisation is the main agenda. In the west, culture has been losing positions in the central budgets, up to the very end of the period.

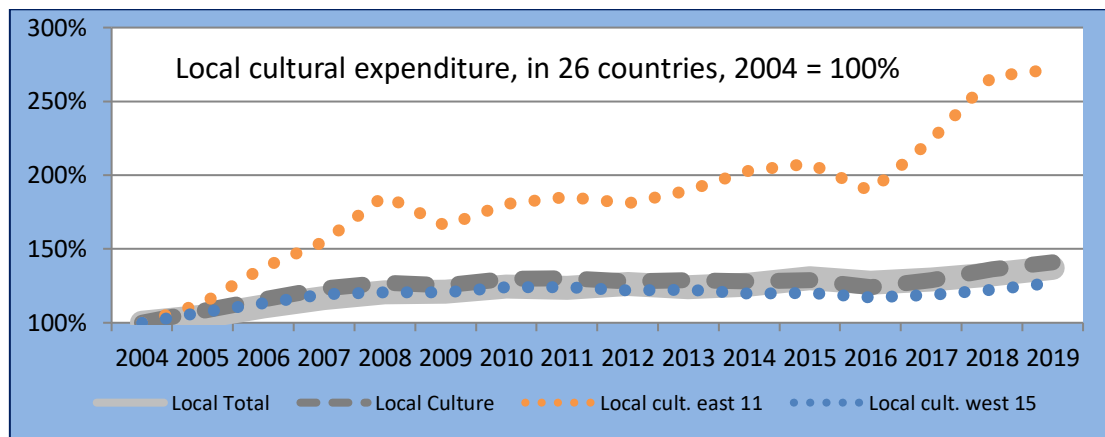


Diagram 21

In the tens of thousands of western local budgets culture has kept pace with the overall dynamic.

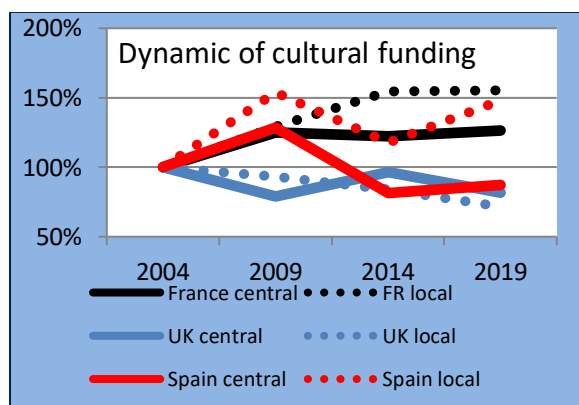


Diagram 22

Remember, these are absolute figures. In 2019 UK and Spain (central governments) spent less on culture than in 2004.

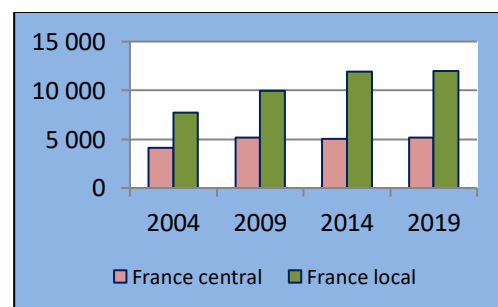


Diagram 23

The numbers stand for million euros. Taken together, in the past decade, French regions and municipalities spent over 10 billion euros a year on culture. And around 5 billion from the central budget.

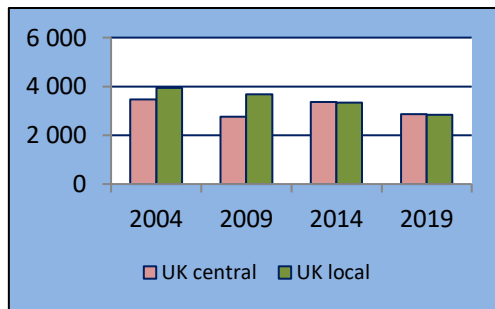


Diagram 24

This is how centralised cultural funding looks like – in the same scale as the next graph.

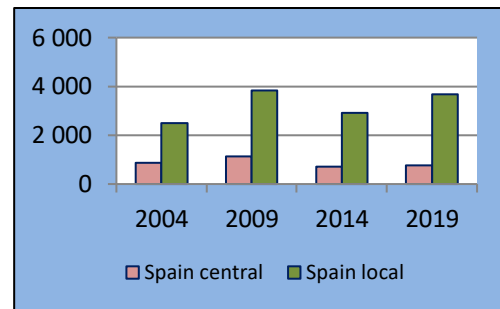


Diagram 25

This is how highly decentralised cultural funding looks like.

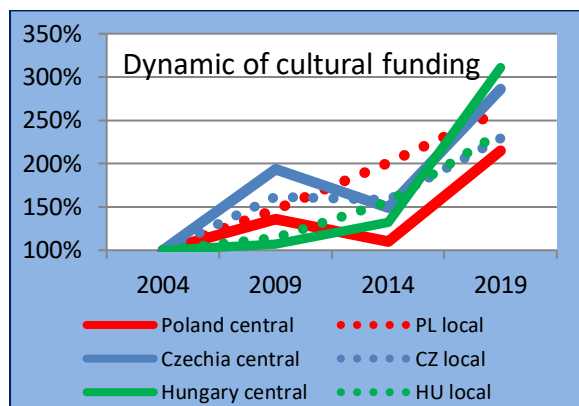


Diagram 26

Emerging countries, indeed.

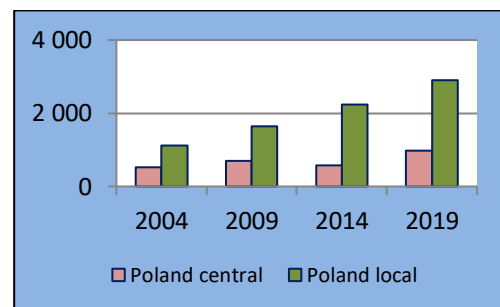


Diagram 27

Public cultural funding has grown even more decentralised in Poland than what it was like in 2004.

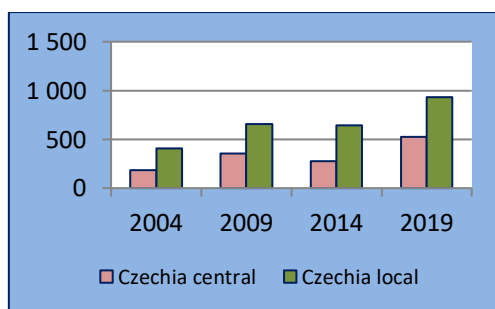


Diagram 28

Stable ratio exists between centre and the local levels.

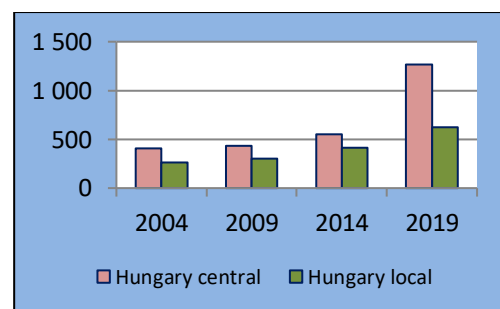


Diagram 29

A prime example of resolute centralisation of public cultural financing.