

The Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory was set up with the aim to provide an overview on culture in the EaP Region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), bringing together evidence-based materials and identifying priorities for research and new policy initiatives. Its first thematic briefs have been displayed on the Observatory [webpage](#), part of Culture and Creativity EU Programme [portal](#), administered by the British Council after the end of the programme.

BRIEF NR.4: CULTURAL CLIMATE BAROMETER

Classification and ranking of countries

Globalisation created permanent direct interaction between societies. This has inspired the need and curiosity to compare them from various aspects. The revolution of info-communication has led to the proliferation of data, including the perfection of national and international statistical systems, which enabled sophisticated comparisons.

Comparison often results classification or ranking. In the classification of the [United Nations](#), the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries are labelled and sorted from various points of view (Azerbaijan finds itself in four different classes).

AM	lower-middle income, economies in transition, landlocked developing
AZ	upper-middle income, economies in transition, landlocked developing, fuel-exporting
BY	upper-middle income, economies in transition
GE	lower-middle income, economies in transition
MD	lower-middle income, economies in transition, landlocked developing
UA	lower-middle income, economies in transition

Other global bodies – IMF, World Bank etc. – classify countries along their own systems. The central concept is *development*, which in most cases is the combined outcome of a large number of indicators. UNCTAD, a development agency of the United Nations, has a much more [detailed system](#) of classes and subclasses. All these systems serve for classifying countries for a certain period, although UNCTAD applies [annual revisions](#).

The lists that rank countries by *competitiveness* have lately received special attention, above all the system of the World Economic Forum. Next to hard statistics, the sophisticated scheme of indicators includes also perceptions, quantified opinions of experts – this expert survey was the direct model for the Cultural Climate Barometer. The EaP countries occupy the following positions on the latest [list of competitiveness](#) (Belarus is not ranked):

35 AZ – 67 GE – 73 AM – 81 UA – 89 MD

The above mentioned systems are dominated by economic data. UNDP, another UN body for development, has developed the [Human Development Index](#), where education plays a decisive role. Here are the positions of the EaP countries on the global rank list:

52 BY – 70 GE – 78 AZ – 84 AM – 84 UA – 107 MD

The first five are in the High Human Development group, with Belarus being at a small step from the Very High category. Similarly, Moldova is on the very top of the Medium Human Development class.

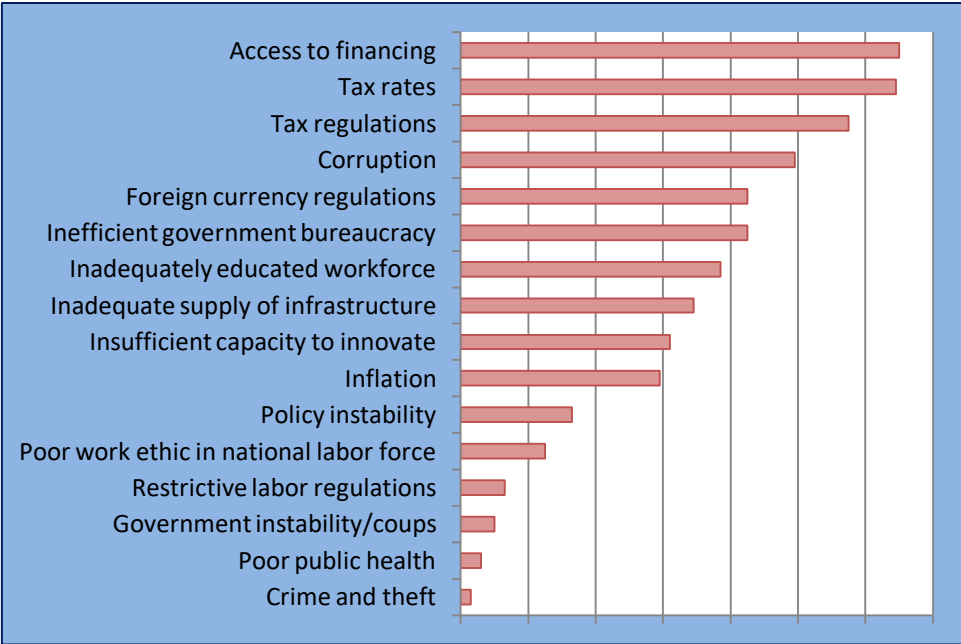
There are a few global agencies, however, which base their analysis largely or entirely on perceptions, on “subjective” data. One of the best known is the [Corruption Perception Index](#) used by Transparency International, with the actual positions of the EaP countries:

44 GE – 79 BY – 113 AM – 123 AZ, MD – 131 UA

Other systems based on subjective perceptions are the World Values Survey, Freedom House, the Perception of Gender Equality, and the Eurobarometer of the EU. Comparing complex systems, like the performance of the [health services](#) combine hard data with subjective perceptions.

Turning to the task of assessing **the cultural climate** in a country, one can rely on continuously improved and harmonised statistical regimes. One example is the complex system of the UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators, applied to [AM](#), [AZ](#), [GE](#) and [UA](#) in the frame of the Culture & Creativity Programme. Also, UNESCO is collecting statistics of cultural performance across the world. In order to grasp the characteristics of the cultural climate in a country, one would have to distil to a limited number of key indicators, similar to the Human Development Index. The best known effort to reach a top indicator of the vitality of culture was the [American Arts Index](#).

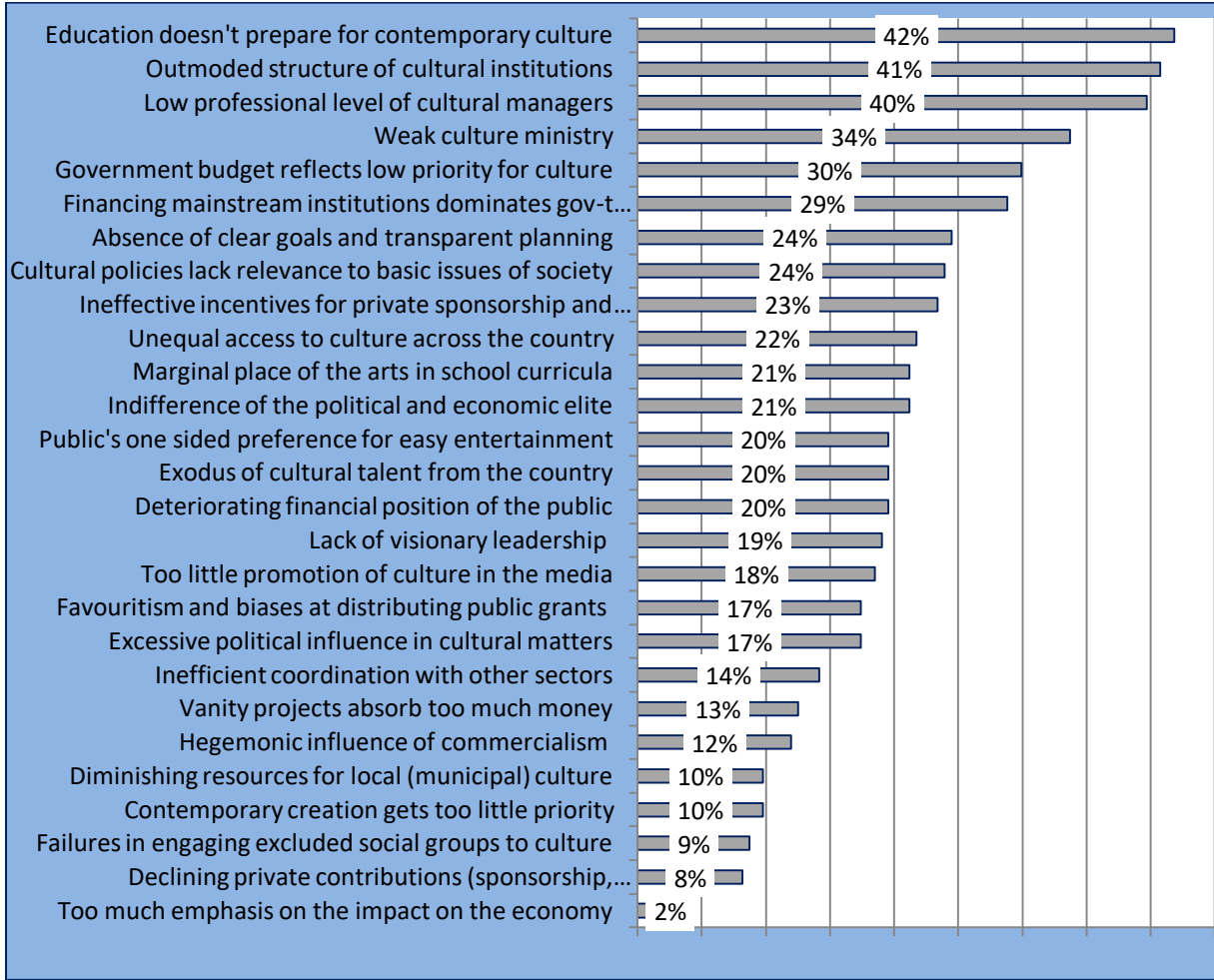
As indicated before, the Cultural Climate Barometer was modelled on one component of the World Competitiveness Index, where specialists rated the problematic factors for **doing business** in a country – [in Armenia](#) in this graph:



Problematic factors for culture

Some of the problematic factors for doing business are also problematic for doing culture, like *access to financing* or *tax rates*. To express the complexity of the cultural ecosystem in a country, a longer list of 27 items was designed for the [Cultural Climate Barometer](#), an expert survey on culture. The participating cultural operators are asked to select five, which they find the most problematic.

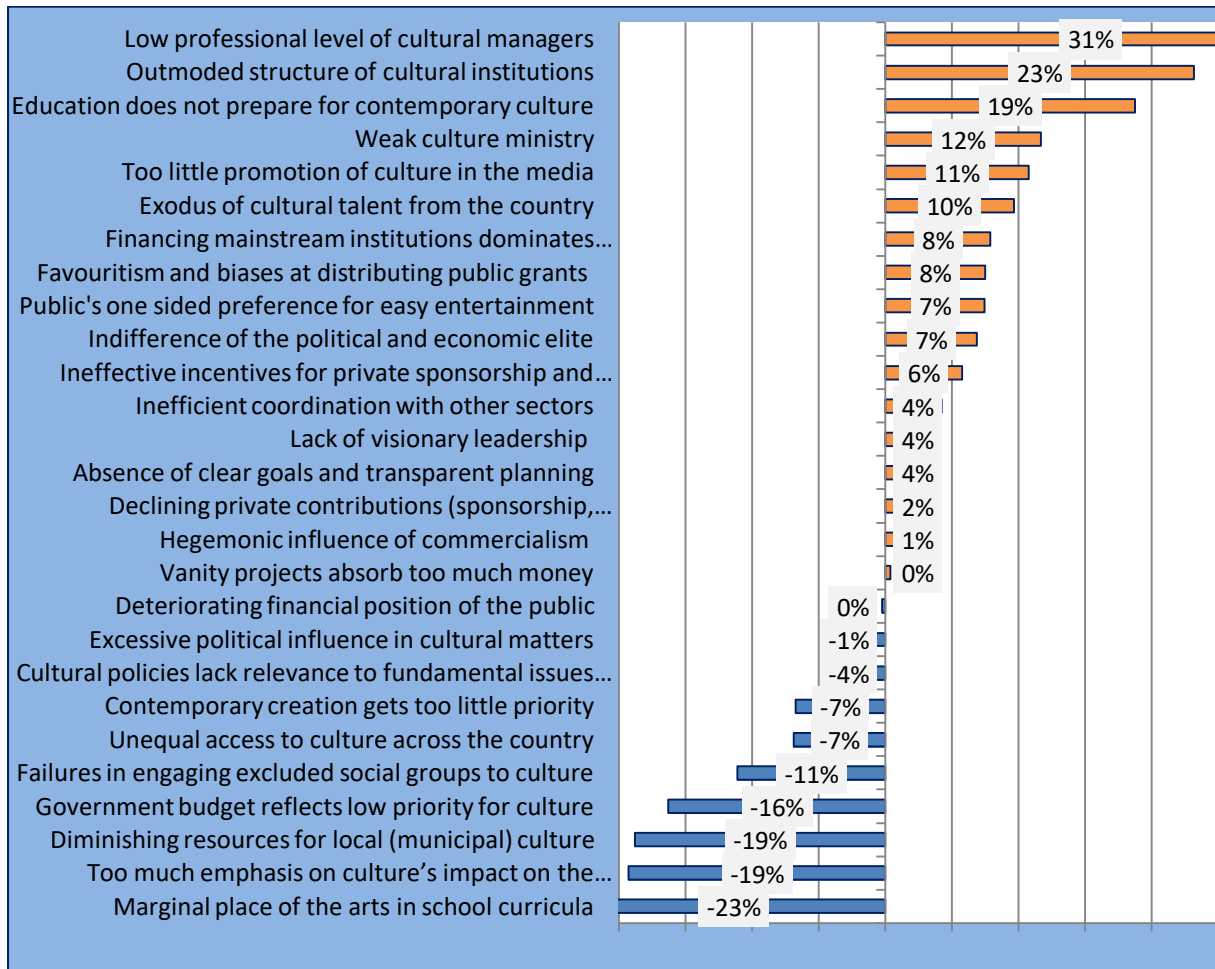
In the winter of 2017-2018 184 responses were collected in the six EaP countries, in the following distribution: AM 32, AZ 12, BY 21, GE 37, MD 8, UA 74. The major part was conducted in the national language, the rest in English, some of it online via Google Forms. Here is the result:



42% of the 184 cultural operators found that for the cultural climate in the region the conservatism of education is the greatest problem: *Education doesn't prepare for contemporary culture*. At the other end, there were only three people (2%) who thought that expecting economic output was one of the five biggest nuisances for culture in the six EaP countries (*Too much emphasis...*).

The result can be best interpreted by comparing it to other regions. From the available choice the 184 EaP opinions show the greatest difference from the score of 91 experts participating in the Cultural Climate Barometer in 2015 in 30 countries in Europe, without post-communist states.

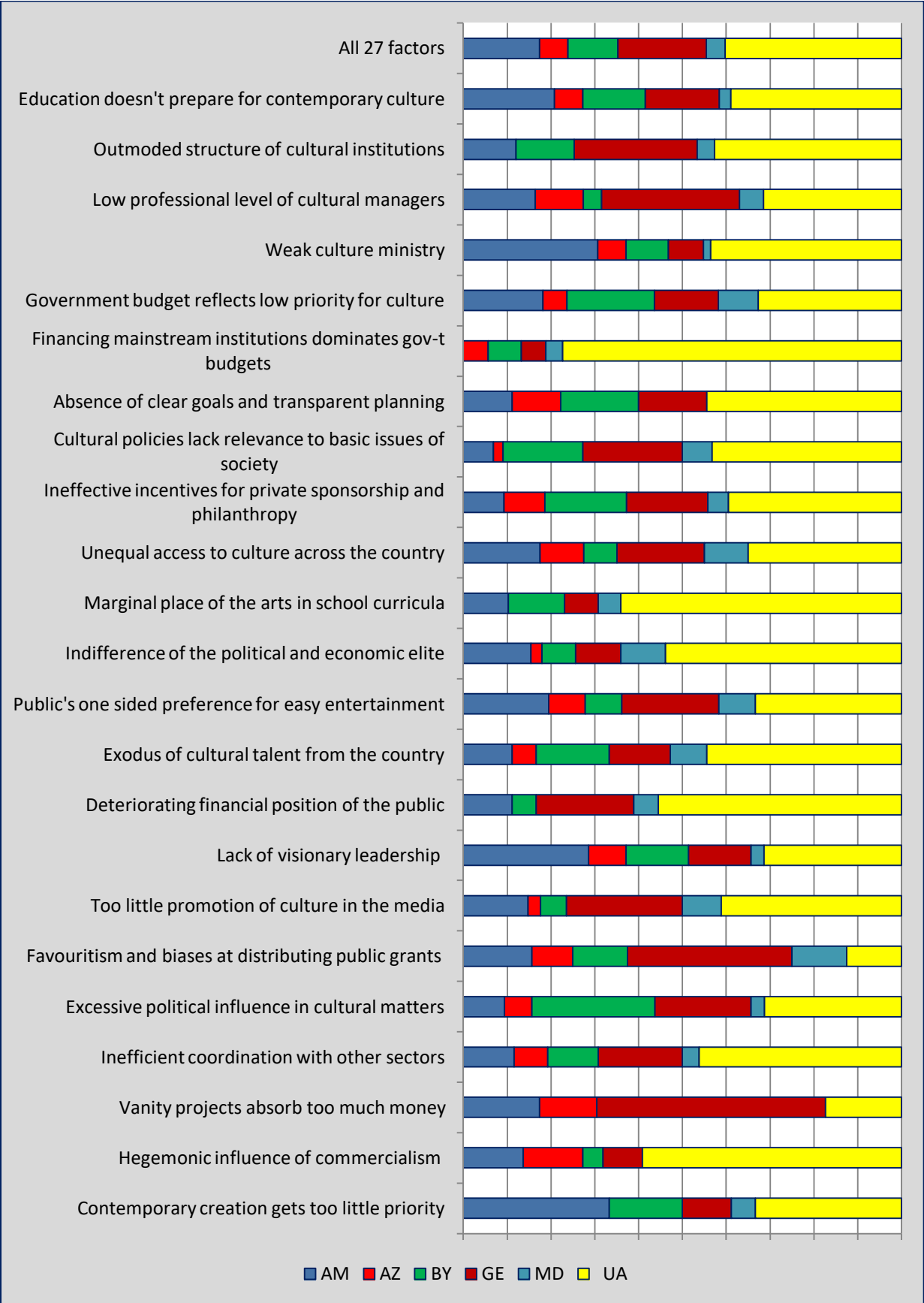
The following diagram presents the distances between the two sets in each of the 27 factors:



The figures indicate absolute distances. This is explained on the item with the greatest distance, *Low professional level of cultural managers*. The 31% means that the 40% we saw at EaP is 31 percentage points more than what had been in west: 9%. At the other extreme we find the issue of culture in the curricula (*Marginal place of the arts...*): 44% found it a problem in the west while in EaP only 21% - the difference is 23%.

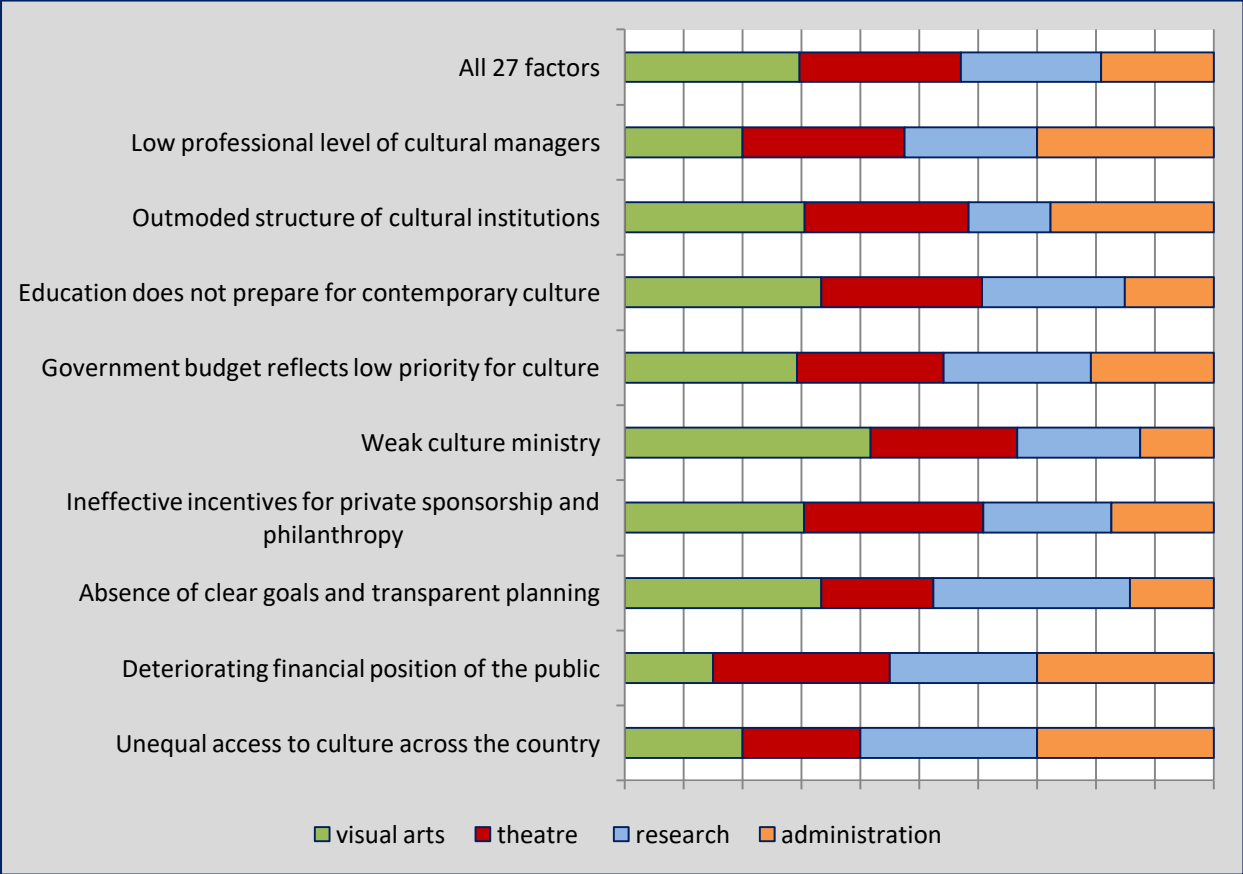
The instrument is too complex and too new to produce clear cut models either on regional or national levels. The multivariate statistical analysis of the responses explores low level of internal coherence which prevents meaningful factor analysis. Observing characteristic differences between perceptions, nevertheless, serves with signals for cultural policies.

The next diagram shows the internal composition of the top six items in the list of problematic factors in the six EaP countries. The coloured bar on top reflects the general distribution of participation (AM 32, AZ 12, BY 21, GE 37, MD 8, UA 74).



Complaining about the role of the school (*Education doesn't prepare...*) was the most often selected negative factor by the 184 respondents: 77 of them, i.e. 42% did so. The internal distribution of the choices by country is almost the same as the general proportion of participants. The next item (*Outmoded structure...*) was not selected by anybody from Azerbaijan but Georgians did so in great number. And so on, the coloured bars reveal the main differences between the expert perceptions. People of culture from Belarus and Georgia usually respond similarly but they greatly diverge about the level of professionals and about government priority. Ukrainian respondents feel particularly hurt by the handicap of small and independent cultural organisations at public grants (*Financing mainstream...*) – but nobody from Armenia, who on their part regret the weakness of their ministry more than the other five countries.

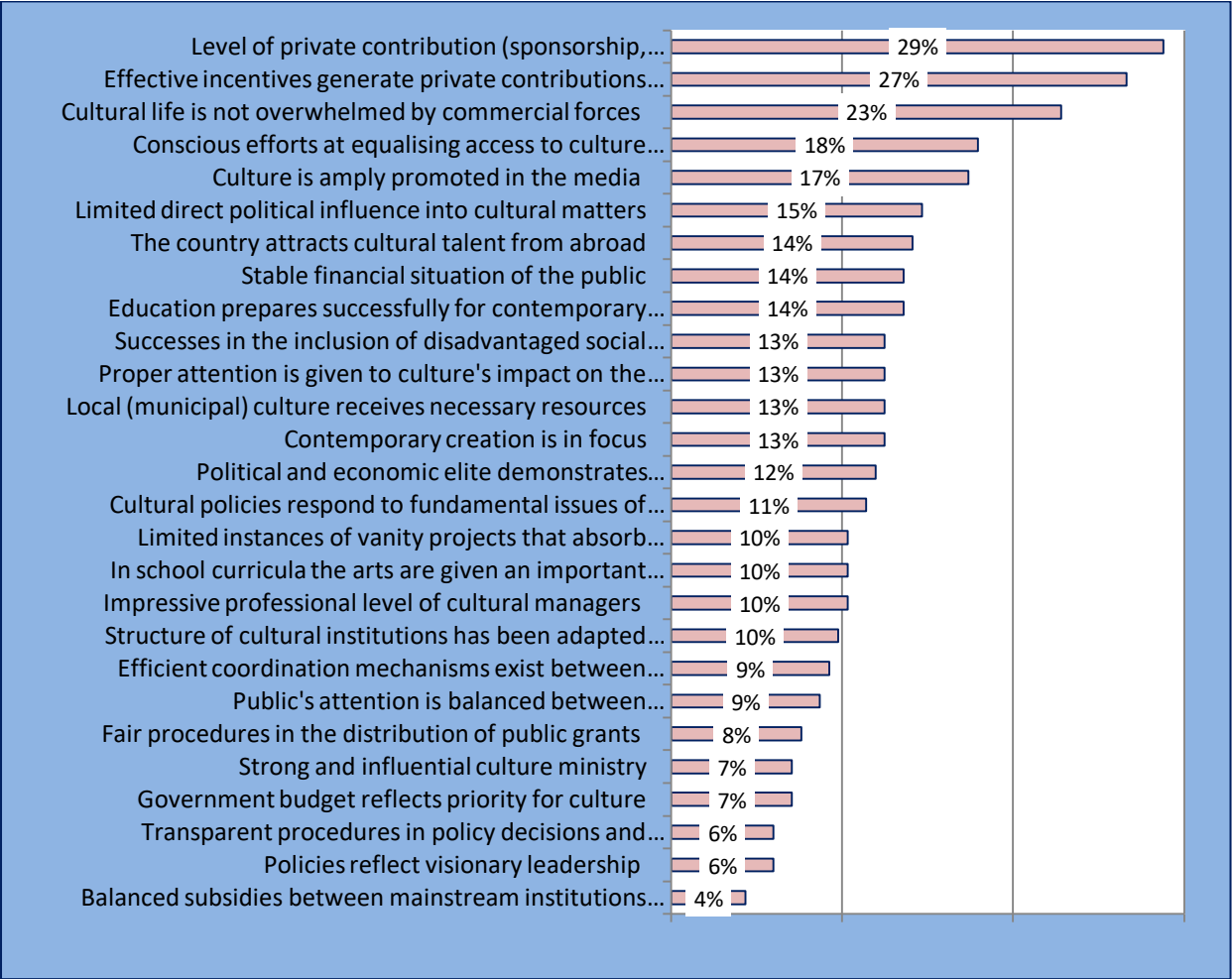
The participants were asked to tell their **professional background**. Due to the wide range of answers, only four groups with at least 17 members could be formed from the six countries. The next diagram shows how the most frequently chosen items were distributed within these professional groups.



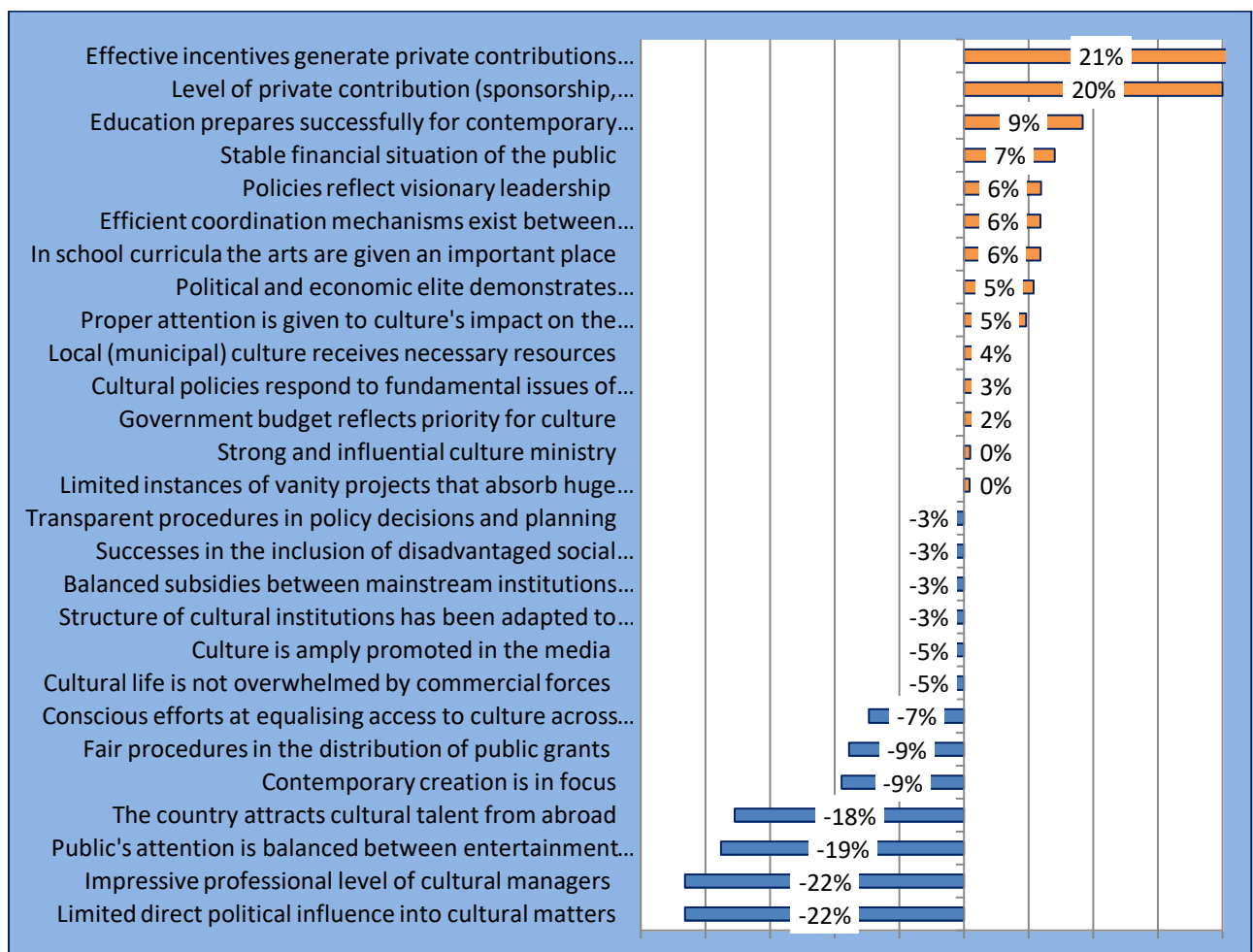
We can see the largest deviations from the original division along the 27 factors (top bar) with regard to the position of the ministry which visual artists found particularly weak differently from administrators. They, on their part, voted in great number on the low professional level of managers. Researchers' strongest claim is for clear goals and transparent planning (*Absence of...*).

Positive factors of culture

As a complement or double check to the scheme adopted from the economic competitiveness survey, a list of positive factors was also designed and applied in the Cultural Climate Barometer. Participating cultural experts found 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 thus less reliable data base. The findings of the 184 responses in EaP are presented in the same order as above:



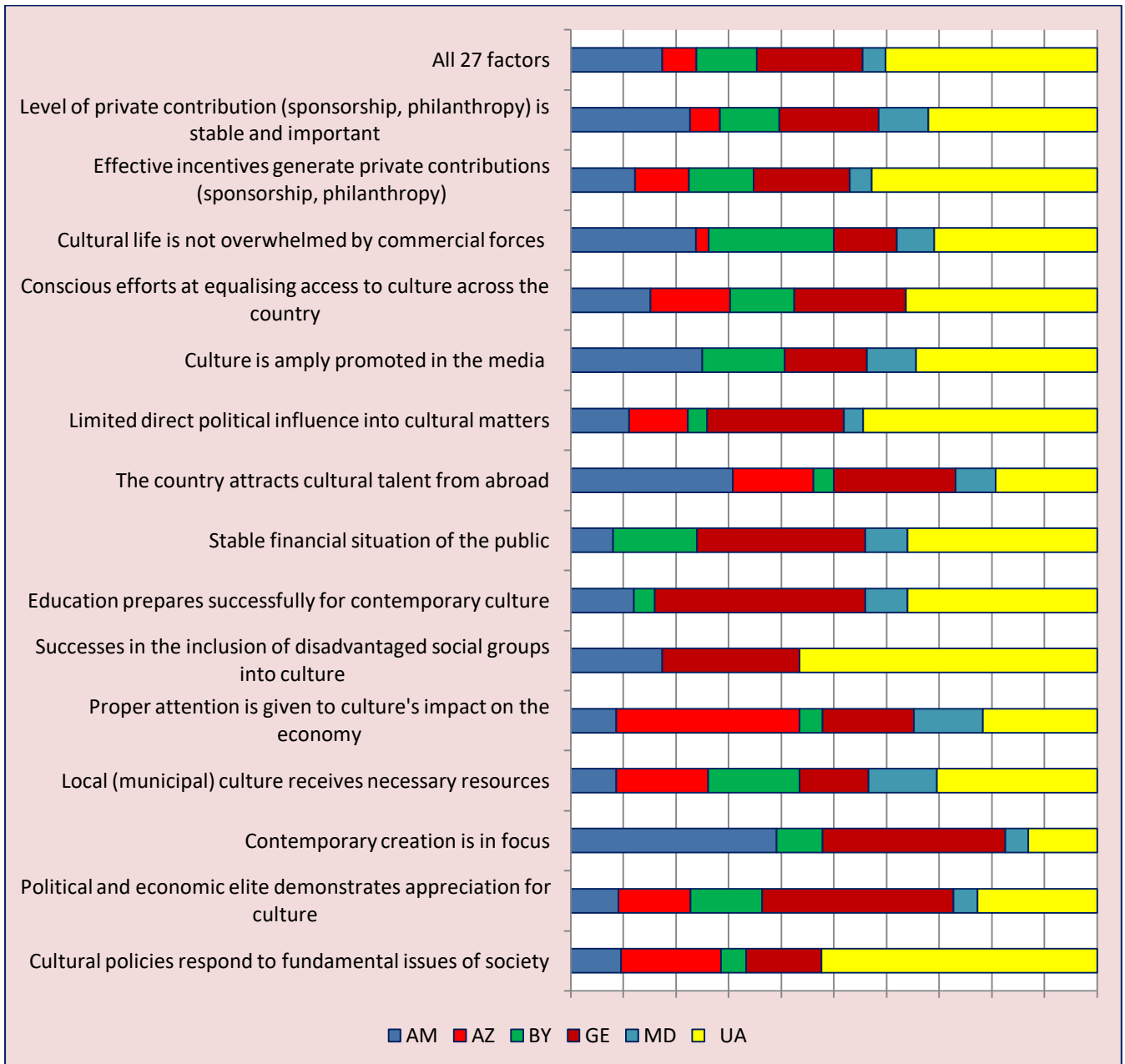
Interpretation is easiest if we compare the scores with expert perceptions in a different environment, in western Europe. See the greatest distances from the 91 western respondents in 2015:



The top and the bottom of the diagram need explanation. It was an unexpected outcome that satisfaction with both the amount of sponsorship and the mechanisms by which sponsorship is generated was leading the EaP list. Sponsorship is originally a western concept. In those countries, however, the Barometer sensed limited interest, both as a problem or an asset. In the absence of reliable full data on financing, we don't know if indeed, in the EaP region amounts of sponsorship and donations have significantly increased lately benefitting cultural action. An intelligent guess may be that in an era of not too lavish public finances even a small increase of support from entrepreneurs and private sources is much appreciated.

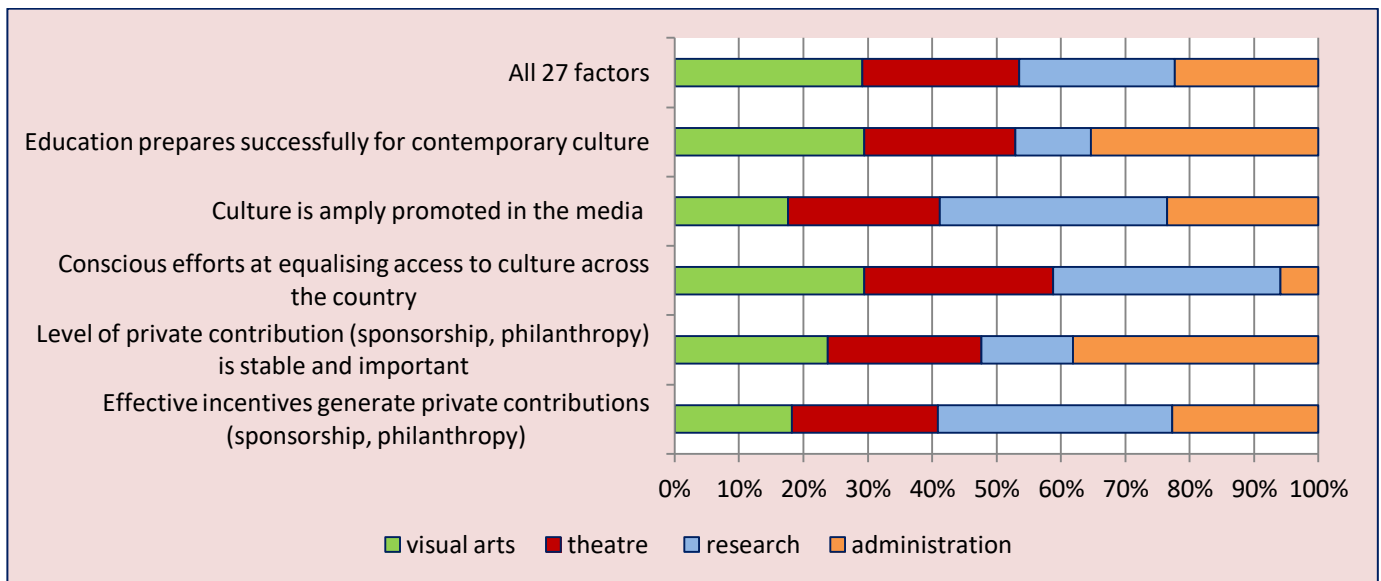
Chosen by 15% of respondents, the issue of political interference (*Limited direct...*) was 6th on the EaP list of positive factors on the previous graph. This and the next two items (attracting foreign talent and stable purchase power) as a cluster do not fit stereotypes of the region. This diagram shows that indeed, western experts came forward and voted on the first two aspects in much higher rates (plus 22 and 18 % points); as to the financial position of the public, they were 7 points less satisfied than their EaP colleagues.

The next graph presents the differences at identifying the positive features between the six countries.



Experts from the six countries are responsible practically in the same proportion for the surprising dominant place of satisfaction with sponsorship and the (probably moral rather than fiscal) incentives behind. Wishful thinking might play a role in these choices. Armenians felt the proudest about the position of *Contemporary creation...* In Azerbaijan commercial forces play limited role (*Cultural life...*) but culture's impact on the economy is appreciated (*Proper attention...*). Relative divergence from the original proportions in two cases reflects Belarusian realities: market forces and political power play inverted roles than in the other countries (*Cultural life...* and *Limited direct...*). This latter is perceived in Moldova as well as the (relatively) good position of *Local (municipal) culture*. The social function of culture is best emphasised by Ukrainian participants (*Successes...* and *Cultural policies...*) – whereas in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Moldova no-one boasted about cultural democratization (*Successes in the inclusion...*).

Due to the overall smaller votes made by the respondent about the positive factors there were fewer statements where sufficient amounts of votes were found by the four professional groups.



In four out of the five cases the combined choices of the researcher-administrator groups were bigger than the two artistic professions. (Remember: choosing was not compulsory among the positive factors.) Conversely, administrators felt little joy over the *Conscious efforts* to equalise access to culture.

Conclusion

The very nature of culture resists overall categorisation or ranking in the same manner as it is done in many other spheres of societies. Specific cultural aspects can be matched between countries: there are plenty of rank lists that feature money or time spent on selected cultural object or pastime etc. One function of the Eastern Partnership Observatory is to collect, display and interpret such statistics: in Briefs [Nr.1](#) and [Nr.3](#) various aspects of the international presence of the EaP countries was matched with the use of data.

The difficulty arises when we reach more abstracts concepts. Statisticians compute the contribution of culture to the economy to the penny, based on production and trade data. Yet they tell little about the vitality of cultural life, about culture’s role in society or about general indicators of success. In this regard culture is behind sectors like education and health, not to speak of the economy. Brief [Nr.2](#) tackled the issue of cultural policy priorities in the six countries. Detecting the general climate of cultural life is an even greater challenge. With the Cultural Climate Barometer we made a first step.

Impressum

This cultural policy brief was prepared in January 2018 by the Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory, a project of the EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme. The content of this paper does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the publication lies entirely with the authors: Péter Inkei, Nairi Khatchadourian, Levan Khetaguri, Kateryna Kravchuk, Zviad Mchedlishvili, Tarlan Rasulov, Veacheslav Reabcinschii, Maria Savushkina.