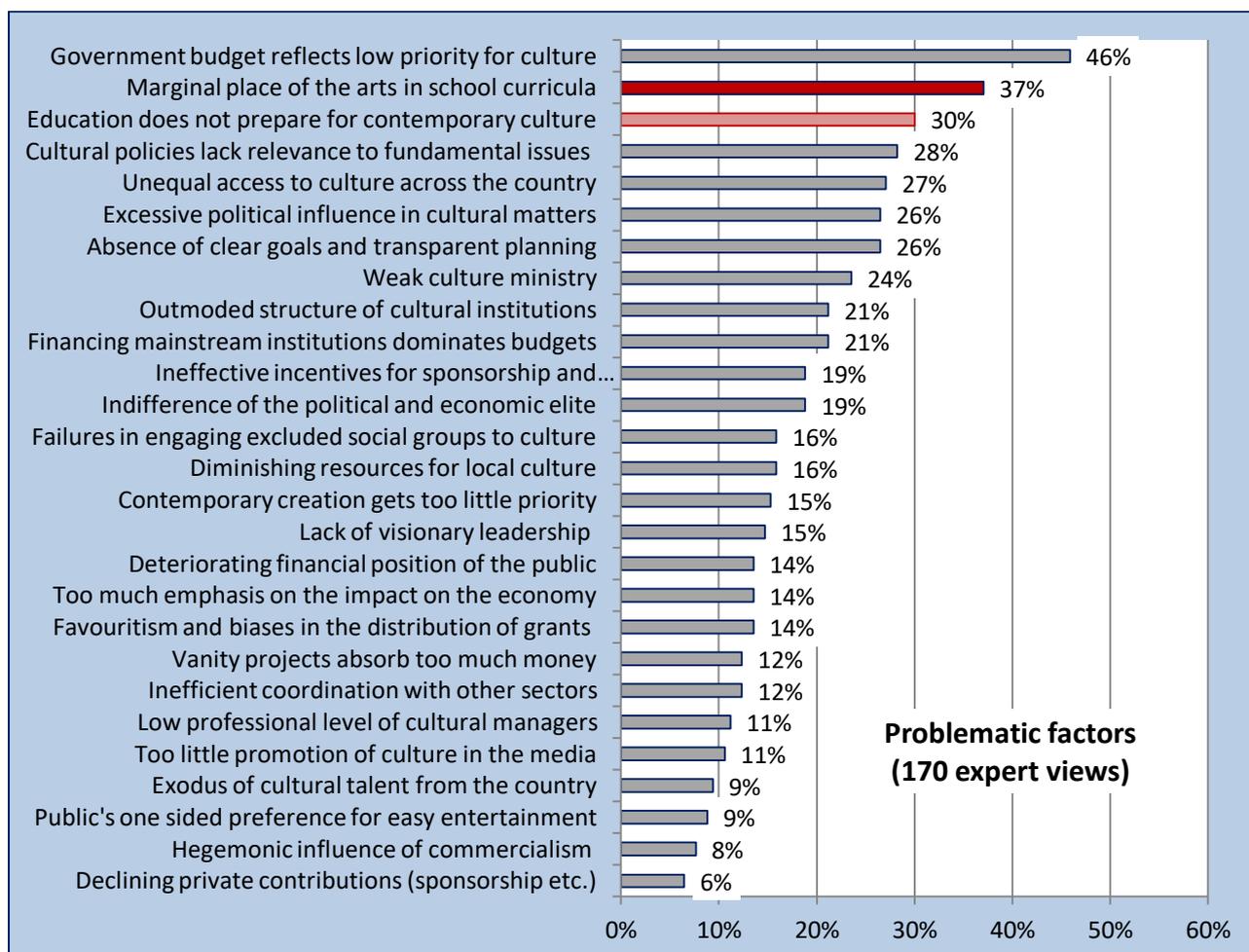


Arts Education

Who are Most Concerned about it, Who are Less

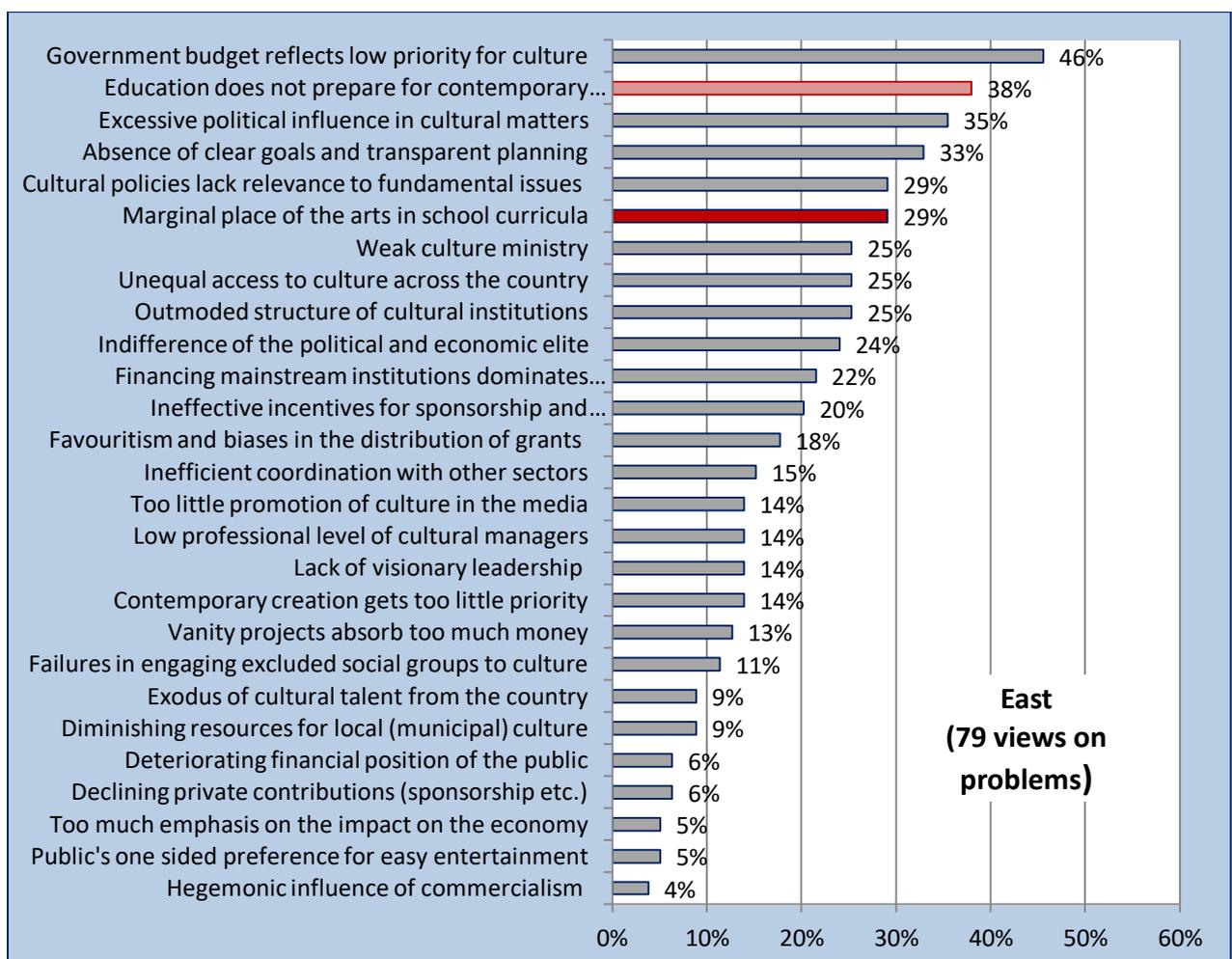
This is the edited version of the power-point-supported contribution of Péter Inkei to the panel debate upon the [keynote lecture](#) by Ernst Wagner on *The challenges in arts education with regard to globalization, nationalism and interculturality* in Rijeka, on the 9th of October in 2018, at the [1st Assembly](#) of the Association of the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends.

Out of the 27 “problematic factors”, from which respondents to the [Cultural Climate Barometer](#) of the Budapest Observatory had to choose, one is about arts education: *Marginal place of the arts in school curricula*. It was identified as a main concern at a surprisingly high rate: selected by 37% of the respondents, it occupied the second position. But if we consider that the most popular complaint *Government budget reflects low priority for culture* is overly general, we can conclude that arts education is the single most specific concern of stakeholders in culture. Although the survey was not representative, the relative coherence of the responses lends weight to the findings. It must be emphasised that here we do not meet a case of the ritual complaint about neglect by a segment of the sector: this prominent concern was shared by all kinds of cultural workers.

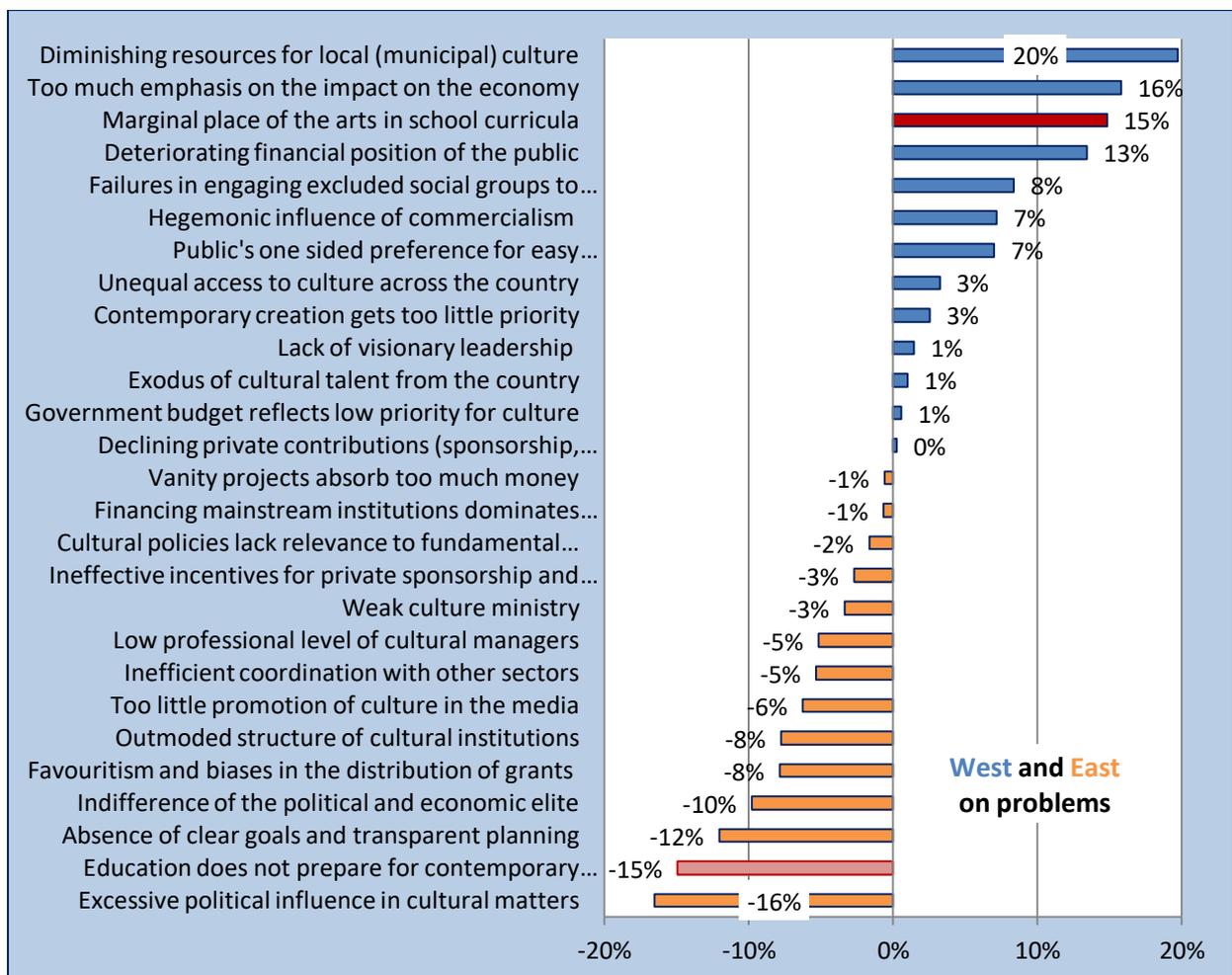


The fact that the third position in the rank list of problematic factors is occupied by a related item, *Education does not prepare for contemporary culture*, corroborates the fundamental importance that cultural operators attribute to the place of culture in the school, although this latter complaint can primarily be interpreted as a critique of the conservatism of the educational system.

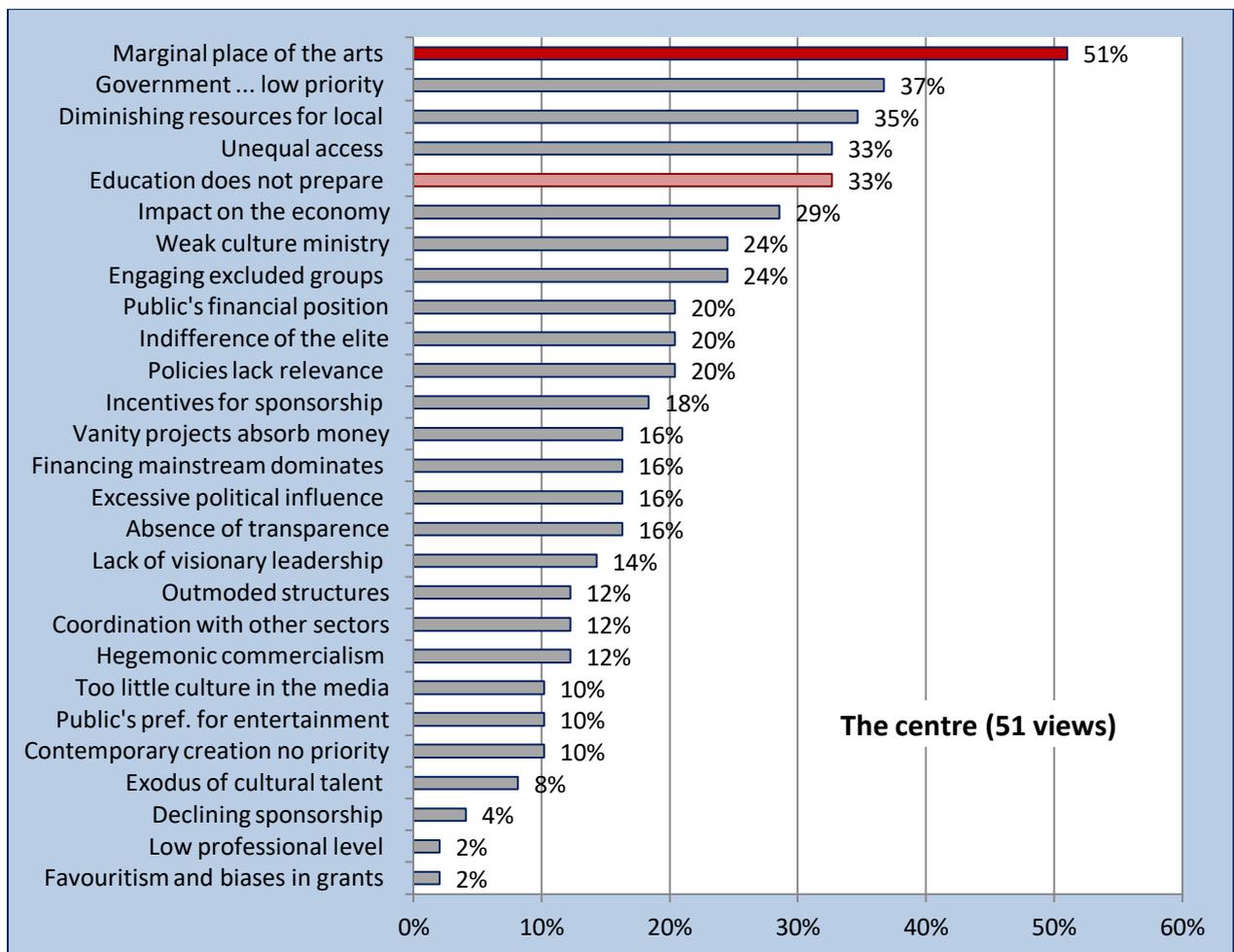
Since a small majority, 55% of respondents are from western countries, the total figures tend to reflect their view better than the 45% from the east, i.e. from postcommunist Europe. In the east, conservatism of the school system is found to be the greatest problem (following the deep-seated grievance about the government budget). The issue of arts education at school comes only after a group of general cultural policy complaints.



The following diagram sorts the 27 problematic factors by the distance between eastern and western respondents, expressed in percentage points between the two. As we can see, the two discussed items belong to the most divisive aspects between the perceptions of the two groups. The distance is 15% points in both cases, pointing to opposite directions. (While the issue of *Declining private contributions: sponsorship and philanthropy* is bemoaned by east and west to exactly the same degree, showing zero divergence.)

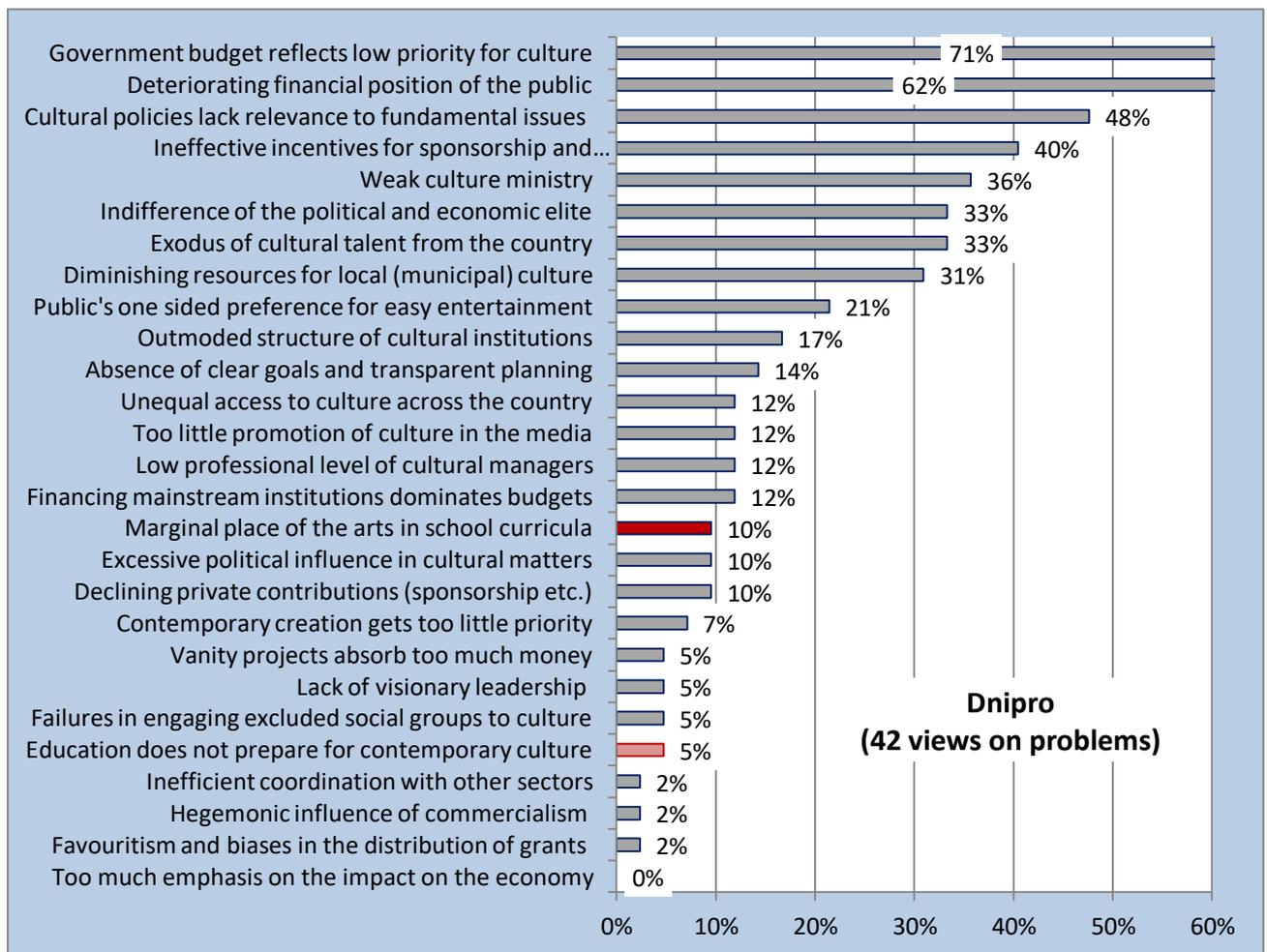


Taking a closer look at the respective regions, we find that it is in the core of western Europe (AT, BE, CH, DE, FR, IE, NL, UK) that the place of the arts in the school curricula is considered to be the most vital problem that affects the climate of culture. Over a half of the 48 respondents (25, to be precise) included *Marginal place of the arts in school curricula* among the five most problematic factors that they were asked to pick from the 27 options. The graph below shows that *Education does not prepare for contemporary culture* was chosen by a third of the participants, ranked also rather high among the challenges to culture's vitality.



Within this geographic group, the participants of the survey from the United Kingdom were almost unanimous in listing the arts at school among the most problematic factors. Do they mean that arts education is neglected in British schools more than anywhere else in Europe, presenting a serious setback for the health of culture in the country?

Before attempting an answer, let us see the other extreme. For this we go to the city of Dnipro (formerly called Dnipropetrovsk, and in the Soviet times by the Russian name of Dniepropetrovsk), where we had the chance to get 42 Ukrainian cultural activists to respond the survey.



As we can see, cultural operators in Ukraine demonstrated much less excitement about the issues of culture in the education system than all other groups, including the 79 “eastern” experts in the larger survey where Ukraine was represented with four voices only.

Why this difference between the east and west concerning the assessment of the role of arts education, demonstrated best by the huge distances between the British and Ukrainian perceptions of this issue?

Identifying any of the “problematic factors” expresses two things at the same time. One is the genuine perception of the gravity of the problem, signalling deficits in the respective areas¹. The second is a value statement, pointing at the importance of the issue.

At trying to interpret the east-west divide with regard to arts education, we can only guess the respective weight of these two aspects as we draw tentative conclusions:

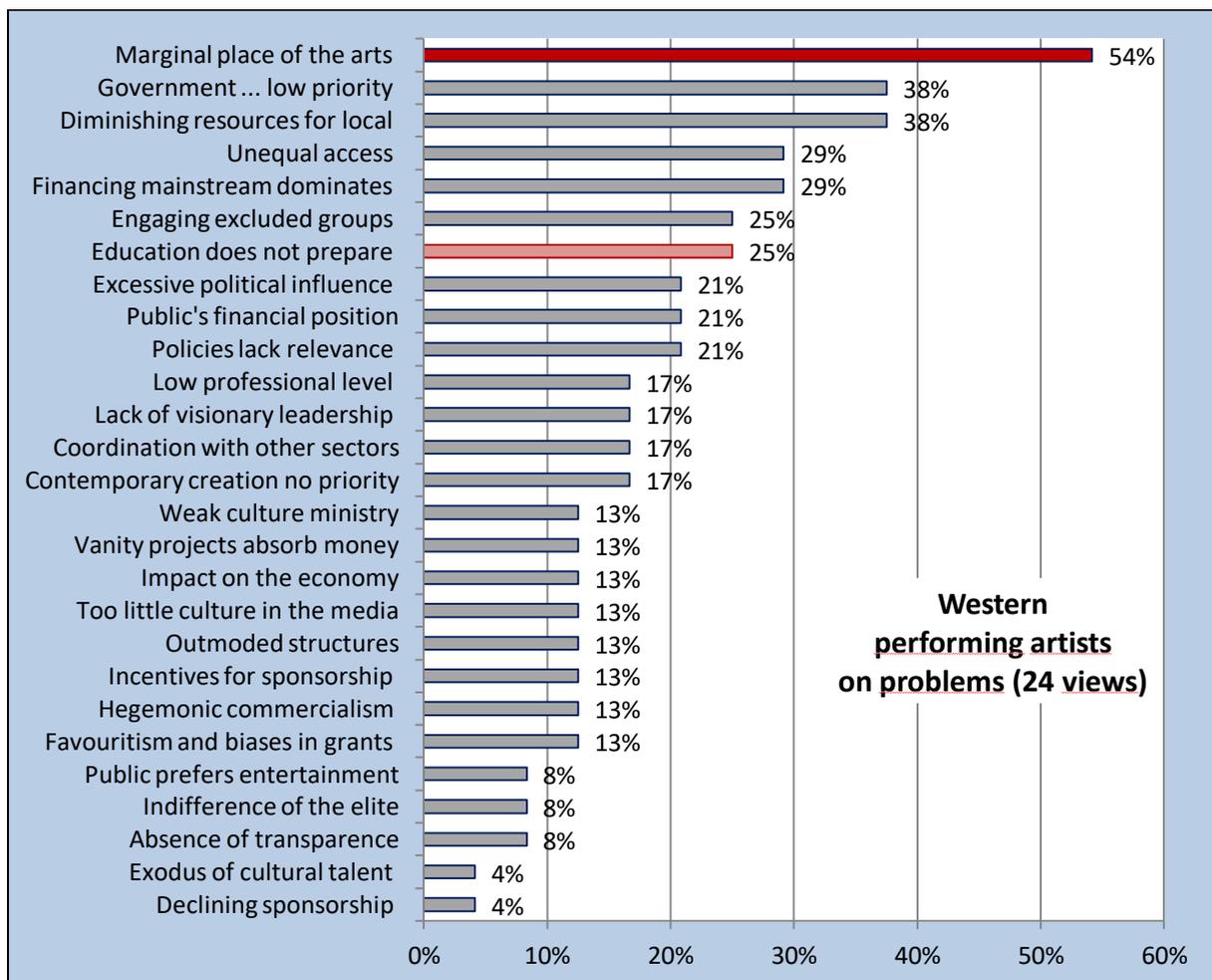
- Important is the context. In the more consolidated western democracies the quality of the content of cultural life can receive greater attention; hence the emphasis on

¹ We could of course follow up and try to establish to what extent the perceived differences of problems between countries (or groups of countries) are indeed based on facts. This we did not do, differently from Goran Tomka, who at the Rijeka meeting presented a survey taken in Novi Sad. In that case researchers contrasted the most popular choices at a similar barometer taken with local activists to relevant facts in an exercise of “myth-busting”.

the performance of the education system to this avail. In the east, still facing a variety of challenges of transition, existential hardships occupy more prominent positions in cultural stakeholders' minds.

- On the other hand, Soviet-type education systems indeed used to put an emphasis on arts education, the legacy of which is still present in most of those countries.

The responses to the Cultural Climate Barometer were also analysed along the professional profile of the participants. Respondents with a performing art background proved to be the most concerned about arts education, especially those in the west.



Strangely, visual artists showed the weakest attachment to the issue of arts education, while participants with backgrounds of research, media, administration and other cultural areas (heritage, literature) occupying intermediate positions.

Going far beyond prior assumptions, the position of arts education, coupled with the assessment of the role of the school about contemporary culture, appears to be central in the perception of problematic factors to culture across Europe, according to the Cultural Climate Barometer. Furthermore, this issue proved to be a distinguishing feature between participants from western and eastern countries in the survey.