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# Nothing but the cuckoo clock? Determinants of public funding of culture in Switzerland, 1977–2010<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

Sociology of culture has established knowledge about the social processes in the production, valuation and consumption of cultural objects and the arts. However, public spending on culture is predominantly studied in political science and political economy. Therefore, the aim of this article is to add a sociological view to existing political and economic examinations of public funding of culture and arts. This is pursued by concentrating on the determinants of public cultural expenditures, which we consider as comprising not only political (party ideology, electoral cycle, direct democracy) and economic (central locations, spatial spending patterns) but also social factors (population's structure according to education, income, age). This interdisciplinary approach is based on the idea that cultural policy is located at the intersection of political decision-making, cultural production, and cultural consumption. Empirically, we study cultural expenditures and their determinants for the 26 cantons of Switzerland from 1977 to 2010 based on hybrid panel regression models. Our results show that the Swiss cantons exhibit strikingly different

<sup>☆</sup> We owe this title to Kevin Mulcahy, who alluded us to the famous remark added by Orson Welles to the script of the movie "The Third Man": "You know what the fellow said – in Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock". Actually Switzerland is not the origin of the cuckoo clock, it originates from the black forest in Germany.

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patterns of cultural expenditure. Consistent with our main assumption, they are shaped by social, political and economic-geographic variables. Yet, the interplay of these variables differs between classical cultural expenditures and public funding of sports and leisure.

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## 1. Introduction

The sociology of culture has established knowledge about social processes in the production, valuation and consumption of cultural objects and the arts. The social and economic situation of art producers and their organization is a thriving field of research (Becker, 1982; DiMaggio, 1987; Menger, 1999; Dubois and Francois, 2013; Lena and Lindeman, 2014; Lachmann et al., 2014), the functioning of art markets is covered not only by economists, but also by sociologists of culture (Velthuis, 2004; Beckert and Rössel, 2013). Furthermore, sociologists have studied the valuation of cultural objects and their consecration by different powerful actors in the respective fields (Bourdieu, 1996; Verboord and van Rees, 2008; Dowd, 2011; Dubois and Francois, 2013). Most elaborate, yet, is the analysis of cultural consumption, whether that be patterns and main dimensions of cultural participation, the different modes of cultural consumption, or its socio-structural basis (Bourdieu, 1984; Roose et al., 2012; Savage and Prieur, 2011; Rössel, 2011; Katz-Gerro, 2011). However, the role of state institutions in evaluating and supporting culture seems to be less prominent in the sociological literature. Even though there is some research on the canonization of culture in textbooks and in the school curriculum (Verboord and van Rees, 2008; Bevers, 2005), support and public spending in the field of culture have not been under much consideration from a sociological perspective (for an important exception: Feder and Katz-Gerro, 2012). Therefore, the aim of this contribution is to add a sociological view to existing political and economic examinations of public funding of culture and arts and thus contribute to a genuine interdisciplinary explanation of cultural policy.

Cultural policy, whose basic component is granting public subsidies for cultural projects, is located at the intersection of different societal fields and thus the result of an interplay of a multitude of actors ruled by different institutions. It is directly connected with political decision making processes and with cultural producers' supply opportunities; but it is also, probably mutually and less directly, tied to the demands of (potential) cultural consumers. Hence, determinants of public cultural spending should be analyzed from several theoretical angles as they comprise not only political but also social and economic factors. Our strategy, then, is to augment previous research on public cultural spending stemming from political science and political economy with discussions about the socio-structural bases of cultural consumption. This results in an interdisciplinary aggregation of social, political, and economic determinants that we assume to be most relevant for the explanation of public cultural expenditure in the present study (Section 2). More specifically, we will focus our attention on the population's educational, income, and age structure as well as political institutions like parties, electoral cycles, and direct democratic alternatives. Moreover, we take account of central locations and spatial spending patterns as discussed in economic geography. Based on these considerations we derive hypotheses guiding our empirical study. After discussing our methods and presenting the available data in Section 3 we present the empirical results with respect to our hypotheses in Section 4. Basically, our results underline our main assumption: public spending for culture results from a complex interplay of social structures, political institutions and economic-geographic patterns.

We study the determinants of cultural expenditure for the case of Switzerland from 1977 to 2010. Previous research has shown that the causal mechanisms that shape public spending are highly context sensitive. The party difference hypothesis for example predicts that left wing parties and their supporters advocate more generous public spending (Hibbs, 1977; Wagschal, 2006:70). However, correspondent findings vary from country to country: in some cases parties seem to matter not at all for cultural expenditures, in some cases left wing parties tend to further it, and in other cases right wing parties and their supporters back such funding (Schulze and Rose, 1998; Getzner, 2004a; Noonan, 2007; Lewis and Rushton, 2007; Potrafke, 2010a,b; Nogare and Galizzi, 2011; Benito et al., 2013).

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