



Benefits of taking part in CitizenHeritage: Systematic Literature Review

Deliverable O6-01 Erasmus University Rotterdam

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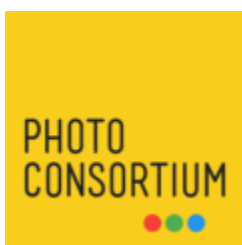
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The Benefits of Cultural Participation: a Systematic Literature Review

Introduction

A recent report of the European Commission (2023) has emphasised the strong relation between citizens' participation in the arts and culture and positive outcomes of democracy, civic engagement, and inclusion. Drawing from a vast range of studies, the report shows that participation in cultural activities serves as a catalyst in strengthening democratic ideals and promoting social cohesion through diverse means. The report found that the benefits of participation encompass an increased likelihood of voting, volunteering, and participating in community initiatives, as well as fostering positive social attitudes associated with civic and democratic values. Such attitudes also include a sense of belonging to a community, tolerance, trust, and empathy towards individuals from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, cultural activities contribute to the development of essential personal and interpersonal skills, equipping individuals with the ability to effectively express themselves, listen to others, comprehend diverse perspectives, and facilitate conflict resolution - all of which are crucial for functioning democracies. By nurturing social capital, cultural activities play a pivotal role in binding communities together and fostering trust, solidarity, tolerance, and cohesion. Remarkably, cultural participation impacts civic and democratic attitudes and behaviours irrespective of a person's socio-economic background or educational level. Both active and passive modes of cultural participation yield positive associations with civic attitudes and outcomes, with more active forms showcasing stronger effects. Beyond strengthening democracy, cultural activities can effectively contribute to a wide array of broader social policy objectives, encompassing domains like health and social care, education, and social inclusion.

Why is cultural participation key in modern society? Its importance links to cultural heritage as an open and evolutionary process. UNESCO defines cultural heritage as those "artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including

symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific, and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile, and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings.” (UNESCO 2009).

Cultural heritage has a variegated if not debated connotation, consisting of a heterogeneous set of goods whose cultural value is negotiated and developed over time until it is recognized as traditional (Guerzoni 2007). Heritage depends on time, space, as well as social and power relations in place. In other words, cultural heritage is what societies inherit across generations, but also what they continuously deem as culturally valuable. Individuals’ participation in heritage and cultural activities is a productive act which sustains and nurtures it. As such, updated versions of cultural heritage consistently stressed the importance of knowledge and its transfer. In 2005, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, also known as the Faro Convention. Here, the emphasis is on the fact that heritage is not valuable per se, but because people attach certain values to it. The convention placed great importance on the institutional aspects of cultural heritage, and it envisions that something can become cultural heritage when a heritage community seeks formal recognition of it. A concept related to this is the shared responsibility towards heritage that communities undertake. Moreover, international cultural heritage networks and bodies are increasingly prompting participation of citizens in heritage institutions (Council of Europe 2005; UNESCO 2005). The international council of museums, ICOM, has approved a new definition of museum after a long co-creation process to which museums professionals from all over the world have contributed. Consistently, UNESCO suggested that cultural heritage should be seen as a global public good (UNESCO 2022) meant as a resource of which citizens have the right and responsibility to contribute and partake.

Cultural participation refers to the engagement in activities such as attending museums, cultural sites, theatre performances, concerts, festivals or to practising artistic activities such as playing an instrument, singing, painting, and dancing. Defining cultural participation, Eurostat reports that it includes “going to the cinema, attending live performances, visiting cultural sites and practising artistic activities (for example playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing or painting)” (Eurostat 2019). This type of understanding links participation to consumption. Demand for cultural goods and services is often used in cultural statistics, which take into

consideration attendance, readership, viewings or listening, and creative involvement (Throsby 2013).

Studies of cultural consumption typically draw on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, according to which cultural knowledge, skills, and preferences play a key role in shaping individuals' social status and social class. People with more cultural capital, higher education, who have been exposed to high culture in their past and have a refined taste, tend to appreciate high culture more than others with a different and less affluent background (Bourdieu 1987). More recently, Richard Peterson updated this introducing the omnivore theory which argues that modern consumers have eclectic tastes and consumption patterns; individuals who are cultural omnivores, that is, who consume both high and popular culture, are more likely to be open-minded, cosmopolitan, and socially connected, and thus, to enjoy higher cultural and social rewards (Peterson and Kern 1996).

In economics, the dynamics related to the consumption of cultural goods and services have in fact determined the birth of a new academic field, that is the economics of the arts or cultural economics. Great attention has been posed by cultural economists to understanding how preferences function in the markets for cultural goods and, as such, how taste is formed. Cultural economists have proven in a variety of empirical studies that tastes are determined by the experience and by the context of the cultural participation (Blaug 2001). This, indeed, connects best with the sociological view on cultural tastes as signals and determinants of social status. Applied economic research has demonstrated that cultural participants tend to have higher socioeconomic status (Falk and Katz-Gerro 2016, Ateca-Amestoy and Prieto-Rodriguez 2013).

Besides a rich and affirmed body of research - especially in cultural economics - that empirically investigates the determinants of cultural participation, a tradition of empirical research regarding what the arts and culture (eventually labelled the cultural and creative industries) can do to society was established. Economic studies on the effects of the arts and culture sector typically regarded the "economic importance" of the arts (Myerschough 1988). Starting in the 1990s, researchers looked at the social effects of participating in the arts. In 1997, Matarasso formulated a list of 50 social impacts resulting from participation in cultural and heritage activities. The list is categorised in six broad headings: personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self-determination, local image and identity, imagination and

vision, health and well-being. He defined cultural participation as the active involvement of individuals in cultural and creative activities, and benefits as the positive outcomes and impacts that arise from engaging in cultural participation (Matarasso 1997). Matarasso's work is now considered a milestone in social impact studies of the cultural and creative sectors (Reeves 2002).

While a variety of attempts have observed the benefits of cultural participation and set the agenda for impact studies in the arts and culture (Matarasso 1997, Merli 2002, Reeves, 2002, Belfiore, 2006, O'Brien, 2010, Bollo et al., 2013, Bonet & Calvano, 2023), no systematic approach has been taken so far to comprehensively assess the extant empirical evidence. This research engages in such an effort by means of a systematic literature review.

Researchers stressed the relative importance of arts and culture in our society: "Rather than just listening to stories, there is an urge to participate in the narration, to negotiate the unfolding of the story, and likewise for any other form of cultural production" (Sacco et al 2018: 6). It is high time for a new conceptualization of the benefits of cultural participation that takes into account an updated and more complete definition of cultural participation, an enhanced methodology able to capture the multidimensional nature of an expanded notion of cultural participation, a refined construction of cultural statistics to provide large-scale yet highly granular information about the cultural experiences as informed by primary data research. This, in turn, will open the possibility to explore the benefits of cultural participation to uncovered areas of social life.

Methodology of the Systematic Literature Review

In cultural economics and cultural policy, a recurring general argument is that cultural participation is important for a variety of reasons and as such should be stimulated (Towse and Navarrete 2020). Cultural participation has been widely studied in the academic literature, and a growing body of evidence suggests that cultural participation can provide numerous benefits for individuals and society. However, such a rich landscape of knowledge has not been systematised yet. The objective of this study is a systematic literature review of the evidence regarding the benefits that cultural participation exerts. Through a systematic revision of the empirical research on this topic, we aim to answer the following research question:

What are the benefits of cultural participation and through which methods are they assessed?

To answer this broad question, we considered the following subquestions:

- What is the empirical evidence in support of the argument that cultural participation leads to social benefits?
- What realms of “impact” are being investigated?
- Through which methods?
- By which disciplines?

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a useful research method to “understand the breadth and depth of the existing body of work and identify gaps to explore” (Xiao and Watson 2019: 93). SLRs aim at reducing bias by following an objective, transparent, and rigorous approach. A fixed process to identify, synthesise, and assess all available evidence results in a comprehensive statement about what we know. Our approach to this review goes beyond description and attempts to extend current knowledge regarding the benefits of cultural participation. To answer the research question, we adopt a thematic synthesis, which entails a thematic analysis of the data extracted and develop themes (Xiao and Watson 2019). The themes will answer the research question, ultimately extending the literature on cultural participation.

The SLR performed followed an eight-step process part of a planning, conducting, and reporting of the literature review (see Figure 1).

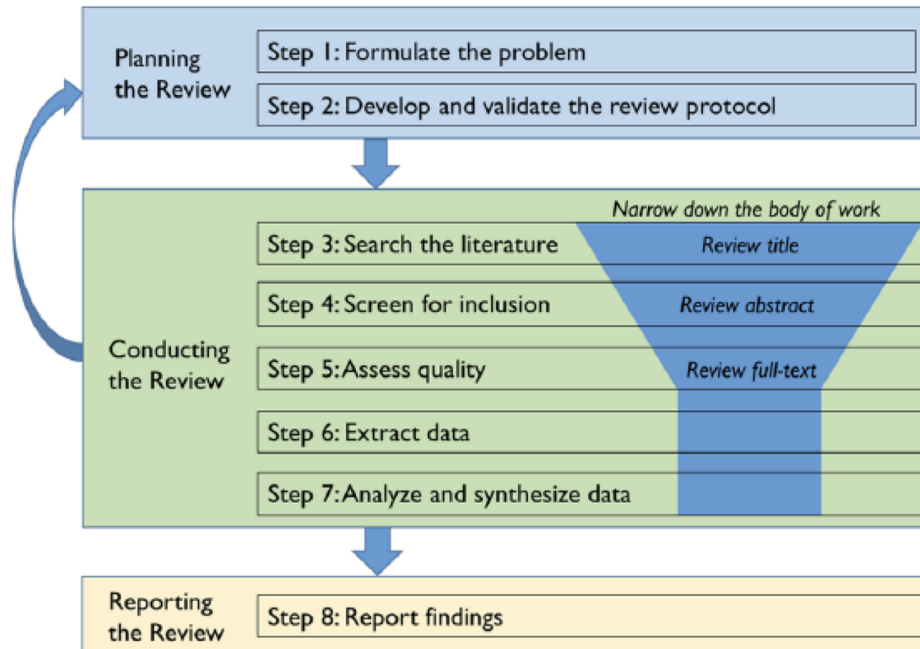


Figure 1: Steps of a systematic literature review (source: Xiao and Watson 2019).

The first phase of the literature review is about planning, during which a problem is formulated, i.e., the research question and a review protocol are constructed. The review protocol is rooted in the current literature on cultural policy and cultural economics, which pose increasing attention to the role of cultural participation in society. Cultural participation is often described as something similar to the demand of culture, proxied by individuals' attendance to cultural sites: "the decision to visit and the frequency of visits to historical monuments, museums, art galleries, or archeological sites" (Falk and Katz-Gerro 2016). In a more inclusive approach, cultural participation has also been framed in terms of partaking in cultural activities, besides attending cultural sites: "cultural participation can range from museums, music, dance and literature to gardening and pottery; and relates to the consumption and production of cultural experiences by different means (Ateca-Amestoy et al 2016). From this, the theoretical constructs that have guided the search protocol are **cultural participation**, **cultural consumption**, and **cultural attendance**.

Similarly, the effects of cultural participation belong to a variety of topics too broad to be captured *a priori*. Instead, following the most seminal literature in cultural economics, which is often considered to engage in the study of what the arts are good for (Dekker 2015), the search protocol has been linked to the constructs of **impact**, **benefits**, and **externalities**. These terms were searched within titles, abstracts, and keywords of the two most comprehensive databases of academic literature: Scopus and Web of Science. In order to implement a fully inductive approach, one that is also inclusive, the search protocol has not been restricted neither to year of publication nor to discipline. The search has produced an initial body of 572 works, of which 138 were publications present in both databases. We started our literature review with 434 publications. Figure 2 describes in detail our application of the design of systematic literature reviews proposed by Xiao and Watson (2019).

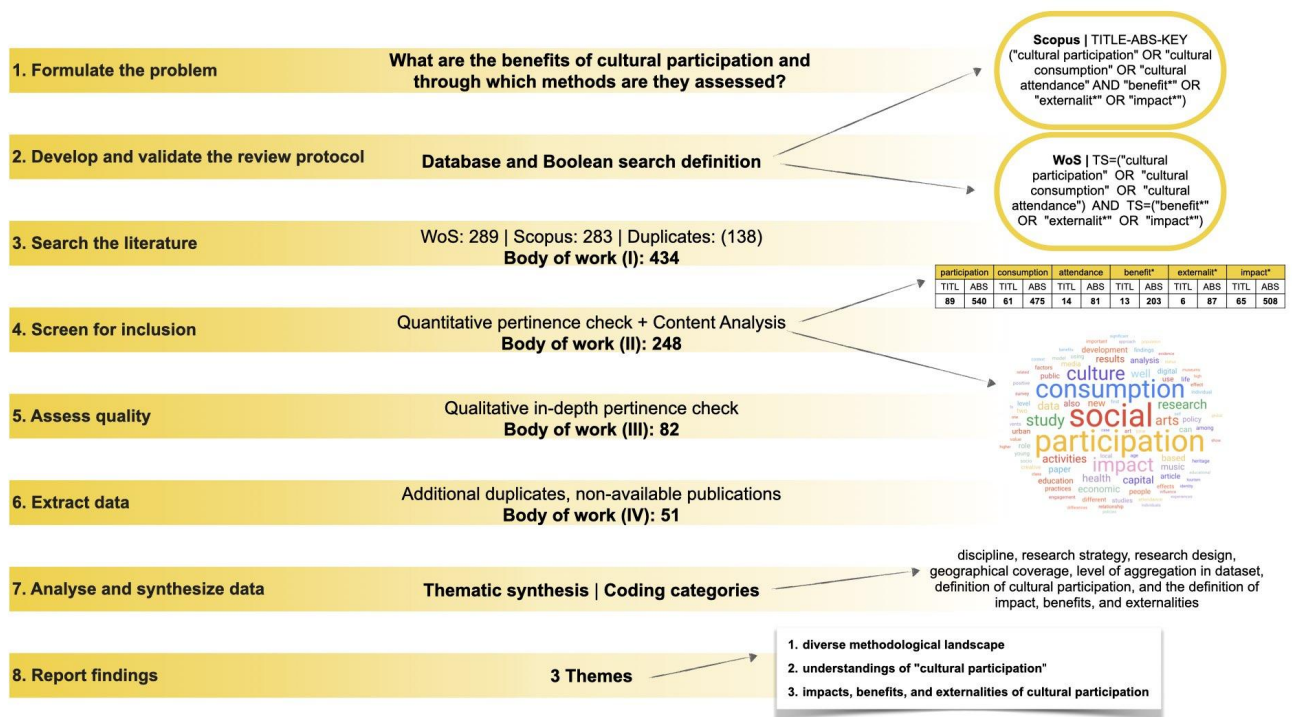


Figure 2: Search protocol and relative search results (source: elaboration of the authors).

At the second phase of the review, a quantitative assessment of pertinence was performed with a two-fold approach, deductive and inductive. We first checked for recurrence of our keywords and ranked the publications based on a numerical score determined by the frequency of the occurrence (see Table A.2). We then performed a content analysis through Atlas.ti to assess the most recurring words in the title, abstracts, and keywords, which resulted in a list of the most frequent words. Figure 3 shows the keywords identified, the larger the word size the greater the occurrence.



Figure 3: Word cloud of the inductive pertinence check through content analysis (source: elaboration of the Authors on Atlas.ti).

From the initial 434 works, we discarded almost half of them, those which scored less than 4 in the deductive pertinent check. To check whether those who scored 4 had to be included or excluded, we conducted a qualitative check of the papers with pertinence score equal to 4,

revealing 56% relevant to our research. The new sample consisted of 248 publications. Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics of the pertinence scores in the culling phase.

	<i>Min</i>	<i>Quartile 1</i>	<i>Quartile 2</i>	<i>Quartile 3</i>	<i>Quartile 4</i>
STEP 4	0	2	4	6	24
STEP 5	4	5	6	8	24

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the pertinence check scores in step 4 and step 5 (source: elaboration of the authors).

We noticed many of the papers selected in both cultural economics and cultural sociology examined the determinants of cultural participation, which is not the topic of this investigation. A manual revision based on title, abstracts, and keywords left a dataset which focused on the benefits of cultural participation as intended, narrowing down the body of work from 248 to 82 papers. A final check to exclude additional duplicates and inaccessible publications resulted in a final corpus of 50 highly relevant articles, which we analysed thematically.

The coding phase started deductively, as we were interested in understanding the following elements: **discipline, research strategy, research design, geographical coverage, level of aggregation in dataset, definition of cultural participation, and the definition of impact, benefits, and externalities**. In addition, for each paper we identified the main **results** and key insights. Identifying the definitional categories and extracting the resulting evidence from each paper is the base of our analysis (step 7).

Most of the papers analysed attain to the discipline of economics (33%) or public health (21%) (see Figure 4). Some studies regard organisation and management, whereas other contributions are in the fields of cultural policy, cultural studies, history and humanities, media, psychology, public policy, regional science, and sociology.

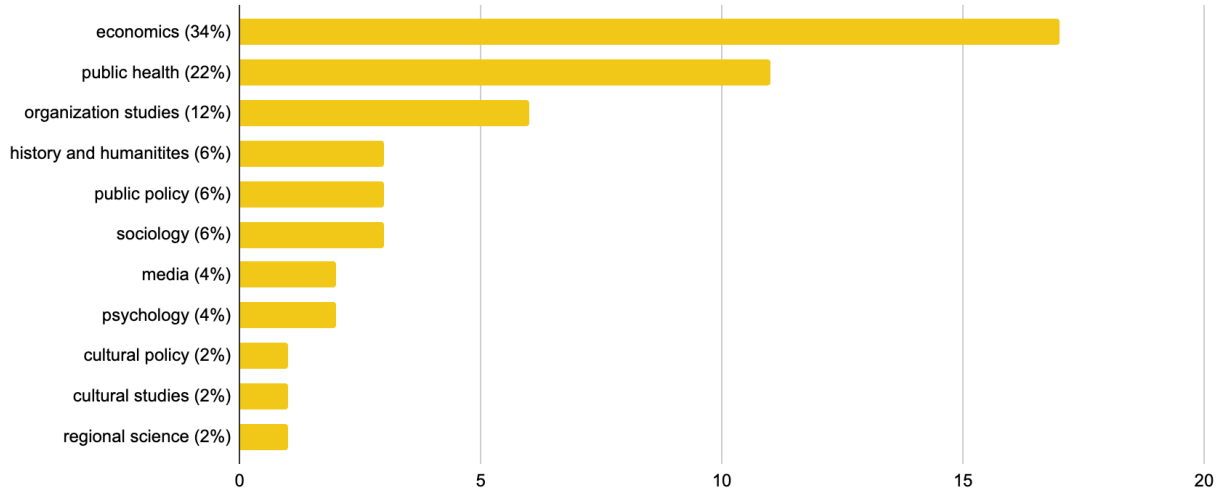


Figure 4: Distribution of the papers reviewed based on their discipline (source: elaboration of the authors).

The majority of the papers followed a quantitative strategy (70%). In many cases, research was carried out through a cross-sectional design (50%) but a considerable amount of studies was longitudinal (38%). This might be due to the fact that qualitative research tends to be cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, and that quantitative research - especially if exploratory - is also often designed in cross-sections (see Figure 5). Three public health papers engage in literature reviews (O'Neill 2010; Clift 2012; Elsdén and Roe 2020).

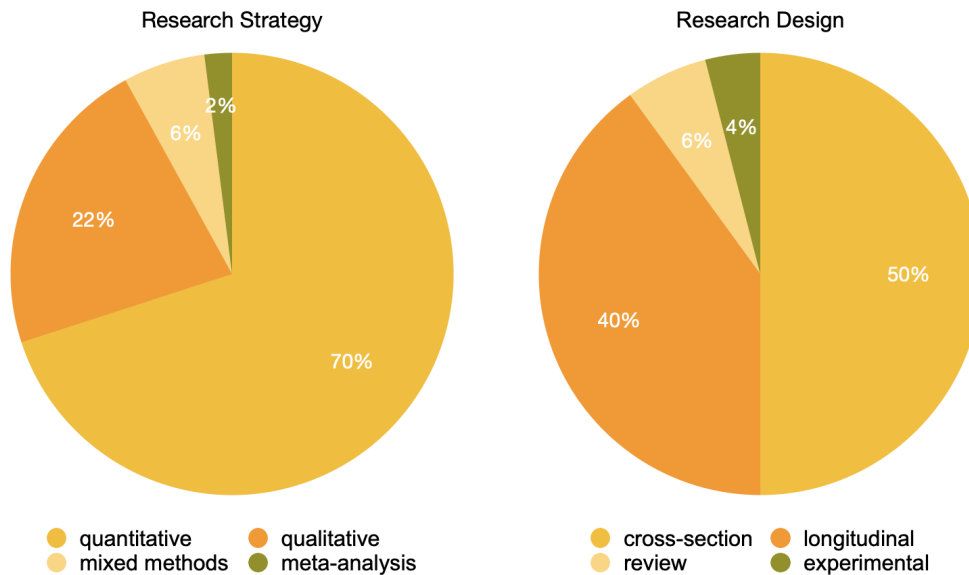


Figure 5: Distribution of the different types of research strategy and design (source: elaboration of the authors).

Regarding the aggregation level (see Figure 6), most empirical studies focused on one country (20), possibly due to availability of census data and the predominance of economics as a discipline of inquiry. Many cases examine cultural participation at the city level (8) or focus on a single event or a project in a specific place (8) or at regional level (7). Only a few cases compare cities (3) or countries (1). In 3 cases, the articles did not specifically focus on a geographical area, being conceptual or review articles (6%).

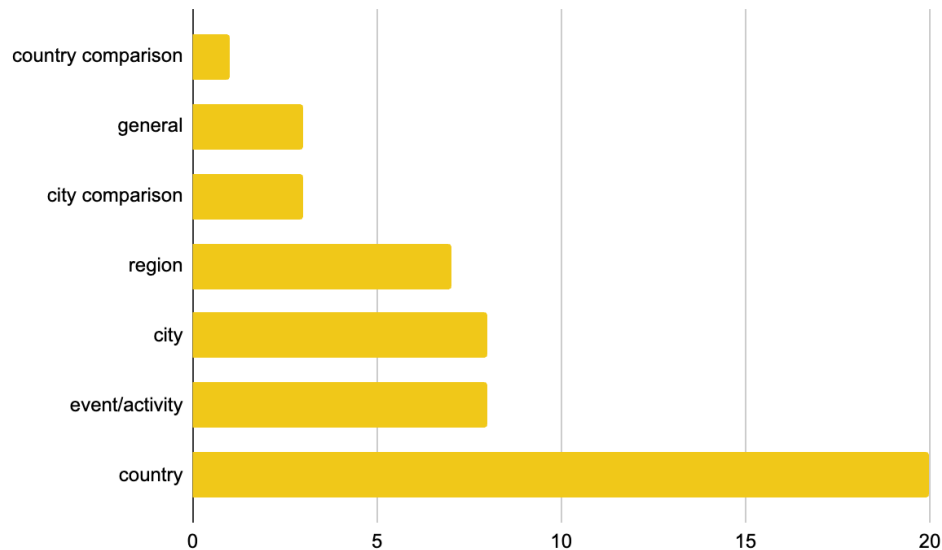


Figure 6: Distribution aggregation level of papers reviewed (source: elaboration of the authors).

We also looked at the geographical distribution of such the empirical analysis (see Figure 7). The focus is mostly on Italy (13 papers), Germany (4), Spain (4), UK (4), and China (3). Other countries investigated in regard to the benefits of cultural participation are mostly in Europe (33 papers) (Norway, Poland, Switzerland, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Lithuania), followed by Asia (11 papers) (Hong Kong, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Brunei), America (6 papers) (Canada, Latin America in general, Mexico, USA, Colombia, Brazil), and Oceania (2 papers) (Australia). No mention was found of data from Africa except 1 paper about South Africa.

During the selection of the papers for our data set a few concerns emerged, which have implications for our study. First, the evidence of benefits of cultural participation is relatively new and there are relatively few publications, compared to other fields where regular systematic review of literature are conducted. This means that there is great heterogeneity in the terminology and in the format of the papers, making it much harder to perform the review. Titles and abstracts were often unclear regarding the categories of information we were looking for, for instance, many missed key information about the methods used. We were determined to examine our data set and conducted much of the analysis based on the body of the article, which required considerable additional time.

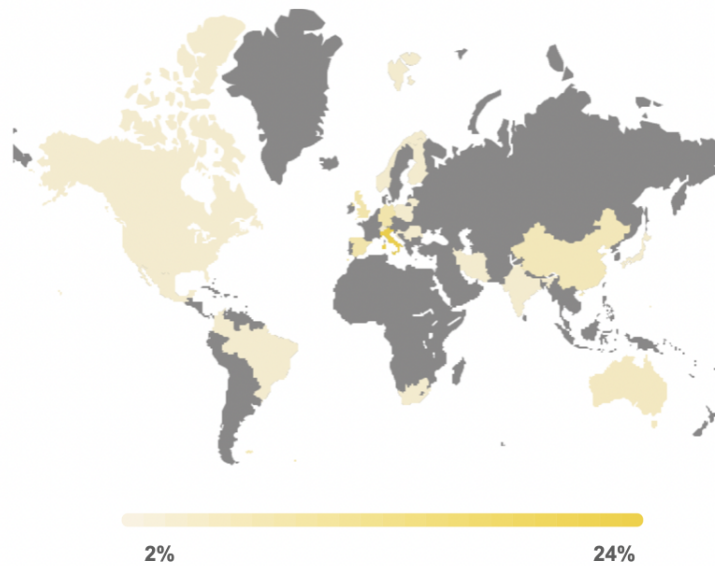


Figure 7: Distribution of geographical coverage of papers reviewed (source: elaboration of the authors).

Second, there is no agreed methodology to analyse cultural participation benefits, challenging eventual comparison in geographic or longitudinal form. We encountered several definitions of cultural participation and several forms of operationalising wellbeing benefits in our dataset, in addition to a diverse selection of variables. We therefore decided to propose a possible structure to understand the type of benefits examined as well as a proposal for a cultural participation framework.

As far as we know, this is the first systematic literature review of benefits of cultural participation and we understand the limitations this may bring with it. We believe such an analysis provides fruitful insights to inform future research as well as to support policy decisions.

Results

In this section, we present the findings of our thematic synthesis, which sheds light on the numerous benefits of cultural participation. Through our extensive research, we have identified three main themes that encapsulate the current literature in this field.

Firstly, we present the diverse methodological landscape employed by researchers investigating the impacts of cultural participation. With a wide array of perspectives and methods at play, selection of data source (primary or secondary) together with the strategy (quantitative or qualitative) emerged as a crucial determinant of the type of investigation, the questions asked, and the evidence gathered.

Secondly, we explore the concept of "cultural participation" used in each publication. While this term guided our search strategy and is discussed in each paper we reviewed, we found great heterogeneity in its application yet could also distinguish a general distinction between active and passive forms of cultural participation.

Lastly, we focus on the evidence surrounding the impacts, benefits, and externalities of cultural participation. Empirical results reviewed approached the topic from a subjective well-being perspective most often. An important finding of this analysis was the role of the hands-on personal engagement and increased reflective awareness to raise benefits, in general, across cultural forms, some of which takes place after the cultural participation.

We discuss each main finding in the following section.

The Current Methodological Landscape

A first crucial insight garnered from the systematic literature review lies in the paramount role of methodology in cultural participation research. This finding brings to light the significance of how research is conducted, providing a cornerstone for understanding the intricacies of cultural participation and its far-reaching impacts. The first thematic area of investigation delves into the

current methodological landscape and its profound implications. It becomes evident that the methods employed, alongside the data utilised, play a pivotal role in shaping the very nature of our comprehension regarding cultural participation and the diverse areas of impact that warrant exploration. The forthcoming sections, namely 2.3.2 and 2.3.3, will focus on these intriguing findings, elucidating the intricate interplay between methodology, data, and the resulting perceptions of cultural engagement. This theme unveils a critical perspective on the current methodological landscape, problematising the ways in which research is conducted and looking at the opportunities to effectively observe the multifaceted dimensions of cultural participation, fostering a nuanced understanding of its profound effects on individuals, communities, and society.

Most of the literature reviewed belongs to the disciplines of (cultural) economics and public health (see Figure 5). As such, it comes with little surprise that the prevalent research strategy is quantitative and tests theoretical assumptions regarding a variety of possible benefits and impacts when participating in cultural activities.

A shortcoming found in the great majority of these studies was the heavy reliance on secondary data, such as national or regional census. In fact, while this approach appears solid regarding the relations tested, based on large samples, often longitudinal, the depth of information is limited. In other words, it is impossible to replicate the level of detail regarding individuals' experience in cultural participation of studies based, for example, on primary data gathered through surveys and interviews, such as Matarasso's seminal social impact studies (1997). In fact, this is a dilemma as old as the life of impact studies. Matarasso's work has been criticised precisely for being hard to replicate, results are hard to generalise, and evidence is greatly anecdotal (Jermyn 2001, Reeves 2002, Belfiore 2006).

To give some examples, Lee and Heo (2023) quantitatively demonstrated for South Korea that cultural participation and individual well-being are positively related. However, this research was based on Korea's national social survey, where the questions relating to cultural participation and well-being were, respectively: "Did you visit any of the following events or venues¹ for the past year? If yes, how many times did you visit them?" and "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life these days?" (Lee and Heo 2023: 4), which, especially in regard to cultural participation, are limited to the events and venues listed and not necessarily represent the

¹ The options were museums, art galleries, music, plays and musicals, dance performances, and movies.

cultural participation palette of an individual. Węziak-Białowolska and Białowolski (2016) studied the relationship between cultural participation and health in Polish regions. Their secondary data were based on the question “How often have you been to the movies, play/theatre or/and have you gone to a concert in the last month?”, and on self-reported health and somatic symptoms measured through a Likert scale. While they could prove that cultural participation is positively related to health, their results could have been stronger using a holistic view on cultural participation and data specific to perceived relevance of the cultural experience.

Sometimes, a driver of research is data availability. Researchers know too well that we tend to measure what is measurable. Thus, it can happen that interesting research questions are posed where statistics are available and within the limits of such availability. Campagna et al (2020) used composite indicators to investigate the relationship between cultural and civic participation in Italy. They selected this case because since 2014 the Italian Statistics bureau publishes a database about some aspects of everyday life. The researchers were bound to a cross-section analysis of data from 2014 “due to the unique availability of specific variables” (Campagna et al 2020: 664). We do not (yet) have population surveys that ask questions regarding the cultural participation experience in relation to a sense of identity, perceived cognitive benefits, or meaning-making. Unlike the depth reached by other methods like ethnography, interviews, or action research, these types of questions do not fully capture the process of experiencing culture, insofar as they do not explicitly enquire into the motives and interpretations of the respondents.

At the other end of the spectrum, qualitative research inquiries about motivations of cultural participation but faces the challenge of generalisation. Rimmer (2009) carried out a comparative case study on cultural policy programmes in the UK that address at-risk youth involving teenagers in music activities. The research was based on ethnography and data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The researcher investigated in depth the experiences of the participants, asking questions related to sense of belonging, identity, family background, but also what has changed after the participation in the programme.

While internal validity is assured, and, as in Rimmer (2009) it is even possible to compare multiple cases, the data are not collected systematically and structurally enough to export this type of approach to a large scale.

In a systematic review of the literature about the effects of cultural participation on mental health, Elsdon and Roe (2021) reported that most empirical evidence on the topic adopts very in-depth approaches but with considerable limitations such as “small sample sizes, no control groups, (...) shorter follow-ups and usually focussed on a single art activity intervention” (Elsdon and Roe 2021: 160). The authors advocate for more large-scale research, even focussing on more passive types of cultural participation, to bolster generalizability.

Snowball and Antrobus (2021) highlighted the helpful use of mixed methods in their study when taking into account the opinions and experiences of participants and its value in assessing the extent to which a cultural event is meeting its goals. Reflecting on the methodology for impact studies regarding quality of life (QoL), they posit that “despite much qualitative research into the relationship between QoL and cultural participation or consumption, there have been relatively few quantitative studies in this area. A problem with econometric QoL studies and culture is that, while there may be positive correlations between cultural consumption and subjective well-being, other factors often have a larger effect and are also highly correlated with culture (e.g. education and cultural consumption often go together)” (Snowball and Antrobus 2021: 1260). Qualitative research excels in capturing the dynamic impacts at the individual level, providing rich and nuanced insights. However, to bolster the credibility and validity of a study, quantitative research should endeavour to embrace this valuable aspect.

Qualitative research, mainly carried out through interviews, can explore meaning making and allow for an interpretivist approach to the research questions (Bryman 2016). This can be of utmost relevance when dealing with the arts and culture, which are rich in symbolic and intrinsic values, as well as important vehicles of meaning-making (Throsby 2001; Hutter and Throsby 2008; Klamer 2017). In our corpus of empirical research, Husu and Kumpulainen (2021) studied youth participation in cultural and leisure projects to encourage young people into active citizenship and participation. They interviewed several workers and volunteers of said projects which revolved around their understanding of what young people value in such experiences. The main questions were: “How did the workers and volunteers perceive and understand the advantages of their projects for young people?” And “How did they understand the different dimensions of participation in their projects?”. While their results about sense of belonging and skills development appear highly relevant, this type of exploratory research does not allow for generalisation.

The deepest reflection on the methodology of cultural participation studies was found in Oman (2019). Focusing on well-being, the author reflected on census data and its possible application to explain cultural participation. To overcome the aforementioned flaws of qualitative research, she suggests to “re-order and re-perform”, meaning, to develop anew, large-scale statistics: “Instead of collecting testimonies of improved wellbeing from a site of cultural participation, I proposed to use a qualitative wellbeing data set to investigate whether people refer to cultural participation when talking about what matters to them – without being asked about culture at all” (Oman 2019: 2010). Like Husu and Kumpulainen (2021) qualitative work, involving questions such as perception of identity, sense of belonging, or skill development when taking part in cultural participation, but also allowing for causal relations to emerge from the respondents’ answers in a national survey, could enrich our understanding of the social benefits of cultural participation.

This theme has highlighted the methodological landscape of the current research on the benefits of cultural participation. Such a landscape is variegated and, what is more, it appears that each of the approaches has implications regarding what can be discovered by empirical research. On the one hand, quantitative research is based mostly on secondary data which overlook the multidimensional nature of cultural experiences and its quintessentially relational aspects (Sacco et al 2018; Dekker and Morea 2023). On the other hand, qualitative research is apt to grasp the details regarding the impacts of cultural participation but falls short on generalizability and external validity (Snowball and Antrobus 2021). By combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, researchers could achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, offering a compelling and robust analysis of the impacts under study. While interviews may take more resources to gather fewer results, establishing methodology to include these specific benefits in a larger survey may be considered to be the natural next step.

Understandings of cultural participation

Cultural participation is the the focal construct of this research but it is also an enigmatic term that presents itself with an air of ambiguity at best and, at worst, baffles scholars and researchers alike. The literature analysed, reveals that authors have grappled with the challenge of defining cultural participation from a plethora of angles. The coding phase has

produced a handful of such different understandings of cultural participation, which in turn have been categorised into “active” or “passive” participation, as literature itself suggests (see, for instance OECD 2022).

Eurostat (2019) defined cultural participation as both attendance of cultural institutions and events, and partaking in cultural and artistic practices. This already broad understanding of cultural participation is complicated by the inconsistent definitions undertaken in the research reviewed. A similar concern is shared by a recent review of the impacts of cultural participation on democracy (European Commission 2023). The study differentiated, although without providing a clear definition, active from passive participation. Intuitively, active participation involves awareness and engagement with some forms of creation, whereas passive participation refers to attendance as spectator to artistic events or cultural locations.

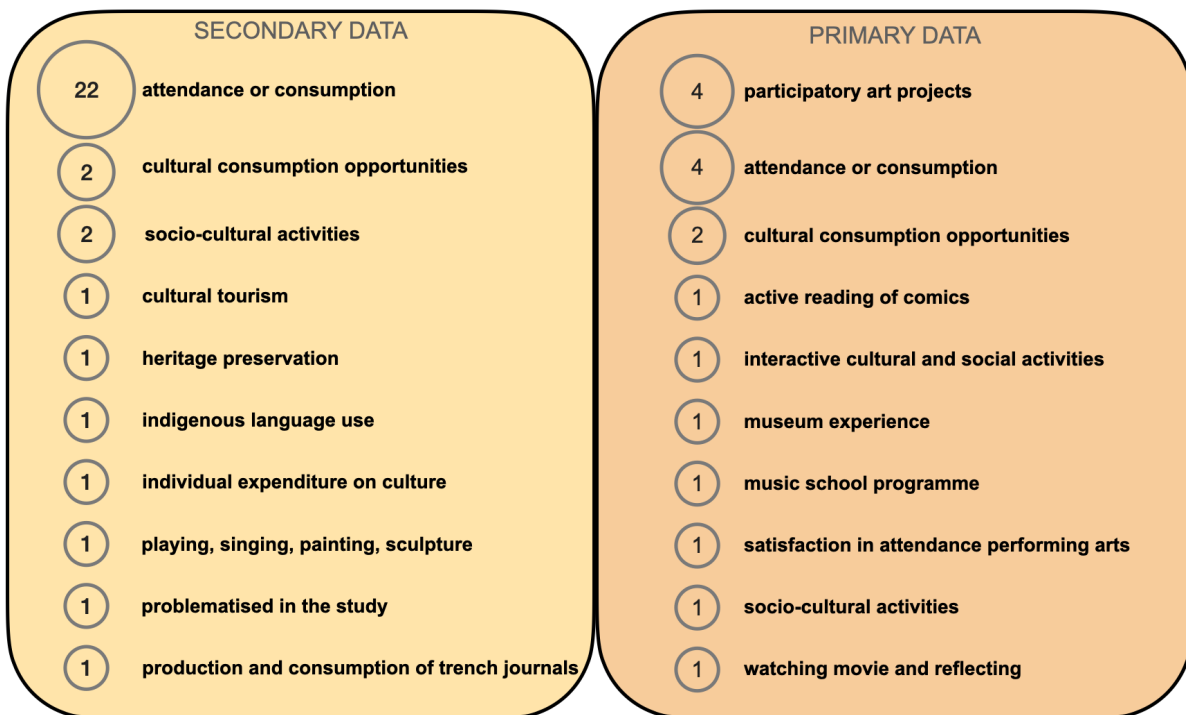


Figure 8: Cultural participation defined by data used, by frequency (source: elaboration of the authors).

Figure 8 shows cultural participation defined by the type of data used in the literature reviewed. It becomes evident that the understanding of cultural participation varies depending on the type

of data used in the research, primary or secondary data. Secondary data, such as national surveys, fail to capture important features of the cultural experience, including the more nuanced aspects related to the process of learning, identity formation, or social interactions. Most importantly, secondary data so far lacks any insight into the participant's awareness of and commitment to the actual act of participating in a cultural activity, which has been identified as key to enable change through primary data research.

Secondary data such as National statistics may aggregate information on both active and passive participation (Węziak-Białowolska and Białowolski 2016; Węziak-Białowolska et al 2019; Campagna et al 2020; Lee and Heo 2023). Most importantly, only one paper in our literature review explores simultaneously active and passive cultural participation. Løkken et al (2019) empirically analysed the effects of cultural participation on longevity. They considered an active type of participation called “creative activities” which comprises: “an association or club meeting/activity 'music, singing or theatre, parish work, outdoor activities, dance and sports or exercise” (Løkken et al 2019: 625). Conversely, “receptive activities”, which relate more to a passive form of participation, were measured as going to 'a museum/art exhibition', 'a concert, theatre, or film', the church/chapel and a sports event” (Løkken et al 2019: 625). Despite their unique engagement with different forms of cultural participation, it should be noted that these categories are not fully consistent with the general understanding of cultural activities, insofar as they include sports, parish work, and outdoor activities which, although certainly meaningful and rich of symbolic value, do not clearly deal with arts and culture.

Figure 9 showcases the variety of understandings of active and passive cultural participation. Passive participation is the most common type of participation whose benefits are being empirically studied (42% of the dataset). The predominant quantitative strategy uses long panel datasets for which only the most basic information is currently provided in terms of attendance of cultural sites (Cicatiello et al 2021, Crociata et al 2020, Denti et al 2022, Elsdén and Roe 2020, Giovanis et al 2021, Lee and Heo 2023, Lee et al 2021, Węziak-Białowolska and Białowolski 2016) and consumption of (reproducible) cultural products (Campagna et al 2020, Crociata 2020, Crociata and Mattoscio 2016 Guccio et al 2017, O'Neill 2010, Reyes-Martínez 2021, Wang et al 2022). These two codes, attendance of cultural sites and consumption of cultural products, regard partially overlapping categories and reflect the difference in research disciplines and in national accounting of the sectors. Other sporadic ways of understanding passive cultural participation are based on the individual expenditure on cultural related services

such as cultural tourism (Crociata et al 2013; Herrero et al 2006), the presence of cultural consumption opportunities (Navarro et al 2014; Corrêa et al 2022; Mughan et al 2022), and attendee's satisfaction cultural events (Domšic L. 2015).

The selection of cultural forms to include or exclude appears random and only dependent on the researcher's access to the dataset. Data on music consumption via radio or television used to be prevalent, yet the notion of radio or television as ultimate passive form of cultural participation has been challenged with the availability of new digital technologies to mediate access. Similarly, authors such as Ateca Amestoy et al (2016) have questioned the extent to which passive participation is indeed a misconception, only reflecting the limited data available for analysis.



Figure 9: Cultural participation defined by engagement mode, by frequency (source: elaboration of the authors).

Active cultural participation is observed in roughly one quarter of works analysed (28%) yet authors' understanding of what constitutes active participation is more heterogeneous than for passive participation. We found no shared definition in the dataset. We did observe a link

between papers on passive participation and large secondary datasets, while research on active participation was generally tailored to specific case studies to evaluate art programmes or events through primary data.

From the papers analysed, active cultural participation comprises all the above activities yet on an active modality to include: active reading of comics (Fung et al 2019), participating in art projects (Domsic 2021; Husu and Kumpulainen 2021; Rimmer 2009; Farrell 2008), community engagement in built heritage (Billore 2021), cultural and social activities (Rapacciuolo et al 2016), festival attendance (Snowball and Antrobus 2021), 'played music' or 'danced or acted or did something similar' by children (Kaiser and Schneickert 2016), use of Indigenous language and connection to country (Wright et al 2021), museum experience attendance (Jafari et al 2013), music school programme attendance (Gómez-Zapata et al 2021), production and consumption of trench journals (Bjerström 2020), satisfaction in attending performing arts (Siu et al 2016), watching movies and reflecting on content (Popa et al 2021).

It would seem that reflecting on the activity, taking part in a group activity, and doing the activity hands on would characterise active cultural participation. While playing music and dancing can be understandably positioned differently than attending a concert or a dance performance, other art forms are not as easily differentiated. The extent to which visiting a museum in general or visiting a museum experience, or visiting an European capital of culture or attending a festival make the difference between passive and active can be debatable. Similarly, reading is considered active when elements of co-production emerge, for instance in the form of fandom. Fans of comics, books, or television shows and movies engage with cultural products in highly productive manners, for instance writing and sharing fanfiction, cosplaying, or even influencing the production of the original materials; in sum they seem to play an important role that might be interpreted as co-production but that still escapes official statistics (Dekker and Morea 2023). If reflecting on the experience with other individuals makes an important difference in the quality of the cultural participation, the data gathered appears to miss the post consumption behaviour. Adding a question such as "Did you reflect alone or with somebody about [the given cultural participation form]?" may solve the uncertainty.

Authors have included both active and passive participation in 30% of the cases analysed. This was mainly operationalised using variables which include attendance of cultural sites and institutions such as theatres, opera, cinema, and exhibitions as well as partaking in cultural

activities such as playing an instrument, singing, painting, or sculpting (Węziak-Białowska et al 2019, Wang et al 2020, Clift 2012, De Santo et al 2021). Such grouping of activities signals attending an event is passive while learning a cultural skill is an active form of cultural participation.

A variety of cultural activities were found in a series of papers without any particular ordering, i.e., jazz, rock, or classical music concerts, theatre, opera and ballet performance, museum visits, disco dance, making art or painting expressions, social activity, watching sports, attending cinema, attending religious activities, reading novels or poetry, doing voluntary work, and local community development (Løkken et al 2020, Sakalauskas et al 2021, Grossi et al 2013, Giovanis 2022, 2021; Jafari 2007). Such a varied list of activities reflects a broad notion of cultural participation, with a strong social function. An example is the study of Ferilli et al (2017) who considered the use of culture in culture-led urban regeneration projects.

Examining Benefits, Impacts, and Externalities of Cultural Participation

The first theme has highlighted the crucial role played by methodology and data selection in cultural participation research. As we explored in the second theme, it became evident that researchers do not have a singular understanding of cultural participation, and this divergence of views might be influenced by the quality and availability of data. Moving on to the third theme, we will delve into the dependent variables, providing a comprehensive overview of the various areas of benefits, impacts, and externalities that have been investigated thus far and the corresponding results that have been presented.

In the thematic synthesis, the body of work has been analysed in order to obtain a category of codes describing the different areas on which cultural participation's impacts have been empirically investigated. In many cases, research has focused on multiple dependent variables. For example, some studies assessed the effects of cultural participation on health and well-being (Rapacciuolo et al 2016; Wang et al 2020; Lee et al 2021), other looked at migration policies and well-being (Giovanis 2021, 2022), or at youth identity and learning (Jafari 2007), as well as identity and civic values (Bjerström 2020, Fung et al 2019). In order to explore in depth each area of impact and the corresponding empirical evidence, in this section we will mainly

consider the various areas of impact, which might be higher in number than the number of articles reviewed.

The studies reviewed have shown a variety of areas in which a positive impact of cultural participation has been proven. In other words, the evidence reviewed is positive: cultural participation has benefits. This is in itself a paramount insight, insofar as only one paper of the 50 analysed reported non-positive impacts. Węziak-Białowolska and Białowolski (2016) performed a DID to study the effects of active and passive forms of participation on health and well-being and obtained insignificant results, which led them to conclude that “a cultural activity—regardless of its passive or active nature—or cultural activities in general (expressed by the CPI) do not exert any causative influence on health and well-being.” (Węziak-Białowolska and Białowolski 2016: 167).

The reviewed literature is predominantly concerned with subjective well-being and health (see Figures 10 and 11, and Table A.1 for more detail). Subjective well-being is defined rather consistently and regards the self-perception of individuals’ quality of life, life satisfaction, level of stress. Health relates to measures of individuals’ physical and mental health. Other areas of impact are rather diverse, in a few cases regarding socioeconomic impacts (Herrero et al 2006; Navarro et al 2014; Domšic 2015; Snowball and Antrobus 2021; Gómez-Zapata et al 2021), in other ranging from youth and learning (Jafari 2007; Rimmer 2009; Kaiser and Schneickert 2016; Crociata et al 2020) to the urban and civic dimension (Bjerström 2020; Billore 2021; Crociata and Mattoscio 2016; Wang et al 2022; Denti et al 2022; Guccio et al 2017; Corrêa et al 2022).

We can distinguish three macro areas of impact that have emerged from the analysis. They are subjective well-being, health, and a miscellaneous group of other areas which regard socioeconomic impacts, youth and learning, and the urban and civic dimension (see Figures 11 and 12).



Figure 10: Word cloud of the areas of impact in quantitative research (source: elaboration of the authors).



Figure 11: Word cloud of the areas of impact in qualitative research (source: elaboration of the authors).

Subjective well-being is mostly studied as a benefit of active cultural participation (Popa et al. 2021, Gómez-Zapata et al. 2021, Husu and Kumpulainen 2021, Domsic, L 2021, Wright et al. 2021, Rapacciuolo et al. 2016, Siu et al. 2016). Only a handful of occurrences are found that associate passive participation to subjective well-being (Giovanis et al 2021; Lee et al 2012;

Reyes-Martínez 2021; Lee and Heo 2023). Active cultural participation is generally associated with positive effects on subjective well-being.

An interesting study based on interviews conducted with Finnish workers and volunteers in cultural projects showed that participants believe that taking part in cultural initiatives can be good for quality of life (Husu and Kumpulainen 2021). The key insight of this research regards the causal relation, whereby cultural participation is a cause of well-being. The participants of this study had interiorised such nexus in their personal experiences.

A public health study on cultural and social engagement and diet, well-being and resilience, states: “Well-being is shaped by not only the absence of disease and reduced physical functioning, but also by the presence of positive physical, mental, and psychosocial state. In this view, well-being is crucial to many aspects of our daily lives, since it includes global judgments such as emotions and resilience, quality of relationships, and overall life satisfaction (...). In particular, cultural participation is the second predictor of psychological well-being after (presence/absence of) major diseases, and in this respect, it has a significantly stronger impact than variables such as income, place of residence, age, gender, or occupation” (Rapacciuolo et al 2016:2). Considering an active type of cultural participation, namely, interactive cultural and social activities, they found that individuals above 60 years old that do not participate in culture have lower scores of psychological well-being and resilience, that >60 male individuals who participate in culture show positive well-being scores, whereas non-participants are in moderate distress and, importantly, that >60 female individuals not participating in cultural activities have severe distress.

Many of the articles in this group looked at young generations' benefits. Popa et al (2021) investigated, in an experimental setting, the benefits of active consumption of movies, in particular those connected to learning about identity differences, emotional resilience, flexibility, and openness to other cultures in students from Romania and Brunei. They discovered that participants, after watching and discussing the movies, developed positive emotions, engagement, and awareness towards cultural differences. Gómez-Zapata et al (2021) looked at a music school programme aimed to “keep children and teenagers away from the city's conflicts and violence”. The results showed positive impacts on social, educational and labour, and cultural habits aspects of participants' lives. For instance, their evidence is that participating in this programme affects positively the chances of getting involved in conflicts (19,35% less

chances), and access social mobility (21.77 % increase in the probability of moving to a neighbourhood associated with a better socio-economic stratum). Overall, they showed that engaging with artistic practices can achieve a better quality of life. Still looking at young generations, Domšić (2021) examined the advantages and disadvantages of involving young people in participatory heritage projects within museums in order to demonstrate how such endeavours can have a transformative impact. She discovered that active participation in museum projects by young people can improve their overall sense of well-being, and that the participatory process is just as important as the final product.

With regard to young consumers in China, Fung et al (2019) have qualitatively analysed how an imported cultural product, Japanese manga and anime, influenced habits, taste, and imagination of Chinese readers. With regard to citizenship values, one of the interviewees stated: "I learned to care more about humanity and the damage accompanied by technological advancement." (Fung et al 2019: 129).

A few studies focused on minorities. Giovanis et al (2021) showed how policies that promote participation in cultural activities enable immigrants to contribute to the integration into the social norms of the host societies and to improve their well-being. Wright et al (2021) studied Australian Indigenous rangers' participation in cultural aspects of their communities based on extensive survey data and found that participation is associated with higher quality of life and well-being.

While we have stressed the difference between active and passive participation, and that passive is usually associated with "simple" attendance of museums and similar institutions, Siu et al (2016) showed that attendance could also be considered active when satisfaction with the experience is taken into consideration. The authors looked at the satisfaction of performing art attendees, for which they found that individuals who "actively participate (either behaviour-ally or psychologically) in a cultural arts activity are likely to be satisfied with their arts experience, in which behavioural consumption of arts has a greater impact on overall customer satisfaction than psycho-logical arts consumption" (Siu et al 2019: 84).

In many cases, subjective well-being is associated with both forms of cultural participation. This mainly happens by means of a combination of data, thus considering both attendance and forms of practice. We did not find papers which discuss in depth the theoretical implications of the difference between active and passive cultural participation. While acknowledged and

operationalised in the analyses, these two types of participation were mostly taken for granted. Nonetheless, in some cases, research focused on them simultaneously. For instance, Wang et al (2020) used fixed effects models that account for unidentified time-constant confounding measures to investigate the long-term relationships between the arts. They considered the frequency of artistic participation (which translates into active participation) and cultural attendance (which translates into passive participation)², mental distress, mental health functioning, and life satisfaction in the UK. They found that frequent participation (more than once a week) in arts and cultural activities were linked to lower levels of mental distress, better mental functioning, and higher levels of life satisfaction. In other words, they highlighted that frequent active cultural participation helps people cope with their mental health more than passive participation. Similar results, again about the UK, were found by Weziak-Bialowolska et al (2019). They investigated active and passive participation in the arts as determinants of well-being looking at census data about self-reported well-being and frequency of cultural participation in terms of engagement and attendance and looked at the mediating role of personality traits. The results demonstrated a positive causal link between cultural participation and well-being. In particular that active participation (at least once a month) reduces the sense of strain by 0.042 on a 4-point scale, and that passive participation (attending arts and culture events three-four times a year) can positively impact life satisfaction, strain, and sense of unhappiness, although with mild effect sizes ranging from 0.023 to 0.038.

In a few cases, evidence also shows that passive cultural participation can lead to benefits in subjective well-being. Lee et al (2021) examined how physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, and an individual's background influence and control the effects of art and cultural

² The authors considered the following activities: "Arts participation included dance (including ballet), singing to an audience or rehearsing for a performance (not karaoke), playing a musical instrument, writing music, rehearsing/performing in a play/drama, opera/operetta or musical theatre, taking part in a carnival/street arts event, learning or practising circus skills, painting, drawing, printmaking or sculpting, photography, film or video making as an artistic activity, using a computer to create original artworks or animation, taking part in textile crafts, wood crafts or any other crafts such as embroidery, knitting, reading for pleasure (not newspapers, magazines or comics), writing any stories, plays or poetry, or being a member of a book club where people meet up to discuss and share books. Cultural attendance included attending a film at a cinema or other venue, an exhibition or collection of art, photography, sculpture or a craft exhibition, an event which included video or electronic art, an event connected with books or writing, street arts or a public art display or installation, a carnival or cultural specific festival, a circus, a play/drama, pantomime or musical, an opera/operetta, a classical music performance, a rock, pop or jazz performance, a ballet, a contemporary dance performance, or an African people's dance or South Asian and Chinese dance." (Wang et al 2020: 2).

participation in museums and art galleries on life satisfaction. Drawing from data from Taiwan, they found that attending museums and art galleries has a positive effect on life satisfaction through interpersonal relationships, particularly among women and the elderly. Moreover, frequent visitors to museums and galleries reported higher levels of life satisfaction and interpersonal contact. This was especially noticeable in older females.

Lee and Heo (2021) found that cultural consumption can increase an individual's subjective well-being and that a more diverse consumption and lower barriers to entry consumption lead to a higher subjective well-being. Reyes-Martinez (2021) studied the relation between passive cultural participation and subjective well-being looking at ethnic-racial groups in Latin America. The results indicate that reading books and news, attending theatres, concerts, and community celebrations, as well as visiting museums and heritage sites have a positive effect on the individuals' well-being (i.e., satisfaction with one's life). For instance, reading news and articles increases of 1.14 times the chance of being in a thriving category of life satisfaction, compared to those who do not read; participating in art classes gives a 1.53 times more chances to experience very positive emotions, and attending movies and theatres increases of 1.16 times the odds of having a positive affective balance.

While most research engages in subjective well-being as the area where cultural participation exerts benefits, other studies look at different domains. The second most popular one is health, which is however often studied together with subjective well-being (see, among the others, Wang et al 2020, Lee et al 2021, Rapacciuolo et al 2016). Ten studies explored the effects of cultural participation on objective measures of well-being or self-reported measures of physical health, mostly from a public health perspective. Three articles in this group are literature reviews about the effects of cultural participation on health (O'Neill 2010; Clift 2012; Eldsten and Roe 2020). Clift (2012) observed three waves in empirical research on art and health. First studies addressed individuals' self-perceived benefits of cultural participation within specific context, following a qualitative approach. Later, the field has evolved as robust body of more systematic studies developed. The author envisioned a third wave of upcoming research which should lay a solid, large-scale foundation of benchmarking for future planning and the wider implementation of arts interventions that are more firmly rooted in evidence (Clift 2012). Since this study was published, it seems that research of this type is still lurking.

Eldsten and Roe (2020) performed a meta-analysis of previous studies on cultural participation and adult depression, and found that engaging with arts can decrease the probability of developing depression. O'Neill (2010) reviews literature in arts and health from the perspective of a practitioner, the author stresses that "great deals of social prescribing, art therapy and community art projects involve participation in relatively intensive, creative or learning activities. These have a great value for the individuals participating." (O'Neill 2010: 26). Cultural participation was found to increase individual well-being, longevity, reduce stress, or help recovering faster from an illness. But unlike physical activities, the author of the review stressed that individuals do not engage in cultural participation for the sake of exerting positive well-being effects but because there is a genuine interest in the artistic practices. As such, the paper reflects on the importance of finding a way for cultural institutions to welcome art therapy projects and the like to enhance the benefits at a population level.

Crociata et al (2013) used individual expenditure on cultural products and activities to explore the effects of passive cultural participation on mental health, and found that "the discharge rate for mental illness is substantially improved by some forms of cultural consumption" (Crociata et al 2013: 228) including sport events, newspapers, books, museum visits, and art exhibitions. In their longitudinal study on Poland, Węziak-Białowolska and Białowolski (2016) found a positive association between active and passive cultural participation and self-reported health but could not prove a causal relationship. Løkken et al (2020) looked at passive and active cultural participation in Norway and found that high levels of participation are linked to longevity. Overall, they found a stronger effect for women and, importantly, that the impact of cultural participation is higher with "active" forms of participation.

Overall, participating in cultural activities has a positive effect in many aspects of life. Most areas in which evidence abounds are subjective well-being and health. A smaller portion of the literature analysed looked at benefits of an interpersonal or social dimension, including socioeconomic impacts, youth and learning, and the urban and civic dimension.

The social and economic impacts of the arts are well-studied in the literature on cultural economics. Nonetheless, the socioeconomic impacts of cultural participation is a sub-group of this branch of research, which may explain the limited number of articles found on this. The studies reviewed here mainly examine specific events at the urban level, such as festivals. Herrero et al (2006) studied the impact of the Salamanca European Capital of Culture 2002.

They looked at individuals' expenditure on the urban festival and found a positive relation with a variety of socioeconomic aspects, such as conflict reduction, improvement in self-reported quality of life, enhanced students' academic performance, increased cultural consumption and artistic activities, and increased willingness to pay to support the programme.

Another study about Spain looked at cultural consumption opportunities from an economic geography perspective (Navarro et al 2014). The authors investigated the influence of the creative class's presence on income disparities, finding that while larger localities relate to lower income levels, the impact of the creative class is less pronounced than favourable business and social climates. Notably, innovation, both in business and cultural contexts, is identified as a key driver of regional development, amplifying the creative class's effect on income and extending its relevance beyond market size. Domšic (2015) studied the urban heritage festival Špancirfest, in Croatia and found social cohesion and community empowerment as main perceived effects (Domšic 2015). Snowball and Antrobus (2021) applied a multidimensional evaluation framework to assess the impacts of two festivals in South Africa. They found perceptions regarding the event's significance can be associated with a sense of inclusion and acknowledgment, as well as the chance for both formal engagement in the event and informal involvement during its preparations (Snowball and Antrobus 2021).

Other studies focused on the urban and civic dimension of the potential impacts of cultural participation. Ferilli et al (2017) comparatively assessed, through surveys, culture-led urban regeneration projects in Montreal, Sydney, and Milan, and found that when participation and engagement are higher the effects are positive, otherwise, they are negative, to the point of igniting gentrification in the area and "very little local pride and identification in residents" (Ferilli et al 2017: 254). Looking at museum experiences in the UK from a marketing perspective, Jafari et al (2013) discovered that visitors engage with museums more actively than the institutions know. Cultural experiences are drivers of "interactive sociality" which extends beyond the physical boundaries of the museums, and this could constitute an important opportunity for museums to develop a stronger relationship with their visitors.

Cultural participation was also found positively associated with sustainable waste management (Wang et al 2022; Crociata and Mattoscio 2016). Denti et al (2022) found that, in Italian cities, cultural consumption decreases hate events; The impact is substantial, as a mere 1 percentage point rise in cultural consumption led to a significant 20% decrease in hate events. The authors

stressed the importance of this result insofar as engaging with cultural content offers fresh viewpoints and effectively challenges prevailing stereotypes, thereby disrupting the process of hate propagation, thus linking civic participation with questions of identity and belonging, similar to Bjerström (2020) historical analysis of newspaper production during the Spanish Civil War, which contributed to the Republicans' civic participation and identity formation.

The last group of areas of impact is that of youth and learning. A study worth highlighting is Jafari (2007) who found that an important effect of cultural participation has an important effect on the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of individuals. His study gathered data through personal interviews to 36 individuals in Iran. Cognitive benefits are not often associated with cultural participation because of the methodological complexity to study this relation. Knowledge acquisition in the classroom has a set of standardised tests that assume a common starting point and developmental progression. Cultural participation, in contrast, may include individuals with a variety of capital at the start and a distinct profile in the collection of cultural experiences within the given timeframe.

Kaiser and Scheikert (2016) challenged the mainstream assumption that parents' education is a key determinant in students' performance. They showed that personality traits (focus, curiosity, and intellect) and playing music are relevant for German primary school students. Rimmer (2009) qualitatively investigated participatory art projects for at-risk youth in the UK, a country notably interested in assessing the impacts of cultural policy. The author found that engaging in music projects is beneficial to young participants, but too little attention is paid to the cultural experience of such activities, which connects meaningfully with its representational, symbolic, and contextual social dimensions. Instead, the dominant emphasis on skill development and achievement evidence in these programs can hinder the engagement of at-risk youth by limiting their autonomy in decision-making, despite this discrepancy aligning with existing community music policies.

The review of the results shows that across the different areas of impact, the "activeness" of participation appears to be more effective in exerting benefits. This might have to do with awareness of the cultural value, enhanced meaning-making processes, and the reflective nature of active participation. Such interpretation appears in line with evidence from the National Endowment of the Arts (2009), which found that attending community activities or making

creative activities such as playing music, dancing, writing, have stronger effects on civic and social engagement than simple attendance.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has attempted to present a comprehensive overview of the current academic empirical research regarding the benefits of cultural participation. To do so, a thematic analysis of the most salient 50 publications in this field has produced three themes. We found that cultural participation is studied in different disciplines, each with their own method and definitions, particularly regarding the operationalisation of cultural participation invariably leading to a different approach to studying, measuring, and arguing for its impacts.

Based on this, many limitations should be considered. First, the database depends on the search protocol, which consists of keywords based on theoretical constructs. It is possible that different keywords lead to different results. Second, the database does not contain grey literature. While this has allowed for a more homogeneous body of work, interesting insights might have been missed. Finally, and possibly most importantly, thematic synthesis depends heavily on the researchers' interpretations, subjectivity, and research questions. In fact, "themes do not *emerge* fully formed from the data" (Braun and Clarke 2018: 12, emphasis added), they are *built*.

This review has illuminated three prominent themes that underscore the intricate discourse surrounding cultural participation and its implications. The first theme highlights the intrinsic connection between empirical evidence and available data sources, underscoring that empirical support relies on the scope of information accessible. Primary data provides a richer perspective on participants' experience and perceived benefits, which has yet to be replicated in large scale research, while secondary data provides a broad but simplified understanding of participation, often based on a documented transaction, concealing participants' response to the experience and potential effect on behavioural change.

The second theme underscores the diversity of cultural participation interpretations in empirical research, linking this variation to data availability. Active participation's nuanced exploration, involving practices and engagement, is often reliant on primary data which cannot be generalised, while passive participation analysis often rely on secondary data and do not

capture details on visitors' experiences. A binary approach (active and passive participation) appears unjustified when passive forms become active if considered holistically, as our review found when including the context of participation (e.g. with others) or the duration of the participation (e.g. from planning, taking part, and reflecting on the cultural activity).

The third theme delves into the realm of impacts, revealing that the majority of studies in our dataset affirm the positive influence of cultural participation on subjective well-being and health. Evidently, active hands-on engagement, heightened awareness and shared reflection, and immersion in the process beyond actual participation emerge as pivotal factors contributing to these benefits. Key benefits reflect an increase in social interaction, cultural identity, and learning of knowledge or skills.

Reflecting upon the insights derived from this thematic synthesis, it is necessary to consider the implications, gaps, and avenues for advancement in the field. Are the questions posed in the current empirical research in line with the dynamic landscape of cultural participation? A notable absence is the analysis of digital technology influencing cultural participation, which has been identified to increase participation disparity and to define the preferences of younger generations (Russo 2023). Digital capital can be expected to gain academic interest, as are emerging cultural dynamics afforded by the digital medium, including co-creation and co-ownership.

The findings of this systematic literature review also highlight what is not currently explored. The geographical coverage of the empirical studies is relatively limited, therefore single and comparative case-studies should tackle this gap, as cultural participation may be understood and experienced differently according to the local cultural heritage and consumption habits. A fundamental step ahead lies in harmonising concepts, discerning what constitutes "benefits" comprehensively, as well as agreeing on a broad notion of cultural participation, considering both the field's nascent exploration and the need for a holistic approach to assessment.

Diversity, and inclusivity, demand more attention. Current available data may not adequately address the power imbalances and the social, economic, or cultural factors that shape participation, and possibly limit their attention to dominant cultural forms. Amateur cultural practices as well as non-paid cultural forms are not accounted for by traditional datasets. Previous studies discussed the limitation of focusing on broad categories of arts engagement, and that future research needs to consider different types of arts or cultural activities in greater

detail, in order to expand our understanding of their impact on well-being (among other things). Data available from traditional cultural forms may miss emerging new cultural participation forms as well as variants within the traditional consumption forms.

Moreover, defining cultural participation solely in terms of active or passive engagement may overlook the broader societal impact of cultural activities. Most of the research reviewed looked at individual benefits even though cultural participation is primarily a social practice, with implications for social cohesion, cultural empowerment, intercultural dialogue, or social change within social groups. Cultural participation is not only about isolated individuals because we function in social networks. Culture shapes our meaning-making process (Kerusauskaitė 2023; Lerssen 2021), which can only take place through social interaction.

In summary, this review identified, synthesised, and assessed available evidence in the field of cultural participation's impacts. Results suggest that the significance of cultural participation lies in the context and awareness in the personal engagement with radiating benefits into interconnected dimensions of individual wellbeing, social interactions, and knowledge creation. Cultural participants may change their attitudes and level of awareness also based on how cultural experiences are designed. Engaged and aware cultural participation is key to generate individual and collective benefits.

Further research should explore innovative ways to conceptualise and gather information on cultural participation, considering the digital variant as well as a holistic approach beyond the transactional approach. The next set of challenges involve determining how to incorporate the depth of insights of primary surveys and interviews into large-scale data sets, and how to identify the information that best describes people's experiences when participating in culture, including their perceived well being, empowerment, and confidence. Finally, we need to address how to include the emerging, hybrid, and increasingly digital forms of cultural participation while also accounting for the ethnic, gender, social, and economic diversity of participants.

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participation		consumption		attendance		benefit*		externalit*		impact*	
TITL	ABS	TITL	ABS	TITL	ABS	TITL	ABS	TITL	ABS	TITL	ABS
89	540	61	475	14	81	13	203	6	87	65	508

Table A.1: Occurrence of each keyword in title and abstract of all results (phase 4).

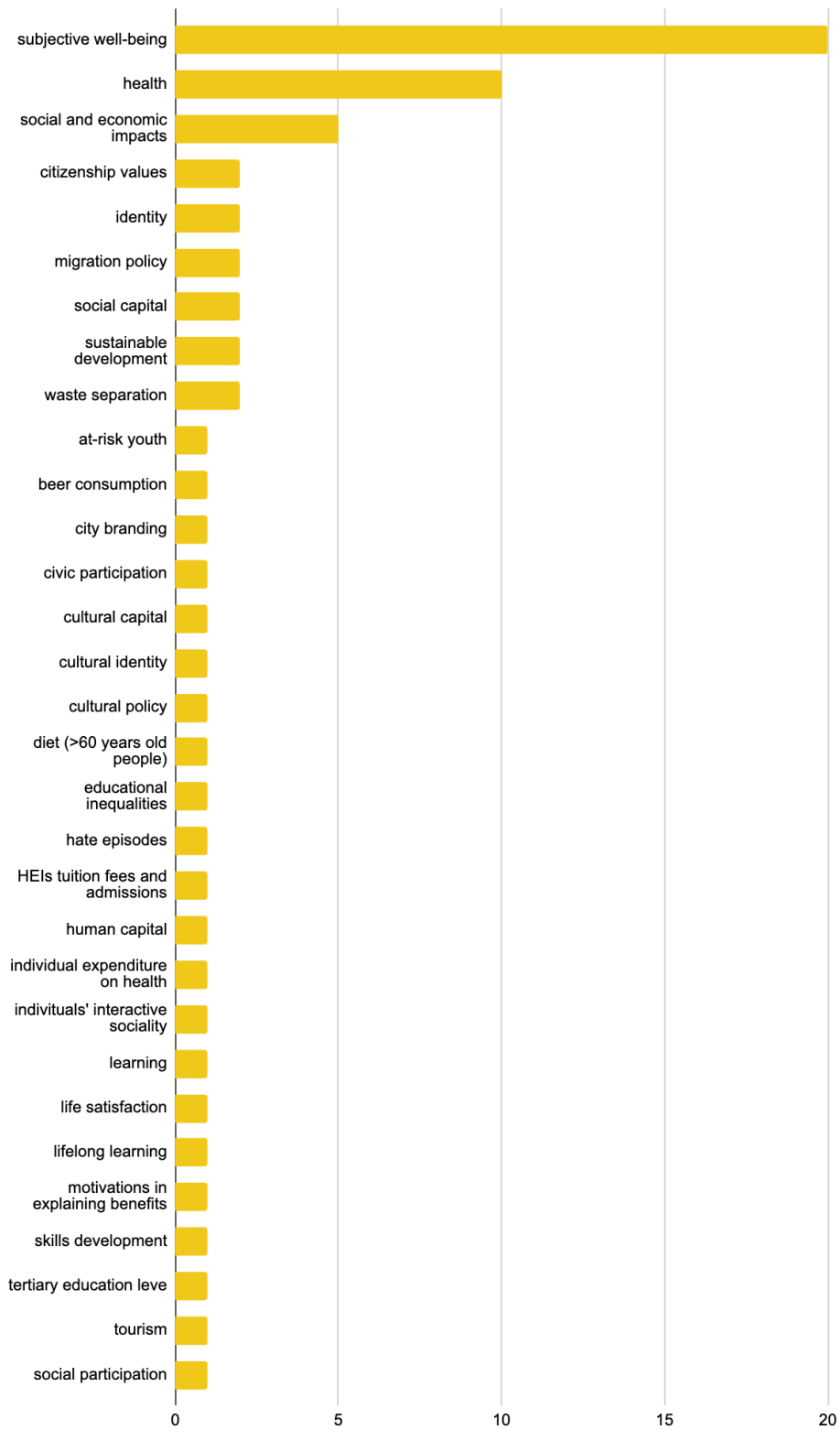


Table A2: The occurrence of all areas of impact.

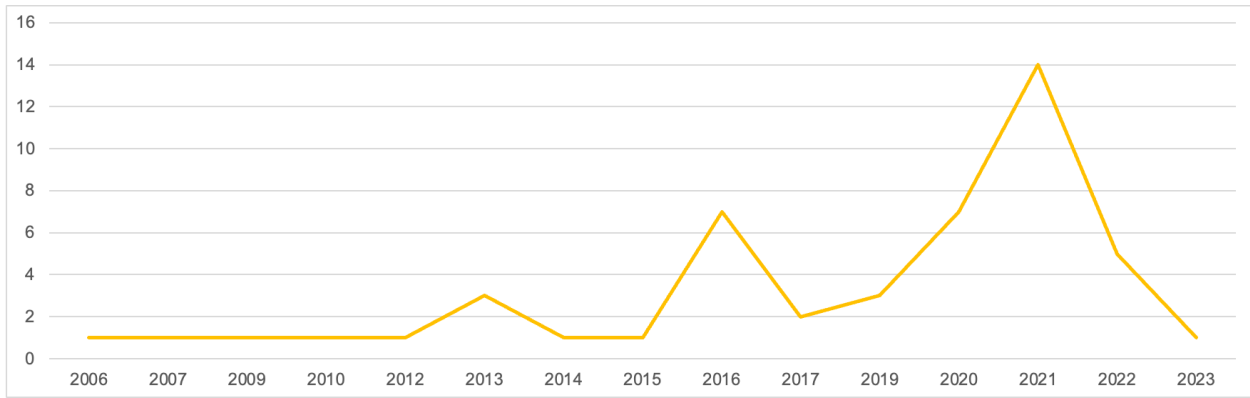


Table A3: Distribution of publications by year (source: elaboration of the authors).

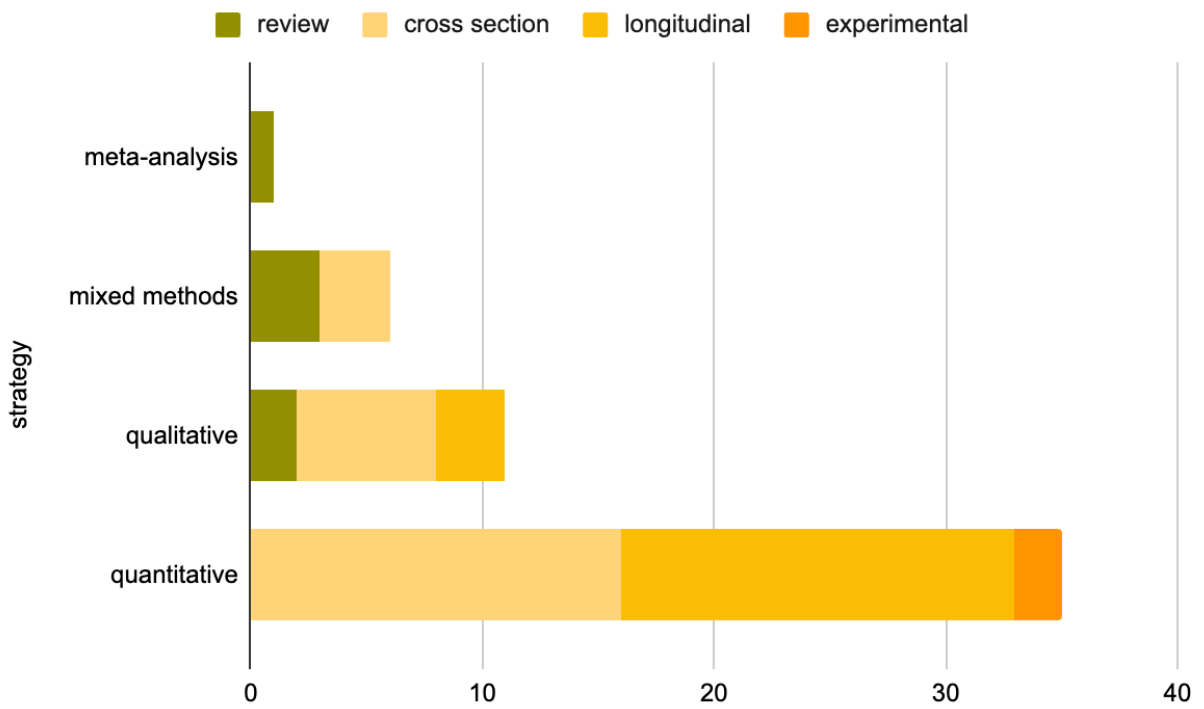


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