SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND HETEROGENEITY IN CULTURAL CONSUMPTION IN AGING POPULATIONS

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Abstract. This study investigates the relationship between cultural consumption patterns and well-being in the older population. Using data from the 2018 Italian Multipurpose Survey on Households *"Aspects of daily life"*, we employ Latent Class Analysis to identify distinct profiles of cultural consumers based on their attendance and engagement in various cultural and art activities. We then investigate the effects of these cultural consumption profiles on life satisfaction and other domains of well-being, including leisure and friend satisfaction. Our findings reveal a positive association between cultural engagement and subjective well-being across different domains. Specifically, individuals who allocate more time to diverse cultural experiences show higher levels of well-being. We also observe gender differences in well-being outcomes. These results highlight the importance of promoting cultural participation to enhance older adults' well-being and inform the development of targeted welfare policies.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been an increasing awareness that economic well-being does not fully capture the multidimensional nature of individual well-being. As a result, social science researchers have turned their attention to subjective well-being (SWB) and related concepts like life satisfaction and happiness. Along this line, a crescent body of literature has consistently shown that both active and passive engagement in arts and cultural activities can have a positive impact on individual well-being (Fancourt and Finn, 2020; Bertacchini et al., 2023). Furthermore, the growing number and share of older people in the population has generated increased interest in studying experiences or activities that can improve life satisfaction during the later stages of adulthood. A crucial aspect of successful aging is the social integration of the older population: by participating in cultural activities, older adults have the chance to engage with their peers, expand their social networks, and combat feelings of loneliness and marginalization. Research has shown that cultural activities contribute to a sense of community and belonging, promoting social interaction and

meaningful connections among older adults. However, despite the growing relevance of this issue, it is still insufficiently explored. Moreover, the existing studies tend to consider only a single cultural activity, neglecting to consider the effect of a simultaneous combination of variety and intensity (frequency) of cultural participation on subjective well-being, in general, and specifically on populations differentiated by age groups. Our study aims to complement and update the knowledge on this topic, by exploring the relationship between cultural consumption patterns and various domains of subjective well-being, including life satisfaction, leisure, and friendship satisfaction, among the aging population. Specifically, using data from the 2018 Italian Multipurpose Survey on Households "*Aspects of daily life*" by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) on a sample of approximately 16,550 individuals, we seek to identify different profiles of cultural consumers based on their patterns of attendance and engagement in various cultural activities (*Culturally Inactive, Culturally Omnivore, Heritage Lovers* and *Culturally Voracious*) (Katz-Gerro, 2004; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro, 2007). To achieve this purpose, we employed Latent Class Analysis (LCA). After controlling for individual socio-demographic characteristics and territorial variables at the regional level, we investigate how heterogeneity in cultural participation, due to different simultaneous combinations of variety and frequency of engagement at the individual level, impacts life satisfaction and friend and leisure satisfaction of the older population. In doing so, our findings show a positive relationship between cultural consumption and subjective well-being and demonstrate that more time dealing with diverse cultural experiences is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and its other components, particularly among older adults. In line with many aging studies (Mendes de Leon 2005; Fancourt and Steptoe, 2018) this result confirms that cultural participation can play a crucial role in active aging and highlights the importance of promoting activities in this field among older adults to enhance their quality of life. Finally, we analyze by gender to verify whether there are significant differences in culture consumption patterns when comparing men and women and to evaluate how the impact of cultural activities on the distinct components of SWB relates to gender.

2. Theoretical Background

Currently, the literature on well-being is vast and implies diverse disciplines or research fields nevertheless a consensus on its comprehensive definition remains elusive (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Galloway, 2006). The starting point in the definition of well-being is the differentiation between objective and subjective components. While the first considers "outer" qualities, such as living in a good environment or an acceptable state of physical and mental health, the second captures the personal

satisfaction of life, in terms of subjective assessment of individual life circumstances. Within the field of happiness economics, subjective well-being is often associated with life satisfaction (Christoph and Noll, 2003). There is a lack of consensus on the metrics of subjective well-being measurement scales and about the correct and best way to analyze them. In conceptualizing subjective well-being, Diener and Suh (1997) refer to three interrelated components: satisfaction with life, pleasant and unpleasant affect, further taking into account the central role played by the presence of negative experiences. In our work, we embrace a multidimensional perspective of subjective well-being (Diener and Suh, 1997) that includes individual evaluation of overall life satisfaction and relevant subdomains (leisure, friendship relation). An extensive body of research has documented the effects of various aspects of life on well-being, such as household income (Diener *et al.*, 2013), employment conditions (Bonanomi and Rosina, 2022), and health status (Galloway, 2006). Recently, non-monetary factors have gained attention, highlighting the multidimensional nature of life satisfaction. Research on the relationship between leisure activities, including arts and culture, and subjective well-being is limited. Empirical evidence suggests a positive association between engagement in arts and cultural activities and well-being, including cognitive enhancement, increased happiness, and the development of pro-social attitudes (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Fancourt and Finn, 2020). The existing studies on this topic, however, focused on samples of the overall population (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Graham and Pozuelo, 2017), neglecting to look into broader phenomena and deepen the interactions between greater engagement in arts and cultural activities and specific domains of life satisfaction. Moreover, they tend to examine the impact of a single cultural activity or treat them as additive factors (Bertacchini et al., 2023) disregarding the potential combined effect arising from the simultaneous interaction of variety and frequency of engagement in different cultural activities. This calls for a comprehensive understanding of how subjective well-being is connected to cultural consumption according to this interaction. To address this research gap, we draw the concept of cultural consumption profiles from the sociological literature (Katz-Gerro, 2004). The pivotal study on this subject is the work of Bourdieu (1984) which introduced the notion of highbrow and lowbrow cultural goods to grasp the different inclinations of individuals toward cultural participation. However, the concept of cultural consumption is broader and encompasses a wide range of activities and experiences. In this direction, Peterson (1992) proposed the concept of (cultural) "omnivores" and "univores". "Cultural omnivores" are individuals who exhibit a broad and diverse cultural "appetite", engaging in various cultural activities encompassing both highbrow and lowbrow cultural forms. In contrast, "cultural univores" tend to have a more limited range of cultural preferences and participation. Sullivan and Katz-Gerro (2007) further expanded these categories by introducing "voracious omnivores" who actively engage in multiple cultural activities. Understanding how these patterns

influence subjective well-being and cultural engagement is crucial. In a recent work, using data from an Italian survey, Bertacchini et al. (2023) investigate the association between the heterogeneity in cultural profiles, and overall life satisfaction, as well as specific domains such as health, leisure, and friendship relations. Findings from their work reveal a positive relationship between cultural participation and some components of SWB that, moreover, tend to increase about the diversity and intensity of cultural practices expressed in the profiles of cultural consumers. In our work, we attempt to complement these findings by investigating the effect of engagement in cultural activities and arts on older adults' subjective well-being. On this matter, a stream of literature concerning older people has documented that engagement in cultural activities provides opportunities for them to interact with others, fostering social connections and a sense of belonging. By serving as a driver for reducing social isolation, cultural activities offer opportunities to engage with their peers, expand their social networks, and combat feelings of loneliness and marginalization (Findlay, 2003). Overall, findings revealed different patterns of cultural consumption according to aging (Goulding, 2018) focusing on the role of sociodemographic factors, such as gender, ability/disability condition, and education level, as important drivers of cultural engagement for older adults (Keaney and Oskala, 2007). Additionally, maintaining cultural traditions seems to have a further positive effect on life satisfaction (Bernardo and Carvalho, 2020), due to the strengthening of interpersonal ties and better social coexistence. However, the existing literature in this area is limited and mainly focused on the consequences of social inclusion/exclusion on well-being.

3. Research Hypothesis

The existing research has found evidence of a positive association between active and passive cultural participation and the individual well-being of older people suggesting that engaging in cultural activities, such as attending concerts, visiting museums, or participating in arts, contributes positively also to cognitive function favoring an active and socially integrated lifestyle (Fancourt and Finn, 2020). By relying on this literature, we hypothesize a positive relationship between cultural consumption and subjective well-being for older populations in Italy (H1). In addition, the omnivore/univore theory (Katz-Gerro, 2004) has emphasized the role played by the simultaneous combination of variety and intensity of engagement in cultural Activities in determining different levels of subjective well-being. From this perspective, we, therefore, hypothesize that the joint influence of engaging in a diverse range of cultural activities (variety) and the frequency of participation in those activities (intensity) impacts SWB (life satisfaction) and other relevant domains, such as leisure, and friendship satisfaction (H2). Finally, some studies recognize the

presence of gendered cultural taste and assume that the heterogeneity in cultural consumption behavior could increase or diminish when controlling for the various groups' sociodemographic characteristics (Katz-Gerro, 2004). Following this approach, we, therefore, expect to find gender differences. More specifically, comparing men and women we suppose that the impact of their participation in cultural and art activities could be associated to different extents with the distinct components of the SWB (H 3).

4. Data and methodology

The data used in this study were derived from the 2018 Italian Multipurpose Survey on Households "*Aspects of daily life*," conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) which contains a sample of approximately 42,000 individuals, Once selected participants aged over 55, we obtain a sample of 16,515 individuals. Given our research aims, we examine socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, work conditions, marital status, education level, physical limitations, and some items related to health satisfaction, and economic satisfaction. From the ISTAT data source, we derive information on regional cultural supply. Our main variable of interest is life satisfaction and other relevant subdomains, such as leisure and friendship satisfaction. Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they participated in outdoor cultural and leisure activities over the past twelve months, such as sports events, dancing venues, music concerts, classical music concerts, cinemas, theatres, museums, and monuments. Response options included "*never*," "*1-3 times*," "*4-6 times*," "*7-12 times*," and "*more than 12 times*" within the last twelve months. To grasp the effects of the simultaneous combination of variety and intensity of engagement in cultural activities on life satisfaction and other relevant subdomains, four cultural consumption profiles have been derived through Latent Class Analysis (LCA).

According to Bertacchini *et al.* (2023), the LCA approach is the following:

$$P(Y = y) = \sum_{c=0}^{C} \gamma_c \prod_{j=1}^{J} \prod_{r=1}^{R} \rho_{j,rj|c}^{I(yi=rj)}$$

Where $P(Y = y)$ is the probability of observing a vector of responses, conditional to $I(y_j = r_j)$ if the response to variable $j = rj$, 0 otherwise; γ_c is the probability of belonging to latent class *c*, while $\rho_{j,rj|c)}^{I(y_i=r_j)}$ is the probability of observing a specific response r_j for each individual *i*. The key parameters are γ, representing the latent class membership probabilities, and ρ, representing the item-response probabilities conditional on γ. The underlying idea of LCA is to endogenously form classes consisting of individuals with homogeneous responses. By employing LCA, we can

group individuals with similar preference structures in cultural consumption based on the diversity and intensity of their attendance. We will start by examining different models with varying numbers of classes, ranging from one class to six classes. The optimal number of classes will be determined based on the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and (Bayesian information criterion) BIC criteria[1]. Once the optimal number of classes is identified, we will assign each individual to the class they are most likely to belong to. Each specific cultural profile (class) will then be named based on the characteristics of cultural consumption (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007) Subsequently, in order to test our main research hypothesis, we will include the cultural consumption profiles obtained through LCA as explanatory variables in our regression models. Given the scope of this study, a probit regression model using a binary choice approach is deemed more appropriate for addressing the cultural question. The main specification is the following:

$$SWB_{ird} = \alpha + \beta_1 CCP'_{ird} + \beta_2 X'_{ird} + \beta_3 Z'_r + u_{ird}$$

Where *SWB* is the subjective well-being of individual *i*, in region *r* for each domain *d* that assumes a value equal to 1 in case individual *i* in region *r* is satisfied, and 0 otherwise. Specifically, "Life Satisfaction" is assessed using an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (completely satisfied). A dummy variable is created with a value of 1 for responses in the top four categories (7-10) and 0 for all other scores. Subdomains Friend Satisfaction and Leisure Satisfaction (time over the past twelve months) is measured using a 4-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (very happy) to 4 (completely unhappy). In this case, dummy variables are created, taking a value of 1 if the individual is either "very happy" or "quite happy," and 0 otherwise. Our main variable is CCP' which represents the four cultural consumption profiles for individual *i* in region *r* for each domain *d.* The cultural consumption profiles obtained through *LCA* implementation can be categorized as follows: *Culturally Inactive*: this category accounts for over 68% of individuals. These respondents have very high conditional probabilities (between 96-99%) of never participating in any of the cultural activities considered.

Culturally Omnivorous: they account for 11% of the sample. Individuals in this group demonstrate moderate probabilities (between 9-43%) of engaging in all the activities analyzed, with a frequency of 1-6 times; *Heritage Lovers*: this category accounts for about 17% of the sample. Individuals in this group exhibit a high preference (between 67-94% probability) for visiting heritage sites such as museums

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[1] In latent class analysis (LCA), the Akaike information criterion (AIC) (Akaike, 1974) and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) (Stone, 1979) are used for model selection. The AIC assesses in-sample fit and selects the model with the minimum value, while the BIC balances model fit and complexity. Lower AIC or BIC values indicate better fit in LCA.

and monuments. They engage in these activities with a moderate frequency of 1-6 times; *Culturally Voracious:* they represent a relatively small but distinct group, comprising approximately 3% of the sample. Individuals in this group participate in all the cultural activities with a high frequency of more than 7 times. The vector X' consists of individual-level observable characteristics. Specifically, it includes variables such as gender, marital status, and the presence of children in the household. Educational attainment is captured through dummy variables representing different levels of education, including low, upper-secondary, and tertiary levels (with low education serving as the reference group, encompassing up to the lower-secondary level). Labor status is represented by dummy variables, which partly capture differences in household income and the availability of leisure time. The ownership status of the individual's residence and a subjective assessment of economic conditions are also considered to understand the individual's propensity to spend on leisure activities. Additionally, subjective measures of health satisfaction and objective indicators of the presence of physical illness are included to account for the individual's health status. Z' consists of a vector of regional-specific characteristics. We include the per capita number of cinemas, concert halls, classical music concerts, theatres, dance floors, monuments, museums, and sporting clubs to capture the geographic variation in the local cultural supply at the regional level. In addition, to account for unobserved characteristics specific to the geographical area, dummies for the macro-region of residence are included (North-East, Centre, South, and Islands, with North-West as the reference group). Finally, u_{ird} is the error term. Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of the key variables.

Table 1 - *Summary statistics-*

Variables	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Life Satisfaction	16,394	.6541418	.4756618	0	1
Friend Satisfaction	16,425	.7802131	.4141148	0	1
Leisure Satisfaction	16,406	.6712178	.469785	0	1
Culturally Inactive	16,515	.6805934	.4662609	0	1
Culturally Omnivore	16,515	.1092946	.3120179	0	1
Heritage Lovers	16,515	.1772934	.3819283	0	1
Culturally Voracious	16,515	.0328186	.1781671	0	1

5. Results

Table 2 reports the results of probit regressions for all the variables of interest.

Table 2. *Probit estimations of the determinants of Life and Domain Satisfaction (Friend satisfaction and Leisure satisfaction) for the older population.*

	(1) Life Satisfaction	(2) Friend Satisfaction	(3) Leisure Satisfaction
DV			
Culturally Omnivore	0.0272**	0.0685***	0.0538***
	(0.0135)	(0.0106)	(0.0128)
Heritage Lovers	0.0863***	0.0916***	0.0505***
	(0.0116)	(0.00914)	(0.0114)
Culturally Voracious	0.0891***	0.137***	0.151***
	(0.0229)	(0.0147)	(0.0193)
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES
Territorial controls	YES	YES	YES
Regional cultural supply controls	YES	YES	YES
Observations	16,011	16,074	16,058

Note: The baseline category is Culturally Inactive. The sample includes individuals aged 55+. The table provides the results of the probit regression analysis examining the relationship between cultural consumption profiles and different domains of subjective well-being, specifically life satisfaction, friend satisfaction, and leisure satisfaction. Marginal effects displayed. Standard errors clustered at the individual level.

The findings from our study align with previous literature (Brown *et al.*, 2015) and confirm a positive correlation between satisfaction with life and the variety and breadth of cultural activities individuals engage in (column 1). Our results indicate that compared to those who are *Culturally Inactive*, significant improvements in life satisfaction can be achieved by engaging in various cultural activities. (H1). Furthermore, the results suggest that allocating more time to diverse cultural experiences (*Culturally Voracious*) is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction (H2). This finding confirms previous research based on preventing satiation effects (Galak *et al.*, 2011), indicating that increased cultural engagement contributes positively to subjective well-being. Furthermore, our study reveals that a specific category of cultural consumers, *Heritage Lovers*, displays a relatively high probability of being satisfied with life. This evidence is in line with recent studies carried out at the European level that show the positive contribution to engagement in heritage (Ateca-Amestoy *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, we find that variety and intensity in cultural consumption significantly impact friend and leisure satisfaction for older adults (columns 2-3). This underscores the importance of cultivating diverse cultural experiences to enhance social networks and combat feelings of loneliness and marginalization (Findlay, 2003). The analysis controls for individual-level factors, territorial factors, and regional cultural supply factors. The inclusion of these controls helps to isolate the specific effects of cultural consumption profiles on subjective well-being, accounting for other potential influences. The findings are further supported by the information depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Predictive Margins with 95% CI on the probability of being satisfied with life, friends, and leisure for cultural consumer profiles.*
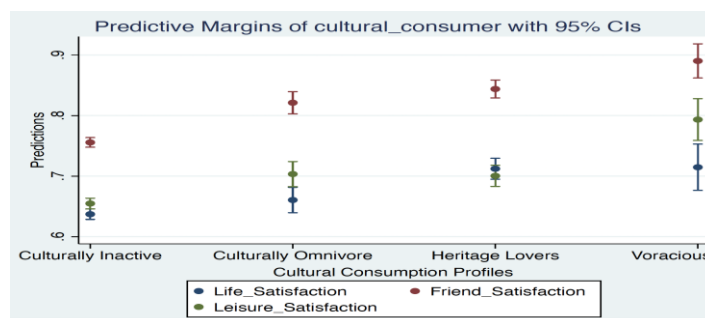
As shown in Fig. 1, the probability of being satisfied with life consistently increases from *Culturally Inactive* to *Culturally Voracious* profiles. There is a notable increase in probability between *Culturally Inactive* and *Cultural Omnivores*, suggesting that even occasional engagement in cultural activities is positively linked to SWB domains. Furthermore, the predictive margins show that as individuals increase their consumption of cultural goods in terms of variety and intensity (to *Culturally Voracious*) their SWB increases. This implies that older adults experience higher levels of subjective well-being when they engage in a wider range of cultural activities and intensify their involvement. Subsequently, we explore to what extent cultural consumption patterns are associated with life satisfaction and different domains of well-being for the older population by gender (Table 2).

Table 2 suggests that the effects of cultural consumption profiles on subjective well-being may differ between genders. While *Culturally Omnivore* has a positive impact on both males' and females' subjective well-being even in the presence of slight differences across genders, the most significant positive effect is observed for the *Culturally Voracious* group, who engage frequently and diversely in cultural activities across all domains. The table indicates that this effect is particularly pronounced for women regarding friend and leisure satisfaction (columns 4 and 6). These results are in line with the previous literature that shows that women tend to report slightly higher subjective well-being than men (Meisenberg and Woodley, 2015). Women often excel in building and maintaining friendships, as well as investing time and effort into cultivating hobbies and leisure activities. They tend to establish and strengthen social connections more easily over time (Scanlon, 2000). Additionally, women are found to prioritize their health and engage in activities that promote well-being. Furthermore, we find a more positive impact of *Heritage Lovers* on leisure and friend satisfaction for women. A prominent role in this perspective is played by the presence of gendered cultural tastes (Katz-Gerro, 2004) which leads to a differentiated impact on SWB.

Overall, these findings underscore the potential benefits of higher levels of cultural consumption, in terms of variety and frequency, especially for older women.

Table 2. *Probit estimation of satisfaction with life and different domain satisfaction by cultural consumption profiles, heterogeneity across gender.*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Life Satisfaction		Friend Satisfaction		Leisure Satisfaction	
DV	M	F	M	F	M	F
Culturally Omnivore	0.0358**	0.0265	0.0733***	0.0612***	0.0587***	0.0526***
	(0.0180)	(0.0191)	(0.0136)	(0.0157)	(0.0166)	(0.0184)
Heritage Lovers	0.0863***	0.0844***	0.0767***	0.104***	0.0391**	0.0582***
	(0.0156)	(0.0164)	(0.0122)	(0.0131)	(0.0155)	(0.0161)
Culturally Voracious	0.0952***	0.0842***	0.127***	0.152***	0.139***	0.169***
	(0.0317)	(0.0313)	(0.0191)	(0.0208)	(0.0258)	(0.0268)
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Territorial controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Regional Cultural Supply covariates	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	7,273	8,738	7,297	8,777	7,297	8,761

Note: the baseline category is Culturally Inactive. The sample includes individuals aged 55+. The table provides the results for different groups: Males (M) and Females (F) for each of the three dependent variables.
Marginaleffects displayed. Standard errors clustered at the individual level.

6. Conclusions

This work aimed to investigate how heterogeneity in cultural participation, due to different simultaneous combinations of variety and frequency of engagement at the individual level, impacts life satisfaction and other relevant domains (friend and leisure satisfaction) related to the subjective well-being (SWB) of older adults. In line with previous literature (Brown *et al.*, 2015), we find that increasing engagement in arts and cultural activities positively influences these aspects of SWB (H1). Furthermore, we derive distinct profiles of cultural consumers (*Culturally Inactive, Culturally Omnivore, Heritage Lovers,* and *Culturally Voracious)* and observe that individuals who allocate more time to diverse cultural experiences, as seen in the *Culturally Voracious* group, tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being. This supports our hypothesis that increasing the variety and intensity of cultural engagement contributes positively to subjective well-being (H2) and also emphasizes the crucial role played by social integration for successful aging. Engagement in cultural activities provides opportunities for older adults to interact with others, foster social connections, and combat social isolation. By participating in cultural activities, older adults can expand their social networks, develop a sense

of belonging, and experience a greater sense of well-being. Additionally, we uncover slight gender differences in subjective well-being and other relevant domains, suggesting that cultural and art participation may affect well-being differently for men and women (H3). This finding highlights the importance of considering gender-specific factors when designing policies and interventions aimed at promoting cultural engagement and enhancing well-being among older adults. In conclusion, our study contributes to the growing body of research on subjective well-being and cultural engagement among older adults.

Acknowledgments

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