

## **Culture and subjective well-being: How culture impacts subjective well-being**

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Recently, there has been a growing concern from academia and international institutions regarding the implication of culture on human and social development aspects. In particular, several scholars and policymakers focus on the role of culture in aspects such as mental health and (subjective) well-being. The topic is widely studied in psychology and economics (see Eakin, 2003; Doyle et al., 2008; Crociata et al., 2013; Grossi et al. 2018; World Health Organization, 2019), and the evidence suggests that culture might improve mental health and people's well-being through participation, exposition, and generally consuming it.

According to the literature, culture is a heterogeneous factor mainly related to society and people who share values and ideas. According to Throsby (2005), these values and ideas generate intangible cultural capital. Therefore, culture can be classified as tangible or intangible. Tangible culture can be identified in historical relevance in activities and goods such as artworks and buildings. In contrast, the intangible culture can be identified in, for instance, traditions, ideas, and belief. Therefore, culture assumes relevance for some groups of individuals (see Throsby, 2005), generating an aesthetic dimension to people who "consume" it (Goldman, 2001). Moreover, the fruition of culture includes an act of consumption from individuals and the degree of participation. Therefore, cultural participation has an important role in shaping identity and reinforcing community ties and social norms (Hutter, 1996). However, the existing contributions often diverge in terms of definition and measurability. For instance, in the contribution of Eakin (2003), the evidence suggests that the culture could stimulate the ability to develop spiritual and mental health, and thus individual well-being. Grossi et al. (2011; 2012) define culture as cultural access (see also Crociata et al., 2014). Differently, Grossi et al. (2015) employ the case study of Sanctuary of Vicoforte, where patients and visitors rate their experience. Wheatley and Bickerton (2019) define culture in terms of the level of engagement in cultural activities. Ateca-Amestoy et al. (2021) define culture in terms of heritage as an objective measurement of non-use value resources.

On the other hand, the literature on subjective well-being is a multidimensional factor affected by objective and subjective factors. The literature also defines subjective well-being by two sub-components: life satisfaction and happiness. Although the concepts of life satisfaction and happiness are frequently employed as synonymous, they differ substantially in definition and conceptualization. For example, life satisfaction considers an overall sense of satisfaction. Instead, happiness considers short-term circumstances such as mood, emotional or affective components. Therefore, life satisfaction appears to be a more stable indicator than happiness. (Diener et al., 2003; Helliwell and Putnam, 2004). However, the existing research on culture and well-being frequently overlaps the definition of subjective well-being concepts with objective well-being or mental health. In turn, the measurements adopted to represent these dimensions do not always fit the standard measurement proposed by the well-being literature. For instance, Grossi et al. (2011; 2012; 2015) employ the psychological well-being index that includes several well-being dimensions. Crociata et al. (2014) employ illness pathology as an objective measurement of well-being. Wheatley and Bickerton (2019) employ four sub-measurements of subjective well-being: overall satisfaction of life, satisfaction with the amount of leisure time, satisfaction of individual health, and job satisfaction. Hand (2018) and Ateca-Amestoy et al. (2021) employ self-evaluated happiness and self-evaluated life satisfaction.

The emerging issues related to the existing literature are: first, the existing literature mainly focuses on dimensions of physical/mental health while less on the concept of subjective well-being *per se*, especially

from quantitative research and economic well-being perspectives. Therefore, these contributions employ small samples and limited control variables by looking mainly at the implications of culture from a clinical and "therapeutical" perspective and less from the well-being perspective. Thus, the empirical analyses are mostly limited to cross-individual surveys or case studies, without longitudinal or panel data analysis. As mentioned earlier, the second aspect is that the existing contributions diverge on the definition of culture and (subjective) well-being. The third aspect, the existing literature, still does not pay attention to inverse-causality between subjective well-being (including life satisfaction and happiness) and culture.

Therefore, this research aims to operationalize the term culture by analyzing the level of consumption and access of cultural goods and then investigate the implications on people's subjective well-being by disentangling the effects of culture on life satisfaction and happiness. Thus, the research question is, *Do cultural consumption and cultural access affect subjective well-being and the two components of life satisfaction and happiness?* The related hypotheses imply that subjective well-being is positively affected by culture. However, the results might also depend on the types of subjective well-being dimensions observed and the types of culture. For example, for its characteristics, we expect happiness might be more affected by types of culture limited in time, such as access to theaters, museums, and events once in a while. Instead, life satisfaction, for its characteristics, might be more affected by types of culture that are continuous in time, such as reading books or playing music.

To test these hypotheses, we collect information from the ISTAT dataset, specifically from the survey of *Multiscopo - Aspetti della vita quotidiana*. We employ this data for two main reasons: first, there is a lack of data related to the culture and cultural dimensions; second, both dependent and independent variables come from the same source. Thus, the surveys of Multiscopo appear to be a suitable source to use to estimate the relationship objective of the research question. In particular, the question for life satisfaction is the following: *"All things considered, how are you satisfied as a whole nowadays?"* the answer is based on a Linkert scale from "0" to "10". For happiness, the question is the following: *"Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?"* the answer is based on a scale from "1" to "6". Moreover, the survey includes individual information about general habits, health conditions, daily life, and work status. The dataset covers the years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019. Data are employed at both individual and regional levels (NUTS 2). The econometrics models employed in this research are ordered logit, longitudinal, and panel ordered logit models. In addition, for robustness checks, GMM-estimation to control further endogeneity. Preliminary results suggest that cultural consumption and access positively impact life satisfaction and happiness. However, happiness appears to be more sensitive to both types of culture. Instead, life satisfaction appears to be less sensitive to both types of culture.

To summarize, this research attempts to measure the indirect impact of culture on people's subjective well-being. According to the results, this paper would have important policy implications related to incentives in the cultural sector and how to improve people's well-being in general. In particular, the evidence of this research could justify the policies addressed to support culture as a *merit good*. Moreover, the commitment of policies addressed to improve life satisfaction and happiness, and similarly, welfare culture, that in turn will relate to health policies. Indeed, *Ceteris paribus*, if the results are in line with the research hypothesis, there will be a possibility to understand what type of culture consumption is more suitable for life satisfaction and happiness.

